



SECTION A: Historical Context

Changes in popular music in the 1950s and 1960s

Popular music, or pop music as it is known today, began in the 1950s. The first of the modern popular music trends was rock 'n' roll, which developed in the USA but became known in Britain through radio stations that played music for American troops stationed in Europe, as well as through American films shown in cinemas. The first rock 'n' roll act to achieve stardom in Britain was Bill Haley and the Comets, especially after their 1954 hit 'Rock Around the Clock' was featured in the film *Blackboard Jungle*. Other artists like Little Richard, Chuck Berry and Elvis Presley soon became popular too.



Bill Haley and the Comets performing in 1954

In Britain, where access to the recently invented electric guitar was more limited, a homegrown version of rock 'n' roll known as skiffle became popular with young people. Skiffle blended American music with jazz, blues and folk, but used simpler instruments such as acoustic guitars, home-made basses made from broom handles and packing cases, and percussion played on old metal washboards. Lonnie Donegan's 'Rock Island Line', released in 1956, was one of the most popular skiffle records. As a style, it would later influence those musicians who would go on to form bands like The Beatles and Led Zeppelin in the 1960s.

In the early 1960s, British groups began developing a style known as beat music – a fusion of skiffle, rock 'n' roll, and rhythm and blues – characterised by a strong backbeat. The Merseybeat scene in Liverpool, an example of this, led to international success for The Beatles, who became such a teenage phenomenon that the hysteria among their fans became known as 'Beatlemania'. This music scene spread to other cities, leading to success for other bands like The Hollies from Manchester, as well as The Rolling Stones and The Kinks from London. These bands were even able to take their music successfully to the USA.





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Glastonbury Festival c.1970-the present day

As the 1960s progressed, the influence of drugs like LSD (a powerful hallucinogenic drug that changes the way a person sees, hears and feels things) among musicians and young people more generally led to a more psychedelic style of music. Studio technology enabled effects on records that had not been possible before. This, combined with the increasing use of alternative instruments like sitars, made for more elaborate and sometimes unsettling musical experiences, with more obscure lyrics that focused on anti-war sentiments, scepticism about government, and other countercultural values, especially concerning sex. The Beatles' album *Sgt. Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band*, released in 1967, is one of the most prominent records representing this changing musical style. New bands like Pink Floyd, whose debut album *The Piper at the Gates of Dawn* also released in 1967, became key figures in the psychedelic rock movement.



The cover of The Beatles album
Sergeant Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band

By the end of the 1960s, popular music was very different from how it had been at the start of the 1950s.

Changes in both how and where young people listened to music

At the beginning of the 1950s, it was difficult for young people to hear music that differed from what their parents preferred. In Britain, BBC radio stations were the only legally available broadcasters of music and they catered mainly to adult audiences. Young people instead turned to other sources. One of the most popular was Radio Luxembourg, which could be heard in Britain and played a mix of rock and pop in the 1950s. By the early 1960s, pirate radio stations such as Radio Caroline began broadcasting from ships anchored in international waters just outside British jurisdiction. These stations played non-stop pop music and gave airtime to new bands and records that the BBC ignored. Their popularity forced the government to pass the Marine Broadcasting Offences Act in 1967, which effectively banned pirate stations and prompted the BBC to create Radio 1, dedicated to popular music for young people.

The technology of listening to music had also begun to change. In the early 1950s, public jukeboxes – often found in cafes, chip shops or youth clubs – were the easiest and cheapest way to listen to new music. By the late 1950s, cheaper and more portable record players like the Dansette became available, allowing young people to listen to music in their own bedrooms. By the 1960s, the compact, battery-powered transistor radio, made by British companies like Bush and Roberts, was mass-produced and gave people more freedom as to where to listen to music. For the first time, young people could carry music with them wherever they went, tuning in to Radio Luxembourg or pirate stations away from parental ears.





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The places where young people chose to listen to music also changed. Teenagers chose to meet in coffee bars or milk bars – like the 2i's in London, where Cliff Richard was discovered, or the Kardomah in Liverpool to listen to new music on jukeboxes – as they were not old enough to be allowed into anywhere that sold alcohol. Special music venues emerged, such as the Cavern Club in Liverpool, which started as a jazz venue in 1957 but became famous in the early 1960s for hosting early performances by The Beatles and many other Merseybeat acts. Similarly, the Marquee Club in London became a key venue for emerging British rock bands like The Rolling Stones and The Who.

Around the same time, discotheques, inspired by Parisian nightspots, began to open in Britain. Clubs like the Acapulco Club in Halifax were among the first places where DJs played recorded music specifically for dancing. These discotheques offered an alternative to live music venues, with a different kind of atmosphere and social experience.

Development of a youth counterculture in the 1960s

A distinct youth culture began to develop in Britain in the 1950s, as a result of the growing affluence of British society after the Second World War. Rationing came to an end, and the economy recovered. Better wages and more secure jobs meant that young people were better off, with more disposable income and leisure time than their parents enjoyed at the same age. For the first time, they could spend money on clothes, records and entertainment, contributing to the growth of a consumer-driven youth market. Young people not only listened to different music from their parents, such as rock and roll and later pop and soul, but also dressed differently as part of subcultures. During the 1950s the Teddy Boys, who wore Edwardian-style jackets and listened to rockabilly music, emerged, followed by groups like the Mods and Rockers in the 1960s, each with their own distinctive fashions, music tastes and attitudes. The Rockers favoured leather jackets and motorcycles, while the Mods rode scooters, wore sharp suits and listened to modern jazz, ska and rhythm and blues.

Improvements in education and greater access to university had also given young people a broader perspective on the world than their parents. By the 1960s, more young people were attending grammar schools and the Robbins Report (1963) allowed more working-class youths to attend university. This exposure contributed to their growing interest in radical ideas from the United States, including civil rights, feminism and anti-war activism. These influences help explain why young people supported the anti-racist Notting Hill Carnival, begun in response to the 1958 Notting Hill race riots, protested against nuclear weapons and the Vietnam War in the late 1960s, and embraced the Women's Liberation Movement.



Young anti-Vietnam War demonstrators in 1968





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This counterculture stood in contrast to the values of the older generation. Many adults supported the Vietnam War as a fight against communism, while younger people often sympathised with revolutionary figures like Fidel Castro and Che Guevara. Older generations preferred smart clothing and conservative hairstyles, while young women embraced new fashions such as the mini skirt, and young men often grew their hair longer. While older people generally disapproved of recreational drug use, younger people increasingly experimented with it. Before the 1950s, young people were largely expected to be miniature versions of adults, with few independent ideas or cultural expressions of their own. The resulting clash in attitudes between generations came to be known as the 'generation gap'.

Concept of free festivals

As well as being a rejection of the political and social values of the older generation, the counterculture was also, in part, a rejection of capitalism – judging things by their financial value. There was a greater emphasis on free, spontaneous gatherings where young people could spend time together away from the pressures of the adult world, express themselves freely, listen to music, watch performances and take drugs.

These gatherings were initially part of the hippy movement that had developed in San Francisco on the West Coast of the USA. The first large-scale gathering was the Human Be-In in Golden Gate Park in 1967. This was a celebration of peace and love and featured speakers like Timothy Leary, who promoted the use of LSD, and the poet Allen Ginsberg, as well as music by Jefferson Airplane and the Grateful Dead. The event was a catalyst for what would become known as the 'Summer of Love' later that year, when tens of thousands of young people flocked to San Francisco.

The biggest of these free festivals in the USA was Woodstock in 1969, attended by nearly half a million people, with famous performances by Jimi Hendrix and Janis Joplin. It was not supposed to be a free event, but too many people simply turned up and the fences failed to keep them out. Crowd control became a serious problem at free festivals in the years that followed. In the USA, it led to tragedy at Altamont in 1969, when a member of the audience was stabbed to death by members of the Hells Angels motorcycle gang, who had been hired as security.

Free festivals started a little later in Britain, but they were clearly influenced by what had been happening in the USA. While there were similarities – drugs, the hippy communal lifestyle and psychedelic music – there were also uniquely British elements, such as travellers, environmental campaigners and anti-nuclear protesters. Festivals were often used as platforms for protest and awareness raising, blending music with activism.



Audience at the 1970 Isle of Wight Festival





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The Isle of Wight Festival, which by 1970 regularly attracted an audience of over half a million people, was another example of a music festival that did not start out as being free, but the organisers could not control the crowds and people got in without tickets. Big-name acts like The Who, The Doors, Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix and Joni Mitchell all played at the Isle of Wight.

The authorities were alarmed by these uncontrolled, massive crowds, so the Isle of Wight County Council Act 1971 was passed to limit audience numbers to 5,000, unless organisers obtained a special licence to allow more. The authorities also imposed strict controls on other free festivals, such as those at Stonehenge and Windsor Great Park.



**SECTION B: Features**

Aerial view of the Glastonbury Festival in 2008

The location of Worthy Farm, where the Glastonbury Festival is held, lies in the shadow of a hill known as Glastonbury Tor. A number of myths are associated with this site, including it being the supposed burial place of Arthur, the legendary British king, and one of the locations where Joseph of Arimathea is said to have brought the Holy Grail, a legendary Christian relic. For the New Age movement, it is the crossing point of two ley lines and a centre of mystical energy. These mythical and mystical associations contributed to the appeal of the location as a site for a free festival celebrating alternative lifestyles and countercultural values.

Small scale Pilton festival in 1970

In September 1970, the Pilton Pop, Blues and Folk Festival was held at Worthy Farm. Organised by dairy farmer Michael Eavis, tickets cost £1 and included free milk from the farm. Eavis had been inspired by the Bath Festival of Blues and Progressive Music earlier that year, where one of the most famous performances came from the rock band Led Zeppelin. The festival was planned for 3,000 people, but fewer than that attended, so it ran at a loss.

It could have been a recipe for disaster. The stage was made from bales of hay, and the facilities were very basic. The headline acts that had been booked – The Kinks and Wayne Fontana and the Mindbenders – cancelled, but other bands like Marc Bolan's T. Rex, which brought a glam energy, stepped up and gave memorable performances instead. Although the festival did not make any money, those who attended enjoyed its communal spirit and the chance to relax with like-minded people. ...





Glastonbury Festival c.1970-the present day

1971 Glastonbury Fayre

A second festival took place at Worthy Farm in June 1971, called Glastonbury Fayre. It was organised to coincide with the summer solstice, a key date for the New Age movement. Andrew Kerr, the new organiser, believed strongly in the spiritual dimension of the festival. He saw it as a way to counter the increasingly commercial mainstream music scene. It was inspired by Woodstock and looked to challenge the commercialism of the Isle of Wight Festival.

Rather than charging an entry fee, people were encouraged to pay what they could, and many of those who provided services were volunteers. Kerr hoped this model would inspire other festivals to return to the hippy ideal of the free festival. There were few toilets and no food stalls, although some festival-goers set up communal kitchens to help feed people. There were no fences, and people slept in tents they had brought with them or simply under the stars.

To preserve the mystical element, the new stage was built to the exact proportions of the Great Pyramid of Giza in Egypt and aligned with the stars overhead. There was no official list of performers; anyone who turned up could play. Folk bands like Fairport Convention appeared, as well as a folk musician named David Bowie. Rock music came from bands like Hawkwind. Musicians also played backstage and among the crowd. In addition to music, there were yoga and meditation workshops.

The festival was filmed, and a highly edited version was released in cinemas in 1972. An accompanying album featured a track from David Bowie, who had not appeared in the film. The event helped inspire other free festivals at Stonehenge (1974–1984) and Windsor (1972–1974), although both eventually ran into legal trouble with the police.

Small scale and informal (1978 and 1979)

The 1978 Glastonbury Festival was not organised by Michael Eavis. Like the 1971 and 1972 events, it was a free festival with no formal timetable or structure. A group of travellers who frequented free festivals gathered at Worthy Farm, joined by punks and hippies who had heard something was happening. There was no formal organisation or sanitation, and legally, those attending were squatting on the farm. Still, a small stage was set up, and some musicians turned up to play. It was far smaller in scale than the festivals that came before or after.

In 1979, a more formal festival was organised at Worthy Farm by Michael Eavis, this time in collaboration with CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament), a major peace movement that had been active since the late 1950s. The mix of countercultural values and political radicalism, particularly peace activism, would become a hallmark of the festival in the 1980s.

About 2,000 people attended. There was no fixed ticket price, so while some saw it as a free festival, others made donations. A temporary Pyramid Stage was rebuilt by volunteers just before the event, after the original had burned down. As before, most of the performers were either local acts or musicians who showed up without prior booking.





1981 and the beginning of annual festivals

The 1981 festival was the first to be planned as an annual event. As a result, there were some changes from previous years. Firstly, there was now an entry fee of £8, which served as a contribution to the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND). Michael Eavis was convinced that the festival could serve an important political purpose by supporting CND's campaign. Secondly, the festival was planned on a much larger scale, with an expected attendance of up to 20,000 people – ten times the size of the largest crowds in earlier years.

As this was considered the beginning of an annual tradition, efforts were made to make the festival's infrastructure more permanent. The Pyramid Stage was rebuilt more robustly, using metal sheeting and scaffolding poles, and it was aligned with the mystical energy of the Glastonbury ley lines. This is the same stage still in use today, although much of its physical structure was replaced in 2000. There was improved planning for electricity, sanitation and campaign areas, along with a significantly upgraded sound system. A children's field was also introduced to help foster a family-friendly atmosphere.

There was a wide range of acts covering diverse musical and artistic styles, including Roy Harper (a folk rocker who had performed at previous festivals), punk poet John Cooper Clarke and British reggae band Aswad. However, as in earlier festivals, many of the other performers were local artists or individuals who simply turned up to play.

The media began to show greater interest in the festival, although regular coverage had not yet begun. For the first time, the festival also made a modest profit. Michael Eavis decided to make it an annual event, with occasional fallow years to allow the farmland to recover. From this point on, the festival would be more formally organised, with official ticket sales and a confirmed lineup of acts. There was also to be greater collaboration with the local community and charities.

Stages

The most iconic stage at the Glastonbury Festival is the Pyramid Stage. Made from scaffolding poles and metal sheets, it was first built for the 1971 festival. It was aligned with the sunrise on the summer solstice and used a shape inspired by ancient Egyptian architecture to reflect the festival's spiritual roots. The original structure only lasted a year, as it was a very simple design – something that contributed to the spontaneous and informal feel the festival aimed to promote. The Pyramid Stage has been rebuilt several times and, since the 1980s, has been a permanent feature of the festival.



The modern Pyramid Stage





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By the 1980s, a second stage – smaller than the Pyramid – was added to accommodate increasing audience numbers and to offer a wider range of music to festival-goers. It was originally called the NME Stage, after the music industry newspaper, but it is now known simply as the Other Stage.

This is where punk and indie rock bands that didn't fit into the main programme on the Pyramid Stage got to perform. It has often been a platform for up-and-coming acts – like Oasis, Radiohead and Pulp – that would later go on to play the Pyramid Stage at future festivals. Audiences on the Other Stage can sometimes be smaller but more loyal, especially when a major headliner is performing on the Pyramid Stage at the same time. This was the case in 2023 when Queens of the Stone Age played the Other Stage while Elton John headlined the main stage.



The Other Stage in 2019

From the 1990s, the festival also featured the New Bands Tent. Unlike the other two stages, this one was indoors, under a tent, to create a more intimate atmosphere and to give audiences a chance to feel closer to the performing bands. The New Bands Tent has been the starting point for a number of acts who later rose to fame, such as Coldplay, Muse and, more recently, Fontaines D.C. These bands returned in later years to play the larger stages, having gained popularity from their early Glastonbury appearances. For a time, this stage was renamed the John Peel Stage, in honour of the influential Radio 1 DJ whose BBC career was built around championing new music.

Problems with Worthy Farm as a venue for a festival

Although Worthy Farm has hosted the Glastonbury Festival for decades, it faces many challenges that must be overcome to serve as the venue for an event of this scale. The dairy herds have to be moved off Michael Eavis's farm before each festival, and the site must be completely cleared before they can return. This process requires a great deal of time and money.

One of the most famous sights of Glastonbury is festival-goers covered in mud. This is because the site is in a hollow surrounded by hills that drain into it when it rains, which is why it is prone to flooding. Clay soil makes natural drainage very slow. In some years, like 1997 and 2007, this flooding caused chaos, creating dangerous conditions for performers and audiences alike, making moving around the site very difficult. Drainage systems and paths covered in gravel have been laid to solve this, but the site is still vulnerable to bad weather.





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Very little of the site is flat, and it is criss-crossed with hedgerows, which can make it very difficult to place the stages and facilities. Overflowing toilets caused problems for many years, until they have more recently been replaced by composting ones. About 5,000 tonnes of waste are left behind after each festival and need to be disposed of. The quarter of a million visitors who attend each festival also cause significant damage to the site – it can take most of the year for the grass to grow back. This is one of the reasons why there are fallow years without a festival every few years, to allow the site to recover.



Muddy water running through a tent at the 2005 festival

Worthy Farm is near Pilton, a village in rural Somerset. There are very few main roads and many narrow country lanes. The nearest station is Castle Cary, and a bus service runs from there to the festival. As most people come by car, the local roads, and even main roads like the A37, get jammed up for days around the time of the festival. The festival organisers have to work closely with the emergency services to ensure they can access the site quickly if needed. Congestion and noise pollution can lead to complaints from residents.

Stricter licensing conditions (1980s)

When the festival began in the 1970s, the authorities did little to intervene, as the good behaviour of the small number of festival-goers was taken on trust. However, once attendance at regular festivals in the 1980s reached 20,000, the authorities invoked the 1964 Licensing Act to gain more influence over proceedings. Mendip District Council refused to grant permission for the festival until certain requirements regarding crowd safety and sanitation were met.

The 1980s saw increasing arguments over the entertainment licence. Local residents complained about the disruption every year as more and more people attended. The lack of formal fencing and crowd control also became a growing concern. After a major conflict with the police in 1985, many New Age travellers chose to attend Glastonbury rather than Stonehenge. This led to clashes between them and the security personnel hired to control the festival boundaries, which continued at subsequent festivals until the 1990s.

Following this, the local council became much stricter in its demands before granting a licence for the festival. In 1989, they refused a licence until significantly better facilities were provided. In 1991, they insisted that improved fencing and security be in place before the festival could go ahead. There was no festival in 1992 to allow time for implementing these security changes. However, after 100,000 people were found to be inside the festival without tickets in 2000, another fallow year was needed to make further improvements.





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After consultation with the police and other experts, a 'super fence' – three miles long and twelve feet high – was constructed around the entire festival site. Noise control (including strictly enforced curfews), emergency access arrangements and capacity limits have all become key elements in securing approval for each festival since 2000. Michael Eavis was, however, happy to pay a £3,000 fine in 2009 when Bruce Springsteen played past the noise curfew, believing the performance was well worth the penalty.

Improvements in fencing and the end of free entry from the 1990s

When Glastonbury started, it was an informal gathering of a small number of people – often travellers or squatters – who believed they should be free to go wherever they wanted. This was an important part of the free festival ethos. There was little in the way of formal fencing or ticketing.

Once festival attendance began to grow in the 1980s, freedom of movement onto the site began to cause major concerns. By the end of the decade, there were around 30,000 people with tickets attending the festival, but a similar number of 'gatecrashers' without tickets as well. This led to a lot of tension between the organisers and those without tickets. This peaked with the riot of 1990, when around 200 people were arrested after widespread violence and destruction during that year's festival. An investigation afterwards concluded that there were as many as 60,000 people at the festival who did not have tickets.

Mendip District Council refused a licence for a 1991 festival until these security concerns were addressed. A patchwork system of temporary fences was put up after a fallow year gave organisers a chance to make some big changes. However, these fences – made from wooden posts, wire and loose metal sheets – were still easy to get past, especially under cover of night or if a large number of people tried to get through at once. By 1998, it was estimated that there were 80,000 ticket holders, but 100,000 gatecrashers. This problem peaked in 2000.

The council refused a license again in 2001, so £1 million was spent on a more effective 'super fence'. This one was 12 feet high with deep foundations to stop people from digging under it. It was also very smooth to make it difficult to climb, and CCTV cameras were installed to help the security teams find anyone trying to break in. New systems based on those used at the Reading and Leeds Festivals were used to electronically scan tickets to make sure they were genuine, as well as wristbands that were necessary to access any services needed during the festival. The 2002 festival was the first time the number of festival-goers matched the number of tickets sold.

Range of entertainment

Music is the most high-profile aspect of entertainment at the Glastonbury Festival. Headliners on the main stage have ranged from classic rock acts like the Rolling Stones to rappers like Kanye West, although guitar-based rock bands tend to dominate music on the bigger stages. However, there are also stages like West Holts, where more global music genres like jazz, funk and reggae can be heard. There is also the Silver Hayes stage, which specialises in house and techno music, while Arcadia has become best known for its raves.





Glastonbury Festival c.1970-the present day

However, there are other forms of entertainment available at the festival. A large marquee hosts circus acts, both old and new. For outdoor encounters with roaming performers, festival-goers can walk around the Theatre and Circus fields. Other attractions include:

- the Cabaret Tent, where performance artists, poets and drag acts perform
- the Avalon Stage, where a lot of stand-up comedy is performed
- the Left Field, where people meet to discuss politics and activism
- the Greencrafts Village for practical craft workshops, with a focus on sustainable living.

There are also sculpture parks, quiet spaces for reflection or observing the solstice, as well as children's areas with regular entertainment. Venues for alternative therapies and discussions about environmental issues can also be found.

The wide variety of entertainment available has helped connect different generations, as there is something for both younger and older people at the festival. This has led to several generations of families attending the festival together.

Steadily increasing attendance and demand for tickets

The scale of the Glastonbury Festival today, compared to its very humble roots, is one of the reasons why it has remained one of the most famous festivals for decades. In 1970, around 1,500 people attended and were asked to pay £1 if they could. By 2024, 210,000 people attended the festival, paying £355 for a ticket. Demand for tickets is now so high – 2.5 million people vying for 210,000 tickets in 2024 – that they sell out almost as soon as they go on sale.

This huge increase in attendance is partly due to steadily increasing coverage of the festival since the 1990s. Television, radio, streaming and social media coverage have all played a significant role in raising awareness of the festival. International acts like Jay-Z and Beyoncé have contributed to a surge in global awareness of Glastonbury. The festival is now spoken of in the same breath as other famous festivals like Woodstock and Coachella in the USA.

This heightened awareness of the festival, coupled with the difficulty of securing tickets and the draw of big-name headline acts like David Bowie, Bruce Springsteen and Paul McCartney, has created an ever-increasing demand, while also increasing the cultural capital of those who are fortunate enough to get tickets.

The need for fallow years

While some fallow years (years without a festival) were necessary to resolve issues with licensing, there are also environmental reasons for these periods of rest. A year without a festival allows not only the grass but also the soil beneath it to recover, giving festival organisers the opportunity to improve drainage and the general organisation of the site in ways they wouldn't be able to during the regular cycle of annual festivals. This recovery period is essential to maintain the site's environmental stability, enabling the Eavis family to continue using it as a working dairy farm.



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Fallow years also provide a much-needed break from the disruption caused by noise and congestion for the local community. Festival organisers understand the importance of maintaining the goodwill of the surrounding area. Additionally, it gives a respite to the emergency services who are required to attend the festival and ensure the safety and wellbeing of attendees. It also offers a rest for the thousands of organisers and support staff whose hard work makes the festival possible.

Fallow years at Glastonbury Festival began after the 1981 event, with breaks occurring in 1988, 1991, 1996, 2001, 2006, 2012, and 2018. These scheduled breaks, typically every five years, allow the land to recover and the organisers a respite. However, the COVID-19 pandemic led to the cancellation of the 2020 and 2021 festivals, marking an enforced break due to unprecedented circumstances.



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SECTION C: Significance

Reflection of changes in popular music

After more than five decades of providing entertainment, the Glastonbury Festival is a good illustration of changes in tastes in popular music.

In the early 1970s, the festival reflected the hippie counterculture and was heavily influenced by the free festival movement that had begun in the USA in the late 1960s. The Kinks, beat music pioneers turned psychedelic rockers, were originally supposed to headline in 1970, but they pulled out. Instead, the festival was headlined by folk artist Marc Bolan, whose act with his bongo player, Steve Peregrin Took, was known as Tyrannosaurus Rex, soon to be shortened to T. Rex. They were originally acoustic folk musicians but would soon become pioneers of electric glam rock. In 1971, David Bowie, another folk musician about to become a glam rocker, performed at dawn after staying up all night. It was British folk music that dominated the small-scale early festivals.

By the 1980s, the musical focus of the festival had shifted more towards the indie rock scene that had developed in the wake of late-1970s punk, with bands such as The Fall and Joy Division. This shift was connected to the rise in popularity of the festival, which had begun to reach a wider audience. There was also a continuing connection with radical political views and activism, with support for the festival from CND (the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) and early environmental organisations. Indie rock headliners like The Smiths, whose songwriters Morrissey and Johnny Marr were supporters of alternative lifestyles like vegetarianism, made their mark. The goth music scene was represented by bands like The Cure. Post-punk acts with strong political views, like Elvis Costello, who headlined in 1987, were also an important feature of the festival's music as it spread to a wider, often younger, audience.

The 1990s saw an even closer connection between Glastonbury and popular music acts. Britpop, a mixture of past musical styles with a British rather than American sound, came to dominate the festival, as acts who were in the music charts also appeared. For some of these bands, these performances were considered to be amongst their best, whether it was Oasis in 1995 or Radiohead in 1997. Appearances at the festival also began to influence popular musical tastes, as Pulp showed in 1995. They appeared as last-minute replacements for the Stone Roses and became very successful as a result of their performance. Popular rock music became the focus of many of the headlining acts from this point in the festival's history.

The increasing popularity of electronic dance music also began to be reflected in the acts performing at Glastonbury, starting with the Prodigy in 1997 and the Chemical Brothers in 1999. In 2000, Fatboy Slim, known for his big beat style, performed at the festival, playing to large audiences in the Dance Tent, and by 2005 he was performing on the main stage. When Kylie Minogue cancelled her appearance in 2004, dance act Basement Jaxx replaced her. This move was met with mixed reactions from some rock musicians, notably Noel Gallagher of Oasis, who criticized the booking of hip-hop artist Jay-Z to headline in 2008. Jay-Z's performance was very highly praised and showed how diverse genres could thrive on the festival's main stage. This opened the way for other notable headline performances, such as Kanye West in 2015 and Stormzy in 2019.





Glastonbury Festival c.1970-the present day

The festival has never fully devoted itself to one style of music and is very proud of its diversity, ranging from Beyoncé's 2011 performance as the first black female headliner to mainstream act Coldplay's five headlining slots between 2002 and 2024.



Coldplay in 2024

Significance of the Legends slot

The Legends slot has its origins in the Glastonbury Festival during the 1990s. It is a phrase that has come to describe the mid-afternoon set on the Pyramid Stage on the Sunday, the final day of the festival. The musical acts invited to perform in this slot are not current chart-toppers, but artists who have had hit records in the past and whose popularity has endured beyond their initial commercial success.

When crooner Tony Bennett performed in this slot in 1998, his performance was highly praised, even though his style of music was more akin to what the parents, or even grandparents, of many in the audience might have listened to. In 2004, James Brown – the 'Godfather of Soul' – was similarly acclaimed, as was Dame Shirley Bassey in 2007. These performances often inspire mass singalongs from the audience, whether to the Beach Boys songs performed by Brian Wilson in 2005, or to 'Sweet Caroline' by Neil Diamond in 2008. A wide range of musical styles has characterised this slot, from the country music of Willie Nelson, Kenny Rogers and Dolly Parton to the folk stylings of Yusuf (also known as Cat Stevens).

The Legends slot has become important to many festival-goers, and to those watching at home on television, as it brings together younger and older generations. Many find singing along to classic songs in a communal setting uplifting. For some, it has become the most cherished part of the entire festival experience. The slot has even helped to resurrect the careers of certain performers, as audiences rediscover and explore their back catalogues.





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Promotion of new acts

The Glastonbury Festival has helped numerous artists achieve recognition. With its vast audience and extensive media coverage, it serves as an important platform for launching new musical acts or boosting the careers of those who have previously struggled to gain attention by other means. A partnership with the BBC led to the creation of the BBC Music Introducing Stage, with local radio stations assisting in the selection of emerging artists who appear on it. Florence and the Machine had their breakthrough in 2008 via this route, as did Ed Sheeran in 2011.

Bookings for rising artists in early slots on the Other Stage or the Pyramid Stage can also play a crucial role in their future success. Billie Eilish played an early slot on the Other Stage in 2019 and returned just a few years later, by then such a major artist that she headlined the Pyramid Stage. Sam Fender performed on the BBC Music Introducing Stage in 2019 and, like Billie Eilish, returned to appear on the Pyramid Stage a few years later. Stormzy began on the smaller Sonic Stage in 2016 before going on to headline the Pyramid Stage in 2019.

Social media now allows early or small-stage performances to go viral, helping artists rapidly gain followers who are eager to stream or purchase their music and attend future gigs. A recent example is the band Wet Leg, who played the Park Stage in 2022 and, within a year, were nominated for both the Mercury Prize and Grammy Awards.

Influence of the media

The Glastonbury Festival has enjoyed a strong relationship with the media, as its performances produce content for audiences unable to attend, while also fuelling interest in tickets for future festivals.

Film was one of the first ways in which the Glastonbury Festival was documented. In 1972, a cinema film titled *Glastonbury Fayre*, made from footage of the 1971 festival, was released. It included performances from bands such as Fairport Convention and Traffic, although not David Bowie's performance. The film also features footage of festival-goers dancing and performing in a drum circle. It was later released on VHS and DVD. In 1996, *Glastonbury – The Movie* was released in cinemas, featuring performances by The Verve and The Lemonheads, among others. A documentary entitled *Glastonbury*, directed by Julien Temple, was released in 2006 and explored the ways in which the festival had evolved over the preceding 35 years. Various compilations of performances over the years have been made available by the BBC, and both the 40th and 50th anniversaries of the festival were marked by programmes combining performance footage with interviews.

Albums of live performances recorded at Glastonbury have also been released. The first was intended as a soundtrack to accompany the 1972 film, although, unlike the film, the album did include a performance by David Bowie. A number of artists have since released albums of their Glastonbury sets, including David Bowie's 2000 headline performance. Other artists who have released some or all of their Glastonbury performances include Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds, Florence and the Machine and Radiohead, who included their full 1997 headline set as a bonus disc in the 20th anniversary deluxe edition of *OK Computer*.





History: Entertainment

Glastonbury Festival c.1970-the present day

Television coverage of the festival took off in the 1990s when Channel 4 began broadcasting highlights. More comprehensive programming followed once the BBC became the official broadcaster in 1997. As the BBC expanded its coverage, Glastonbury became the most widely televised music festival in the world. In the UK, it is regularly broadcast on BBC Two and BBC Four, with more limited coverage appearing on BBC One, boosting the profile not only of the artists involved, but also of the festival itself. There is also extensive coverage across the BBC radio networks.

Glastonbury on streaming services

The growth of internet streaming services has given Glastonbury Festival several ways to offer more comprehensive coverage than ever before, while also allowing audiences to select the content they want to see. The BBC holds the broadcasting rights in the UK, but the festival can be watched on television, listened to on the radio, and accessed on-demand and via BBC iPlayer. Key performances are also posted on YouTube. In 2023, the BBC broadcast 40 hours of festival coverage, showcasing music from 85 different acts. Compilations of performances from across each day and full sets from individual artists were uploaded to iPlayer, along with highlight compilations from previous festivals.

As well as offering audiences more choice in how they watch and listen to Glastonbury performances, the festival adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic. When the event was cancelled in 2021 due to restrictions, a ticketed virtual livestream was broadcast, featuring performances by bands including Coldplay, HAIM and Idles from various locations around Worthy Farm. This event marked the first live performance by The Smile, a new band including members of Radiohead. Due to technical issues with accessing the livestream, the event was later made freely available online.

There are limitations to what viewers can see. Some artists prefer to share their full performances via their own media channels, while others request that some or all of their sets are not broadcast, to avoid spoiling upcoming live shows, as Blur did in 2009.





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