The Evolution of Psychedelic Music

We have been witnessing a gradual change in rock and roll since the 1950s. After the initial impact of the “British Invasion” bands of 1964 and 1965, the American response was swift and began to take rock and roll in an entirely new direction. With the fabled Acid Tests and underground psychedelic clubs of 1965, drugs and rock and roll were starting to be intertwined, and the psychedelic era of rock and roll was born. For many, the pinnacle of this period was the three-day festival at Woodstock in 1969.For this activity, you will analyze how music morphed from the standard “hit single” format of the early 1960s to the much more experimental format of the late 1960s, and compare the differences. While watching and listening to the videos, ask yourself the following questions: Influence: What are the main influences on the music and how have they changed? Lyrics: How do the lyrics change from 1966 - 1969? Do the lyrics of the different periods have a similar or different focus? Instrumentation: How does the instrumentation change from 1966 - 1969? Do the instruments make the same sounds in the different periods? Form: How does the form of the songs change from 1966 - 1969? Are there any unusual features in the songs of 1969 that aren't there in 1966?Begin by clicking on the links of the following songs. Be sure to listen to them in chronological order. The Yard birds Throughout their career The Yard birds performed a cover version of Bo Diddley’s song “I’m A Man” (1955)I'm A Man (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [02 min 38 sec] (1964)The second wave of "British invasion" bands with Eric Clapton on guitar. I’m A Man (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [03 min 11 sec] (an (1965)A year later with Jeff Beck on guitar. I'm A Man (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [06 min 06 sec] (1967)Jimmy Page (who would later lead his own group - Led Zepplin) plays a guitar solo with a violin bow. Notice how everyone has to stop dancing because the band starts improvising on a much faster beat that no one can dance to. Cream Strange Brew (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [02 min 21 sec] (1966)Eric Clapton (after the Yardbirds) playing a cover of a reworked blues song from 1934. The band was still looking toward American blues for their material but putting a much different spin on it. I'm So Glad - Live (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [09 min 08 sec] (1969)This video gives you a good idea of the English “psychedelic” experience in concert. This is one of Eric Clapton's most famous guitar solos. Crossroads - Live (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [02 min 38 sec] (1968)Another one of Cream’s greatest recordings and Clapton’s great guitar solos. This is a cover version of the blues song Cross Road Blues by Robert Johnson from his legendary recording of 1936. This shows just how closely British rockers were listening to American blues recordings. If you’d like to listen to the original recording to see how Cream interpreted it. The ByrdsMr. Tambourine Man (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [02 min 42 sec] (1965)The cover of Bob Dylan’s song featuring the jingle-jangle guitar sound of Roger McGuinn.Chimes of Freedom, He Was a Fried of Mine & Hey Joe (Links to an external site.) [Video file] [09 min 14 sec] (1967)This is the Byrds set at the Monterey Pop Festival. They're covering two Dylan songs and the Jimi Hendrix song “Hey Joe.” The front man of this set is David Crosby (later of Crosby, Still, Nash and Young). This is a much different sound for the Byrds.Interesting Tidbit: at 6:20 the film cuts to a close up of an impossibly young Mama Cass who reportedly sat through all the shows that year.