

Divine Inspiration

By

George Orton

At the age of 8, the working-class poet, artist, musician, visionary and mystic, William Blake, was walking through Peckham Rye Common when he was struck by a vision. He saw a gathering of angels, 'a tree filled with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars.' Premonition or delusion, it established the driving force of his life: imagination.

Moments of imagination and inspiration are part of a mystical process. This is at the heart of songwriting and creative expression. Whether it's Pulp's Steve Mackay being influenced by 'the bass blaring from a passing car' or Ian McCulloch's dream about a Killing Moon, moments of passion and actions of rebellion are not mechanical acts.

Whether we like it or not, most students will be using ChatGPT. When faced with a blank page, who wouldn't? You can see it as the barrier to creativity or a light for that initial spark. For Blake, imagination was more powerful than God, nature and eternity. The alchemical feeling of an idea, whether it's an adjective or a guitar part, is a psychic experience. Technology has become an inseparable part of that experience, irreversibly altering how we realise our unfinished songs and unwritten reviews.

At this moment in time, algorithms are the most important voice in music, moulding tastes and trends as we know them. Spotify Discover Weekly Playlists and TikTok recommendations have almost single-handedly made Duster, Galaxie 500 and an obscure Pavement B-Side as common in uni halls as a Pulp Fiction poster. Everyone listens to 'a bit of everything' now. So, as Artificial Intelligence pushes writers, musicians and artists underground, it is our job to listen through the floorboards.

Automated playlists are just the start. AI is a technology capable of writing interviews, thinkpieces and live reviews. It may not be able to imagine angels gathered in Peckham, but it will give you their exact map coordinates. In the same way that home recording software wasn't the death knell for the studio, AI cannot kill the critic. From Lester Bangs to Laura Snapes, all that we, the shadows in the music venues, writing in our notes apps and scrawling into notepads, can really do, is hang onto our moments of inspiration. It's a car that will pass us all someday.