

# **Rock Concerts & Hegelian Absolute Spirit**

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## Abstract

This essay commentates on whether a live rock concert can provide an episodic experience of the self recognition associated with Hegelian absolute spirit. It first introduces Hegel's conception of spirit, distinguishing subjective consciousness, objective freedom embodied in social practices and institutions, and absolute spirit's self understanding through art, religion, and philosophy: within which algorithmic systems now also contribute to the expression of, by virtue of intellectual and creative utility. Music is situated within this framework before concert participation is considered.

The central hypothesis is that, under conditions of reciprocal recognition and freely shared participation, individuals may encounter their feelings and commitments within a collective expression without losing their distinctiveness. The concert becomes significant not because the audience dissolves into one consciousness, but because participants recognize themselves and others within a differentiated whole. Shared singing, movement, and exchanges between performers and audiences supply possible moments of this recognition.

Research on collective effervescence, *communitas*, musical belonging, and embodied coordination provides supporting accounts, while remaining distinct from Hegelian interpretation. The essay also examines exclusion, coercion, commercial staging, and emotional conformity as counterexamples. It concludes that concerts may illuminate art's contribution to absolute spirit without completing Hegel's philosophical system or proving metaphysical unity. The decisive distinction is between collectively intensified feeling and a shared experience that preserves freedom, difference, and mutual recognition among its participants.

**Keywords:** *Hegel; absolute spirit; rock concerts; recognition; music; collective effervescence; communitas; freedom; differentiated unity.*

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## **A – Limitations**

This is a speculative, commentative and philosophical application, not an account of Hegel anticipating rock music. Its concert vignette is fictional. Empirical research on shared emotion and belonging cannot establish absolute spirit, and reports of unity need not demonstrate reciprocal recognition. The argument concerns favourable possibilities, not every concert or participant. For certainty the essay is a philosophical commentary not proof of concept.

## 1. Introduction: More Than Entertainment?

Ari arrives at a fictional rock concert carrying an ordinary mixture of fatigue, anticipation, and private associations. A familiar song once accompanied a loss; another recalls friendship. Initially, the crowd is an obstacle between Ari and the stage. During a chorus, however, strangers begin singing the words Ari has usually heard alone. The musicians pause, and the audience carries the melody, what felt private becomes publicly audible.

This episode can be described as excitement or nostalgia, a more ambitious interpretation asks whether Ari encounters something of the self through others: not merely ‘everyone feels what I feel’, but ‘what matters to me can acquire shared expression without ceasing to be mine’.

The hypothesis is that a concert can, under favourable conditions, enact an episodic, sensuous experience of individuality finding itself within a differentiated whole. Hegel’s philosophy gives that proposal conceptual depth because it connects freedom with forms through which spirit recognizes itself. Nevertheless, the argument must resist making a loud chorus into a miniature completion of his system.

Three questions organize the inquiry:

- *What does Hegel mean by spirit and its subjective, objective, and absolute forms?*
- *What do music and contemporary research contribute?*
- *What distinguishes recognition from emotional absorption?*

## 2. Hegel’s Concept of Spirit

Spirit, translating Geist, concerns self-conscious life and its expression through thought, action, culture, and institutions. For this application, it is neither a ghost circulating above the audience nor a scientifically detectable crowd consciousness. Hegel’s account is metaphysically more

ambitious than social psychology, but it does not license equating spirit with an invisible substance released by music.

Individuals become selves within languages, practices, and relationships they do not invent alone. They can nevertheless understand, criticize, and transform those relationships. Hegelian freedom therefore exceeds the absence of interference: it involves finding oneself in a world whose relations are not simply alien constraints (Hegel, 1971).

This matters because ‘arriving as one’ cannot mean arriving as a socially unformed atom. Ari’s private attachment to a song already depends on musicians, language, recorded culture, and previous relationships. The concert does not create sociality from nothing. It may make an existing dependence on others newly intelligible and affirmative.

Nor should spirit be understood as uniform agreement. A shared world can contain difference and conflict. The philosophical issue is whether difference becomes compatible with freedom rather than requiring domination or exclusion. A concert might offer a limited experience of that compatibility; it cannot establish that society as a whole has achieved it.

The distinction is between dependence that merely restricts and mediation through which agency becomes possible. Language enables expression precisely because it is shared; musicians make available forms listeners could not have produced alone. Depending on these forms need not diminish autonomy. The issue is whether participants can make them meaningfully their own while acknowledging the independent contributions of others.

### **3. Subjective, Objective, and Absolute Spirit**

Hegel’s Philosophy of Mind distinguishes subjective, objective, and absolute spirit. These are systematic distinctions, not three successive moods in an evening (Hegel, 1971).

| Domain            | Basic concern                                                     | Possible concert relevance - and limit                                                                     |
|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Subjective spirit | Embodied mindedness, consciousness, and individual agency         | Ari's attention, memory, and feeling matter, but arriving alone does not inaugurate this domain.           |
| Objective spirit  | Freedom embodied in rights, ethical practices, and institutions   | Rules, access, obligations, and shared practices shape participation; mere crowd presence is insufficient. |
| Absolute spirit   | Spirit's self understanding through art, religion, and philosophy | Music may offer sensuous self understanding; emotional intensity does not complete it.                     |

Objective spirit especially requires care: 'Objective' does not mean that the participant becomes an object or acquires physical presence. It concerns freedom having a shared, publicly organized actuality. Tickets, contracts, and venue procedures belong to a social world, but their existence does not make every event an adequate realization of ethical freedom.

Absolute spirit is not a superlative for the strongest feeling. It concerns the forms through which spirit articulates its understanding of itself. Art, religion, and philosophy are related but distinct: sensuous presentation, religious representation, and conceptual understanding cannot simply be collapsed.

The proposed movement from solitary arrival to shared expression is consequently an experiential reconstruction, not Hegel's architecture reproduced in chronological order. Indeed, the domains intersect throughout the event. Individual feeling depends on social conditions; artistic expression occurs within institutions; later reflection can reconsider what the experience meant.

This also explains why objective spirit cannot be bypassed by enthusiasm. The concert's practical arrangements can contradict its expressive promise. A song celebrating freedom performed within conditions of harassment or exclusion does not overcome those conditions

by naming freedom. The institutional setting and artistic experience must be assessed together, while remaining conceptually distinct.

#### **4. Art and Music within Absolute Spirit**

Hegel places art within absolute spirit because it gives sensuous form to significant spiritual content. A work can make human freedom, conflict, or reconciliation available to perception rather than merely explain it propositionally. Art's role is therefore more than provoking pleasure (Hegel, 1975; Houlgate, 2024).

The extended Aesthetics translated by Knox is Hotho's posthumously edited lecture compilation, not a book Hegel published himself. Its editing is contested; Hegel's own concise Encyclopaedia account and surviving lecture transcripts help qualify its authority, particularly on aesthetic hierarchy and art's modern role (Houlgate, 2024).

Music is particularly relevant because its medium unfolds in time. Rhythm, harmony, and melody give organized expression to inward life through sounds that vanish as they occur. Hegel's account associates music with subjectivity hearing its own movement, not simply with sensations acting upon a passive body.

Rock music combines sound with lyrics, bodily performance, amplification, and audience practices. Words may articulate grief or solidarity; musical form can make those meanings differently inhabitable. A familiar song can become newly significant when another person sings it nearby.

This is a contemporary extension, Hegel's preference for controlled reconciliation rather than mere uproar also challenges any equation of loudness with spiritual significance. Distortion, dissonance, and intensity require interpretation; none proves or disqualifies meaningful expression by itself.

A further limitation is Hegel's contested 'end of art' thesis does not mean that modern art stops existing. It means, broadly, that art no longer supplies the highest, most adequate articulation of truth in modern life. Philosophy's conceptual understanding cannot be replaced by musical feeling (Houlgate, 2024).

The defensible claim is therefore not that a concert supersedes religion and philosophy. It is that modern music may continue art's work of making aspects of human freedom and self understanding sensuously present.

Why emphasize a concert rather than the recording? Not because live performance is always superior. The live event makes the relation between expression and reception unusually perceptible: a phrase is answered, a tempo adjusted, a moment prolonged by participation. The audience can become part of the experienced form without being the song's composer. This extension from Hegel's account of musical inwardness to participatory performance is the essay's proposal, not a claim he explicitly made.

## **5. Recognition and the Differentiated Whole**

In Hegel's account of self consciousness, recognition concerns relations through which a self is acknowledged by another self. Its significance exceeds approval, visibility, or identification with a celebrity. Relations of domination expose the inadequacy of seeking recognition while denying the other's independence (Hegel, 1977).

Applied cautiously, concert recognition would involve acknowledging others as participants in shared meaning, not treating them merely as bodies producing atmosphere. Ari need not know everyone's biography. Yet the event must leave room for others' agency: they may interpret differently, remain silent, participate from a seated position, or refuse a demanded response.

A differentiated whole is thus a unity sustained through distinctions, not their erasure. The melody depends on different contributions; the shared occasion can mean different things to different people. ‘We recognize ourselves here’ need not mean ‘we are interchangeable’.

Hegel’s sublation, or *Aufhebung*, helps name a transformation that both negates and preserves. Private listening can cease to be merely private while its personal history remains meaningful. This is an analogy to dialectical transformation, not proof that every chorus instantiates a necessary philosophical dialectic.

The audience’s relation to performers is also asymmetrical. A musician cannot personally recognize thousands of listeners. Nevertheless, responsive performance and practices that acknowledge audience contributions may support mediated recognition. Applause alone cannot establish it.

The hypothesis concerns finding individuality more adequately expressed through participation, not escaping individuality altogether. Without that distinction, an account of freedom becomes indistinguishable from an account of absorption.

It also requires separating shared feeling from shared interpretation. The same lyric may evoke mourning in one person and defiance in another. Acknowledging this plurality can make the relation richer than perfect agreement would. Recognition is not demonstrated by a survey showing identical emotional labels; it may instead appear when someone discovers that another person's different response belongs within the common occasion.

## **6. The Concert as a Participatory Event**

Ari’s experience might develop through several junctures, but the sequence is neither universal nor compulsory.

First, shared attention makes the presence of others noticeable. An opening riff coordinates anticipation. The recognition that others know the same musical cue can turn anonymous proximity into a sense of participation.

Second, shared expression externalizes meaning. During a chorus, private associations become voiced alongside others. Ari may feel less alone in an emotion without concluding that everyone's histories coincide. Alternating performer and audience phrases can make responsiveness audible.

Third, moments of care may give unity practical substance. A fallen participant is helped; people make space; an artist interrupts to address a safety problem. Such actions are not decorative additions to the philosophical argument. They help distinguish recognition of persons from enjoyment of their collective energy.

Finally, reflective recognition may follow rather than coincide with peak arousal. Ari notices that the song mattered differently because strangers participated. Later, the memory might support friendship or renewed willingness to engage with others. It might also fade immediately.

The proposed pattern is therefore:

Personal meaning ↔ shared expression ↔ reflective recognition

Collective participation can change private meaning, while personal interpretations contribute to the event. There is no necessary ascent from individual to institution to absolute.

Nor must unity remain continuous. Quiet attention, disagreement, fatigue, and leaving the venue can interrupt it. 'Various junctures' is a plausible description of episodic recognition; a concert need not become one uninterrupted state of transcendence.

Its quieter intervals may be especially revealing. When someone stops singing, is the relationship preserved? Can a stranger ask for space without being treated as an interruption of

the collective? A whole that survives such differences offers stronger grounds for this interpretation than a peak moment maintained only by unquestioning participation.

## **7. Academic Accounts and Empirical Evidence**

Several academic traditions support the experiential premise without proving its Hegelian interpretation.

Durkheim's collective effervescence concerns the intensified shared energy through which gatherings acquire collective and sometimes sacred significance (1912/1995). It offers an account of participants feeling carried beyond ordinary individual experience. Yet collective intensity can bind a group around exclusionary as well as generous commitments.

Turner's *communitas* describes a heightened fellowship associated with liminal situations, in which ordinary distinctions can temporarily loosen (1969). Concert participation may resemble this condition, but ticket categories, performer hierarchies, and unequal access do not automatically disappear. Temporary felt equality is not durable institutional equality.

Sylvan's *Traces of the Spirit* investigates religious dimensions of popular music subcultures through interviews and participant observation, including Deadheads, metal communities, raves, and hip-hop (2002). His account supports taking ritual, belonging, and numinous experiences seriously. It neither demonstrates one consciousness nor makes every popular-music community a realization of Hegelian freedom.

Kronsted proposes an embodied and enactive account of collective effervescence as the experience of high degrees of self-organization within a crowd under suitable conditions (2025). Enaction emphasizes experience arising through active engagement; self-organization concerns patterns emerging from interacting processes rather than only centralized instructions.

This helps explain why audience contributions can matter beyond the intentions of a performer. It remains a theoretical account, not a direct test of absolute spirit.

The empirical foundation is broader than particular rock scenes. Rickard et al.'s systematic review includes 56 papers comprising 59 studies, with a total sample of 17,991 participants reported in its Results section. It identifies connection, shared experiences and values, empowering community, and sustained community as major themes (2025). Most studies were conducted in Western countries, and the review combines qualitative and quantitative work.

These findings justify investigating collective belonging. They do not isolate recognition from selection effects, establish benefits for every attendee, or show that rock is uniquely capable of producing them. A philosophical interpretation must not inherit a stronger causal claim than its evidence supports.

Participants who already identify strongly with a band may be more likely to attend and report connection. Retrospective accounts may emphasize memorable peaks over discomfort; different methods may measure different forms of belonging. These limitations do not make the evidence worthless. They constrain the inference from 'concert participants describe connection' to 'this concert produced a particular transformation of self understanding'.

## **8. A Hegelian Interpretation of Concert Experience**

The concert's distinctive philosophical possibility lies in a relation between inward feeling and publicly shared form. Ari hears something personal expressed through a work not privately authored, then encounters others finding significance in it. What initially seems external can become a medium of self understanding.

The Hegelian interpretation adds a normative question to descriptions of synchronization: does this relation enable people to encounter themselves through others while acknowledging those

others' independence? Participants need not articulate Hegel's concepts for an experience to be interpretable through them. But the interpreter must demonstrate more than coordinated movement.

There are therefore three evidential levels. Research can document shared emotion and belonging. Observation and interviews can investigate whether participants describe reciprocal acknowledgment, preserved difference, and meaningful freedom to participate otherwise. Philosophy can then assess whether those relations illuminate art's role in spiritual self understanding.

None permits a leap to metaphysical proof, even a participant's declaration that 'we became one' is evidence of an experience and its language, not the discovery of a numerically single subject.

Calling the event self transcendent can mean that ordinary self preoccupation temporarily gives way to a broader relation. Calling it transcendental, however, would introduce a different philosophical claim about conditions of experience. Here, the proposed unity remains immanent to embodied social participation, not a claim about supernatural access.

The qualified thesis is that a concert can enact a fragment of the relationship Hegelian aesthetics helps articulate: freedom finding expressive form in something shared. It neither reconstructs his entire system nor substitutes sensation for conceptual knowledge.

Its explanatory value can be tested against simpler accounts. Emotional contagion explains feelings spreading; social identification explains attachment to a group. The Hegelian reading earns a distinct place only if it illuminates how an expressive form changes the relation between individuality and shared life. Such change could remain modest: a listener understands personal grief as communicable, or acknowledges strangers as contributors rather than obstacles. It need

not yield a permanent moral transformation. The claim concerns what becomes intelligible in a relation, not a hidden spiritual force added to its observable processes.

## **9. Conditions, Counterexamples, and Limits**

Relevant conditions for such gatherings are proposed as and include safety, accessible participation, respect for non participation, and freedom from harassment. A person who cannot dance, sing, tolerate intense stimulation, or stand for long must not be treated as a deficient member of the whole.

These conditions do not guarantee recognition. They make it possible to distinguish invitation from pressure. A performer who shames silence may generate synchrony while undermining autonomy; a crowd that excludes newcomers may experience intense fellowship precisely through exclusion.

Commercial staging poses another challenge, paid admission and professional production do not invalidate an experience, but curated spontaneity can disguise unequal power. An audience may feel recognized while functioning principally as a market or promotional image. Neither sincerity nor branding settles which relation predominates.

Intoxication and sensory intensity complicate interpretation without automatically discrediting it. Reports should distinguish changed bodily states, emotional contagion, and sustained understanding. Pleasure alone does not establish recognition; sobriety alone does not guarantee it.

The most serious counterexample is a unified crowd organized around humiliation, hostility, or submission to charismatic authority. Such a gathering can display effervescence and shared identity while contradicting the freedom preserving thesis. This shows why collective feeling is sufficient for neither ethical goodness nor absolute spirit.

The account must also face Hegel's own historical limitations. His aesthetic hierarchy and treatment of cultural traditions are contested. Applying his concepts to rock should not import those hierarchies as unquestionable standards. Nor should rock's history be detached from Black musical traditions, cultural exchange, and unequal commercial recognition.

The inclusion criteria offered here are therefore a contemporary, Hegel inspired reconstruction, not instructions extracted verbatim from his texts. They ask what would make the claimed unity compatible with freedom today. This leaves room to challenge the interpretation from within Hegel scholarship as well as through evidence about participants' experiences.

A useful study would combine observation with interviews before, immediately after, and later than an event. It would ask whether participants felt acknowledged, could differ without exclusion, and found subsequent relationships changed. Comparisons should include unpleasant experiences and people who did not feel unity. Observed care and accessible participation could complement self-report; physiological synchrony would not independently establish freedom.

If reported unity consistently depends on silencing differences or disappears when someone declines to participate, the recognition hypothesis weakens. If the same experience is fully explained by excitement and familiar group identification, its specifically Hegelian contribution requires further argument.

## **10. Conclusion: An Episodic Expression, Not a Final Achievement**

A rock concert can be more than coordinated entertainment without becoming a complete realization of Absolute Spirit. Its potential lies in making inward meaning publicly expressive and allowing people to encounter themselves through a shared work and one another.

Hegel supplies distinctions that protect this hypothesis from its easiest exaggeration. Subjective, objective, and absolute spirit are not three crowd moods. Art can disclose freedom without replacing philosophy. Unity can preserve difference rather than dissolve it.

Research on collective effervescence, *communitas*, and musical belonging supports investigating the experience, not declaring its metaphysical completion. The stronger claim concerns occasional, embodied recognition under conditions that sustain agency and mutual regard.

Our fictional character Ari leaves as a distinct person. That departure need not undo the moment's significance. The concert's achievement, if there was one, was not to abolish separateness but to make it less alienating: something private found a shared form, and sharing did not require surrendering the self.

The decisive question is therefore not how completely the crowd became one, it is whether those within it became more able to recognize themselves and others as free participants in a common expression.

The rock concert as speculative Hegelian metaphor therefore, in the inward facing, isolationist and hyper-personalised AI era, potentially represents a far more constitutive, archaic and unifying aspect of what it may mean to be human in pursuit of transcending the isolation of the subjective experience via art, philosophy and religion e.g. ritualistic practices.

Part 2 of this 3 part essay series explores the significance of human ritualistic practices and examines their utility for the AI era with regards to Hegelian spirit.

## **Glossary**

**Absolute spirit:** Hegel's account of spirit's self-understanding through art, religion, and philosophy; not maximal emotional intensity.

**Collective effervescence:** Intensified shared affect and collective significance arising in gatherings.

**Communitas:** Heightened fellowship associated with liminal conditions; not guaranteed institutional equality.

**Differentiated whole:** Unity that preserves meaningful distinctions among participants.

**Enaction:** Understanding experience through active embodied engagement with the world.

**Freedom:** Here, agency sustained through relations one can inhabit without simple domination or alien constraint.

**Liminality:** A transitional condition in which ordinary arrangements may temporarily loosen.

**Objective spirit:** Freedom embodied in rights, ethical practices, and institutions.

**Recognition:** Acknowledgment of another self's standing and agency, beyond approval or emotional similarity.

**Self-organization:** Emergent coordination arising through interactions among processes.

**Self-transcendence:** Experience extending beyond ordinary self-preoccupation; not necessarily supernatural.

**Spirit / Geist:** Self-conscious life expressed and understood through thought, action, culture, and institutions.

**Subjective spirit:** Embodied mindedness, consciousness, and individual agency.

**Sublation / Aufhebung:** Transformation that negates while preserving and reconfiguring.

**Transcendental:** Concerning conditions of possible experience; distinct from felt self-transcendence.



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