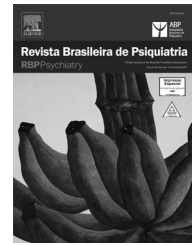




# Revista Brasileira de Psiquiatria

## RBPPsychiatry

Official Journal of the Brazilian Psychiatric Association  
Volume 34 • Number 4 • December/2012



Psychiatry and the arts

## George Harrison's inner light



George Harold Harrison was part of the world's most influential music alchemy of all time. The introspective Beatle was responsible for a musical revolution by merging rock with Indian sonorous spices. The big shift from the rocker rebel to the mystic guitarist and composer was influenced by psychedelic drugs (such as LSD) in the mid sixties. LSD is associated to mystic "tours"<sup>1</sup> as George expressed in his bi-

ography: "Out of the LSD madness (and there were a few horrors) there came a few 'zaps'. It made me laugh. I'd never thought about, couldn't even say the word 'God'. It embarrassed me, but it was so strange, GOD, and it washed away all these fears and doubts and little things that hang you up"; "I suppose having LSD was like somebody catapulting me out into space".<sup>2</sup> George experienced ineffability, a subjective state of mind that cannot be expressed in words, that is a singular feature of mystic experiences:<sup>3</sup> "Sometimes you just want to yell about God because it's right there, but the moment you try and explain it, it's like rabbiting".<sup>2</sup> At the same time, the unique and contradictory mystical elements are best described through music.<sup>3</sup> Harrison's transcendental sounds can be heard in songs like *Norwegian Wood*, *The Inner Light*, *Love you too*, and lyrics that express the contact with God and self devotion such as *My Sweet Lord* and *Give me Love*.

Psychedelic drugs are frequently associated with psychiatric disorders and it is well known the deleterious effects of LSD in other eminent musicians, such as Brian Wilson, Arnaldo Baptista and Syd Barrett.<sup>4</sup> Mystical experiences are observed in many neuropsychiatric conditions such as schizophrenia, mania, epilepsy and drug intoxication (LSD, ayahuasca). Break down of self boundaries can be part of schizophrenia-like symptoms observed in psychotic disorders and LSD intoxication.<sup>5</sup> Interestingly, LSD was used as an

experimental model of psychosis to induce transient florid perceptual distortions.<sup>5</sup> Hallucinogenic properties of LSD involve the serotonergic system, mainly via 5-HT<sub>2</sub> receptor agonistic effect, and this finding led to the serotonin hypothesis in schizophrenia.<sup>5</sup>

On the other hand, religious and mystical faculties evoked by the use of psychedelic drugs, are related to peaceful, transcendental, musical inspiration and creativity. Even in the absence of drugs, through spirituality and a more tolerant lifestyle, it is possible to have positive experiences of some self dissolution into "a complete whole" or a "universal consciousness".<sup>3</sup> For example, the song *Within you Without You* was inspired by a meditational state. *I Me Mine* is another song composed by Harrison that criticizes the inflated egos, as he argued that the renunciation of egocentrism brings the opportunity to achieve a spiritual state of mind and experience divine feelings.

As a rock guru, George Harrison (Figure 1) taught that music can be a unique language of tolerance and comprehension to people in different cultures and with various religious beliefs. George's passing completes a decade but his guitar is gently weeping through all those years ago.

### Acknowledgements

Figure 1 was drawn by the first author, GNMO, using ink and paper. Then it was scanned, colored and edited with the advice of a professional artist, Dario Velasco.

Guilherme Nogueira M de Oliveira,<sup>1,2</sup>  
João Vinícius Salgado,<sup>1,3</sup>  
Izabela Guimarães Barbosa,<sup>1</sup>  
Antônio Lúcio Teixeira<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Neuropsychiatric Unit,  
Neurology Division, School of Medicine,  
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

<sup>2</sup>Epilepsy Treatment Advanced Centre (NATE),  
Felício Rocho Hospital, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

<sup>3</sup>Hospital de Ensino Instituto Raul Soares (FHEMIG),  
Belo Horizonte, Brazil

## Disclosures

**Guilherme Nogueira M de Oliveira, MD, PhD**

**Employment:** *Neuropsychiatric Unit, Neurology Division, School of Medicine, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais; Epilepsy Treatment Advanced Centre (NATE), Felício Rocho Hospital, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.*  
**Research grant:** *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do estado de Minas Gerais (Fapemig)\*\*\*, Brazil.* **Other research grant or medical continuous education:** *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES)\*\*, Brazil.*

**João Vinícius Salgado, MD, PhD**

**Employment:** *Neuropsychiatric Unit, Neurology Division, School of Medicine, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais; Hospital de Ensino Instituto Raul Soares (FHEMIG), Belo Horizonte, Brazil.*

**Izabela Guimarães Barbosa, MD, PhD**

**Employment:** *Neuropsychiatric Unit, Neurology Division, School of Medicine, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.*  
**Other research grant or medical continuous education:** *Coordenação de Aperfeiçoamento de Pessoal de Nível Superior (CAPES)\*\*, Brazil.*

**Antônio Lúcio Teixeira, MD, PhD**

**Employment:** *Neuropsychiatric Unit, Neurology Division, School of Medicine, Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil.*  
**Research grant:** *Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do estado de Minas Gerais (Fapemig)\*\*; Conselho Nacional de Desenvolvimento Científico e Tecnológico - (National Counsel of Technological and Scientific Development - CNPq)\*\* Brazil.*

\* Modest

\*\* Significant

\*\*\* Significant. Amounts given to the author's institution or to a colleague for research in which the author has participation, not directly to the author.

## References

1. Griffiths RR, Richards WA, Johnson MW, McCann UD, Jesse R. Mystical-type experiences occasioned by psilocybin mediate the attribution of personal meaning and spiritual significance 14 months later. *J Psychopharmacol.* 2008;22(6):621-32.
2. Harrison G. I, Me, Mine. 2nd ed. United Kingdom: Weidenfeld & Nicolson; 2002.
3. James W. *Varieties of Religious Experience.* New York: Routledge; 2008.
4. Fusar-Poli P, Roger Keith "Syd" Barrett (1946-2006). *Am J Psychiatry.* 2007;164(7):1028.
5. Passie T, Halpern JH, Stichtenoth DO, Emrich HM, Hintzen A. The pharmacology of lysergic acid diethylamide: a review. *CNS Neurosci Ther.* 2008;14(4):295-314.