193426 - Is Beatboxing Prohibited in Islam?

the question

I would like to find out the ruling on “beatboxing”, which is sounds resembling music that a person makes with his mouth, without the use of any musical instruments of any kind. What is the ruling on listening to it or learning it?

Summary of answer

Beatboxing is prohibited because it sounds like musical instruments which are forbidden and distract people from remembering Allah.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

What Is Beatboxing and Why It`s Controversial in Islam

Beatboxing is an art which involves producing the sounds of drums, percussion and other musical sounds by using the mouth, nasal passages and throat; sometimes these artists also use their hands or other parts of their bodies to expand their repertoire of vocal effects and percussion.

This has been widespread in the West for decades and has begun to appear and become widespread in Arab countries in recent years.

Islamic Rulings on Music and Beatboxing

These human sounds that are produced in a way that resembles the sounds of musical instruments are prohibited sounds. It is prohibited to produce them in this manner and it is also prohibited to listen to them.

This is indicated in a number of ways:

- Musical instruments, as mentioned in the texts which forbid them, are not limited to specific instruments; rather the prohibition applies to everything that may come under this general heading.

The linguists did not limit it to any particular type; rather they included under this heading everything that may be called entertainment. The word Ma`azif (musical instruments) is a name that covers flutes, drums, and the like, as it says in Jamharat Al-Lughah by Ibn Durayd, 1/425.

As the prohibition of musical instruments is not limited only to one type and not another, the prohibition is not because of what it is, rather it is because of what it produces of prohibited types of entertainment. If this prohibited type of entertainment was produced by something else, it would also come under the same ruling as these instruments. If it did not have these features, then this prohibition would not apply to it.

Ibn `Abidin (may Allah have mercy on him) said: The musical instrument is not prohibited because of what it is; rather it is because it is intended for (prohibited) entertainment, either for the one who listens to it or for the one who plays it. (End quote from Hashiyat Ibn `Abidin, 6/350)

- Islam does not differentiate between things of a similar nature, so it is not appropriate to suggest that the wise Lawgiver would prohibit one sound then permit another, similar sound.

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Islam does not differentiate between things that are similar at all, and it does not regard as equal things that are different. It does not forbid one thing because of its harmful effects then permit another thing that is equally harmful, or permit one thing because it serves a useful purpose and forbid another thing that could serve an equal purpose. There is no suggestion that the Messenger (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) did any such thing at all. (End quote from Bada'i` Al-Fawa'id , 3/663)

These sounds are so similar to musical sounds that even sound engineers themselves may sometimes find it difficult to distinguish between these sounds and actual music.

- What matters is the consequences or results of things. If the human voice is changed and turns into a musical sound, then what matters is what it turns into, not what it was originally, such as if a man`s voice is turned into the voice of a teenage girl or adult woman.

Although these sounds are basically permissible, after this change they come under a different ruling. If rulings were to be based on what things originally were in the past, then we would say that alcohol is permissible, because it originally comes from grapes or raisins which are known to be permissible.

Ibn Al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) noted how the devil misleads people with regard to matters of this nature, as he said:

When the devil despaired of devoted worshippers ever listening to prohibited sounds such as flutes and drums, he looked at what results from these instruments, then he tried to make singing (without musical accompaniment) produce the same effect, and he made it attractive to those who lack understanding and have little knowledge. His aim is to mislead people step-by-step. But the one who has knowledge would look at what things may lead to and their likely results; he would look at the ultimate purpose behind things. (End quote from Kalam `ala Mas'alat As-Sama`, p. 167). There is a similar discussion in Talbis Iblis by Ibn Al-Jawzi (p. 274)

- The kind of pleasure that comes from these sounds is similar to that which comes from musical instruments, so they should be included under the same heading.

The scholars have stated that some things are prohibited because of the kind of pleasure they lead to. Ibn Hajar Al-Haytami (may Allah have mercy on him) said that it is possible to determine that reed flutes are prohibited by analogy with other prohibited musical instruments, because they produce the same kind of pleasure. (End quote from Kaff Ar-Ru`a`, p. 160)

Shaykh `Abdullah ibn Jibrin (may Allah have mercy on him) was asked: What is the ruling on producing sounds from the mouth that are similar to the sounds of musical instruments?

He said: In our opinion it is prohibited because it sounds like, and could be taking the place of,

musical instruments, which are forbidden and which distract people from remembering Allah. So whatever takes their place is also prohibited. We quoted this from him previously in the answer to question no. 1867 .

Permissible Sounds in Islam: Understanding the Boundaries

With regard to human sounds that do not resemble the sound of musical instruments, they are permissible, just as the sound of flowing water or the sound of the wind or the sounds of animals – such as horse's neighing or birds' tweeting – or the human voice – whether it is crying or laughing – or the sounds of guns and shells, or the sounds of cars, falling objects and breaking glass etc. are also permissible.

For more details, please see the following answers:

Is Music Prohibited?

Is Singing and Dancing Prohibited?

Can You Listen to Music in Ramadan?

Ruling on listening to foreign music whilst studying and revising

Is it permissible for her to listen to music whilst exercising?

And Allah knows best.