

## Relationships between Popular Music and Democracy: Implications for Popular Music Pedagogy

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### Abstract

*Strong relationships exist between modern popular music and the democratic societies that produce and consume it. Some of the music may sound revolutionary, and much of it does advocate changes in the status quo. Nevertheless, it is the music of the masses, the music of democracy, music that could not and did not exist in anything like its modern forms prior to: (1) the evolution of democratic societies, (2) massive capitalism-driven economic improvements for the proletariat, and (3) the invention and evolution of electronic technology. It is the music of, by, and for the great masses of us. Music educators should persist in teaching this music in all its contexts, some of which are not easily accessible through performance alone. This article cites numerous examples of social and political meanings of popular music in democracies.*

That the most influential country of the twentieth century produced the world's most influential music should come as no surprise, much like Western Europe produced the most influential music during that region's dominant period, what musicians call the "common practice period."<sup>1</sup> Music based on American popular musical styles spread throughout most of the world during the second half of the twentieth century. In the words of Christopher Small:

by any reasonable reckoning of the function of music in human life, the Afro-American tradition

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<sup>1</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, "Influence of Cultural Policy on Education in Music and the Other Arts," presented at the Fifth Anniversary Celebration Conference of the Institute for Research and the Archiving of Music: "Cultural Policy and Music Education II, Skopje Conference," Skopje, Macedonia: Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, January 2005; available at <http://mmc.edu.mk/IRAM/Conferences/Skopjeconf2/02Jere.pdf>; and at <http://repository.asu.edu/items/15568>.

is the major music of the west in the twentieth century, of far greater human significance than those remnants of the great European classical tradition that are to be heard today in the concert halls and opera houses of the industrial world, east and west.<sup>2</sup>

By the 1970s isolated villages were obtaining cassette recorders even before they had running water or main line electricity. Some scholars claim that "music industry technology penetrates faster than any other technological development in the history of mankind."<sup>3</sup>

That the music education profession should teach popular music can almost go without saying, and in fact it was taught by the first American music educators who catered to the masses, colonial singing masters of the eighteenth century. Today, "popular music should be taught" for a host of historical, social, and humanitarian reasons, the most important being "because it is the music of our time,"<sup>4</sup> not to mention place. Unfortunately, not unlike the colonial period, many modern intellectuals and classically trained musicians remain unconvinced. This attitude renders the academic music profession out of step with the world, musically speaking, and less effective

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Small, *Music of the Common Tongue: Survival and Celebration in Afro-American Music* (London: John Calder, 1987), 4.

<sup>3</sup> Roger Wallis and Krister Malm, *Big Sounds from Small Peoples: The Music Industry in Small Countries* (London: Constable, 1984), xiv.

<sup>4</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, "Popular Music in the American Schools: What the Past Tells Us about the Present and the Future," in *Bridging the Gap: Popular Music and Music Education*, ed. Carlos Xavier Rodriguez (Reston, VA: MENC: The National Association for Music Education, 2004), 102.

than it might be.<sup>5</sup> Our collective stance on teaching popular music reminds me of a story:

A man named Pat said, "Mike, I'm calling you from the freeway on my new cell phone." Mike replied, "Be careful, Pat. They just said on the radio that there's a nut driving the wrong way on the freeway." Pat retorted, "One nut? Hell, there are hundreds of them."<sup>6</sup>

This paper is neither a comprehensive survey of popular music nor a "how-to" on teaching it. Others can do these things better than I, despite the fact that there is still little in the way of theory or tested, replicated models in popular music pedagogy.<sup>7</sup> What I will talk about are some relationships between popular music and the democratic societies that produce and use it. Hopefully these remarks will generate some discussion relative to the symposium theme, popular music pedagogy. But first I want to define popular music for the purposes of this paper as music that resulted from the comingling of European and African-American musical styles. Blues, ragtime, and jazz were the early progenies of this comingling during the nineteenth century. The further importance of these styles was manifested through their influence on Black rhythm and blues. Meanwhile, White backcountry and mountain music, which morphed into country and western, combined with rhythm and blues to form rock and roll in the 1950s. Rock and

roll and its successor styles, in turn, have spread throughout the world.<sup>8</sup>

### Democracy and Popular Music: Pedagogy through Performance

Some of you know that I am a proponent of performance as a primary vehicle, a delivery system, for music education.<sup>9</sup> Others have advocated the inclusion of popular music performance in the school and university music curriculum.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, some contemporary commentators criticize traditional performing ensembles for being, among other things, undemocratic. I find this criticism puzzling for several reasons. First, music ensembles played important roles in the establishment of the world's earliest democracies, notably in France and North America. Furthermore, music ensembles entered the American public schools during the highly democratic progressive education movement, and even today they retain their middle class associations.<sup>11</sup>

Another reason I find the anti-democratic rhetoric about music ensembles puzzling is that part of their spectacular success in North American schools is attributable to their reliance on voluntary participation.<sup>12</sup> Their voluntary, democratic participation practices are a strength, not a weakness,

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<sup>5</sup> See Jere T. Humphreys, "Some Notions, Stories, and Tales about Music and Education in Society: The Coin's Other Side," *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 23 (April 2002): 138-40. For more on this topic see Humphreys, "Popular Music in the American Schools," 91-92; and Jui-Ching Wang and Jere T. Humphreys, "Multicultural and Popular Music Content in an American Music Teacher Education Program," *International Journal of Music Education: Research* 27 (February 2009): 19-36.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted slightly from Thomas Cathcart and Daniel Klein, *Plato and a Platypus Walk into a Bar. . .: Understanding Philosophy through Jokes* (New York: Abrams Image, 2006), 177.

<sup>7</sup> Termed "no settled history, no definitive canon" in Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street, "Introduction and Chronology of Pop and Rock," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), x.

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<sup>8</sup> Humphreys, "Popular Music in the American Schools," 91-92.

<sup>9</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in American Education: In Service of Many Masters," *Journal of Band Research* 30 (spring 1995): 64; Humphreys, "Some Notions, Stories, and Tales," 151-57; and Jere T. Humphreys, "2006 Senior Researcher Award Acceptance Address: Observations about Music Education Research in MENC's First and Second Centuries," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 54 (fall 2006): 185-86.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Andrew Krikun, "Mixing Memphis Soul into the Community College Stew," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 21 (March 2009): 76-89.

<sup>11</sup> Humphreys, "Instrumental Music in the American Schools," 43-45, 50-51, 58-59. Non-traditional ensembles in school settings also have humble roots, such as mariachi (Mexican street) bands.

<sup>12</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, "United States of America: Reflections on the Development and Effectiveness of Compulsory Music Education," in *The Origins and Foundations of Music in Compulsory Schooling*, eds. Gordon Cox and Robin Stevens (London and New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2010), 133.

in part because participatory practices in music reflect increasing egalitarianism in society.<sup>13</sup>

In addition to democratic historical contexts and voluntary participation, bands, choirs, and orchestras operate in accordance with democratic principles. Consider that most democratic organizations, institutions, and nations function not as “pure” democracies, but as representative democracies in that they delegate certain responsibilities to specific individuals and groups. Attempts to form utopian groups and societies in which all members participate as equals in every way have invariably failed and thus remain rare in the real world. The willingness to work together under experienced leaders is important in democratic organizations and institutions of all types.<sup>14</sup>

Some critics are taking their anti-democratic arguments to extremes unprecedented in our staid field of music education. The allegations that participation in a choir inherently subjects members to abuse, even that directors inflict “violence” on choir members, are simply astounding. I find it ironic that critics allege undemocratic practices in ensembles when such groups could be viewed as the epitome of democracy due to their practice of democratic values like their participants’ willingness to work together to accomplish goals, willingness to trust a leader while voluntarily participating, and involvement in the civic lives of democratic communities. One reason music ensembles have flourished in schools in the democratic United States is that they are part of the democratic fabric, not antithetical to it. For all these reasons, I hope we can find ways to continue to add more and different types of popular music ensembles to the highly successful traditional performing ensemble model in the schools

today.<sup>15</sup>

There must be ways to combine the best characteristics of teacher-led ensembles with the benefits of students directing themselves, without leaving minor students unsupervised in school settings. A good example of a non-school ensemble program is a non-profit organization near Boston called Plugged In that provides free instruction to ninety-five teenagers in twenty-eight garage-style rock bands taught by eight paid professional rock musicians. The students give three concerts each year at town hall-style meetings at which they democratically select benefit causes. To date these benefit concerts have supported Amnesty International, the Tobacco Free Mass Coalition, the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, We Care Solar, Seeds of Peace, and a Boston homeless shelter.<sup>16</sup>

Popular music pedagogy programs in schools, universities, and communities should incorporate performance ensembles, but ensembles are not a complete vehicle for music education. Why? The biggest problem with performance-based music education is not that it is undemocratic, that it does not focus on composition, or even that it does not reach all students. Instead, the biggest drawbacks are that the curriculum is limited to musical works and practices within the students’ performance capabilities, and that it does not always take context into account. Ensembles offer intimate engagement with music together with many other benefits, including the practice of democratic principles, but the performance of popular and other music can take us only so far as an educational vehicle.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, “Political, Economic, Social, and Technological Changes Resulting from Modernization: Implications for Music Education,” Keynote speech presented at the 1st International Conference on Music Education, Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt. February 2011, pp. 18-19; available at <http://repository.asu.edu/items/15569>.

<sup>14</sup> Estelle Jorgensen made a similar point when she wrote that “Bands, choirs, orchestras . . . contribute to the fabric of cultural life in communities large and small.” Estelle R. Jorgensen, “School Music Education and Change,” *Music Educators Journal* 96 (June 2010): 23.

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<sup>15</sup> Humphreys, “Some Notions, Tales, and Stories,” 151-55; and Jere T. Humphreys, “Commentary: Ensembles,” in *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, vol. 1, eds. Gary E. McPherson and Graham Welch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 788-89.

<sup>16</sup> Marilyn Jones, “Helping Teens be a Real Guitar Hero—by Caring for Others,” *Christian Science Monitor*, October 25, 2010, p. 47.

<sup>17</sup> Humphreys, “Some Notions, Stories, and Tales,” 151-55; and Humphreys, “2006 Senior Researcher Award,” 185-86. For a discussion on some positive and negative aspects of teaching popular music through performance in universities and other related issues, see Paul Théberge, “The Project Ahead: Some Thoughts on Developing a Popular Music Curriculum,” *Canadian University Music Review* 21 (2000): 28-39.

### Democracy and Popular Music: Pedagogy through Listening and Study

In fact, the scope of learning through performance may be more limited for popular music than for traditional music, because arguably more of the meaning of popular music lies outside the music itself. Today I want to discuss a few examples of relationships between popular music and the democratic societies that produce, consume, and are influenced by it, contextual facts and concepts not easily accessible through performance alone.

One thing students can learn through the study of popular music is the role played by popular opinion, that people in democracies hold popular opinion in particularly high esteem. In 1840 Alexis de Tocqueville said this about Americans:

Not only is common opinion the sole guide that remains for individual reason among democratic peoples; but it has an infinitely greater power among these peoples than among any other. ... [It] gives them an almost unlimited trust in the judgment of the public. ... In the United States, the majority takes charge of furnishing individuals with a host of ready-made opinions, and it thus relieves them of the obligation to form their own.<sup>18</sup>

Recently, *New York Times* Op-Ed contributor Derek Leebaert wrote:

A century ago, a foreign journalist asked the theatrical impresario Charles Frohman why one saw only actors' names on Broadway marquees, whereas in Paris the names in lights were those of playwrights. Frohman explained that in America, the emphasis is always on the doer, not the thing done: "There are starts in every walk of American life. It has always been so in democracies." It remains true today: as the most individualistic of all democracies, America creates, rewards, obsesses over starts of every kind and intensely extols personal success.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, vol. 2, trans. Harvey C. Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000 [orig. 1840]), 409.

<sup>19</sup> Derek Leebaert, "Our Envoys, Ourselves," *New York Times* Op-Ed (online), December 11, 2010; available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/12/opinion/12leebaert.html>.

By definition popular music is popular, and students need to understand the benefits, drawbacks, and sheer power of popular opinion in democracies, where people value collective opinion more than individual opinions. According to de Tocqueville, this is so because people in democracies look to popular opinion for judgments instead of to their "betters," because of course they have no "betters."<sup>20</sup>

Another thing we should acknowledge is the belief that the driving force behind popular music is commercial interests, that mass tastes are being created and manipulated solely for the purpose of making money. This paradigm, initially set forth by the father of music sociology, Theodor Adorno (1903-69), and his followers, provided a way to reconcile the worldviews of Adorno and other classical musicians on the one hand, with the realities of popular music on the other. Since then, scholars in fields as diverse as sociology, anthropology, communications, history, political science, economics, musicology, and ethnomusicology have expanded Adorno's largely Marxist economic model.<sup>21</sup> Running parallel to the belief that music business interests manipulate public tastes for gain is the notion that modern popular music is a tool of capitalist imperialism employed primarily by the United States. In this view, the main goal of promoters of popular music is political and/or cultural domination. For example, much as been made of the development of salsa music in Latin America as a defense against the alleged imperialistic "encroachments of rock."<sup>22</sup>

Unquestionably, there is truth in the allegations of taste manipulation by music business interests, and we should acknowledge the role of music industry in the origins, development, and spread of modern popular music in the U.S. and throughout the world. We should also acknowledge cultural and economic imperialism, which is ever present or potentially present in relations among nations. And of course we should acknowledge the

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<sup>20</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 409.

<sup>21</sup> John Shepherd and Kyle Devine, "Sociology of Music," in *New Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., ed. Charles Hiroshi Garrett (New York: Oxford University Press, in press [2013]), and *Oxford Music Online/Grove Music Online*; available at <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com> ([in press, 2013]); see also Reebee Garofalo, "Introduction," in *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, ed. Reebee Garofalo (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 2, 13.

<sup>22</sup> Garofalo, "Introduction," in *Rockin' the Boat*, 3.

role of capitalism, which operates in tandem with democracy. Along the way students should learn that democracy and capitalism leave in their wake spectacular positive results, but also some serious shortcomings.

One important lesson that students could learn is that the development and use of modern popular music not only coincides with, but is part and parcel of the long-term shift toward egalitarianism in the Western world since the Golden Age of Pericles in fifth century Greece (c. 495-429 B.C.E.). Significant egalitarian movements appeared in Europe when the nation-state began to emerge as the primary political unit during the second half of the Middle Ages. Since then, countries that began as monarchies have shifted toward more egalitarian forms of government.<sup>23</sup> France and the United States became the world's first democracies, both in 1789, with Great Britain and other countries following in the nineteenth century. Germany and Japan became democracies in 1945; Southern Europe, Korea, and Taiwan in the 1970s; followed by most of Latin America in the 1980s and Eastern Europe in the 1990s. According to historian Francis Fukuyama, by the early 1990s approximately 140 countries had adopted democratic forms of government.<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to imagine how much more egalitarian much of the world has become, say, since classical Athens, "the cradle of democracy," where "at best only 25 percent of the total population. . . were citizens."<sup>25</sup> By contrast, most residents of contemporary Athens enjoy the rights of citizenship.

During the American colonial era, certain religious beliefs of Calvinist churches, together with relatively primitive conditions, led to simple music and musical practices, with congregations singing indigenous music whenever they could, as opposed to art music produced by and for the European monarchical system. As democracy spread, the masses of people, the proletariat, grew in size and strength, with some people remaining in lower and working classes but with increasing numbers moving into the middle class. Not coincidentally, the scope and importance of popular music increased commensurably with the rise of the proletariat.

From the Sacred Harp and religious revival singers; to the urban gospel music that led indirectly

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<sup>23</sup> Humphreys, "Political, Economic, Social, and Technological Changes," 5.

<sup>24</sup> Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), 42.

<sup>25</sup> Nancy Evans, *Civic Rites: Democracy and Religion in Ancient Athens* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2010), 86.

to Tin Pan Alley; back to blues, ragtime, and jazz; to professional and community military-style bands and more—all were produced by and for the lower and middle classes. These popular musical styles and practices not only reflected, but helped create a more democratic society. With the spread of democracy and capitalism and aided by new technologies, popular music, especially since the beginning of rock and roll, has become a ubiquitous part of mainstream society in increasingly complex ways.<sup>26</sup> Today, although popular music is by and large produced by the music industry, it still "reflects the interests of ordinary people." Those interests include the trends toward egalitarianism evident throughout most of the world, including improved civil rights "for previously disenfranchised groups such as women, children," and various racial, ethnic, and religious minorities.<sup>27</sup>

Today, some fear that rock and roll tries to change society ("the system"), but scholar Robert Pattison maintains that rock does not try to change the system because it is the system; it is "the dazzling progeny of American democratic premises."<sup>28</sup> Our students may understand this intuitively, but the lesson is too important to be left to chance, in part because opposing forces insist that popular music is at best without merit and at worse a corrupting influence.

One of the most important facets of our popular music heritage lies in the realm of race relations. A compelling case could be made that popular music has been organic to the democratic movements that have and continue to lead to improvements in race relations, in addition to being an obvious reflection of the various civil rights causes. For example, the blues and its limited 12-bar form and harmonic structure represented the lives of an oppressed people. In contrast, Duke Ellington evoked the wide range of forms and improvisatory practices when he stated that "jazz is freedom."<sup>29</sup> Princeton scholar Cornel West wrote:

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<sup>26</sup> Keir Keightley, "Reconsidering Rock," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 140-41.

<sup>27</sup> Humphreys, "Political, Economic, Social, and Technological Changes," 7.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarly: Rock Music in the Mirror of Romanticism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 212.

<sup>29</sup> Cornel West, *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight against Imperialism* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2004), 91.

The blues and jazz made it possible to engage race in America on personal and intimate terms—with democratic results. ... The rich blues and jazz heritage was eventually embraced by white citizens and was especially appealing to the antiestablishment youth behind the infectious pulses of rock. This heritage was the first major cultural point of contact between whites and blacks, and we've seen this dynamic again in the embrace of rhythm and blues and hip-hop by white citizens.<sup>30</sup>

Much has been made of white teenage listeners crossing over to rhythm and blues, and then Black and White performers crossing over to their respective counterpart musical styles. Pattison makes the point that Elvis Presley's debut at Sun Records in Memphis in 1954, and the recordings that followed, may have been "a more accurate reflection of the current sweeping across America" than the landmark school desegregation decision handed down by the U.S. Supreme Court only six weeks earlier.<sup>31</sup>

In the tradition of their colonial predecessors, twentieth-century American intellectuals initially ignored popular music, but when popular musicians began to assimilate folk music it became fashionable to acknowledge connections between popular music and race and other social issues. The big star was Bob Dylan (b. 1941), who combined folk and folk-style music that was intellectually and socially appealing with the rhythms of rhythm and blues and rock and roll. The new social movements with which this new music was associated—movements based on "race, age, and gender"—were more complex than those reflected in the class-based conflict theories espoused by Marxist scholars.<sup>32</sup> These new styles proved irresistible to millions of fans, and the Beatles added additional millions.

Currently, the popular music scene continues to be heavily influenced by rap, the signature style of the hip hop culture that speaks to social class, sexuality, and violence<sup>33</sup> among the urban Black poor, conditions that clearly remain

unacceptable to the creators of the music and presumably to many consumers of it as well. Examples include an early rap song called "The Message" by Grandmaster Flash & the Furious Five in 1982, a protest against urban poverty and "trickle down economics." As the hip hop culture emerged, in 1988 Patti Smith recorded a song entitled "People Have the Power," an optimistic ode to idealism, democracy, and revolution and a call to action on the part of ordinary people.<sup>34</sup> Much progress in racial equality has occurred since Elvis drew untold millions of fans to a new, racially hybrid musical style, but racism remains stubbornly imbedded in American and many other cultures, hence its continuing prominence as a topic in popular music. Students should understand these issues, including how music can reflect perceived reality and also how it can contribute to progress.

Students should also learn about censorship in relation to popular music in democracies. We are told that Plato was opposed to the widespread use of popular music, and that he and his teacher Socrates (c. 469-399 B.C.E.) advocated state censorship of it. Despite being early architects of democratic principles, ancient Greek philosophers were instrumental in creating the concept of mind-body dualism, with what they considered elite musical and other works of art becoming what I have termed "the artistic analogue for universal 'truth'." They and later Greek philosophers specifically objected to composers aiming their works toward mass appeal, oriented as they were toward democracy for elite men only.<sup>35</sup>

During the sixteenth century, as the middle class grew, the church banned works by Orlando di Lasso (1532-92) for lyrics that praised drinking and mocked Christian hymns—as well as for sonic qualities such as chromaticism that were reputed to evoke feelings of eroticism.<sup>36</sup> In the late seventeenth century, Louis XIV (1638-1715) censored some emerging operatic works that appealed to wider audiences because they expressed criticism of the state. Later, Mozart (1756-91) was required to have

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>31</sup> Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Garofalo, "Introduction," in *Rockin' the Boat*, 2-3.

<sup>33</sup> Carlos Xavier Rodriguez, "Popular Music Ensembles," in *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, vol. 1, eds. Gary E. McPherson and Graham Welch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 885.

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<sup>34</sup> *Top 25 Protest Songs*, DVD, VH1 Educational.

<sup>35</sup> Jere T. Humphreys, "Toward a Reconstruction of 'Creativity' in Music Education," *British Journal of Music Education* 23 (November 2006): 351-54; quoted material from p. 354.

<sup>36</sup> David Crook, "A Sixteenth-Century Catalog of Prohibited Music," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 62 (spring 2009): 23-25.

the libretto to his *The Marriage of Figaro* revised due to its ridicule of the nobility.<sup>37</sup>

Today, advances in civil liberties and electronic technology make it difficult for governments to censor the massive amounts of music being produced and consumed. Some of us were in Egypt last year, where the government had recently stopped trying to censor music broadcast on radio after their failure to suppress such popular songs as “I hate Israel.” The current demonstrations there appear to be calls for more freedoms, together with economic improvements. Despite all the progress worldwide, music censorship still occurs, occasionally even in the most liberal democracies.<sup>38</sup> Students should learn about the existence and contexts of music censorship.

Popular music often serves as a vehicle for protests against events and conditions. Since it tends to reflect the interests of lower and middle socioeconomic classes, much of it is against the status quo, generally from the left side of the political spectrum. However, some music and practices emanate from the political right, such as the use of rock music “in the [U.S.] invasion of Panama and in the [Persian] Gulf War.”<sup>39</sup> Allegedly music and other sounds have been used as tools in the interrogation and torture of prisoners by U.S. armed forces for at least fifty years,<sup>40</sup> a practice formally protested in 2008 by the American Musicological Society,<sup>41</sup> following earlier protests by the Society for Ethnomusicology, Society for American Music, and the U.S. branch of the International Association for

the Study of Popular Music.<sup>42</sup> Interestingly, despite the perceived conservatism of country music listeners, relatively few country songs deal with political or even social issues of the kind that can be identified with right wing causes.

Teenage and older students should know about a DVD from VH1 entitled *Top Twenty-Five Protest Songs*, which elicits a great deal of discussion in my classes.<sup>43</sup> Students could learn that Neil Young’s 1989 hit “Keep on Rockin’ in the Free World” was about disenfranchisement and poverty in the world during the Reagan and Bush administrations, not about pumping fists in the air during flag-waving, patriotic demonstrations. Students also need to learn about Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land” from 1944, one of the most popular, recognizable songs ever. Guthrie intended it as a response to “God Bless America” by Irving Berlin, but the dissenting lyrics about the U.S. were later removed from Guthrie’s original version, which had included both laudatory and dissenting lyrics. “This Land is Your Land” was recorded by folk music revivalists Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, Joan Baez, Bruce Springsteen, and others. Famously, Springsteen and Pete Seeger performed it during the Obama Inaugural Celebration at the Lincoln Memorial on January 18, 2009. There are now versions of “This Land is Your Land” for Canada, the Bahamas, Belgium, Virgin Islands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Wales, Namibia, and Israel (in Hebrew). The song has been featured, often in parody, in films and in the television shows *Home Improvement* and *The Simpsons*, and in *A Prairie Home Companion*. For decades the song has been recommended for and used in school music programs, typically, though not always, with the sanitized lyrics.<sup>44</sup>

There have been so many influential protest songs that I find it a stimulating but challenging topic in college classes because students bring strong opinions about the songs. One song that keeps surfacing is Public Enemy’s “Fight the Power” from 1989, a landmark rap song about racism that itself became something of a social movement. Currently we have the wildly popular Grammy Award-winning

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<sup>37</sup> John Wells, “A Society Marriage,” in Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, Lorenzo Da Ponte, and Edward Joseph Dent, *The Marriage of Figaro = Le Nozze di Figaro*, Opera Guide 17 (London: Calder, 1983), 9-14.

<sup>38</sup> For examples of modern-day official and unofficial censorship of popular music, see John Street, “Rock, Pop and Politics,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Pop and Rock*, eds. Simon Frith, Will Straw, and John Street (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 243.

<sup>39</sup> Garofalo, “Introduction,” in *Rockin’ the Boat*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Suzanne G. Cusick, “‘You are in a Place Out of the World’: Music in the Detention Camps of the Global War on Terror,” *Journal of the Society for American Music* 2 (February 2008): 3-4.

<sup>41</sup> “AMS Board Condemns the Use of Music in Physical or Psychological Torture,” *AMS Newsletter: The American Musicological Society* 38:2 (August 2008): 5; available at <http://www.ams-net.org/newsletter/AMSNewsletter-2008-8.pdf>.

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<sup>42</sup> Dexter Edge, “Is There Abuse and Corruption in Musicology?” October 3-4, 2010, p. 1; available at <http://idiography.blogspot.com/p/writings.html>.

<sup>43</sup> *Top 25 Protest Songs*.

<sup>44</sup> For more information on “This Land is Your Land,” see Mark Allan Jackson, “Is This Song Your Song Anymore? Revisioning Woody Guthrie’s ‘This Land is Your Land,’” *American Music* 20 (autumn 2002): 249-76.

rap metal band from Los Angeles called Rage Against the Machine. Rage recently played a benefit concert in support of a boycott of my state of Arizona in opposition to what they called “racist” legislation aimed at Latino residents.<sup>45</sup> In *Evita*, there are the haunting, memorable protest songs against the Peronist regime in Argentina, interspersed with love songs by and for Eva Perón; and there are well-known political and social protest songs and dances about New York City’s Puerto Rican-Americans in *West Side Story*. Rock and rock-derived styles have been used for protest purposes in Tiananmen Square in China, behind the Berlin Wall in Eastern Europe, and in the Luna Park stadium in Argentina.<sup>46</sup> Even country music has a corpus of protest songs.<sup>47</sup>

Anti-war songs are an important special genre of protest music. While our popular music curriculum should include performance, composition, and improvisation as well as listening, only through historical context can students understand the meaning and purpose of such songs as Arlo Guthrie’s “Alice’s Restaurant,” an acidic song from 1967 about military conscription during the Vietnam War, not about celebrating Thanksgiving. Creedence Clearwater Revival’s 1969 song “Fortunate Son” is a bitter anti-war, class-conscious rant about disparities in Vietnam War military service between the “have’s” and “have not’s.” Springsteen’s “Born in the U.S.A.,” a Vietnam War protest song recorded in 1982, was not intended as a patriotic song, though it was misappropriated for that purpose by politicians, including a U.S. president. Another was System of a

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<sup>45</sup> Steve Appleford, “Rage Against the Machine Rock for Immigrants’ Rights: Zack de la Rocha protests Arizona’s ‘racist law’ at explosive hometown show,” *Rolling Stone*, July 26, 2010; available at <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/rage-against-the-machine-rock-for-immigrants-rights-20100726>; see also Chris Barth, “Rage to Headline Arizona Immigration Protest Concert: L.A. show marks first hometown gig in a decade,” *Rolling Stone*, July 15, 2010; available at <http://www.rollingstone.com/music/news/rage-to-headline-arizona-immigration-protest-concert-20100715>.

<sup>46</sup> Garofalo, “Introduction,” in *Rockin’ the Boat*, 3.

<sup>47</sup> MSN Entertainment: “Country Music Protest Songs,” available at <http://music.msn.com/search/music/?q=country+music+protest+songs&q=AS&sk=&pq=country+music+protest&sp=1&sc=1-21&p=2>.

Down’s 2002 song “Boom!”, an angry indictment of the then forthcoming military invasion of Iraq.<sup>48</sup>

In February 2010, President Barack Obama hosted an appreciation gala for protest songs, calling them “music of movement.” He stated that he might not have been elected president without them because the songs gave people a sense of power to make changes.<sup>49</sup> What some consider the best protest song ever is Bob Dylan’s “Blowin’ in the Wind” from 1962. Inspired by nuclear disarmament, civil rights, and anti-war sentiments, it paved the way for protest songs by the Beatles, Rolling Stones, and others.<sup>50</sup> Popular music has helped galvanize many movements and causes. As such movements diminished beginning in the 1980s, music itself became the organizing force in “charity-rock” events like Live Aid, Farm Aid, Sun City, Amnesty International tours, Nelson Mandela tributes, and the Greenpeace project.<sup>51</sup>

### Other Topics

Other topics for popular music pedagogy include countless popular songs with double or otherwise hidden meanings. Sociologists began publishing on this topic as early as 1927, in an article in the *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* on obscene “double meanings” of words in blues lyrics such as “jelly-roll,” “shortnin’ bread,” and “easy rider.”<sup>52</sup> 1928 saw the emergence of the pop hits “Making Whoopee,” “Button Up Your Overcoat,” “Stouthearted Men,” “The Sweetheart of Sigma Chi,” and yet another version of “Shortnin’ Bread.”<sup>53</sup>

There are countless songs about mundane interests and concerns of ordinary people. Southern humorist Roy Blount, Jr. mentions the plethora of

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<sup>48</sup> *Top 25 Protest Songs*.

<sup>49</sup> “Obama Hosts Gala for Protest Songs: Smokey Robinson, Bob Dylan, Natalie Cole and Jennifer Hudson among the Performers at White House Concert,” CBS News.com. February 10, 2010; available at <http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2010/02/10/politics/main6193720.shtml>.

<sup>50</sup> *Top 25 Protest Songs*.

<sup>51</sup> Garofalo, “Introduction,” in *Rockin’ the Boat*, 1-6. Paul Simon and his *Graceland* album is another important related topic.

<sup>52</sup> Guy B. Johnson, “Double Meanings in the Popular Negro Blues,” *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 22 (April-June 1927): 12-20; discussed in Roy Blount, Jr., *Long Time Leaving: Dispatches from Up South* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2007), 91.

<sup>53</sup> Blount, *Long Time Leaving*, 87.



popular country songs about food, including these songs about gravy:

Cootie Williams and His Rug-Cutters for “Ain’t the Gravy Good,” Link Davis for “Rice and Gravy Blues,” ... Dee Dee Sharp for “Gravy (for My Mashed Potatoes),” Cisco Houston for “Beans, Bacon and Gravy,” the Ink Spots for “Pork Chops and Gravy,” the Nighthawks for “lickin’ Gravy,” King David’s Jazz Band for “What’s That Tastes Like Gravy?,” Johnnie Temple and the Harlem Hamfats for “What is That Smells Like Gravy?,” and others too numerous to mention.<sup>54</sup>

Blount claims to have collected recordings of 2,961 popular songs about food, most of which, he maintains, are also about sex. He owns thirty-four recorded versions of “Honeysuckle Rose,” twenty-three of “Jambalaya,” twelve of “Roly Poly,” and nine each of “Digging My Potatoes,” “Ain’t Gon’ Give Nobody None of this Jelly Roll,” and “Saturday Night Fish Fry,” in addition to thirty-five different recordings of “Shortnin’ Bread.”<sup>55</sup>

It is also important to debunk myths about specific popular songs and groups, such as the widely held belief that “Puff, the Magic Dragon” is about drug use. Peter Yarrow, later of Peter, Paul and Mary, wrote some additional lyrics and put a melody to a poem written by fellow Cornell University undergraduate student Leonard Lipton. Yarrow said in a 1996 interview: “What I brought to it [the song] really was the sense, as opposed to the adventure story, of the idea of the loss of innocence, when I wrote, ‘A dragon lives forever, but not so little boys’ ... Now, I sing, ‘girls and boys.’ The idea was that this was a song that really had a sense of tragic, if you will, implications, like some of the great mythical stories.” Paul [nee Noel Paul Stookey] recalled that *Newsweek Magazine* concocted the story

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 86. Shortnin’ bread, biscuits, and other wheat-based breads were sometimes used as “a good metaphorical reference to sex of a fairly steady and good quality,” whereas cornbread was equated with more ordinary sex, such as with one’s spouse. Sweets (including pies and honey), meats, potatoes, and various fruits were also common sex metaphors among oppressed slaves and their immediate descendants. For more information about food/sex metaphors in blues lyrics, including an extensive list of reference sources, see “The Use of Food as a Sexual Metaphor in the Blues”; available at <http://www.partywithmepunker.com/Food%20and%20sex.htm>.

as a kind of joke, and that the myth persisted despite years of efforts on the part of the trio to discredit it.<sup>56</sup>

Many musical styles have contributed to multiculturalism. For example, Mexico-born Carlos Santana, the first Latino popular music superstar in the United States, was a great blues-rock guitarist before developing an Afro-Cuban blues hybrid called “Latin.” The Latin-American tunes “Louie Louie” and “Day Tripper” were covered by the Beatles. And we have the influence of Hispanic musicians Richie Valens, Machito, and Selena Quintanilla from Corpus Christi, Texas, who learned to sing in Spanish before she understood the words. And there was Linda Ronstadt of Tucson, Arizona, the biggest female rock star of the 1970s, who finally, against the wishes of her producer, “came out” with her Spanish language album *Songs of My Father (Canciones de mi Padre)*, which became the top selling non-English language album in U.S. history.<sup>57</sup> Finally, current images of Lady Gaga depict a woman acting in masculine roles while maintaining female sexual characteristics in “an intentional blurring of gender roles.” She is portrayed as anti-sexual and marketed successfully toward the gay population.<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusions

The European colonial powers sometimes imposed their music on their subjects, but often it was adopted willingly. Similarly, since World War I the United States has dominated popular culture in areas as diverse as “fast food” and Coca Cola, motion

<sup>56</sup> Stookey also recalled a third meaning of “Puff, the Magic Dragon”: Vietnam veterans reported that “Puff” was a nickname applied to C-47 cargo planes with added guns that flew into combat zones. William Ruhlmann, “Peter, Paul and Mary: A Song to Sing All Over This Land,” *Goldmine*, April 12, 1996. Available at <http://www.peterpaulandmary.com/history/fruhlmann1.htm>. Travers said later that Lipton’s early text had been inspired by a rhyme by Ogden Nash. She insisted that the song was never about drugs; see Snopes.com; available at <http://www.snopes.com/music/songs/puff.asp>.

<sup>57</sup> *Latin Music U.S.A.*, VCR, 2 vols. (PBS Distribution, 2009).

<sup>58</sup> Kate McCarthy, “Not Pretty Girls? Sexuality, Spirituality, and Gender Construction in Women’s Rock Music,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 39 (February 2006): 69-94.

pictures, clothing fashions including blue jeans, and music including jazz, rock, and now rap.<sup>59</sup>

These powerful influences notwithstanding, for several reasons the prospects for teaching the social and political meanings of popular music are not bright. One is our ultra-conservative university-based music teacher education programs, which in addition to failing to provide training in popular music,<sup>60</sup> convey an ideology of music as a non-referential, contextually neutral object, a construct that is an anathema to the realities of popular music. Another reason is the documented socially conservative attitudes of teachers, including music teachers,<sup>61</sup> as well as the schools in which they teach. These ideologies, attitudes, and lack of training make it difficult for teachers to see, much less teach, the topics of love, sex, racism, and imperialism that constitute the subject matter of so much popular music.<sup>62</sup> In short, schools,<sup>63</sup> music educators, and university curricula are all so conservative that the profession is simply not teaching what modern popular music is about. Largely it is about the concerns of the democratic masses, people who have historically fared far better in democratic and even partially democratic societies than have the masses in non-democratic societies.

The democracy in ancient Athens was imperialistic and racist, and most countries since have been likewise, democratic or not. In the words of Cornel West, “our denial of the antidemocratic

foundations stones of American democracy ...” constitutes a “self-deceptive innocence.”<sup>64</sup> And of course interest in love and sex has remained high over the centuries and shows no signs of diminishing. To heighten awareness we should teach these associations, together with the easier topics of popular music like food (with literal meanings), albeit in different ways at different age levels. Popular music is an inseparable part and parcel of democratic societies, and surely it is the duty of the education system to teach it as such.

We need to persist in teaching this music in all its contexts. Some of it may sound revolutionary, and much of it does advocate changes in the status quo, but it is the music of the masses, the music of democracy, music that could not and did not exist in anything like its modern forms prior to the evolution of democratic societies, the accompanying massive capitalism-driven economic gains for the proletariat, and the invention of electronic technology. It is the music of, by, and for the great masses of us.

We music educators argue endlessly about whether we should teach through performance, composition, conducting, listening, or study, when clearly we need to do all of them. We argue over whether music education should be teacher led (notice I did not say teacher centered) or student centered, when clearly different content material, maturity levels, and other circumstances require different approaches. And we argue endlessly over the nonsensical question of whether we should teach only intrinsic aspects of so-called absolute music or whether it might be all right for students to learn some other things as a part or result of the process, such as how to cooperate in groups and how music is produced by, and in turn influences, the society around us.

Meanwhile, we continue to avoid the major problems and issues of our time and place, and of all times and places. We can do better. Postmodernism has helped us expand our horizons and insights, but the sometimes accompanying nihilistic thinking, where nothing is real and therefore nothing really matters, can paralyze us. The nihilism expressed in the Sex Pistols’ “God Save the Queen” and its chant-like refrain of “no future,” and the nihilism in some gangsta rap and Black metal and death metal songs,<sup>65</sup> should be taught for what it is: artistic expressions of

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<sup>59</sup> Pattison, *The Triumph of Vulgarity*, 154; and Humphreys, “Influence of Cultural Policy,” p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> Descriptions, reasons, and some potential solutions for inadequate instruction in popular music and popular music pedagogy in American music teacher education programs are discussed in Wang and Humphreys, “Multicultural and Popular Music Content,” 20-23, 27-31; and Humphreys, “Some Notions,” 138-41. The accreditation system for university music units is yet another reason; Humphreys, “2006 Senior Researcher Award,” 187.

<sup>61</sup> Howard G. White, “The Professional Role and Status of the School Music Teacher in American Society” (Ph.D. diss., University of Kansas, 1964), 366.

<sup>62</sup> Paul Friedlander with Peter Miller, *Rock & Roll: A Social History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2006), 10.

<sup>63</sup> Paul G. Woodford, “The Social Construction of Music Teacher Identity in Undergraduate Music Education Majors,” in *The New Handbook of Research in Music Teaching and Learning*, eds. Richard Colwell and Carol Richardson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 679.

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<sup>64</sup> West, *Democracy Matters*, 41.

<sup>65</sup> Jamie Tompson, “Thrash is Back on the Menu with the Big Four,” *Guardian.co.uk*, July 22, 2010; available at <http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/2010/jul/22/big-four-tour-metallica-slayer>.

human thoughts and feelings; but it is incumbent upon scholars and teachers to strive for more objectivity and balance. And we need to surmount the self-serving curricular and other goals of our educational institutions.<sup>66</sup>

Today I have mentioned several areas in which we have made progress as a society. Music education contributes to that progress. It has not been very long since we began to throw off the yoke of our own insistence on the unquestioned superiority of classical art music, so it is not surprising that we are still in the process of developing the necessary curricula, methods, materials, and teacher attitudes and skills for teaching popular music effectively. The other two keynote speakers and some other participants at this symposium have done more than their share to find solutions to important problems and issues related to music education, including popular music pedagogy. I am confident that we will continue to progress as a profession and as a society as our democracies mature and people come to realize that they really do “have the power,” as the song says.

John Lennon is reputed to have said, “Before Elvis, there was nothing,” and Chuck D of Public Enemy pronounced “Rap ... the CNN for young people all over the world. ...”<sup>67</sup> But there was a great deal before Elvis and after Elvis, and rap is more than a CNN. All of this is history and an important part of mass culture and mainstream society. For a while enthusiasts and “culturists” considered Bob Dylan’s lyrics as poetry, the Beatles’ *Sgt. Pepper* album as art, and Woodstock as community, while Motown was special because it was Black. But these things were not really poetry, art, community, or racial; they were not even about mass appeal; they *were* mass culture.<sup>68</sup>

This music is small in form, relatively non-hierarchical in thematic and tonal development and performance modes, and it changes rapidly. It is the product of a nation of immigrants, some willing and some not, a great many of whom ended up in what Roy Blount calls “[t]he bodacious social and moral

stew”<sup>69</sup> of the southern U.S. culture, to which were added elements from Harlem to Hawaii, and now from countries throughout the world. This music does not just reflect the culture that produces and consumes it; it *is* the culture, an increasingly international and democratic culture, and we should teach it as such.

Thank you.

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<sup>66</sup> Humphreys, “2006 Senior Researcher Award,” 187.

<sup>67</sup> Chuck D [née Carlton Douglas Ridenhour] with Yusef Kama, *Fight the Power: Rap, Race, and Reality* (New York: Delacorte Press, 1997), 256.

<sup>68</sup> Reebee Garofalo, “Mega-Events,” in *Rockin’ the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, ed. Reebee Garofalo (Boston: South End Press, 1992), 18. For arguments about the influence of politics on music and visa versa, see Street, “Rock, Pop and Politics,” 243-55.

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<sup>69</sup> Blount, Jr., *Long Time Leaving*, 145.

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## CHINESE ABSTRACT

### 中文摘要

流行音樂與民主的關係：對流行音樂教學法的啟示

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現代流行音樂與生產消費流行音樂的民主社會之間有著緊密的聯繫。有些音樂可能聽起來具有革命性的特點，事實上很多音樂確實對現實社會的變化與發展起到了推動作用。可以說大眾的音樂以及民主的音樂在以下的幾個條件成熟之前是不可能存在的：1、民主社會的進步與變遷；2、大規模的資本運行模式所帶來的基層人民的經濟水準的提高；3、電子科技的出現和發展。流行音樂被大眾創造並服務於大眾。音樂教育工作者們應該在音樂所存在的社會背景中教音樂，這些音樂中有的不能單單通過表演而獲得的。本文引用了很多事例來闡釋流行音樂在民主制度下的社會意義以及政治意義。