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Diffusion and Mixing Politics and Music

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The history of humans on this planet is replete with indications of the powerful role that music can play in controlling or influence the lives of others. King's and noblemen in Europe during the 15th to 18th Centuries had music in whatever scale they could afford, to lend prestige to themselves and their courts. Even lesser noblemen engaged musicians in their courts. When noblemen went into battle as commanding officers, they hired musicians from their own coffers to provide music for their troops. In Eastern Europe it was common for noblemen and landlords to have bands of Gypsy musicians to play for their entertainment and for that of their guests and special bands modeled on the Turkish military bands to play military music.

The Chinese of ancient times believed that a people's song or poetry, the two were not separable, contained the essence of their spirit and so systematically collected songs from all the regions of China, both as documentation but also as a symbolic demonstration of the fealty that these provinces owed to the central government. During the Sui and T'ang times, from the 6th to the 10th centuries, there was great interest in the cultures which surrounded China on all sides, including Persia, India, and the vast number of cultures which existed then in Central Asia and South East Asia. During these times it was considered very prestigious to have orchestras from each of these countries performing at the Chinese court. While it was prestigious for these countries to have their music presented in the Chinese court, for the Chinese, their presence also symbolized a lord and vassal relationship between them.

Music as a Political Force

Throughout history there have been indications that music was not always regarded as only an enhancement, a formality or a frill. Even when music is performed without words, music can have a powerful effect on events and for this reason has often been feared and treated with heavy restrictions. Even without the aid of words to clarify a political or religious message, the sound of the music itself communicates something that is many cultures including our own regarded with great apprehension.

When the Spanish Conquistadors subjugated the Aztecs of Mexico, in order to ensure peaceful acceptance of the new rule and religion, and certainly to prevent the

possibility of the disastrous economic effects for Spain of a political uprising, they destroyed all the Aztec priests and scholars. The Spanish also killed all of the Aztec musicians, as well, so great was their fear of the power of music to organize the population and to effect a potential uprising. Even so, many of the first accounts by Spanish priests they describe an amazingly high level of musical proficiency and skill on the part of these Aztec musicians. While it was possible that there was genuine dislike of Aztec music which may have played some part in its eventual destruction, it was the political factors which outweighed all else in the final decision.

In the United States during the early period of slavery, a policy more stringent and brutal than any known anywhere else in the Americas was imposed on the slaves. Not only were slaves from the same tribes systematically separated, but husbands from wives, children from parents as well. So great was the fear of a possible slave uprising and of the potential role which music might play in such an occurrence that in addition to all the controls to prevent the use of African languages among the slaves, all African musical instruments, in particular the drums, were strictly forbidden in the United States as well as the singing or playing of any African musical forms which might be recognized as such.

Two music functions which managed to continue in the United States that bear an unmistakable African structure, albeit without the benefit of African texts, were the work songs and the children's songs. It is interesting that in spite of the stringent and often brutal measures taken to prevent it, so many Africanisms were so irrepressible that they survived in the United States and eventually flourished in sufficient degree to serve as major distinctive stylistic influences on American popular music even today. Consider that the major trends in American music, once they could be identified as separate from America's European roots, were Ragtime, then Jazz, then Rock and more recently Rap and Hip-Hop, all of which are African American in origin, although many other contributions have been added to them. Their survival in the face of the history in the US of the suppression of African culture is indeed impressive.

Maintaining an Identity While Part of the Whole Hawaiian Music in America

After British control and then United States domination, the Hawaiian Islands became a state. Tourism was and continues to be a major economic factor in the islands' survival. Visitors from the mainland as well as from other countries carry away with them the memory of the tropical islands, the colors, flowers and especially, the local music. What is interesting is that Hawaiian music has different strata, the oldest Polynesian music of the original Hawaiian indigenous community and then the Hawaiian music that was the result of the combination of these

traditional chants with Western music and instruments like the guitar and ukulele.

In Hawaii today this mixed form is the current popular music most often heard by tourists, but it is also part of the same genre that is the popular music of the Hawaiian Islanders themselves. The popular song culture of Hawaii is strong and thriving. There is a repertoire of something like 800 or so songs, almost all sung entirely in the Hawaiian and known by several hundred musicians in the islands. What is interesting is that, in spite of all the local place names and the strong spirit of identity which native Hawaiians feel with their culture, the Hawaiian language is no longer spoken by most of the residents, even by most of the native indigenous Polynesian Hawaiians. Here is an example of such strong regional pride, virtually akin to nationalism, that songs in a language which most of the consumers no longer speak have become a symbol of their identity with that culture and stand as a metaphor for the uniqueness of the Hawaiians within the United States.

Political and Cultural Control

During most of the years of the Soviet East Block in Europe, for many of those nations, East Germany, that is, the former Democratic Republic of Germany, served as the leader in things considered most modern. In East Germany as elsewhere in the former Communist Block, popular forms of music from the West were strongly discouraged. However, the Western Zone of the city of Berlin in the very center of the then East Germany was bombarding the airways with radio and television broadcasts filled with new popular music and opulent advertising of consumer goods. It is little wonder then that East Germany represented a seepage point for the introduction of the latest music styles from the West. Although, television sets in East Germany were especially rigged in order that West Berlin channels could not be received, most enterprising East Germans found the means to correct this modification and frequently even in official government hotels, TV sets had been fixed in order to pick up channels from West Berlin. In spite of all restrictions against it, the population found the means of gaining access to what was going on outside the wall and from East Germany the aesthetic styles spread to other East Block nations. Indeed, the force of this cultural seepage from West to East was one of the factors which brought pressure to bring down the Berlin Wall in 1989. The role of music in this was very important.

In the Union of Burma, today called Myanmar, that South East Asian nation which has been virtually sealed off from the rest of the world since the early 1960s, one can sense that one has stepped back in time. Outsiders, long only allowed to enter the country on 24 hour transit visae, now can, with complex and tedious visa application processes, be permitted to spend one week or two in the country. Most Burmese who manage to leave the country cannot ever return. The government has a

clear and strong cultural policy which supports the traditional arts of Burma as opposed to foreign importation and its control, supported by a strong military dictatorship is powerful. In spite of all of this, the younger generation of Burmese is completely given over to the pursuit of Rock, much of the source for it coming in cassettes smuggled over the mountains from Thailand. So widespread is the new Rock oriented popular music that the government of Burma has been powerless to prevent it and has virtually given up.

The roots of this recent Burmese story of failed political control of music may lie in an old and honored South East Asian custom, one that prevails in Indonesia, as well. Throughout several countries in this large geographic area, it is understood that theater and in particular the traditional clowns are not to be suppressed. The various theaters either using marionette puppets, shadow puppets, or live actors, all tend to use plots drawn from classic Hindu or old local historical epics. The actors speak in old elaborate and formal language, beautiful and appreciated by the public, but somewhat difficult to fully comprehend. The clowns in each of these cultures, represent on stage, the local characters, placed on stage, as it were, to observe and comment, and incidentally, to explain the actions of the high noble characters. In this context many jokes are made as well as broad satirization of the actions. Comment on local conditions which are quite out of place in the line of the historical plot going on onstage are quite freely introduced and greatly appreciated by the audience. Even during the October 1966 Revolution in Indonesia and in under the current strict military dictatorship of Myanmar, or Burma, the clowns have been largely free to criticize the government and voice the concerns and resentment of the populace. The clowns in the theater have been allowed to criticize current affairs and even direct their criticism to the current political leaders.

During the last few years of the Soviet Union, they at last relinquished the official policy of discouraging two specific forms of music from the West, Jazz and Rock. (See Inset) After many years of imposing sanctions against these musics, even sometimes sending the offending musicians off to Siberia, it was decided that they simply could not keep this music out any longer. Borders that long stood fast against political and free market economic encroachments were hopelessly permeable to the influence of the most popular forms of mass media transmitted music. Smuggled cassettes and records simply could not be kept out efficiently enough to prevent the music from being heard. After that it was finally impossible to prevent people from playing and enjoying this music.

Not long after even the People's Republic of China opened its borders officially to Rock after having kept the most effective and total blockade against Western popular music since 1949 of any country in the world. If China and Russia both gave up trying to control the suspected evil influences of the popular Capitalist media, then clearly the power of that media is an example of the importance of cultural

change and natural force which strives to ensure it.

During the early period of Martial Law in Poland at the end of the “Solidarnosc” movement in 1978, a ban was placed on all recorded Rock music coming either from the US or even Scandinavian countries as reaction to the imposition of sanctions against Poland by the Western powers. In this last instance the reason for the new restriction was to prevent the music from assisting in civil disobedience. However, it also seems likely that the possibility of a simple statement of symbolic retaliation against the West may have been the motivation.

In many nations of the West, the East and even what was formerly known as the Third World, the arts are talked about in terms great cultural pride and of the freedom they enjoy, but such freedom has often meant freedom from support and in the former East Block this meant controlled support without freedom. In many nations either support or freedom can be withdrawn whenever the arts are seen as a threat to political stability. But free economics does not provide support for the arts either. Only those forms which can gain access to sufficient media distribution can find audiences sufficient to guarantee their survival. In this rather inverse manner, then, we have tangible endorsement of the power of the arts by the major political and economic systems of the world.

The Power of Music as a Guarantee of Freedom.

There are some cultures, however, in which the arts are seen as powerful, perhaps in a form akin to magic, and as such are allowed to remain free even in a society in which the behavior of individuals may be constrained. In the *griot* or minstrel tradition of West Africa, in Guinea, Senegal and Mali, the singer is free to sing song of praise or derision and can fan the emotions of his listeners at will with a freedom of expression not allowed even to the kings. In Latin America, in particular in some parts of the Caribbean cultures of Venezuela, Cuba, Puerto Rico and Veracruz, Mexico, this tradition survives in the manner in which musicians can sing complimentary songs about passersby. However, if in some way, usually with money, this is not acknowledged or appreciated, the songs can quickly change to strong public criticism. In both Burma and Indonesia, the clowns who appear as part of the traditional theater are free, even in old historical plays, to comment on current events.

Recent Trends in the United States

Over the past ten years a slowly growing conflict has risen to a head. This concerns the level of, or even the validity of any government support for the arts. Although the former Socialist states of Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union

as well as many nations of what was called the Third World, the lesser economically developed nations, continued to vigorously support the arts at a national level, the United States has moved in the opposite direction. After starting out in the late 60s with a modest National Endowment for the Arts, one of the smallest of those of any industrialized nation and smaller even than the support level for the arts in many of the underdeveloped nations of the world, the NEA grew ever so slightly and then in very recent years was virtually decimated by congress and the cultural wars which swept the nation in the 90s.

The talk was about the battle between censorship and freedom of expression on the one hand and between asking the taxpayers to support what they viewed as pornography and whether the masses can effectively decide what is artistically best for the health of the nation. A great political battle arose over a few government funded works of art which some deemed to be blasphemous or pornographic and the argument that these were an infinitesimally small portion of the great good done by the endowment all across the nation even with the meager resources at its disposal fell on deaf ears and the endowment was reduced by almost 50% of its already very small budget.

While the arguments on either side remain unresolved, the effect of the decimation of the NEA budget has been felt and the waves of reduction are rippling across the states and local areas in a slow domino effect. What is clear is that there is a new attitude about music and the arts and that new attitude has been made manifest by recent congressional action, driven incidentally by massive statements of agreement from letter writing constituents. This is clearly the way the nation is inclined to go. The question will remain, is the culture well served when the major driving force will be economic rather than artistic.

Where There is Money Involved

It is a basic principle of economics that if one person is to devote himself to making a fish hook, then another must catch enough fish for two while the other makes hooks. There are cultures in which everyone in the community shares in the work of providing food and necessities for the group and all share in the making of music when it is required or desired by the group. But in most of the societies of the world today, musicians are specialists. They are people who are regarded as having special skills and their subsistence is provided by others in order that they may continue to provide what they do best and in exchange for these services.

The principle is clear enough. In static times musicians understand their role and provide what they must in exchange for having their need for survival met in kind or in money. However, as cultures change the popular taste changes as well. New musical styles arise and musicians must adapt to the changes or be left without

support. What about those who create the new styles? In popular music, changes come steadily and rapidly. The process of adapting to new styles is challenging but not so drastic. In the case of art musics, like Western classical music, the creator of new forms may need long periods of support with little completed work to show for the time spent working out new ideas. In modern times, composers try to get grants, or teach music privately or in an institution in order to make ends meet while trying to work on something new. During the 16th, 17th and 18th Centuries wealthy patrons would pay for the services of a court musician or even a court composer whose job it would be to provide new music for the court. Something like this was also true in the courts of Asia and the Middle East. Patrons gave free reign to artists whom they respected and allowed them to create new forms, largely without interference.

In modern Europe, many countries still provide support for composers of music to work on their own in creating new works. This support is provided because of a strong belief that it is of value for the society at large to have the benefit of this creative force at work and it recognizes that there is no longer any other way to provide such support. In the former East Block countries this kind of support for creative composition was always understood to be important to the state and composers were considered workers.

If one musician can manage to make or buy an instrument and finds the time to devote to becoming a specialist, it is a fairly simple matter to do so. Think about what happens when the music requires the playing of five or six musicians, or what about ensembles of 50 musicians or more. It now becomes not just a matter of the logistics of getting that many musicians together at the right time and place, they must all be paid, the location in which they play must be arranged for, people must be notified of the performance, or there must be some cultural support system which provides for all this. We are soon talking about some larger political or economic system which must be in place to provide all this.

Wealthy patrons could provide money for musicians in their own entourage. The earliest military bands consisted of small groups of musicians, personally paid for by the wealthy noblemen who were the commanding officers of those military units. Eventually, some of these functions were taken over by municipalities and states and at the same time wealthy private patrons gradually ceased providing support for ensembles in this manner.

There are cultures in which musicians perform functions in their society but do so not primarily with the intention of making personal profit. In many such societies musicians have other means of livelihood and perform musical functions for reason of tradition, status or personal prestige. Such musicians continue to provide an important service in their communities, but are rewarded in other ways. Under some cultures, in traditional Turkey and Iran of not too many years ago and in Okinawa

today, it would be considered unseemly for a musician to be paid for performing music.

Community, State, and Institutional Support for Musicians

There are communities in which musicians are recognized as specialists, that is people whose task it is to provide this service for the community or group. They may be specially compensated for this purpose, but it is also possible that they are not compensated in any special way other than the by the prestige associated with providing something that is valued by the group. In larger and more highly stratified societies, musicians are more likely to be a specialized group and in societies such as our own, are paid for these services. In our society some musicians are paid great sums for their performances and others must seek numerous engagements in order to make a living and still others can only manage to get a few performances and must have other means of livelihood to survive.

Under the Socialist system that was in place in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe as well as in the Communist countries of Asia, being a musician was not something that one could simply decide to do. Musicians were considered workers and in order to be considered a musician then one had to pass rigorous examinations and training after which one's work could then be exclusively devoted to the performance of music. However, this did not always mean that others could not enjoy music. If one could find time after doing one's assigned work in the profession to which they had been designated, one could devote oneself to playing music for one's own enjoyment or for others. But there was a very big economic and professional difference between those who were designated musicians and those who were not.

The Media as a Control in Economic Selection

Powerful and far reaching systems of communication and networks for transmission themselves exert a strong influence on the selection of what is to be transmitted. Only those forms of music which are believed to have sufficient appeal to bring about a response wide enough to merit the financial investment required to buy time into the system are allowed air time. Getting on the air now, can be difficult. Once into the networks of TV, radio, and recordings, the potential for reaching an audience is global, although saturation is by no means guaranteed. It is against this overwhelming pressure to seek as well as to provide what large segments of the population want that both traditional cultural and political barriers have proven ineffectual. Economic factors, however, can also serve as powerful barriers. Becoming a nationally or internationally known performing artist certainly

depends on talent. However, those in control of the media and those who make decisions about what will finally be produced and what will not be, make judgments on the basis of economic predictions rather than about talent. Sometimes they are wrong about both.

Many of the traditional forms of music in Western Classical are undergoing difficult times, particularly in the United States where even the meager government support has been largely withdrawn. There are no longer wealthy patrons who provide support for composers and musicians and the large foundations are not nearly so large as the need and even they have begun increasingly to turn to what they regard as the more pressing social needs of the world. Chamber music concerts and solo recitals are declining drastically and many symphony orchestras are disbanding. The traditional avenues for exposing and educating people into the tradition of classical music, such as music education in the public schools, are also dying out. Oddly, classical music continues to hold its own small market share in the purchase of CDs and although one might have predicted that because of such little general public interest, that such sales would be limited to a few well known favorites, this has not been true. There is a great diversity of classical music being recorded and if anything that diversity has increased over the past twenty years instead of decreasing.

As with popular music, many are content to purchase CD of their favorite music and listen to the music at home rather than attending live concerts. Attendance at Rock concerts remains high, however, the volume of those attending concerts is still a smaller fraction of the vastly greater CD purchasing audience. Many people in arts world decry the decline in support for the traditional high art forms and the lack of attendance at concerts. It may be that we are, in fact, in the midst of a major cultural change from one set of styles to another, much like what happened in Western music in the change from the Renaissance style to that of the Baroque, or from the Baroque to the Classical. What is different, however, is that instead of a few artists given freedom by their noble sponsors to create new forms and idioms, and thus to lead the culture, the drive for greater sales is the controlling factor in the presentation of new forms and ideas. Support can only be provided if it is deemed that future sales will justify the expense. The question for the future of our mass media driven society will be, when the old complex high art traditions are gone, with what will we replace them if the only growth is the result of trying to find what pleases the largest number of people.

