

Musical Responses to Western European Bureaucratic Action

Ella Lambert¹ and Jim Haisler^{1#}

¹Obra D. Tompkins High School

#Advisor

ABSTRACT

With the rise of popular culture music, as well as resurgence of traditional folk music in the late twentieth century, Western cultures, distinctly Western European states, saw the relations between music and politics emerge to its current state- a deeply intertwined dependency between the two, with its effect spreading across borders to reach greater populations. To look at how the relations between music and politics came to be, first the examination of the dependency between the two in the latter half of the twentieth century must occur. Across genres, artists drew inspiration from their current political climate, creating music as a response. Yet, political action also resulted from music, distinctly with songs coined as “protest soundtracks.” The multifaceted nature of the relationship allows for a greater understanding of the extremes of this relationship, distinctly with music censorship occurring in most European states, democratic and authoritative alike. The continued censorship of music from European states leads to the notion that the existence of music warrants political action, despite proven lack of substantive response of the music itself. To grant a greater autonomy to artists and develop an enhanced comprehension of the multifaceted relationship that is music and politics, the implementation of music-based lessons of core classes into secondary schools will warrant the greater awareness of the relations between music and politics.

Musical Responses to Western European Bureaucratic Action

In his address to the United Nations, *Why Music Matters*, Leon Botstien, President of Bard College, claims “music seeks to transcend the bounds of language and exploit its limitations” (Botstein, 2009, p.178). Botstien establishes “two forms of music that are today ubiquitous...so called folk musicality and its modern mirror image ... popular culture music,” (Botstien, 2009, p. 180). John Street, published in the Cambridge University Press, advocates that “pop culture provides space for resistance to be articulated” (Street, 2003, p.121), conveyed with examples of “early 1960s of the mods and rockers, to accounts of skinheads and punks in the 1970s, and rap and dance culture in the 1980s and 1990s” (Street, 2003, p.121).

However, this space for resistance is not as prominent in certain countries. Robin Ragan, associated with Knox College, examines how the oppressive dictatorship of Spain under Francisco Franco resulted in a highly regulated music industry, with songs having to be approved before being recorded to align with Franco’s morals (Ragan, 2017). Contrasted to A.V. Satish Chandra’s, professor of political science at Osmania University, research on the growth of sub genres, such as rave, techno, and trance, in the United Kingdom, resulting from increased LSD usage, where artists got almost complete musical freedom (Chandra, 2010).

Michele Gelfand with the Department of Psychology at the University of Maryland, and her associates introduce the idea of Tightness-Looseness Theory, T-L theory, that social groups have a range of norms, with tighter norms resulting in stricter rules and punishments for deviance and looser norms having weaker rules and more tolerance for deviance (Gelfand, et. al., 2020, p. 4-5). This theory is reflected on the scale of which different states, depending on the strictness of their government, implement censorship of politically charged music.

The range in which music is created, based on the tightness or lack thereof in a society brings up the question: “To what extent have sub-genres of music developed in response to bureaucratic action of western European nations in the late twentieth century?” Ultimately, an examination of the range of music created in response to bureaucratic action will warrant greater understanding on the role of music, both folk and popular, reinforced by integration of music into education systems.

Musical Responses to Bureaucratic Action

Music and politics are deeply intertwined, making it difficult to discern who affects who. Music, particularly sub-genres of music, can be a response to current bureaucratic action. A.V. Satish Chandra finds this relationship in the United Kingdom in the 1990s, with the rise of Ecstasy culture, a “combination of dance music in all of its myriad and various forms, and drugs” (Chandra, 2010, p.462). Chandra attributes Ecstasy culture to have “sent out shock waves that reverberated culturally and politically, affecting music, fashion, the law, government policy...” (Chandra, 2010, p.462). Specifically, this culture led subgenres such as “rave, techno, and trace to be global phenomena ” (Chandra, 2010, p.265). Ecstasy culture, according to Chandra, was fostered by “the Margaret Thatcher years in Britain... It simultaneously advocated and curtailed freedom” (Chandra, 2010, p. 464). The United Kingdom provides an additional example of its political setting leading to popularity of a newfound subgenre. Robert Martinez, published in the *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, examines how punk-rock rose to popularity in Northern Ireland. Martinez claims the rise of bands such as the Sex Pistols or Stiff Little Fingers roots from “failure to acknowledge the isolated, neglected voices in Northern Irish society” (Martinez, 2015, p. 206-207).

It is important to note this relationship is not isolated to popular culture. In a mini documentary from Nikon Europe, established camera company, the song of freedom at the Estonian Song and Dance festival is detailed as the Estonian people are celebrating their independence, with the traditional folk song of freedom, renowned for its ability to provide a medium for the Estonian’s to relish in the fragility of their freedom (Nikon Europe, 2014). While the Estonian people use folk music to respond to an oppressive government, David Kaminsky, Assistant Professor of Global Art Studies at the University of California, examines how folk music has seen a revival in Sweden. In Sweden, an ongoing debate on its nation’s folk music presents itself given its complicated history (Kaminsky, 2012). In particular, “Swedish musicians and scholars first used the tactic of deconstruction in the late 1970s to distance themselves from the national romantic underpinnings of the folk music concept,” arguing “that pure and ancient folk music was an ideological fiction” (Kaminsky, 2012, p.77), in an attempt to counter the “anti-immigrant narratives of right-wing nationalists” (Kaminsky, 2012, p.75).

Music’s response to bureaucratic action is not isolated to response to current political action. Ulrich Schonder, associated with Haverford University, marks the 1960s in Germany’s music scene as a turning point, as music looked to modern inspiration, as well as “classical works and art songs from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Schonder, 2010, p.114).

Music, regardless of genre, has been a medium to express discontent with current political systems, proving the dependent relationship between the two. A greater analysis of music’s dependency on bureaucratic action relies on the iteration of this relationship, achieved through incorporation of music secondary schools, immortalizing the relationship between music and politics.

Bureaucratic Responses to Music

The dependent relationship between music and politics is not limited to that previously established, as bureaucratic action can derive from musical creation. John Street examines this relationship, providing examples of songs “associated with social movements: 'We Shall Overcome', 'Blowin' in the Wind', 'With God on Our Side', 'A Change is Gonna Come', 'Mississippi Goddam', 'People Get Ready'... form[ing] part of the soundtrack to the protests over civil rights,

the nuclear bomb and the Vietnam war” (Street, 2003, p.122). Street’s examples are not limited to indirect causation of bureaucratic action, as previous examples inspire social movements, which then warrants bureaucratic action. Street exhibits a direct causation of bureaucratic action deriving from music as “rock musicians in East Germany came to provide an important catalyst for the collapse of the Eastern German regime” (Street, 2003, p.122), attributed to the space of resistance rock supplied, its encoding of political messages through metaphors, and the musician’s economic position (Street, 2003). The nature of music is elevated by stressing music’s role on modern society, resulting in substantial political responses.

Bureaucratic action’s dependency on music is not isolated to popular music. Harry White, with the University of Toronto, assesses Northern Ireland’s folk music, demonstrating the need for a sociology of folk music. He claims the very existence of folk music in Ireland warrants bureaucratic action, proving the dependency of politics on music (White, 1984).

The relationship between music and politics is multifaceted, both inspiring each other, proven by examples in Europe from the late twentieth century. An emphasis on this multifaceted relationship arises from music-oriented secondary education system, warranting greater comprehension of this relationship.

Censorship in Music

The existence of music not only warrants bureaucratic action that responds to what music is demanding, it also warrants more extreme forms of action, censorship. Umberto Fiori, who studied philosophy in Milan, assesses rock music in Italy, or rather, the lack thereof. Fiori claims that due to the Marxist condemnation of rock, Italy saw a delay in the arrival of rock, and once it arrived in the late 1970s, forced by circumstances, “Italian rock music therefore based itself on parody” (Fiori, 1984, p.271). The overbearing government in Italy resulted in music lacking politicization, and listening to rock music was transformed into a political choice (Fiori, 1984). Controlling governments dictating the music industry is not exclusive to Italy. Robin Ragan studied the shift in censorship of music from Francisco Franco’s dictatorship to a democracy in Spain. Ragan identifies the standard of censorship set by Franco, banning “any discussion of the Spanish Civil War that showed empathy toward those that lost the war and their ideologies” (Ragan, 2017, p.30), and how after Franco passed in 1975, music labels upheld this censorship, with punishments as harsh as imprisonment.

Authoritarian governments placing stricter regulations on music proves Michele Gelfand and her associates’ T-L theory. Both Spain and Italy in the mid-twentieth centuries had “tight” governments, warranting “stricter rules and punishments for deviance” (Gelfand, et. al., 2020, p.9), in this case, extreme forms of censorship. However, tight governments are not the only ones partaking in music censorship.

John Street counters the notion that only authoritarian, tight societies censor music, as democratic, loose societies, particularly the United Kingdom and the United States, engage in censorship. Street pulls examples of Paul McCartney’s “Give Ireland Back to the Irish” or the Sex Pistols’ “God Save the Queen” being banned “by broadcasters, acting within their understanding of the duties of public service broadcasting” (Street, 2003, p.118) as well as the United States’ usage of the parental advisory warning. Street recognizes “this code is operated voluntarily by the music industry” yet emphasizes the disproportionate effect “on black musical forms, hip-hop/rap, rather than other genres” limiting access to music as “retailers chose not to stock marked items” (Street, 2003, p.118). Street’s claims counter Gelfand and associates’ T-L theory, as it provides in depth analysis of loose countries responding in ways that tight countries were expected to, with “stricter rules and punishments for deviance” (Gelfand, et. al., 2020, p.9).

This leads to the notion that the very existence of music, politically charged or not, warrants forms of censorship, in democratic and authoritative governments alike. The prominence of awareness on censorship, particularly in democratic countries, is bolstered by the integration of music into secondary schooling, providing a newfound perspective into the multifaceted relationship of music and politics.

Response to Censorship

Often, censoring music has minimal effects on music itself. Peter Schmelz, with the University of California, examines music during the Cold War, identifies serialism, a method of composition, attributing its rise in popularity, particularly in Eastern Germany, to early Cold War fueled tension (Schmelz, 2009). Subgenres facing opposition from the general public, frequently in forms of censorship, utilize opposition to benefit their popularity, present in the case of Cold War serialism, or can be manipulated by artists to exemplify the true meaning of their work. Robert Alonso Trillio, with a PhD from the Moores School of Music, University of Houston, establishes levels of music activity, “the real, which could also be identified with the term ‘popular,’ the official, and the underground” (Trillio, 2014, p. 107), in relation to the 1960s Spanish music industry following Spain’s civil war, and the effect on avant-garde music. Trillio claims that often, avant-garde music was forced underground, due to its “left-wing potential” (Trillio, 2014, p.115). However, its movement underground failed to stop avant-garde artists from reacting to their political climate (Trillio, 2014), with continued responses to the “appropriation and self-serving use of those avant-garde movements” (Trillio, 2014, p. 115) present, contrasting avant-garde’s established political affiliations. Isolation of avant-garde, provided by its underground development, gave avant-garde artists a medium to express political standings without fear of government manipulation (Trillio, 2014). The Estonian people, documented by Nikon Europe, maintained the tradition of their song of freedom and dance, even during the Soviet Union’s attempts to manipulate the festival to meet their propagandist desires. The festival has been a constant in their history since 1918 (Nikon Europe, 2014), providing an additional example of politically charged music resisting attempts to eradicate or alter the music.

However, politicization of music in response to censorship is not always beneficial for music genres. Marcello Keller, board member of the Mediterranean Institute at the University of Malta, examines the lack of traditional folk music in Trento, an Italian province, despite resurgences of traditional language. Keller attributes this to increased politicization of music, among other factors (Keller, 1984). Regardless, a placed importance on politicized music in response to extreme bureaucratic action warrants a more distinguished comprehension of the intricacy of music’s relationship to politics, reinforced with musical inclusion in secondary education systems.

The Recommendation

In order to aid artists in gaining autonomy over their work, granting them freedom to produce music that both responds to political action, as well as warrant bureaucratic action, it is necessary to first understand that music itself is “genuinely a form of life” (Botstien, 2004, p.179). Sanctioning a “universal impulse, need, and cognitive capacity for music...found to be inherent in all humans to varying degrees can engage the participation of all in a given society.” (Botstien, 2004, p.180). Once the nature of music is understood, the emphasis of music’s role in societies arises. This can be expressed through the incorporation of music more heavily into school curricula. Robert Sellen, Professor of History at Georgia State University, uses a music based lesson to teach high school students about the French Revolution, which received 91.67% support of implementation into the curriculum, effectively immortalizing relations between music and politics (Sellen, 1976). This needs to be enacted on a larger scale, reaching more schools, particularly in Western Europe, due to its history of music censorship, in order to stress the nature of music and its effects on modern politics.

References

- Botstein, L. (2004). Why Music Matters. *The Musical Quarterly*, 87(2), 177–187.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/3600903>
- Chandra, A. V. S. (2010). LSD, ECSTASY AND THE MUSIC OF POLITICS. *The Indian Journal of Political Science*, 71(2), 459–468. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/42753708>

- Fiori, U., & Burgoyne, M. (1984). Rock Music and Politics in Italy. *Popular Music*, 4, 261–277.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/853366>
- Gelfand, M., Calouri, N., Jackson, J. and Taylor, M., (2020). *The cultural evolutionary trade-off of ritualistic synchrony*. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2019.0432>
- Kaminsky, D. (2012). Keeping Sweden Swedish: Folk Music, Right-Wing Nationalism, and the Immigration Debate. *Journal of Folklore Research*, 49(1), 73–96.
<https://doi.org/10.2979/jfolkrese.49.1.73>
- Keller, M. S. (1984). Folk Music in Trentino: Oral Transmission and the Use of Vernacular Languages. *Ethnomusicology*, 28(1), 75–89. <https://doi.org/10.2307/851432>
- Martínez, R. (2015). Punk Rock, Thatcher, and the Elsewhere of Northern Ireland: Rethinking the Politics of Popular Music. *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, 48(1), 193–219. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43549877>
- Nikon Europe (2014). *The Song of Freedom at the Estonian Song & Dance Festival*.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCDsPbUORtc>
- Ragan, R. (2017). Censorship in Political Music Lyrics and Concerts During the Transition to Democracy and the 1980s in Spain. *Hispanic Journal*, 38(1), 29–44.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26535327>
- Roberto Alonso Trillo. (2014). Music and Politics in the Spain of the 1960s: The Case of Tomás Marco. *Perspectives of New Music*, 52(1), 106–133.
<https://doi.org/10.7757/persnewmusi.52.1.0106>
- Schmelz, P. J. (2009). Introduction: Music in the Cold War. *The Journal of Musicology*, 26(1), 3–16. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jm.2009.26.1.3>
- Schönherr, U. (2010). Out of Tune: Music, Postwar Politics, and Edgar Reitz’s “Die zweite Heimat.” *New German Critique*, 110, 107–124. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40926585>
- Sellen, R. W. (1976). Ideas, Politics, and Song: The Use of Music to Illustrate the French Revolution. *Music Educators Journal*, 62(9), 56–59. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3395054>
- Street, J. (2003). “Fight the Power”: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics. *Government and Opposition*, 38(1), 113–130. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44483019>
- White, H. (1984). The Need for a Sociology of Irish Folk Music. A Review of Writings on “Traditional” Music in Ireland, with Some Responses and Proposals. *International Review of the Aesthetics and Sociology of Music*, 15(1), 3–13.
<https://doi.org/10.2307/836505>