

# MUSIC

## Current election echoes songs of the 60s

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The 1960s was a revolutionary decade filled with many changes in beliefs and behaviors. With the formation of the counter-culture and the "hippie" era, everything from beliefs of sex, race, religion and fashion were completely transformed.

Since this year is an election year, and many people are torn over different beliefs such as the Iraq War, abortion and gay marriage, it is important to recall one major trend in the 60s that is echoed in today's society- the protest song.

In the 60s, musicians had a lot to protest about. There was the Vietnam War, a seemingly endless battle against the corrupt Vietnamese. There were the race riots, where black Americans

fought for their right to freedom and equality. There was the women's movement, which saw thousands of American women fight for their place in society. There was also the gay rights movement, which saw many homosexual males and females demand for their voices to be heard.

While the older generation of America turned a blind eye and deaf ear to the cries of the youth, music turned into a legitimate outlet for people to express their complaints, ideas and fears about the American government. Some of their songs were revolutionary to the points that popular culture uses them today. Below are some of the examples of these musicians and their protest songs:



A young Bob Dylan poses for the camera.

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**Phil Ochs:** One of the best examples of his style of protest was his live version of his song "Talking Vietnam Blues." In his introduction to the song, Ochs claims to have written the song with "the aid of a young, liberal songwriter named Bob McNamara." McNamara was the Secretary of Defense from 1961-1968, during which he made many questionable decisions in regards to the Vietnam War. Ochs also dedicates the song to President Johnson. His most famous protest song, however, is the popular "I Ain't Marchin' Anymore," a well-known tribute to anti-Vietnam sentiments.

**Bob Dylan:** Dylan was always known as a protest singer. Whether he enjoyed the title or not, many of his songs became known for their political finger-pointing. His 1963 sophomore release *The Freewheelin' Bob Dylan*, became known as one of the most civil-rights-driven albums in music history.

The first song on the album "Blowin' in the Wind" contained lyrics directly associated with corrupt government officials. "How many times must a man look up/Before he can see the sky?/Yes, 'n' how many ears must one man have/Before he can hear people cry?/Yes, 'n' how many deaths will it take till he knows/That too many people have died?/The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind..." This song became the anthem of the 1960s civil rights movement.

Other songs from the album, including "Masters of War," which was covered by Eddie Vedder and other musicians, and "A Hard Rain's A-Gonna Fall" are both directly associated with protesting.

**Marvin Gaye:** Gaye took an unexpected turn in Motown, when he decided to release a heavily political album. Much to the dismay of owner Berry Gordy Jr., Gaye's album, *What's Goin' On*, called out many wrongdoers in American societies, from politicians sending troops to war, to people being racially unjust. "Picket lines and picket signs/Don't punish me with brutality/Talk to me, so you can see/Oh, what's going on..."

Shortly after Sept. 11, many artists combined to make a remix of the song, as a tribute to the fallen victims and a call for action among the citizens. Artists such as Britney Spears, Gwen Stefani, Christina Aguilera, 'NSYNC, Destiny's Child, Jennifer Lopez, and Gaye's daughter Nona came together for the song.

**Joan Baez and Pete Seeger:** While both musicians were instrumental in the early 60s folk revolution, it was one of their songs that they recorded individually that became well known in the decade. Their versions of "We Shall Overcome" struck a chord among the people suffering many different injustices. Everyone from black citizens being denied their equality, to women being mistreated to young Americans against the Vietnam draft came together in harmony to this song.

While Baez's song rang more loud and vibrant, Seeger's take was much more solemn and direct. At many of her concerts, Baez would ask the audience if they were "ready to sing 'We Shall Overcome.'" Seeger also frequented the song at his live concerts.

**CSNY:** Like many important issues, these political protests lasted far beyond the 60s decade. In 1970, four students were killed and nine others injured in a tragic shooting on the campus of Kent State University. Some of the students who were shot by the Ohio National Guard were protesting American's activity in Cambodia, while others were merely walking to class. The team of Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young came together to write a tribute to the victims as well as criticize Nixon's military action.

The song "Ohio" penned by Neil Young, climbed to No. 14 on the charts, as it was one of the most successful protest songs. "Gotta get down to it/Soldiers are cutting us down/Should have been done long ago/What if you knew her and/Found her dead on the ground?/How can you run when you know?"

Many other songs in music history rang out as protest anthems. Songs such as The Kingston Trio's "Where Have All the Flowers Gone" to Bob Marley's "Get Up, Stand Up" became

more than just songs from popular artists in the 60s and into the 70s. They became revolutionary propaganda for musicians to help change to corrupt government officials and plea for peace.

## Music meets politics: Is there a connection? Or should the two never meet face to face?

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Music has been a successful medium of conveyance for emotion and opinion for some time now; made particularly evident in the 1960s. As the time for presidential decision-making is withering away each and every day, politics are becoming an essential part of each person's daily life; and if they're not, they should be. Many Behrend students are experiencing their first opportunity to give input in this year's election, so there's no need to explain why this is such a hot topic.

Whether you are conscious to it or not, music can be considered one of the largest role players in politics each election year. This could be considered beneficial to citizens, or it could also be interpreted as a destroyer of genuine opinions. Either way, it is certainly a powerful way to send a wake up call of reality to the young minds of America. Dr. Colleen Kelly, a Communications Professor at Penn State Behrend, feels that music can play a pivotal role in the world of politics. "I think music is a legitimate channel for expression of all kinds of emotions and ideas, and I think it has as much place in our public forum arena as any other form of communication," Kelly continued. "And I don't think it's more influential than any other mean necessarily, but it certainly is a good way to connect particularly with younger people. It always has been since the 60s."

While Kelly's views present a precise scope on the relationship between music and politics, some would make the argument that politics should not make any sort of appearance when going to see a concert- it should be all about the music. Republican Justin Miller, a marketing major at Penn State Behrend, strongly feels this way. "In a concert setting, you're there to listen to a band play their music. When you're paying to go listen to them play, that's what you want to hear- their music, not their political views and insights." Miller also shared these thoughts on the politics' involvement with music. "I don't know if it's the best way to become politically involved because you're going to be biased to your band's opinion. So, it's almost like your letting them form an opinion for you instead of yourself."

Many bands across America make their political concerns well known, via their

lyrical art, and concert touring. Bruce Springsteen has recently been a positive voice for Barack Obama and wrote this on his website. "Senator Obama, in my view, is head and shoulders above the rest. He has the depth, the reflectiveness, and the resilience to be our next President. He speaks to the America I've envisioned in my music for the past 35 years, a gener-

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- Dr. Colleen Kelly, Professor of Communications at Penn State Behrend

ous nation with a citizenry willing to tackle nuanced and complex problems, a country that's interested in its collective destiny and in the potential of its gathered spirit. A place where "...nobody crowds you, and nobody goes it alone," wrote the Boss.

Indeed, music fuels countless American minds along the lengthy journey to the national significance of this November. Music is an ingredient to virtually every American's life because it is near impossible to escape its presence. It's everywhere- we all know this. Inevitably, we all become more and more conscious to what's being presented through this particular form of art. It's not always about lost loves and memorable nights- it can

also be about the future of our homeland; the future of our lives depends upon the decisions we collectively make in November.

Democrat Brad Kovaleik, a junior at Penn State Behrend, feels that a band has the right to make their views known when performing a concert, as long as it's in moderation. "I don't think artists preaching on stage about their politics ever helps the show, but I think that if they kind of limit their selves to maybe just a couple political jokes it's all right." Kovaleik then referred to the controversial comment Stephan Jenkins of Third Eye Blind made when they performed at the Junker Center a couple weeks ago. To inform those that were not in attendance, he was quoted telling the audience that the band could not play their tune "Slow Motion" because George Bush wouldn't let them. Naturally, this did not hit on a good level with the Republicans in attendance.

Whether music provides a positive or negative political channel, it certainly gives us, as Americans, a relatable way to become politically active. Without music, young Americans most likely would not actively participate half as much as they do with the presence of politics in music due to the fact that music is such an enormous part of the generation's culture.

Kelly agrees with this idea and explains why political music is so significant. "Music in the 60s was actually made by, created for and consumed mostly by young people. It's changed substantially, but there are still independent voices out there that I think are significant. And I've listened to them, and I think that's something more of us should try to do."

What a truly wonderful aspect of freedom music can present. It creates opportunity not only musically, but also on a larger scale that represents what each American strives for in this country. Whether your views are more liberal or conservative, you still have to appreciate the varieties in music that are offered.

Remember to make your voice known on April 22 for the Pennsylvania Primaries and remember: music can be more than just notes on a sheet of paper- it can possess meaning that could change history forever.

## Weekly Musical Trivia for the Behrend Beacon

Vietnam was a popular theme in the 80s. Which of these songs was about a Vietnam vet struggling to find work in the midst of an economic recession?

- A. "Born in the U.S.A." by Bruce Springsteen
- B. "Goodnight Saigon" by Billy Joel
- C. "19" by Paul Hardcastle
- D. "Pink Houses" by John Cougar Mellencamp

Answer to last week's question: **D. Keith Morris**



The crowd enjoyed a variety of music before and after the speech.

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## A sampling from Obama's wide array of supporting songs

- "Born to Run" by Bruce Springsteen
- "Sweet Caroline" by Neil Diamond
- "Firecracker" by Ryan Adams
- "Send Me On My Way" by Rusted Root
- "Beautiful Day" by U2
- "Only in America" by Brooks & Dunn
- "Waitin' on the World to Change" by John Mayer
- "I Won't Back Down" by Tom Petty



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