

MUSIC

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

By Ryan P. Gallagher
music editor
rpg5004@psu.edu

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 Kelley, 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." Kelley 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 Kelley'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 generous nation with a citizenry willing to tackle nuanced and complex problems, a country that's interested in its collective destiny"

"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."

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

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 partic-

ular 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 Kovalcik, 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." Kovalcik 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.

Kelley 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.

One man's view on our interpretations of the art known as music

There are infinite perspectives on the subject of music. How do we know who's right? Is anyone right? The answer is no.

By Ryan P. Gallagher
music editor
rpg5004@psu.edu

"An art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and color." So I ripped my lead off of a dictionary; call it uncreative but I'm going to call it essential. Anyway, that's the definition of music according to the knowledgeable dictionary.com. Is it good? Well define good, because when we're dealing with music good can be bad and bad can be magnificent. I'm labeling that as the essence of the article and we're only at the beginning folks so let my words lead the way through a musical journey of realness.

Often I hear conversations among friends, colleagues or people I have never seen in my life. That's right - I listen to your conversations, and it's not because I'm creepy (or am I?), I just possess a yearning to understand communication in its entirety, but most importantly I want to know everything about music.

When I say that I want to know everything about music, I am not, in any way, referring to acquiring the

Thelonious Monk, Conor Oberst, etc. - I could literally go on forever, but that would just bore those of you who cannot relate to the afore mentioned artists. That's why it's impossible to define good music. To you, the reader, you may classify Van Halen as good music and you are 100 percent correct. I personally cannot attest to that statement because in my mind, I believe that Van Halen is garbage, just as you may think the same towards my Sinatra-driven views.

It's where one human differs from the other. It may be due to the culture you were raised in or you could be considered a music expert by many and could validate the astounding work of Halen to me for an hour, but you're still wrong. And it's because I'm telling you that you're wrong. Not because I'm smarter than you or because I'm a better musician than you, but because I simply do not possess the same taste as you, and that goes both ways. You can tell me I'm wrong too, there's nothing wrong with that and that's the beauty of music.

It is impossible to define good music.

knowledge of every band in the world, every genre, or defining what good music is, and that's because it's impossible. I myself have listened to hundreds of bands throughout almost every genre of music, while the person sitting behind me in this lab may have listened to another thousand bands that I do not care for; that's because music is subjective and not one person shares the exact same feelings about each and every musical group.

In addition to the hundreds of bands that have graced my ears, with one of the truest forms of art throughout history, I have personally known plenty of groups that never made it big enough to release an album through a major or even a successful independent label. The point I'm slowly driving towards is that the amount of music that has been created in our world exceeds any possibility of grasping music in its entirety. One day you may think you're an elitist of music and the next day an underground band that has been in existence for 10 years may play out of a jukebox in a bar in a complete state of randomness and your elitist thoughts and dreams are drowned in your lager.

There is no way of listening to all the music in the world. We attend college or educate students (for the profs) at one small Penn State campus in one state. That's just one college in one small city in one state in one country on one continent in one world in one universe (I think). That means that every local band that helps define your life means nothing on a larger scale. Sure, to you it means everything on an intrapersonal level, but to an African culture that is too far away for my communication based brain to measure, it means nothing.

Again I'm rambling, but I swear there's a cause - I just haven't figured it out yet. I said earlier that it's impossible to define good music. To me, in my own crazy state of mind, I can define good music. Again it's intrapersonal. To me good music is Elliott Smith, Frank Sinatra,

In no way do I condone modern pop radio, but if you like it, then listen to it. It's your own damn loss and it's not my problem so I don't care. I don't know why I just wrote that but it's staying.

An art of sound in time that expresses ideas and emotions in significant forms through the elements of rhythm, melody, harmony, and color. There, I made you read it again and you had no way of resisting because it came out of nowhere- I'm a huge jerk. I'm sorry, but I needed for you to read it again. Music can reflect society, but society cannot reflect music. Music is music; it's not what the big name record companies blow it up to be. I don't care about the realities of modern music companies because they're garbage and it's not an accurate depiction of what music was created to be. Music in the 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s (not to mention music from earlier centuries) - society didn't have to deal with the bullshit because the music was much more real back then. It was real artists conveying real meaning to real people. Pop music now is just an excuse for money- that's pretty much it (with a few minor exceptions that I won't get into at the moment because the article is already way too long).

So please don't tell me that Conor Oberst is a whining drunken fool and provide a follow-up response that consists of stating the brilliance of Metallica because it's a hopeless cause. It ultimately means nothing to me because I don't relate. If rap is your coffee at an AA meeting, so be it. If heavy metal is what you eat for every meal of the day then good for you. If jazz is the only respectable form of music in your mind then that's just fine. But don't tell me what good music is and live the rest of your life thinking that you're right, because to me, you're wrong. Each individual is granted their own opinion if subjectivity lies in the field. So take advantage of it because it's one of the finest individual virtues that exist. Thanks and keep reading.

My pilgrimage to the Rock 'N Roll Hall of Fame

By Chris LaFuria
editor-in-chief
csl5005@psu.edu

Not many people were there when Eric Clapton played his live, unplugged set. Only a handful of people saw Bob Dylan at his typewriter, typing the lyrics to "Like a Rolling Stone." Only Jim Morrison, his teacher, and his parents were able to see his third grade report card.

However, last summer I got an opportunity to make a pilgrimage to the place where not only can you see such artifacts, but also you can experience them first hand.

From the I-90 exit into Cleveland, I saw the giant, glass, pyramid-like structure that encases the world of rock and roll. Walking from my car to the front door, a thousand things ran through my mind. "Will I get to see everything?" "Can I take pictures?" "Will I see David Bowie's costume from *Labyrinth*?" Although the answer to all of these questions was "No," the experience was well worth the trip.

On the front steps of the building, I noticed there was a mysterious, 80s-looking black bus. Like any curious music fan, I walked up to it and was immediately star-struck. On display outside of the Hall was Johnny Cash's last tour bus. For only \$2 with my admission, I was able to walk on the same bus that Johnny, June, and John Jr. rode while on tour. I was immediately taken to "Walk the Line" and I envisioned them on the bus at the same time. I heard Johnny whisper in my ear, in his deep, gravelly voice, "Don't take a picture of my toilet on your cell phone. That's illegal."

After the bus I walked with my girlfriend Emily to embark on a life-changing experience. It's important to have the right company when at a place such as the Rock Hall. While she may not know as much about the annals of music like I do, she can recognize

names when I spot their artifacts. Also, her amazement made me feel like a rock professor when I told stories of Simon and Garfunkel recording the soundtrack for *The Graduate* and how Eric Clapton, Jeff Beck and Jimmy Page were all part of The Yardbirds before becoming famous guitarists.

Everything I could ever imagine and much more was encased in thin, glass cases, inches away from my fingertips. Everything from early Sun Records recordings of Elvis and Carl Perkins, all the way to a Vans Warped Tour exhibit, featuring instruments, clothing and skateboards from such punk bands as Pennywise, Bad Religion and MxPx. With all of these artifacts surrounding me, the trip turned into a crazy Magic School Bus-like journey into the core of my most prominent dreams.

Even the exhibits in which I had no prior interest were life changing. Every year, the Rock Hall has certain bands or musicians that are on display. The featured musicians are portrayed through old albums, photos, childhood memories, love letters, and everything that pertains to their lives and careers. The two bands that were focused this time were The Doors and The Clash. In my own opinion, Jim Morrison was too egotistical to find a place on my rock and roll guest list. Furthermore The Clash just didn't appeal to me. However, it was the dedication to music that was shown through the exhibit that actually made them interesting.

The last thing we watched, after buying \$3 waters and over-priced snack food, was a video tribute to every Hall of Fame inductee from the Hall's inception- everyone from Fats Domino, Elvis Presley and Hank Williams, to more modern groups such as U2, R.E.M. and The Police.

Music has been more than just a hobby to me. Ever since I became a music fan, the artists, songs and albums that are associated with the industry became my life.

Testament. Before music, I knew I was missing a spiritual aspect of my life.

The earliest albums I remember owning are Green Day's *Dookie* and Nirvana's *Nevermind*. The pure motivation and art behind these albums got me hooked. At that point I became a fan.

The first artist I became thoroughly involved in was Bob Dylan. My first vinyl record that I owned was Dylan's *Bringing It All Back Home*. At that point, I became a disciple.

The first artifact that I was drawn to was the guitar owned by Robbie Robertson of The Band- the same guitar Robertson used during "The Last Waltz." It was similar to seeing one of Michelangelo's paintbrush, Lincoln's top hat or Columbus' map. I was an arm's length away from the guitar that brought us such killer guitar riffs as the ones from "Up On Cripple Creek" and "The Weight."

It is important for everyone to have a hobby. Many people collect model cars. Others play competitive poker. Still others go on weekend bike-rides. These activities cleanse people's spirits and renew their lives daily. For me, dropping a needle down on a Dylan or Cash album is therapeutic. This is the extent of importance that is the pilgrimage to the Rock Hall. Not only can I see for myself the artifacts that have helped the music industry flourish and evolve. But I can also pay homage and respect for the artists, living and deceased that have changed my life.

Most Islamic people make an annual trip to Mecca, for their yearly Hajj, the fifth pillar. There, they validate their existence to religion by submitting themselves to God. Likewise, with my annual trips to the Rock and Roll Hall of fame, I continue to surrender my life as just an avid fan of music and engage in a life of devotion to the men and women that gave sound to my life.