

A cardboard box in my closet contains several reams of sheet music-- all period "originals" with beautifully, colorful art printed covers --Tin Pan Alley tunes, Ziegfeld Follies show stoppers, WWI and WWII political songs, RKO & CBS top hits and more. Adorno would hate everyone, from "By the Light of the Silvery Moon," "How Ya Gonna Keep Em Down on the Farm After They've Seen Paree?" to the tunes of young Frank Sinatra and Peggy Lee. This is my box (Menotti reference unintended) of 'mysteriously venerated objects' or musical fetish (Bowman via Adorno via Marx). Adorno would say that I engage in or consume 'infantile and primitive' music; that my act of 'consuming music has become more important than what music is being consumed' or that am being 'deprived of my capacity for concentrated musical listening, my freedom of choice and responsibility' (Bowman, p. 319).

"Ordinary Americans, in Adorno's view, were oppressed by the music that they had been misled into liking, just as they were oppressed by advertising, by the consumer culture, by Hollywood, by the idols of the marketplace—in short by just about everything that appealed to them. A critique of their musical culture was primarily a critique of the capitalist system which had confiscated their inner freedom."¹

Yes, I have "capitulate[d] before the superior power of the advertised stuff and purchase spiritual peace by making the imposed goods literally its own thing" (Adorno via Bowman, p. 320). (Insert here: sound effect of needle scraping across the vinyl). Wait! Actually, I was bequeathed the sheet music by the daughter of a very, very old, retired, music teacher (so I only capitulated to non-advertised, free- "stuff") AND I did not purchase or obtain spiritual peace through the transaction. I might have used the music for a "troubling, anti-intellectual" Schubertiad-type event (with singer friends, a.k.a. "emotional listeners"); and yes, we may or may not be guilty of using the "music predominantly as an excuse for extramusical emoting" (Bowman, p. 321).

Adorno conflates his ideas about music with Marxist theory, so much so that I have to do some mental gymnastics to locate the truth in what (and how) he shares. It is interesting to me that Adorno provides a definition of Kitsch as cultural fetishism. When you remove the Marxist (mysterious cultural fetishism) from the Adorno, maybe Adorno is just saying that some music is art and some music is Kitsch. Then we just have to figure out--who decides? As music educators, I think it is our responsibility to make some of those decisions. This way we can assist in opening the minds, (ears) and hearts of our students. We allow them to make acquaintance with music outside their comfort zone. For these kids who are inundated by "music" that I might regard as primitive, or containing limited musical elements, or containing degrading, personal or social messages; Schoenberg and the serialists will not be at the top of my list of composers to share-- not even as "shock therapy." Youth (and adults) in western cultures desire to hear music containing identifiable cadential moments.

If Adorno could have had an ipod or playlist, what would his top ten have been? I wonder. What do you suppose would have topped his most played works? The clichés of Cole Porter's song stylings wouldn't have made Adorno's hit parade, but what about Bach and Brahms? Alright, Adorno wouldn't have ever considered purchasing a device for playing music from capitalist America. "... if nothing else in Adorno deserves our sympathy, we must surely admire his courage in pouring scorn on mass culture. The strange thing is that he believed American popular music to be the enemy of the people, when it is was the people who had produced it, and who had found in its glittering surface the true mirror of their soul" (Scruton). ²

¹ Scruton, Roger. 2009. “Why Read Adorno?” in *Understanding Music Philosophy And Interpretation*. Ebook. (London: Bloomsbury, 2009), 205-228.

² Ibid., p. 18