

## **'Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow'**

Think about how you spent last week, last weekend or even the last 24-hours. Now, ponder the number of times and ways you experienced or interacted with music, by any means: (internet, television, movies, radio, in stores while shopping, from open windows of other drivers, half-time shows or sign-off music from news shows etc.)? You may or may not be a musician (professional or hobbyist). You may or may not sing in your church choir, car or shower. Regardless of the quantity or quality, music permeates much of our culture and daily lives. Recalling the ear-worms of just the commercials you heard, supports the fact there is a great deal of social and political messaging in music. Political campaigns use popular songs of the day to sell their ideas.

When, then presidential candidate, Bill Clinton was up against incumbent, G. H. Bush, Clinton insisted on using the already dated, *Fleetwood Mac* song, "Don't Stop Thinking About Tomorrow." Clinton purposefully took up his saxophone and was able to convince the electorate, "...*Don't stop thinking about tomorrow, it'll soon be here, be better than before, Yesterday's gone, yesterday's gone...*"

Have you ever considered that music has a power to improve your life, or even help societies progress? Today, perhaps more than ever, many of our musical experiences occur in solitude, yet viewing the many virtual choir offerings online attest to some of the many social aspects of music. Social philosophers consider music in the context of the cultural constructs and its potential for persuading (and even assuaging) listeners and participants.

Theodor Adorno, (1903-1969), German, Social Philosopher was highly critical of the "quantitatively dominant," popular music (especially of America). A member of the Frankfurt School, Adorno advocated Critical Theory which "...undertook to reconstruct and refine Marx's critiques of exploitation and oppression, showing how social and cultural institutions perpetuate the false consciousness that protects existing power structures from critical scrutiny by mystifying sources of oppression. It sought to understand how the consciousness of the proletariat had become so highly susceptible to manipulation, and to better understand how to nurture the kind of authentic consciousness that might reverse society's alarming acceptance of political and social domination" (Bowman, p. 309).

During World War II, many German intellectuals found refuge as exiles in other countries, like Turkey, Palestine, Argentina, Brazil, South Africa, The United States and Shanghai. It is interesting, but not necessarily noteworthy, that Adorno (despite his vociferous vilification of capitalism), chose to exile in the U. S., who wouldn't? American Republic-enabled capitalism empowered Americans away from the vulnerabilities to oppressive socio-political influences Adorno feared (i.e., totalitarianism, fascism). Adorno would not have been afraid to live in an American society. In American capitalism, people are **choosing** to follow, enabling them greater strength to choose. In fact, though Adorno was able to be restored to his fatherland, he returned to the U. S. for extended stays (two years at a time), so he couldn't have found his freedom and capitalism that repugnant.

During the post war years, American industry was on full display, cranking out feel-good, celebratory, happy music, movies and products and it wasn't just Americans who were buying. Adorno was vocal in his disdain for the simplicity of the popular music and the 'extravagant devotion' people displayed for things. "Like good philosophy...", Adorno thought "...good music should defy effortless consumption" (Bowman, p. 308). I can understand the view of music as a commodity for 'culture consumers' and having reservations over capitalism unfettered (when taken to extreme purchasing, gluttony and monopoly). However, Adorno could only see the dark side ('fetishization'). He viewed the dark side of

music, individuals and the society. Adorno's writings and life history reflect a glass-half-empty view of the world and himself. His commentary often disparages others, expresses not wanting to make decisions and choices, and speaks of unhappiness. Here are a few examples:

"The darkening of the world makes the irrationality of art rational: radically darkened art."

"The only true thoughts are those which do not grasp their own meaning"

"One must have tradition in oneself, to hate it properly."

### **Change the Music, Change the World**

Adorno goes on to say, "In so far as the culture industry arouses a feeling of well-being that the world is precisely in that order suggested by the culture industry, the substitute gratification which it prepares for human beings cheats them out of the same happiness which it deceitfully projects." In order to help awaken people (the proletariat) from their "false or ideological consciousness", Adorno was convinced 'modern,' Avant-garde, atonal music provided the sounds to awaken the masses of 'childish' and passive, pop-driven consumers to critical thinking. Of course, Adorno was also convinced he was one who could do it (of the social elite) (Bowman, p. 311). Schoenberg's music, based on 12-tone row series, was Adorno's ideal music and provided a new, modern form that could disorient the listener from a tonal center. Adorno has written [some pieces](#) displaying comparable depravity. With the predictability of sound lost, an awareness of music as art, (Adorno surmised) would encourage social progress. Adorno thought:

"Like philosophy, music should complicate the easy, undermine the habitual, and challenge the status quo, thereby creating critical awareness of the problems and contradictions, the alienation and suffering, inherent in modern life."

[Robert Reilly](#), former diplomat and music critic, expresses this 'modern' phase of composing well: "Music was re-conceptualized so completely that it could no longer be experienced as music, i.e., with melody, harmony, and rhythm. This catastrophic rupture, expressed especially in the works of Arnold Schoenberg and John Cage, is often celebrated as just another change in the techniques of music, a further point along the parade of progress in the arts. It was, however, a reflection of a deeper metaphysical divide that severed the composer from any meaningful contact with external reality."

Though I imagine there are plenty of musicians today who enjoy serial music; for everyone, I'm betting there are a hundred and one who would work to avoid attending a "New Music" concert (put forth by composers for the purpose of making a recording of their "music", because they can't expect to fill a classroom, much less a concert hall). Quite simply, most people don't want to listen to this deconstruction of sound.

These ideologies give rise to more questions about music as a social or political force. Is music a religious force? Is music a social force for religion? These ideologies (Adorno, Attali, Göttner-Abendroth, Foucault and more) have little to no discussion in them, about the power or force that music commands. Göttner-Abendroth, at least, discusses music as a Matriarchal force. The soul is nourished and fed by seeking out beauty in music, art and humanity; not by being made 'uncomfortable' by constructed cacophonies in the name of falsely-based ('radical skepticism') postmodern, critical social theories. I think about this every day. I believe music is a social and political force that supports my faith. The majority of the world believes in a faith based musical force. The world faiths do not exist to persuade (for the purpose of persuading) the masses to believe in God. Faith based theory is centered

on a divine power that exists in a better way than we do ourselves. If we follow that higher power, we can live a divine life.

Well Done! Adorno was not the kind of person you would invite to a picnic, but your thoughts on him are much appreciated. I also like your conclusion. I hope this class has been of value to you. 😊

## References

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