

## **‘Fight the Power’: The Politics of Music and the Music of Politics\***

‘If there’s any hope for America, it lies in a revolution. And if there’s any hope for a revolution, it lies in getting Elvis Presley to become Che Guevara’.  
(Phil Ochs, musician, 1940–1976)

DURING THE RUN-UP TO THE 2001 UK GENERAL ELECTION, THE *DAILY Telegraph* ran a story about the music with which the Conservative Party was going to accompany its campaign. This apparently trivial item warranted a surprising amount of media attention. The BBC’s *Newsnight* current affairs programme devoted ten minutes to it, and the story was also covered in broadsheet and tabloid papers. Maybe this was simply a symptom of the so-called ‘dumbing down’ of British mass media, but the story was revealing in other ways. For the journalists, what mattered was that the Tories’ tune was composed by Mike Batt whose other claim to musical fame was as author of hits in the 1970s for the Wombles, a group of furry animals who were supposed to roam south-west London: ‘underground, overground, wombling free / the Wombles of Wimbledon Common are we’. That the Conservative Party should call on the writer of such lines to compose its theme tune was taken as a sign of the political mire into which the Tories had sunk. By comparison, their rivals had made altogether more astute musical choices — the Liberal Democrats had a song by Stephen Gately of teen idols Boyzone; and Labour had followed up their 1997 choice of D:ream’s ‘Things can only get better’ with the Lighthouse Family’s ‘Lifted’.<sup>1</sup> Neither choice represented the cutting edge of contemporary pop, but they were taken as far more credible than the Conservatives’. And this was the

\* This article is the second in an occasional series on Politics and Culture.

<sup>1</sup> *The Sunday Express* had reported earlier in the year that Labour was planning to use the pop band S Club 7 for its campaign tune, until some of the group were arrested on a drugs charge (*Sunday Express*, 25 March 2001).

message of those news items and current affairs discussions: musical taste was a mark of political credibility.

Behind the battle of the bands and parties there lurked a more intriguing argument. Not only was it assumed that pop was a necessary adjunct of contemporary political communications, but that judgements about music were themselves political judgements, revealing of more than mere taste. However trivial this particular moment in pop's engagement with politics, it was a sign of the way in which political and cultural capital are entwined. The aim of this article is to explore the contours of this relationship, in order to show both how the study of politics can illuminate an understanding of popular music and how the study of popular music can illuminate political science. We begin by looking at how popular music, and its ability to move people, can be used as political propaganda.

#### POPULAR MUSIC AS PROPAGANDA

At the simplest level, the music chosen to accompany election campaigns acts as a form of propaganda. It serves to evoke particular images and associations, much in the same way that politicians' photo-opportunities with pop or film or soaps stars are supposed to do. If anything, songs and sounds are more powerful weapons in this armoury because of the way music works directly on our emotions. Just as the soundtrack to films or advertisements generates moods and feelings, so too do campaign songs. And in choosing suitable songs, it is not just a matter of going for the right demographic (the Lighthouse Family as the music of choice at dinner parties and in shopping malls), it is also about branding (creating an 'ident', in the jargon of advertising executives and broadcasters). The sounds are there to establish an emotional response to the party/product.

Popular song has long been a device for making propaganda. In her history of Britain, Linda Colley documents the ways in which 'God Save the King' became a form of state propaganda that sought to legitimate monarchic rule.<sup>2</sup> Later and with more deliberateness, the Soviet Union and the Nazi regime both exploited popular music for propaganda purposes. In 1938, the Soviet government created

<sup>2</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*, London, Pimlico, 1992, pp. 44-8.

the State Jazz Orchestra of the USSR at a cost of some two million roubles.<sup>3</sup> During the Second World War, the USSR funded bands and other forms of entertainment in its bid to maintain military morale. The Nazis too used popular song for propagandist purposes. Before the war, for example, the Horst-Wessel Song was made compulsory in school and Nazi Youth training manuals specified the use of songs at key points in the daily rituals.<sup>4</sup> Such examples were not, of course, confined to one-party states. The British did something similar with ENSA, the wartime entertainment organization, and the US with the Glenn Miller Orchestra. As S. Frederick Starr notes, the Western allies' use of music served a dual propaganda purpose: 'Along with the rise of folkish melodies [that recalled home], the war also called forth a militant nationalism that found expression in music.'<sup>5</sup>

After the war, the Psychological Strategy Board, an agency created by the CIA, was responsible for overseeing the broadcasting of, among other things, folk songs.<sup>6</sup> The broadcasts of the Voice of America, another CIA creation, also served as a source of US propaganda, again through the use of music. Frances Stonor Saunders tells this story: 'In March 1953, a Voice of America producer called down to the music library for a recording of the 'Song of India', but was told by the librarian he couldn't have it, as "it's by Rimsky-Korsakov, and we're supposed not to use anything by Russians".'<sup>7</sup> Under apartheid, the South African authorities promoted their 'homelands' policy by encouraging the playing of 'rural' music on the so-called Bantu radio stations; for the same reason urban music was censored. The intention was to create a particular sense of nationhood.<sup>8</sup>

More recently, nationalist movements have exploited music's propaganda powers, as have elected and aspirant politicians. In the late-1960s and 1970s, President Mobuto of Zaire made extensive use

<sup>3</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Red & Hot: The Fate of Jazz in the Soviet Union*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983, pp. 175–6.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, pp. 208 and 235.

<sup>5</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Red & Hot*, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War*, London, Granta, 2000, p. 151.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 196.

<sup>8</sup> Muff Andersson, *Music in the Mix: The Story of South African Popular Music*, Johannesburg, Ravan Press, 1981.

of bands such as OKJazz to sing his praises and in Kenya Daniel Arap Moy sponsored musicians who celebrated him in songs that became national hits.<sup>9</sup> In the UK in the mid-1990s, a coalition of comedians and musicians supported 'Rock the Vote', an attempt to utilize popular culture's propaganda effects to increase youth participation in elections (ten years earlier, a similar alliance had supported the Labour Party in the guise of Red Wedge, to equally unimpressive effect).<sup>10</sup> Elsewhere, in Scandinavia and in Canada, governments have imposed quotas on the broadcasting of Anglo-American popular music in order to promote indigenous national music and its associated identity.<sup>11</sup>

Whatever their success, these examples emphasize the continued attempt by parties, politicians and states to harness music's perceived power for propaganda purposes. The futility and the triviality associated with some of them should not deflect from either the serious intent of others nor from the apparently widespread assumption that music is powerful. From Plato to the Frankfurt School and beyond, the case has been made for regarding music (especially popular music) as a source of power, and often one which works to malign effect. In the 1940s, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer wrote of the standardization and 'pseudo-individualism' of pop and of the illusion of 'free' improvisation in jazz. Such music, they suggested, created a false sense of liberation and autonomy which disguised the reality of systematic exploitation and oppression.<sup>12</sup> (Similar arguments, albeit from a quite different political perspective, emerged in Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind* in the 1980s.) Although Adorno and Horkheimer's judgements have been extensively criticized, their conceptualization of the relationship between musical form and social action have acquired a paradigmatic force. In the words of one commentator: 'No one has

<sup>9</sup> Mark Slobin, *Retuning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe*, London, Duke University Press, 1996; Gary Stewart, *Rumba on the River: A History of the Popular Music of Two Congos*, London, Verso, 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Simon Frith and John Street, 'Rock Against Racism and Red Wedge: From Music to Politics, From Politics to Music', in Reebee Garofalo (ed.), *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, Boston, South End Press, 1992, pp. 67–80.

<sup>11</sup> See Tony Bennett et al. (eds), *Rock and Popular music: Politics, Policies, Institutions*, London, Routledge, 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, 'The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception', in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, London, Verso, 1979, pp. 120–67.

done more to persuade us of the moral dimension of all cultural construction and of the sociality that is the basis of anything truly creative and liberative.<sup>13</sup> This is a view crudely underlined by the way music is censored for fear of its effects. The potential of music to promote approved causes is linked to its potential to fuel rebellion.

### CENSORING POP

If it is believed that music's power can be harnessed to evoke and articulate officially endorsed sentiments and identities, then a corollary of this is the belief that it can also evoke and articulate unwelcome sentiments and transgressive identities. So it is that states and their agencies have devoted considerable time and effort to the censorship of music in order to guard against its evil effects.

From attempts by the Stalinist regime to ban the saxophone from the Soviet Union in the 1920s to the persecution of 'swing youth' in Nazi Germany, music and its fans have incurred political persecution. In the USSR and in Germany, jazz was dismissed as the 'whining instruments so insulting to the soul', and scorn was poured upon those who liked 'to dance to the "decadent Jewish" and "degenerate" prohibited music of Benny Goodman, Tommy Dorsey, Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong, and other giants of the age of jazz'.<sup>14</sup> The South African Broadcasting Corporation, under apartheid, operated a system of censorship that involved scratching records to ensure that they could not be played over the air. Under the Taliban, all forms of music were banned in Afghanistan.

In 1998, the journal *Index on Censorship* devoted a special issue to music censorship. There it documented the case of imprisoned Tibetan nuns who made illegal recordings which were smuggled from their cell; of Fela Kuti whose music was banned in Nigeria and where he himself endured several episodes of imprisonment; and of the Sudanese artists persecuted by the National Islamic Front. But although censorship may be commonplace under such regimes, it is not exclusive to them. Martin Cloonan has provided a comprehensive history of censored music in the UK. He documents the

<sup>13</sup> Robert Witkin, *Adorno on Music*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 200.

<sup>14</sup> S. Frederick Starr, *Red & Hot*, p. 85; M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State*, p. 220.

broadcasting bans on Serge Gainsbourg and Jane Birkin's 'Je t'aime', the Sex Pistols' 'God Save the Queen', and Frankie Goes to Hollywood's 'Relax'; and several songs about Northern Ireland, whether Paul McCartney's 'Give Ireland Back to the Irish' or the Pogues' 'Birmingham Six'.<sup>15</sup> Such decisions were taken by broadcasters, acting within their understanding of the duties of public service broadcasting. They were not direct responses to government pressure. However, it is worth noting that the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act (1994) does provide for the banning of 'music . . . characterised by the emission of a succession of repetitive beats' (this is the legal definition of dance music as it might apply to illegal raves). And more recently, British MPs have debated the possibility of restricting the performance of music in public places (a move inspired by the pressure group, Pipedown).<sup>16</sup> Nonetheless, direct state censorship of music is rare in Western liberal democracies, especially ones like the USA where free expression is constitutionally protected. It is worth noting that when a New York City ordinance, limiting jazz performance to three instruments, was overturned, one of the grounds for this was the right to 'free expression'.<sup>17</sup> Other commentators have noted that, despite such cases, a form of de facto censorship operates through the use of the 'Parental Advisory' labels on records, warning of potentially offensive content. Although this code is operated voluntarily by the music industry, it can have the effect of limiting access to music because of subsequent decision by retailers not to stock (or to sell to young customers) marked items. It is also claimed that the label tends to be used for black musical forms (hip-hop/rap), rather than other genres.<sup>18</sup>

These examples of censorship and propaganda beg a number of questions. At one level they ask what exactly constitutes an act of censorship — does it make sense to talk of retailers or broadcasters 'censoring', where they are not state monopoly suppliers? Are all decisions about what to broadcast or sell acts of censorship? Did the cultural boycott of apartheid South Africa constitute censorship?

<sup>15</sup> Martin Cloonan, *Banned! Censorship of Popular Music in Britain: 1962–92*, Aldershot, Arena, 1996.

<sup>16</sup> Simon Frith, 'Music and Everyday Life', *Critical Quarterly*, 44:1 (2002), pp. 35–48.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Chevigny, *Gigs: Jazz and the Cabaret Laws in New York City*, New York, Routledge, 1991.

<sup>18</sup> Claude Chastagner, 'The Parents' Music Resource Center: From Information to Censorship', *Popular Music*, 18:2 (1999), pp. 179–92.

Does the use of quotas to protect indigenous music represent a case of political propaganda? Clearly, there is a danger in construing all acts of regulation or sponsorship as acts of censorship or propaganda. But rather than engaging with this perennial debate, what seems more appropriate is to draw attention to the underlying assumption that is common to both censorship and propaganda. This is that music 'matters', that it needs to be censored or that it can have propagandist effects. Music might, after all, be irrelevant and insignificant.

Although it is possible to chart acts of censorship, the state's actions are not themselves necessarily a response to the power of the music. Just because the state or its agents censor x or y does not mean that x or y had the ability to shock or disturb or inspire. State intervention may politicize the apolitical or irrelevant, so that what we are observing is the operation of the state, its prejudices and paranoia, and not the intrinsic potency of music. The Soviet Union's attitude to jazz changed dramatically following the collapse of the Hitler–Stalin pact and US involvement in the war. This had nothing to do with the music and everything to do with state politics. It cannot be assumed that the state's reaction to popular music is a direct and necessary result of the threats or dangers represented by the sound. Stalin's fear of the saxophone, or the BBC's of the Sex Pistols, tell us little about the effects of either, and rather more about the ideology and interests of Stalin and the BBC.

The state's behaviour may be premised on a set of assumptions about what the music represents, and indeed by censoring it, the state — as a self-fulfilling prophecy — may have invested it with a status it would otherwise have lacked, but the state's intentions and assumptions do not validate the claims made for the music. The state's musicological or aesthetic judgements are, after all, likely to be even less sound than its ideological ones.

So how might music be claimed to matter politically? One answer lies in the ruling that overturned the New York ordinance on the performance of jazz in the city. Music was a form of speech and was to be protected as such. A similar argument can be found in the case for protecting particular indigenous or minority musical forms. Music sustains ways of life and identities. This point is brought home in the claims of Naim Majrooh, reporting on the consequences of the Taliban's censoring of music: 'The ban on music has drastic effects on weddings and other celebrations, the art of production of

musical instruments and the life of the musicians and the cultural heritage. Lack of music is slowly turning the Afghan people into a dead nation, their weddings and funerals are performed in the same manner.<sup>19</sup> Majrooh's point is reinforced by the news pictures of Afghans celebrating the overthrow of the Taliban regime by digging out their hidden radios and cassette recorders and playing music in public. The implication of this is that we need to look more closely at how music is used politically, and how this use is connected to the way music — as sound and experience — is linked to political thought and action. Typically such ideas are founded in music's role as a source of resistance and opposition.

#### MUSIC IN OPPOSITION

Music has long been a site of resistance. From the folk songs of rural England to the work songs of slaves, from anti-war protest songs to illegal raves, music has given voice to resistance and opposition. Eugene Genovese provides this instance from the era of US slavery:

Massa sleep in de feather bed,  
Nigger sleeps on de floor;  
When we'uns gits to Heaven,  
Dey'll be no slaves no mo'e.<sup>20</sup>

Resistance through music does not have to be given verbal form. The German youths who danced to swing defied the Nazis just by the way they looked. One Hitler Youth leader noted disapprovingly that: 'Mostly they wore long, often checked English sports jackets, shoes, with thick light crepe soles, showy scarves, homburg hats . . .'<sup>21</sup> In a similar vein, Thomas Cushman describes a rebellious counterculture in Soviet Russia, where the rock scene provided 'an active code of resistance and a template which was used for the formation of individual and collective identity'. A formative icon of one Russian scene, notes Cushman, was the unlikely figure (to

<sup>19</sup> Naim Majrooh, 'The Taliban have Banned all Music in Afghanistan', in Proceedings of 1st World Conference on Music and Censorship, Danish Center for Human Rights, Copenhagen, 20–22 November 1998, pp. 49–56.

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in Eugene Genovese, *Roll Jordan Roll: the World the Slaves Made*, New York, Vintage, 1976, p. 581.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State*, p. 221.



British readers, at least) of Marc Bolan, the glam rock leader of T Rex.<sup>22</sup>

To impute resistance to popular music is a familiar theme, too, within liberal societies. In Sociology and Cultural Studies, the notion of a sub- or counter-culture has been used to link the consumption of popular music to acts of defiance or 'rituals of resistance'. From studies in the 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, it has been suggested that, rather than being simply entertainment or escapism, popular music provided a space in which acts of resistance could be articulated. Subcultures, it was argued, made sense of their marginal status by appropriating and re-interpreting popular culture. The young fans engaged, in Paul Willis's words, in 'symbolic creativity', forging counter-hegemonic accounts of their world.<sup>23</sup>

Critics of the subcultural approach have raised doubts about, among other things, the extent to which popular culture can be read politically and whether its politics are as radical as some have claimed. But it is notable that within this debate, there is little challenge to the idea that cultural activity is a legitimate subject of enquiry and that it is revealing of experiences and attitudes. And what is also notable is how this argument has been confined, for the most part, within sociology and cultural studies. Political science has, until recently, taken relatively little interest in popular culture generally and popular music in particular.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, it might be argued that where it has taken an interest, it has been to emphasize its deleterious effects.<sup>25</sup> There are, however, signs of change. Recent political science conferences have, for example, featured panels and papers on Bob Dylan. Perhaps more significantly than this focus on individual figures, there is evidence of attempts to integrate accounts

<sup>22</sup> Thomas Cushman, *Notes from Underground: Rock Music Counterculture in Russia*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 1995, p. 91.

<sup>23</sup> Paul Willis, *Common Culture*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1990; Paul Willis, *Profane Culture*, London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978; Dick Hebdige, *Subculture: the Meaning of Style*, London, Methuen, 1979.

<sup>24</sup> Notable exceptions include: James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 1990; Richard Merelman, *Partial Visions: Culture and Politics in Britain, Canada and the United States*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1991.

<sup>25</sup> Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 1987; Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*, New York, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

of popular culture into the central concerns of political science, especially in relation to the study of new social movements and identity politics.

There is, of course, a familiar and long tradition of songs which, one way or another, have become 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'. These songs and many others form part of the soundtrack to the protests over civil rights, the nuclear bomb and the Vietnam war. There is also the tradition of songs and performances that relate directly to particular moments and movements (George Harrison's Concert for Bangladesh, Live Aid, Nelson Mandela's Wembley Birthday Party, Bruce Springsteen's and Sting's tours for Amnesty, Bono and Bob Geldof's Jubilee 2000 campaign for relief of Third World debt, and Emmylou Harris's and others' initiative against the use of landmines). At the Sydney Olympics in 2000, the Australian rock band Midnight Oil performed to an audience of millions. On their T-shirts was the single word 'Sorry', a deliberate attack on the Australian government's refusal to issue a formal apology for the treatment dealt to Aboriginal peoples. One way of seeing these examples of how popular music has become linked to political causes and issues is to view them simply as embellishments to the politics, useful in raising money for, or the profile of, the movement, but not contributing anything more substantial. They form part of the packaging, not the substance, of the political activity.

This is a perspective which is being challenged by two related literatures. The first is that produced by historical study of particular musical genres. These have revealed not only the extent to which political interests and movements were intimately linked to the development of the musical form, but also how the music informed and shaped the politics. At the end of his vast study of the relationship between black music and the civil rights movement, Brian Ward concludes: 'The real strength of black-oriented radio and Rhythm and Blues music was its ability to dramatize and celebrate shared aspects of the black experience and, at its best, to give shape and form to barely apprehended hopes, dreams and aspirations.'<sup>26</sup> Similarly, Suzanne E. Smith argues that the Motown Record Company —

<sup>26</sup> Brian Ward, *Just My Soul Responding: Rhythm and Blues, Black Consciousness and Race Relations*, London, UCL Press, 1998, p. 449.

home of the Supremes, The Temptations, Marvin Gaye, Stevie Wonder and Smokey Robinson — played a crucial part in the cultural politics of Detroit, not just by articulating a particular popular consciousness, but by providing a key element of the political infrastructure that facilitated community activism and campaigns for office.<sup>27</sup>

In much the same way, recent accounts of the folk revival of the 1960s, which brought to prominence people like Bob Dylan, Joan Baez and Phil Ochs, argue that the political and musical movements were also intimately linked. Robert Cantwell, for example, suggests that the folk archivist and anthologist Alan Lomax not only used his field recordings to trace the history of American folk music, but also to help define ‘the people’ (the ‘folk’ of folk music) in ways which fitted the politics of the Popular Front. Cantwell writes: ‘Alan Lomax brought a leftist program of active intervention, often under the patronage of major publishing houses and recording companies, to bear on an epic vision of American folklife shaped by the messianism of the Popular Front.’<sup>28</sup> Gathered round magazines like *Broadside* were folk singers and political activists, the one providing rallying calls the other pressing causes.<sup>29</sup> Within rock, a parallel network linked John Lennon and the International Marxist Group, via their paper *Black Dwarf* and its editor Tariq Ali.<sup>30</sup> Subsequent campaigns like Rock Against Racism in the late-1970s/early-1980s demonstrated a similar symbiosis between music and politics (in the form of the Socialist Workers’ Party).<sup>31</sup>

In an account of the Belgrade radio station B92, Matthew Collin argues that it was instrumental in organizing opposition to Milošević’s regime. Collin quotes one B92 listener as saying: ‘When the borders were closed and war started, if we hadn’t had B92 we would have been locked in some kind of prison . . . We stopped travelling — we stopped living, actually — so the only contact we had

<sup>27</sup> Suzanne E. Smith, *Dancing in the Street: Motown and the Cultural Politics of Detroit*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1999.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Cantwell, *When We Were Good: The Folk Revival*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1996, p. 377.

<sup>29</sup> Jeff Place and Ronald Cohen (eds), *The Best of Broadside 1962–1988*, Washington, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 2000.

<sup>30</sup> Tariq Ali, *Street Fighting Years*, London, Collins, 1987, pp. 250–4.

<sup>31</sup> David Widgery, *Beating Time: Riot’n’race’n’rock’n’roll*, London, Chatto & Windus, 1986.

with the outside world was through B92. It became a cultural phenomenon and it was stronger, fortunately, than any political movement here.<sup>32</sup> Collin himself reports: 'From their ad hoc control room in the dilapidated halls of the Faculty of Philosophy, the students' "creative team" planned daily stunts and spectacles, weaving images from pop culture, film and rock'n'roll into a witty iconography of resistance.'<sup>33</sup> Collin argues that B92 contributed to 'liberation through culture', but importantly not culture defined by some set of propagandist criteria — sometimes it was Serbian folk music, sometimes Cozy Powell's 'Dance with the Devil'.<sup>34</sup> The question begged by such reports is how and why these connections get made: how does an old British pop hit become part of Yugoslavia's political turmoil?

#### MUSIC AND MOVEMENT

These examples of the link between political movements and music cannot be seen simply as the happy coincidence of sentiments or mere serendipity. They were the result of identifiable interests and the webs that connected them. The music was a product of politics, just as the politics was a product of music.

An intriguing case study is provided by Peter Wicke, who argues that rock musicians in East Germany came to provide an important catalyst for the collapse of the East German regime. He writes: 'rock musicians were instrumental in setting in motion the actual course of events which led to the destruction of the Berlin Wall and the disappearance of the GDR.'<sup>35</sup> This claim rests on a number of linked ideas. The first of these is that the state's repression of rock transformed it into 'a medium of resistance which was more or less impossible to control'.<sup>36</sup> The second thought is that musicians developed skill in encoding political discussion of society within metaphorical

<sup>32</sup> Matthew Collin, *This is Serbia Calling: Rock'n'Roll Radio and Belgrade's Underground Resistance*, London, Serpent's Tail, 2001, p. 56.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 104.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 108.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Wicke, '“The Times They Are A-Changing”: Rock Music and Political Change in East Germany', in Reebee Garofalo (ed.), *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, Boston, South End Press, 1992, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 81.

lyrics that the audiences could then decode, a skill they themselves had learned from reading between the lines of Communist propaganda. Thirdly, the musicians had power, partly as a result of their economic position. The more successful groups were under contract to West German companies and represented a valuable source of hard currency in a failing economy. In trying to counter this power, President Honecker attempted to create divisions within the GDR's rock community, but this strategy was seen for what it was, and in fact forged a closer alliance between fans and performers. In 1989, concerned about the exodus of young people from the GDR, rock musicians drafted a statement (that was eventually signed by some 1,500 performers from all genres) drawing attention to the problem. The state refused to acknowledge the crisis or to broadcast the statement. In breach of the law, the musicians leaked the document to the Western media and read it aloud at concerts celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the GDR. The security forces in small towns arrested and imprisoned performers, but the most prominent musicians were left untouched. The repression ignited a hostility that, according to Wicke, drove forward the New Forum movement that ended in the unification of Germany.

Such case studies stimulate speculation about the link between music and politics, but they are notable for the lack of any overarching theoretical framework. Little attempt is made to generalize about the relationship or to identify its essential features. There is evidence, however, that attempts are being made to fill this gap in recent work on the politics of popular music.

Mark Mattern's *Acting in Concert*, for example, is one such effort to understand the ways in which communities use music for their collective ends. Mattern regards popular music as a form of communication which allows groups to establish shared meanings and interests: 'By expressing common experiences, music helps create and solidify a fund of shared memories and a sense of "who we are".'<sup>37</sup> Mattern maps musical forms onto different types of community action. Such action, he suggests, comes in three forms: the confrontational, the deliberative and the pragmatic. The first conforms to the idea of protest music, where one side pits itself against another; the music frames the opposition. Deliberative use of music involves

<sup>37</sup> Mark Mattern, *Acting in Concert: Music, Community, and Political Action*, New York, Rutgers University Press, 1998, p. 19.

debates within a community about its members' identity — rap, Mattern suggests, contains competing visions of the African-American community. Finally, pragmatic use of music occurs when a common identity and interest already exist, and music is deployed to advance these pre-established aims. Despite his attempt to draw music into the account of political action, Mattern's portrait of the role of music tends to view it in functional terms, as something that describes and expresses prior political goals. Such a view does not allow either for the way in which music may shape those goals or how its aesthetic pleasures might motivate the aspiration to achieve them.

These issues are addressed more directly by Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison who come to their study of music's political significance from social movement theory. Competing accounts of the new social movements — from structural-functionalism to resource mobilization and beyond — vary in the importance they attribute to 'culture'. Explanations located at the macro- (structural level) or the micro- (individual) tend to marginalize the cultural, locating the account in material forces or rational actions. Eyerman and Jamison, by contrast, are wedded to a meso-level approach in which cultural forms and practices are central. 'Social movements', they write, 'are not merely political activities'. Instead, movements are to be seen as providing space — a kind of public sphere — for 'cultural growth and experimentation' which entails the making and re-making of cultural traditions that are themselves generative of further political activity.<sup>38</sup>

In the language of social movement theory, Eyerman and Jamison provide a cognitive approach to social movements. The world is viewed through a 'frame', or as they prefer, culture generates a 'cognitive praxis', which provides the resources for mobilizing social movements. Music becomes 'both knowledge and action, part of the frameworks of interpretation and representation produced within social movements'.<sup>39</sup> These thoughts, which bring together musical experience (how and where we hear sounds) and political action, are immensely suggestive, providing the theoretical bridge implied by historical case studies of the link between music and social movements.

<sup>38</sup> Ron Eyerman and Andrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23–4.

At one level, social movements provide a context within which music is heard and given meaning. Eyerman and Jamison claim, for example, that American (egalitarian) political culture in general, and the labour movement in particular, created a context for the radical populism within folk music. By extension they argue, following Raymond Williams, that social movements help to shape 'structures of feeling and underlying social sensibilities'. Thus, the civil rights movement is seen to imbue soul music with 'a special intensity and responsibility'. This, though, introduces a second dimension to the relationship: the way that music is able to articulate 'forms of social solidarity' that become 'exemplary social action'. Musicians act as 'truth bearers', versions of Gramscian 'organic intellectuals'.<sup>40</sup>

There is, I would argue, one problem with their approach, or at least their execution of it. The sophistication of the social theory is not matched by an equivalent theorization of the music. Accounts of individual artists and their musical contribution are not defended or analysed with anything like the same rigour that is applied to social movement theory. Rap is rather glibly labelled 'electrified folk poetry' and Eyerman and Jamison's survey of this now vast genre is very selective, focusing only on the politically self-conscious Arrested Development.<sup>41</sup> Nor do they make much attempt to incorporate the industry into the development and meaning of music, in contrast to Smith's study of Motown, where she draws frequent attention to the links between black capitalism and black consciousness. Despite this, Eyerman and Jamison have provided the theoretical grounding for a fuller comprehension of the part music plays in constructing the collective consciousness that mobilizes political action, and how this action in return shapes aesthetic sensibility. Glibly, we might say that they have provided a political theory of music, but what is also needed is a musical theory of politics.

#### PLEASURE, POLITICS AND CULTURAL POWER

A crude way to characterize this problem is to listen to a CD compilation produced in 2000 by the Smithsonian Institution. It collects together songs and documents that emerged from *Broadside*

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp. 72–7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

magazine in New York from the 1960s onwards.<sup>42</sup> What is notable is how musically dull many of the songs are. As many reviewers observed, the songs are worthy in their political correctness, but musically uninteresting. The exception to this general rule is provided by Bob Dylan, whose caustic delivery, lyrical invention and melodic imagination highlight his comrades' aesthetic inadequacies. Such judgements are not passing asides. They help to explain Dylan's capacity to command a following, to move people, to make them believe and feel differently. This is what is meant by the power of music, and this must be part of the story linking music and politics. After all, a star's ability to secure an audience is what eager politicians see in the performers they recruit to their campaigns; it is also what enables a musician to act as 'truth bearer'. A star's popularity is not a simple product of his or her political insight or charisma. It has to do with the opportunity to communicate musically and in the ability to do so.

In *The Rhetoric of Moral Protest*, Christian Lahusen provides a study of this process, exploring the particular conditions under which musicians become involved in political movements. He points to the role of networks linking the different fields and the various forms of capital — cultural, social, economic — that enable the alliance to happen. It is not just a matter of who owns what, but who knows whom.<sup>43</sup> Lahusen argues too that the sounds of the music matter.

How music comes to have an effect is a vast topic, beyond the scope of this article or this author. Instead, I can only hint at the kind of arguments involved. Wicke, in his account of the part played by East German musicians in the collapse of the Berlin Wall, points out that the changes that occurred in the GDR were not necessarily those intended by the musicians, and that what was driving the desire for change 'was the almost total lack of an attractive and stimulating cultural life within the mainstream of everyday experience for the majority of the population'.<sup>44</sup> It is the political possibilities inherent in pleasure that are important. Musical — or any other cultural — texts cannot be read simply as documents of political aspiration or resentment or compliance. They have to be seen, first and foremost, as sources of aesthetic pleasure. The question then becomes how

<sup>42</sup> J. Place and R. Cohen, *The Best of Broadside 1962–1988*.

<sup>43</sup> Christian Lahusen, *The Rhetoric of Moral Protest*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 1996.

<sup>44</sup> P. Wicke, 'The Times They Are A-changing', p. 92.



that pleasure is linked to politics. For Simon Frith, music has the capacity to evoke an ideal order and so that 'communal values' can be 'grasped as musical aesthetics in action.'<sup>45</sup> Whether we agree with this particular claim about music is perhaps less important than that any attempt to make sense of music's politics must include some account of its pleasures.

## CONCLUSION

This article began with the derision that greeted the Conservative Party's choice of theme tune. It was a moment which might be seen simply as an example of misguided opportunism, a trivial example of contemporary political trivia. My conclusion would be different. It was revealing of the relationship between politics and music. Not only was it one among many instances when politicians have made use of popular music for propaganda effects, but it is also part of a large family of links between politics and popular music. The corollary of music's use as propaganda is the fear that music can be socially disruptive, and hence the need for its censorship. And while these state reactions may expose ignorance and prejudice, more revealing of the state's political interests and motives than of the music's power, they are indicative of music's capacity to provoke a political response. Such responses are most familiarly identified in the use of music in political movements. What is more important, though, is that this use is not confined to giving formal expression to political sentiments and formations already in existence, but extends to actually forging both the sentiment and the organization. This shifts the emphasis from what the political actors do with the music to what music does to political action.

What is at stake here are the ways in which popular culture and political thought and action are connected. And there are two issues involved. The more obvious one is what political science has to say about popular music; the less obvious one is what popular music can teach us about politics. Not only is it important to see how states (and other agencies) use and affect culture for particular political ends, to treat cultural policy to the same kind of attention that is given to economic or education or foreign policy; and indeed to see cultural

<sup>45</sup> Simon Frith, *Performing Rites*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996, p. 275.

policy as part of these, whether in the regulation of copyright or the content of the National Curriculum. The importance of music as a policy object derives from the arguments that connect to ideas of free speech and identity. But these in turn lead to questions about how music forms and shapes the feelings and passions which animate political action. In thinking about the politics of music, it is important to see how it comes to matter, both to the states that manage it and the citizens who enjoy it. The pleasures of music are part of its politics, not an incidental feature of them.