

Soothing the savage beast? Music, type and other things

Peter Geyer

I love my Music.

Ain't nothin' gonna change my view.....Kenny Loggins and Jim Messina 1973

My heart is black,

And my lips are cold

Cities on flame with Rock and Roll.....Eric Bloom 1972

I will sit right down

Waiting for the gift

of sound and vision

David Bowie 1977

Ya gotta have something

that always rhymes

Ya gotta have something in 4/4 time

Ya gotta have something.....Daryl Hall 1980

When we think about music, what is it that we feel?

The respected rock music journalist Mat Snow asserted recently that music is "the noblest expression of what it is to be human" (Snow, 2004), yet it seems to be gifted unevenly in our species.

Some people, for instance, hear rhythms and dance in their head, rather than where it might be expected to be, in the feet and hips and so forth. This attribute is a source of consternation to dance teachers, and spouses as well as the person concerned, who may feel embarrassed or stressed in places where public performance of dancing is required.

On the other hand, having few inhibitions about engaging in collective musical expression doesn't necessarily mean having a facility with the process. Recently, I watched a DVD of a superb performance by the late soul composer and singer Curtis Mayfield, in which he engaged the audience in the production of the music in several places, as is customary. His English audience were enthusiastic, although some visibly demonstrated their inability to clap off the beat as required; others were unable to sing in time. [1986]. No evidence was found of the tone-deaf, but one presumes they would be doing something else.

So, is this uneven response an accurate rendition of what happens when humans express music and dance? Inga Clendinnen tells us that there were occasions when British and Aboriginal Australians danced together in the early days of the Port Jackson settlement (2003). What it looked like and what the participants thought it was are open to conjecture, but it seems at least that this was a serious exchange between cultures.

From the evidence presented, not everyone seems thrilled by Aboriginal music and dance, but there were many colonists who regularly went out to observe ceremonies presented in neighbouring areas. The dancing between cultures didn't go on all that long,

for a number of reasons, and one wonders, like Clendinnen, what might have happened had it continued on for a while longer.

Music, or perhaps sound, seems to have been part of human culture for a long period. We're familiar with the discoveries of what look like prehistoric flutes, and acoustic properties of Greek amphitheatres are well documented. The acoustics at Stonehenge and in long barrows have recently been demonstrated on television (Costello, 2004).

Music was considered at one time to be essential study for those being trained to rule. Richard the Lionheart, for example, was highly regarded as a musician and composer. One of his songs is still in print today (Danziger and Gillingham 2003). His mother, Eleanor of Aquitaine fostered the troubadour movement, amongst other stellar achievements. What's now called classical music was developed in various European royal courts and sinecures. Even today, we have Tony Blair's electric guitar and Bill Clinton's saxophone, not much else, regrettably, other than Nelson Mandela dancing the dance of his culture.

Today, even if music isn't the most important part of your life, odds are that every day you'll have a musical experience, from the *doof-doof* sounds from passing cars to the sometimes startling sounds that accompany you as you wait on the phone for service from an organisation proclaiming how they value your call, but paradoxically, not to the extent of employing sufficient people to help you. Music is in shops, in the street.

You can access it through radio, internet, videos DVDs television and movies.

You can be woken by it or have a favourite tune as the tone on your mobile phone.

You can also read about it either in newspapers as feature articles and reviews. Recently, readers of the Age and Australian on one weekend would have been able to read a review of a book interpreting Bob Dylan's lyrics as poetry, an article on the selection of music played in stores a brief interview with a musician and a cover story on indigenous music, on top of all the regular features.

Three decades ago, the blues musician Michael Bloomfield defined his pioneering jazz-rock band, *The Electric Flag*, as "an American music band". He went on to say that

"American music is not necessarily music directly from America. I think of it as the music you hear in the air, on the air, and in the streets; blues, soul, country, rock, religious music, traffic, crowds, street sounds and field sounds, the sound of people and silence." (1995 [1967]).

Like his contemporary, Jimi Hendrix, who carried his guitar wherever he went (for this highly introverted man it was probably also a self-protecting activity), Bloomfield lived for music and saw the world in that context. Also like Hendrix, and a large number of musicians, Bloomfield was an outsider in his culture. Blacks, Jews and other social minorities are over-represented in popular music at least. In Australia, Aboriginal people have favoured country music, or reggae.

How does this compare with the person in the street, or even other musicians, not all of whom would be so expansive on what was music and what was not, or what was relevant and what was trite. Contemporary classical music, for instance is a minority interest, not least because of the complex and confronting sounds that are produced (e.g. Colbert 1988). Some may use music as background without considering the music at all Others may struggle with *Australian Idol*, country music or nightclubs.

There's always a fine line between music and entertainment.

If music is a mixed bag, its contents seem to be related to the unconscious in some way. Jourdain (1997) suggests the brain as an important location regarding responses to and experiences of music and to my way of thinking, that's not inconsistent with an unconscious perspective.

This is why music is felt by many to have a therapeutic benefit regarding enlightenment, development, or stress relief. There's also the music of churches, and the muezzin's call, and the notes of the gamelan addressing the rising and setting sun.

Some parents have been enjoined to play Mozart to their babies (a form of cultural imperialism in a way), notwithstanding that the mother's voice is what babies prefer to hear (Hershkowitz 2002). Stress management or relief has had its musical temperament interpretations with uncertain results, perhaps because of the lack of choice through overgeneralisation and also that stressful situations vary and require different remedies. I use music as a prime means of dealing with stress, but the music choice is fairly wide, including that of no music at all.

In popular music for instance, figures such as Elvis Presley, John Lennon and Slim Dusty seem to have had an effect on the collective psyche in that their deaths were mourned by significant proportions of the community. Many of these people may have had little previous interest in the music produced by these people. Many other people interested in similar music, such as myself, remain curiously unaffected or detached from such an experience. Presley is almost literally a deity these days (there is a Church of Elvis) and is somewhat incongruously depicted in his Las Vegas attire, when his creativity and passion might be said to have almost disappeared. Perhaps his previous incarnation as a danger to society, a menace even, precluded this kind of apotheosis for our society's psyche.

The menace in the words of Eric Bloom needs no elaboration. Paradoxically, Blue Oyster Cult, the band of which he is a member, use many motifs of that type including some World War II German images, notwithstanding that the band members were all Jews from New York's Long Island. A double-outsider strategy, perhaps.

Music is also about passion, humour, power, beauty, patriotism, solidarity and a host of other things. Friedrich Engels, on a number of occasions, joined his friend and collaborator Karl Marx and his family on Hampstead Heath. Here, they picnicked, sometimes singing folk songs from Strasbourg (Buruma 2000). Whilst the quality of performance would be conjectural, one suspects a passionate rendition.

Passion of various kinds, no matter the personality type of the musician(s) involved, is something that attracts/repels people. Most of my music is in my head, and so I rarely watch it played, preferring to directly engage with the music without seeing it, or needing others' responses to help me engage with what's being played. I'm not a visual person, anyway, and I have my own internal vistas created by music and books. Miles Davis' *The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions* (2003 [1969]) is something recent that comes to mind. Musicians involved in these sessions make various comments in the liner notes that come with this music, and interestingly have no hesitation in ascribing the role of composer to Davis, notwithstanding their significant role in developing the music. An almost mystical appreciation of the power of this musician.

But the joy and intensity of viewing public performance can also be compelling.

Recently, I watched film of the trumpeter Chet Baker's last performance (he died not long afterwards) (2003 [1986]). He appeared frail, a consequence of the drugs and alcohol that had been a large part of his life, but out of that condition he produced music that was clearly from deep within, as well as from his life experience. Quite possibly there was no difference for him.

In a similar vein, I came across a performance of his acclaimed *Disney Girls* (1957) by Bruce Johnson, a member of the Beach Boys over some time. Johnson performed the song accompanying himself on piano, stripped of the harmonies and studio add-ons. One had the experience of watching a private performance in a public place, where he performed as one with the song. He completed the song, then shyly said "That's *Disney Girls*", as though coming back from somewhere else. I think that's something of what music is. I don't know his type.

What types **are** these people, musicians? In some ways, it's better to look at music another way and say that people of various types use music to express who they are, and other things. I think that's part of the gap between music and entertainment.

But, in general, I'd say that what passes as popular or folk music would be largely an SP enterprise. Certainly Chet Baker clearly presents as an SFP of some sort to me, and there are a few people easily identified as such like Presley, Springsteen, Van Morrison, Clapton, Keith Richards, Marvin Gaye and so on.

Grace Slick, the voice of Jefferson Airplane presents as perhaps an ESTP, apologising to anyone and everyone she may have offended, and not actually talking about the music much at all amidst a very physical description of her life (1999). Phil Kerr has presented compelling evidence that the Beatles are 3/4 SP, You also have the STPs like Dylan, raconteurs of the road, plain speech and physical life. These people will have learned music through listening repeating and adapting, more than specific study.

You'd expect NTs to be into complexity of some sort, clinical and technical in their music in some respects but at the same time can express their own passions, verbally, or through the instrument. King Crimson, Steely Dan are the repositories for people like this. Avant-garde jazz as well. They may be seen as emotionless, although that's far from the case. Robert Fripp, the convenor of King Crimson is passionate about musicians owning their own music, something that is slowly increasing, but from a low base. His liner notes to the live CD *Absent Lovers* (1998) which are predominantly about the iniquitous businessmen he's had to put up with ring with crisp NT tones of precise words and logic. It's worth reading, even if you might find the music not to your taste. Some nice NT lyrics.

NFs are attracted to music in large numbers. Brian Wilson and Sting come to mind, Neil Young, and of course Lennon. And the INFs are overrepresented in orchestras and conductors. One might expect peace and love from these people, but they can also be confronting regarding their values, David Byrne, perhaps or singing without words in the manner of Jeff Buckley or Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, where' you're taken to some awesome place that's perhaps empty and profound at the same time.

SJs I rarely hear in the music I listen to. Mike Love the opposite to his cousin Brian Wilson comes to mind, and perhaps Ian Anderson of Jethro Tull and country music performers of no individual style. Tribute bands come to mind, and quests/competitions for "stars" are at least SJ in format, with prescriptions regarding dress and bodily shape being key indicators, although these characterisations seem somewhat unfair.

I'd expect SJ musicians to want to play by the notes which, while it's a general requirement for music, isn't as important for jazz and rock and so forth. What counts is interpretation more than replication.

Are performing musicians E or I. I'd suspect mostly I? For every Mick Jagger there'd be two or three Lennons or Charlie Watts'. It may be different with local bands who seek to entertain for enjoyment and fun, but music can be a convincing mask.

And in any case, it ultimately doesn't matter. No matter type or temperament, there are other reasons for people to like, engage with and ignore what's out there, and in your head and heart.

SOME REFERENCES

- Chet Baker *Nightbird* Essential Records ESMCD 015 1990 [1986]/*Live at Ronnie Scott's* Umbrella DVD DAVID 0013 2003 [1986]
- Peter Barrett *The spin doctors* in The Age A2 Saturday January 17, 2004 p2
- Eric Bloom *Cities on Flame with Rock and Roll* from Blue Oyster Cult CD Blue Oyster Cult Columbia Legacy CK 85482 2001 [1972] Donald Roeser-Albert Bouchard Sony/ATV Tunes LLC1973
- Michael Bloomfield Liner notes from Electric Flag *A Long Time Comin'* LP, reproduced in Old Glory: The Best of Electric Flag: An American Music Band Columbia Legacy CK 57629 1995.
- David Bowie *Sound and Vision* from Low (Bewlay Bros Music/Fleur Music BMI) EMI/ Jones Music/Mainman CDP 7977192 1991 [1977]
- Ian Buruma *Voltaire's Coconuts, or Anglomania in Europe* Phoenix 2000
- Inga Clendinnen *Dancing with Strangers* Text Publishing 2003
- Brendan Colbert *Altered States* (Colbert,1988) from Elision Ensemble RCA Ariola CCD 3011 1993
- Hugh Costello *New Ways of Unearthing the Old: A Review of Unlocking the Past* (Sunday 4 January 2004, 7om History Channel UK) in BBC History Magazine January 2004 p 62.
- Danny Danziger and John Gillingham *1215: The Year of Magna Carta* Hodder & Stoughton 2003
- Miles Davis *The Complete Jack Johnson Sessions* 5CD Box Set Columbia/Legacy K 86359-S2

- Michael Epis The songs stripped bare: A review of Christopher Ricks' Dylan's Visions of Sin in *The Age Review* Saturday, January 17, 2004 p5.
- Robert Fripp Liner notes from King Crimson *Absent Lovers: Live in Montreal* 1984 Discipline (GM) DGM9804 1998 [1984].
- Daryl Hall *Something in 4/4 Time* from Sacred Songs (Daryl Hall) Buddha Records CD 7446599604-2 1999 [1980]
- Norbert and Elinor Hershkowitz (fwd. Jerome Kagan): *A good start in life: Understanding your child's brain and behaviour*. Joseph Henry Press 2002.
- Bruce Johnson *Disney Girls (1957)* from The Beach Boys *Surf's Up* Caribou/Epic Associated ZK 46951 and *The Old Grey Whistle Test Volume 2* BBC DVD 1279 2003 (Bruce Johnson Artists Music Inc/BMG Songs Inc ASCAP 1971)
- Robert Jourdain *Music, the Brain and Ecstasy: How Music captures our imagination* William Morrow and Company 1997
- Kenny Loggins and Jim Messina
 My Music from Loggins and Messina CD *Full Sail* Columbia CK32540 (und.) J.Mesina-K.Loggins Jasperilla/Gnossos/Portofino Music ASCAP 1973
- Curtis Mayfield *Live at Ronnie Scott's* WarnerVision DVD 0927488512 und. [1986]
- Nicolas Rothwell *Pump up the songlines* in The Weekend Australian Review January 17-18. 2004 pp 4-6.
- Dino Scatena *What I've Learnt: Dave Faulkner* in The Age A2 Saturday January 17, 2004 p2
- Grace Slick, with Andrea Cagan *Somebody to Love? A Rock-and -Roll Memoir* Warner Books 1999
- Mat Snow Review of Johnny Cash *Unearthed* in *Mojo: The Music Magazine* January 2004 p110