Politics and Music in Europe, 1945 to the Present: from Stockhausen to Lady Gaga

Research Seminar
Organised by Prof. Steve Smith
Mondays 15.10-17.00, Sala Belvedere
Secretary: Kathy Wolf-Fabiani (Office VS 17)
Starts on 9 January 2012

All music – all organization of sounds – is a method of creating or consolidating a community; it is the link of power with its subjects, and an attribute of this power, whatever its form. Moreover, there is no freedom without music. It inspires man to rise above himself and others, to go beyond standards and rules to build an idea – however fragile – of transcendence. And precisely because noise is at once an instrument of power and a source of rebellion, political powers have always been fascinated by what their subjects listen to.

Jacques Attali, Bruits: essai sur l’économie politique de la musique

“I would like my listeners to be people who consciously think things over, who think for themselves, who regard music and art as a whole as a mirror of human searching, of people who want to grasp how things are, to cast off impositions, and to leap into the unknown and thus become more open and tolerant towards their surroundings

Olga Neuwirth

Do you spend too much time inside your head
Worry too much about what the other man said
Need to pay heed to dis sonic reflection
Turn dis disconnection into interconnection
And get into de collective mode

Asian Dub Foundation

Since 1945 music has been of enormous significance in shaping social relations and individual lives as a result of the commercialization of music production and recording, new technologies (from cheap record-players through to i-pods), rising living standards and cultural change. Today more money is spent on music than on books, films or any other source of entertainment. Yet historians have found it difficult to find ways of analysing the relationships of music to political and social change. The idea of the seminar is to explore some of these inter-relationships in Europe (including, I hope, its northern, eastern and south-eastern parts) after 1945.

The seminar, which is feasible only because of the wonders now available through youtube, will look at all types of music – classical, jazz, folk, rock, pop – that have explicitly addressed themselves to challenging the status quo. It will approach politics in a broad sense, as all practices that reproduce or seek to transform – or maintain - relations of domination and subordination, whether at the level of nation states and international relations, of movements that seek to bring about social change or transform practices of everyday life.
The ‘politics’ of a piece of music is determined in complex ways that relate to the context in which it is produced, its explicit ideology, the texts or images that may form part of the music, its musical language (harmonic, rhythmic, orchestration etc), the context of performance (including the individual or collective persona of the performer(s), the use of visual media, video etc), its impact on its audience, the extent of its dissemination among the public and its reception by that public as well as by those in authority.

The course is not intended for the faint-hearted, for those for whom music is ‘easy listening’! The idea is that we should listen to music that is challenging, whether in terms of its musical language (the rise of the European avant-garde in the 1950s) or its political message (black power or punk). So although rock and pop music will be well represented, it’s my hope that the seminar will stretch our ears by exposing us to music with which we are not familiar.

**Course requirements**

The course outline below is suggestive rather than fixed. The choice of broad topics is for us as a group to decide. To help make the choice real, I have suggested some alternatives, but I’m very open to ideas you may have. The only exception to this is week 1, the topic of which I’ve fixed, so that we get into the course straight away. But week 1 will also be when we determine the shape of the rest of the course, so please come along with your ideas and suggestions.

Each member of the seminar will be expected to introduce short pieces of music at intervals through the nine weeks of the seminar, locating a clip of music, providing text of the music if relevant, plus a brief piece of more academic writing (should it be felt necessary). These presentations should not be long, in order to accommodate several presentations in one seminar, but I hope each person would direct the discussion. Within the limitations of a broadly defined notion of ‘music that aspires to be political’ – not the same as ‘music I like’! - the idea is that presenters introduce the seminar to music they think is interesting and worthy of discussion. I am rather keen that we listen to some music that stands apart from an anglophone pop-music mainstream.

**Some questions we might find ourselves asking**

Can ‘pure’ music – sans text, sans context – carry a political meaning (put another way, can music express anything other than itself)? Is classical music necessarily elitist? Are the tensions between commercially produced music and aspirations for political change irresolvable? How do class, race, gender, heteronormativity influence musical taste, musical content, performance practice? Are some genres (folk? choral?, marching songs?) more effective than others as vehicles of political expression? Are there differences in the ways that music has been enlisted for left- and right-wing ends? What has been the role of music in promoting nationalism? How has music functioned in dictatorships of right and left? How do the ‘means of production’ influence the political character of music?

What is the relationship between words and music? Is a political music compatible with pleasure, lyricism etc.? What are the tensions between professionalism and amateurism in creating (a democratic?)? How does the relationship between audience and performers shape the political meaning of the music? How does the wider social and political context of music-making shape its meaning and/or influence reception? What is the relationship of music to identity building? How is music used to build political community? Are dominant forms of music, whether pop or classical, intrinsically male-defined? Is there a ‘European’ music after 1945? These are just a few of the questions we might discuss.
**Week 1 – Darmstadt: Starting Over (after 1945)**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Aa6BRREy7g&NR=1
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rHVFddI9fQ&feature=related
Music: Luigi Nono, ‘Ricorda cosa ti hanno fatto in Auschwitz’

**Reading**
Theodor Adorno, “On the Fetish Character in Music and the Regression in Listening”
http://elenarazlogova.org/hist452w07/adorno.pdf

**Topics for the rest of the course**

Here are some ideas for topics for the rest of the course which we can discuss and to which you can add your own:

**war** - penderecki threnody – britten war requiem- shostakovich baby yar- reich – distant trains – dylan – masters of war – baez blowin’ in the wind – lennon – i don’t want to be – rage against the machine – killin’ in the name


**right-wing** – nazi punk - – 270b – perković – e, moj narode -

**eurovision**

**communism and politics**

**music and authoritarianism**

**gay** – diamanda galas – plague mass – jimmy somerville – etheridge – yes i am – lily allen f-ck you – lady gaga


List of books and articles

This is **not a bibliography** for the course. It is a list of books and articles that you some of you may find useful in preparing presentations.

**Useful journals**

**Music and Politics**

**Popular Music and Society**

**General**

Alex Ross [http://www.therestisnoise.com/](http://www.therestisnoise.com/)

And Alex Ross, *The Rest is Noise*


**The Classical Avant-Garde**


Cornelius Cardew, Stockhausen Serves Imperialism.


1968 and all that


Communist Europe


*Protest Song in East and West Germany since the 1960s.* Edited by David Robb. (Studies in German Literature, Linguistics, and Culture.) Rochester, N.Y.: Camden House, 2007

**Political Folk**


**Protest Rock**


Peter Doggett *There’s a Riot Going On: Revolutionaries, Rock Stars, and the Rise and Fall of ‘60s Counter-Culture*. Edinburgh: Canongate, 2007


**Punk, Rap, Hip Hop etc.**

Matthew Gelbarta, “Cohesive Shambles: the Clash’s ‘London Calling’ and the Normalization of Punk


Nathan Wiseman-Trowse, *Performing Class in Popular Music*


**Race, Class, Gender, Heteronormativity**


Susan C Cook, Judy S Tsou (Editors), *Cecilia Reclaimed: Feminist Perspectives on Gender and Music*


Philip Brett and Elizabeth Wood, ‘Lesbian and Gay Music’
http://www.rem.ufpr.br/_REM/REMv7/Brett_Wood/Brett_and_Wood.html


Samuel A. Floyd, The Power of Black Music Interpreting Its History from Africa to the United States