

Music and Politics

This book is not about music or politics. It is about the ‘and’ that binds them together. How do these fields intersect, and what theories and approaches can help us understand their interactions? How have the relationships between music and politics changed over time and across cultures, and are the familiar tools we use in dealing with them fit for purpose? This book overhauls our understanding of how these fields interact, offering a rigorous reappraisal of key concepts such as power, protest, resistance, subversion, propaganda and ideology. It explores and evaluates a wide range of perspectives from contemporary political theory, engaging with an array of musical cultures and practices from medieval chant to rap. In addition, it discusses current ways in which the relationships between music and politics are being reconfigured and reconceptualized. Where else can you find Donald Trump, Kendrick Lamar and Beethoven under one cover?

JAMES GARRATT is Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Manchester. His publications include *Music, Culture and Social Reform in the Age of Wagner* (Cambridge, 2010) and *Palestrina and the German Romantic Imagination: Interpreting Historicism in Nineteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge, 2002).

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A Critical Introduction

JAMES GARRATT

University of Manchester



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For Lucy, Lydia and Emiliana

Contents

- List of Figures* [page ix]
List of Boxes [x]
Preface [xi]
- 1 Music and Politics: Key Concepts and Issues [1]
 - 1.1 Politics and the Political [5]
 - 1.2 Musical Messages, Noises and Affects [11]
 - 1.3 Agency and Causation [23]
 - 1.4 Is All Music Political? [33]
 - 2 Power and Counterpower [37]
 - 2.1 Power, Hegemony and Violence [37]
 - 2.2 Weaponizing and Controlling Music [42]
 - 2.3 Music Censorship [48]
 - 2.4 Resistance, Micropolitics and Constituent Power [52]
 - 3 History, Ideology and the Politics of Context [65]
 - 3.1 Context and Causal Power [65]
 - 3.2 Regime Change: The Politics of Periodization [70]
 - 3.3 Context, Commitment and Composition [83]
 - 3.4 Ideology and the Political Unconscious [94]
 - 4 Propaganda, Ritual and Sovereign Power [107]
 - 4.1 Political Promotion and Affirmation [111]
 - 4.2 Ritual and the Politics of Acclamation [117]
 - 4.3 Contemporary Rituals of Acclamation [123]
 - 5 Performing Protest: Music and Activism [127]
 - 5.1 Protest Music and Social Movements [128]
 - 5.2 Auteur-Activists: Bob Dylan and Fela Kuti [135]
 - 5.3 Beyond Protest Song: Contemporary Musical Activism [143]
 - 6 Critique, Subversion and Negation [147]
 - 6.1 Wagner's *Ring* and Music as Political Critique [148]
 - 6.2 Shostakovich, Subversion and Secret Dissidence [156]
 - 6.3 Negation and Critical Composition [162]

7	Nationalism, Racism and Fascism	[173]
7.1	Political Identity, Culturalization and the New Racism	[173]
7.2	Fascism and the Aestheticization of Politics	[178]
7.3	Metapolitical Activism and the Extreme Right	[185]
	Postscript: Music and Politics after the Future	[197]
	<i>Notes</i>	[200]
	<i>Select Bibliography</i>	[248]
	<i>Index</i>	[263]

Figures

- 1.1 ‘The Piano Player’, Euromaidan uprising in Kiev, 2013 [page 2]
- 4.1 Heinrich Olivier, *Die heilige Allianz* (The Holy Alliance), 1815 [114]
- 4.2 Rehearsing a parade in Kim Il-sung Square, Pyongyang, North Korea, 2008 [124]
- 5.1 Tom Morello performing on day 28 of the Occupy Wall Street protest, 2011 [131]
- 7.1 Parades Commission notice, Belfast, 12 July 2013 [175]
- 7.2 Laibach ‘Einkauf’ (shopping) performance action in Ljubljana, 2003 [184]

Boxes

- 1.1 Liberalism, Liberal Democracy, Neoliberalism [page 7]
- 1.2 Marxism, Socialism and Communism [16]
- 1.3 The Affective Dimension of Political Songs [20]
- 2.1 Hegemony [38]
- 2.2 Attali on Music, Violence and Power [43]
- 2.3 Plato on Controlling Music's Effect on Behaviour [47]
- 2.4 Foucault on Power and Resistance [55]
- 3.1 Marx's Materialist View of History [68]
- 3.2 Base and Superstructure [72]
- 3.3 Hanns Eisler on Revolutionary Art [85]
- 3.4 Adorno and the Politics of Form [88]
- 4.1 Hitler on Art and Propaganda [108]
- 5.1 Marcuse on Dylan and Revolutionary Language [139]
- 6.1 Wagner's 'Revolution' [149]

Preface

This book is not about music or politics. It is about the ‘and’ that binds them together, in ways that include yet go beyond the concept of political music. How do these fields intersect and exercise effects on each other? What theories and approaches can help us understand these multiple interactions and the functions they serve? How have these interactions and functions changed over time and across cultures, and are the familiar conceptual tools we use in dealing with them fit for purpose? And in an era often characterized as post-political – or at least one in which confidence in progress and the future has leached away – how are the relationships between music and politics being reconfigured and reconceptualized?

It may seem unnecessary to pose these questions, given the extensive literature that already exists on music and politics. But much research approaches the intersection of these fields narrowly, focusing on either a restricted sphere of music or a limited dimension of politics. Most studies address just one aspect of the political – be it power, protest, resistance or identity – while those that offer a more comprehensive approach tend to focus on just one musical culture, genre or repertory. This is hardly surprising, given that some of the most influential theorists of the present (such as Jacques Rancière) define politics in wilfully narrow terms, and given the still dominant historicist, culturally bound model of knowledge animating music studies. This is not the place to trot out clichés about blind men and elephants, but there is a real need to survey the area from a macro level and to remap it in the light of current theory and practice.

In exploring the ‘and’ of music and politics, I have three aims. The first is to understand the processes shaping how these two fields intersect. How do they act on each other as causal powers? How can music acquire political agency, and what are its capacities and limitations as a political force? Is it right to conceptualize music and politics as two distinct spheres, and under what conditions can music function politically simply by doing what it does as music? My second aim is to reappraise the concepts that are most often used to stitch together music and politics: protest, resistance, propaganda, subversion, ideology and so on. Are these conceptual tools – most of which had their heyday in the fascist period or the Cold War – still

useful, or do they constrict our field of vision and chain us to the politics of yesteryear? Is our continued recourse to them motivated by nostalgia for a time when change seemed possible and when music seemed to have a more meaningful role? The third aim is to explore the interactions between music and politics in a different sense, bringing together insights and approaches from the wide range of disciplines that engage with the interface between these fields. At a time when relationships between the various disciplines within music studies can be fractious, it is worth stressing that neither historical musicology, nor popular music studies nor ethnomusicology has all the answers (or even poses all the questions). A significant amount of the most interesting current work on music and politics stems from outside music studies entirely, whether from the disciplines of cultural studies, sociology, political science, political theory, anthropology, psychology, behavioural science, history, language and area studies, geography and so on. I have fed voraciously on the insights they have to offer, and I hope that this book will be of use to researchers and students working in these fields and help to increase interdisciplinary dialogue.

Methodologically, this book offers a combination of theoretical discussion, conceptual analysis and empirical engagement with cultures, texts and practices that exemplify (or problematize) the broader issues. Given that its whole thrust resists any single strategy for explaining how music and politics interrelate, I have avoided leaning too heavily on any particular theorist or body of discourse (in some ways it would have been easier to write a Marxist introduction to music and politics, or one oriented around Adorno, Foucault or Rancière, but such an approach would have provided too limited a set of resources for dealing with the multiple musico-political interactions we will encounter). My original plan was to have a series of historically oriented chapters, mapping particular political concepts onto the periods of Western music history in which they reached their high point (so propaganda would have been examined through the lens of the Third Reich, while the protest chapter would have focused entirely on the 1960s, and so on). The concepts and material, however, fought against being constrained by such a narrowly historical approach. One reason for this is that political concepts – most notably freedom, democracy, community and equality – are transhistorical in thrust, striving beyond the conditions of a particular present while also looking sideways and backward (it is their future-oriented quality that gives them the effect of universality). Another is that exemplary intersections between music and politics, by their nature, exercise effects that go beyond their original

contexts; protest music of the 1960s continues to shape perceptions of such music today, just as the music of the French Revolution provided a model for revolutionary music throughout the nineteenth century. Accordingly, each chapter examines not only key historical moments colouring particular musico-political concepts but also the present state of play, scrutinizing current developments in theory and practice.

Writing about music and politics can sometimes feel like a no-win game, given that every reader is likely to be irked by both inclusions and omissions. Although I have cast my net pretty wide, the majority of examples and case studies are drawn from Western music or from cultures whose music and politics have been informed by Western practices. I have had to be selective in the genres, composers and theorists examined (which regrettably meant omitting any discussion of jazz and leaving out seemingly indispensable figures such as Hans Werner Henze and Jean-Luc Nancy). The exponential expansion of the political field since the 1970s has also necessitated omissions; while social movements are explored in Chapter 6 and identity in Chapter 7, it has been possible to explore only a small fraction of contemporary forms of movement activism and identity politics. More mundanely, I made the choice at an early stage to omit examples from scores as well as links to online recordings, although almost all the music discussed is available on YouTube. Moving from sins of omission to those of commission, it is a fair bet that no one has picked up this book out of an interest in my political views, and I have tried to bear that in mind when writing. Complete neutrality is impossible, however, given the entirely different ways in which those on the left and right understand key terms such as neoliberalism.

Originally, I had intended not to include any acknowledgements in this book (reader, they count toward the word limit!). But it would be churlish not to show my gratitude to Victoria Cooper, who instigated this project, her successor Katharina Brett and all the other staff at Cambridge University Press (including Eilidh Burrett, Fleur Jones and Sophie Taylor) who nudged me along and showed much kindness and patience along the way. I am grateful to Lisa Sinclair, Saritha Srinivasan and Stephanie Sakson for ably and amiably steering the book through the production process. I would also like to thank Simone Schulz and the Bildarchiv Foto Marburg for permission to reproduce Heinrich Olivier's *Die heilige Allianz*; Sperans of the band Laibach for permission to use the photo 'Einkauf'; and Nick Stewart for kindly allowing me to use his photo as the cover illustration.

I remember here Mark Fisher and Kenneth Gloag, both of whom died – far too young – while I was completing the book. I often thought of them while writing, and very much doubt that I would have undertaken it without their inspiration.

Although this is my shortest book to date, my wife Sinéad and I managed to have three lovely daughters over the course of its gestation. So it is dedicated to Lucy, Lydia and Emiliana, on the understanding that they don't delay the next book by so long.