



## Music, Politics, and Violence

Susan Fast and Kip Pegley, Eds.

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Research into the relationship between music and politics has, over the past decade or so, expanded exponentially in terms of its breadth of field and sophistication of argument. *Music, Politics and Violence* sets the benchmark for current research into the ways – overt and covert – that music can either attenuate or temper the unholy alliance between politics and its brute enforcer. The great strength of the volume is that the nine essays (ten, if you include J. Martin Daughtry's brilliant Afterword) so effectively reinforce and validate the tripartite conceptual framework established in the editors' introduction. This correspondence between concept and content lends to the volume an intellectual and structural integrity often sought but seldom attained in collections like this. The introduction couches the relationship between music, politics, and violence in terms of what might be described as cause, effect, and legacy. These correspond to the collection's three parts, each of which is prefaced with a highly informative and taut summary of its contents: Objective and Subjective Violences; Violence and Reconciliation; Musical Memorializations of Violent Pasts.

With regard to the first of these, the introduction defines violence in terms of a model put forward by the seemingly ubiquitous Slavoj Žižek in his *Violence: Six Sideways Reflections*. Žižek describes overt and covert forms of violence as being 'subjective' and 'objective', respectively. The former, according to the editors, refers to violence that is 'empirical, visible, and quantifiable (war, genocide, terrorism)' (4). Objective violence, on the other hand, 'includes the systemization or "objectification" of exploitation and oppression'. Objective violence is itself divided into two subcategories, the symbolic and the systemic. Symbolic violence is 'the violence (racism, gender discrimination, etc) that is embodied in hegemonic forms of discourse, particularly language'; 'systemic' violence includes the 'violence of capitalism' that in effect takes with one hand and gives back with the other – the philanthropy of George Soros and Bill Gates are cited as cases in point (5).

The resultant misconception that capitalism is doing its bit and therefore, in the words of Žižek, that the rest of us need 'do nothing' (5) finds its corollary in the recent (at least since George Harrison's 1971 Concert for Bangladesh) so-called 'charity rock' phenomenon. Here, as the editors rightly point out, benefit concerts 'perpetuate a second

layer of symbolic violence through the choice of performers (largely white and male) and the pre-eminence of rock music over other genres' (5). Amen to that. This part of the introduction segues to the now customary consideration as to what might reasonably be expected of music; that is, can and does it actively participate in, reinforce or counter the various forms of violence outlined above, or can it at best bear witness *post factum*? As the editors assert, the task of the collected essays is to 'uncover *precisely* how music does its cultural work' (12, their emphasis). The four essays in Part One tease this out respectively by exploring: German musicology's service to that nation's war effort during the First World War (Nicholas Attfeld, ' "A Healing Draft for a Sick People" '); the ostracism of the Croatian folk-pop singer, Neda Ukraden, following the collapse of Yugoslavia (Catherine Baker, 'The Afterlife of Neda Ukraden'); the appropriation the song 'Lili Marlene' by Axis and Allied troops during the Second World War (Christina Baade, 'Between the Lines'); and the use of diegetic and non-diegetic sounds in American news broadcasts during wartime (James Deaville, 'The Changing Sounds of War').

The next section of the introduction corresponds with the three essays in Part Two, and concerns itself with the volume's second main theme, that of music, violence and reconciliation. Here, and taking their lead from Jacques Derrida's observations that globalisation has altered not simply the theatres in which conflict is played out, but the very nature of violence itself (along the lines of Žižek's objective violence), the editors argue that music plays a fundamental role in an individual's sense or absence of belonging (12). Central to this is the role played by music in either reinforcing or undermining national identity. To that end the editors rightly predicate their discussion on Judith Butler and Gavin Spivak's 2007 *Who Sings the Nation State?*, and its engagement with, among many other things, the controversies surrounding the rendering of 'The Star Spangled Banner' into Spanish in 2006 and, at the hands of Jimi Hendrix at Woodstock, into a sonic commentary on the 1960s zeitgeist, one unsurpassed to this day in its ferocity, beauty, and ambiguity of meaning. With considerable understatement the editors assert that the latter stands as an example of the use of music 'as a means through which to articulate notions of otherness and belonging in the context of the nation-state' (16). One assumes Hendrix would have been pleased.

That assertion is teased out in the essays in Part Two, which is a culturally diverse selection of case studies dealing respectively with: the protest music of several Palestinian performers during the 2002-2006 al-Asqa intifada, in particular its promotion of cultural and religious diversity (David McDonald, 'Revivals and New Arrivals'); the ways in which the musical, poetic, and ritualistic practices of Sufism support and encourage a reconciliation between Muslim and Western worlds (Victor Vicente, 'Pax Mevlana'); and the manner through which Indigenous Fijian musicians subverted their inter-coup government's attempts to visit upon Indo-Fijians a symbolic violence in the form of an artificially imposed multiculturalism for the benefit of the tourism industry (Kevin Miller, 'Choreographing (against) Coup Culture').

The third and final section of the editors' introduction explores the possibility that music might be used 'as a means of healing and reconciliation' (18). They pose a specific and perfectly reasonable question: 'How can an art form – any art form – assist in understanding violent events and help us to heal from their trauma?' (18). Music's potential in this regard is teased out via a fascinating overview of the music and musicians used in a memorial service held at the World Trade Centre precinct on 28 October 2001, some seven weeks after 9/11. The two essays included in Part Three – Musical Memorializations of Violent Pasts – then focus on the ways that music aids in the remembrance of acts of subjective and objective violence with which the volume has been concerned (195). The first examines the changes undergone by 'testimonial songs' during and subsequent to the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2001-2003) (Jonathan Ritter, 'Complementary Discourses of Truth and Memory'). The second essay interrogates the use of music as part of an attempt to forge a reconciliation during

the late 1950s between the two German states – the GDR and DDR. What began as an attempt to encourage East and West German composers to memorialise the Holocaust was subverted by the Cold War enmity between East and West (Amy Lynn Wlodarski, 'National Identity after National Socialism').

The volume concludes with an erudite, sometimes witty and always beautifully written set of seventeen, interwoven observations by J. Martin Daughtry on the immediacy between voice (in all its forms) and violence (in all its guises) ('From Voice to Violence and Back Again'). Daughtry's Afterword is at once sobering and uplifting. 'The bad news', he writes, 'is that violence and voice will always co-exist, and musical voices will never succeed in putting a permanent end to violence, no matter how much we may want them to' (260). The good news, Daughtry reassures us, is that:

we can be moved by these voices. We can be moved by their sounds; we can be moved by the resilience of the humans that produced them; and we can hope that they move us, if only incrementally, toward a more just life (260).