

People and Power

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Famous Athenian philosopher Plato once stated “Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and charm and gaiety to life and everything.” While Plato clearly romanticises about the power of music he explores an interesting concept of the interaction of music and power. Merriam Webster states that power is “the ability to act or produce an effect”. In history music has created pivotal turning points or supported movements and people. Music’s capability to create action is undeniable and can be seen uniting people and power like a needle weaving two threads together, whether it is in the form of a battle cry ,an anthem of a racial ideology or a soft mellow ballad touching the hearts of thousands, music exercises its relation to people and power throughout history.

A demonstration of music’s ability to conceive action is apparent in critical moments in history such as during the Haiti earthquake in 2010. The Haiti earthquake was devastating to the country, the magnitude reached a 7 on the Richter scale and 316 00 people were reported as dead. After the calamity, a telethon by the name of ‘Hope for Haiti Now’ was aired in order to raise money for damage repair. Hope for Haiti Now featured the biggest artists of this generation such as Taylor Swift, Beyoncé, Alicia Keys, John Legend, Shakira and even Stevie Wonder. This telethon was witnessed by 83 million people, and is the most widely distributed telethon to this day, and raised \$58 Million Dollars; the money was then divided and given to 7 non-profit Haiti earthquake relief charities.

Another presentation of music’s capacity are the many movements that use song as anthems in a civil rights mannerism. Popular songs such as ‘Times, they are a-changin’ by Bob Dylan helped inspire generations of future Americans to end the outdated practice of African-American segregation or ‘Give Peace a Chance’ by John Lennon, which encouraged the anti-war movement at the height of the Vietnam War. These songs accentuate the power of music in a movement. Music allows people to be outspoken and address social issues, consequentially a songs such as ‘Give Peace a Chance’ may become popular as the music allows audiences to convey their alike stance with passion.

Music’s influence on the selected listener can also be powerful. While music is a form of expression that can evoke, relate and convey emotion music can also glorify substance abuse, sexual promiscuity, suicide, death, homicide and gang activity. A study that was published on October 17 2016 by the US National library of Medicine concludes that “the findings suggest that young peoples’ substance abuse and aggressive behaviours may be related to their frequent exposure to music containing substance abuse and violence”. A certain incident in which a third-party band or musician has influenced a circumstance would be the Nic Diederichs Technical High School slashing. In Krugersdorp, South Africa on the 17th of August 2008 Sixteen-year-old pupil Jacques Pretorius was killed. Two gardeners and a second pupil were also injured. The offender, Morné Harmse, was wearing the mask of Joey Jordison, the drummer of popular death metal band Slipknot. The implication of music in this incident is easier to grasp by understanding Slipknot’s music. The band often explores concepts of aggression, psychosis, nihilistic behaviour and The Guardian’s article on the slashing features an interview with South African community leader Pierre Eksteen who refers to it as ‘satanic music’.

Rap music has also been controversial in its criminal nature with many rap artists depicting gang activities in their music such as murder or robbery, some musicians have even received jail time. Most notably, rapper Taymor McIntyre professionally known as Tay-K was found guilty for home invasion, 1st degree murder and 3 counts of aggravated robbery. The case reads that on July 2016 Taymor invaded a home in Mansfield in which he left one man dead and another injured. Other incidents include American rapper Daniel Hernandez or 'Tekashi 6ix9ine' receiving a 32 years sentence in prison for charges of armed robbery, racketeering and Hernandez's involvement with well-known gangsters the Nine Trey Bloods, an east coast gang heavily submerged in drug dealing and murder.

Music is not only powerful in a contemporary setting, Church hymns and songs in the bible exert the Christian faiths devotion. Themes such as repentance, grace and unconditional love are all features of church songs and hymns. The most popular Christian song, Amazing Grace, is a song written John Newton, a former slave trader in the 1700's. The song displays John's relationship with god and their connection in lyrics such as "that saved a wretch like me" or "I once was lost but now am found". The dynamic change in John Newton's life from Slave trader to devout Christian can be encapsulated in this song and exemplifies how a composer can convey emotion and empower people through their music.

Finally, the people behind the music have amassed considerable power in history. The Musicians of the modern era, namely Jay-Z and Andre Lloyd Webber have compiled power in money. American rapper Shawn Corey Carter, otherwise known as Jay-Z has a total net worth of 1 Billion Dollars by not only making music but also becoming a successful businessman. As a businessman Jay-Z holds stakes in Uber has invested in art, real estate and individually owns Armand de Brignac or Ace of Spades champagne. His liquor company has earned 410 million dollars after also investing in a cognac brand.

Andrew Lloyd Webber is a name synonymous with Broadway. Broadway's 20 greatest hits all featured soundtracks composed by Lloyd Webber, these include phantom of the opera, Jesus Christ Superstar, Cats and Love Never Dies. Profit from everything related to his products generated a net worth of 1.28 Billion Dollars. His fortune became so vast he became a baron of a small village and estate in Hampshire, England called Sydmonton.

Musicians are also aiming for political power with rapper Kanye West announcing his 2024 presidential run in August 2015. Beatles member John Lennon stated that they had become more popular than Jesus in a March, 1958 interview that was published on The Evening Standard. This opinion met very little resistance and was even published on other newspapers such as The National Tattler, suggesting the statements agreeable nature.

Overall, music's irrefutable effect on actions that have partaken in important moments in history and the influence and power of the people behind the music are forces commonly overlooked. Music's abstract form of emotional interaction with large audiences of people and its ability to unite, form and create movements of power is most definitely a way to weave people and power together.