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Why You Can Actually Sing: A Study of Human Evolution and Culture as Influenced by Music

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Introduction

It's the age-old line of karaoke revellers and socialites alike: "I can't even *try* to sing that!" Although such attempts may be a clever ruse to avoid public embarrassment, singing and music in general is as natural to humans as drawing breath.

For as long as humankind has recorded history, life experiences, values, and accomplishments, music has been a messenger that has transcended the planes of language and art to become unsurpassed in its breadth of variety and uses; globally, despite thousands of miles geographically separating ancient cultures, music has been and is still used to describe events, ideas, and emotions in, as Nietzsche might describe, a 'Dionysian' manner.

Since the universal use of music to share knowledge and emotions is indisputable, such widespread use begs the larger question of why isolated cultures throughout history used this medium to tell their stories. Other forms of storytelling have been found stochastically throughout civilization, from the Ancient Assyrian Cuneiform and Egyptian Hieroglyphics to the eventual evolution from the scroll to the modern book in the European Middle Ages. Although these forms of recording history have prevailed alongside musical ones, written works, due to their inherent elite nature, have seen surges and downfalls of use, whereas musical recollections have remained open and accessible to all members of society.

Music is a vital form of expression that is used by all corners of humanity, and herein will be analyzed in depth to discover the ways it has shaped narratives and likewise been controlled by political narratives, how it is different from other forms of communication, and if it is possible to express emotions musically. Finally, case studies will be presented focusing on a significant piece from each era of Music History¹ and a contrasting piece of literature or art from a similar period, to examine the legacy and relevance of each work to a present-day audience.

Human Evolution & Prehistoric Music

In order to analyze the impact of music on society, it is important to first reflect upon how intricately linked the two have become over the last few thousand years of civilization. Ian Morely's *The Prehistory of Music: Human Evolution, Archaeology, and the Origins of Musicality* provides a concise introduction to the connections between music and the earliest human societies prior to written records.

Morely begins by investigating several Hunter-Gatherer societies: the Native Americans of the Plains, the African Pygmies of the equatorial forest, the Australian Aborigines of the Western Desert (Pintupi), and the Eskimo of south-west Alaska and Canada. Through archaeological explorations, Morely was able to draw broad conclusions regarding the use and nature of music in these societies. He mirrors Mithen (2006) in differentiating between “a natural biologically based musicality and music as a culturally constructed phenomenon which builds upon that biological basis” to understand how the latter has developed from the former (Morley). He establishes that musical patterns between all cultures involve the “encoding of pitches into between three and seven pitches which are unequally separated across the scale,

¹ Baroque 1600–1750, Classical 1750–1830, Romantic 1830–1920, and 20th Century 1920–Present

including the perfect fifth, favouring consonance and harmony over dissonance, and organizing the sequences of such pitches into a regular pulse” (Morley).

Morely notes that during the winter, oftentimes smaller factions of an Aboriginal tribe would gather to share resources, resulting in a sharing of music and dance between the different isolated communities. At these annual meetings, there would be many opportunities for exchanging knowledge, with song and dance forming a powerful, memorable method of sharing stories. The groups were able to exchange vital information, and they chose to augment their stories from the simpler oral stories to the celebrated, community accessible songs.

Morely also concluded that music was used for ceremonial purposes as well as those of pleasure. The nature of the ancient music was predominantly vocal, with end-blown pipes providing the only, single-toned, instrument accompaniment. The Plains Aboriginals and those of the Pygmies songs had minimal lyrics, but included emotive sounds “with no obvious inherent symbolism” (Morley). This pattern may reflect the use of the music, as it was not intended for story-telling, but rather to accompany rites of passage and other rituals related to hunting. The Puntupi included a much higher lyrical content in their songs, which were an ancient database of community knowledge and mythologies. Morley found that the Inuit music was rich in both lyric and melodic content, and while they incorporated animal sounds (presumably for aesthetic purposes), the larger proportion of their music portrayed stories, events, environments, journeys, and food sources, and thus provided an important knowledge base for the whole community.

All the groups shared the belief of human origin from the land and believed themselves to be akin with the other plants of their environment, and therefore used their music to attempt to influence their surroundings. Music and dance fostered group cohesion, affected moods, and provided a way to encourage group interactions and communality in the local group and into the greater society.

Overall, the music of these people functioned to encourage group cooperation, collective learning, and served as a repository for history and legend. Adopting a broader perspective of the ancient music, further evidence of Paleolithic music has been uncovered in the form of fabricated pipes, whistles, and percussive instruments, which appear around the globe (Morley).

Morley also explores the evolutionary history of music and the human brain through comparing the neurological relationships between music and speech. After diverging from other high primates, humans developed a vocal tract with greater range of sound production, and also developed a neurological method for voluntary larynx control, to allow for voluntary duration, structure, and a higher complexity of sound production. Humans can learn vocal patterns by imitation or invention and adapt them to new situations, making them unique in their possibilities of musical story-telling (Morley). Humans, therefore, have a physiologically optimized ability to produce a range of sounds, and it is a natural progression from this baseline evolutionary history to posit that music has been used to communicate events, ideas, and emotions for millennia.

The Empirical in Music – How Music is Effective

In *Cognitive Bases of Musical Communication*, editors Mari Riess Jones and Susan Holleran have compiled a series of research papers written by several contributors focusing on what music can communicate and how it does so. In one of the first essays of the book, “Empirical Studies of Emotional Response to Music” (John A. Sloboda), the researchers asked adult participants to recall any memories from under the age of 10 that involved music. The study found that out of 113 memories produced from the participants, 39% included a valued emotional experience that was “derived from some aspect of the musical sound itself” (Jones and Holleran). There were other memories recounted where the emotions (either positive or negative) were based on the context of the music, but the study showed that “sustained involvement with music was more likely in those subjects who could recall a musical event of the positive type”. In

another study cited in the essay, participants were asked to recount their most valued emotional experiences of music, and the most common trend they found was the concept of music as an agent of change. Within this group of participants, two common trends emerged regarding the participant's use of music; firstly, the calming melodies provided a respite from an adverse situation or helped participants to adopt an alternative perspective on such a situation, and thus helped the individual to understand and react more positively to the situation. The second most common response of participants in the study credited music with encouraging the intensification or release of existing emotions and allowing the person to further analyze or confront emotions already within themselves. The author also cited Alf Gabrielsson's 1989 study with a similar prerogative, which resulted in a significant amount of participants reporting "feelings that this music deals with myself; it reflects or clarifies my feelings and situations" (Jones and Holleran).

These studies, and many others referenced in the essay, provide clear, empirical evidence of independent individuals having clear emotional responses to music. This connection, and subsequent retention of childhood memories, could provide an answer as to how and why music has been so universal in culture. If a melody can help an individual to better remember a set of instructions, a story, or their emotions at the time, music would be an invaluable tool for humanity's growth and development. Setting aside the debate of written versus oral tradition, before humans began recording their histories and stories through writing, music may have provided a simple and effective method of ensuring the survival and integrity of a culture through many generations. It is clear that humans physiologically evolved to be able to produce these wide-ranging sounds, and that they helped in the preservation of cultural memory and identity.

From a scientific perspective, the presence of these traits in the modern human population reflects the actions of natural selection on those individuals who failed to inherit the vital

heightened larynx control. As these individuals did not possess the genetic requirements for an expanded vocal range, they would have been at a distinct disadvantage in a time when communication between group members determined the survival and cohesion of the entire community, and thus were gradually selected against in the greater population of humans. Perhaps these individuals were not as effective in a hunt by not being able to produce the same breadth of sounds as their counterparts, or they simply failed to have performed as well in the larger group and were eventually left behind. Genetically, even a single change, or mutation, in the bases which encode information as DNA can result in a defective or missing protein in the development or regulation of larynx, which would result in its mal- or complete dysfunction. These changes occur sporadically during the production of sex cells or during embryo development, when cell division is rampant with mistakes due to the maternal regulation of transcription, as opposed to later in development when the embryo regulates its own DNA replication. Thus, when the embryo duplicates its genome for cell replication, the fidelity of the replication is extremely compromised (up to 25% of embryos become aneuploid, or have serious, fatal imbalances in chromosome number) and so these mutations readily occur (McCoy). It is important to note that these mutations are not archaic; they have occurred throughout human history and continue to do so as selection acts upon the non-viable embryos, although there is some debate among scientists as to the extent to which natural selection acts upon (some) populations today due to medical advances.

In short, individuals who survived fetal development to birth had an extremely high chance of mutation, and those who had harmful mutations to the larynx would have missed the physiological selective advantage of communication, which those individuals without the mutation would have intrinsically had. Humans have been genetically selected upon to have

superior larynx control, and Music, being so effective in retaining cultural and crucial survival memories, was a consequence of this evolution.

The Perils of the Written Word – Music vs. Books

Due to the rift of several thousand years separating the use of music and oral tradition and the development of writing techniques² and technologies³, arguably, music has long since prevailed as a dominant form of storytelling and recording of events. Writing down stories, events, and emotions inevitably distorts and oversimplifies the information because of the loss of human contact in the process. As Gellrich states in *The Argument of The Book*, “writing [is] only a semblance of the truth that would impede man’s ability to know and recall” and he continues on to quote Socrates: “For this discovery of yours [writing] will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories...” (Gellrich and Clio). Thus, writing down a story does not enhance the reader’s ability to understand it, but simply provides an empty vessel, merely a shade of reduced communication which is only able to spread the simplest outline of what the story truly is. By foregoing the use of human memory and intuitive emotions, the written word degrades the story compared to the use of music. The act of writing down the information inevitably results in degeneration of the event the author wishes to convey, which can then be misconstrued and subject to skewed interpretation by subsequent readers. Thus, writing threatens to disintegrate knowledge by its very existence, and creates only a semblance of the original form of the information.

Music, on the contrary, provides stories and information with respite from the written word even when reduced to notations on paper, due to the inherent differences between recorded language and music. As stories, emotions and events began to be recorded in books in the Middle

² Hieroglyphics, cuneiform, etc.

³ The progression through the scroll to handwritten book, and eventual printing press

Ages, European music was being recorded in a similar way by monks and members of the Church in the form of Gregorian Chants. These initial forms of music notation soon developed into the staves and rhythm notation in use today, and yet remain fundamentally different from a written recollection. Music, when written down, is not forced through the lens of the copier, and translated into their own bias and incomplete perspective of the event. It is not written down in terms of the copier's taste or opinions of the piece, but rather in a more objective way. The notes and rhythms are written down for the purpose of recreating the original Form of the music, and thus by recording it on paper, the Music is not lost or reduced into a semblance of itself. There is no added barrier of the copier attempting to describe the music, as the music is objectively recorded as just the notes and other directions left by the composer.

Digitized and computer-generated music is in accordance with this idea, as again, there is no copier bias in the recording of the music. Even when older manuscripts are revisited, edited, and published as a new edition, the editor cannot inherently change the notes, rhythms, or meter without completely altering the piece into new music, unlike in literature when new editions are filled with new ideas and explanations of the older material.

Music is unique in that it cannot be re-interpreted and presented as the same material, as any change of the core elements cause it to be completely different than the composer intended and alter the Form. In a written story, modern editors have much more freedom to change around dialogues and re-interpret them into the current dialect while still maintaining the core story as the author intended. Just as Miss Bennet and Mr. Darcy's story has been revisited and published under 'abridged' editions to appeal to younger readers, works of literature inherently have an added layer of ornamentation—the diction and connotation of words, rhythm, style of descriptions and dialogue, etc.—which may be revised without altering the true nature of the story. However, because written music, in comparison to Charles Dickens' or Victor Hugo's

pedantic descriptions, encompasses just the core elements of the piece, it cannot be subjectively altered and still remains inherently the same.

Of course, writing music down does necessitate the interpretation of the music, and thus leaves freedom for the new performer to make it more malleable and pleasant to his taste; but the subsequent interpretation cannot be inherently biased if the music he is interpreting was written down objectively and clearly in the modern notation accepted prior to the Baroque era.

Another way to examine this debacle is to consult Plato's ideas regarding the communication of The Truth. The Truth, according to Plato, is the original Form of the object or idea, which originated from God Himself. It has no physical reality in itself; rather, the true Form is a divine concept. In the *Republic*, Plato uses the allegory of the bed to describe the subsequent generations away from the truth that it travels as it is dispersed through culture. The Ideal Bed, created by God, is the original True Bed. God then sends the idea of the Bed to the manufacturer, who creates a physical bed, thus creating an object which is one generation away from the Bed. A painter then takes the bed one generation further from the Bed, by representing it on paper (Plato). The same philosophy can be applied to the Music itself. If we accept that all things have Divine origin, then Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* was an idea given to him by God. Mozart himself is the 'manufacturer' in this case, by writing down the Music and taking it one generation away from its True Form. Then, any subsequent performances of this music are done by 'painters' of the music, interpreting and performing it as they please. Following this argument, when books are edited and revised into new editions, they are thus progressing more generations further away from the work's True Form than a relatively unchanged piece of music.

Plato's prerogative was that humans, as they interact with the representations of God's Truth, should not be complacent in this mimesis of the Truth, but should always seek it out.

Therefore, the best way to access the Truth of the event, story, or emotion in question is to view it as close as possible to the Truth, and therefore through Music, rather than written in a book.

The Dionysian Vision of the World – Music as a Vessel to the Truth

Friedrich Nietzsche was a 19th century German Philosopher who proposed radical ideas pertaining to the discipline of Aesthetics. Famous for his proclamations that ‘God doesn’t exist’, Nietzsche created a foundation for philosophy that does not take a universalized view of an objective truth or absolute. In one of his publications, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, he introduced the concept of the Apollonian and the Dionysian as ways to access the awful and tragic Truth, or the very foundational That Which Is True. The two methods, named after Apollo and Dionysus, the Greek Gods of music and wine, respectively, represent Nietzsche’s admiration of the Ancient Greek civilization. He believed that the Greeks were the archaic birthing point of civilization, and that humanity’s interactions with their literature and art formed the history of humans confronting the Truth. Humans, Nietzsche suggests, would naturally prefer to avoid confronting the Truth, but that the aesthetic experience is our primary access to the Truth.

The Apollonian method is the approach to the Truth through Appearances and Aesthetics, such as visual art. Apollo was associated with light, prophesy and visual arts, and so Nietzsche creatively re-interpreted Apollo’s attributes and created the theory of the rational, ordered, dream, or illusion as way to access a Truth. This method thus creates a “veil of illusion” in the accessing, as one is using the artwork as a way to reach the Truth, which shields one from the Truth. The Truth is only confronted through appearances, and Nietzsche considers this method the lesser of the two methods of accessing the Truth (Nietzsche).

In contrast, the Dionysian method is the better way to access the Truth, because it is a negation of mediation in the process. The Dionysian method of reaching the Truth centers around such liberating methods as music and dance, which lack the safety net of the Veil of

Illusion. It is thus a faster access to the Truth and therefore better. Dionysus evokes the images of ritual, festival, and becoming inebriated with the crowd in describing:

Singing and dancing, the human manifests himself as a member of the high, more ideal commonality; he has unlearned walking and speech... He feels himself a god; what else lives only in his power of imagination, he senses now within himself. The human is no longer artist, but has become artwork; he is as ecstatically and exaltedly transformed as before he saw the gods transformed in his dreams (Nietzsche).

This ecstasy, the feeling of heightening and purifying the senses, is what it means to be human in the most baseline sense. The Dionysian method advocates reaching the Truth by being close to nature itself, because to lose one's individuality is to embrace one's pure humanness. Man himself is becoming art by embracing his humanity, and avoiding the Apollonian Veil in his accessing of The Truth (Nietzsche).

Music, therefore, is an example of the Dionysian method of accessing the Truth. It expresses emotions and ideas beyond the plane of mere language, and thus appeals to the irrational and human instincts of listeners and performers alike. Through the dynamic and emotional appeals to the human soul irrationally, music acts as a universal language to forge a connection between instinct and intelligence. Music brings together faith and reason and the rational and irrational to inspire emotion in the listener. Thus, music has transcended the written word to be used universally by cultures around the world to share events, stories, and emotions as they pursue the Truth.

The Aesthetics of Music – Music and Emotion

Aesthetics is the branch of philosophy that reckons with the emotions portrayed in music. Ergo, to accept Music as a primary form of communication, one must consider the ability of music to communicate emotions.

Eduard Hanslick, in his 1854 publication *The Beautiful in Music*, proposed that music may mimic certain objective phenomena, such as whispering, roaring or tumultuous weather, but because the feelings are subjective, composers cannot possibly represent them in music. He argues that since emotions don't physically exist, they cannot be embodied in an art form "which is incapable of representing the remaining series of mental states" (Hanslick). Hanslick's main premise for these arguments is that although the beautiful exists for the gratification of the listener, it is independent of him. Thus, music, as an art, has no aim, and is not contingent upon any subject introduced to it. Arguing that music has no model in nature, Hanslick describes how a composer's ideas are purely for the sake of creating nice combinations of sounds. Music is created simply for itself, with no purpose, emotions or narrative in mind. Therefore, with no aim in its creation, no emotions or story can possibly be communicated through music, and anything a listener experiences originates from inference and the imagination (Pratt).

Edmund Gurney, in his 1880 publication of *The Power of Sound*, expanded upon Hanslick's work and argued that music is beyond the capabilities of generic principle in aesthetic experience, because of the personal, individual factor(s) that determine the degree of aesthetic response, and therefore any attempt to capture all aesthetic experience of music into a singular principle is, essentially, foolish. According to his treatises, a melody consists of units of motion, which are the real sources of pleasure in music. Therefore, it is not the emotions and representations in music that make it beautiful, but that the beauty of a piece instead originates from the unique musical experience gleaned from the act of listening. He argues that any expressiveness that is experienced comes from the imagination, and not directly from the music (Gurney).

Although the works of Hanslick and Gurney were first published decades ago, their Formalist claims remain controversial in the aesthetic branch of philosophy and music. However,

there are several key points within their arguments against emotion in music that can be contested.

Primarily, Hanslick's premise that music has no prototype in nature is definitively inaccurate. Music is the absolute foundation of the natural world, and the manipulation of sound is one of the main methods of communication in large groups of animals. Birds rise together in song, the mating calls of thousands of species all carry a distinct melody, and the rising pitches of all mammals on Earth are used to signal messages between members of the same species. Hanslick regards music as the simple rising and falling pitches which make up a melody, but to disregard natural music, or the obvious manipulation of sounds into music by so many species, is a serious fault in his argument.

Furthermore, the assertion that composers, when writing great works of music, have no message in mind and are simply composing music for the sake of creating harmonious sounds is equally absurd. Through this claim, Hanslick pulls a cover over hundreds of years of cultural history; he ignores social, political and religious revolutions in claiming that music is created simply for the sake of itself (Madell).

Before the Enlightenment, music was created and recorded almost exclusively by the literate and educated religious elite, and Monks were famous for their Gregorian Chants—hypnotizing works of sound that blended the notes of the Church Mode scales together through call-and-answer styles dedicated to the Glory of God. Through the Baroque era, composers such as J.S. Bach, A. Vivaldi, and G.F. Handel continued this long tradition and transformed it to suit the times, using modern instruments and notation styles to compose concertos and sonatas that delighted society, and still focused on religious themes (Lopinski et al.). The great success that is Handel's *Messiah* was not written simply because the chord progressions sounded agreeable, and the work has not continued down for almost 300 years of history to be performed every year at

Christmas because the Composer considered the key of D major particularly pleasant to the ear. It is Handel's passion, love, and devotion to his religion and beliefs that continues to entice audiences every year.

The same can be said of composers in the Romantic and Classical Eras, who were reacting to the religious, national and domestic conflicts in their lives. Beethoven's 3rd Symphony, *Eroica*, was originally dedicated to Napoleon, whom the composer greatly admired for his military conquests and rise up the social hierarchy. However, the dedication was later revoked after Napoleon broke from republican values in his quest for power (Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*). The passion and enthusiasm that Beethoven felt for Napoleon's revolution is evident in every note, and even if the specific name of Napoleon doesn't come to mind, one cannot listen to the decadent music without the images of nationalism and strength coming to mind. Chopin, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Stravinsky, and countless others experiencing political and social turmoil through their lives inspire emotional connections with their musical representations, and the narratives behind their creations cannot be ignored. The *Rite of Spring* hardly sounds pleasant upon the first listen, and yet it would not be popular decades later if the audience could not glean any emotions or stories from his music.

To ignore the intent of the composers behind such magnificent works is unjust, as it is condescending and ignorant to refuse to acknowledge their sociopolitical motivations. Music, to the men and women living through times of war and persecution or conversely celebrating religious or political ideas, was an outlet for their emotions and ideas, and in ignoring these motives and messages, Formalists may truly only grasp the objective notes of the melody and thus become ignorant to the greater context and purpose of the music. The understanding of beauty in music cannot be approached, as Gurney agrees, with one single principle. The Kantian

approach of ‘disinterestedness’ to qualify the beautiful⁴, which the Formalists so clearly reflect, may hold some truth in analyzing such stagnant works of art as a painting or other classical artforms, but the Principle cannot possibly be used to analyze the beauty of the ever-evolving discipline of music. The Formalist philosophy “rejects the idea that music possesses any extra-musical significance”, and that “any meaning beyond what is objectivity there in the notes, the form, or the structural relations that a competent listener should be able to grasp” are imagined and thus of little consequence in evaluations of the beauty of the music (Norris).

As Ken Hirschkop outlined in his essay *The Classical and the Popular*, “when the notes themselves are the exclusive focus of interest, we lose the sense of music-making as communication taking place at particular occasions and among particular groups” (Norris). Upon experiencing music, the emotional response of an individual is not whimsical inference or imagination, and in fact holds depth and meaning as an interaction between the listener and the music itself. A man’s experience of music may grow and change as he gains new life experiences, and his emotional response is integral to the pleasure he gains from the subjective beauty of the music. Music cannot be reduced to the objective pitches of the melody without inherently losing the personal, individual aspects which appeal to every listener differently, and so the Kantian Formalists’ efforts to empirically parse up the concept of beauty within music are futile.

Finally, Hanslick’s broad claim that the beautiful exists for the gratification of the listener but remains independent of him leads one to the conclusion that music is independent of its audience. However, through all the cited examples of historical works, it is clear that music’s unique ability to impact every individual and be experienced variably by all members of the audience is what has led it to be so long enjoyed by humanity.

⁴ See Immanuel Kant’s *Critique of Judgement* (1790)

National Music – Music and Historical Narratives

Music has long since been used to influence moods within a crowd; be they curiosity, passions or even actions. Social movements in history, such as nationalism or patriotism, would be nothing without the anthems (combining prose and music) or cultural-specific instruments (the bagpipes, mandolin, fiddle or drummers in war) which defined local music styles.

Through such political movements as the 1789 French Revolution, World War I and World War II, music was used effectively by governments and their opponents to ensure obedience to the dominant cultural narrative. In 1789, the rebels were able to rally themselves against the French Army through “La Marseillaise”, an exhilarating song which united their untrained civilian-fighters in the common themes of liberty and hope that they were fighting for, and the song eventually became the country’s National Anthem.

In World War I, the Allies used Morse code to communicate encrypted messages, and famously chose the letter V (for Victory) to be represented by the dot-dot-dot-dash, the rhythm of the main motif of the German-born Beethoven’s Symphony No. 5 (Swafford, *Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph*). The implications of this choice are obvious; the Allies were insulting the Germans through appropriating a defining cultural triumph as symbol for their own defeat. Other songs such as “Keep the Home Fires Burning”, “Pack Up Your Troubles”, and “The Last Post”, encouraged the men and women on the home front to keep up morale, fostered courage in the hearts of soldiers on the front, and became an international, musical, tribute to the millions of fallen soldiers after the War (Maddocks).

In World War II, spirited pieces such as “We’re Off to Finish Hitler”, “Smiles will Never Be Rationed” and “God Save Our Men” became popular to guide the public opinion (Vance and Broad). These songs cultivated anti-Hitler sentiments, helped those on the ‘home front’ to endure rations, and “God Save Our Men” was a carefully reconstructed version of the British National

Anthem “God Save the King” circulated by the government to commemorate the fallen soldiers and encourage public sentiment for their sacrifices.

Messages of hope for a better future are also found in the lyrics of “Follow the Drinkin’ Gourd”, which gave African-Americans directions northward to safety in Canada during the days of the Underground Railroad. Throughout history, music was also a means of expressing love, desire and sensuality, and has been used in all forms of communication to incite emotions in the audience and to forego the barrier of artistic mediums.

As Carl Engel described in *An Introduction to the Study of National Music*, “National music, be it ever so artless and simple, is in most cases, what music in the first place always ought to be—a faithful expression of feelings” (Engel). He describes how the average working person “has no inducement to sing his favourite tune” unless his heart’s emotions incite him to it. His musical effusions emanate therefore from the heart, or, in other words, “they are psychologically true” (Engel). Similarly, composers have often incorporated national motifs into their works (i.e. Chopin’s Polonaises, Glinka’s “The Patriotic Song” utilizing Russian Airs, Elgar’s works, and Aaron Copland’s more recent pieces) order to appeal to the public and gain popularity, and so National Music is an effective tool by which a nation can endure hardships and collectively celebrate accomplishments.

From this rich, vibrant history narrated through music, it is clear that music is an evolving enigma, the likes of which have bewildered and captivated humans for thousands of years. It speaks to each individual directly, transporting every listener to a place where he experiences his True Self (Kramer). As R.A. Sharpe said in *Music and Humanism*, “Music is connected with the life humans live. The possibilities it has for expression make it possible for composers to write autobiographical music or music that expresses the conflicts of their times. Music is, to this extent, a humanist art” (Sharpe). Although the way cultures produce music has long been

evolving over human history, the precious messages and emotions so painstakingly woven into every note are still understandable and applicable thousands of years later.

A Comparison of Musical Works to Art Forms: A Case Study in 4 Parts

Handel's Messiah and Da Vinci's "The Last Supper"

Premiering April 13th, 1742, at Neale's Music Hall in Dublin, Ireland, (in English)

Handel's Messiah has enjoyed popularity and recognition that few other compositions can match. The music is an oratorio, and the libretto was compiled by Charles Jennens. The lyrics were sourced from the King James Bible, and included Psalms from *The Book of Common Prayer*.

The Messiah's story was split into three sections; Part One detailed the prophesy of the coming of Christ and his birth, Part Two consisted of Christ's suffering, death, and the spread of his doctrine, and Part Three showed the redemption of the world through faith. The performing forces include soprano, alto, tenor, and bass soloists, with STAB chorus and string orchestra with continuo, oboes, bassoons, trumpets and timpani (Lopinski et al.).

Through the almost three hundred years since its premiere, the Messiah has been consistently performed, most recently around the Christmas season. The Toronto Symphony Orchestra is known to put on a fantastic performance each Holiday Season and is one among many other international orchestras that have adopted this tradition. It has become a staple of Classical Musicians and appreciators throughout the years and gave rise to one of the most popular and recognizable pieces in modern history: the "Hallelujah" chorus. Even 300 years after its composition, all able audience are brought to their feet by the powerful resonance of the chorus. The piece is spectacular to listen to, and despite its obvious religious messages, is generally enjoyed by a wide variety of audience members. The Hallelujah chorus, especially, has

left a mark on popular culture, often appearing in car advertisements or in popular films. Even if the members of the public do not explicitly attribute the piece to Handel, it is generally well-known and appreciated by most modern Western audiences.

Leonardo Da Vinci's "The Last Supper" was painted between 1495–1498 in Milan's Santa Maria delle Grazie and is the most famous artwork that depicts Christ's Institution of the Eucharist and His Announcement of Judas's betrayal to his 12 disciples. The Composition is painted in the style of realism, and as was common to Renaissance painters of the time, Da Vinci imagined an embellished scene from the scant descriptions offered in the Bible, costuming the figures in the antique style to demonstrate his mastery of linear perspective and the human anatomy (Wasserman).

The painting has remained extremely popular over the six centuries since its creation and has been restored multiple times. In 1997, all the layers of overpaint and varnish, originally intended to protect but in reality only acting to conceal, were finally removed, and Da Vinci's original experimental painting technique was once again revealed (Varriano).

The painting remains an extremely popular tourist site to this day, but one of the most significant contributions to its continuing popularity (outside of art enthusiasts and religious pilgrims) was Dan Brown's 2003 publication *The Da Vinci Code*. This mystery-thriller novel is essentially based off the conspiracy theory that Mary Magdalene married Jesus Christ, and that their bloodline carried on through the Merovingian Kings of Gaul. The truth of this story is said to be passed through the generations since the days of the Crusades by the secret society of the Priory of Sion, and Brown proposes Da Vinci as one of the society's great dignitaries (Regnier). The novel became extremely popular, eventually resulting in a movie 2006 and sequels released in 2009 and 2016. Thus, the painting has retained its reputation into the 21st century and is rightfully one of the most recognizable paintings in the world.

Although the two works have become easily recognizable to a modern audience, it is evident that Handel's *Messiah*, through its complete permeation in popular culture advertising as well as annual performances, has carried Handel's emotions and legacy to a greater modern audience through its stronger presence in popular culture.

Beethoven's Symphony No. 3 *Eroica* and Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*

Ludwig van Beethoven's 3rd Symphony is one of his most fascinating works. It was composed in 1803 and is known for being written and originally dedicated to Napoleon Bonaparte, who's humanist, libertarian, egalitarian French Revolution inspired the young Beethoven. In 1803, Napoleon was still the First Consul of France, and according to his associate Ferdinand Ries, Beethoven "held him in the highest regard and compared him to the greatest Roman Consuls". In the same 1838 report, Ries continues to describe how, upon learning that Napoleon had declared himself Emperor in 1804, Beethoven "flew into a rage and shouted: 'so he too is nothing more than an ordinary man. Now he will also trample all human rights underfoot, and only pander to his own ambition; he will place himself above everyone else and become a tyrant!'" before ripping his original title page into pieces and rewriting it with the title *Eroica*, or Heroic (Sipe).

In terms of the Symphony's place in modern popular culture, it has enjoyed moderate fame in 21st century concert halls, having regular performances as one of Beethoven's most popular Symphonies. Beethoven himself has been the subject of many biographical films over the years, including 1994's *Immortal Beloved*, 2006's *Copying Beethoven*, and perhaps is most well-known for the 1992 children's book *Beethoven Lives Upstairs*. Overall, the Symphony itself is most likely only recognizable by musicians and symphony-goers, but the changed dedication remains an interesting historical intersection between politics and music.

On the contrary, Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) remains one of the most iconic and recognizable novels of the 19th century, perhaps due to its reputation as “the brick” by the hundreds of high-school students who study the volume. The story centers around several characters as they struggle through the events leading up to and following the June 1832 Paris Uprising. The novel explores the theme of law and mercy through the events of the story, offering detailed accounts of urban Paris at the time, the political stage of France surrounding the Uprising, moral philosophy of both lawmakers and rebels, and anti-monarchist sentiments common to the rebels of the day.

Les Misérables has remained well-liked in popular culture ever since its publication, being the subject of many film and even radio adaptations over the 20th and 21st centuries, adapted for a musical in 1980, and most recently the 2012 film of the musical, starring Hugh Jackman, Russell Crowe, Anne Hathaway, Amanda Seyfried, and Eddie Redmayne. Thus, the novel has the unique position of being well known for both its literary form (being one of the largest novels ever written) and musical form. Several pieces from the musical have become almost mainstream in popular music performances and continue to be well-known and enjoyed by the public in 2018.

Between the two works, *Les Misérables* has undoubtedly become the more well-known work, due to its long run on Broadway and recent Hollywood revival. However, both Victor Hugo and Ludwig van Beethoven are well-known names in the popular culture, each with his respective distinguished literary and musical legacy.

Brahms's Lullaby and L.M. Alcott's “Little Women”

Brahms' Lullaby (Opus 49) was published in 1868, and entitled “*Wiegenlied: Guten Abend, gute Nacht*”, or Good Evening, Good Night. It was written upon the birth of Bertha and Arthur Faber's second son, as a counterpoint to a Viennese *Ländler* that Berta used to sing to

Brahms in their infatuated youth. In July of that year, Brahms sent the Lullaby to Arthur, describing in his journal how “Frau Bertha will realize that I wrote the ‘Wiegenlied’ for her little one. She will find it quite in order... that while she is singing Hans to sleep, a love song is being sung to her” (Swafford, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography*). The Lullaby gained immense popularity, and was soon sung around the world in “ramshackle arrangements” (Swafford, *Johannes Brahms: A Biography*), as the melody left the constraints of Brahms’s exact counterpoint and became infused into households through children and parents alike singing the simple melody.

Ever since the summer of 1868, the Lullaby has become common place as a children’s song and is one of the most recognizable pieces ever written. In terms of its place in popular culture, the Lullaby has been featured in recordings by Bing Crosby (1941), Frank Sinatra (1944), Dean Martin (1959), and used in several films. It is hard to identify why the Lullaby has become so common place in culture, perhaps due to the feelings of calm, content and peace exuded by the gentle melody and harmonies Brahms created, or perhaps simply due to the timelessness of the piece as a children’s lullaby. Multiple generations of parents grew up hearing the song in their childhood, and sang it to their children, and so the Lullaby has retained a unique place in the hearts of parents around the world.

Little Women, a children’s novel published in 1869 by Louisa May Alcott, has also become a timeless classic, although admittedly with a smaller audience. The novel focuses on four young women as they grow from careless girls into mature married women, and deals with the themes of love, loss, heartbreak, and female empowerment. Thus, the novel has been loved by countless young women as they transition into adolescence and begin to grow into themselves.

As for the book's place in current popular culture, Alcott's original story has given way to six movie adaptations made in the 20th century, several animated series made in Japan in the 1980s, a Broadway Musical hit in 2006, and six television shows. Most recently, the BBC released the book as a TV series in 2017. Thus, *Little Women* has retained its beloved place in modern pop culture a result of its timeless values and lessons. Despite the Miss Marches' story taking place nearly 200 years ago, Alcott's captivating story continues to capture the hearts of young women internationally.

However, this classic coming-of-age novel is no match to the almost sub-conscious love that generations of parents and children have had for Brahms' Lullaby. The piece has become ubiquitously associated with childhood memories in Western cultures and has been as far back as the summer it was first published. Although Brahms' name may have faded from the popular culture, his timeless melody surpasses almost any other classical piece in modern Western culture and has retained a much larger audience than *Little Women*.

Bernstein's *West Side Story* and Martin Luther King Jr's "I Have a Dream" Speech

West Side Story is a musical Broadway production with music written by Leonard Bernstein, lyrics by Stephen Sondheim, accompanying book by Arthur Laurents, and choreography by Jerome Robbins. It was first performed in 1957 on Broadway and was expected to be a complete flop for many reasons. The story was originally based on warring Catholics and Jews in a modern-day attempt at a Romeo and Juliet story, did not include any established Broadway stars, and exploited a Hispanic style of music which was already overused. The score itself, written by the classically-trained Bernstein, was dissonant and difficult to play and sing, and even included a fugue. However, despite these seemingly-unsurpassable hurdles, the show about working-class teenage gangs went on to become "one of the most successful, beloved, and iconic musicals of the century... [carving] itself a place in American culture, as has almost no

other musical” (Wells). The powerful songs, love story between Tony and Maria, and reflections on the immigrant life in America are universally loved by Americans and continue to keep the show in the spotlight.

The production itself has enjoyed widespread popularity in modern American culture, being included in two prominent music history textbooks, the Peter J. Burkholder *A History of Western Music*, and Mark Evan Bonds’ *A History of Music in Western Culture*, which attests to the prominence and importance of the production. High schools and universities alike are known to stage performances of the story, and in 2011 a revival of *West Side Story* was put on Broadway to widespread success (Wells). Overall, the musical has remained extremely popular in North America, its songs are widely known, and the stories continue to captivate audiences around the continent.

In contrast, Martin Luther King Jr.’s famous “I Have A Dream” speech was the result of hundreds of years of racial tension in America and was delivered by the Civil Rights Activist during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom protest on August 28th, 1963. It is known as a pivotal moment in the fight to end racism in the United States, and was composed of skillfully-written rhetoric, with allusions to the popular patriotic hymn “America”, the Bible (Psalm 30:5, Isaiah 40:4–5, and Amos 5:24), as well as the Declaration of Independence, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the United States Constitution.

Almost every student in America has studied the speech at least once in their education, and the speech is well-known in both Canada and the United States. The phrase “I have a dream”, repeated so effectively throughout the speech in a device known as anaphora, immediately brings to mind the civil rights movement in virtually every educated citizen of North America. As David Bobbit argues in *The Rhetoric of Redemption*, “this speech has taken on a powerful, symbolic role in American culture as an articulation of the vision of what the civil rights

movement was striving for and as a national consensus of what America should be” (Bobbit). The phrase has taken on a meaning of unprecedented importance in American culture, a “contemporary cultural icon, symbol of the civil rights movement and the great American promise of freedom, justice, and equality” (Bobbit).

In terms of comparing the legacies of these two magnificent works, it is almost impossible to categorically determine which is better known to a modern audience. *West Side Story* has been a massive favourite of Broadway, and the “I Have A Dream” speech was a pivotal moment in American History. The stories inherent to these works have become almost synonymous with the American Identity and so in this case, the literary and music have both garnered a place in modern popular culture.

Conclusion

Having presented throughout this essay the significance, uses, history, and legacy of music in human culture, the sociological and historical significance of music is undeniable. Be it through half-hearted sing-alongs, ancient Aboriginal gatherings, or epic hours-long symphonies, Music has given humanity the tools to preserve thousands of years of culture, while still maintaining a seemingly endless repository for future creations. It allows every individual the ability to construct his or her emotions into tangible reality, and thus is tantamount to human culture. These individual, unique experiences are also by definition universal in their ability to inspire and unite all listeners, through communal understanding of the narratives and emotions behind the music. From the earliest known Indigenous stories to modern-day Broadway musicals, music has been paramount to human civilization and contains an unmatched repository of cultural knowledge. There is no prejudice or judgement in the experience of music, and it is universal and without ramifications in its purest form. Music is uniquely applicable to all of humanity, as it is an enthralling and passionate method of storytelling—something every person

can admire and revel in, regardless of age, culture or point in history. Despite the often congested and chaotic life in the 21st century, music is still as omnipresent in society as it was hundreds and thousands of years ago. Music is a powerful tool that can be used to create harmony and joys as well as sorrow and anger and will continue to chronicle humanity as the human emotions remain entwined with the rational.

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