

Statement: Toward a Universal Music Consciousness

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It is probably redundant at this time in history to say that world peace is no longer simply an ideal toward which to strive. Peace has become an imperative that offers no rational alternative.

Political tensions among the world's superpowers continue to be so strained and precarious that the possibility of nuclear war has become an ominous and omnipresent threat to our existence. What role can we as musicians and therapists play in response to this terrifying situation? As musicians and therapists, we are aware that different musics may unite us within *national* cultural groups, but how can music finally unite us on a *global* level?

In point of fact, we have to acknowledge that the unifying aspects of music for people *within* various culture groups has been a factor in fostering nationalism, cultural identification, and related ethnocentric values. And it is this nationalistic identification which has historically *separated* the world's peoples, leading to the very dehumanization of the "others" that has made war possible. In the worst sense unifying songs, like national anthems or other music with strong national meaning, have been used by politicians and military leaders to manipulate and incite the vitriolic passions of patriotism and hatred of the enemy in the very service of aggression and war.

While music is a universal phenomenon, no one music is a universal language. Although the seemingly infinite diversity of world musics in various cultural contexts is one of the great wonders and joys of music, it is regrettable, in some respects, that there does not yet exist a musical language which could be equally meaningful and accessible to all persons of all cultures.

How wonderful it would be if we could compose a song of peace in some kind of universally integrated musical idiom that would combine and unite the stylistic nuances of the world's many music genres! Imagine a song that could equally touch the hearts and minds and be sung by the Chinese and Eskimos, Iranians and Americans, Australian Aborigines and Vietnamese—all the world's peoples—perhaps with lyrics in Esperanto.¹

¹Esperanto is an artificial language created in the nineteenth century with the hope of being adopted as a universal verbal language.

The transmission and wide dissemination of Western music through radio and other technological media actually does seem to be leading toward a kind of universal music appreciation. We can see villagers in Nepal and tribespeople in Brazil enjoying American popular musics on transistor radios. In many countries of the world, we are also seeing the gradual emergence of new musical genres that combine culturally indigenous musics with Western-derived popular music. For example, music used in the scores of the immense film industry of India is typically a strange combination of Indian melodic elements and language, set to American-derived pop rhythms with Hollywood-style orchestras, augmented by traditional Indian instruments. On the other hand, the serenity of Indian music, initially introduced and popularized by the artistry of performer-composer Ravi Shankar, is being accepted in the West.

It is interesting to see how jazz (which has its own roots in traditional African musics) has been taken back to Africa and, in turn, has influenced its popular musics, much of which is now a fascinating hybrid of indigenous African and American-derived jazz and popular musics.

Along the same lines, some of our most effective cultural ambassadors to the U.S.S.R. have been musicians like Louis Armstrong, Dizzy Gillespie and, most recently, Billy Joel. These musicians have brought together Americans and Russians in shared and humanizing musical experiences.

Perhaps these gradual processes of musical acculturation (unfortunately at the cost of a loss of integrity of many culturally indigenous musics) are leading toward a kind of universal music consciousness. These acculturative processes may represent the beginning of a gradual evolution of a universally integrated musical language to which all people can respond equally, a music which might finally bring us together beyond our national and cultural boundaries.²

Even when specific musical idioms may not be fully shared on a cross-cultural level, the current gradual evolution of a universal musical consciousness may be making it more and more possible for all of the world's peoples to receive and feel each other's music. This universal musical consciousness may even now be contributing to global identification and the cause of world peace.

As performing musicians and therapists, perhaps our greatest challenge at this time is to support music and music-making, not only in the service of art and beauty and therapy, but in the conscious

² A recent American space probe sent to explore the outer reaches of our solar system has included samples of different world musics to convey aspects of humanity to possible extraterrestrial beings who might encounter it. Perhaps this is prophetically leading to the day when music will be the common element that will unite all peoples of the universe.

service of humanizing all who listen to it. Performers and therapists have a unique mission: namely, to conceive of their music not only to move their listeners, or to heal their patients, but far more important, to unite and heal the world.

Each time that we as music therapists effectively communicate with our patients, we are awakening and raising a conscious awareness of our shared humanness. Each time that an artist performs any kind of music with reverence and love, the listeners may become more aware of their common bonds and further sensitized against the horrors and brutality of war.

It is time for performing musicians and music therapists to unite in a common cause for peace, with performers moving beyond the service of art, and music therapists moving beyond service to the overtly "ill." Both performers and therapists need to actively call for peace on an international level—through concerts for peace, and through sharing the power of music to humanize and unite and heal. Herein lies our challenge and our opportunity: to work toward unifying the world's peoples through a shared human identification that could ultimately make nuclear war impossible.

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*It seems to me that any singer who values
the future of his work and his children
would want to feel that his work is helping
to build world peace. . . . A lullaby, a love
song, a rip-roaring hoedown—these all tremble
with love of life. Can we be so careless as not
to try and figure out steps to insure Life's
continuation?*

—Pete Seeger

From *The Incomplete Folksinger* by Pete Seeger, published by Simon and Schuster,
New York, 1972, p. 477.