



MUSIC AND POLITICS

Politics and music have gone hand in hand for a long time, but now more than ever, musicians are stepping up to give their two cents on modern issues.

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Music is an important part of Gen Z culture. According to Insider Intelligence, at least 43% of Gen Z consume music media daily. While they “consume” daily, do they listen? In an increasingly divided political sphere within the U.S., musicians have begun integrating their take on modern issues into their art. Are these actions influential, or do they go in one ear and out the other?

The United States is no stranger to the connection between music and politics. From its birth to the 1950s, political music had historically been centered around pro-patriotism. Then in the 1960s, something shifted.

The Vietnam War caused a great deal of unrest among citizens of the world, and many of them felt as though music was the only way to get their point across. Artists like Bob Dylan and John Lennon were very popular during this period, largely due to the anti-war themes that were present throughout their musical discographies.

Music as a method of political protest did not stay exclusively in the 1960s though. It has remained an integral vehicle for political expression into the 21st century and continues to affect modern politics. Not everyone is happy with the current relationship between musicians and politics, however.

Timothy Hagle, a professor of Political Science at the University of Iowa discussed how musicians taking a political stance often can be detrimental.

“Musicians entering the political fray hurts the overall political discourse,” said Hagle. “[This] can also be a problem if [the musicians] are uninformed about the aspects of some particular issue.”

Artists use their voices and their platforms to spread meaningful messages further. In the current political climate, citizens are told to “be the change,” but change isn’t always easy to come by. Musicians can be the bridge between music and politics, simply because of the connection between fanbases.

“I like to think that music helps bring an element of humanity into the often cold and heartless landscape that politics can be,” said Lance Tanner, an independent music artist also known as LAN.

Politics can often be isolating, but musicians can help make it feel a little less so. People are

often told “Vote! Participate in your community!” to feel as though they have a say in the political sphere, but how impactful is that truly? Regardless of the size of their platform, musicians have the opportunity to highlight aspects of politics that may not get talked about a lot otherwise, which can make people feel heard.

While musicians feel as though they are making a positive impact, the perpetrators of politics may not share that sentiment.

“When I was in college I went to a concert by David Crosby when he was touring as a solo act,” Hagle said. “The crowd was happy to listen to him perform, but when he just started talking about some political issue the crowd got restive and some started booing. They wanted to hear him perform, they didn’t want to be preached at.”

Could musicians be going too far in their attempts to be politically active? Artists have traditionally been typically given their platform because of the music they made, not the message behind it. Fans often wilfully turn a blind eye - or deaf ear - to the messages behind the music.

Hagle also suggested the idea that often artists may not have the best intention behind their political activism. Politics can be so polarizing that having a “hot take” can boost an artist’s media attention. It is often said within the world of media that any news is better than no news, and that can particularly be applied to taking divisive stands.

“If [artists] are simply parroting some talking points or spreading misinformation it can make it that much harder to sort out the aspects of some complex political issue,” Hagle said. In Hagle’s eyes, artists may not be fully understanding the topics they are discussing.

Politics do not need to be polarizing or hard to understand, but it is up to the people to keep themselves educated on the topics at hand. While musicians could be spreading lesser-known information, in actuality the information being shared may be inaccurate political discourse. The idea that musicians are bridging the gap between music and politics can cause more harm than good.

In the world of politics, artists pitching their two cents can be another “take it or leave it” scenario, with their messages often going unheard or falling on deaf ears entirely. At the end of the day, there may be good intentions behind political music, but it might not always be what the people want to hear.