

Dario Martinelli, *Give Peace a Chant: Popular Music, Politics, and Social Protest*, Springer International, Cham, 2017.

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Dario Martinelli's *Give Peace a Chant: Popular Music, Politics, and Social Protest* is a critical analysis of the ways that popular music can express social politics. The topic of the politics of popular music is not new since social politics have long motivated the study of popular culture. What is distinct in Martinelli's book, and curious, is that it attempts to study how popular music takes on political meaning without itself being explicitly political. Instead, *Give Peace a Chant* intends to provide layers of semiotic taxonomies for more precise analysis of popular music's political aims. The book's purpose immediately called to mind one of the most formative essays in popular music historiography, Stuart Hall's 1981 *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*. Hall's essay, written at the onset of the serious scholarly analysis of popular culture, argued that the academic study of popular culture should not be concerned with taxonomizing the genres, styles, and forms that constitute the cultural sphere at a given time. Instead, scholars should attend to the historical irruptions produced by power relations, new social forces, and technological developments that transform not only common-sense understandings of what popular culture is, but also the political potentials of the cultural field.

Hall's essay was on one level a methodological intervention, opening up the inquiry of culture through social politics using the nascent discipline now called cultural studies. Yet Hall intended the essay, and the discipline more broadly, to provide intellectual scaffolding for the deployment of cultural criticism to enact socialist revolution. As his conclusion famously states, «[popular culture] is not a sphere where socialism, a socialist culture—already fully formed—might be simply "expressed". But it is one of the places where socialism might be constituted. That is why "popular culture" matters. Otherwise, to tell you the truth, I don't give a damn about it».[1] Hall's essay contends that the study of popular culture is always already (to surface the Althusserian influences of early 1980s cultural studies) political, and that scholars must direct their work toward conceptualizing and enabling its potential for expressing and thus enacting resistance and revolution.

The argument that scholarship is activism has become central to American popular music scholarship as reflected in recent meetings of the US Chapter of the International Association for the Study of Popular Music, the Popular Music Study Group of the American Musicological Society, the Popular Music Special Interest Group of the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the Society for American Music, and has become increasingly emphasized in the wake of the rising specter of white nationalism and institutional discrimination during the Trump presidency.[2] By 2018, American popular music scholarship (or at least an influential portion thereof) is motivated by the belief that analysis of cultural politics must be anchored in engaged amplification rather than critical distance. It is thus striking to engage with a monograph whose argument is not only predicated upon delineating a taxonomy of popular music genre, but that very genre, political music, intended to be transformative to academic inquiry. To be sure, the methodology of *Give Peace a Chance* offers useful theoretical perspectives and illuminating analyses that will be detailed in this essay. Yet there is a lingering concern lurking throughout this book: whether we should, or how we should, give a damn about an analysis of the politics of popular song that isn't itself directly political.

Martinelli's argument in *Give Peace a Chant* can be distilled into three main points. First, protest song, understood as popular music oriented towards effecting social change in some fashion, is a distinctive genre in its own right. Martinelli uses genre here to refer to a coherent analytic object rather than a set of musical characteristics. Second, this genre is constituted by context, lyrics, and musical features. Third, the proper analysis of protest song must move past lyrical analysis and account for all three of these dimensions. The book is organized along these lines. The first chapter advances his argument and theoretical model for analyzing protest song. The following three chapters cover context, lyrics, and music, respectively. The second half is comprised of four case studies of protest song that are intended to apply his theoretical perspectives and emphasize repertoires or, in the case of the chapter on the Beatles, political interests that have received less scholarly attention.

Chapter 1 opens with the issue of terminological precision. Martinelli contends that the commonly-used phrase "protest song" is inadequate for his analytical purposes since many songs, particularly love songs, protest without broader political implications. Martinelli considers protest strictly as a sociopolitical concept, but the word protest is useful for him because it does not presuppose anything about the social message. He writes, «"protest" may be the only word that manages to keep, in the same group, descriptions of and prescriptions for a wrong or just society, leftist or rightist musicians, songs of revolution, reaction or resistance...» (p. 2). In order to delimit protest to social factors, he introduces the term "songs of social protest", which he abbreviates as SSP, to define his object.

The difference between "protest song" and "song of social protest" may seem little more than semantic hair-splitting at first glance, but the shift opens up two crucial foundations of Martinelli's theory. First, his definition only requires that a song aspires to social protest without any assessment of its political validity or efficacy. This allows for the genre to potentially encompass more than the usual litany of Euro-American genres linking leftist political expression and counter-mainstream stance such as folk, rock, punk, and hip-hop. Yet avoiding reception risks shearing away crucial dialogues that problematize political aims. The first oeuvre discussed in the book, for example, are Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel's 1980s "world music" releases. This repertoire, especially *Graceland*, has been critiqued by ethnomusicologists and cultural studies scholars for reiterating cultural appropriation and neocolonialism.^[3] Martinelli, however, simply contends that this repertoire qualifies as SSPs because the musicians' efforts were in part motivated by political sympathies. Second, placing songs first in the phrase places analytical stress on the song as text. Songs are social objects, but the SSP concept focuses on a song's social nature and textual meaning rather than factors like compositional intent or reception history.

After introducing his concept of the SSP, Martinelli lists five musical characteristics that he proposes are shared by SSPs in order to demonstrate how protest music has coherent if flexible sonic expectations and thus can form a genre. These five are «common and easy-to-carry instrumentation», «simple and accessible harmonic structures», «basic rhythmic structures», «catchy hooks and/or refrains», and «culturally-connoted (and recognizable) sound» (pp. 9–10). These characteristics are used to analyze John Lennon's 1969 *Give Peace a Chance*, the source of the book's title. The song is written for guitar and any number of voices from one to a thousand, and it can also easily be accompanied by hand percussion. The harmonies alternate between two basic guitar chords, C and G7, the rhythm is in a clearly articulated duple meter, and the melody is set in a diatonic C major. There are verses, but the main focus is a simple chorus that can be repeated *ad infinitum*. The lyrical emphasis on "peace" allows for easy apprehension and reinterpretation in different contexts. Last, the sound draws on folk and rock, the two genres associated with Euro-American social protest in the late 1960s and whose associations maintain resonance today.

Leading with musical characteristics insists that SSPs are songs whose aural dimensions are essential for their political work, but Martinelli does not intend to necessarily privilege musical analysis in his own theoretical approach. Directly after the analysis of *Give Peace a Chance* Martinelli puts forth the book's main methodological argument that

music, lyrics, and context are coequal parts of SSPs that must be considered by the analyst. Martinelli readily acknowledges that this claim is in of itself superficial, and the above list of musical characteristics hardly plumbs to greater depths. The claim that each factor is equal, though, directs analytical attention to the multiple ways that different types of contexts, lyrics, and music can help analyze an SSP's political valences. Classifying these types forms the basis of the subsequent three chapters.

Chapter 2 turns the first part of Martinelli's triumvirate, context. His approach to relating SSPs to their social contexts first builds on the work of Italian semiotician Gino Stefani. In his 1991 essay *Conzoni e difesa popolare nonviolenta*, Stefani proposes three such relationships between protest songs and the politics at hand: direct commentary on the specific political topic, discussion of the general topic more broadly, or the creation of communal feelings without a strict relationship between song and text.^[4] (The latter might be thought of as how *You'll Never Walk Alone* relates to Liverpool in distinction to, say, *Ferry Cross the Mersey* or *Strawberry Fields Forever*.) Stefani's argument enables Martinelli to contend that, while most SSPs make political claims, any song used in a political manner can be an SSP. He then extends Stefani's scheme to five classifications of context, dividing Stefani's second relationship into "general" (broad discussion by way of theme rather than topic) and "indirect" (broad discussion through general values of morals or ethics) and by adding the concept of "paratextual relationship", songs about protesting or resistance itself such as Pete Seeger's *We Shall Not Be Moved*.

This first schema connects textual and contextual meaning, but it assumes that these meanings are fixed and shared by all participants. To nuance this further, Martinelli introduces an ecological perspective on context through the concept of the *Umwelt*, a term used by the early twentieth-century biologist Jakob von Uexküll to argue that an environment can have multiple meanings based on its different applications for different populations. A garden bed serves different purposes for humans, pollinators, plants, and worms, for example.^[5] Conceiving environments as *Umwelten* does not just mean for Martinelli that the meanings of SSPs are wholly subjective or contingent. Rather, he uses it to explore how SSPs can themselves be a means of constructing political environments. They make meanings not only by taking political positions, but by positioning the listener and performer. Martinelli uses the "time/space" metaphor to classify the positioning of SSPs. They can suggest different temporal moments in relationship to political action—before, during, or after. Their political message can also have varying degrees of "visibility" (a concept more usefully rendered on its own rather than awkwardly shoehorned through space): explicit or "exposed", visible or "clear", unidentifiable or "ambiguous", and rejected or "hidden".

Chapter 3 focuses on lyrics. Placing the lyrics chapter between those on context and music is intended to counter standard lyric-based approaches to protest music, but lyrical content is of course an essential part of the political work of SSPs. Martinelli begins the chapter with a short history of protest lyrics following the Enlightenment, which also serves to include at least superficial reference to political music outside the book's Euro-American focus. From this history, Martinelli proposes four lyrical typologies: analytical, spiritual, universalistic, and satirical. The first three of these terms are situated in the histories of particular repertoires, white folk music, African-American folk music, and European art music, respectively. While acknowledging that semiotic classifications can err toward idealization, I find these divisions too clean and the terminology problematic. Connecting art music with "universal" values or reducing black music to "spirituality" seems to reinforce problematic mythologies while, as with the opening discussion of Paul Simon and Peter Gabriel, ignore how the dynamics of race and cultural hierarchy shape musical discourses.^[6]

More useful than the terms themselves are the respective descriptions of each typology. The analytical type is descriptive of and exegetical about an event or issue, and it is exemplified by songs such as *John Brown's Body* or Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young's *Ohio*. The spiritual type, rooted in African-American spirituals but also encompassing songs like Cat Stevens' *Peace Train*, uses religious metaphors to make a protest statement about the hope for freedom or

peace. The universalistic type, marking the flipside of the analytical type, expresses protest through rhetorical strategies such as metaphor, personification, and questions rather than direct statement. Bob Dylan's *Blowin' in the Wind* or Eddy Grant's *Gimme Hope, Jo'anna* are examples of universalistic songs. The satirical type, exemplified by Joe Hill's *The Preacher and the Slave* uses strategies like satire, inversion, irony, and parody for political ends. The chapter then ends with a brief and unnecessary tangent contending that protest songs since the 1960s «have become the establishment» (p. 51), pointing the finger particularly at Bono. Here Martinelli's careful criticism reverts to tired stereotypes of popular music scholarship opposing "authentic" counter-mainstream politics and a compromised mainstream, stereotypes that have increasingly been scrutinized in recent scholarship.^[7]

Chapter 4, the final theoretical paragraph, turns to the complication of what he calls «musical songwriting strategies» (p. 53). This phrase, like "songs of social protest", is a useful way of thinking about the musical side of SSPs. Martinelli is not interested in a Tagg-esque exposition of musical signifiers. Rather, the concept of strategy acknowledges, in his words, that SSPs are inherently "functional music" that are «often written with some kind of practical application...» (p. 53). In emphasizing strategy, Martinelli is attempting for his musical typologies to transcend genre just like his for context and lyrics. He provides five such typologies: simple, solemn, aggressive, manneristic, and a catch-all "X". The simple type is the most obvious and essentially already covered in his discussion of John Lennon's *Give Peace a Chance*. He emphasizes here that simple and intimate music is often associated with «political credibility» (p. 56)

The other four offer strategies that move beyond the simple. The solemn type is associated with post-1960s popular music (Martinelli credits its origins to the Beatles' *All You Need Is Love*) and is characterized by a «mainstream, pop quality, with lavish arrangements and big productions». He cites *We are the World*, *Born in the USA*, and Peter Gabriel's *Biko* as examples. The aggressive, by contrast, is associated with alternative music, hip-hop, and heavy metal. He provides a description of aggression, one that takes into account tempo, instrumentation, and genre. Some examples are obvious (*Fight the Power* for one), but the discussion of XTC's *Dear God*, whose critique of organized religion uses alternation between a child singing with acoustic guitar and a full indie rock band, is illuminating. The manneristic type uses sonic reference to folk music or 1960s touchstones like Bob Dylan and the Beatles to create political resonance. Finally, he ends with an "X" category that encompasses all the musical strategies not covered in the first four. This is probably to avoid closing off all categories, but a miscellaneous section (one only lasting a page or so) seems in a way to undo his semiotic work. Musical categorization is obviously challenging, but one wonders if slightly more nuanced terminology for the typologies than that used in the chapter would help reduce the remainder. Such nuance would also be welcome because, despite Martinelli's opening remarks in this chapter, his strategies too easily boil down to genre: folk music is simple, post-1960s pop music is solemn, underground music is aggressive, postmodern pop is manneristic, and other genres are "X". Teasing out the ways that "solemn" music aspires for simplicity, or how underground music makes "manneristic" reference to its own canons, would develop his concepts further. This chapter then concludes by summarizing the model elucidated in chapters 2–4 in four succinct pages.

I have spent much of this review detailing the first four chapters not only because they lay out the book's theoretical premises and interventions, but because they are the most successful. The remaining chapters are intended to be applications of Martinelli's theoretical points, but they prove frustrating for two reasons. Distilling the manifold semiotic typologies, each of which is essentially intended to provide essentially all-encompassing categorizations for different aspects of SSP, into a single case study is challenging. It is unclear whether the aforementioned typologies can serve as a surface methodological marker outside of broad categorizations, or if they are more useful in focusing a clearer analytical perspective on a given relationship between music, politics, and social context. Yet the later chapters too often read as if Martinelli isn't that concerned with the analytical utility of his SSP theory, which could be detailed by a series

of related or comparative case studies. Instead, it seems as if he just wants to draw scholarly attention to political musics that he finds worthy of discussion. They have some meritorious points, but they are disconnected from one another and unevenly connected to the first half of the book.

Chapter 6, the most successful case study, discusses the 1980's Lithuanian band Artis and the "Singing Revolution" as part of the then-SSR's fight for independence. Here Martinelli uses his theoretical premises successfully, situating Artis's politics within the concept of "soft power", detailing the history of the Lithuanian Singing Revolution, and situating the movement within the history of Fluxus. He provides a detailed history of the band and discusses their lyrics and performance practices. On page 109, he lists songwriting strategies used for protest messages, including dystopia, dreamlike imagery, references to Soviet stereotypes, and using «private relations as metaphors for public events». Chapter 8 also enters into the political thickets of jazz, fascism, and censorship through the example of Alberto Rabagliati. He argues that Rabagliati's 1941 *Quando canta Rabagliati* is an example of a "canzoni della fronda", a political song that manages to express its politics indirectly in a manner that gets around fascist censors. There are no direct references to the theory of the first half in this chapter, but the "canzoni della fronda" is clearly an example of the "universalistic" musical classification. The other two chapters, on "the end of ideology" in postmodernism and environmental advocacy in the Beatles' repertoire, would be bolstered by greater exploration of Martinelli's own theory.

Despite its unevenness, *Give Peace a Chant* offers useful theoretical approaches for thinking about the political strategies of protest music through the constituent parameters of context, lyrics, and music. It helps remind the analyst that multiple factors textual and contextual alike can contribute to the meaning of a "song of social protest". Martinelli's expertise on a wide range of political songs is also apparent throughout. Yet, to return to the opening of this essay, are not popular music scholars already innately attuned to the political potentials of popular music? What is the value of consolidating protest music into a genre (regardless of the porousness of its borders) and taxonomizing the avenues of popular music's political work? Martinelli intends his theoretical apparatus to categorize and ultimately clarify the parameters of a "song of social protest" to assist further analysis without direct amplification of any political message. On page 70, he does inform (reassure?) the reader that «I have never made a mystery of my leftist political preferences», and the case studies of Artis and Italian jazz obviously relate to his own background as an Italian musicologist working in Lithuania. Yet it seems to move against the grain of popular music studies to aspire toward objectivity rather than political engagement.

Admittedly, one of the cheapest tacks a book reviewer can take is to criticize a monograph because its author did not share his theoretical perspective, disciplinary background, or training. My perspective is as an American popular music scholar with background in cultural studies and music theory, not a continental European musicologist steeped in semiology, and I am not going to argue that *Give Peace a Chant* should be written my way. It is also clear throughout *Give Peace a Chant* that Martinelli clearly enjoyed the writing and research process. Instead of dense thickets of semiotic theory, we get light, humorous, and personable writing that Martinelli intended for a wider audience. The concern lies not so much in Martinelli's desire for clarity, then, as the fact that there is just very little dialogue with either American or European pop music scholarship. One of the dangers of writing scholarly passion projects, of course, is that one can wade into well-tread waters without realizing it. Perhaps if Martinelli attended to the politics of popular music scholarship rather than just those of popular music, his book might be realized a bit differently.

[1] Stuart Hall, *Notes on Deconstructing the Popular*, in Raphael Samuel (ed.), *People's History and Socialist Theory*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London and Boston, 1981, p. 239.

[2] For example, see William Cheng's Spring 2018 lecture tour on music and racial violence in the 2012 death of Jordan Davis, an African-American teen who was shot by an older white man in a convenience store parking lot for loudly playing hip-hop. Cheng donated the honoraria from his speeches to the Jordan Davis Foundation.

[3] Steven Feld, *Notes on World Beat*, «Public Culture», 1/1, 1988, pp. 31–37; Louise Mientjes, *Paul Simon's Graceland, South Africa, and the Mediation of Musical Meaning*, «Ethnomusicology», 34/1, pp. 37–74; George Lipsitz, *Strategic Anti-Essentialism in Popular Music*, in *Dangerous Crossroads: Popular Music, Postmodernism and the Poetics of Place*, Verso, New York, 1994, pp. 56–61; Veit Erlmann, *Hero on the Pop Chart: Paul Simon and the Aesthetics of World Music*, in *Music, Modernity, and the Global Imagination: South Africa and the West*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1999, pp. 179–98.

[4] Gino Stefani and Paolo Predieri, *Canzoni e difesa popolare nonviolenta*, in Antonino Drago and Gino Stefani (eds.), *Una strategia di pace: La difesa popolare nonviolenta*, FuoriThema, Bologna, 1993, pp. 267–72.

[5] Jakob von Uexküll, *The Theory of Meaning* [1940], «Semiotica», 42/1, 1982.

[6] Martinelli does address the problematic nature of the term "universalistic" in a footnote on page 43. He intends it to refer more to the inclusive nature of Unitarian Universalism, but another concept like "rhetorical", "poetic", or "metaphorical" would be less problematic and perhaps more precise.

[7] For example, see Eric Weisbard, *Top 40 Democracy: The Rival Mainstreams of American Music*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2014.