

## Boundlessness and Music

I feel like downtime, but without any time. My rhythm's been exploited, and now I cling to the echo of a heartbeat only I can hear, to some life force, some hope that I'll reinvent myself. In the meantime, the only source I have that allows me to feel *anything* other than anger, frustration, and exhaustion is *Appalachian Waltz*. It is difficult to feel anxious when the sound of those strings bellow and yawp through the spaces of my apartment. But it is difficult to know what I feel, instead, with the slide, the creep, the scrape of bow on strings. I feel... distracted and inverted, folded in and pulsing out. I feel heavy (but not collapsing), flowing (but not between any shores). I can feel my shoulders fall, my knees soften, my joints suffuse with sweat, as I'm peeling away, layer by layer, from the back of my neck to the soles of my feet.

I am reminded of one especially hot, perfect, Appalachian afternoon, when my ex and I sat in a dark, leaning tool shed behind our friend's old, weather-worn, two-bedroom house, by the road in a town with no stoplights. We listened to *Uncommon Ritual* on repeat in the CD player all afternoon, smoking cigarettes and swaying in the makeshift hammock my ex rigged diagonally across the tiny shed. I sat in a tie-dye dress he'd just made and pulled, cold and wet, from the washer sitting on the back porch of our friend's house. I remember the cool of the dress to my skin. I am *not* reminded of how much I hated him when I hear this music, of how empty I *usually* felt. But this seems to be one of the great powers music (or this music) has over me – to push me past the space I'm in into some other, boundless, dark, and resonating space.

This music seems to be an inspiration for sanity, though maybe only mine. And this sanity is not some logic-oriented consciousness; it is not rational, though I try to reason it through here. But it leads me back away from the ledge, slowly yet empathetically. And I can't help but become a part of it, moving, moving, moving, returning and leaving, returning and leaving. I watch it work its magic even in the rhythms of my writing, and I have to marvel at Shelley's Aeolian harp, while I entertain, with a smirk, the notion that I might be such a vessel or a collision of forces, for one lingering, harmonic moment.

This "magic," as I call it, seems to manifest itself in music's ability to take me away from myself. No, that's not it, exactly. I picture a flowing out and a flowing in, but without any "out" or "in" any longer. It is as if my boundaries dissolve. I forget the rigidity of my conclusion-obsessed experiences; I stop trying to *understand*. Maybe this boundlessness is actually the feeling of being focused or of not being distracted. According to music therapists, listening to music dramatically increases concentration. They call this the "Mozart effect" (Turner par. 4, 6). Music seems to somehow make us intellectually "whole" by allowing us a focus. Or, perhaps, "whole" might be thought of in a more holistic sense, like mind-spirit-body whole, in which case, we would be wholly open – boundless, that is – through the intellectual/spiritual/physiological effects of music. As Turner notes, music can "relieve muscle tension," "improve motor skills," "rebuild physical patterning skills," and function as a "pain reliever" (par. 3). So, music heals, not only our mental capacity to concentrate and think, but also our body's ability to "rebuild." Music even makes us more socially open and receptive and

boundless. Some researchers have found that music can change a group of peoples' heart rates, making them beat "in synchrony with each other" ("The Effects" par. 6).

But maybe I've gotten this boundlessness thing wrong. I mean, if I'm not listening to *Appalachian Waltz* and am, instead, listening to Tori Amos or Ani DiFranco, my feeling actually does begin to take "shape," however violently protean that "taking" may be. I've even heard that music can cause a loss of consciousness ("The Effects" par. 6), and as I sit here contemplating what, exactly, I feel when I listen to Tori, "trance" is the word that comes to mind. But then, how far is "trance" from "focus"?

Maybe I am being too small-minded about music by viewing it simply as a method to some end: focus, healing, consciousness, unconsciousness. The moving (and I mean that literally) thing about music, and about writing, is that it extends out, that eventually, it's no longer about me, or even about you, but about movement, about tapping out black squiggles, about watching them expand over the screen, about following a rhythm, about tracing the rise and fall of a key, about hearing notes expand across the space between my walls, about following the rhythm.

#### Works Cited

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Mar. 2003

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