

## The Whispers of Music: An Analysis of the Connection Between Modern Culture and Civilization

Throughout the history of the world, music has been the gateway through which humanity enters the realm of inexpressible things. The tunes that we create represent the most amazing forms of creative expression in the known universe. The melodies made by the artists of our age bind and connect entire generations of individuals to a common cultural heritage. From the simple chants of our ancestors to the global music of the modern era, music has had an almost magical command over the human mind. While music's influence over the human psyche is self-evidently apparent, the true nature of music's connection to the human experience is not as readily observable. Music serves as a reflection of the people and the societies that create that music. As a picture captures a visual snapshot of a moment in time, a melody can capture the mindset of the civilization that produces it. Because of this, we can analyze how music changes over the centuries to analyze macroscopic trends in societal progression. Unfortunately, the music of the modern era paints a less than flattering image of us. The music of the modern era, though unique in its influence and widespread nature, is fundamentally more basic and repetitive than the music of the preceding centuries. We who inhabit this age of catchy tunes and rudimentary musical ideas are less developed, less reflective, and less attentive than those who came before us. And this decline in our characteristics will continue unabated until the radiant

glory of our civilization disappears into the night, just as the golden sonority of music disappears into the aether as the source of the sound is snuffed out.

Music as we know it today has its roots in the Gregorian chants of the 8th century. This music was almost exclusively religious in its context and purpose and it featured simple, monophonic melodies and limited harmony. This [music](#) is beautiful, but it is a foreign sound to our modern ears. After the beginning stages of Gregorian chants, Western music developed something known as polyphony, or music with multiple lines of melodic and harmonic material.

Following this development, [music](#) became richer and fuller than the music of the



A standard example of polyphony. Contrast this with the earlier example of monophony to get a clear understanding of how music developed from one stage to the next.

previous era.

From this

point, music

only increased

in complexity.

By the Baroque period, music

had a very well established

set of rules that governed the

methods by which composers

developed their musical ideas.

The music of this epoch was substantially more [complex](#) than the music of eras past. But

although the music itself was often dense and rich with texture and musicality, its structure was

designed to be fairly predictable and regular. This trend continued with slight variation through

the [Classical era](#). The linear nature of music came to an end, however, in the 19th century when

the Romantic Era began. The composers of this age pushed music to new heights, breaking from the regular and predictable forms of ages past and exploring new ways to communicate through music. Individuals such as Faure, Tchaikovsky, Dvorak, and Debussy wrote pieces unparalleled in their [expressive power](#) and [creativity](#). And in the latter half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, composers such as Ravel and Vaughan Williams crafted [ethereal music](#), defined by unique textures and a rejection of linear storytelling. The Romantic period is the zenith in Western music in terms of its expressivity and complexity.

An astute reader now asks the following: “What end does this information serve?” The answer to that question is a very simple one: the trends that have historically governed music contrast so strongly with the trends that govern music today that there must be traits or elements within our society that have been utterly absent in all eras before. Unfortunately, it seems that these new traits are entirely negative: a decreased attention span and an inability to process complex ideas. These are the traits that plague our society, and these are the traits that drive the engine of the modern musical engine. Evidence for this can be found by analyzing the chord structures commonly found in modern music. A chord structure can be essentially described as a roadmap for music. It establishes where the music is and defines where the music will typically go from any given location. Music of the Romantic Era made use of common chord structures, but composers would often and intentionally subvert the expectations of the listener to craft more dynamic and expressive pieces. The same cannot be said of those who make popular music today. One only needs to watch [this video](#) or read [this wonderfully crafted article](#) to see that this is the truth. Almost all genres of popular music rely exclusively on horrendously predictable structures and patterns. Yet and still, our society does not tire of this repetition and predictability.

Quite the contrary; we consume it in unprecedented amounts. For the first time in human history, our popular music has stopped increasing in complexity, and is in fact regressing. Our music today is about as complex (and in some instances, much less complex) as the music that one might observe in the Renaissance period. Comparing the music from the two eras, one can find striking similarities. [This piece](#), for example, is essentially the Renaissance equivalent of a modern pop song. If you replace the lute and viola da gamba with a guitar and a bass, you can almost imagine that this could be found on any given pop radio station today. The piece, though expressive, is demonstrably lacking in complexity, just as modern music is. However, unlike this piece, modern music fails to be expressive. Because most pop songs utilize similar tempos, similar keys, and similar chord structures, the emotional weight of any given song is essentially nonexistent in the absence of lyrics. The music that we enjoy today is meaningless. The music resides in the background, worthless in the face of the lyrics of the soloist. The composers of the Romantic Era used music as a tool to express the inexpressible, taking a feeling or emotion and communicating it through their music, all without using a single word. Now, listeners can only understand and comprehend the meaning and value of a song if it is filled with words overtop a syntactically meaningless musical accompaniment.

We as a people lack the same capacity for understanding and comprehension of complex ideas that our predecessors possessed. The music that we listen to and the stunning lack of variety between songs is a reflexion of this truth. The progression of our music has always followed the same progression as our societies. And as our society becomes more base, our music suffers the same fate. The world in which we live moves too quickly for the thoughtful introspection required to comprehend and appreciate classical music. And as such, the great

traditions of Western music fade into the fog of time, unheard and forgotten, merely whispers in the winds of time.

<https://www.wired.com/insights/2014/07/artificial-intelligence-changing-world-humankind-must-adapt/>

<http://www.enterrasolutions.com/2017/02/redesigning-work-cognitive-era.html>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2014-07-08/why-music-is-dying>

<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2017-03-02/putin-invented-this-toxic-ambassador-ga-me>

The first writer whose style I have decided to incorporate into my paper is Stephen DeAngelis. In the two articles I read from him, he has the job of explaining a somewhat dense socio-economic/technical concept to an audience that knows nothing about the field. Even more laudable, he takes (or at least, attempts to take) a step further to deliver an argument based on that information. The author's writing style is, in my particular opinion, subpar. For example, in

the third paragraph of his article “Artificial Intelligence is Changing the World, and Humankind must adapt,” the tone and diction of the article shifts suddenly and abruptly. After inundating his article with quote after quote, the author’s return was not made to match the register of the preceding passage. It seems infantile and sloppy, which is something that I have hopefully avoided in my essay. When writing about a complicated topic, it be difficult to explain a concept without over-simplifying the language. But by looking the pitfalls of another author, I have made myself conscious of this potential flaw so as to avoid replicating it. Despite my protestation of the author’s voice, I admire the way that he makes a complex issue understandable for the general population. This is something that I aim to mimic in my own editorial. The author makes good use of sources and links to ensure that the audience believes his analysis is objective and based in fact. Although he lacks the voice to make a very clear and compelling argument, I have learned several methods by which I can efficiently and effectively condense a long-winded and labyrinthian topic into an editorial that can be read with minimal effort. The second author, Leonid Bershidsky, has a diction and tone that exudes aggression and finality. He makes solid and clear claims and often includes links to evidence to support his stance. This is something that I mimicked in my own writing. I include references to music that illustrate my point, just as Bershidsky includes links to data tables and other articles that illustrate his point. Aside from simply being a skillful author, one of the two articles of his that I included here revolves around music and its current state in the modern world. I did not incorporate his mindset or argumentation into my paper, but it was elucidating to see how another skilled writer deals with the topic of music in a professional and intellectual context.

