

## **Worlds in Collision: Music and the Trauma of War**

Saturday 29 June 2013, The Mansion House

### TRANSCRIPT

#### **How music has been, and is used to propagate war – Alberto Portugheis**

Good morning everybody. Thank you Michael for inviting me today. I'm very honoured to be here. My talk is from a different perspective than many of the speakers I heard here today and yesterday. And I didn't hear everybody but I read the programme.

I would like to tell you a little bit about my background. I was born in Argentina, in a family of people who escaped war. But Argentina was not only home to my family, it was home to thousands, millions of people from Europe or from Japan who had escaped war. So I grew up surrounded by people who hated war and people who were traumatised by war. As a child I used to think that perhaps people who didn't come to Latin America were people who were in favour of war. But then as a music student I came to Switzerland first and lived there for seven years and after my studies I started to travel and perform. I went to many countries and wherever I was I never found one single person who liked wars. And so I started to question myself, if nobody likes wars why is it that we have wars all the time? Because I had read in the introduction here it says, "to help us understand what leads us to wage war and the part that music can play in promoting that instinct". To me it is not an instinct, to me this is something forced on to us by the people who make a living out of war. So I understood after realising that, and especially after meeting many people who worked in the United Nations, because I was in Geneva, that was the European headquarters of the United Nations. I called them "united necrologists" because the more I learned about them, the more I realised how they were a club of nations only replacing the defamed League of Nations and organised to promote wars in the world. But, of course, like always in political terms saying the opposite, that they were promoting peace. I could be speaking the whole day or for three months about what I saw and heard in Geneva.

This experience made me understand why my feelings as a child about the music that we were taught were so against peace. Starting with the National Anthem that I had to memorise. I couldn't understand why it spoke so much about dying for the country and killing others and about how our country was so great. Of course I studied the anthems of other countries and I realised they were all the same, they were all promoting patriotism and which in turns promotes divisions between the countries and helps wars. Then I started to learn songs, I had to learn a lot of songs, national songs. All the songs were praising our heroes. What they called heroes, to me, reading history, were the people who had killed the most. Those were the heroes, people who, most of them were really mercenaries because they were people who were working for whichever Government engaged them to fight wars for them, to conquer new lands. To me music was always used to promote violence and war.

I have with me something about a man who worked for the United States Government for the military and specialised in what is called "psychological operations" or psy-ops as they call them. He wrote specifically about music. He never thought about publishing this, but there were so many requests from students who were doing PhDs at university and they asked him. It is an extraordinary thing how music is used all the time to help war. From every point of view, but it is not so much the music what is more important in the music is the lyrics, the words. By the way the British anthem, very often people just say "Rule Britannia", but it is "Rule, Britannia", it is not also "Britannia rules the waves" it is "Britannia, rules the waves". It is extraordinary the words and how they encourage people to invade the world and conquer the world, saying only with us the world will be a good world.

This is from a song in the American Civil War in the 18th century, although this was used by Lincoln and Johnson, in their election campaign. It says "for Lincoln and Johnson hurray boys, hurray, down with the rebellion and on with the war, while we rally round the cause boys we are rallying in our might, singing the holy cause of freemen".

Music is used, as we heard yesterday, when it is kind of slow and calm, to send a baby to sleep. The opposite, the rock music we just heard about, is used for encouraging conflict. Words, as I said we heard Ian Ritchie mention *L'homme arme*, a typical set of lyrics used to encourage conflict. This is from *La Marseillaise*, the French anthem: "Children of the fatherland let's go, the day of glory has arrived, tyranny is against us, the bloody banner is raised, the bloody banner is raised, in the countryside do you hear the roar of these ferocious soldiers, they come into your arms to kill your sons, your companions", and the chorus, "to armed citizens form your battalions, let us march, let us march, so that in pure blood we will water our furrows". This goes on for about ten stanzas.

Whether we think of recent wars, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iraq; in past wars in Vietnam, Korea; everywhere music played an important role in encouraging war in conflict. Not only to encourage the soldiers, but to kind of catch people. For instance, recordings would play music that people liked so that people will come out into the streets to listen better to the music. Then they got shot at. Sometimes an American soldier says how in Iraq if they played music that they knew the Iraqis liked, but nobody came out into the streets, that meant that they were preparing to fight. So then they would stop the music and get ready themselves to fight because they knew that was coming. Music was used to attract entire populations to start fighting. Music was used to, and is used to depress populations. For instance when they want to have the population worried they play music that is very, very, very sad, there are dirges. They play sometimes, not music, but recorded sounds of children crying and crying and crying.

We heard a lot about music therapy here yesterday. In my own experience, I was very much involved in this. When I first came to the country I knew Dr Henry Rollin, and with him I did a lot of music therapy at the then very famous now extinct Horton Hospital in Epsom. He and Lady Forsdyke started music therapy in this country.

I remember what happened in childhood to me in South America, I remember when I saw these people really traumatised by war, not traumatised by things that happened to them directly, but by what they saw. Like my father who, until he died, had nightmares all the time about what he saw 40, 50 years earlier. Well I saw a lot of people who loved music and who listened to a lot of music and who were very happy listening to music. But the effects of war never, never disappeared. Probably I think that among the arts the art, the painting, the visual arts are probably more effective. There is in fact a lot of this going on in the whole world and because for music in many of the war-torn countries there are no instruments. And also people have to study a little bit to do music. But art is far more natural and easy for children or people who are traumatised by war.

I have so many examples of songs that were used by politicians and in the past by kings or by religious leaders also. Churches have used them, because to remember that many, many, many years ago politicians didn't exist, churches around the world, most of the old wars were all fought between them. Music was also used by them and lyrics were used by them to promote conflict.

So my main theme is that we have to naturally continue to do music, but we have to work to abolish wars. And abolishing wars can only be done by the abolishment of the arms trade. That means by abolishment of armies, Armed Forces everywhere. There is no way in the 20th century America could attack Iraq without warships and air fighters and drones etc. They are not going to be swimming to Iraq to destroy the country or Afghanistan or wherever. And the same with us, we have so many military bases in the world, just doing that, they say to the population that this is all necessary to develop democracy in the world, and this is a lie. Democracy doesn't really exist and the more we accept what politicians sell to us, the more we are really conspirators with them in the state of affairs. Imagine that the United States, well also England, we have 72 universities who will receive a lot of money for military research. 24 of them do peace studies and give diplomas for peace studies. In America MIT has this famous man, Noam Chomsky, and he gives the impression that MIT must be a lovely university, promoting peace, but MIT has the biggest contract in America with the American Armed Forces, with the CIA, with the FBI and they are working on wars, in ten years to come in 20 years to come developing special materials that are not yet ready. Nobody, not one single man in the White House of those in power is thinking of peace. So we really have to work to end this, because otherwise the world will never change. That is my campaign is to use music to promote peace, but at the same time, against arms. So that's all I want to say. Thank you.