## TechNews

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# An inclusive basis for music criticism

Reno Fera-Ducatt

DISTRIBUTION MANAGER

I like music. And in the tradition of acknowledging that I feel a particular way about something, I want to understand the source of my thoughts and emotions.

I, however, perceive that my appreciation of music, and this may be generalizable to appreciation of any form of art, is more complicated than simply something being to my liking. Music can, in fact, affect my liking depending on how it is done. More specifically, I can listen to music and at first, perceive it to be distasteful, and then to grow to appreciate it for any number of reasons, often more so than music that I enjoy on first listening.

This leads me to form the conclusion that there are different levels of appreciation, and the level at which I appreciate music beyond that "first listening" mentality feels superior to me, since it resists taste, and grows my taste, growing something I perceive as a part of myself. Even if I am not "in the mood" to listen to music, there is almost a rational appeal in my mind that tell me something has markedly more merit than something else. This appeal is not concentrated in my understanding of the music to any aspect of it which makes it more impressive (e.g. in whether the music is more technically extravagant or dramatic), but in several areas, and in an understanding of how the areas are developed and understood which, though I may not necessarily understand them, can appreciate the goal that the artist wishes to advance in the their music.

Furthermore, these considerations, observing the projection of my interest in music over my life, I note the value that I ascribe to music in an album form for folk composed music, in opposition to to classically composed music, is of a higher regard than what are typically understood to be singular songs. This relationship between a song and an album I liken to a symphony; although the many parts of the symphony may be very different, they were designed to go together, and can not be appreciated fully without the acknowledgment of the others and the collection. Obviously, it is very difficult to talk in terms of music being folk, classical, symphony, song, and album because those terms are highly colloquial in use (some more than others). I use them only because they are so common.

It is no secret that the prevailing idea about music from critics is that the an album, being consumed as a full piece, offers a better experience than singular songs (this a claim in the folk paradigms of most popular music). Why, though? Why should an album, which colloquially is understood to be a collection of songs, either by some artist and curated by that artist and/or other parties for the purpose of packaging or as a compilation of many artists, be superior to the songs themselves individually? And furthermore, if we are to understand this to be the case, does this mean that a singular "song" could not be held to the same level of regard as the album?

I have been known to desire to listen to one particular song, even one particular song repeatedly, in response to an inclination under which I may find myself. Furthermore, songs that I have heard in the past, and which

my mind or the state which they create for me, and that do so because of preferences for any of the characteristics or any given element or elements of the music to which I respond.

However, there is something in the album form which I believe to be, although related to this interest in the music and appeal, distinguishable in its objectivity, or at least shared acknowledgement of genius. Music can be understood as a collection of parts—musical works are collections of notes or chords or tempos or rhythms or sounds or instruments—and all these elements, in how they fit together, make what is compelling about the music: notably, say, a good song. Why the artist made the choices they did in composing the music, why they chose to put the pieces together, in addition to where the pieces came from and why the artist choose to use them, are what is compelling about the music. Surveying the whats and whys, though we may never understand them with the vividity and clarity that the artist did, allows us to speculate and marvel at them nonetheless.

Now, one may look at the standard array of music and see the glaring examples of similarity formulaically scattered through all of it. In fact, music that doesn't follow these formulae is often perceived as sounding bad because of ignorance or laziness or just incapability on the part of the artists who may have tried to apply it, or just never even considered applying it. Sound, lyrical content, structure, technique, and more are shared and distinguish types and genres of music as they represent the attitudes of the artists that made them.

The formulae of music primes one's mind for what is next: for the change in key or tempo, or a response to particular sounds or concepts or attitudes, fulfilling or breaking expectation based on the artists' wills towards their musical preferences. And typically, these are perceived through the lens of the original artist, who considered the array of possibilities and chose based on intuition or reason. Crafting carefully, over some time, their work, investing themselves in creating what they want to create, nothing more and nothing less, using what tools they have at their disposal and their experienced understanding of their relationship with them, always pushing the possible limits of their capabilities and growing and learning so as to come closer and closer to the final product of perfection, is the ultimate goal of any artist. This is just to say, "the artist has goals, and wants to be good at them," but adding a little more passionate pizzazz. The mind may be a subjective organ, but it can be affected in predictable ways, and follows predictable patterns that can make sense (if not be fully realized or understood) by everyone.

Songs, imagining them as we have previously established, are those collections of elements based off of will and capability, but they tend to be, due to composition style or preference, limited. They are pieces. The album, eliminating the constraint of the "song's" strive for specificity, allows the artist much more liberty over their work, and ability to control it and experiment with the elements they want

therefore draw up pleasurable or familiar to utilize, are comfortable with, and know. It experiences for me are, in themselves, also enhances the music as aligned with the inclinations. There is no doubt that I have folk composition style, since perceiving each preferences for songs due to their effects on song as its own compartment eliminates the tedium, unintuitiveness, and frivolity of trying to build all desired but varied pieces into one discombobulated compartment.

> The style of music throughout the album is expected to be quite different from song to song, but there will inevitably be similarities related to the goals or style of the artist(s). And the dynamic range and variety that maintains a consistent lens of the artist and the tone or sounds they've worked extensively with is what allows for the interesting elaboration to take form. Ideas themselves, most often through lyrical content, might be echoed throughout the album in what is often called a "concept album."

> Sometimes, an artist will want the previous song to prepare the listener to the next song. It adds a sense of following to set the work on the best grounds to perceive it. It is not uncommon for a listener to want to listen to something similar to what they have just listened to, having gotten a taste from it, and this meta-ization works off of this. It is possible that listening to one song with a cleansed palate would be distasteful, but after being built and familiarized to some level on the song's elements from the previous one, the artist can demonstrate a continuation, a different take, a different though similar style or sound which they would not have been able to provide in a satisfactory way through the single song. This gives the artist even more will to exercise their experimentation on the mind: a thorough dissection of their music and ideas, one song opening up new doors and more possibilities for future ones.

> All in all, the album, in perceiving and consuming more and more varied elements of the goals and styles of the artist, allows any passive listen to enter the mind of that artist. Whether or not the art is intended for the ear that the music reached, it does widen the spectrum of thought, or mimic the widening of a spectrum of thought, from creator to perceiver, and that is thrilling. It is not just the experiencing of what is already compelling, but experiencing what you didn't realize could be compelling that is exciting.

> The colloquial "album" does this better. There is no limit to this. In theory, the meta-ization of art could go on forever, but it becomes harder and harder and less fulfilling to express the primary building blocks which make up the emotional appeal. It is a subtle and delicate balance that must be upheld.

> Returning to the question of whether a song can be considered as much of a compelling and comprehensive piece as an album made up of them, I can now provide an answer: the colloquial song described cannot. Equally, an album can be designed as the composition of parts without thought, or much thought, to the whole. However, this is remarkably less impressive. The holistic goals and styles can come in many forms, and really, it is more about the artist conveying that the choices they made were made consciously and purposefully. But doing this, and desiring this to be experienced to the fullest extent possible, should be desired.

