

A response to richard brookheiser's "all junk, all the time"

[Art & Culture](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Richard Brookheiser throws every single indictment that he can think of at the institution of rockmusic. It is obvious that Brookheiser is writing merely to vent his personal feelings: he has no intention of learning more about the music that he has chosen to criticize so roundly. It is unfortunate for him, since if he had decided to actually listen to some rock music with an open mind, he would have been certain to hear some music that he would have liked. The first criticism that Brookheiser (1996) makes is that rock appeals to the masses, even to megachurches.

That, in itself, is not a bad thing to be entirely honest. Music should appeal to the masses. Regardless of whether there is a variety of music that only exists for the highbrow enjoyment of the elite class, the “ average” person also needs to experience the sensation that listening to music can bring to a person. Music needs to “ speak” to the person that listens to it, to have relevance to that listener, and perhaps even reflect the events in his or her life.

If rock appeals to the masses, it's because most of its listeners understand the artist when the pain of rejected or unrequited love leads the artist to sing about the “ first cut” being “ deepest” or the sense of loss “ counting the steps” of a retreating lover. Opera, after all, has the same theme, only it's shouted at the top of one's voice and in another language. Brookheiser (1996) also criticizes rock music for having “ E Z 2 Play musical instruments” (p.

1), equaled by the apparent ease of the lyrics. Once again, he misses the point. Clearly, Brookheiser has not listened to enough rock music to

appreciate the harpsichord used by the Beatles, the saxophone used by Billy Joel, or the experimental music used by more artists than it is possible to count. Rock music is about pushing the boundaries of acceptable sound. While much of the music can be played on the guitar, it is never about playing it " safe.

" Appreciate it or not, both the original and the remake of " Funky Town" make a statement with their electronic music--try that on the guitar! Neither are the vocals as simplistic as Brookheiser would make out. For every song with the simplicity of Natasha Bedingfield's " Unwritten," another song exists with the artistry of Celine Dion's vocal riffs that makes the listener sit up and listen. Even more so, Brookheiser should listen to the sentiments expressed by those apparently simple or mumbled lyrics.

Even those without artistry purposefully state the writer's hopes, fears, or social concerns. If Brookheiser feels that rock music fails as a memory marker because it is " crude and blank" (p. 1), obviously he has not been listening to the " right" kind of rock. " Rock" music is a genre that ps many areas, as he so rightfully points out. Snap some easy listening or oldies into the DVD player and even Brookheiser is likely to find music that he feels appropriate to mark even his most special memories.

All he has to do is to listen with an open mind and a whole new world will open up for him. Not every person is going to like every kind of music, or even every subgenre of every kind of music. Many people might know of country music, but not as many even know about its Cajun cousin, zydeco, let alone appreciate it. That lack of appreciation does not make zydeco any

less of a valuable resource for the culture that produces it; rather, it speaks even more loudly to those who understand what it is trying to say.

Virtually every generation of parent has said, " in my day, music meant something! " Yet even as we age and listen to the music that we once felt was so radical, it turns into something safe and familiar, associated with our youth. The television series, The Simpsons, did an episode in which the rock song " In the Garden of Eden". Richard Brookheiser ends his essay with the statement, " It's Bottom 40, all junk, all the time. And it's here to stay" (2). Sadly enough for him: he's right--and thank Heaven for it!

Reference

Brookheiser, R. (1996). All junk, all the time. National Review. Retrieved 23 July 2007 from http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1282/is_n22_v48/ai_18914547/pg_1