

choose among them, that we have "freedom of choice." Both the terms "freedom" and "choice" are important here. We should be given a choice—the alternatives; and we should be free to make our choice. But "freedom" is used by the new sophists in another, more subtle sense. Traditional science is bound, limited, restricted by an unnatural allegiance to the use of reason and evidence. The new constructivist is happily free from such restrictions. When it comes to saying how things are, the constructivist, unlike the rest of us still wearing our blinders of rationality, has freedom of choice.

Finally, the postmodern advocates are fond of tossing into their verbal soup the

old word "democracy." In olden days democracy was a form of rule in which political power was in the hands of the "demos," the citizens. A corollary was that each such citizen shared the power equally with all the others. Today, when *representative* democracy is the norm, we tend to think of democracy as involving the notion that each person has the same civil rights enjoyed by every other person. That's what most of us mean when we say that everyone is equal. We are clearly not all equal in all ways (otherwise I would be earning millions as a seven-footer in the NBA). We just enjoy, ideally, equal rights. But the sophists, old and new, are clever. "Democracy" is a strong word, with

almost exclusively positive connotations. The concept of equality is at the heart of democracy. They know this. So they use the term with great abandon. And what do they mean by it? Just this: all beliefs are of equal value, equally viable, equally true!

Today's postmodern constructivists have mastered the art of verbal abuse. They are true artists. They are con-artists. They are to be taken seriously not because of the force of their arguments (they eschew argument); they are to be taken seriously because of the force of their numbers. They have persuaded very large numbers of the gullible, and they have done so in a place that was meant to be the reserve of rationality—the academy.

## A Skeptical New Age Music DJ

TANI CHEN

As a disc jockey of New Age music, I would like to increase its visibility and influence as a valid form of music in its own right. I would also like to give many musicians and artists as much public exposure as possible, which is not easy in a weekly two-hour radio and Internet program. However, because of its association with other New Age concepts and beliefs, I do not want to disseminate false or misleading claims, or to promote concepts of little scientific or medical worth.

What exactly is New Age music? Although there continue to be disagreements as to its exact definition (Leacy 1999), I would describe New Age music as a genre of music that is generally slow-paced, usually instrumental music, which can include unfixed or varying rhythms or lack a defined melodic structure. New Age music may also include unusual instrumentation, such as the *didgeridu* (Australia), the *huqin* (China), or the glass armonica (U.S.), among many others.

Although no one particular piece or artist fits all of these definitions (see Werkhoven 1998), New Age music can be considered to be a specific style of music, much as jazz and rock are specific styles of music.

Besides the term "New Age music," various other terms have been proposed over the years for this genre, including "contemporary instrumental" (too long at nine syllables, not to mention that the human voice is also used), "adult instrumental" (pornographic music?), "instrumental" (which could include other genres, such as jazz or classical), "conint" or "conin" (shortened forms of contemporary instrumental, although not intuitively obvious), "Muzak" (which is trademarked by the Muzak Company), "elevator music" (usually derogatorily), and even "lifescape music" (which could mean anything). Other terms, such as "spacemusic," "ambient," "electronica," "solo instrumental," etc., are more specific and do not encompass the entire genre. None of these terms have the sim-

ilarity or the recognition power that "New Age music" does, so "New Age music" continues to be widely used, despite its obvious flaws and associations.

This association can be harmful to the promotion of New Age music (Leacy 1999). Many people avoid the New Age music sections of record stores based simply on the "New Age" title, without knowing what New Age music actually is. I regularly get calls from listeners who are surprised to find that what they have been listening to is considered to be New Age music. One person even argued with me and refused to

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believe that it was New Age music.

Many composers wish that the genre were called something else, without being associated with the rest of the "New Age" field (Leacy 1999, and various references therein). Many of these artists are from small record companies and are interested only in increasing their exposure and sales. One label even resorted to giving away albums just to increase exposure (Sarno 1999). However, there are other New Age musicians who take advantage of this association to promote various New Age concepts (usually musical "healing"), as well as their music (Halpern and Fuentes 1999; Aeolia 1998; Summer 1996).

So how does a skeptical DJ of New Age music determine what to air? For most of the music I receive, the artist or label is interested in getting the music aired (and hopefully increasing sales), and does not claim any specific benefits (other than maybe increasing the size of the listening audience). Alternatively, labels will add disclaimers to the music, such as "This music . . . is not intended to replace traditional medical treatment" (Evenson 1999).

However, other artists do include some dubious claims as part of their promotional materials or album jackets. In these cases, I still like to promote the music as music *per se*, but I do not want to promote their claims. I have a few options available—not playing the album, playing the album for its musical content, or playing and questioning the album on the air. Examples follow.

(1) **Do not play the album.** Music in this category usually promotes very specific ideas and claims. This includes either religious- or cult-oriented music (e.g., Gabriel of Sedona 1997), and music that supposedly has direct health or psychological benefits, usually from "subliminal" messages (Summer 1996). In these cases, it is usually impossible to air the music without simultaneously promoting the pseudoscientific claims of the artists. Fortunately, music in this category is rarely sent to me, being tar-

geted more toward "self-help" audiences rather than a radio show.

(2) **Play the album for its musical content.** This is especially true for religious, ethnic, or holiday music. Music has often been written and played as a form of religious worship, and this music can often be enjoyed as pure music. Noteworthy recent examples include the *Sacred Treasures* collection (Ivanoff et al. 1999; Hearts of Space Music 1998), and *Prayer: A Multi-Cultural Journey of Spirit* (Soundings of the Planet Music 1998). For these pieces, a simple qualifier or description of the piece is usually enough to place it in proper context.

(3) **Play and question or even criticize the album on the air.** This can be a difficult thing to do properly. In general, I would only air music that can be gently critiqued. If more extensive criticism is warranted, then the criticism would be too disruptive to the flow of music on the show and I would not air the album. Usually, this criticism is for music that specifically claims to heal certain ailments, rather than subjectively claiming to be "soothing," "stress-relieving," "relaxing," or "meditative" (or many other equivalent synonyms).

The most popular claims seem to be music infused with "Reiki" energy (e.g., Deuter 1998; Hwong 1998), or will tune the "chakras" (Aeolia 1998; Halpern 1975). Reiki energy is supposedly a "healing energy" that is transmitted by touch (Deuter 1998) (which immediately begs the question of how it can be transmitted via music), while a chakra apparently is an "energy center" of the body that controls a particular activity, which can somehow be tuned by listening to music (Aeolia 1998).

For these pieces, I will usually criticize it by questioning the "chakra" or "Reiki" concept on the air, but mention that the music is worth listening to as music and not as a substitute for a doctor, despite what the album cover says. This critique is typically not disruptive to the flow of the show, but, I hope, fos-

ters a more evaluative mindset towards that album. In addition, there's a certain amount of leeway a DJ gets from being considered an "expert" in the music being played, and the audience would expect some level of criticism towards the music.

In conclusion, New Age music is a specific style of music. As with other music genres, there are good musicians and bad ones. Many musicians avoid making outlandish claims, focusing instead on the creation of music as an artistic form of expression. However, some musicians do make unscientific claims, which should be treated with skepticism and not promoted as fact, especially towards the general public. The name "New Age music" for this genre is unfortunate, but in time, it may become regarded as a meaningless title, much as "jazz" and "rock 'n' roll" are (Bryson 1994).

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