

Music and Vulnerability: A Secret Friend

It resonates through wander, but never actually in sight. Until we wonder, ‘What makes it feel so right?’ Up above the octave sky, down beneath the bass’ low. By the time we say goodbye, we realize that music is more than just a show. From the start of the prehistoric era, music genres have developed along the side of the evolving world. Because of that, music has never been out of fashion, as its genres have constantly adapted with the current audience, making it a preserving (cultural) art. Thus we can say that since music has been omnipresent even before the historic era had started, it also has become an ancient friend.

Regardless of where we come from, what we stand for, what we believe in and who we are, music will always be there for us. When words fail to express our emotions, music lends a hand. Even so, each individual has their own unique response when it comes to music. For instance, an elder person may feel restless when listening to a rock band, while a mother may cry during her child’s piano recital. At the end, aside from every possible way of human expression, music has the capability to guide people in being confident to embrace their emotions.

“Music represents an enjoyable activity in and of itself, but its influence goes beyond simple amusement” (Welch et al., 2020). When we finally get home after a bad day, or simply getting ready to start a productive morning, music has always been something preferably enjoyable to get ourselves involved in. It does not have to be a song, even. It can just be a humming session of any notes and *voilà*, a melody has been made! That is just how simple the relationship between music and humans can be.

But for creating the entire music package, simplicity cannot always be the final key. When a song is introduced to the public, its authenticity is what makes it pop out. In relation to music as a symbol of universal expression, it is the composer’s degree of *poured* feelings—when making a piece—that becomes a bridge for the audience to connect with the music. Not just pouring any feelings, however. It is the decision-making process of letting **vulnerability** be one with the music that makes a piece attractive and genuine at the same time.

Vulnerability can be a lot of things: Crying your heart out when a loved one has passed away, consulting your parents about not getting admitted to your dream university, until telling your clubmates that you feel peer-pressured by them. In spite of those, vulnerability *is* a part of human nature, and because of that, many musicians have applied it into music—especially pop music. As doubt starts to question its effectiveness for the audience, it turns out that the application of vulnerability to music is what makes a piece even more admirable. Because based on what Candy Chang has said in her exhibition with James A. Reeves, *A Monument for the Anxious and Hopeful*, something so real and personal is what makes the audience feel reassured and special, as if receiving a certain message, implying that we all are humans, after all (Smith, 2019).

Nowadays, music (particularly the pop genre) has become a friendly reminder to our everyday lives that being vulnerable is equal as being a human. One current example is BTS' song, *Life Goes On*. Its production was initiated by the darkness that almost everyone has suffered because of the Covid-19 pandemic, and how it has paused the world from spinning. The song is intended to uplift the spirit of those who get affected from the pandemic. BTS helps the audience to understand that the suffering world should not make humans stop growing. In other words, even if the seasons change, humans do not. Because in reality, life *must* go on, whether we like it or not. But that is just a small part of what all of this is about: The effectiveness for composers in utilizing their vulnerabilities through musical arrangements to deliver meaningful messages for the audience. Referring to that, *Life Goes On* is created based on a sense of vulnerability (getting affected from the pandemic), and is about fighting it. Hence, the existence of a familiar connection with the vulnerable—and relatable—side of life is what makes a piece of music so comforting for others to listen.

Often, in the journey of daily life, whether we are aware of it or not, we find ourselves being recovered because of the relatable vulnerability in some music pieces. At the same time, we tend to see our imperfections as some kind of error; a dissatisfaction. That includes letting our vulnerability be purposefully hidden. With that being considered, it is common to come up with an ambiguous thought upon the fact that we will get even more insecure from the punch of an external vulnerability source such as the music piece itself.

However, as every person is born with their own flaws, when a vulnerable song hits (them), it helps to reflect on themselves instead. Because it is the composer's emotions that we feel in a song—it is someone else's vulnerability, and not solely ours. A psychological study implies that when one sees another's state of vulnerability, one distinguishes something disparately intriguing (Smith, 2019). The distinction is not caused by human sympathy, per se, but it is due to one's sensibility. The fascination that we obtain from others' vulnerability is not to gain some sort of reassurance, moreover comfort, over the fact that they are admitting their weaknesses while we remain 'strong' behind our public personas. But it is because we understand them, particularly understanding how raw their emotions are—the fragileness, the sorrow, even the pain that flies beyond harmonies and lyrics. We understand them because we have been, if not *are* being situated inside their shoes. Because of that, we are supported by the companionship that comes in waves of relatable emotions from music, as we occasionally find ourselves expressing the unspeakable through it.

All in all, vulnerability in music can treat people's wounds. It can be the home for the lost soul. It can help people to feel whole (again). As Christina Aguilera, an American singer-songwriter, once said in an interview, "I turned to singing as an outlet," she said. "The pain at home is where my love for music came from" (Thompson, 2009). There are people out there, who have survived, grown, and succeeded, all because they allow themselves to be vulnerable through

music. Therefore, vulnerability in music is not just about expressing the composers' emotions. It is to empower, to support, and to better one another, as those are what a *friend* is all about, though a secret one it may be.

References

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