

Ian Peddie
Music, Rights, and Hope

This discussion is an attempt to bring together the concepts of music, rights, and hope. Predicated on the concept of music's possibilities as a medium of protest, I discuss how music articulates protest, especially in relation to ideas of human rights. Beginning with the broad parameters offered by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), a document whose statutes proclaimed "as a common standard" the ideal that "all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights," my discussion examines how music might illuminate the gap between the ideal and the real. Given that the contemporary social visions through which we interpret concepts such as human rights have polarized to a vertical drama wearily articulated in terms of a struggle between democracy and tyranny, a new and sustained examination of cultural responses to such issues is warranted. In this respect music, which of course is always produced in a social context, is an extremely useful medium; in its immediacy music has a potency of expression with a reach both long and wide. At the same time, popular music also has a length and breadth of expression that remains impressive. Music is the articulation of that protest; it speaks its opposition. How can music help us understand rights? What can it tell us about protest? How can it offer a pragmatism of the possible?