

My Artist Statement

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I see Art as a transformative and progressive sense of being. I see it as higher level of self-expression. I view it is the act of finding meaning as a human from an individualistic as well as communal perspective. When I say art is transformative, I believe it does so on a multifaceted level. It not only induces change in its creator, the manufacturer, but it induces it in its audience, the consumer, by allowing them to shape their lens and see life in a different way. It encompasses both the manufacturer and the consumer as an inseparable whole. I could go even further then and say that art is intrinsically transformative. It not only induces change in its creator but since it induces it in others by allowing them to shape their lens and see that art in a different light, this allows art to take on a life of its own, one that, more often than not, is unexpected and more beautiful than what the creator by him/herself could have imagined. Art then to me is the emotion, the meaning that comes from what has been manufactured, not just the manufactured item itself. It is the feeling, it's meaning, it's expression that becomes a gift we share amongst our community, and expands upon, or challenges, our current societal definitions of what it means to be human.

If a stranger were to stop me on the street and ask me why I do what I do, it is more than likely that I would reply "because I'm an Artist, and music, and all art, is in my roots." The more complicated answer however brings an image to mind. As I close my eyes, I see a dusty, old acoustic guitar gently lying alongside a rusty tape recorder. I had a deep curiosity for these two things as a kid. This is how music has become such a big part of who I am. I have never been one for verbal interaction, but when I am playing the guitar, writing a song, or sitting behind my console mixing, producing or arranging, I am able to communicate with ease. If I could respond to every stranger's question with a song, I would surely do so.

I grew up listening to and loving all different kinds of music ranging from Jazz, Flamenco, and Afro-Cuban, to Country, Soul, Hip-Hop, Funk, Rap, Pop, Rock, and more. I believe all genres to be created equal. I spent most of my childhood traveling and experiencing all art including food, painting, and architecture, but especially music of all cultures. Through my travels I would spend all my hours every day in those countries listening to the different types of music produced there. It was my way of learning about culture and about other people as well as how music behaves physically within different spaces, influencing perspective and deriving various contexts and pre-texts.

When I listen to music, I see it as a way to immerse myself in a culture and the story being told. I let the culture speak to me. I close my eyes and let all of my prejudices and preconceptions go and let the music take me on a journey, if it is able. If the art speaks to me and communicates properly, it transports me to a sacred space and time where emotions and stored up memories tell me about myself and about others. Culture and communication to me is the

fundamental basis of art and experiencing life and what it means to be human. Living in Mexico for 2 years was a wonderful journey to understand the people through their art. I see music, and all art, as a higher communication that transcends time space, and unites humanity. On a deeper personal level, art is a sacred ritual to me as an Artist. It transports me to a higher level of being and is a way to gratify my soul and express my gratitude in a way of sacred prayer and worship. I don't take art lightly. I believe in helping Artists produce art that speaks to the world and stands the test of time. I believe art not only expands upon and even challenges our current societal definitions of what it means to be human but posit that Art therefore is complex as it imitates the complexity of its creators and society itself. Who we are as people is intrinsic to art. Therefore, I believe, as did the great philosophers of old who developed western thinking, such as Aristotle and Leo Tolstoy, that without Art, humans would cease to exist.

How I approach record production as an Artist and how Artists approach their music via my record production process is influenced by all of this. I believe in self-discovery and authenticity, and this philosophy creeps its way into my sessions. Discovering oneself, the way one communicates, and one's understanding of their culture is vital to my process. Naturally then, I view Pre-Production to be a vital part of my process. I consider microphone placement to be less about sound and more about artistic expression through the manipulation of sound within an acoustical environment. I have countless large diaphragm condenser mics, for example, in my collection within my production studio and yet they all sound different. Which one I plan to use for any particular Artist, as well as where I place those mics within the studio space and how I use processing after the fact, is a matter of artistic communication within a cultural framework. This philosophy leads the basis for questions such as, what do my Artists wish to communicate, how do they want their audience to feel emotionally, how do they want their audience to move kinesthetically, what type of sound will effectively achieve their vision, what's the focal point, what is their Artist identity, and certainly, what does the song and message ask for from its own cultural and philosophical perspective. These are all pertinent questions I delve into and ask my Artists when starting off a project before selecting any mic, and, as we progress through the various stages of the production process, we explore the answers to these questions together so I can help them tap their emotional journey, and shed light on their humanity. I view my studio, and mic choices, as instruments in and of themselves. This is my medium as it were, to paint with sound to capture a piece of humanity, a piece of the human experience.

I put my main focus and emphasis on the lead vocal or lead instrument in any given piece as that is the main communicative element in any musical work of art. Everything else is of a supportive nature to that. I have come to find that music is inherent in speech and I have come to appreciate the individual elements that form the basis of phrasing as well as the nuances of vocal classification and range. I hold in high regard a singer's gift of interpretation that they can bring to a song to make the story truly special. I believe that our truth is their truth and their truth is ours! If I feel the lead vocalist, or the lead instrumentalist if there is no vocal, is center of attention and can get all the recognition from reviews and articles, I consider my job well done and the piece to be a work of art! My approach to all of this however is not so unique. I spent 15 years of my life searching for a process that incorporated my beliefs and ideology of recording, music, and art in general. It wasn't until I started interning and researching the process implemented by Major Record Labels that I started to find what I was finally looking for. This eventually led me to Berklee College of Music where my philosophy of artistic expression not only was reinforced but was taught by the same record producers working for the Major Record Labels and top Artists I had been researching so long and hard about.

My Personal View of Music Aesthetics comes from a deep appreciation and understanding of cultural identity. Through my life experiences and study, I have come to consider myself an emotivist. I believe that not only does music convey emotion, but it also can produce emotion when communicated effectively. With my view I consider there to be NO attribution error: listeners can *actually feel sad* if they hear sad music. Therefore, I even believe music to be a cross-cultural communication phenomena.

My own personal list and understanding of music aesthetics (the characteristics I believe are most important to evaluating music) is paramount to the understanding of my work method and philosophy of modern, contemporary art. The following criteria applies to both program and absolute music set in today's modern societal framework, and I also believe both program and absolute music to be adept and equally qualified aesthetically to be canonized and copyrighted by the modern government as "A Musical Work."

1. Does the musical piece connect with the audience and move them emotionally and kinesthetically and contain strong emotional contour? This is number one on my list for a reason: if a musical piece fails to connect, then it fails to communicate. An artist's primary job is to effectively communicate. On a record, there's only sound. No stage lights, pyrotechnics, or performers to provide sensory input. Strong emotion is vital. How an artist chooses to convey emotion forms part of their personal aesthetic and identity (think James Brown's emotional delivery vs Frank Sinatra's).
2. Does the musical piece have a strong groove or a firm underlining pulse? This goes along with the idea presented by composer, jazz pianist, and philosopher Mickie Willis defining that it must "exploit(s) a variety of elements of music¹" with rhythm being, in my opinion, the forefront for contemporary music in the modern age. But this postulation even applies to the most basic of stripped-down compositions, with Willis's 6th criteria: "Is there a feeling of 'musicality' about it? That is, does the piece invoke a desire for body movement that corresponds to the gestures in sound?"² This, in my opinion, is what today's modern underlining pulse in contemporary music should do, and do well! I'm a natural explorer of the *Pain/Pleasure Paradox*, and the basis of such exploration coincides with the pleasure gained from a strong groove, formed by a strong coupling of the kick and bass, underlining an emotionally moving lyric/story. Which leads me to my next criteria.
3. Does the musical piece have strong prosody? That is, does the musical piece tie itself together in intricate ways to support the message. A very basic example would be choosing a minor key for a sorrowful song. But prosody comes in extremely complex ways too, such as key changes, tempo fluctuations, odd time signatures, an uneven number of lyrical phrases to provide off balance, a melody "tracing" the lyrical content or theme such as in Garth Brooks' "*I've got Friends in Low Places*³", or Vivaldi's *Spring Birds* from *The Four Seasons*⁴.
4. Does it conjure up strong Imagery in the mind, even if there isn't a lyric? Imagery is powerful as it allows us to connect to our pasts and conjure up smells, and senses, exactly as when we were there. Being an emotivist, I contend that the emotions we feel when listening to music are just as real as when experiencing them out in the "real" world and brain scans are a large component to this notion.

5. Is there strong continuity? For example, is the musical piece so full of ideas it seems like the artist is trying to cram every idea and bit of who they are into it thus, lacking focus and continuity? This certainly applies to single musical pieces, but also a collection of pieces that are meant to be listened to as a whole as well, such as albums.
6. Does the artist's vision and their intent seem clear? For example, if an artist's musical work comes across abstract, does it do it well to the point you could conclude that that was the artists intent? Or does it seem like it was a result of poor vision and poor intention? This ties in heavily with emotional contour and continuity as well.
7. Is the musical piece memorable, repetitive, catchy, and enticing to sing or hum along to? This is second to last on my list, but equally important as the rest of them in my opinion. In my experience, most people when speaking about aesthetically pleasing music, discuss not only how it moves them emotionally, but also how it sticks around on their playlist, well past its prime. A simple look at people's comments on YouTube regarding various past hits can be very enlightening. The musical piece not only wiggles into their ear like a worm, but with the above criteria implemented, it also has a chance to speak to them so emotionally that they use it to as means to define who they are. If I find myself, days after having listened, humming, or singing a musical piece's main motif, hook, or chorus, that's a pretty good sign, and it tells me there's a much higher chance that the musical piece will stand the test of time. Beethoven's 5th symphony and the Beatles "Hey Jude" are perfect examples of this, in my opinion.
8. Does the musical piece have a structure and form leading up to a climax? In other words, does it have "a beginning, middle, and an end?" Structure is vital in my opinion, but structure comes in different forms and is harder to define at times, which is why it's last on my list. John Cage's composition *Music of Changes* might challenge current popular definitions and expectations of aesthetics and musical structure/form. His structure is found and defined within the abstract and as an exponent of the "Happy Accident." Could one argue that his work is not aesthetically pleasing?

My personal definition of what it means to be an Artist stems not only from my own personal journey as an Artist but a deep research into the philosophy of art and the creators of art as well. Allow me to approach this philosophy from behind. I believe, in a sense, that all humans are artists. Every one of us can be, and is, creative, even if we don't realize that we are. To what extent each of us engages in what we each personally define as creative endeavors, is more of the defining factor of who Artists are rather than the act of creating the art itself. I believe that every Person has a narrative and is an editor and writer of their own narrative, some on a more subconscious level than others. But each one of us has a narrative that changes and grows throughout life; this very life, forces us to become editors as we strive to seek understanding and meaning of the role we play in our own narrative. An older person can write or talk or think about what it means to them to be an old person and deal with life crisis, as can a young person dealing with teen crisis in high-school, an autistic person, an orphan, a 16-year-old girl preparing for a quinceañera, or a disabled or health burdened individual striving to find a job or simply survive.

If anyone so chose, and many do after big, life changing experiences or events, they could write a book, or a song, or make a movie about their personal narrative thus changing or expanding upon current societal viewpoints, potentially throughout the entire world. But at the very least, we as humans celebrate and commemorate the life changing events we want to remember and enjoy remembering, such as birthdays and anniversaries forming them into creative narratives, often told, and retold, amongst our closest of friends and families. These are artists, I spell out as such with a lower-case “a”; even the very same individuals that make up humanity as a whole

We can then begin to understand more in depth those who we would consciously and decisively call Artists. These Artists are Artists in a stronger sense, which is why I’ve capitalized them, in that they have gotten very good at crafting their own personal narrative for others to easily consume and understand. They have made it their life passion and living to write about their narratives and the way they see and interact with the world through their own lens. Those who don’t so decisively consider themselves artists, that we will define herein as the rest of the world, benefit drastically from the perspective that these Artists give because it feeds into the rest of the world’s own narrative as a whole as well as on an individualistic level, either subconscious or not.

Thus, we can see how art is vital to humanity and shapes humanity and the societies in which we belong. Being this decisive kind of Artist is a courageous and bold act because these kinds of Artists lay everything on the line as they tap their own personal feelings, emotions, and identity on behalf of those who listen, or read, or watch. Artists in this sense I view as extraordinary people, often rising to much fame and fortune, gaining a devoted, often cult-like, following on behalf of their viewpoint and narrative. They are the eyes and ears of everyone of today and of the past. They are the philosophers of their own narrative and the narrative of the lives of those around them and the world in which they live.

To this day I view it is as my passion and devotion to collaborate with such Artists. I see it as my duty and responsibility to remain an intermediary between them and their intended audience and always put myself in a position to provide an objective ear. I collaborate with my Artists to get the best out of their art for the sake humanity as well as for their success as a professional entrepreneur. To understand my Artists, is to understand the person within that artist and vice versa. Who they are as people is intrinsic to their art. Every day when I step foot into my studio, a light switch flips on within my soul and I become centered on creating music that stands the test of time and helping Artists speak to the world. I always ensure I work from our artists’ most successful best work! It’s my reason for existence, and my purpose to give fuller meaning and understanding to other’s existence. This is why I say “music, and all art, is in my roots.”

Works Cited:

¹ Willis, Mickie. “What Makes Music Good”, from the *Unconservatory*. January 26, 2006. Paragraph 4 subsection 2.

² Willis, Mickie. “What Makes Music Good”, from the *Unconservatory*. January 26, 2006. Paragraph 4 subsection 6.

³Brooks, Garth. “I’ve got Friends in Low Places”. *No Fences*. Producer Allen Reynolds. (Capitol Records/1990).

⁴Vivaldi, Antonio. “Spring Birds”. *The Four Seasons*. Published 1725, Amsterdam.