

Friday, June 30, 2006

III Fashion
She's a soccer fan
in the stands, 3E



By Joerg Koch, AFP/Getty Images

Weekend



ROCK KNOCKS IRAQ

As the war continues, artists sing out in protest, but no song has conquered the airwaves

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USA TODAY

Cover story

Anti-war songs are on the march. Artists of all stripes are rallying for a cause that many regarded as career kryptonite three years ago, when a patriotic fervor favored flag-waving anthems and punished naysayers.

As public frustration with the war mounted, so did the decibel level of music targeting the president and his policies. Last fall, the Rolling Stones dubbed Dubya a hypocrite on controversial *Sweet Neo-Con*, and

System of a Down raged against "pathetic flag-waving ignorant geeks" on its *Hypnotize* album.

Today, the mood and the marketplace are accommodating *Let's Impeach the President*, one of the most vitriolic titles on Neil Young's *Living with War* album. It was delivered because the veteran felt that younger stars weren't speaking up.

In fact, armies of musicians are churning out anti-war songs. Arriving Tuesday is *The Diaries of Private Henry Hill* by New York band Blow

Up Hollywood, which mined a dead soldier's journals for its searing anti-war concept album. Experimental art-rock trio TV on the Radio bashes Bush in *Dry Drunk Emperor*. Rising British singer Nerina Pallot dreads news of a soldier's death in *Everybody's Gone to War*.

James Blunt, Ben Harper, Merle Haggard and other brand-name artists are singing out as well. Just hitting airwaves is John Mayer's *Waiting*.

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Anti-war tunes are getting a hearing

Continued from 1E

ing on the *World to Change*, from his upcoming *Continuum* album. He ponders, "If we had the power to bring our neighbors home from war/They would have never missed a Christmas, no more ribbons on their doors."

The Pet Shop Boys' new I'm with Stupid scripts a valentine from Tony Blair to Bush. Responding to Bush's foreign policy, the Flaming Lips below in *Haven't Got a Clue*, "Every time you state your case, the more I want to punch your face." Todd Snider knocks Bush without naming him in wry waltz *You Got Away With It* (*A Tale of Two Fraternity Brothers*). And Billy Bragg has been singing *Bush War Blues*, an anti-war variation on Leadbelly's *Bourgeois Blues*, on his *Hope Not Hate* tour.

More are in the pipeline. On its *Games Theory* album—due Aug. 29, The Roots examine war on *False Media* and the government's domestic spying on *New World*. The title track of pop choir Polyphonic Spree's upcoming album, *The Fragile Army*, attacks Bush.

In a literal throwback to the Vietnam era, P.F. Sloan's *Sailor*, due Aug. 22, includes a freshly recorded *Eve of Destruction*. Sloan wrote the anti-war classic, a No. 1 hit for Barry McGuire in 1965.

Also reactivated from that year is Pete Seeger's *Bring Them Home*, Bruce Springsteen's apparent response to Bush's refrain, "Bring 'em on." The Boss is playing the anti-war tune on tour with his Seeger Sessions Band, along with the old Irish ballad *Mrs. McGrath*, which seethes, "All foreign wars, I do proclaim, live on blood and a mother's pain."

The crop ends a thaw imposed by a chill that settled over music after 9/11, when Clear Channel advised its 1,200 radio stations to suspend 150 "questionable" songs, from Black Sabbath's *Suicide Solution* to John Lennon's *Imagine*. The Dixie Chicks were tarred after Natalie Maines knocked Bush. And Madonna took a pounding for her anti-war *American Life* video. Country radio blared such patriotic fare as Darryl Worley's *Have You Forgotten?* and Toby Keith's *Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue*.

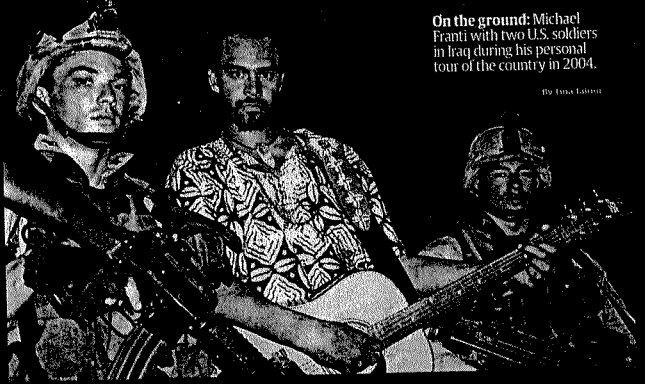
Music's conservative front is lying low as sentiments shift. The last support-the-war tune with significant reach was 2004's *The Bumper of My SUV* by country singer Chely Wright (and it's more of a support-the-troops song).

Though the '60s generated popular and commercial protest songs by Bob Dylan, Creedence Clearwater Revival and Pete Seeger, few modern examples are chart standouts, says Sean Ross, vice president of music and programming at Edison Media Research.

"It's not that nobody's stepped up, it's that nobody made the hit record that's also the definitive statement," Ross says.


Since the Iraq invasion, only Green Day has racked up an anti-war blockbuster, selling 5.5 million

Two artists who visited Iraq brought back different perspectives



On the ground: Michael Franti with two U.S. soldiers in Iraq during his personal tour of the country in 2004.

By Nina Lohman



*Three piece suits and bank accounts in Bahamas
Wall street crime will never send you to the slammer
Tell all the children in the arms of their mommas
The F-15 is a homicide bomber . . .
Girls and boys hear the bass and treble
Rumble in the speakers and it make you want to rebel
Throw your hands up, take it to another level
And you can never, ever, ever make a deal with the devil*

— Yell Fire!, Michael Franti

*I've got a bright red sticker on the back of my car
Says: "United States Marines"
And yesterday a lady in a mini-van
Held up her middle finger at me
Does she think she knows what I stand for,
Or the things that I believe?
Just by looking at a sticker for the U.S. Marines,
On the bumper of my SUV*

— Bumper of My SUV, Chely Wright

Source: Wright and Bumper by Andy Huxley, USA

incubus' *Megalomaniac* ("You're no Jesus/You're not Elvis/You're no answer") in 2004, and top 40 played the Black Eyed Peas' *Where Is the Love* ("A war is going on but the reason's undercover") in 2003. Pearl Jam saw its stinging *Bushleaguer* go ignored four years ago only to find current *World Wide Suicide* reach No. 1 on the modern-rock chart.

Preaching to the choir

An uptick in lefty tunes doesn't mean the country is on the brink of peace. Political songs preach to the converted, says rocker-turned-talker Johnny Wendell, a former punk musician and now a weekend host on progressive talk station KTLK-AM 1150 in Los Angeles.

"They're a barometer of how people feel," he says. "And when Bush ordered the Iraq invasion, the prevailing feeling among rockers was futility, he says. Artists held back 'not just because it was a bad career move, but because it wouldn't get any attention to buck the tide. The tide turned when it was obvious the mission wasn't accomplished, reasons proffered for war were proven false and casualties started mounting. It isn't that it became safe (to speak out), but the general mood in the country changed."

Even if anti-war sentiment

swells, Wendell doubts that one song will captivate the masses.

"One enormous difference between the '60s and now is how the market is split into a million pieces," he says. "I don't think a single piece of protest music can galvanize the public the way *Like a Rolling Stone* did."

And while he's glad to hear agit-prop noise, punkers and rappers don't get points for taking risks. "Neil Young isn't breaking ground," he says. "You expect it from Propagandhi. But the Dixie Chicks? That's a revolution. Natalie Maines took an anti-war stance in the run-up to this atrocity, and it cost her big time."

Pearl Jam bassist Jeff Ament believes post-9/11's air of McCarthyism stifled rock's rebellious nature.

"The country was going to hell and nobody was saying anything, Ament says. "There is some solidarity out there now."

Justin Sane of Anti-Flag says his snarling anti-war invective on *Blood and Empire* is "speaking truth to power" and results from a strong belief in democracy, the Constitution and the duty to identify and confront injustice.

Airplay for Anti-Flag's *The Press Corpse*, a modern-rock hit, "would have surprised me two years ago," Sane says, "but as more body bags come home and as people decide

Bush is not telling the truth, I'm not surprised. People who supported the invasion three years ago are feeling frustrated."

Anti-Flag felt pressure to retreat after 9/11, when "there was a litany of insults, people told us to shut up, change our name," Sane says. "Fear has been the best ally of this regime. So very few artists put their necks on the line after the right-wing talk-show network made an example of the Dixie Chicks. I feel honored to be part of a group that was unwilling to be bullied."

The band, which registered 10,000 voters during the 2004 Warped tour, pushes its message on and off stage. Its recently launched Military Free Zone helps high school students opt out of government-imposed recruitment drives permitted under the No Child Left Behind Act.

What does this have to do with music? Everything, Sane says.

"I got involved in activism after listening to bands like The Clash," he says. "Kids at our shows say they never cared about issues until they heard our band. Music can be an effective tool in the political arena."

Political music helped shape his world view, and Sane is certain the band's songs have swayed fans, including soldiers. Iraq is a high priority, largely because he feels inexpressible youth are victimized.

"It's simple logic for me," he says. "If this war was not about WMD, then what was it about? Follow the money, and you'll see war profiteering like never before. I can't see young kids fighting for the benefit of a few very powerful individuals."

Longtime musician/activist Michael Franti says he also felt the sea change of 9/11, "when the whole nation had the wind knocked out of it, and a few in the government used this fear and pain to give us an ultimatum: 'You're either with us or with the terrorists. I thought, 'Can't there be some where in between those vast polar opposites before we go marching off to war?' Those who tried to say that were pounded down like a nail."

Katrina changes climate

The anxiety plaguing artists began abating "after Katrina," Franti says. "It lifted the wool off of the wolf. People said, 'Wait, why are they literally starving in New Orleans when all the helicopters and resources are in Iraq?' I don't think it's the responsibility of any artist to make political art. The responsibility is to make great art, and to find some truth. If you look at the truth today, you can't be quiet."

Two years ago, Franti went to Iraq, Israel and the Palestinian territories with a guitar and a video

camera, a trip captured in a documentary, *I Know I'm Not Alone*, and *Yell Fire!*, an album of politically charged reggae, rock, rap and soul, both due July 25.

The music is pointedly anti-war "but also lets people know they're not alone," Franti says. "When I went to Iraq, I thought I'd come back with a whole notebook of stop-the-war protest songs, but what I found from every person I met over there was that they wanted to hear songs that got them dancing or tender songs about a person they loved."

Franti doesn't expect his songs to bring home the troops.

"I don't know if music can change the world overnight," he says, "but I know it can help us make it through a difficult night, and sometimes that's what we need to keep up the tenacity to make large shifts happen."

"Any good anti-war song has to be a good song first," says Paul Simon, whose mournful *Wartime Prayers* steers clear of headlines.

"The songs that last have to do with some universal theme," he says. "Those are always compassion, love, loss, sorrow, deep things that occur in the course of a lifetime. Really topical songs have their moment in time in proximity to the event, but after a while, as the event recedes, so do those songs."