

MILITARY MUSIC MASKS MURDER

THE PUBLIC RELATIONS MACHINE

Can we view this evening's entertainment as "just another concert?" By doing so we overlook the function of the Air Force Band as part of the more than \$47 million public relations campaign waged each year by the Pentagon.¹ Over 2800 people are assigned the job of selling the public on the armed forces, their weapons, and their foreign policy objectives.² This campaign includes the scheduling of "cultural programs" ranging from jet displays and parachute jumpers to marching bands and color guards for fairs and other public events.

JUST MUSIC?

The Department of Defense is well aware of the growing unhappiness of the American people over the size and expense of the armed forces and their actions throughout the world. Military bands and jet displays help to obscure and mystify the role of the Air Force. They teach us that militarism is good for us. They subtly persuade us of the "special importance" of the Air Force in society, and the need for them to use more and more of the country's resources. They serve to instill a sense of awe, wonder, and pride at the technological capabilities of the military. And it is just this sort of emotional response that prevents us of facing the consequences of that technology.

THE LARGER PICTURE

What role has the military played? We need look no further than Vietnam. The war the American government waged there was a highly sophisticated application of military technology and expertise on an agrarian peasant society. For the Vietnamese people, the Air Force was not an air show at the state fair or an evening of classical music. It was instead an onslaught of destructive firepower beyond the comprehension of those of us in this hall.

THE SALE

Military public relations is a vitally important aspect of the legitimization of the military at home and abroad. In addition to staging "cultural events," the DOD spreads its propaganda through a vast media network. The Office of Information for the Armed Forces spends \$12 million a year to operate 350 radio and TV stations throughout the world. Yearly, they produce about 50 films, print 8.5 million copies of 70-odd publications, and distribute 400,000 copies of posters. They also provide articles and photos for some 1500 newspapers run by the military.³

THE PRODUCTS

One of the recent targets of the DOD sales effort has been the proposed B-1 bomber, a \$92 billion weapons system which will cost more than \$400 per person in the U.S. It has already been costing \$87 million per month, but final Congressional approval has yet to be granted.⁴ Weapons systems such as these bring huge profits to war corporations and their owners. But they mean death and destruction to the people of the world, and the diversion of resources from desperately needed social services in this country.

FREEDOM OR RESPONSIBILITY

Some people tonight may feel that we are interfering with the Air Force Band's right to play music, or their freedom to listen. This is not our intention— we are simply raising the larger issues which we don't believe can be divorced from music by the military. Freedom in America is often interpreted as the freedom to deny our responsibility to our community, or to ignore the consequences of our actions. IS THIS REALLY FREEDOM?

FOOTNOTES: #1 and #3: Senator William Proxmire, Report from Wasteland, 1970, pp.20-21.

#2: Senator J.W.Fulbright, The Pentagon Propaganda Machine, 1970, p.25.

#4: American Friends Service Committee, Seattle.

Thoughts on an Air Force Band Appearance

Tonite, we have the pleasure of seeing
how far the depravity of morality
has progressed in this country.

We are able to witness
talented musicians, artists,
who have often been known for
their conscience, play for the United States Air Force.

These musicians don't look on what they do as wrong.
Rather they see it as pursuing their interest,
their love of music.

In the process, they are able to possess the souls of people,
sweeping them off of their feet and captivating
emotions in the surge of feeling that comes
from the first notes of their instruments.

Culmination comes in a final stirring crescendo.

The crowd is theirs--enraptured, encaptured, clay in their hands--
It seems a long ways (in fact no one even thought about it)
from the bombers flying low in the early morning lite
as they swoop in to unload their fiery death
on the awakening village.

She never did know what hit her.

The morning dawning rosy in the east--
suddenly shattered by deafening roar, blinding lite--
she never knew what hit her.

And the audience, lost amidst the sweet strains of
mindless melody,
didn't even know her name.
And didn't care.

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