

Earbuds: surrounded by music, far from our friends

Here comes that guy I met at the Olds last Friday. Oh no! He's waving. I don't really feel like talking to him ... iPhone out. Earbuds in. Head down. No conversation.



BY GABE POLLAK
STAFF WRITER

As this familiar Guilford scene suggests, listening to music has become an increasingly isolated experience.

While gaining instant access to our favorite tunes, we lose out on the conversations and experiences that instill the sounds themselves with great depth.

Let's dig deeper.

First, removing ourselves from conversations about music, we often do not understand a song's context.

Take Notorious B.I.G.'s diss track "Kick in the Door."

Before entering the ring with a combative first verse, Biggie dedicated this fight song ambiguously.

"This goes out to you and you and you," rattles off Biggie.

It's clearly a song for someone, but we don't know who. Unless that is, we talk about the conversation going on in the song.

"I had no idea that song was about (legendary hip-hop lyricist) Nas until I listened to it with some friends," said sophomore Timmy Barrows. "It made so much more sense."

It's like the difference between reading a book alone or in class.

Oh! So, when Melville wrote about the whale, he was really talking about fate?

Oh! So, when Biggie said, "Your reign on top was short like leprechauns," he was really talking about Nas' early

commercial failures?

To facilitate these music-listening epiphanies — where, like a lock's pins all clicking into place, we finally understand and appreciate the music more — we need to talk to each other.

Another tasty layer within the cake of music listening is social. The power of music is also associative.

You don't just love a song because of the sound itself; you love it because of the memories you attach to that sound.

Think about this year's summer jam, "Get Lucky," by Daft Punk. You love it for its disco groove, but also because it reminds you of driving fast late on a summer night, all your friends singing along.

Listen alone and you leave behind more than your friends — you give up music's inherent social meaning.

Already sacrificing musical depth through both a loss of conversation and shared experience, we must ask ourselves: how much more are we willing to give up?

Will we settle for ring tone-quality sound bites when we could have surround-sound experiences?

And still, this issue of isolated music listening dives even further down, resonating deeper than the bassiest subwoofer.

Changes in how we listen to music correlate with changes in human nature.

Here's the comparison.

Often, when we listen to music with other people, we actively seek to understand other peoples' perceptions of the music.

"I jump back and forth between understanding the music from my perspective and trying to imagine how other people are hearing it," said Raina Martens, junior and teaching assistant for the Art, Noise and Sound First Year Experience.

This practice — attempting to understand other's

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viewpoints — is the root of empathy.

When listening to music alone, however, we leave this awareness behind.

Is it any surprise, then, that college students are becoming less empathetic?

According to a recent study by the University of Michigan, college students are 48 percent less empathetic than they were in the 1979, with 61 percent of that 48 percent drop suffered in the last 10 years — the same 10 years in which iPods have flooded the market.

"We need to pay attention to how technology affects us and maybe anticipate better the consequences," said Dana Professor of Psychology Richie Zweigenhaft.

When we plug in, we are also plugging out, denying the possibility for conversation, shared experience, and perspective sharing.

We limit more than our relationships to the music: we limit our relationships to each other.

"Who knows what we might miss?" said Martens.

Racist comments towards Miss America pageant-winner illustrate ignorance

Terrorist. Un-American. Miss 7-11. Miss al-Qaeda.

This was the reaction to the crowning of Miss America 2014 Nina Davuluri.



BY SHELBY SMITH
STAFF WRITER

The pageant took place Sunday, Sept. 15 in Atlantic City, N.J., where the pageant was first born in 1921.

As I watched the pageant, I couldn't help but be impressed by Davuluri's poise, talent and ability to speak so eloquently about every topic that was given to her. Even though I was rooting for two close friends who were vying for the title, I couldn't

help but be excited to see someone of her character win.

Not all of America shared my enthusiasm. Twitter was bombarded with racist tweets about Davuluri.

"And the Arab wins Miss America. Classic," wrote @Granvil_Colt.

@EJRBuckeye said, "Well they just picked a Muslim for Miss America. That must've made Obama happy. Maybe he had a vote."

Here's my personal favorite, from @JAYres15: "I swear I'm not racist but this is America."

This level of racism is not new within the pageant industry.

"I had a contestant tell me there was no way that Miss Virginia (a state preliminary to the Miss America pageant) would crown a black girl two years in a row," said Hester Fletcher, director of the Miss Virginia

Dogwood Pageant, in an interview with The Guilfordian. "It's sad."

Having a Caucasian military member as a contestant also fueled the fire.

"I saw tweets about how Miss Kansas is the 'real Miss America,'" said Asian pageant contestant Laetitia Hua to The Guilfordian. "On one side you have the Caucasian blond who can shoot a gun. Then you have a woman of Indian descent who graduated from med school."

"People's anger stems from the fact that the woman who seemed 'more American' in terms of stereotypes didn't win."

Yet no contestant is "more American" than the other. According to the rules, every contestant must be a citizen of the United States, making them all American.

But this is more than an issue of citizenship. This is about perceptions of what is culturally American.

"I experience racism on a monthly, sometimes weekly basis because I look Asian," said Hua. "Even in the states, where I have been living for over ten years, many people see me and ask, 'Where are you from?' But I'm an American."

We live in a country culturally dominated by Caucasian traditions. Anyone who is not of European or mostly Caucasian descent must place a label in front of her or his American status like "Asian," "African," "Indian" or others.

Also, we can't seem to accept that a woman who was born in Syracuse, N.Y., raised in the United States, attended the University of Michigan to become a doctor and espoused a platform of "celebrating diversity through cultural competency" could truly be American because they don't look white enough — and

therefore, not American enough.

However, our new Miss America has not been quiet about this issue.

"I have always viewed Miss America as the girl next door, and the girl next door is evolving as the diversity in America evolves," Davuluri said during the Miss America finals.

Indeed, despite traditional racism, Miss America has evolved along with the "girl next door" image. Past winners include African Americans, Asian Americans and Native Americans — Norma Smallwood, a Cherokee, took the crown in 1926. 2014 marks the first Indian American and the second Asian American to win.

"Race is not a factor when I judge," said pageant judge Penny Smith to The Guilfordian. "The fact is, Nina was extremely consistent across all the categories. She had enthusiasm and passion for the organization."

Though disturbed, racial minority

contestants are not discouraged from pageantry.

"I know that as long as I work hard and persevere past my obstacles, everything will fall into place," said Miss America contestant Chrissy Ching to The Guilfordian. "Is there a chance I may encounter people similar to the infamous 'tweeters?' Maybe. However, as long as I am the best 'me,' that's all I can control."

I'm not discouraged, either. As a queer, non-Christian pageant girl, I'm inspired to see someone like Davuluri win what is known as the "Super Bowl of Pageants." It lets me know that someone like me could be in such a position one day.

In the meantime, we can learn from Davuluri. As a society, we must take control of our thoughts and words to realize there is no one definition of what a Miss America — or any American — should look like.

Savannah Dale @savannah_dale97 [Follow](#)
Miss New York is an Indian.. With all do respect, this is America

Kaleb Trahan @kalebistocute [Follow](#)
Man our president nor our new Miss America isn't even American I'm sorry but Miss Kansas I salute you your the real American #MissAmerica

De La Rutherford @Blayne_MkttRain [Follow](#)
Congratulations Al-Qaeda. Our Miss America is one of you.