**Why Music, Part 8: The Messenger** by: Frank Fitzpatrick

**"One good meal can feed a man for a day; one great song can impact a million souls for a lifetime."**

We all know that listening to a great piece of music or one of our favorite songs can immediately transform our energy and our state of mind. Hearing even a few bars of a familiar tune can trigger us to recall cherished memories, reopen unhealed wounds or even get up and dance. Music and sound vibration affect our brains, emotional states, senses of identity, nervous systems and the health and development of the very cells in our bodies.

How can we use music as a catalyst, however, for helping to influence large groups of people, even entire cultures, in a way that can bring the world into greater balance? Like many, I see music as an essential component for the conscious awakening of the human race and the well-being of our planet. Music can help us as individuals to better cope with these external challenges and inspire us as a global community to come together in a more harmonious fashion.

I remember the first time I went to Brazil roughly 10 years ago. I was invited to speak at a film festival in Belo Horizonte and introduce my latest short film, [*Jungle Jazz*](http://frankfitzpatrick.com/junglejazz.html). I was also on a personal mission at that time to better understand what lies at the root of music's ability to affect us so deeply. I was enamored with Brazil and its rich musical culture. The ideas of Brazil and music were so intertwined in my mind, I would tell my friends back home that Brazilians had music running through their veins. Even the government respected music's role in society enough to make Minister of Culture a key cabinet position, and to bestow the honorable throne to Gilbert Gil, one of Brazil's most respected artists.

I committed some extra time on that trip to travel around Brazil and meet with several professionals using music as a modality to heal, inspire and improve the lives of others. It was a fascinating journey. I met composers who had developed methods they believed would heal ailments in the human body. I spent time with a choir director who used a particular musical tonal system to guide his singers toward spiritual enlightenment. I met amazing musicians and artists using their talents in an attempt to make a difference in society. Before long, I realized that the different applications of music for the good of others were far more vast and varied than I had ever imagined.

In Salvador, Bahia, I spent an afternoon in the home of a radiant being and powerful healer name Babalu. He was not a musician at all; he was a painter. He had one of the most amazing energies I had ever experienced. Just to be in his presence was transformative. We discussed in depth the use of art and music to heal and positively impact the world. Babalu insisted that music had the greatest potential to impact humanity on a massive scale because, unlike a physical painting or work of art, a piece of music could be shared with an unlimited number people and be carried forward in their hearts and minds.

This resonated with me. I realized what intrigued me most in my explorations was music's ability to deeply affect human beings on a social and cultural level, large-scale. I was fascinated by the idea that an artist, or group of artists, could shift the perceptions of, give voice to and provide hope and inspiration to entire nations, and beyond.

Milton Nascimento is a living legend who has inspired generations with his signature voice and genre-defying style. He is also an amazing human being who cares deeply about creating a positive influence through his music and presence on the planet. I shared my interests with Milton and asked if he would be part of a film I was trying to put together on the healing and influential power of music. He agreed, but it was his reason that really stuck with me. Despite the countless interviews throughout his career, Milton said that he was rarely asked about his deeper heart's desire to positively impact humanity, or his deeper beliefs around how we can do that. I found this surprising. Here was this amazing master -- full of experience, immeasurable creative light, and invaluable insights into the nature of the human spirit -- someone who was clearly affecting the hearts and lives of millions, yet we were not reaching beyond his music to embrace this knowledge, share it with future generations or welcome it as an invaluable component in the shaping of society.

When I envision certain [artists who have shifted entire cultures](http://earthtones.org/featured-artist/), or have had positive global impact on humankind through their intentions and their music, I don't see them in the framework of performers or entertainers. I see them as messengers, musical ambassadors or, at the highest level, as musical prophets. At certain times in history, their voices ring out to help wake us up, bring us back to our senses and, hopefully, back into balance as more compassionate people. At other times, and to those most in need, they are a voice of strength, dignity, and inspiration.

What would Jamaican culture, if not the world, be like today without the musical messages and vibration-shifting voice of Bob Marley? Can you imagine the civil rights movement of the '60s without the soundtrack of Curtis Mayfield, or the cries to end the unjust war in Vietnam without the accompaniment of Bob Dylan? Would Brazil be the same country today without the sanity of Caetano Veloso or Gilberto Gil to light a torch during the dark repressive years of the dictatorship there?

The '60s and '70s, a time of social uprising around the world, resounded from the calls of these and many other notable messengers. They sang to and on behalf of millions of people, giving voice against the unspeakable and inspiring huge followings to carry their messages far into the future. Just like a sermon is silent without the speaker, the power of music to create a positive shift in the consciousness of mankind lies dormant without the messenger. I believe it is critically important for us to recognize and embrace these artists -- these musical prophets -- for their contributions beyond the entertainment value and popularity of their music. They represent some of the world's great thought leaders and often have the potential to reach the ears, shift the minds, and open the hearts of more people than our top political and religious figures. Their followings and influences are, in most cases, timeless and beyond race, class, religion and physical borders.

I have had the honor and blessing of meeting, learning from, and working with musical legends throughout my career, including some of the great musical messengers of the '60s and '70s. I believe it is essential to pass along the knowledge and insights of these great voices and minds to future generations and to cultivate and support the new messengers, so they can tap into these powerful forces of transformation as the world starts to spin out of control.

Fortunately, in today's highly unstable times, there is a whole new generation of messengers around the globe using music, as their weapon, to fight for justice and song, as their torch, to guide us toward the light of a more humane world. As much as I am shaped by and indebted to the elder statesmen and women of music that have paved the way, I am inspired by these new messengers like [K'Naan](http://earthtones.org/portfolio/knaan/) from Somalia,  [MV Bill](http://earthtones.org/portfolio/mv-bill/)from Brazil, [Les Nubians](http://earthtones.org/portfolio/les-nubians/) from France, [Idan Raichel](http://earthtones.org/portfolio/idan-raichel/) from Israel, [Ziggy Marley](http://earthtones.org/portfolio/ziggy-marley/), and the countless others struggling to keep the "human" in "humanity," channeling their intentions, talents and music to keep the world from spinning off its axis. God bless the messengers.