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The Icing on the Cake

Danielle Iden
NSU University School

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The Icing on the Cake

Daniel Iden

The appeal of popular music to Americans is undeniable. We have to wonder why, though devoid of much sincere artistic inspiration, it still has the largest following of any other form of music. Why do we turn to the pulsating beat of America's pop? How can we choose to ignore the icing of melody and harmony on top of the musical cake? These ingredients transform the sugar and batter into a "Happy Birthday"! All too often, art imitates life. All too often, our modern American society leans to the side of higher potency and lower quality.

Our society as a whole does not have the capacity to appreciate the smaller nuances of life. What we want is to have what we want, when we want it, and sacrifices in quality and craftsmanship obviously come secondary to the size of both the product and the discount. This can be easily seen in any facet of our world, but no example is as blatant as in our loss of respect for detail in music. What makes popular music popular? It quite accurately represents the American dream. We can be bombarded with the greatest decibels in the shortest period of time to make it impossible for us to have missed "the point." In America, if we cannot rise to art, the art will be degraded to a common level. An electronic bass drum pounding out the most basic of rhythms gives an inexperienced listener a feeling of interpretive superiority: he can "feel" the music. The unfortunate miscalculation

lies in the fact that music becomes music worth listening to with unpredictability, not with an obvious progression. This is the appeal of baroque, classical, and romantic music. Even in jazz, the listener can enjoy pleasant surprises with interesting and complex harmonies. But this is America. We have to be concrete about everything. And as long as there are higher volume thresholds to be shattered and brisker tempos to be attained, popular music will continue to appeal to those who want access to music without controversy, music that tells them what and how to feel, music without the fluff. Thank you, but I prefer my cake with icing.