

PERSPECTIVES IN MUSIC AND ART

Imagine for a moment a man who is out of touch with reality and misunderstands the world around him. Now contrast him to someone who correctly understands both himself and the world he lives in. Will the behavior of these two men be similar? Of course not! They will each act according to their perspective of reality. Imagine further, that these two men are artists or musicians. When they compose a symphony or paint a scene, will they do so in a similar manner? No! Just as they behave in accordance with their worldview, so they will also paint or compose in accordance with their worldview. A man's painting or composition will clearly display his perspective of reality.

Johann Sebastian Bach is perhaps the perfect example of a musician whose perspective on life shined in his compositions. Coming from a distinct Christian background, Bach's primary goal in composing music was to bring glory to God. Because of his Christian perspective, Bach's music had a distinct feel that his audiences picked up on. Helmut Walcha, a German organist, said of Bach and his music, "After experiencing him [Bach], people feel there is meaning to life after all." How could Bach convey such an idea as there being "meaning to life" through his music? The answer is simple – because Bach believed so himself. Bach's perspective on reality gave him confidence in the fact that his life would be resolved after his death. This resolution had a strong presence in Bach's music. Though at times his compositions seemed to wander, they always resolved in the end.

John Cage is another prime example of a musician whose views were very apparent in his music. Cage believed that the universe was entirely random with no meaning behind it. As a result, he composed his music in the way he believed the universe operated – in a random fashion. He sometimes allowed a robot to direct his orchestra with chance motions; other times he ordered two conductors, separated by a curtain, to direct the same orchestra. Needless to say, the resolution in Bach's music that had conveyed meaning was entirely absent in Cage's music. His random methods of conducting music resulted in mayhem, effectively communicating his perspective of reality.

Francis Schaeffer once said, "In great art, the technique fits the worldview being presented." This is most certainly the case with Rembrandt Harmenszoon van Rijn. Rembrandt was a man with a biblical perspective on life that impacted his artwork significantly. His painting *The Raising of the Cross* portrayed his beliefs in a most unmistakable manner. Here Rembrandt painted himself raising Christ's cross, declaring that it was his own sin and wickedness for which Christ paid the penalty. Rembrandt's perspective influenced his art in more subtle ways as well. For example, in his paintings, Rembrandt portrayed nature in its proper place, neither exalting it beyond measure, nor overlooking its value and significance all together. In addition, Rembrandt ardently sought to portray mankind in his full and true nature, maintaining man's greatness as created in God's image, while also depicting man's fallen nature and moral depravity.

Rembrandt's art stands in stark contrast with that of the modern Pablo Picasso. Breaking with all forms of humanistic art, Picasso took a step in the opposite direction.

When he looked at the world, he saw no glimmer of or reason for hope in life. He saw the world, and mankind in particular, as fragmented, and he effectively communicated this perspective onto the canvas. In describing Picasso's paintings, Schaeffer said that the "humanity [of the subjects] had been lost." In many of Picasso's paintings, there is indeed no resemblance of a real human being left; in its place is a subtle sense of despair.

As Schaeffer wisely said, "A man's worldview almost always shows through in his creative output..." The perspective of an artist or musician affects more than just the way he lives; it profoundly impacts the way he paints or composes, as can be seen by the lives and work of the men above. Each man had a distinct perspective on reality – a perspective that was clearly manifested in his work.