



Political Musical Satire

with David Misch

When we think of political songs we think of “We Shall Overcome,” maybe “Union Maid,” “Where Have All The Flowers Gone.”

But not all protest songs are earnest – some are funny and satirical, brimming with sarcasm or irony or outrage. Some even hide their messages so that only those in the know, know it.

It’s a unique form of music, one that’s intentionally, ferociously unfair to the other side, always insisting it’s not a debate but an argument – one you win by attaching your insults to witty words and memorable melodies.

In this multimedia talk, David Misch (“Mork and Mindy,” “Saturday Night Live,” “The Muppets Take Manhattan,” “Funny: The Book”) looks at political musical satire from a wide range of artists who’ve taken on a wide range of subjects: Randy Newman’s “Sail Away” (slavery), Country Joe McDonald’s in-your-face “Feel Like I’m Fixing To Die Rag” (war), Tom Lehrer’s “National Brotherhood Week” and Stephen Sondheim’s “America” (racism), Yip (“Over The Rainbow”) Harburg’s “When The Idle Poor Become The Idle Rich” (income inequality), Mel Brooks’ “Springtime For Hitler” (Nazis), Nellie McKay’s “Won’t U Please B Nice” (feminism), Monty Python’s “Every Sperm Is Sacred” (birth control), Bo Burnham’s “Problematic” (cancel culture). And we learn about “secret satire,” where the message is coded and hidden, like the Village People’s “YMCA” (gay rights) and Chuck Berry’s “Brown-Eyed Handsome Man” (racism).

In hearing these songs, along with their stories and times, we get not only entertainment but an insight into why they exist; the timeless, primordial impulse of human beings to tell other human beings how wrong they are.

David Misch wrote and produced stage and screen comedy for more than 40 years; his credits include “Mork and Mindy,” “The Muppets Take Manhattan” and “Saturday Night Live.” He’s also an author, playwright, songwriter, recovered stand-up comic, and teacher (his own comedy courses at UCLA and USC), and has spoken at the Smithsonian Institution, Yale, Columbia, Grammy Museum, Sony Pictures, Oxford University, 92nd St. Y, Raindance Film Festival (London), VIEW Cinema Conference (Torino, Italy), University of Sydney and many others. Too much more at davidmisch.com.