

contact

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THE MUSICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF POP

A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

By Laurence Williamson (reprinted, with permission,
from "The Musical Significance of Pop")

The first thing I noticed when I read this article was the feeling that I had been hit by a brick. The author was so sure of himself, so certain of his own superiority, that he wrote in a way that was both arrogant and condescending. He seemed to be talking down to me, as if I were a child who had just discovered the existence of the world.

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

— Sir,

I always find great amusement in reading articles "intellectualizing" about popular music. Richard Middleton's "The Musical Significance of Pop" is a good example of this type. In this article Mr. Middleton talks of "basic cultural perspective", "basic world view" etc.; he does not talk about music in musical terms. Of course, I do appreciate his difficulty: popular music has no musical significance, it is bad, low quality music. Those who write articles on popular music are faced with a dilemma. Popular music is low quality music because in order to appeal to a mass audience it must lie at the lowest common denominator of the public intellect. Realising this, writers try to argue that popular music has some value, but being unable to talk in musical terms they then talk about anything but the music. Thus the articles that Mr. Middleton and others who write about popular music in your magazine contain nothing about the music itself. No end of "intellectualization" will ever elevate popular music, it is simply inferior music.

LAURENCE WILLIAMSON