

DEV 110 Sample Essay: Illustration

Mass-Produced Music



In the days of Mozart and Beethoven, or even in the days of Davy Crockett, music was a true art form; and when people were able to attend a concert on those rare occasions or listen to a guitar-strumming pioneer on an unusually quiet night in the settlement, they treated it as an artistic experience, or at least as enjoyable entertainment. Today, however, music has been transformed into a commodity, a product to be packed and sold. It is heard by millions of people daily and has invaded nearly all facets of human life--facets as diverse as baseball games, public media, and consumer spots.

A person can go few places and do few things without the accompaniment of music today. A baseball fan attending a game in any major league park in the country will find music thrust at him between innings, during warm-ups, and after pitching changes. As Johnny Bench strikes out to end the inning in Cincinnati, the Reds' fan must sit through the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive" before the Dodgers bat. In Cleveland, after the Indians have won the game, the fan exits to the sounds of "Happy Days Are Here Again." And what baseball fan has gone to a game without hearing, standing up to, and stretching to "Take Me Out to the Ball Game?" In Chicago, the fan doesn't have to wait for the end of the inning; the White Sox management plays a few bars of "theme" music before each batter.

There are other things besides baseball and sporting events which capitalize on packaged music. The public media, radio, and television, broadcast countless measures of music each day. Aside from a very few "all-news" stations, radio sells music as its chief commodity. Television series all have soundtrack music and theme music, and even the news programs have their theme music. The National Broadcasting Company, in fact, even has its own orchestra. Television and radio have certainly played a large role in forcing packaged music on millions of people.

The most pervasive type of canned music, though, is "Muzak," that warmed-over brand of music one hears in virtually every consumer spot--from offices to stores to restaurants--in America. Muzak sets the atmosphere, depending upon what atmosphere is desired. In the dentist's office, the Muzak is soft and calm and reassuring. At the S. S. Kresge Company, the Muzak displays a much more fast-paced, bustling mood for exotic food. No matter where one goes, the chances are good that Muzak will be there, too.

In former days, music was treated as something special. It was something to be cherished. Today, however, music is mass-produced by popular "artists" out to succeed in the money-making world of show business. It is warmed-over and redone to the least common denominator for mass distribution over the nation's Muzak systems. It plays a part in almost everyone's life, be it at a baseball stadium, in the family room, or in a restaurant. Perhaps someday, music will return to its former position as an elevated source of artistic enjoyment and entertainment. Until that day, though, music as an art will remain a fond memory.

Soap Operas



Soap operas have been broadcast for many years. Before television there were radio programs similar to the present-day soap operas. Although day-time serials have been on the air a long time, they are still very unrealistic. Three of the most unrealistic aspects of soap operas are the distorted presentation of time, the cosmetic appearance of the characters and their surroundings, and the concentrated misery of the characters.

By distorting the passing of time, soap operas insult their audience's intelligence. For instance, on *All My Children* little Carl Blair, on a Monday afternoon, was playing with a squeeze toy in his playpen. Then, three weeks later, as a four year old he was in the park throwing a football back and forth with a friend. Another example of distorted time took place on *Guiding Light*. Faith Baver, at the age of thirteen, left home to attend a girls' boarding school. She returned home two years later as an eighteen year old graduate. Although soap operas distort time, the rate of progress on the serials is still very slow.

Another unrealistic aspect of the daytime serials is the cosmetic appearance of the characters. For example, in *General Hospital*, Laura Baldwin was raped and hospitalized one evening after work. The next morning when she woke up, her hair appeared freshly groomed and her make-up was perfectly applied. Not only does the lack of realism appear in the characters' cosmetic appearance, but it also appears in their immaculate surroundings. For instance, on *One Life To Live* Samantha Vernon moved into a new apartment without any of the normal disorder and chaos that goes along with moving day. In two days' time, Samantha's apartment was neatly arranged with everything in place. Even her walls were decorated with pictures and wall vases. Although Samantha worked at her job full time during the two moving days, her apartment was picturesque.

Although everyone has to endure some misery, the characters on the daily soap operas endure an overabundance of misery; they have one misfortune after another. An example of this is Laura Baldwin of *General Hospital*. At the age of twelve, Laura discovered she was the illegitimate daughter of Dr. Leslie Weber and not the daughter of Barbara and Jason Vining, who had reared her since birth. Then, she ran away from home to Canada and lived in a commune with some other teenagers. Later, when she returned home, she had an affair with an older man which resulted in her accidentally killing him and being put on probation for a year. Within the same year she had an auto accident that nearly killed her. Later, after taking a job as a waitress at a disco, she was raped by her boss. Laura had endured all of these unpleasant misfortunes before reaching the age of eighteen.

Soap operas have improved a great deal since radio days, but they are still ridiculous and unrealistic. Nevertheless, these serials are loved and enjoyed by millions of viewers every day.