

Ska Music

Transcription by Evernote

High school. I have listened to ska music. I don't listen to it every day, but I do listen to it sometimes. I have found virtue in ska. I enjoy some of it.

Ska music has some characteristics which distinguish it from other musical genres and makes it a distinct genre. A big characteristic of ska is the prominence of horns [Common Knowledge]. In ska, horns are central [Common Knowledge]. It's all centered around the horns [Common Knowledge].

Other types of music, such as classical, may involve horns, but usually horns are not the center of it all. Jazz uses horns as well, but ska music seems to have a more easily discernible melody [Common Knowledge], plus ska music is lighter and perhaps more upbeat. Jazz can certainly be that way, but the two are very different.

Some compare ska to reggae. This is not a comparison I would think of finding, but some say it is the case. Again, a big difference between the two is that ska music has lots of horns and reggae does not.

Ska music has become popular. A lot of people like it. A lot of people have heard of it. Ska music is played on Top 40 Radio and MTV. You can buy ska albums in chain stores. Some of the bands even have become almost household names.

It is ironic in a way that ska is popular. When you think of cool, you typically don't think of horns. Remember in high school? The people who played horns in the band were generally not considered the coolest. Some even considered them dorks [hence the iconic "band dork" thing. Thus, perhaps ska is a way for band dorks to be cool. A lot of people listen to ska, so band dorks are having their day.

In high school, I became friends with this dude named Alan Saunders. He was reserved, introverted, and shy. He didn't open up to a lot of people, but I did become friends with him. He was probably the most passionate fan of ska I have ever met. He did not like the popularity of ska. He viewed it as a

bastardization of true, pure ska. Just as people view the commercialization of other forms of music.

Alan listened to just about exclusively ska music. However, I was able to broaden his horizons some. We exchanged CDs in a CD swap to listen [the idea of CD swaps I got from the editor of this *QRST Monkeys Zine* as I recall]. I gave him Dead Kennedys and Bad Religion. He gave me a couple of Ska CDs.

It was good he listened to the Dead Kennedys and Bad Religion. He [said, "He] did not like it, but he said it was better than he thought it was."

One time in College Algebra class, two of the popular girls were talking about Ska. One of them said, "The Mighty Mighty Bosstones started Ska." This caused Allen Saunders to cringe. Being the big fan of Ska he was, he knew this was not the case. Afterward, he told me, "He wanted to break his pencil." He did not like Ska becoming popular because he was so elitist about it. He didn't want people getting in on his turf.

I once told him about a poem I wrote about Ska. He said, "How could I write a poem about Ska when I know nothing about it?" Later on, his elitism became too much to bear.

One time, he and I were hanging out with a mutual friend of ours, Aaron. Aaron was a very musical person. He loved to talk about and listen to music. He also played instruments and was in a band. His band later adopted some Ska elements. That time we hung out, Allen talked mostly to Aaron and didn't respond much to me. I was later thinking a reason for this could have been Aaron was musical, thus Allen thought he was worthy, but I am not musical, so he did not think I was worthy.

Aaron and I joked in an email headline, "Allen Saunders doesn't like you anymore," which is a spin from the Ska song, "Jen doesn't like me anymore." I don't remember who originated that spin-off quote, but we both shared in the joking of it because Allen Saunders even later did not like Aaron's essence either.

In 7th grade music class, our music teacher said, "All music conveys emotion", thus Ska music conveys a certain type of emotion. Ska music is very upbeat, happy, and melodic [like others note]. It's the type of music

you dance to [like others note]. It's the type of music you party to if you're inclined to party. It's the type of music that fills you with joy. Some say there's a connection between the music and the lyrics. Thus, the type of music Ska is creates a certain type of lyric style. An overwhelming amount of ska lyrics are without substance or profound meaning. I like ska, but sadly ska music does not make great statements on society generally. Certainly, there are exceptions, but overall the music has lyrics which do not say much.

Referring to one ska band in particular, that friend of mine Aaron said, "its CD was full of teen politics." Teen politics is a derogatory term for issues that may get people frustrated or worked up, but really aren't that important in the grand scheme.

I wish there would be straight edge ska. I love straight edge, and I think ska music is a neat type of music. Unfortunately, straight edge lyrics are almost always, if not always, associated with hardcore music. The ska style is often better to my ears than the hardcore style. Thus, it's unfortunate we cannot have straight edge ska.

There was a dude I knew in college who had a radio show on the campus station. The show played a lot of ska. I told him, "I was disappointed in the fact ska music generally lacked meaningful lyrics of substance." He said, "He wanted to find me a ska song with meaning." The fact he had to look for it reflects how lacking in substance ska lyrics often are. One ska song, "When the Footsteps Fade Away," is a great exception to the rule. The song, from my interpretation, appears to be about a mother who has recently been diagnosed with cancer or some other similar terminal illness and is trying to cope. The song is touching. It's one of those songs I listen to over and over.

Some ska bands have gained a political conscience. The lyrics may not be political, but the music has been used for political ends. A prime example of this is the *Rock Against Bush* effort. *Rock Against Bush* has been a two-CD effort put out by Fat Records. A number of bands came together and contributed songs all for the purpose of fighting and opposing Bush. On these CDs, there has been ska music. I don't think the ska songs were super political in meaning, but at least the music is being used for a political end. Like other types of music, [as observers note] ska has its old school style and its new school style. Sometimes the big difference between the two is

time. [As observers note] The term old school naturally refers to older ska, while new school also naturally refers to newer ska. If you started a ska band a long time ago, you would be old school ska probably. If you started one more recently, you're more likely to be considered new school ska.

[as observers note] But time is not the only distinguishing factor between the two. [as observers note] The two also have different styles, so technically you could start a ska band today and use old school style, even though you would be a new band.

[as observers note] Old school ska tends to be more pure ska. The hardcore ska people like this because they consider it more real. [as observers note] It's considered less commercialized, more back to the roots. As I've said, horns are very prominent in ska. Even more so in this form of ska, horns are prominent. This type of ska seems to generally be even more easygoing and mellow. New school ska may be less mellow and easygoing. [as observers note] It may involve elements of punk and or rock music. [as observers note] There may be instruments such as guitars and drums in addition to horns. [as observers note] New school ska is more likely to be faster than maybe even louder than old school ska. New school ska is, as many point out, much more commercialized, which is why many oppose it. Many believe new school ska is more accessible, hence commercialized. [as observers note] Old school bands include:

- Let's Go Bowling
- The Toasters

Alan Saunders gave me those CDs to listen to. New school bands include many of the bands you have heard of, probably [Common Knowledge]:

- No Doubt
- Mighty Mighty Boss Tones
- Less Than Jake
- Catch-22
- Mustard Plug
- Mad Catz

I got this compilation CD called *Skankin' Around the World*. Alan Saunders listened to that and he did not like it. He said, "there were too many synthesizers." He mentioned he preferred the real deal horns.

The band Propagandhi has a song called *Ska Sucks*. Even though I like ska, I like that song. Years later, I would find out the ska dissing song was more than meets the eye. In an interview, Propagandhi said, “the point of the song was not to diss. The point of the song was not to diss ska lovers.” Propagandhi explained that “during one event some ska was being played and these National Socialist types were getting into it.” Since Propagandhi “hates the National Socialist types and wanted to make fools of them, they started singing the song *Ska Sucks*.”

They explained, “they did not want to ridicule people who listen to ska, but instead wanted to diss National Socialist types.”

If good ska music came around, I have listened to some of it, there will be snobs as I have come across, but we should not let that prevent us from enjoying ska, nor on the other hand should we let the commercialization destroy it, as many claim commercialization does.

Good evening.