

Here Comes the Sun

Careful listening is a mantra for business leaders, management gurus and, of course, professional therapists. In what is colonially called Canada, which muddles together entrepreneurial fantasy and managerial technique, identity politics with market-driven policies, and the mystique of meritocracy with the allure of technocratic expertise, it is not controversial to suggest that learning how to listen well is the path to strong relationships.

With wit and imagination, *Another World That Sounds Like You** draws attention to collective and communal forms of listening as well as careful and active ones. The comfy chairs, bean bags and cups of tea that are generously provided to help visitors to the exhibit feel at home should not be confused with invitations to merely lounge around describing or escaping the problems of the world. Nor are they interchangeable with the images of bourgeois families huddled around the radio in their living rooms that have made their mark on so many representations of domestic life in the early twentieth century.

Accepting the exhibit's invitation to bring our histories and personalities into focus, I was transported back to my grandmother's kitchen table. I was reminded of the ditties I sang with my Nan about loving a nice cup of tea, and the hours we spent scanning the radio for shows that described, satirized, and resisted conservative codes for managing working-class cultures. I also felt the ambitions, achievements, regrets, vulnerabilities, fears, desires, eccentricities, tenacity, tenderness, and love that she shared with me while we listened to the radio on car journeys. In short, I was granted a precious moment of reverie to recall the person who, more than anyone else, inspired me to probe beneath the surface of the stories we tell each other about the past, present and future.

In asking us to rest our eyes and activate our ears, *Another World That Sounds Like You* also reminded me of soul rebels reared on Funkadelic's clarion call to "Free your mind ... and your ass will follow". I thought of those concertgoers lucky enough to have heard Bob Marley, Curtis Mayfield, Aretha Franklin and other performers in the sixties and seventies who not only translated precious resources from religious and sacred spaces into secular and profane ones but also created ideal communicative moments that surpassed anything the structures of the family can provide. The carefully curated sonic journey of *Another World That Sounds Like You* may also be placed in productive dialogue with soul rebels whose engagement with revolutionary sounds and a protest ethic were never reducible to the solitary act of purchasing a record or the passive consumption of popular culture. Lest we forget, such active users of soul records, music magazines, records stores and other venues constituted a counter-cultural public sphere that shared precious information and resources to help its members address complexity with control.

This extraordinary exhibit also invites us to consider how collective joy and liberation are experienced in relation to collective trauma, pain, and sorrow. Lying down and experiencing the aural sensations, I jotted down some notes about the heartbreak and grief expressed by soul rebels as they bore witness to the decline of alternative print media and what they considered the deskilling and debasement of Black music in the digital age. I pondered how the young soul rebels that used pointed examples of the struggles for political legitimacy on dancefloors, concerts and protest marches to critique commodification and exaggerated individualism in the 1980s had, decades later, transmitted their opposition to neoliberalism in almost identical terms with references to television shows, the quiet virtues of walking and an appreciation of nature.

For members of my political and cultural generation – who came of age at the dawn of the twenty-first century listening collectively to soulful house DJs as much as, if not more than, soul rebels – politically infused acts of pleasure could be found at Blockorama, Pride Toronto’s longest-running stage. One of my life-changing experiences with music came at Blockorama in 2015 when torrential rain interrupted a DJ set. Rather than retreat from the parking lot that has been transformed into a space that celebrates Black love, joy, music and community for over twenty years, we few – we lucky few! – began to sing and dance in the rain. We roared every time the rain came down with greater intensity. We formed a circle and recited Aly-Us’s “Follow Me”. We treasured a rainbow emerging before the DJ shared Shaun Escoffery’s “Day Like This”, a perfect track to celebrate this moment of collective joy:

Freedom reigns, and washes away all my pain, my pain

And I, I'm smiling from the inside cause we've got nothing to hide

I love days like this

Yeah, I love days like this

It's here

Here comes the sun ...

[**Click to Play: Days Like This
\(Spinna & Ticklah Club Mix Edit\)
Shaun Escoffery**](#)

Daniel McNeil is a Professor in the Department of Gender Studies and the Queen’s National Scholar Chair in Black Studies. His scholarship and teaching explore how movement, travel and relocation have transformed and boosted creative development, the writing of cultural history and the calculation of political choices. His recent publications include “Even Canadians Find it a Bit Boring: A Report on the Banality of Multiculturalism” (winner of the inaugural 2022 Editor’s Award from the Canadian Journal of Communication), and *Thinking While Black: Translating the Politics and Popular Culture of a Rebel Generation* (Between the Lines, 2022, and Rutgers University Press, 2023).

*[Another World that Sounds Like You](#) is an audio project and exhibition featuring the works of Nick Dourado, Hong-Kai Wang, JJJJerome Ellis, Bani Abidi, and Urok Shirhan. It is curated by Toleen Touq in collaboration with Heather Canlas Riggs and Nedda Baba, and presented at Gallery TPW together with SAVAC (2023).