

Linda Simonis:  
Neo-Gnosticism in Contemporary Popular Music: Current 93 and Nox Aurea

In contemporary popular music we observe a remarkable revival of ideas and figures from ancient mythological and religious traditions. This tendency can be illustrated with reference to two experimental music groups, the British group Current 93 (founded by David Tibet in 1982) and the Swedish group Nox Aurea (founded in 2005). The musical productions of Current 93 abound in allusions to ancient mythologies – particularly that of early Christian Gnosticism – as well as evocations of religious and mythical figures, e. g. Daedalus, Lazarus, Christ, Judas, and Lucifer. These references are part of a syncretistic impulse to resume and transform religious and cultural traditions, to intermingle diverse spiritual and metaphysical currents in the search of a new synthesis. A characteristic feature of this “dark music” appears to be an inversion of the view points of the official or larger religious traditions, a sympathy with marginalized or damned figures in the canonical versions of religious creeds. This subversive element goes hand in hand with references and allusions to apocalyptic and eschatological literature, an aspect which recalls a mentality widespread in Early Christianity. In a similar way, the first album “Via gnosis” (2009) by the Swedish band Nox Aurea amply draws on the imagery and mythological inventory of ancient Gnosticism, in songs such as “Odium divinum” (which evokes the dubious figure of a demiurge to be overcome by the “pure fire of gnosis”) and “Mother Aletheia” (which culminates in the invocation of a primeval plenitude: “oh, pleroma”). The paper explores the ways in which the adaptations and reinterpretations of mythological elements and figures function in the songs: Does this eclectic mixture of quotations and borrowings from diverse traditions make any sense at all? If so, in how far does it contribute to create a new kind of style or religious attitude (or world view) which might be appropriate to postmodern culture? A further point of enquiry is the question of music as a medium apt to convey idiosyncratic or unorthodox religious views. Does music offer a particular mode of articulating a Neo-Gnostic mythology? And how do musical composition and text work together to create this effect?

Keywords:

Music, Neo-Gnosticism, Popular Culture

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