

# Musical tracks on the campaign trail



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Published on: March 4, 2016 | Last Updated: March 4, 2016 12:27 PM EST



A little Trump music includes: opera, metal and Born in the U.S.A. CHARLIE NEIBERGALL / AP

If music be the food of electioneering, play on.

A team of Canadian and U.S. scholars, including Carleton University

music professor James Deaville, has created a website called Trax on the Trail ([traxonthetrail.com](http://traxonthetrail.com) (<http://traxonthetrail.com/>)) to document the beats and lyrics played on the current U.S. presidential campaign trail.

Using music from campaign ads, rallies and parodies, the site offers insights into candidates' political identities and how they reach out to their constituents.

"This was something that caught my attention, that no one seems to be paying attention to the sounds, how candidates and campaigns are trying to establish some kind of sound branding," says Deaville.

For example, Donald Trump now appears with the grand Puccini aria *Nessun Dorma* from *Turandot* appropriate to the candidate's outsized image.

Unsurprisingly, Trump's music, like a comover in a windstorm, also rages all over the place. It swings from Sweet Home Alabama to the Beatles' Hey Jude to – and this annoyed composer Neil Young no end — Rockin' in the Free World.

"Trump wants to show he's beyond the law, an outsider who can break convention and freely use music in all styles," says Deaville.

Trump's main opponent, evangelical Ted Cruz, goes for country sounds like Aaron Tippin's patriotic pap *Where Stars and Stripes and the Eagle Fly*, tunes by the Christian group the Newsboys, and, on at least one occasion, the wistful *Somewhere Over the Rainbow*.

"He's playing for the conservative Christian side that does not go for the grandiose," says Deaville. The lyrics in Cruz's songs stress family values and the like, he adds.

A Florida-born Cuban-American, Marco Rubio favours electronic dance music and, perhaps with an eye to wall-building Trump, piped Montgomery Gentry's *Where I Come From* at one town hall meeting.

With Bernie Sanders breathing down her neck, Hillary Clinton had been pumping out Bon Jovi's *We Weren't Born to Follow* and, in notably heavy rotation, Rachel Platten's *Fight Song*. With her surge on Super Tuesday, we may be hearing more than we have of Pharrell Williams' R&B tune

Happy.

Deaville says Clinton has been criticized for aiming at too young a demographic by using Katy Perry and others to endorse her. “She’s better off with the Elton Johns because that speaks to the generation that seems to be voting for her.

“We think there has to be a certain congruity between the music and the candidate and their image.”

In keeping with his platform, Bernie Sanders leans to revolutionary new beginnings including Tracy Chapman’s Talkin’ Bout a Revolution and the O’Jays’ Give the People What They Want. He smartly blends those with This Land is Your Land and Bruce Springsteen’s We Take Care of Our Own, which Barrack Obama used during his 2012 campaign.

So far, no one has opted for death metal numbers.

Canada has hardly been immune to music on the campaign trail. During the 2015 federal election, for example, Collective Soul’s white-bread Better Now was top of the charts for Conservative Leader Stephen Harper. NDP Leader Tom Mulcair grooved to the Sam Roberts Band’s We’re All In This Together. Justin Trudeau regularly dug Deadmau5’s The Veldt. Trudeau’s pick is a progressive house tune inspired by a science fiction story, a combination which likely delighted the observant among his foes.

Although Deaville doesn’t notice substantial differences between campaign music here and south of the border, he does note that Canadian selections don’t bow to the religious right.

Trax on the Trail is chock-a-block with other goodies.

They range from links to a lesson plan for teachers on the history of presidential campaign music to a scholarly article, Dancing Around the Double-Bind: Gender Identity, Likability, and the Musical Rebranding of Hillary Clinton, about the Girl Power playlist (the Dixie Chicks, Beyoncé) on Clinton’s public Spotify account.

There’s also a link to a news story about a protestor trolling Ted Cruz during the candidate’s barnstorming in Iowa earlier this year. The

protestor held aloft a sign reading “Ted Cruz Likes Nickelback,” a double-edged slash at Cruz for being both Alberta-born and, apparently, a man with appalling musical taste.

Trax on the Trail notes as well that Metallica’s Enter Sandman welcomed now-defunct candidate Chris Christie to an event in National Harbor, Md. in 2015. Whether the rousing song’s lyrics about a child’s nightmares were meant to frighten off other candidates or inadvertently signal the horror of a potential Christie presidency remains uncertain.

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