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## Torture songs spur a protest most vocal

Musicians call for release of records on Guantanamo detainee treatment

By [Joe Heim](#)

Washington Post Staff Writer  
Thursday, October 22, 2009

Was the theme to "Sesame Street" really played to torture prisoners held at Guantanamo and other detention camps? What about Don McLean's "American Pie"? Or the Meow Mix jingle? Bruce Springsteen's "Born in the U.S.A."?

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[Records sought](#)

A high-profile coalition of artists -- including the members of Pearl Jam, R.E.M. and the Roots -- demanded Thursday that the government release the names of all the songs that were blasted since 2002 at prisoners for hours, even days, on end, to try to coerce cooperation or as a method of punishment.

Dozens of musicians endorsed a Freedom of Information Act request filed by the National Security Archive, a Washington-based independent research institute, seeking the declassification of all records related to the use of music in interrogation practices. The artists also launched a formal protest of the use of music in conjunction with torture.

"I think every musician should be involved," said Rosanne Cash in a telephone interview Wednesday. "It seems so obvious. Music should never be used as torture." The singer-songwriter (and daughter of Johnny Cash) said she reacted with "absolute disgust" when she heard of the practice. "It's beyond the pale. It's hard to even think about."

Other musicians, including Trent Reznor of Nine Inch Nails and Tom Morello, formerly of the band Rage Against the Machine, also expressed outrage.

"The fact that music I helped create was used in crimes against humanity sickens me," Morello said in a statement. "We need to end torture and close Guantanamo now."

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The musicians' announcement was coordinated with the recent call by veterans and retired Army generals to shut Guantanamo. It is part of a renewed effort to pressure President Obama to keep his

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**NOT-SO-JOYFUL NOISE:** Former detainees say sensory assaults included repeat playings of various artists, such as the Bee Gees, whose original members were brothers Barry, Maurice and Robin Gibb (not pictured). At left, their sibling, Andy, also a recording artist. (By Associated Press)

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promise to close the prison in Cuba in his first year in office. Television and radio spots focused on the issue also launched this week by the [National Campaign to Close Guantanamo](#), led by Tom Andrews, a former congressman from Maine.

A White House spokesman said music is no longer used as an instrument of torture, part of a shift in policy on interrogations that Obama made on his second full day in office.

The president also formed an interagency group, called High-Value Detainee Interrogation Group, to examine the techniques used during questioning, but a White House spokesman said this week that the new group has yet to be fully constituted.

"The president banned the use of 'enhanced interrogation techniques,' and issued an executive order that established that interrogations must be consistent with the techniques in the Army Field Manual and the Geneva Conventions," a White House official said.

"Sound at a certain level creates sensory overload and breaks down subjectivity and can [bring about] a regression to infantile behavior," said Suzanne G. Cusick, a music professor at New York University who has studied, lectured about and written extensively on the use of music as torture in the current wars. "Its effectiveness depends on the constancy of the sound, not the qualities of the music."

Played at a certain volume, she said, "it simply prevents people from thinking."

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