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NAVIGATING THE GLOBAL TURN IN WESTERN MUSIC HISTORY PEDAGOGY

What versions of the West do we invent when we teach western music history outside the West? For those teaching in locations far removed from classical music's heartlands in Europe and North America, the question adds complex issues of postcolonial cultural geography to the process of developing effective learning and teaching. However globalisation is defined, its power to shape the theory and practice of musical scholarship has become increasingly apparent, as musicologists confront the diversity of a global musical culture and an internationalised higher education landscape. In what follows I set out one possible response, derived from the experience of teaching music history at KM Music Conservatory (KMMC) in Chennai, India, as part of a transnational undergraduate degree programme validated by Middlesex University in London, UK.¹

Establishing how the canon of dead white European composers speaks to international students in the 21st century requires sensitivity to how the present is shaped by the past. Just a few miles from KMMC in Chennai (formerly Madrās) stands the birthplace of the British Empire at St. George's Fort, where the East India Company established their first permanent trading post in 1639. Whilst British merchants no longer travel to India to exploit its natural resources and manipulate local politics, their modern counterparts, in the form of Western universities, now pursue its lucrative expanding market for higher education qualifications. Because the critical turn towards the global in musicology has occurred alongside the corporatisation of universities, discussion of pedagogy must acknowledge the broader institutional and financial contexts in which qualifications are awarded.

The more tangible elements of the internationalisation trend can be summarised as follows: the movement of students, faculty and curriculum across borders; an increasingly diverse international student demographic; pressure on academics to orientate courses towards vaguely defined forms of global citizenship or intercultural competence; the perceived need to prepare students for global labour markets; and, the increase in universities establishing overseas campuses and institutional partnerships. This global agenda has been particularly influential in the UK, USA and Australia, but its ramifications are

¹ The role of Western classical music at KM Music Conservatory, and in Indian culture generally, is discussed in P. TAYLOR, "Mozart in Madrās: Global Learning and Western Art Music", this journal, V, 2015, pp. 113-125.

being felt everywhere. Western universities are falling over themselves to establish formal links with institutions in emerging nations, in order to fulfil the corporate agenda of the former and the capacity and accreditation challenges of the latter. If university internationalisation promotes the export of those western values considered most useful for economic development, the role of historical knowledge and understanding of music in a future dominated by such commercial imperatives seems uncertain.

Turning from institutional context to educational content, globalisation's relationship with the arts and humanities appears equally unsettling.² It is tempting to dismiss demands for global relevance as fashionable marketing spin that distracts from the already impossible task of communicating the depth of the West's musical heritage to young people. The conceptual vagueness of global phenomenon does little to help with the practicalities of designing effective music history courses, particularly as undergraduate education normally reflects and reinforces the internal priorities of state or national cultural policy. So, whose global vision are we supposed to be adopting? What appears on the surface as an egalitarian ideology often serves as a mechanism for maintaining unequal power relations between the West and the rest: thinking and acting globally relies on wielding the economic power to impose your ideas onto others. Attitudes towards globalisation are also highly subjective, varying between students, faculty and recruitment offices around the world. However well intended, therefore, efforts to broaden the perspective of musicology teaching in Europe and North America are inevitably constrained by the West's ability to critique its relationship with the rest of the world. One way out of this quandary may be to look back at the West from the outside, and consider the ways in which Western music has been implicated in important historical developments around the globe.

Following this approach, my aim in teaching at KMMC has been to reduce the sense of dislocation experienced in international education by relating historical knowledge to the realities of musical culture in modern India, making connections between inside and outside the classroom. Some of the challenges involved are similar to those posed by international students in the West, involving different cultural attitudes towards musical literacy, critical thinking, conventions for academic writing and referencing and so on. Significant economic disparities create difficulties for providing print and online resources, such as academic monographs or a subscription to Grove Music Online. Textbooks can be problematic for non-Western readers due to their complex prose, range of cultural reference, and the underlying feeling they are telling someone else's story. Though indisputably an extremely valuable resource,

² For an insightful analysis of globalisation's impact on historical scholarship, see L. HUNT, *Writing History in the Global Era*, New York, W. W. Norton, 2014.

Richard Taruskin's *Oxford History of Western Music* presents all three issues.³ Students are also simply much less familiar with the sounds of Western art music, with only minimal exposure available through broadcasting, public concerts and amateur music-making.

The challenge is to create a Western music history curriculum that responds to the distinctive cultural position of Indian students, and those from the Indian diaspora in Asia, Europe and the U.S., whilst also providing them with the skills and knowledge that will allow them to establish parity with their peers in the West. Fortunately, the spread of European music around the globe from the early modern era onwards enables the conventional Eurocentric narrative to be adapted into a more international social history of music; including an account of how Western music was projected into India through the spread of Christianity and colonialism. This involves reducing lecture content on composers, works and styles to create more space for discussion of amateur musical activity and the historical influence of Western paradigms such as staff notation, concert performance and canonicity. However we theorise these connections, as cross cultural encounter or intercultural transfer, students are introduced to a historical context that explains something of the complexity of musical culture in South India today, as illustrated by the following case study.

The appropriation of western music in India during the colonial era offers a valuable counter narrative to the textbook account of European music in the 18th and 19th centuries.⁴ As elsewhere in Asia, music was ever present in the spread of Christianity, military culture and the social and leisure activities of the European and Anglo-Indian communities. Western music also became popular with elements of the Indian courtly elite, who were attracted to the art form's connotations of wealth, taste and social status as they adapted to the instability caused by successive waves of intervention by the Portuguese, French, Dutch and British. In the 1790s, the Maratha Prince Sarabhoji II assembled a European instrumental ensemble at the court of Thanjavur, then the primary intellectual and cultural centre in South India.⁵ Instruments including violin,

³ Two reviews of *The Oxford History of Western Music* criticise the narrative's omission of Western music as a global historical phenomenon, and the accessibility of the text for a global readership, respectively: G. TOMLINSON, "Monumental Musicology", *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, CXXXII, n. 2, 2007, pp. 349-374: 365-368; M. EVERIST, "In Search of the Waters of Oblivion", *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, LXII, n. 3, 2009, pp. 699-720: 717 f.

⁴ I. WOODFIELD, *Music of the Raj: A Social and Economic History of Music in Late Eighteenth-Century Anglo-Indian Society*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000; B. V. D. LINDEN, *Music and Empire in Britain and India: Identity, Internationalism, and Cross-Cultural Communication*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013.

⁵ S. SEETHA, *Tanjore as a Seat of Music, during the 17th, 18th, and 19th Centuries*, Chennai, University of Madras, 2001, pp. 111-113 (1st ed. 1981); I. V. PETERSON, *King*

clarinet, piano, dulcimer, flute, tambourine and harpsichord were obtained via diplomatic and trading connections in Europe. The Prince compiled a library of songs and music theory lessons printed in London: notebooks at the court's archives contain handwritten annotations adding Indian sol-fa symbols above the Western staff notation. Sarabhoji II also composed his own instrumental marches and musical dramas, which were transcribed in staff notation and performed by the court's musicians. In this context, Western modes of composition and performance operated as a form of cultural diplomacy, enhancing the social and political prestige of the Thanjavur court. In the longer term, the appropriation of Western notation and specific instruments such as the violin and clarinet had a transformative impact on South-Indian musical culture, influencing the modernisation of Carnatic classical music in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

During the 19th century Carnatic music migrated from its established role as elite courtly entertainment at the palaces of Thanjavur to that of urban middle-class public concert culture in the emerging commercial centre of colonial Madrās. Lakshmi Subramanian has shown how this self-conscious process of modernisation introduced new regulative concepts of the autonomous musical work, canonicity and formal concert performance.⁶ The violin proved such an effective accompaniment for vocal melody that it became an essential component of the supporting instrumental texture, with a modified playing position and method of tuning. The clarinet's route to acceptance was more problematic, partly for technical reasons – it was less suited to reproducing the *gamakas*, pitch glissandi and oscillations central to Carnatic musical style – but also because it retained its alien connotations for longer than the violin, being derided as a foreign import by conservative elements in the Carnatic music establishment until well into the 20th century.

The modernisation of Carnatic music, indeed almost its invention as a distinct genre, was driven by the desire of the urban elite in Madrās to promote the intellectual sophistication and social prestige of native art against that of the West.⁷ Through the disruption of colonial encounter, Indian music became codified as 'classical' in the eyes of Indian performers, musicologists and audiences: a similar process occurred in northern India with the Hindustani classical tradition. In South India, Carnatic music reflected the politics of national and regional identity across the pre- and post-independence era, contributing to cultural expressions of both Brahmin Indian nationalist and

Serfoji II of Thanjavur and European Music, lecture at the Music Academy of Madrās, Chennai, 29th December 2012, available online at http://www.academia.edu/5987947/King_Serfoji_II_of_Thanjavur_and_European_Music.

⁶ L. SUBRAMANIAN, *From the Tanjore Court to the Madrās Music Academy: A Social History of Music in South India*, 2nd ed., Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2011.

⁷ A. J. WEIDMAN, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2006.

Tamil Dravidian ideology. The Madrās Music Academy, for example, founded in 1928 after a meeting of the All India Music Conference hosted by the Indian National Congress political party, added civic prestige to the newly codified classical art form. The current building stands as an icon to South-Indian artistic culture, hosting an internationally renowned festival in December each year. In 1932 the Department of Indian Music was opened at the University of Madrās, further symbolising the formal transferral of musical knowledge from palace to city. For students with previous training in Carnatic music, discussing these historical developments helps to form connections between Western music and their own cultural heritage, as well as showing how music has been implicated in significant moments of change in Indian society.

Throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, as Madrās emerged as the dominant cultural centre in South India, Western music became embedded into the cultural practices of the city's European and Indian-Christian communities. The music shop *Musée Musical* was opened in 1842 to furnish the colonial community with Western instruments, and since 1906 it has been delivering instrumental tuition and examinations in association with Trinity College, London. Several of KMMC's current students began their Western music education in this way, as did the Conservatory's Principal, film composer A. R. Rahman. The *Madrās Musical Association*, founded in 1893, claims to be the longest-standing Western music society in Asia, hosting an amateur choral society that gives regular concerts of sacred music. I have attended a performance of extracts from Handel's *Messiah*, with several of my students in the audience and some playing in the orchestra. This ongoing tradition raises fascinating questions about the global reception of Western music – such as why the audience stand during the Hallelujah chorus – that can only be addressed through the historical study of music as a social phenomenon.

These amateur activities have sustained a significant marginal presence for Western music in the modern city of Chennai, enhanced by the work of European cultural organisations such as the Goethe Institut, Alliance Française and British Council. These institutions host live performances from touring artists and promote digital broadcasts of archive performances by symphony orchestras such as the Berliner Philharmoniker. Here Western classical music operates as a form of diplomatic soft power, promoting European language and culture to India's urban middle classes. Again, providing appropriate historical context for these events contributes to students' awareness of not only the music that is being performed, but the human developments that have formed the institutions and practices that shape Western music's role in contemporary Indian society.

This cursory summary of the transformative impact of colonialism on musical culture in South India suggests that making space for comparative approaches alongside mainstream European music history could help students to balance the global with the local in their transnational education experience.

Case studies such as this should not be restricted to the domain of ethnomusicology, but incorporated into a broad history of Western music's worldwide development. We can't escape the paradox that the creation of global music history narratives is a phenomenon exclusive to Western musicology, and an expression of the intellectual power claimed by Western traditions of scholarship. We can, however, acknowledge that learning and teaching music history is a political act, requiring decision making that shapes and reflects our local, regional and (inter)national identities. Engaging students in this process will encourage them to foster a critical awareness of the social and cultural history that informs their performing, composing and listening activities. Teaching music history outside the West should inform a global narrative that dissolves binary oppositions of West and East into a rich historical record of intercultural musical encounters.

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