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Balzan Conference: Theorizing Music Across Cultures, 27th May 2014

Matthew Pritchard

Cultural Autonomy and the “Indian Exception”: Debating the Aesthetics of Indian Classical Music in Early 20th-Century Calcutta

I begin, in the first half of this paper, by exploring the concepts named in the first part of my title. What might be meant by “cultural autonomy”, and how could India constitute an “exception” with respect to it? Moreover, what is the purpose of introducing such terms in an already crowded ethnotheoretical field? It is here that I would most like – before getting on to the more specific contexts of Indian musicological research underlying the second half of my paper – to embrace the speculative dimension of Reinhard Strohm’s Balzan project: the invitation to “think big”, to tackle music history on a global scale. Given the width of the frame, certain details of the picture must inevitably be provisional and lack detail. But I hope the urgency of the issues will encourage the reader to bear with me as I attempt to challenge certain paradigms, and sketch out alternative modes of interpretation for patterns of change in world musics, particularly musics in Asia, during the twentieth century.

Music and postcolonialism beyond Said

To imagine a global history of music in the modern era is inescapably to confront the history of music and colonialism. As a process and an era of political domination by imperial regimes over colonized peoples and territories, colonialism often seems to dominate the “global” theatre of cultural history. In some cases, such as pre-Columbian America, it obliterates cultural epochs preceding it; in others, it leaves behind, as it recedes, a cultural landscape ineradicably marked by the struggle for liberation from colonial hegemony. Postcolonialist theory attempts to come to terms with the latter situation, and one theorist in particular still exerts a seminal and controversial influence on postcolonial analyses within musicology: Edward Said. As Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh observe in their introduction to *Western Music and Its Others* (2000), “if there is a distinctive field of postcolonial analysis, it developed in the wake of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978)”.¹

Drawing on Foucault, Said’s account cleared what in retrospect seems an indispensable space for reflection on the ties between Western scholarly and artistic images of the oriental Other and the West’s colonial domination of that Other – between knowledge of the Orient and power over it. By discovering Orientalist tropes in a wide range of texts from Western literature and history, including many by canonical authors from Aeschylus to

¹ Georgina Born and Desmond Hesmondhalgh, “Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music”, in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 1-58 (p. 4).

Camus, Said demonstrated the productivity of investigating the material interests behind cultural representations and encounters, and how the former constrain the latter. Musicologists have made ample use of Orientalism as a theoretical model over the last few decades.²

Yet such application has not been without controversy, as the May 27th workshop showed once again. For as many critics have observed, Said's work, like Foucault's, embodies a problematic tendency to theoretical totalization – to suggesting that no more resistant or hopeful model of epistemological relationship between those from colonial and colonized (or formerly colonized) nations exists, or *could* exist a priori, given the concrete fact of Western governmental interests “on the ground” in Asia.³ There seems to be no experiential or historical space from which to begin to nuance or complicate such overwhelming power relationships as are portrayed by a statement such as this, from *Orientalism*: “It is therefore correct that every European, in what he could say about the Orient, was consequently a racist, an imperialist, and almost totally ethnocentric”.⁴

One can thus understand why Nicholas Cook should have coined the phrase the “Received Saidian Model”, or RSM, to sum up this fundamentally “pessimistic view of cross-cultural encounters”.⁵ Against Matthew Head's Saidian assertion that eighteenth-century Orientalism, even when critical of established European power structures, was “not evidence of an innocent openness to non-European culture, but [of] unabashed appropriation of the Other”,⁶ Cook aims to interpret the late eighteenth-century Anglo-

² Gerry Farrell's *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997) declares its Saidian affiliations early on: “In the present study certain of Said's perspectives are brought to bear on the relationship between Indian music and the West. In particular, his contention that the Orient was ‘almost a European invention...’ is apt” (3); chapter 7 of Derek Scott's *From the Erotic to the Demonic: On Critical Musicology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), “Orientalism and Musical Style”, also relies heavily on Said. For a fuller list of musicological, and ethnomusicological, applications of Said than can be provided here, see Tom Solomon, “Where is the Postcolonial in Ethnomusicology?”, in Sylvia Nannyonya-Tamusuza and Tom Solomon, eds., *Ethnomusicology in East Africa: Perspectives from Uganda and Beyond* (Kampala: African Books Collective, 2012), pp. 216-251 (p. 222).

³ For theoretical critiques of Said on this point, see Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992), chapter 5, and Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), chapter 2. Moore-Gilbert observes that while Said in certain statements of the 1980s and '90s was “at pains to retract the assertion in *Orientalism* that Westerners are ontologically incapable of ‘true’ or sympathetic knowledge of the non-West” (67), Said's later *Culture and Imperialism* nonetheless continues to reinforce his earlier Foucauldian determinism.

⁴ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979), 204.

⁵ Nicholas Cook, “Encountering the Other, Redefining the Self: Hindostannic Airs, Haydn's Folksong Settings and the ‘Common Practice’ Style”, in Martin Clayton and Bennett Zon, *Music and Orientalism in the British Empire, 1780s-1940s* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 13-37 (p. 16).

⁶ Matthew Head, *Orientalism, Masquerade and Mozart's Turkish Music* (London: Royal Musical Association Monographs, 2000), 14.

Indian genre of the “Hindostannie Air” as “precisely evidence of an innocent openness to non-European culture”.⁷

Yet it is perhaps time the debate moved away from such oppositions, for there are other more significant deficits attaching to Said’s approach and the musicology based on it, ones that have been corrected to some extent by postcolonial theory and music studies since *Orientalism*. To cite Martin Stokes, “Said focuses exclusively on the representations of [that is, produced by] the powerful partners in the colonial relationship” – ostensibly for theoretical reasons, if one lends theoretical credence to Said’s simple assertion that Orientalism has “no corresponding equivalent in the Orient itself”, but more likely because of Said’s disciplinary background in Western literary criticism, as Aijaz Ahmad has pointed out.⁸ The subsequent postcolonial reflections of Gayatri Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Paul Gilroy emerge from other backgrounds more deeply informed by the experiences and cultures of those affected by Western imperialism, and yet they have characteristically tended to uncover what Stokes calls a “certain ambivalence in colonial practice”.⁹ Colonial and postcolonial subjects have their own flexible, hybrid, and strategic modes of engaging with the images circulated of them within Western culture and scholarship – a fact that can no longer be ignored.

It is particularly noticeable in relation to studies of “classical music” in India how the integration of postcolonial theory *after* Said has coincided with an expansion of disciplinary range beyond text-based musicology. Not only do authors such as Janaki Bakhle, Amanda Weidman and Virinder Kalra demonstrate much more complex and discursively mediated effects deriving from the colonial situation than previous musicological work on Indian music and the West was able to do, they do so precisely from the perspectives of history, anthropology and sociology.¹⁰ “Music” naturally becomes for them more than a set of works in written or recorded form containing representations of the Other: it is a whole set of institutions, practices, biographies, aesthetic debates, and oral discourses, mostly taking place on the terrain and in the languages of the subcontinent. Where Born and Hesmondhalgh note that “postcolonial analysis has tended to avoid questions of agency” on the part of colonial subjects, these analyses restore agency to a central position.¹¹

⁷ Cook, “Encountering the Other”, 17. Both Cook and Head were present at the May 27th workshop, and contributed to the final roundtable discussion.

⁸ Martin Stokes, “Postcolonialism”, in *The Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Musics of the World*, vol. 1, *Media, Industry and Society*, ed. J. Shepherd et al. (London: Continuum, 2003), 103-6 (p. 103); Ahmad, *In Theory*, 162.

⁹ Stokes, “Postcolonialism”, 103-4.

¹⁰ See Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), Amanda J. Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: The Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), and Virinder Kalra, *Sacred and Secular Musics: A Postcolonial Approach* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015).

¹¹ Born and Hesmondhalgh, “On Difference, Representation and Appropriation in Music”, 7.

In light of this, earlier Saidian scholarship such as the work of Gerry Farrell (vigorously attacked by both Weidman and Kalra) starts to seem problematic as soon as it is forced to refer to Indian music as an actual historical entity, rather than simply as an imagined Other “produced” by Western music and discourse. Farrell reproduces the very problem he critiques in (as Weidman puts it) “preserv[ing] a pristine place for Indian music as an entity that exists before and after two centuries of ‘misunderstanding’ on the part of the West”.¹² (I will provide my own example of how Farrell’s method and assumptions lead to a misreading of Allauddin Khan’s interactions with Western musical culture later in this article.) What starts to emerge in the work of Bakhle, Weidman and Kalra is a more complicated picture, in which the norms of Western culture continue to exert power over practices in both colonial and postcolonial or nationalist phases of Indian musical history, but by much more subtle and discursively complex means than an equation of power “on the ground” with Orientalist tropes in the cultural sphere.

Cultural autonomy, agency, and the scientific prestige of the West

What cultural significance can be attributed to what happens “on the ground” depends in part on strategies of colonial rule. David Irving’s *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (2010) is a probing exploration of a characteristic strategic use of music and culture in Spanish colonialism, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. European music was imposed in the Philippines as part of a strategy of religious domination, including the conversion to Catholicism of indigenous populations. This was what one might call a “Spanish model”, for which, during the early modern period, it certainly held true that “the musics of many non-European peoples...declined or were eradicated amidst the imposition of new cultural systems by European colonial empires”.¹³ But this was not always the case, particularly in the history of British colonialism, in which preservation of and adaptation to local cultural styles (in “Indo-Saracenic” architecture, for instance) was a significant feature of imperial policy.

The starting-point for Bakhle’s analysis of the historical development of Indian classical music during the colonial era is the remark that music even looks like something of an exception within the cultural atmosphere of the Raj. Whereas Indian law, education, literature and art all absorbed overt Western influences thanks to colonialism, North Indian music seemed to stay substantially “the same” in terms of genres and style from the height of the Raj to Independence.¹⁴ What certainly did change, however – for both good and ill – was who participated in it and how it was transmitted, perceived, and discussed. It is in this area that Bakhle shows the agency, initiative and labour of Indian musicians and (especially) musicologists to have been crucial, especially that of the “two men” of her title, Vishnu

¹² Weidman, *Singing the Classical*, 28.

¹³ D. R. M. Irving, *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 2.

¹⁴ Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music*, 3.

Narayan Bhatkande (1860-1936) and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931). Their motivating ideology was nationalist, and it was after Independence in 1947 that the resources of the new Indian nation could be used to build on the earlier reformers' efforts. One result of that was that by the 1960s, rather than imitating Western genres, India was exporting its classical music to the West through the international tours of Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan and their successors.

There is an obvious temptation here to apply the terms used by Bruno Nettl and say that Indian classical music "modernized" rather than "Westernized" itself.¹⁵ Nettl defines modernization as the use of modern technology and institutions while keeping the music's sound and style consistent – a process he finds exemplified in the Carnatic tradition of South India. Westernization, however, involves capitulation to a perceived superiority of Western musical genres, and the attempt to bolster up one's own tradition by borrowing from them – something he observed in Iran during the 1970s.¹⁶

While Nettl's dichotomy is an attempt to come to grips with a highly important issue, in the end it purports to be more objective than it actually is. For who gets to decide what constitutes modernization or Westernization? Does the ethnomusicologist have the last word? What if insiders to the culture in question optimistically see it modernizing, while a Western outsider sees only a depressing slide into "cultural grey-out"? The "emic"/"etic" divide, or the issue of cultural self-perception, is unavoidable.¹⁷ Here, then, the historian must examine not just issues of colonial political and economic power, but also *debates* within particular countries about where musical practices should go next, how (and how far) they should adapt to changing social and political circumstances. It is these sorts of aesthetic debates that the sociologist Howard Becker regards as bringing about "revolutionary" changes in artistic cultures, or as he called them, "art worlds".¹⁸

The more confident, sophisticated and effective such debates are in guiding the development of a musical or artistic culture, the more we may be justified in speaking, as my title does, of "cultural autonomy" (in the sense of cultural self-determination, let it be noted, rather than of the absolute separation of culture from politics implied by ideologies of "absolute music"). There is no implication here that autonomy necessarily implies difference: the outcome of a debate could perfectly well be the decision to imitate Western

¹⁵ See Bruno Nettl, *The Western Impact on World Music: Change, Adaptation, and Survival* (New York: Schirmer, 1985), 24-5.

¹⁶ Nettl, *Western Impact*, 40-43.

¹⁷ As an anthropologist, Weidman rejects Nettl's terms for this very reason – "they imply that the categories of 'Western' and 'modern' are unambiguously definable and imposed from the outside, rather than debated and constructed" (*Singing the Classical*, 294 note 2). I have found it useful to employ them nonetheless, not as "imposed" categories of analysis but as names for processes of change that agents within Asian musical cultures themselves identify and discuss.

¹⁸ See Howard S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, 25th anniversary edition (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press 2008), esp. 304-5.

forms. But autonomy is augmented the more these debates are conducted in terms of cultural issues, such as identity, adaptation to geography, climate, local social structures, language, or modes of feeling. It is reduced if the issues are seen purely in terms of conforming to a relationship of power or a direction of historical progress being determined elsewhere.

One of the factors, I will argue, that works most strongly against such cultural autonomy is the imaginative and discursive ascription of power to Western science and technology. This significantly complicates the terms of postcolonial analysis, precisely because such imagined power exerts its fullest real effects under conditions of political independence. Time after time, it is independent regimes that have sacrificed potential emblems of cultural distinctiveness with much greater speed and efficiency than occurred in colonial territories. The combination of political autonomy, or the absence of both traditional monarchy and Western colonial rule, with a consciousness of inferiority to the West (an inferiority pictured as “scientific”, but usually interpreted much more generally than one would interpret the “scientific” today) tended to encourage imitation of Western cultural forms – sometimes bypassing any preparatory stage of aesthetic debate altogether.

This might look like “Westernization” to us, but to those involved in the process at the time, it was simply “modernization”. There was no self-evident divide, as Nettl assumes, between cultural ends and scientific-technological means. All sorts of aspects of Western music could take on the glamour of scientific prestige, not just radios and concert halls. As Mina Yang notes regarding music’s role in East Asian nationalism:

East Asia’s inculcation in the practices of Western classical music proceeded coincidentally with the project of modern nation building... Nationalist policies that equated science and technology, i.e. modernity, with greater economic opportunities and sovereignty promoted the conversion to the ‘scientific’ rigor of Western music, with its rationalized notation, theory, and industrialized instrumental production.¹⁹

I will quickly mention four examples of this typical kind of modernization process across Asia and the Near East, in Japan, China, Thailand and Iran, before examining in more detail some of the processes that constituted India as more of an “exception” to the rule.

Late nineteenth-century Japan is perhaps the earliest and swiftest case of wholesale cultural adaptation to Western models. This process formed part of the modernization that took place in the Meiji era (1868-1912) as a defensive move to avoid colonial exploitation by the West. According to William Malm, Western music was picked up by the Japanese “not out of any special interest in its qualities per se, but rather as a necessary part of a Western-

¹⁹ Mina Yang, “East Meets West in the Concert Hall: Asians and Classical Music in the Century of Imperialism, Post-Colonialism, and Multiculturalism”, in *Asian Music* 38:1 (2007), 1-30 (p. 3).

derived...organization".²⁰ A team of music pedagogues led by Suji Izawa began to research systems of Western music education, and ended up adopting the curriculum of the Boston Music School, instituted by Luther Whiting Mason, as the model for Japan's entire public school system. The report of the Music Study Committee in 1879 suggested a dual system of tuition in Western and Japanese music, but as Judith Ann Herd points out, "in reality it worked differently. The rigid *iemoto* system of traditional music instruction demanded years of study and devotion. On the other hand only three years of study in Western music was necessary to become certified as a public school music teacher".²¹ Children's songs emerged as a major new Western-derived repertory, shaping mass taste from an early age: an 1872 Ministry of Education edict required singing teaching at elementary level, and the songs learned were largely Western in origin or style, using Western harmony and notation.

It was not surprising, then, if at Japan's first conservatory, the Tokyo School of Music founded in 1887, "most students chose to specialize in Western music rather than indigenous musical traditions".²² And having colonized Taiwan from 1895 and Korea from 1910, Japan introduced the same system there, with similarly damaging results for their indigenous musical traditions.²³ It was only in the 1930s that a rethink began to take place, with a phase of what Judith Herd characterizes as "heated, public debates" over Japanese culture and identity in which "artists and critics called for a reassessment of Western music's cultural merit and social value".²⁴

In China, cultural modernization was catalyzed by the "May Fourth Movement", an anti-imperialist wave of student agitation beginning on May 4th 1919 following the disappointing results for China of the Treaty of Versailles. Overcoming the backwardness of feudal or traditional Chinese culture through a new cosmopolitanism was a priority. "In the eyes of the May Fourth generation of reformers", writes Richard Curt Kraus, "foreign culture was modern culture, a weapon against the oppressive feudal weight of China's own arts".²⁵ The Maoist era complicated matters by introducing conflict within Chinese attitudes to Western music – an opposition, not between Chinese traditional music and Western classical music, but between the repertoire of the latter (stigmatized as imperialist) and a Chinese populist tradition that Kraus claims "dealt even harsher blows to China's traditional music than had

²⁰ William Malm, "The Modern Music of Meiji Japan", in Donald H. Shively, ed., *Tradition and Modernization in Japanese Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971), 257-304 (p. 259).

²¹ Judith Ann Herd, "The Cultural Politics of Japan's Modern Music: Nostalgia, Nationalism and Identity in the Interwar Years", in Yayoi Uno Everett and Frederick Lau, eds., *Locating East Asia in Western Art Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2004), 40-56 (p. 41).

²² Mina Yang, "East Meets West", 4.

²³ Mina Yang, "East Meets West", 5.

²⁴ Herd, "Cultural Politics", 41.

²⁵ Richard Curt Kraus, *Pianos and Politics in China: Middle-Class Ambitions and the Struggle over Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 43.

the cosmopolitans, as they updated instruments, harmonized melodies, and spread choral singing, adapting Europe's musical technique while rejecting its musical repertory".²⁶

Thailand, meanwhile, saw significant transformations in its courtly musical tradition during the middle decades of the twentieth century, particularly during the nationalist military dictatorship of General Phibun (Plaek Phibunsongkhram, 1938-44 and 1948-57). According to Jiraporn Witayaksapan, "having experienced contempt as a citizen of a 'backward' country, Phibun was determined to modernise the country so it would win the respect of Western powers. Western culture, therefore, became [the model] for Phibun's cultural reforms".²⁷ Phibun's regime established a new Department of Fine Arts, including a national symphony orchestra, and a new style of music influenced by the West was favoured. Significantly, this was characterized through the adjective *saakon* ("universal"), intended to connote modernity and civilization.²⁸ Thai traditional music took decades to recover from the Phibun era, and its damaging effects are still referred to by practitioners of Thai court music today.²⁹

In Iran, the Pahlavi dynasty, beginning with Reza Shah's reign from 1925-41, brought political independence (maintained by playing off Britain against the Soviet Union) and cultural modernization in all domains, including music. Bruno Nettl points out the central importance of Ali Naqi Vaziri to the processes of change that were applied to Persian musical culture during this era. Vaziri trained in Paris and Berlin in harmony and counterpoint, founded the Iranian National School of Music in 1923, introduced orchestration, harmonization and staff notation into Persian classical music, and proposed the rationalization of its scalar structure, resulting in a system of 24 quarter-tones. Yet though Nettl elsewhere describes Vaziri's legacy as a "Westernized" tradition, in discussing his biography he repeatedly emphasizes Vaziri's "modernizing" aims. In the end the two overlap: "Vaziri was at once a Westernizer and a champion of modernization".³⁰

In India, by contrast to the above examples, the colonial political situation in the early twentieth century did not bring about any moment of sharp, "modernizing" reaction against "feudalism", monarchy or the court: Indian maharajas were left in place, more or less as puppets of the colonial regime, but able to continue in their cultural roles. Some did adopt Western bands and orchestras as symbols of their fashionable ability to "modernize", but others continued to promote the classical traditions that had been sponsored by their

²⁶ Kraus, *Pianos and Politics*, 100.

²⁷ Jiraporn Witayaksapan, *Nationalism and the Transformation of Aesthetic Concepts: Theatre in Thailand During the Phibun Period*, PhD diss. Cornell, 1992, 103-4, cit. Dusadee Swangviboonpong, *Thai Classical Singing: Its History, Musical Characteristics and Transmission* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), 14.

²⁸ Swangviboonpong, *Thai Classical Singing*, 14.

²⁹ I am grateful to Panravee Charoenpakdee for insights into this topic.

³⁰ Nettl, *Western Impact*, 112.

predecessors stretching back into Mughal times.³¹ However, this local patronage was hardly sufficient to turn Hindustani classical music into the internationally familiar symbol of Indian identity that it subsequently became. For that, other factors were responsible.

From Calcutta to Paris and back: Indian classical music and hybridity in the 1930s

What, then, created the “Indian exception”? I have hinted at the importance of aesthetic debates in questioning or reshaping images such as the West, modernity, or the “scientific” dimension of culture, and will address one of these debates more directly in the final section of this paper. But before that, we can trace some important channels through which cultural exchanges, hybridity and adaptation affected the form and fortunes of the supposedly “pure” Hindustani classical tradition between the wars.

The international “breakthrough” point for that tradition, which to many made it representative of Indian music per se, is normally placed after World War II. 1967 is an obvious landmark: the year in which Ali Akbar Khan set up his college for Hindustani music in Berkeley, California, Ravi Shankar played at Monterey and released his *West Meets East* LP of duets with Yehudi Menuhin; and the Beatles released *Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band*, including George Harrison’s Indian-style “Within You, Without You”. Yet encounters between some of these figures had already occurred before the war. Ravi Shankar had already heard Menuhin perform Bach with Georges Enesco in Paris in 1931.³² Enesco was a friend of Ravi’s older brother, a pioneer of Indian dance, Uday Shankar; and it is Uday’s tours of Europe and America with his dance troupe that were really the first lastingly influential presentation of Indian performing arts to the West in the twentieth century. By the time of his last tour, 1936-8, Uday was performing with a sophisticated musical ensemble directed by Allauddin Khan, the future guru of Ravi Shankar.

The tricky question is – was Uday’s dancing “authentically” Indian? The evidence suggests not, certainly if defined by the usual criterion of pedagogical lineage or *guru-shishya-parampara*: his approach was primarily individual and imaginative, and it was only after he had already achieved fame that Uday sought training from a traditional master of any Indian dance form.³³ For some this is sufficient to write off his entire project. Gerry Farrell’s *Indian Music and the West* presents Uday’s performances in Europe and America, and Allauddin Khan’s musical role within them, as cases of outright conformance to Western Orientalist stereotypes. The Orientalist cliché of India is once again granted agency over any creative impulses that Indian artists may have had – for instance in the use of performances with a

³¹ For discussion of the southern Indian maharajas’ contributions to “modernizing” Carnatic musical culture and their interests in Western music, see Weidman, *Singing the Classical*, 59-76; for processes of change further north in the state of Baroda, see Bakhle, *Two Men and Music*, chapter 1.

³² Peter Lavezzoli, *Bhairavi: The Global Impact of Indian Music* (Noida: HarperCollins India, 2009), 37.

³³ See Ruth K. Abraham, “Uday Shankar: The Early Years, 1900-1938”, in *Dance Chronicle* 30:3 (2007), 363-426 (pp. 399-400).

large variety of items “exhibiting” styles from all over India (in the manner of colonial exhibitions):

It was to be expected...that Indian music and dance in the concert-hall would, to an extent, follow the format of an exhibition. The West, after all, had come to regard India, and the whole of the Orient, as a show – furthermore, a show the contents of which they controlled. The purpose of that show was to package something recognizably Indian for Western consumption, no matter how incongruous the constituents of the package might appear... That Uday Shankar’s shows also took this format is evidence of the way in which Indian artists, despite their original intentions, had to adapt in order to promote their culture in the West.³⁴

But when Farrell proposes that this type of performance would have been at odds with Allauddin Khan’s training and background – implying that Allauddin was passively conniving in a misrepresentation of his “real” musical self – he relies upon what is itself a rather one-sided and mythical portrait of Allauddin. Farrell describes him as “a purist and strict disciplinarian, who had been brought up in a traditional lineage of court musicians”.³⁵ This is far from the whole story, as we will see.

Moreover, had Farrell tried to find out how this “incongruous” and undignified show looked from Allauddin’s perspective, he might have been surprised. A relevant document here is Allauddin’s reminiscences, taken down in interviews with Subhamay Ghosh in 1952 and published in Bengali in 1980. From this text it appears that Allauddin greatly appreciated the experience of playing before Western audiences; indeed he even declared that he preferred it to playing in India:

In Vienna, Paris, Prague, Budapest and various other cities I saw a particular enthusiasm for music and art. In all these cities there are special ‘music halls’ [concert halls]. These rooms are constructed in such a way that from any position in them one can hear even the faintest tinkle... The hall is so quiet, one would think one were playing in some cave in the Himalayas. But as soon as you finish there are shouts and applause... To play before such listeners and to discuss music [with them] gave me much encouragement. I became engrossed in my playing. I have never managed to forget myself so much in playing in India. My wooden instrument suddenly took on a life of its own. I had a kind of pleasure in playing to European listeners that I have found nowhere else.³⁶

³⁴ Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, 166.

³⁵ Farrell, *Indian Music and the West*, 165.

³⁶ “Vienna, Paris, Prague, Budapest probhriti sahare sangit o shilper bishesh samadar dekhlam. Eshab sahare alada ‘music hall’ achhe. Gharer eman byabastha, je kon jayga theke sangiter sukshmatam jhankaro shona jay... ‘Hall’ eto nistabdha thake, mane hoy jeno Himalayar kon ek guhay bashe bajachhi. Kintu shesh hoye gele cheetkar ar hattali... Emon shrotar kache bajate, sangit samvandhe alochanar karte amar khub utsaho hato. Tanmay hoye bajatam. Emon atmahara hoye deshe- kothao kakhano bajaini. Amar kather jantra pranban hoye uthto. Europar shrotader kache bajije je anando peyechhi, emon ar kothao paini”, Allauddin Khan, *Amar Katha* (Kolkata: Ananda Publishers, 1980), 68 (my translation).

What Allauddin was playing and how he presented it would have been inspired by the setting in which he found himself, but also by his own early experiences. Allauddin Khan's early training was not as purely "traditional" as Farrell claims. During his years as an adolescent and young man in Calcutta, having recently run away from home to learn music and explore the world, he had a number of rather unconventional teachers: the elder brother of Swami Vivekananda, Habu Dutta, who played a number of instruments, ran an orchestra, and taught Allauddin both Western and Indian music (including the banjo), and then Asher Lobo, a bandleader of Portuguese descent, who taught Allauddin staff notation, and his wife who taught him the piano. Allauddin also spent time in the theatre company of the leading Bengali director and playwright Girish Chandra Ghosh.

Allauddin's experience of Calcutta's hybrid musical world of bands and theatres left its mark when he moved to Maihar in 1918 as an employee of the local maharaja and founded the so-called "Maihar Band". The Bengali film director Ritwik Ghatak's 1963 documentary about Allauddin Khan includes footage of the Maihar Band playing, featuring xylophone, cello, and harmonium alongside esraj and sitar, and Allauddin himself leading on violin.³⁷ Ghatak's commentary notes the Maihar Band's influence on subsequent attempts at orchestration of Indian music, including "Ravi Shankar's *Vadya Vrinda* [Indian orchestra], Timir Baran's orchestra, and even Vishnudas Shirali's music for government newsreels and documentaries". (Timir Baran and Vishnudas Shirali also served as music directors for Uday Shankar's earlier tours.)

Allauddin's crucial connection with the Shankars was made in the mid-1930s. Ravi and Uday attended the All-Bengal Music Conference in Calcutta in December 1934, where they heard Allauddin Khan and his son Ali Akbar for the first time. It must have had an impact on both of them: Uday requested the Maharaja of Maihar to let him release Allauddin for a tour in 1935, and when the tour group returned to India, Ravi travelled to Maihar himself and undertook training with Allauddin. Of hearing his future guru in Calcutta (who was also performing with his Maihar Band), Ravi said that "seeing him then, something hit me... Then when he joined the troupe, it was such an excitement for me".³⁸

It is important to an understanding of Ravi Shankar's later career that his lessons with Allauddin did not begin in Maihar, where Allauddin imposed a legendarily strict eighteen-hours-a-day practice routine on his disciples and generally conformed to the received image of the stern traditional guru, but earlier, on tour. Here the atmosphere was very different: Ravi reports that Allauddin was very "open" in his attitude, constantly composing, and notating, innovative new material incorporating European influences, such as flamenco or

³⁷ The documentary can be viewed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1aIFUQfe1Dw> (accessed 16th July 2014).

³⁸ Lavezzoli, *Bhairavi*, 377.

Romanian gypsy music – an aspect that Ravi felt was “completely lost when I came to Maihar, where he was the guru, the disciplinarian”.³⁹ The seeds of Ravi’s later fusion experiments were already planted in the mid-1930s.

Meanwhile on tour, Ravi early on absorbed from his elder brother the importance of *presentation* to a successful performance: the use of a carpeted dais, careful illumination (Ravi noted that a “mixture of pink and amber light is best for most Indians”!), and “proper” comportment on stage. Overly informal behaviour was frowned upon in a Western concert environment, Ravi discovered, and “would have distracted [listeners] from the music itself, so presenting myself in a professional manner was essential when I embarked on my first tour there. Now it has caught on among all our Indian performers, and I am pleased that we are much better at this”.⁴⁰

The Shankar brothers’ rethinking of Indian classical performance affected more than the externals of the “show”: it penetrated into the musical “substance”, particularly the dimension of rhythm. Ravi comments on the greater prominence he aimed to give to the tabla during his concerts, including both space for tabla solos and a close back-and-forth interplay between the instruments, borrowed from his observation of Carnatic drumming. The enthusiastic audience response this technique could evoke is evident in films of Ravi’s concerts with Alla Rakha, such as the Monterey Festival performance in 1967. As for Ravi’s experimentation with a greater metrical variety in improvisation, he acknowledges that it arose on tour with Uday “from the dance, and the folk element that I always heard. I took that a lot from Baba [Allauddin], all different aspects of *chanda* [metre], not just the classical *teen tala*”.⁴¹

Not only were such innovations contributory factors to the tremendous success of Ravi Shankar’s concerts in the West, many of them also remained a part of the standard concert format for classical music in India. It cannot be maintained that the expectation of audience attentiveness, matched by performers’ careful and self-aware stage presentation, was nothing but a coercive Western “imposition” on Indian performing and listening habits. Allauddin’s enthusiasm on tour strongly suggests that he saw advantages for the Indian performer in the greater formality of the situation as against the traditional Indian *jalsā* or concert party (in which the performers were often treated fairly menially). In sum, the presentation of “authentic” North Indian classical music both at home and abroad in the post-war era was affected by musicians’ experiences with what many scholars have seen as

³⁹ Lavezzoli, *Bhairavi*, 380.

⁴⁰ Ravi Shankar, *Raga Mala: The Autobiography of Ravi Shankar*, ed. George Harrison (Shaftesbury: Element Books, 1999), 298-9.

⁴¹ Lavezzoli, *Bhairavi*, 397.

the “inauthentic” and even Orientalist showmanship of Uday Shankar’s dance tours in the 1930s – and in wider terms, on the colonial hybrid culture of Bengal and Calcutta.⁴²

Finally, the interwar success of the Shankar troupe also utilized a Western Indophile network of support, both financial and organizational. This involved such people and places as Dartington Hall, where Dorothy and Leonard Elmhirst not only hosted the Shankar troupe but put up £20,000 for Uday’s project of a centre for Indian Dance in Almora in the Himalayas, and the British Jewish portrait artist William Rothenstein. Rothenstein taught Uday Shankar painting, during the early phase of his career before he decided to become a dancer, at the Royal College of Art in London. While Uday was keen to produce Western-style canvases in oils, Rothenstein directed him towards Indian traditional genres such as miniatures and temple sculptures – genres that he would later use as inspiration for his dance performances.⁴³

The aesthetic politics of ragas: Tagore and Dhurjatiprasad Mukherji’s debate

At the centre of these networks of support for Indian musicians trying their luck in the West was one man who had already achieved global fame for his creative achievements – though in literature rather than the performing arts. This was Rabindranath Tagore, first Asian recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature (for the poetry collection *Gitanjali*, 1913). Tagore was much more than a poet: by the 1930s he was an active painter, playwright, novelist, essayist, composer and educator. The university and cultural centre he established in Santiniketan, Visva-Bharati, was the inspiration for the Elmhirsts’ Dartington Hall (Leonard Elmhirst had spent the early 1920s working for Tagore’s rural development project in Sriniketan, adjacent to Santiniketan); while Rothenstein was Tagore’s friend and the dedicatee of *Gitanjali*. The 1934 All-Bengal Music Conference, at which Allauddin Khan met Uday and Ravi Shankar, was inaugurated by Tagore. His opening speech incorporated many of his ideas on Indian music, which by that point were well known to a good number of his hearers.⁴⁴

⁴² On this note, it may well be that the importance of Calcutta to the twentieth-century growth of Hindustani classical music has been underestimated: music festivals proliferated there during the middle decades of the century, with up to 30 events per year according to some recollections. Characteristically for the hybrid ambience I have been describing, they were often held in cinema halls, and included not just classical music, but other genres such as Bengali modern songs – see HQ Chowdhury, “Of Men and Music: Classical Music in Dhaka comes of age”, *Dhaka Daily Star* 3.12.2012 (http://archive.thedailystar.net/newDesign/print_news.php?nid=259641, accessed 16th July 2014).

⁴³ Uday later praised Rothenstein as “the first to open my eyes to the greatness and beauty of India and her arts” – cit. Mohan Khokar, *His Dance, His Life: A Portrait of Uday Shankar* (Delhi: Himalayan Books, 1983), 25.

⁴⁴ Tagore’s writings on music, including correspondence and diary entries, were posthumously collected in the volume *Sangit Chinta* or “Thoughts on Music” – *Sangit Chintā* (Kolkata: Visva Bharati Granthanbibhāg 2004) – which I am in the process of translating from Bengali, and on which I draw in the following part of this paper.

Tagore's arguments in this lecture for a reform of Hindustani music were soon answered by the Bengali sociologist, novelist, literary and musical critic, and graduate of Bhatkande's Marris College in Lucknow, Dhurjatiprasad Mukherji (1894-1961).⁴⁵ His correspondence on this issue with Tagore, conducted from 1932-5, was published in 1935 as "Melody and proportion" (*Sur o sangati*).⁴⁶ It constitutes one of the most intelligent and revealing music-aesthetic debates of the early twentieth century, and if one can venture such a comparison, was perhaps just as significant a milestone in the aesthetic history of Indian music as the contemporaneous debate between T. W. Adorno and Ernst Krenek was in the history of European musical modernism.

As a brief background sketch of Tagore's own intellectual development as a writer on music, he had begun as a young firebrand attacking Indian classical music in his first public lecture of 1881, just returned from Europe and determined to apply ideas gleaned from evolutionary theory and Spencerian aesthetics to the reform of the North Indian tradition. By the time of his second published essay on music of 1912, his position had altered and softened: Hindustani music had its own kind of beauty, he acknowledged, which was something separate from both Western music and from the poetic texts set by Indian composers.⁴⁷

Yet although Tagore acquired sensitivity to the particular aesthetic qualities of Indian music, and its necessary difference from Western music, nevertheless some of his arguments retained a noticeable tendency towards the kind of automatic "scientific" reforming imperative seen in Iran or the Far East around the same time. Tagore stressed the importance of notation, and attempted to shift the aesthetic power-balance back from the master performer or *ustad*, who Tagore thought had gained a dangerous stranglehold over the art-form, to the composer – a shift for which Western classical music provided the explicit model. In illustration of the point I made earlier that Nettl's divide between technological means and musical substance was not something fixed, Tagore even presented Western harmony as a kind of universal technological development that Indian musicians would eventually have to work out how to apply to their own tradition. For him it was as important a sign of modernity as Western medicine: "if harmony has to be categorized as something entirely European just because it is used in European music, then

⁴⁵ Dhurjatiprasad Mukherji (or Mukhopadhyay) gained a lectureship in sociology in Lucknow in 1922, the same year in which he joined Marris College as the classmate of the singer Srikrishna Ratanjankar. Aside from works of sociology and a well-received trilogy of novels (1935-1943), he published *Indian Music: An Introduction* in 1945, and a series of articles on music, collected in vol. 3 of his *Rachanabali* or Collected Works (Kolkata: Deys, 2002). His son Kumar Prasad Mukherji was also a music critic and author of the colourful memoir *The Lost World of Hindustani Music* (New Delhi: Penguin India, 2006), which makes reference to his father's debate with Tagore (pp. 335-6). I am grateful to Sitansu Ray, formerly head of the Rabindrasangit department at Visva-Bharati, for information on Dhurjati's biography.

⁴⁶ Tagore and Dhurjatiprasad Mukherji, "Sur o sangati", in *Sangit Chintā*, 126-72.

⁴⁷ I discuss this shift in Tagore's opinions in my introduction to "Two Tagore Essays: 'Inner and Outer' and 'Music'", in *Sangeet Natak* Special Issue 46:1-4 (2012), 207-19 (p. 207).

one would [logically] have to maintain that, because the surgery practiced in Europe on anatomical principles is European, it would in consequence be a mistake to practice it on the body of a Bengali".⁴⁸

Against Tagore's arguments, Dhurjati demonstrated how Indian classical music could find a place within social and aesthetic modernity, without requiring further radical "modernizing" reforms. Thanks to attempts such as his, it could appear to Indians of his and subsequent generations as something modern, not a mere hang-over from tradition, or a nostalgic harking-back to the courts of the maharajas. (It is also significant that Dhurjati framed the tradition in secular terms, keeping an important distance from Paluskar's Hindu nationalism as exposed by Bakhle.) While Tagore tried to argue by analogy with other fields, particularly literature, that Indian classical music was backward and needed reform, Dhurjati demonstrated its compatibility with modern literature, philosophy, and social critique. There is not space here for a survey of the whole argument, but I will try to summarize some salient points.

First of all, Tagore argued that the classical tradition had become unhealthily socially restricted. Underlying his critique was an animus, shared by many Hindu music-lovers of the time, against supposedly illiterate and ignorant Muslim musicians unduly protective of their unique cultural "treasure". In one essay Tagore even used the metaphor of classical music as a "sleeping beauty" guarded by "demons" (*rakshasas*) – the jealous *ustads*.⁴⁹ Tagore wanted a "democratization" of the tradition. Part of this involved attacking class, or caste, prejudice – the kind of prejudice that might all too easily be reinforced if the classical tradition was straightforwardly "Hinduized". Why should classical musicians regard their music as superior to folk or popular music because it obeyed complicated rules of purity (carefully avoiding mixtures of ragas, and always sticking to *tal*)? Wasn't this like the rules of Hindu caste purity – exactly the system of ancient prejudice that modern India was struggling with?

Dhurjati's response was, firstly, to accept that purity was by no means a requirement for all music in modern India. He could appreciate Tagore's own "impure" mixtures of ragas in his songs, and in a fascinating metaphorical linkage of aesthetics and contemporary Indian politics, he even applied Gandhi's term for the outcastes or untouchables, *harijans* ("children of God"), to Tagore's compositions ("to call your songs the *harijans* of music is not, I believe, an insult to them").⁵⁰ Such genres were to be given a "seat in the temple of our musical system" too. But equally, just as Brahmins could carry on practising their rituals

⁴⁸ "Hārmoni yuropīyo sangīte byabahār hay baliyāi jodi tāke ekāntabhābe yuropīyo bolite hay tabe e kathāo balite hay je, je dehatattva anusāre yurope astracikitsā cale seṭa yuropīyo, ataeba bāngālir dehe oṭa cālāite gele bhul haibe", Tagore, "Sangīter Mukti", in *Sangit Chintā*, 44-66 (p. 57).

⁴⁹ Tagore, "Sonār Kāthi", in *Sangit Chintā*, 36-43.

⁵⁰ "Āpnār sangītkē sangīter harijan balaleo tār apamān karā hay nā", Dhurjati to Tagore, 25.3.1935, in "Sur o sangati", 136.

in modern India if they wanted, so could the rules of classical music retain their relevance as long as they were not regarded as absolute.

Another point of contention was whether Hindustani classical music could really be regarded as “art” in the modern European sense. For Tagore, the overriding criterion was unity and proportion (*sangati*): did it have a unified “form” in the way that a painting or a poem did? Performances at *jalsās* were in Tagore’s eyes interminable displays of virtuosity, greedily sucked in by listeners who always wanted more: this was a kind of musical feasting, entertainment rather than true art, as moderated and curtailed by the concern for proportion, control, and good taste. In another metaphor, it was like going into a clothes shop and “spend[ing] the whole afternoon rummaging through innumerable sorts of expensive clothes... But when I see just one well-chosen sari on the body of a beautiful woman, I say: Enough! That’s it! I do not believe that if we make her successively try out all the saris, the level of our satisfaction will keep increasing”.⁵¹ Pressing the point, Tagore drew his favourite comparison with Indian literary history. Modern literature had thrown off the old, endlessly proliferating forms of Sanskrit epics and become something more concentrated – should music not do likewise?

In response, Dhurjati elaborated a highly sophisticated and essentially phenomenological line of argument, drawing on his knowledge of modern European philosophy (especially the ideas of Henri Bergson) and literature. In Bergsonian terms, Tagore was regarding the time of music “spatially”, as a whole to be viewed at once like a notated composition. Only from this perspective could one view the “proportions” of the whole and say whether it had “unity”, whether it was excessively long, and whether too many flourishes or ornaments were applied. Yet such measurement and reflection was inimical to the experience, the *durée* or “organic time” of musical flow in *alap*. *Alap* was to Dhurjati (with the Hanslickian overtones inescapable for a Western reader) “our pure music...at the most basic or fundamental level, *ontologically*, *alap* must be granted pre-eminence”.⁵² And it was essentially a performed and experiential process, intended not to gratify the listener superficially with a display of sheer skill, but to gradually clarify the ideal image of a raga in the listener’s mind, to “reveal” the raga – just as Tagore himself had insisted that “art is never an exhibition but a revelation”.⁵³ For a raga to be “revealed” fully, hours of musical development might be necessary – development less in the sense of a blow-by-blow narrative than in the sense of a photograph being “developed” in the darkroom or an architectural blueprint being developed into a finished building.

⁵¹ Tagore to Dhurjati, 21.3.1935, in “Sur o sangati”, 131.

⁵² “Ālāpi āmāder ‘pure music’... ādhimoulik bicāre, ‘ontologically’, ālāpke prādhānya dite hay”, Dhurjati to Tagore, 25.3.1935, in “Sur o sangati”, 139.

⁵³ Tagore to Dhurjati (the phrase is in English in the original), 21.3.1935, “Sur o sangati”, 131.

As far as the comparison with literature went, Dhurjati, well-acquainted with recent modernist literature in Europe, was ready with counter-examples to Tagore's overly prompt equation of modern artistic consciousness with the concern for unity. Had Tagore read Proust or Joyce? Where was the external "proportion" in their work? Was he aware of the European idea of the novelistic "stream of consciousness"? Here again modern art served as an embodiment of experienced, "organic" time, in which proportion and formal balance paled into insignificance next to the reader's deepening experiential immersion – an immersion that Indian classical music could generate just as effectively as any other art-form.

The point is not so much that Dhurjati won the debate as that many of his points were scored through the redeployment of arguments that Tagore himself had developed previously. For beyond the specifics of Indian music and music aesthetics, it was Tagore's consistent message, in his lectures given in Europe and America between the wars, that cultural variety should be celebrated as an immanently valuable manifestation of the human "personality" in its local context, and must never be reduced by approaching it with the instrumental, formalizing attitude of the scientist.⁵⁴ During an age in which the worldwide attraction of science was steadily depersonalizing the aesthetics of Western classical music and homogenizing musical cultures across Asia, Tagore and his fellow Bengali intellectuals endeavoured, with great intelligence, wit and imagination, to think and act in the interests of their own cultural autonomy.

⁵⁴ See e.g. "What is Art?", in Tagore, *Personality: Lectures Delivered in America* (London: Macmillan, 1931), 3-38. I discuss Tagore's humanist ideas of personality and "surplus" and his critique of science in my essay "Wege aus dem Systemzwang der Moderne: Eine vergleichende Perspektive auf Tagores Begriff des 'Überschusses'", in Gabriele Fois-Kaschel, ed., *Un autre regard sur la modernité/Ein anderer Blick auf die Moderne – Rabindranath Tagore* (Tübingen: Francke Narr, 2014), 87-101.