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### Author

GARFIAS, R

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Author(s): Robert Garfias

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## *Aspects of the Profession*

# The Changing Nature of Musical Change

ROBERT GARFIAS

University of California, Irvine

IT IS THE NATURE OF SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY to focus on the definable and to seek answers to questions which further refine these definitions. The lesson of history is perhaps in what we learn when we trace the path we have taken in these inquiries and when we display and understand the effects of these pursuits. A discipline thus naturally evolves by pursuit of the definable with its inherent narrowing of focus, but at the same time must, on occasion, reverse the telescope to gain needed perspective. By this, I do not mean to propose that we need a history of a discipline so much as need a broad view of the subject and the methods by which we have been pursuing its study. This broader view, of necessity, requires some restatement of the obvious. Such restatements should bring with them added clarity and fresh insight to justify the exercise.

In large measure, many of the methods and perspectives which we bring to bear in our study of the world's music are based on conditions which existed generally at a time when cultures were significantly isolated from each other, isolated enough so that the various levels of internal development, external stimuli and assimilation could, in theory, be examined independently. I should like to postulate that this situation has today changed radically. Increased proximity between formerly isolated cultures has resulted in intensified contact and stimuli of such proportions that we need to be consistently mindful of this altered condition when considering the nature of change in musical tradition.

Clearly, everything we do as scholars concerns itself with change, whether we focus on change in a musical tradition or we choose to concentrate on some delineated and "static" moment in history. Musical change is gradual and continuous and is affected by external impulses as well as the natural and regular review of the immediate past by the present. Although it is virtually impossible to measure the exact relationship between internal and external influences leading to any specific and definable as-

pect of musical change, for purposes of discussion it may be useful to take some initial steps toward such a distinction.

In our own times, when we are continually bombarded with external stimuli designed to modify the patterns of our daily lives in everything from career and investment choices to the best kind of toothpaste we should use, it is easier to think of change as a result of such stimuli thrust before us for inclusion into our repertoire of free choices than it is to consider how we arrive at these choices once the possibility is already a part of our internal system. Musical cultures in isolation from each other and free from the influence of cultures defined by them as outside have also been subject to gradual and continuous internal modification. In the Japanese novel of the Tenth Century, *Genji Monogatari*, there is a reference to an informal musical performance in which an old woman created an embarrassingly humorous situation for all present when she proceeded to perform, with unabashed confidence, in a style that had been out of fashion for some thirty years.<sup>1</sup> Japan had at that time severed relations with the outside world for some two hundred years and from what we know of the culture of these very refined inhabitants of *Heian*, they would have looked with great disdain on anything even from the most proximate of provinces. Yet in the short space of thirty years, musical styles had changed, apparently solely as the result of internal generic development, so much that this, to them, humorous, disynchrony could occur. Most often, however, we encounter examples of change as a result of such internal development occurring simultaneously with changes which came about as the result of contacts with other cultures.

Most of us have been engaged in the study of musical traditions whose evolution reached its most recent point of development before the advent of mass media communication and instead developed largely from isolated internal development with significant external cultural stimuli regularly absorbed into the internal system of cultural change. Diplomatic contacts by extension brought cultural contacts and as political consciousness evolved in the hands of the powerful and persistent, these diplomatic and economic contacts bridged increasingly vast expanses of geographical and cultural distance. At the same time that isolated cultural contacts reached across great distances, regular contacts between neighboring groups resulted in continuing stimulus and assimilation. The stability of this pattern throughout the history of man is evident when we consider that the cultural distance traveled by Marco Polo to China in the Thirteenth Century was not significantly more than that traveled by those Eu-

<sup>1</sup>Lady Murasaki Shikibu, "Writing Practice" in *The Tale of Genji*, trans. by Arthur Waley (New York: Random House, 1960), pp. 1104–1105.

ropean travelers who visited China in the early Nineteenth Century. In contrast to this cultural distance, for every mile of the way between Venice and Kanbalu, the inhabitants of every village knew much about the language, culture, and politics of the inhabitants of the next village along the road taken by these travelers. While little had occurred to bring Europe and China closer together during the six hundred years which elapsed since Marco Polo's travels, the knowledge based on continuous contact between neighbor and neighbor continued unabated. The nature of culture contact may thus be defined by proximity, be it of the type that occurs only as the outcome of diplomatic contacts between nations separated by great distances, or the simple result of man knowing the habits of his neighbor. The character of this proximity is defined by the context required for it to occur. Although the distinction between the two examples just cited is important, this distinction is really only a matter of degree of intensity in the type and number of contacts.

The rate of the process of evolution from stimulus to assimilation is dependent on the supportive nurture which can be provided to its growth in the new context as well as upon the existence of enough structural and stylistic congruents to permit a fusion to occur. A strong political system, for example, can virtually force the acceptance of alien cultural elements to such a degree that even culturally dissimilar musical styles can be adopted. The rate of assimilation—that is, the rate of adoption and imitation of the elements of the new stimulus—may thus occur slowly or rapidly, depending on the existence of supportive social or intrinsic structural contexts. Nonetheless, even rapid assimilation is something which we observe as measurable in years rather than months.

Throughout Africa, south of the Sahara, there has been during the past ten to twelve years the spread of a new style of popular music generated from the Congo region, or Zaire. In Harare, the capital city of Zimbabwe, there has been a small band of Congolese musicians who regularly play for Shona-speaking audiences in one of Harare's well-attended drinking houses. The acclaim of these musicians was based on their performances of popular songs in Congo Rumba style. Had they only stayed in Harare for a short time, this style might have come and gone with them. However, in deciding to remain in Harare, they began to modify their repertoire to include in each performance one set of songs in the popular *Rabi* style, which might be generally described as similar to Black American swing of the 1940's with some blues admixture. This *Rabi* style had already been an established favorite with Shona audiences. The elements of the style could be quickly adapted by the highly polished Congolese musicians. It was, however, only after they had resided in Zimbabwe for some four or five years that the group had assimilated the tone and speech

patterns of the Shona language well enough to begin to compose and perform songs in Shona which drew on the linguistic and cultural roots of the audience. Their popularity had already been established but they now became assimilated to such a degree that they could now speak to their audiences in the language of that audience and in a manner which won their approval. The success of the Congo group in Zimbabwe was based not only on their excellence and proficiency in discovering the key which permitted their entry into Shona society, but on the previous acceptance of electric guitar music by the Shona, their familiarity with the Congo style, and certainly the fact that, although mutually unintelligible to each other, the Shona and Luba languages are structurally related. It was the familiarity with the contours of the language which permitted the stimulus to be assimilated.

One of the natural inhibitors to smooth assimilation of external stimuli is the natural proclivity of most men for choosing the familiar over anything but an occasional foray into the exotic. It is perhaps the task of assimilating that with which we are familiar which gives rise to the greatest difficulty. When there are a significant number of matching structural elements in two traditions, it seems at times to make the assimilation of the remaining few distinctive elements problematical. Certainly each of you can easily recall some experience to illustrate this point, but I would like to suggest one from my own experience. I have, on occasion, attempted to cook in a friend's kitchen. As one might imagine, the frustration of not finding the exact utensils to accomplish each task to one's own satisfaction as well as having to scramble around looking for spices, trying to suppress comments like, "This is an egg beater?" are enough to lead one to give up the idea. Trying to cook in a Japanese or Burmese kitchen is an experience, however, which cannot be described in simple terms of frustration. All is so unfamiliar that one no longer expects or hopes to be able to depend on old standbys and instead the task becomes a challenge of survival or a respectful withdrawal.

The analogy of survival in a Japanese kitchen is an apt one for what I would next like to consider. Continued exposure to cultural patterns with only few dissimilarities might eventually lead to a level of familiarity which would allow us to function efficiently, if we do not bear long-term grudges against people for the type of egg beaters they choose to employ. But the task of assimilating structures with few parallel elements requires a supportive system which would provide a motivation for assimilation, a motivation which becomes close to the need for survival.

Traditionally, the influence of international diplomacy or political power was sufficient to provide the supportive structure for this type of acculturation. The existence of German music in the Russian court, Chi-

nese music in the Japanese court, or Spanish music with the Indians of Mexico are just a few examples of the adoption of musical styles with few congruent structural elements between donor and recipient culture. But examples of this kind of musical adoption are rarer than those in which elements from the music of one culture are absorbed into that of its proximate neighbor.

Today, mass media communication systems and the economic and political systems which govern them have increased the level of contacts between cultures to such a degree that the process needs to be viewed from a different perspective. The 1936 "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," postulated by Herskovits, Linton and Redfield,<sup>2</sup> still applies; however, the increased level of contact means that the intensified rate of acculturation and its effects must be considered differently than was required when these guidelines were drawn. Were it true that man's capability for assimilation of external stimuli was virtually limitless, then the recent developments in media technology would merely represent an increase in intensity of a system already equipped for adaptation. The 1977 *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook* reported that according to a 1975 survey, there were 953 million radio receivers in use in the world, or 305 receivers for every 1,000 inhabitants. In 1978, it is reported that Japan alone produced 19.9 million radio sets, and the sale of these radios represented an growth rate of 40.4% over 1976.<sup>3</sup> Although we have as yet no idea of the potential limits of man's ability to absorb stimuli, it is difficult to be sanguine about his capacity to absorb this level of cultural input.

The intensified degree of contact has had effects in many other areas in addition to music. To cite one parallel example in medicine, the increased attendance of preschool children at day care centers, at ages too young for them to have developed natural immunities, has resulted in the much earlier and more rapid spread of the common childhood diseases. While such diseases as even the common cold continue to be studied as discrete cases, the pattern of their spread has now become an area of concern for epidemiologists. While the comparison of music to epidemics may be an unfortunate one, rapid dissemination of musical styles in our own times suggests that we might well look into the patterns of this dissemination in addition to our studies of discrete musical styles.

Related to recent changes in media communication systems, political and economic systems also show distinctive differences in the manner in which they affect the arts. In our time, the major portion of the world's

<sup>2</sup>Melville J. Herskovits, Ralph Linton and Robert Redfield, "Memorandum for the Study of Acculturation," *American Anthropologist* 38(1936), 149-152.

<sup>3</sup>Unesco, *Statistical Yearbook* 1977.

musics falls under the sway of one of two dominant political and economic systems: that of the socialist states or that of the state's adhering to the principle of free enterprise. Although neither of these systems operates with total implementation in its own sector of the world, each at its most highly developed state departs significantly from the basis on which most of the traditional music of the world evolved, and each has increased its influence on the arts largely as the result of improved media communications systems. During those times when cultures were more isolated from each other, support of the arts came from small communities of consumers or from the benevolence of a few powerful patrons. Such patrons of the arts as the Esterházy's apparently knew that while you may suggest to an artist the forms which he may employ, the patron should never attempt to dictate the content. Fidel Castro has suggested a principle which appears to be the inverse of this: that the artist must be free to use whichever medium he chooses but that when the content goes against the principles of state, the state will withdraw its support.<sup>4</sup>

Under the free enterprise principle, the costs of production and distribution must be passed on to the consumer which has meant that as a general policy only that which can guarantee greatest consumption can warrant the risk of investment of costly production and distribution resources. As a concomitant of this, there is a tendency for reduced diversity in favor of a safer return of the initial investment. Even in situations in which additional charitable support is sought to supplement the system, such support is usually awarded with a view toward greater dissemination and accessibility.

The attitude in many socialist states, and one not limited exclusively to socialist states, is one which recognizes the importance of a people's music in strengthening an awareness of the state as a community. Here again, although such attitudes were also prevalent in the development of national music in nineteenth-century Europe, the political structures of the Twentieth Century have gained increased effectiveness in being able to enlist the complete cooperation of the media communications systems to implement their policies. Therefore, unlike the national music movement of nineteenth-century Europe which, however powerful or officially endorsed, could only hope to reach a small percentage of their population, twentieth-century states with control of media can today reach virtually every member of their population.

The desire for standardization follows closely upon the establish-

<sup>4</sup>Herbert Marcuse, "Art in the One-Dimensional Society," *Arts Magazine* 41(1966-67), 26-31, and Susan Sontag in the Introductory Essay to *The Art of the Revolution: Castro's Cuba: 1959-1970*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1970.



ment of the state. Even before independence, Thomas Jefferson had given much thought to the development of a system of national education. In Russia the Cyrillic alphabet was adopted as the standard in 1917. In defining the parameters of the music of the state along national lines rather than according to the diverse traditional regional ones, twentieth-century socialist states also followed the tendency of most modern states to define their boundaries and to unify all within those boundaries as much as possible. The Marxist Socialist position has most often manifested itself in the attitude that regionalism in the folk arts tends to divide communities rather than unite them and, therefore, the state should promote the development of state or national styles rather than any of the existing regional variants. It is not always a simple matter to impose a single national music style. In Romania, for example, strong traditions, the existence of regional ensembles trained primarily in the village styles, and regional pride have meant that the national style is being assimilated gradually. However, regular exposure to the national style on radio and television and the current marked tendency to standardize variant forms in the Romanian regional styles are clear indications of a move toward national standardization and away from regional diversity.

The biologist Lewis Thomas has stated that speech and especially, music, are dominant aspects of human biology.<sup>5</sup> Recent brain research also suggests the notion that the capacity for speech and music are among the unique specialized functions found only in the human brain. We are also learning more about how the brain reacts to sensual stimuli and that its responses are not single and direct, as is characteristic of even the most complex artificial intelligence computer system, but rather that for each stimulus there is a complex of multiple and simultaneous neural responses. Biologists also tell us that the health of any species is reflected in the degree of variant forms in which it appears. In addition to their importance as biological indicators, diversity of choice and variety appear to be closely linked to the best functioning of the human brain and in this way may also be important factors in observing culture. All of these ideas in combination suggest strongly that the study of changes in the patterns of accessibility and, in particular, the potential loss of diversity in music for large percentages of the world population should be a matter of serious concern because of the possible far-reaching effects they may have on the human condition.

How do we measure the effects of change in the level of diversity on musical systems when we are dealing with such volume? At the moment,

<sup>5</sup>Lewis Thomas, *Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* (New York: Bantam, 1974), p. 26.

the problem does present some real difficulties. I would like to propose that the question should hinge on the rate at which the consumer population can assimilate new stimuli. Such a question, of course, depends on the manner in which we choose to define assimilation.

“Assimilation” is a term like the term “culture,” which is difficult to define with exactitude and on which there is more general agreement as to what it is not. Studies of the functioning of the human brain have thus far determined that speech production and musical perception are located in different areas of the brain. These studies have, however, focused primarily on the recognition of melodies and not on the little understood process of composition. It is clear that creation must depend on memory in some way and that in all probability memory must draw on some of the same brain functions which were engaged in the actual execution of this activity or event being remembered. It is also evident that several areas of the brain may be simultaneously engaged in the execution of what we may perceive of as a single activity. I would here like to propose that although the speech and melodic recognition functions are located in different areas of the brain, in the creation of music the process links these two functions in some way and that by extension the creation of music naturally follows a pattern congruent with the tone and stress patterns already learned for speech. By extension of this concept, I would further suggest that assimilation of external musical stimuli might be measured in terms of the degree to which the music conforms to the speech contours of the language of the consumers.

To cite just a few examples of this, let us note that Jenkins and Purcell wrote music following the basic formal patterns of Italian music, while in the melodic contours of their music the deviations from the Italian pattern were characteristically English. A German musical style was well established and recognized before the establishment of the German political state. Japanese popular music, however, presents an interesting exception to this. Twenty years ago there existed a number of Japanese popular music forms which emphasized their western origins by deliberately distorting the natural stress contours of Japanese speech. The result was a pastiche of East and West. Ten years ago, Japanese audiences had gained considerable familiarity with many forms of Western popular music. Yet, although the melodic and instrumental accompaniment style of these new popular songs were extremely sophisticated, the distortion of Japanese speech contours continued. In 1979, the newest examples of Japanese popular songs in the western style had reached a very sophisticated level of adoption of western style to a new form of Japanese poetry which is suited to the contemporary Japanese concept of today's world. Although these new song texts read like good examples of traditional poetry, in

their interpretation on these new records there is a distinct and apparently conscious distortion of the natural accent and stress patterns of spoken Japanese. One might suspect that total assimilation of the new popular music to the patterns of Japanese speech is being consciously avoided.

Measuring the level of congruity between speech contour and melody contour may well provide us with perhaps at least one means of observing the pattern of adoption and assimilation of external influences even when the level of intensity reaches that which modern media has imposed on large segments of the world population. Will we then be capable of determining when a culture is being effected by a level of external stimulus which might be dangerous to its own integrity? Perhaps postulating a dichotomy between diversity and standardization is really making this all too simple. It is more likely that man's ability to cope with external stimuli will be found to be in some degree as flexible as the system being imposed on him. Perhaps the failures of political and economic systems to impose complete conformity are the successes of man's basic sanity.

Today, when the level of uniformity in most radio and television programming in the United States has reached almost criminal proportions and when it is becoming increasingly difficult to escape the comfortable conformity of Holiday Inns and McDonald's, there manage to survive a few channels for diversity which as yet, and in spite of pressure to do so, have not completely followed the larger mold. The publishing industry and the record business are two examples which immediately come to mind. The mortality rate for experiment in these industries may be high, but the continued attempts at maintaining diversity are substantial indications of the present health of these two avenues for communication. In spite of continually increasing manufacturing and production costs a great variety of new books and records appear monthly both from the well-established houses as well as from low-budget operations.

We have today in the western world and primarily in the United States a slowly but steadily increasing minority of musicians who are devoting themselves to the study of the class music of India. This concentrated large-scale study of Indian music has been going on for almost fifteen years and yet in spite of a few noteworthy and significant experiments, there has been little true assimilation of this tradition nor has it moved much beyond the inner circle of knowledgeable specialists. This is in no way to belittle the large audiences that attend concerts of Indian classical music nor to ignore the increasing frequency of those concerts, but only to observe that these events still survive in a context that is strongly tied to the Indian tradition and have not been significantly modified for easier assimilation into the recipient culture. There are, of course, many reasons for this, not the least of which may be the fact that as a classical

tradition carried on by professional exponents, there is little about Indian classical music which allows for the broad popular dissemination, something which might be easily accomplished with a popular music. It is also apparent that the study of Indian classical music is much more than a passing fad. Although it is certainly pointless to speculate on the future, it is interesting to consider the very solid and substantial growing interest in this music and compare this to the plight of the symphony orchestra in the West. With the increasingly high costs of concert hall bookings, transportation costs, and the rising pay scales for union musicians, many large cities in the United States are finding it nearly impossible to sustain symphony orchestras. Even fund-raising drives which are mammoth compared to standards of only a few years ago still leave symphony orchestras with deficit budgets and dwindling audiences. Municipal orchestras, as large institutions in a free enterprise system, have had to cope with increased costs imposed upon them by similar institutions, such as labor unions, transportation agencies and publicity organizations. The Indian classical music movement in the West has been able to thrive because it lies largely outside these institutional systems.

The tradition of study of Indian classical music survives in the West because it chooses to function largely independent of the monolithic institutional structures. Symphony orchestras today face difficulties proportionate to this dependence. The contrast between the present condition of these two musical traditions arises from different responses to the pressures of large institutional structures to impose uniformity. In spite of the pressures, diversity continues. Perhaps the formal imposition of systems of uniformity both emphasizes and encourages continued diversity. The art of Chinese calligraphy has been practiced carefully and with little change for over a thousand years in Japan. Exactitude in teaching this art requires that the student imitate as precisely as possible the models set before him. As skill is gradually achieved even the most assiduous attempts at careful imitation only reveal to the teacher the clear and irrepressible reflection of the student's own personal traits. It may well be that diversity as a manifestation of the expression of each individual's perception and assimilation of his experiences is a natural and irrepressible aspect of man's response to his environment.