WORLD BAND

Richard Teitelbaum

> It is customary to contrast "Western music" -- the music of Europe and the Americas with that of primitive and oriental cultures. This division of the world, however, corresponds only in part to the new reality. For these other cultures also have been and are being inundated by Western music; they are widely giving up their previous styles and forms and undergoing fundamental changes. A universal musical culture is spreading out which in many respects is no longer geographically limited. Hence this contrast holds only for a period that is already passing. In the new Age it is being covered over by relationships that reach around the whole globe....
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> Through this expansion the native art of primitive and oriental peoples is being driven back; by now it has largely died out or disappeared from the center of musical life. Progressive industrialization of all parts of the earth will continue this process.
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> (Walter Wiora, The Four Ages of Music, 1965)

The spread of Western technology around the globe has been hailed by recent utopian thinkers as a prime means towards the founding of a one world community. However, the accompanying diffusion of Western culture which this technology carries is taking a heavy toll, suppressing and destroying traditional non-Western cultures. For almost 100 years, "classical music" has meant European art music to the vast majority of concertgoers and music students in Japan, and similar situations now exist in many Asian and African countries, which are flooded by Western popular music as well. If electric

technology is truly bringing Western consciousness closer to the primitive, the tribal, and the Oriental, then this trend may soon be reversed and balance achieved. Meanwhile, with "our official culture still striving to force the new media to do the work of the old" (McLuhan), and media-messages flowing from areas of greatest power to those of least power, the present destructive trend continues.

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In music, several significant counter-currents are notable. The most visible of these is the infusion of non-Western elements into Western popular music. Jazz has long been a major counter-force to the expansion of purely European music, and the influence of Indian music on recent rock (and jazz) is well publicized. In a quieter way, the rapid growth of ethnomusicology is increasing interest in and appreciation of non-Western musics, particularly in American universities where several centers have already been set up. The concept of ethnomusicology is of couse Western in origin, and the days are not long gone when its practitioners literally carried chocolates wrapped in silver paper to native musicians, hoping they'd be mistaken for money (Jaap Kunst, Ethnomusicology, 1959). Now, however, in "world music" programs such as those at Wesleyan University, UCLA, and Calif. Institute of the Arts, native masters are hired to be in residence, both performing and teaching. After several years of study, students spend several more years of field study in the native countries. From these programs a number of gifted Western performers of non-Western musics have emerged, several of astonishing virtuosity. On the other hand, some criticisms of such programs, and of the "bi-musical" approach itself have been made. Reflecting the economic inequities in the world at large, native masters remain underpaid, ranking below their Western colleagues in academic hierarchies. A non-Western musician has pointed this up from his perspective by asking: "Would Van Cliburn or Milstein, for instance, accept an analogous position in, say, a Japanese or Indian university?"

Concerning the "bi-musical" approach, the possibility of achieving a truly deep mastery of another culture's musical art has been seriously questioned. Art forms developed in specific cultural, linguistic, and racial contexts may prove graceless transplants. Observing American students performing a delicate Oriental classical dance, a wag once quipped: "Meat and potatoes trying to look like rice!"

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Another important counter-trend is the growing interest by Western composers in techniques and structures of non-Western musics (which can be traced back at least to Debussy's encounter with a Balinese gamelan at the Paris Exposition of 1889). During the 1930's and '40's composers such as Messiaen in Europe and Cowell, Harrison, McPhee and Cage in America studied Oriental music concepts and utilized them in their own works, especially with respect to rhythmic structure. In particular the influence of Oriental thought on the work of John Cage has been profound.

The past few years have seen a strong revival of interest in non-Western music by such composers as LaMonte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Phil Glass, all of whom have studied with native masters for various periods of time. Their music also reflects the "orientalizing" influence of electric technology: LaMonte Young spent hours listening to the electric "drone" of telephone poles as a child, long before encountering Indian music, and his early sustained-note pieces reflect this experience. Though long interested in African music, Steve Reich's pulse music actually grew directly out of his experiences with tape loops played on machines with slightly different speeds.

Another approach was taken by the composer/performer group Musica Elettronica Viva in Rome. In 1967 this group (of which I was a member) began experimenting with collective improvisation techniques similar to certain meditative practices. By turning inward, searching through one's own consciousness as if in a labyrinth, each player encountered and passed through his own learned responses and accumulated musical cliches, en route to common musical archetypes. This process frequently resulted in musical expressions resembling those of archaic and Oriental cultures -- characterized by chanting, drones, unvarying pulse -- and often gave rise to internal states of harmony and tranquility. The use of electronics in live performance was an integral element in this process, allowing the performer's activities to mix, inter-modulate and feedback from a spatially dispaced, electronically transformed "double" issuing from the loudspeaker. In the kabbalah it is written that in a state of ecstasy a man "sees the shape of his self standing before him and he forgets his self and it is disengaged from him and he sees the shape of his self before him talking to him and predicting the future." (Scholem, Trends in Jewish Mysticism.)

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During the past year, while studying Javanese, African and Japanese music at Wesleyan University, I organized a series of experiments which were carried out under the general heading "World Band." Unlike approaches described above, these were based neither on bi-musical nor individual compositional methods. Rather, open field situations were created which allowed several world musics to co-exist, interact, and interpenetrate simultaneously in the same space, and on an equal basis. No musical structure was preconceived, but rather allowed to evolve out of the collective actions of all participants. The combining of diverse musical traditions was facilitated by the unusual and generous resources of the Wesleyan World Music program.

A time and place were announced for music-making -- usually Tuesday evenings at the house where several of the participants lived. Only a few musicians were involved at the first session, but at successive weekly meetings each participant invited approximately one additional musician-friend (or teacher). Anticipating difficulty in explaining such an experimental undertaking to the non-Western musicians themselves beforehand, the first sessions included mainly their most advanced students. The initial group included David Roach, sitar, Ruth Kaplan, Javanese gender, and composer/performers Douglas Simon, Ken Maue and myself. As the group grew rapidly in a kind of geometric progression, it soon involved a large part of the Wesleyan world music community, including a number of the non-Western artists. This process resulted in a social structure that acted as a cohesive force within the group. The notion of hospitality, particularly towards visiting artists in a foreign environment was also important. From the start musical activities were associated with social ones. At rehearsals no verbal instructions were given, no rules enunciated, no written scores employed. The music was shaped through attention to sound. In this way, a variety of forms and textures emerged, as well as unspoken but very real common understandings. One of these was that no one personality was to dominate.

Electronic instruments and amplification were utilized from the beginning. The latter served both to balance loudness levels for softer instruments, and to fill out the sound-space in the manner used by Indian musicians who often use amplification with level so low that most of the audience remains unaware of its use.

In early sessions, Indian and Javanese elements were prevalent. Once, for instance,

the superposition of a North Indian raga, a South Indian raga, and a Javanese folk song, all pentatonic, arose simultaneously and spontaneously, with magical effect. The drone, the pulse and repetitive modal melodic patterns frequently emerged as unifying elements in "ensemble" sections. At other times the music was more abstract, multi-centered, spread out and moving in space, anarchic.

Shortly before the first public performance at Wesleyan, the group was joined by Navaho singer and dancer Douglas Mitchell, which significantly altered the Asian "high culture" tone which had prevailed. The confrontation of those classical outlooks with the more ritualistic, elemental approach which Mitchell brought created an interesting tension, tending towards polarization. The addition of many other elements at the concert dissolved this dichotomy into a complex, multi-pointed mix. These included jazz saxophonist Anthony Braxton, composer/performer David Behrman, Alvin Lucier's conch shell playing, the intermedia group Pulsa, tapes of musics not represented live (e.g., Pygmies), and singing and dancing by many of the "audience." In addition to the main performing space, an adjoining smaller one was provided where quiet ensemble playing took place. A number of performers (and listeners) passed back and forth between the two. The concert lasted about four hours and was preceded by a "global potluck" supper, each of the band members (about 30) bringing one dish. Indian curries, Indonesian shrimp snacks, Balkan and Mid-East specialties, Navaho lamb stew and fry bread, beer, wine and cookies were among the fare.

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A later series of experiments was made with smaller groups of musicians under more controlled conditions. Some of these groups were formed by combining timbral homogeneity with cultural diversity (for instance, four conga drums played by an African master drummer, a Western classical percussionist and two Afro-American musicians). Other criteria included evident similarities of expression between otherwise diverse traditions (for instance, microtonal inflections of Korean "folk-art"music and those of jazz and blues), and intangible elements of interpersonal chemistry. Jazz musicians in particular seemed to mix easily in many situations. Itself an hybrid form, "syncopated jazz catches up the theme of global unity created in the twenties by the

international acceptance of jazz" (McLuhan).

In the first series of experiments the hesitation which several of the musicians felt at risking dilution of their traditions was overcome in some cases by playing instruments other than their own. In later experiments techniques were found which enabled each performer to play his own instrument, rooting his activity in his own traditional base, but in some way detaching his actions from it in a way that preserved its probity. Increasing musical consciousness of another musical consciousness is one benefit accruing to the former "bi-musical" approach. This external (Western) path can help break down communication barriers arising from the "us" and "them" syndrome. The case for the inner, traditional approach was stated well by one of the Asian musicians when he said: "Someone, maybe Indian or Japanese, if he doesn't know about his things at home, and he's just doing another kind of music, I don't know how deeply he can go into it, you know, how deep. Because the truth is always near me, myself, not long distance. But if I understand some kind of truth it's easy to find near myself, rather than making a long distance call. Inexpensive!" Future experiments might well follow both these paths, which will ultimately be seen to merge.

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Western scientific approaches can offer us valuable insights, particularly in areas of electronic communications and psychophysics. Research in the latter may soon provide us with a biological basis of the arts, revealing physiological responses to pitch, rhythm, and timbral patterns universal throughout the species.

Other bases for experiments might include known or hypothesized time-space relations between specific musics and peoples, for instance African and Afro-American, East African and Indonesian, and East Asian and American Indian. Large-scale performances (perhaps on the model of Fuller's World Game) could illustrate the history of world music, showing development of individual traditions, cross-fertilization through migrations, commerce, etc., common origins and roots, and the movement towards global unity that characterizes the present. Much of the information being compiled by ethnomusicologists and anthropologists concerning instrumental families, tuning systems, and structural characteristics of the musics themselves might be utilized. It is however, of the

utmost importance to carry on such activities as collective endeavors in which as many of the world's cultures as possible are represented equally, and in the full knowledge that all music is "ethnic" music. If a true world music is to evolve, it cannot (as in the present trend) be dominated by Western consciousness or technique. That projects in this area must currently be funded by Western institutions is itself problematic. Nevertheless, some way must be found to prevent the extermination of the more subtle and elsuive inner spiritual technologies of Oriental and other non-Western cultures which the West has sacrificed in its pursuit of the outer.

To date many of the points of contact used in combining musics of East and West have been on the superficial level of cliche. If a meaningful synthesis is to develop we must find a way to penetrate to common origins and archetypes hidden in the collective unconscious shared by all our brothers in the world community, and to return together to the future.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SUNDAY, AUGUST 15, 1971

Java's 12-Piece Gamelan Orchestra Yielding to One-Piece Tape

By JAMES P. STERBA
Special to The New York Times

KUPUH, Indonesia.— Indonesia's gamelan orchestras —the xylophone, drum and gong ensembles that have helped give this nation its enchanted flavor—are slowly finding themselves out of a job.

Their music can still be heard at night all over this area of central Java, but if one travels down village paths to the source of the sound, there is a good chance that it will be not the practiced hands of a bewhiskered collection of old and revered Javanese men but a tape recorder.

No one seems to know how many gamelan orchestras there are in Indonesia, but most people agree that there are far fewer than there were a couple of years ago.

Prawirosukamto, a 58-year-old farmer and shopkeeper in this tiny village, has a set of 12 instruments that his grandfather passed on to his father in 1918 and his father passed to him sometime before the Japanese invaded Java during World War II. The instruments have been gathering dust for months.

Rental Business Declines

"I used to rent them out for the night to the musicians for birth celebrations or shadow puppet shows," he said, adding that he does not perform but keeps the instruments because they are heirlooms.

He used to be able to make a little extra money renting them out, but rentals have declined from several times a month two years ago to less than once a month now. It's a matter of progress and economics.

An orchestra of 12, including musicians, can be hired for about 5,000 rupiahs, or $13 a night. The average musician takes home about 60 cents for a performance that can last more than eight hours if it accompanies a puppet shadow play.

"They need the money, but this is something a man does for his heart," Mr. Prawirosukamto explained.

Included is the cost of transporting more than a ton of bulky instruments by horse or oxcart to the site of the performance, usually a simple open spot along a path in a hamlet.

For 3,000 rupiahs or less, a collection of young men on motorbikes or in a borrowed truck will speed down from Solo, a city 15 miles north of here, with loudspeakers, a tape recorder and tapes of the best gamelan orchestras in Indonesia. They can be ready for action in minutes.

Mr. Prawirosukamto concedes that the local musicians are not as good as Indonesia's best, but he naturally argues the virtues of a live performance.

To many villagers, especially the young, the new, fancy electronic machinery, which runs on batteries, is much more exciting than a group of old men and their ancient instruments. As a result, not many young men are interested in learning to play and carry on the art form.

One consolation is that even though tape-recorders are taking over, most of the music played on them in village ceremonies is still gamelan music. Most, but not all.

The other night a young couple held an all-night celebration called a slametan for the birth of their third child. The tape-recorded music was by John Lennon.

WORLD BAND MUSIC

World Band Piece No. 1

Play your own music.

World Band Piece No. 2

Play another music.

World Band Piece No. 3

Play an unknown music

World Band Piece No. 4

Choose a partner from a different area and play a duet.

World Band Piece No. 5

Choose two partners from different areas and play a trio

World Band Piece No. 6

Form larger groups

World Band Piece No. 7

Perform Nos. 4, 5, or 6 choosing partners by chance methods

World Band Piece No. 8

Perform any of the above via world communications bands (satellite, microwave, cable) connecting as many global points as possible; broadcast via radio telescope into outer space towards other perhaps inhabited planets.

World Band Piece No. 9

Combine any of the above

World Band Piece No. 10 (Time Cycle)

Play the music of your own tradition as it is today. Gradually move back in time, playing increasingly older styles or compositions.

Be aware that your tradition may begin to merge with others.

Continue this process until you are playing the oldest style you know.

Continue further, imagining music even older. When reaching the extreme, gradually transform into music of the most distant future imaginable.

Come back gradually from the future to the present.

World Band Piece No. 11

Perform No. 10 in reverse direction (present-future-past-present)

World Band Piece No. 12

No. 10 and No. 11 simultaneously

World Band Piece No. 13

Charter an ocean liner and fill it with world musicians

Sail around the globe

Pick up and drop off players as you go

Give concerts in ports en route

Continue playing on the high seas

Continue circumnavigating the earth

World Band Piece No. 14

Sing or play a children's song familiar in your own country.

Teach it to musicians (or children) from other lands, each repeating it in turn

Note the differences in performance

Sing it all together

Go on to a song from the next person's home and repeat

World Band Piece No. 15

Add pieces to this list and perform them

World Band Piece No. 16

Compose music for a performer from
the nation that is the number 1
enemy of your own

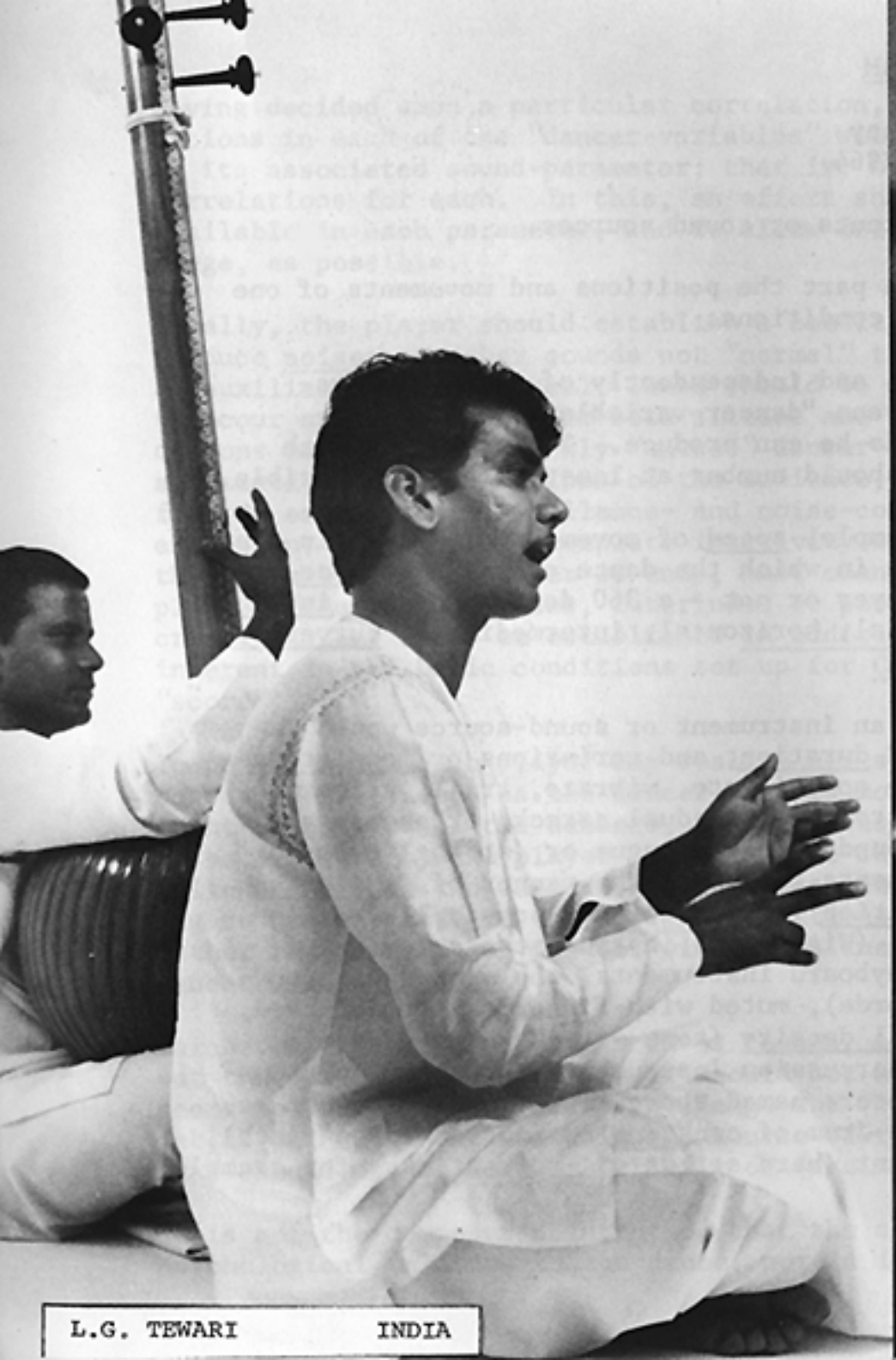
Ask him to compose something for you

Perform the pieces

(Nam June Paik)

DOUGLAS MITCHELL NAVAHO

ABRAHAM ADZENYAH GHANA



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