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The Wesleyan Way: World Music in an American Academic Structure

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In this paper, I will first quickly compare and contrast the situation of world music transmission in the US and Europe, say a bit about the general situation of world music in American academia, and then highlight the forty-five year experience in this area at my home institution, Wesleyan University, in Connecticut.

Europe and the US share some common approaches. Both have institutions that hire non-mainstream Europeans, that is, imported or resident artists and recent immigrants, to teach "their" music. Both might also employ mainstream Europeans to teach non-European music. On both sides of the Atlantic, governments from local to national create events, perhaps called "multicultural," where musical transmission takes place. And everywhere there are also local initiatives outside of institutional structures—teaching studios—run by a variety of teachers who either come out of minority communities or have been trained by minority musicians. For example, one of our recent graduates, who is not Brazilian, runs a successful samba school in New York, while we have also had a South Indian graduate offering music classes to local South Indians.

But Europe offers some possibilities that are less prominent in the US. We do not have large-scale organizations such as WOMEX and WOMAD and the whole festival structure they both create and feed. There is nothing like the BBC World Music Awards, and far less purchasing of world music recordings. Greater

New York, with its 25 million inhabitants, really only has one world music concert agency, the World Music Institute, and one long-standing organization that works with minority communities to generate events set in their neighborhoods, the Center for Traditional Music and Dance. And there is little American participation in large-scale international projects, such as those from UNESCO or CDIME itself.

In the US, some world music education goes on in local schools, partly with the support of programs run by ethnomusicologists. The impact and value of that initiative lies beyond the scope of this paper, and is a fascinating topic in its own right. But the real support rests in the more permanent positions at colleges and universities, much less the case in Europe. Our conservatories, except for the remarkable New England Conservatory in Boston, tend to ignore world music. The conservatories within our larger universities, called "Schools of Music," also neglect traditions outside western concert music, with a few exceptions.ⁱ Surprisingly, it is the mainstream music departments, as part of the "liberal arts" model of higher education, that house most of our world music transmission. This was pioneered at the University of California at Los Angeles in the mid-1950s by Mantle Hood, who discovered world music in the Netherlands and then invented the term "bimusicality" to cover the creation of ensembles such as the gamelan and West African drumming. My institution, Wesleyan University, invited its first non-western faculty member, T. Ranganathan from Madras, in 1963, followed quickly by the purchase of a gamelan and its teachers from Indonesia. We added West Africa, also on the

model of UCLA, North Indian, Japanese, and African American music as permanent components, and while we have lost Hindustani and Japanese music due to budget cuts over the years, the other musics are firmly entrenched and new ones are added as interest, budgets, and personnel allow. Indeed, the longest-serving member of our department is Abraham Adzenyah, who came in 1969 from Ghana, quoted below.

This boom at a small college was unique; it was far more common for world music teaching to find a niche in the large institutions, such as the original UCLA program. The Wesleyan initiative came from two faculty members: David McAllester, one of the four founders of the Society for Ethnomusicology, and Richard Winslow, a composer fascinated with the new globalization ideas offered by visitors to the university's Center for Advanced Studies--John Cage and Buckminster Fuller--as well as Marshall McLuhan's writings. In a visionary way, around 1960, Winslow and McAllester announced to the university that in the future, music would be based on a global consciousness and the emergence of new media in composition, so Wesleyan would have to fund a program for this next phase. Surprisingly, the small college of elite white boys, operating under a quota system for people of color, Jews, and even Catholics, embraced this global ecumenical vision. To get the program going, in 1962 they hired Robert E. Brown, one of the first graduates of the UCLA program and a natural empire-builder, like his mentor Mantle Hood.

Within a few years, Brown had taken a tiny music staff and expanded its size and scope, establishing a Master of Arts and Doctor of Philosophy

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program, the former including both composition and ethnomusicology, the latter just ethnomusicological. In 1973, the department comprised 31 graduate students, three ethnomusicologists, and twelve visiting artists in "non-western music," as David McAllester summarized it in an article entitled "Cerebration or Celebration." McAllester was all for "celebration," meaning a strong respect and investment in performance as complementary to "cerebration," the study and understanding of world music: "we have found that even the highest levels of attainment in performance skills have not tended to supplant 'scholarship,' but have, instead, given it a deeper meaning....performance has been a safeguard against niggling scholarship and scholarship has added a healthy dimension of speculation to the creative process." ii

At first, there was a sharp divide between the "visiting artists" from other cultures and the American faculty and students. Brown felt that teachers from abroad—India, Indonesia, Ghana—needed to leave New England after a year or two to keep from becoming westernized. I have heard that he even graded these teachers' students, since the foreigners would not know how to handle academic requirements and procedures. Some "grad students" did the work of full-time teachers. Over the 1970s, after Brown's departure (I came in 1971), the department decreased the foreigner-American gap, regularized the status of the teachers, and allowed them to stay for longer periods of time if they wished. Some received advanced graduate degrees, either at Wesleyan or elsewhere, and even added scholarly work and research-based courses to their ensemble instruction duties. Sumarsam, who is quoted below, received the doctorate

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from Cornell University in Southeast Asian studies and is a world-renowned scholar, so goes far beyond the original model of the visiting artist that was in place when he came to Wesleyan in 1972.

In sum, the Wesleyan experience, or what I have called "the Wesleyan way" in the title of this paper, is literally unique in American higher education for three reasons: first, it grew integrally with a department which was quite small, unlike other institutions where world music was "tacked on" to a large existing program based on western classical music; second, there is no overarching graduate school that the music department has to conform to in academically enshrined ways, so we have been free to improvise, and third, the program abandoned the concept of quickly-circulating "foreign" staff, opting instead for the possibility of long-term musical and intellectual growth of the faculty, regardless of their initial place of origin.

In the balance of this paper, I will quickly survey three of our programs, with short interview clips from the teachers: Karnatak, or South Indian, vocal and percussion, West African drumming, and Javanese gamelan. The aim is to hear from the instructors themselves, but also to pinpoint specific issues of our pedagogy and its implications. These will be clear from the first case study, Karnatak music, since David Nelson, now the senior instructor, is definitely not from Madras (now Chennai), the point of origin of the original teachers of the music. Karnatak was the first world music to be taught at Wesleyan, as that was Bob Brown's field, and he brought his mentor, T. Ranganathan, in 1963 as the initial "visiting artist." Ranganathan, a percussionist, his brother T. Viswanathan,

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a flutist and vocalist, and their sister, Balasaraswati, a major figure in world dance who spread the bharata natyam genre, also came to Wesleyan, teaching in the style of the Vina Dhanammal lineage. Nelson studied with Ranganathan, so here we have the extraordinary case of an extended chain of world music transmission of a very particular lineage and style, over 44 years, from Indian master to American disciple, who has himself now become a master teacher. David works with B. Balasubrahmaniam, a South Indian vocalist who has also studied the same tradition; he learned from Viswanathan over ten years when that master went back to India to teach. The rooting of this lineage as literally a world tradition was driven home when Viswanathan became the first artist to receive both the President's Award in India and the National Heritage Fellowship of the National Endowment for the Arts in the US, the highest award for "traditional" arts.

Interviewed in his office, this is what David Nelson says about the transmission of Karnatak music at Wesleyan:

We're sitting in the room that, since this arts complex was constructed, [1973] has always been the South Indian room. This is where I worked with my teacher T. Ranganathan, for 3 years when I was a graduate student, and now, all these years later, I'm the person doing the teaching in this room. I have his picture, and his teacher's picture, and my other teacher's picture here, and some days I really think they're smiling.

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Viswanathan, who also taught at other institutions in the US, developed a pedagogy for transmitting his knowledge to Americans, a technique which itself has been studied by graduate students at Wesleyan, who have begun to write Master's theses on this approach to world music teaching. As Nelson says, "what Ranga and Viswa wanted to do was to transplant this music into this culture. They weren't just trying to get away from India." Nelson, in turn, has found ways to adapt the Viswa-Ranga tradition as he has become a teacher in his own right:

Ranganathan never taught any two people the same material. I can't claim that. He was a genius, and I'm not. I haven't diluted anything, but we do use some of the approaches more formulaic than he would have done it. I make extensive use of stroke notation, and there are forms of graphic analysis that I use, and now the technology has taken us to an entirely new level [i.e. the use of email and other computer-aided learning techniques]

The tradition of the Vina Dhannamal lineage has faded in its homeland, especially since the passing of Viswanathan in 2003. In 2006, one excellent student, Deborah Witkin, talked about how deeply she was immersed in her work with Balasubrahmanyam, stressing the extent to which the *gurukala* custom of close learning from and subordination to a mentor had survived in Middletown, while it has also declined in India. Although she appreciated her experience, she nevertheless wondered aloud in my class one day about why we are keeping this particular, small tradition alive so intensely and at such

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expense, in Middletown, Connecticut. It is the stability of the institutional structure that allows this to happen, as well as the department's belief in continuity. This is an extremely conservative situation all around, and far from the volatility of a world music as a commercial concept, a social fad, or an exemplar of exotica.

And a shift of perspective comes about by itself, from demographics. As is often the case with immigration patterns, what was once exotic is now part of our neighborhood anyway. When Viswanathan won the NEA award, it struck me that he was being treated not so much as a world musician, but as a worthy representative of the rapidly grown population of Indians in America. Nowadays, we at Wesleyan relate to that community through the fact of Connecticut's largest Hindu temple being located in Middletown. I have heard that this siting is partly due to the the temple's founders desire to locate in a town where Indian music was already being supported. Indian-Americans attend Wesleyan's Navaratri Festival, now nearly thirty years old, and Wesleyan students sing at the Temple occasionally. So from an "exotic" visiting artist situation, Karnatak music has taken root locally as a venerable transcultural tradition.

Let me turn now to the very different situation of West African drumming. The main overlap is the concept of the long-serving teacher from abroad; our authority here will be Abraham Adzenyah, mentioned above as the department's longest-serving faculty member. Adzenyah summarizes his background and beginnings in the US briefly:

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While I was in Ghana, I came from a musical family, my father had his own band, with his children. Before I went to Legon, to the school of performing arts, I knew the repertoire of my area. Our first president, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, said we had to have a national dance company. We were recruited into it; we had no choice. I learned the repertoire of different groups, even of Benin and Nigeria. When I first came it was a little rough, because of the language barrier. But I set a goal that I wouldn't go back until I could learn enough to teach westerners.

Adzenyah's evocation of the heady Nkrumah days of early postcolonial identity is an important piece of background for his approach. The national dance company threw together musicians and dancers from all over the country and reshaped their local traditions to fit stage presentation, as happened in countries around the world from the earliest days of the Soviet folk troupes through today. So what the Wesleyan students are getting is an already highly filtered set of strokes and moves: the modernity of the academic classroom meshes well with the modernity of the national dance ensemble. Adzenyah's ambition to teach westerners is, then, part of a postcolonial outreach that began with the arrival of J. K. Nketia to UCLA, where he moved the bimusicality model away from Orientalism—gamelan, Indian music—to a recognition of the African contribution, always defined as drumming, following early ethnomusicology's designation as Africa as the "rhythm continent."

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The African drumming pedagogy at Wesleyan is typical of those campuses that have enough staff and student interest to offer a multitiered teaching approach:

I have an introductory course with beginners [30-35 students], where we teach the rhythms and the techniques employed on the drums. The tempo is very slow, because they are beginners. The theme of the introductory course is communication. We use the instrument as a medium to talk. In ethnomusicology you have polyrhythm, cross-rhythm, etc. but we use the instrument to iron out our differences and share the common ground together. They are assigned reading materials, so they will learn about the history and other aspects of the music in the culture. As I have been teaching here for a while, there are a lot of theses they can read. In the intermediate [18-20 students], we review the ensembles that we learned in the beginning and then add more complicated repertoire. That is to prepare them towards performance level. We also do some reading and writing of essays to determine how much they understand about the culture. In the advanced class [10-15 students], they learn more complicated rhythms and perform on and off campus. We learn different songs, in different languages, from different ethnic groups.

The bureaucratic context of a twice-a-week-for-eighty-minutes course hinders a properly integrated approach to this kind of music. As Adzenyah points out, "in Ghana, from the word go, we start with the dancers. Drumming, singing, and dancing are inseparable," whereas in the university context, separating the performance media "is part of the academic system in the western world." At Wesleyan, "world dance" — Javanese, South Indian, and African — are housed in the Dance Department, which causes some difficulties of synchronization of the learning environment.

In fall, 2006, we asked a graduate student named Elikem to fill in for Adzenyah who, as an academic, gets sabbatical leave to update his work. Let's hear from the younger generation, who arrives at the now-venerable Wesleyan teaching context:

It's really amazing to see all these foreign students performing my music. I like the way the teacher gives them the context of the music. The performance practice is very good, compared to other places, where the students just start drumming.

This has been going on for over 40 years, so the same pieces keep repeating. It's social music, it's not very ritual, where complexity of rhythms might arise. In the real traditional setting, certain movements should not be done at all. Some ritual music—you can't really allow students to get possessed, even though that happens in Ghana. Some of those movements are restricted.

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Here, I don't think everyone is born into a religious system where you have to be initiated. It's part of the music, but people here are not connected.

Elikem feels that the music being transmitted is perhaps a bit simple, being based on entertainment rather than ritual. Of course, he doesn't think this can be pushed too far—we wouldn't want Wesleyan students being possessed while drumming and dancing.

Finally, the Javanese gamelan class offers its own issues; here the spokesman is Sumarsam, who has managed this program since 1972:

I am from the second generation of gamelan teachers coming to the United States; the first was Hardjo Susilo, in the 1960s, as part of the movement for a "study group," which was a process-oriented classroom, where the interaction between students and teachers was emphasized.

In the late 1970s, we started having beginning and advanced gamelan classes. That's quite a change from the early 1970s, when we had a mixture of beginning and advanced students [in one class].

Sumarsam's personal development has affect his pedagogical approach:

When I came here, the first thing was to learn how to teach American students. The advanced students helped to teach and organize the class. As time progressed, I was enrolled in advanced studies, MA at Wesleyan, PhD at Cornell, which had an impact on

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how I teach gamelan. In addition to learning to play, we now assign students to read a couple of articles on gamelan and have a few discussions in class. I wrote a short introduction to gamelan we use as a reading assignment.

One large question is: why do students take a course such as gamelan? We do not have any study of this key question, surprisingly. In short, we do not do the market research about our clientele that a non-academic teaching center would be obliged to undertake. But Sumarsam has long been interested in his students' motivation:

I myself became more interested in the value of music-making in the context of liberal arts education. I ask incoming students to explain themselves, why they want to learn gamelan. The answers can be very interesting. A few of them will say 'my friends say it's a fun thing to do,' but many say that learning gamelan is a form of intercultural experience.

One of the main points about the Wesleyan program has been the integration of undergraduate, graduate, and faculty contributions to the musical and learning environment. Sumarsam points with pride to his Indonesian graduate students who have returned to their homeland, imbued with the open, interdisciplinary approach to gamelan they learned at Wesleyan, and cites the possibility that his own scholarly work has influenced the Indonesian understanding of gamelan history. It was for this reason that he translated his book, published at the University of Chicago Press, into Indonesian. So

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Sumarsam is a striking case of how a long-lasting pattern of institutional support can create a particular intercultural flow of personnel and ideas.

Sumarsam's long-term partner in the gamelan program, I. M. Harjito, (at Wesleyan since 1975) has benefited from another creative current, the composition program of the department. He has developed a latent compositional talent over the past few years, writing pieces for traditional gamelan, but also pioneering works for gamelan and orchestra and one for gamelan and bagpipe. The latter was inspired by a graduate student who specializes in nontraditional and experimental music for the Scottish bagpipe, and reaffirms a long-standing Wesleyan tradition of compositional combination. The existence of a stable academic structure allows the evolution of traditions that grow over generations of students and teachers in ways that most music education programs do not allow for.

Despite the generally positive evaluation of the Wesleyan program above, we do have our administrative problems with the university at times. Recently, our method of grading has been challenged by the university as not being academically stringent enough. Occasionally, the goals of music education clash with the ideals of an elite liberal arts college. The university has reduced the number of times that students can take performance courses for a grade, instead of just a "pass-fail" evaluation, or for credit towards graduation. They don't quite understand our point that every time a student works in an ensemble, he or she is deepening skills and insights. On the other hand, Wesleyan is in the minority in the US in offering full credit for world music

ensembles. Many colleges and universities give no credit or only partial credit for any form of performance class, which is seen as non-academic or even as an "extra-curricular activity" that might be fun, or a release from serious academic work, but not for credit. So there is a constant give and take about the place of our special type of education. It should be said that the issues are no different for the orchestra and chorus than for the gamelan and African drumming classes.

Many Wesleyan doctoral graduates have gone on to faculty positions around the world—if they came to us from other countries—or in the US. Some of our American graduates find they are not quite prepared for the jobs that they get with their degrees, since they can never duplicate the distinctive atmosphere of a small college with big world music dreams. We do not even give the standard course expected everywhere, the world music survey, since we can offer so many kinds of more focused and in-depth ways of getting students involved in the idea of music and culture.

Ultimately, our success at home in Middletown rests on the enthusiasm of the students for this kind of learning. Our particular tradition is both static and evolving. On the one hand, we continue to perpetuate a particular South Indian legacy, and increasingly, wonder about being able how to carry on our older styles of Asian classical musics, since they are less popular, as compared to the African and African diasporas musics that make up the backbone of world music recordings. Sumarsam notes the decline in gamelan graduate students.

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On the other hand, the recent surge in interest in East Asia has allowed us to fund stable Chinese and Korean ensembles for the first time.

Perhaps we are so self-contained that we take too much for granted about our traditions and are out of touch with current trends. But I expect that we will persist in carrying on the Wesleyan way well into the twenty-first century, if only because it has become such an identifiable part of the institution's profile, and universities are very aware of their selling points in an increasingly competitive market for the students who consider going to American elite colleges and universities, where the annual cost for tuition and maintenance is around \$40,000. Administrators know the value of "positive branding" and, oddly enough, the world music program plays a substantial part in that process. Somehow, we manage to keep sixteen full-time positions in the music department, while one of our chief rivals, Amherst College, has four. We are pleased to be part of a place that appreciates music as a "liberal art," though we also recognize that this is a model that is increasingly outmoded in the new tech-driven approach to education that will mark the next era in the US, so there is no way of telling what things will look ten or twenty years into the future. Let us hope that American colleges and universities will continue to invest in the "multicultural" contribution of world music, without the political downsides that Keith Howard points to in his essay in the present volume. Being aware of social currents and crosscurrents means being constantly vigilant and adaptive—but that has always been a part of the musician's life and the transmission of tradition anyway.

Reference

McAllester, David. "Cerebration or Celebration.", *Current Musicology* 15-16 (1973): 95-97

ⁱ The National Association of Schools of Music—NASM—goes back and forth about the need for world music studies in their member schools, and went so far as to mandate the presence of an ethnomusicologist, but I heard informally from an ethnomusicologist at one of those Schools of Music who was told by the Dean, after complaining that the NASM mandate was not being honored, "Oh, we don't pay attention to NASM rules."

ⁱⁱ Mcallester, "Cerebration or Celebration," p. 97.