

STUDIES IN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AS CREATIVE PRACTICE

# GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON ORCHESTRAS

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Collective Creativity and Social Agency

Edited by

TINA K. RAMNARINE

# **Global Perspectives on Orchestras**

Studies in Musical Performance as Creative Practice  
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## STUDIES IN MUSICAL PERFORMANCE AS CREATIVE PRACTICE

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Until recently, the notion of musical creativity was tied to composers and the works they produced, which later generations were taught to revere and to reproduce in performance. But the last few decades have witnessed a fundamental reassessment of the assumptions and values underlying musical and musicological thought and practice, thanks in part to the rise of musical performance studies. The five volumes in the series *Studies in Musical Performance as Creative Practice* embrace and expand the new understanding that has emerged. Internationally prominent researchers, performers, composers, music teachers and others explore a broad spectrum of topics including the creativity embodied in and projected through performance, how performances take shape over time, and how the understanding of musical performance as a creative practice varies across different global contexts, idioms and performance conditions. The series celebrates the diversity of musical performance studies, which has led to a rich and increasingly important literature while also providing the potential for further engagement and exploration in the future.

These books have their origins in the work of the AHRC Research Centre for Musical Performance as Creative Practice ([www.cmpcp.ac.uk](http://www.cmpcp.ac.uk)), which conducted an ambitious research programme from 2009 to 2014 focused on live musical performance and creative music-making. The Centre's close interactions with musicians across a range of traditions and at varying levels of expertise ensured the musical vitality and viability of its activities and outputs.

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AND SOCIAL AGENCY

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# Introduction

## GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON ORCHESTRAS

Tina K. Ramnarine

There are many kinds of orchestras around the world.<sup>1</sup> These include symphony, steel, Indian film and gamelan ensembles. Orchestras simultaneously mark and cross geopolitical boundaries as they are sites for the construction of community and cultural encounter. They are often symbols of power and status, yet they are also an important medium for sociomusical gatherings in local communities. They have cherished and celebrated histories, yet they also respond creatively to changing economic and technological environments. While orchestras are held in high cultural esteem, they require significant resources and social support. Many symphony orchestras in European, North American and Pacific contexts, for example, are concerned with cultural sustainability, perceiving themselves to be musical institutions in crisis over diminishing funding and audiences (Botstein 1996; Holoman 2012). Symphony orchestras are flourishing, however, in other geographic contexts. In Shanghai, symphony orchestra histories date back to the establishment of a public ensemble in 1878–89 (Bickers 2001). In India, orchestras were established in Kolkata in the 1920s and in Mumbai in the 1930s (the Bombay Symphony Orchestra, 1935–50s). Most recently, the Symphony Orchestra of India was established in 2006 in Mumbai. Steel orchestras and gamelan ensembles likewise enjoy a global spread and increased growth. Under colonial administration of the 1930s, the status of the steel orchestra in Trinidad and Tobago was low (its musicians were perceived as disreputable). But the steel orchestra has transformed to become a national symbol in the postcolonial state. The inaugural worldwide steel orchestra competition, International Panorama, was held in Trinidad in August 2015, and it featured competitors from Trinidad and Tobago, other Caribbean islands, the USA, the UK, Japan, France and Canada. Trinidad All Stars won the first prize. Some factors in the global

spread of all kinds of orchestras are new geopolitical orders, changing cultural relations in the transitional politics of decolonization, intercultural musical projects, national politics and tourism.

An understanding of the orchestra as reflecting the social world in miniature has led to descriptions of its internal workings in relation to social relationships (Barenboim 2009: 55; Gillinson and Vaughan 2003: 194). Orchestras are moving away from metaphoric conceptualizations of the institution as a microcosm of society to becoming conscious of their roles as social, as well as musical, agents (Ramnarine 2011). Steel orchestras in Trinidad and Tobago, for example, have been pioneering new technologies in instrument construction (including the Percussion Harmonic Instrument, which is a steelpan synthesizer) and using mobile technology (apps) as educational tools. Steel orchestral musicians have been keen to ensure rural access to foster social inclusion in music projects. The discussion on social inclusion is pronounced in symphony orchestra projects such as Venezuela's El Sistema with its banner of 'changing lives through music', the London Symphony Orchestra's 'On Track' initiative to work with young people irrespective of social background, and France's 'cultural democracy' orchestral education project, which is coordinated nationally by the Cité de la Musique. The New York-based World Civic Orchestra has a mission statement to 'bridge the world's differences'. In 2014, the Indonesian National Orchestra, established in 2010 by the Indonesian composer and ethnomusicologist Franki Raden, and comprising traditional instruments, announced a challenge to composers worldwide to write symphonic works for this new ensemble. The announcement stated that the orchestra has 'a global mission . . . to create a new symphonic music culture of the new millennium'.<sup>2</sup> In addition to civic orchestral projects and moral discourses on the positive benefits of collective musical experience, considering the social agency of orchestras is related to thinking about global labour histories, colonial heritages, postcolonial politics and the cultures of decolonization. These themes are explored in several of the chapters that follow.

Although orchestras are social agents, orchestral practitioners are often more preoccupied with the everyday creative transmission routines of rehearsal and performance. One reason for this preoccupation is that orchestral musicians invest considerable time in practice in order to acquire the necessary musical skills. Musicians bring their skills to collective musical endeavours characterized by a variety of creative and transmission processes. Symphony orchestra musicians are often trained in conservatoire environments, in which solo abilities are highly valued, as well as in youth orchestras. In steel orchestras, arrangers play a key role in oral transmission and choreographic learning methods, which underpin performances of both symphonic and Caribbean popular repertoires. In Bali, a creative person is someone who is skilled. Gamelan musicians learn in ensemble environments even when individual learning is a priority. Other players are assembled on an ad hoc basis from among villagers listening and

congregating around the area so that an individual part can be conceptualized consistently in relation to the wider whole (Bakan 1999: 290–1).

This volume explores orchestral micro and macro processes across diverse contexts. It considers orchestras in terms of ensemble interactions, musical histories, cultural heritages, institutional practices, international markets, aesthetic encounters and moral discourses of public benefit, which lead orchestral practitioners into the realms of advocacy and cultural policy. A thematic focus on collective creativity centres on the internal workings of orchestras by highlighting rehearsal, composition, performance, the relationships between the individual and the collective, and the experiences of orchestral performers in different contexts. A thematic focus on social agency shows how the micro processes of orchestral practices are shaped by macro processes, such as economic environments, policy-making, cultural governance and other sociopolitical factors. Collective creativity and social agency in orchestras are inherently linked as shown in this volume's chapters, several of which highlight how governance shapes orchestral performances (e.g. Aguilar, Johnson, Palmer, Wolf) and how sociopolitical factors influence creative decisions (e.g. Curkpatrick, Norton, Ramnarine, Wilson).

The idea for this volume began when I reflected on my own orchestral experiences (playing in symphony orchestras, steel orchestras and Balinese *gamelan gong kebyar*, and listening to Indian film orchestras) as the conceptual turn towards 'ethnomusicology at home' gained momentum in the early twenty-first century. I was interested in exploring what kind of musical context I would call 'home' rather than in a place as a site for fieldwork. This volume is thus, in part, the outcome of my own performance work and ethnographic interests. Research 'at home' became increasingly significant because it challenged earlier conceptual models of fieldwork necessarily being undertaken in distant or unfamiliar contexts and recognized research pursued locally. It offered critical and reflexive perspectives on issues around alterity, cultural difference and ethnographic divides between what has been called 'us' and 'other' (see Maybury-Lewis 1999 on 'the shock of the other'). Such critical perspectives on cultural encounters are not new. Travellers and explorers from the beginning of the age of exploration likewise interrogated the familiar as they encountered new, unfamiliar cultural practices. In doing so they contributed to comparative studies and to intercultural exchanges. A critical gaze on the familiar to broaden ethnographic and theoretical horizons in ethnomusicology has paralleled developments in other fields such as anthropology, history, comparative literature and postcolonial studies, and it is closely related to the musicological project of approaching music histories more globally.

Theoretical possibilities for conceptualizing orchestras, given the diversity of examples, include comparison, interculturalism, postcolonialism and global thinking. Ringer noted a close relationship between reflexivity (as indicated by my own reflections in initiating this project) and theorization in arguing

that we should return to a broad comparative musicology in order to understand musical creativity. Commenting on the methodological and conceptual premises underpinning how we become aware of ‘pervasive phenomena and their manifold manifestations’, he suggested that the quality of data ‘presents itself as a complex of relative notions rooted in prior experiences and their comparative evaluations’ (Ringer 1991: 197). Hobart expresses a similar point, writing that it is ‘uninformative . . . to talk about facts free from observers or commentators’ (1987: 31). Reflexivity is useful in thinking about how ethnographic choices, empirical data or social facts contribute to theorization, the latter now seen as ‘constructions’, not as ‘things’ (see Holy 1987: 5). Reflexivity is intertwined with comparison, highlighting some of its limitations insofar as comparing all relevant examples is impossible, and revealing its potential as all ethnographic work involves comparative responses. Nevertheless, comparison prompts much disciplinary anxiety. Indeed, we seem to be ‘permanently in crisis’ about ethnographic comparisons despite field techniques such as participant observation, which place us ‘in an inextricably . . . comparative position’ (Barnes 1987: 119–20).

Displays of orchestras at the Cité de la Musique in Paris invite comparison. One display focuses on music and instruments in France. It includes information about the shifts from musical performances for royalty to public audiences in the eighteenth century, the establishment of music conservatoires in 1795, influences on musical creativity and professional activity following the sociopolitical changes of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, and orchestral changes in the twentieth century as the percussion section of the symphony orchestra gained prominence. As the museum visitor proceeds through the galleries, another display shows the instruments of a Balinese gamelan with accompanying audiovisual and interactive material from *gong kebyar* virtuoso performances. Another display features the competition performances of renowned steel orchestras such as Renegades (recorded in 1987). These displays provide examples of the interaction between museum arrangement and ethnographic theory, and between research and public education, as well as of the contribution of museum ethnography to aesthetic practice (Stocking 1985: 3). They cultivate what Clifford describes as ethnography’s ‘continuous play of the familiar and the strange’, and they promote (for museum visitors) an ‘attitude of participant observation among the artifacts of a defamiliarized cultural reality’ (Clifford 1988: 121). By encouraging viewers to rethink the familiar, they lead to a ‘redistribution of value-charged categories such as “music”’ (ibid.: 131). This approach to the ethnographic display of collective music-making highlights that there are many kinds of orchestras of which the symphony, steel, gamelan and Indian film examples are prominent and practised in a global context. The displays at the Cité de la Musique reveal some of the complexities around the ethnographic object—in this case, the orchestra—as

a ‘unit for comparison’ (see Kuper 2002) and pose a fundamental question: what is an orchestra?

## What is an orchestra?

The term ‘orchestra’ referred to the place in front of the stage of an ancient Greek theatre where the chorus stood (Weaver 2006: 9). Renaissance humanists revived the Greek term to refer to the space between the theatre stage and the audience, and by the seventeenth century this was where instrumental ensembles played (Spitzer and Zaslaw 2004: 15). The symphony orchestra is linked with the rise of public concerts, new systems of musical training in conservatoires, changes in instrument design, economic growth and migration to urban centres, and support from commerce and patrons from the eighteenth century onwards. By the end of the nineteenth century, the modern symphony orchestra had become a civic cultural institution (Carter and Levi 2003). Several of today’s major European orchestras were established during the nineteenth century (e.g. the Helsinki Philharmonic and the Berlin Philharmonic, both founded in 1882).

Contemporary discussions centre on economic considerations (including salaries for concert artists and conductors), generating new audiences and orchestral sustainability in the digital age. The literature includes an edited volume by Lawson (2003), containing a chapter on comparative perspectives on symphony orchestras, which discusses how international performance trends and uniform sonorities are replacing more distinctive, nationally based orchestral performance characteristics (Tolanski 2003). Peyser’s edited volume (2006) examines the historical transformations of the orchestra as a musical institution beginning with large string ensembles in 1470, which are discussed in relation to the formative stages of the orchestra (Weaver 2006), and ending with reflections on new instruments and electronic and computer technologies in the twentieth century that are changing orchestral concepts (Machover 2006). Köpp (2009) discusses orchestral performance practices from the baroque to the romantic era, highlighting notation issues and strategies for ensemble playing. Spitzer and Zaslaw (2004) suggest that most instrumental ensembles in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were ‘pre-orchestral’, preceding later orchestras temporally but not being their earlier forms. Seventeenth-century musical trends in churches and theatres, and especially the French string ensemble, which was a royal monopoly, point towards the formation of the orchestra (*ibid.*: 68–9, 180). From the perspective of the twenty-first century, they write, ‘the orchestra can and should mean many things’, including court culture, the rise of the middle class, musical innovation or the conservation of cultural heritage (*ibid.*: 531). These observations are confirmed in this volume’s chapters.

Existing literature also considers youth symphony orchestras, first established in Europe and the USA in the early twentieth century, and later

in other contexts such as Australia (Kartomi 2007). The politics of youth orchestras have been discussed with reference to European integration and energy resources in the Baltic Youth Philharmonic (Ramnarine 2014), Middle Eastern segregationist politics alongside musical humanitarianism in the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (Barenboim 2009; Beckles Willson 2009; Etherington 2007) and music pedagogy as social programming in the Venezuelan El Sistema (Baker 2014; Majno 2012; Tunstall and Booth 2016). Social analyses have examined the gendered aspects of orchestral labour (Allmendinger, Hackman and Lehman 1996; Breda and Kulesa 1999) and musicians' perceptions of creative flexibility under freelance working conditions (Cottrell 2004).

An initial response to the question posed here is that an orchestra is a musical ensemble. Spitzer and Zaslaw consider whether or not any large number of instruments constitute an orchestra, since the ensemble used by Monteverdi in *Orfeo* (1607), a marching band, a Balinese gamelan and a group of Suzuki violinists might be orchestras, if judged by their instrumental forces alone (2004: 7). In this volume we treat ensembles as 'orchestras' not because of instrumental forces alone, but rather if they are so described by practitioners. So a Balinese gamelan is included while a marching band is not. The literature on orchestras is substantial, but it tends to address orchestral traditions separately rather than globally. Thus literature on gamelan is as extensive as that on symphony orchestras, and it includes ethnographic studies on the Balinese *gong kebyar* (McPhee 1949, [1947] 2002; Tenzer 2000), and on *gong gede*, which is the oldest and largest ritual orchestra identified in a late eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century Balinese text, *Prakempa*, as having been both a palace and a community ensemble for more than two hundred years (Hood 2010).

Gamelan is a gong chime ensemble that sometimes includes a bamboo flute, a plucked zither or a rebab (bowed string lute), and solo singers. Gamelan ensembles are embedded within Hindu–Buddhist religious philosophies and often perform as part of ritual events in Java, Bali and Sunda (Becker 1988). They are part of court culture, symbolizing ruling power (Sumarsam 1996: 7), and they also provide instrumental accompaniment to voice, dance or theatre performances, in village contexts. Examples of the latter may be found in puppet theatre traditions such as *wayang golek* (three-dimensional puppets) and *wayang kulit* (shadow puppets) that narrate stories from epic traditions such as the *Ramayana*. Interlocking techniques demanding rhythmic precision, tuning in pairs of instruments and colotomic structures leave little space for individual improvisation. Gamelan became increasingly established in ethnomusicology university programmes across Europe and the USA following Mantle Hood's (1960) call to develop performance skills as an integral part of academic analysis. In community contexts, gamelan ensembles are regarded as having therapeutic potential, and they are used in rehabilitation projects in the UK (Mendonça 2010).

Separate treatment of orchestras like the symphony or gamelan makes it difficult to see how they are connected historically, musically and socially. Yet, there are plenty of examples of orchestras interacting with each other. Gamelan ensembles have been incorporated in symphony orchestra community projects, a notable example being the London Symphony Orchestra Gamelan (Ramnarine 2011), and steel orchestras perform together with symphony orchestras. In Bali, in August 2013, I visited a workshop manufacturing the ‘Bali pan’, which is based on the steelpan and is made from Honda oil cans. These Bali pans also feature *slendro* (pentatonic) and *pelog* (heptatonic) gamelan tunings. In November 2014, I found a CD subtitled *Gamelan meets Orchestral* (2014), a tribute to the Indonesian composer Ismail Marzuki (1914–58), who was also a broadcaster for the Dutch East Indies radio station and, later, leader of the Jakarta Studio Orchestra. By exploring examples of this sort, this volume shows how different kinds of orchestras are interlinked in various ways. If orchestral traditions in the global context have been treated separately in the literature hitherto, orchestras are beginning to think more comprehensively about their related and connected practices. For example, the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, the Shanghai Symphony Orchestra and Shanghai Conservatory of Music have entered a partnership involving performer exchanges, residencies and orchestral training under a scheme called the Shanghai Orchestra Academy.<sup>3</sup> Networking is part of transcultural transformation processes, as Sumarsam emphasizes in a study of colonial legacies and gamelan music (2013: 139), and partnership examples like the Shanghai Orchestra Academy indicate the timeliness of generating further academic interest in orchestras globally.

Since orchestras are changing institutions, which are shaped by social environments, cultural policy trends and technological developments, it is not possible to present a comprehensive view of orchestral practices. One of this volume’s main contributions, however, is to bring together research on orchestras in various musical traditions, thus offering unique perspectives on the diversity of orchestral practices. Yet, many important contexts inviting further ethnographic analysis are not included, for example, folkloristic and Roma wedding orchestras (Nercessian 2000), Nigerian bell (‘Ogene Anuka’) orchestras (Nzewi 2000), and Guoyue Tuan (Chinese orchestras using traditional instruments) in Taiwan and Malaysia (Chen 2012). Jazz orchestras are mentioned in this volume but would merit more extensive study. Other important contexts to consider would be the rapid growth of interest in the steel orchestra worldwide (including in the Pacific region) and in the symphony orchestra among middle-class practitioners and audiences in places such as China, Hong Kong, South Korea and Qatar. Gamelan ensembles (often described, although contested, as orchestras) have also spread across the world, through nineteenth-century labour histories (involving, for example, Javanese contracted workers in Suriname), ethnomusicological interests and contemporary



diasporic Indonesian community projects. New gamelan compositions reflect these multiple routes. In New Zealand, for example, gamelan ensembles date from the 1970s, and new works are regarded as contributing to the multicultural nation-state (Johnson 2008).

Various ensembles called 'orchestra' expand our notions of what kind of musical collective this might be, as do their performance environments, which are diverse and include concert halls, film studios, temples and urban streets. Nineteenth-century American orchestras performed in concert halls, parks, theatres, and eating and drinking establishments (Spitzer 2012). Twenty-first-century steel orchestras perform in streets, concert halls, carnivals, cruise ships and virtual spaces. Since the late 1980s, symphony orchestras have recorded music for the video game industry. Gaming is the running of specialized applications (electronic games) on machines designed for such programs. Personal computers can be used on the internet to meet the demands of several thousand online users simultaneously. Younger audiences, in particular, have been introduced to orchestral music through the soundtracks of video games. Ensembles such as the London Symphony Orchestra and the Los Angeles Philharmonic organize live performance events to cater for the interest in video game music.

Looking towards the future, we can raise questions about how contemporary digital technology shapes and changes orchestral transmission, how it is shifting our focus away from human players in ensembles, how it reconfigures the listener in new virtual landscapes, and how it is used in fostering global human communications by projects like the YouTube symphony Orchestra, as well as human and computer performance interfaces in laptop orchestras and robot orchestras.<sup>4</sup> A humanoid robot, Honda's Asimo, conducted a performance with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (13 May 2008), which has been posted on YouTube. Online comments included 'are you trying to say he's actually listening and interpreting?', 'Can we have one for our orchestra please? He looks cute and less trouble than the real thing', and 'the most touching thing is that Asimo didn't care that everyone laughed at him in the beginning'. (The comments additionally indicate interesting gendered views of the conductor in referring to Asimo as male.)<sup>5</sup> Installations and app technologies are also changing concepts of the orchestra, for example, the *Fragmented Orchestra* devised by Jane Grant, John Matthias and Nick Ryan. The *Fragmented Orchestra* was a sound installation, first realized between 2008 and 2009 at twenty-four sites around the UK.<sup>6</sup> A work was created by transmitting audio from these sites over the internet to a central computer. The twenty-four channels of audio stimulated twenty-four artificial cortical spiking neurons, which processed and granulated the audio. The processed audio was transmitted to twenty-four speakers at a central space, to the project website (<http://www.thefragmentedorchestra.com>) and back to the sites. This project explored the relationships between stimulation, interneuronal

plasticity and public interaction as well as the possibility of a new Neuronal Music Technology.<sup>7</sup>

In contrast to these digital technological developments are vegetable orchestras. The first of this kind was set up in Austria in 1998, the Vienna Vegetable Orchestra.<sup>8</sup> Its online promotional material states that a ‘concert of the Vegetable Orchestra appeals to all the senses. As an encore at the end of the concert and the video performance, the audience is offered fresh vegetable soup’.<sup>9</sup> There is also a London Vegetable Orchestra using the promotional slogan ‘home grown entertainment’.<sup>10</sup> Musicians shop for vegetables in local markets, chop them up in constructing musical instruments, perform in concert halls or open-air spaces, and then cook and consume the instruments, following an ethics of organic sustainability, recycling and environmental concern.

One of the most intriguing examples in highlighting human and nonhuman interactions in the natural world is the ‘great animal orchestra’, the term Krause (2012) adopts in examining and recording the diverse and changing acoustic signals of the world’s species, the soundscapes of ecosystems and the resonance of the planet. The composer, Richard Blackford, later used some recordings from Krause’s archive to compose the *Symphony for Orchestra and Wild Soundscapes* recorded by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales (2014), paralleling similar projects by Rautavaara and by Valkeapää (see Ramnarine 2009).

A planetary view was taken by the Sydney Symphony Orchestra in an orchestral project called the Global Orchestra. An internet audience was invited to participate in a mass participant and multilocalized event and to ‘celebrate human creativity and ability to work in harmony’ by taking part in a concert of Holst’s *The Planets*, which was livestreamed on 28 March 2015. The audience was asked ‘What part will you play for the planet?’ and informed that this project was not just about playing music but also about finding ‘a better way for humanity to live to ensure the sustainability of our planet’.<sup>11</sup> The Global Orchestra provided a further example of environmental political thought played out in orchestral performances.

Another way of responding to the question ‘What is an orchestra?’ emphasizes how we treat the orchestra ethnographically and as a subject for research. The orchestra is a unit for comparison if we bear in mind Kuper’s question about such units. He asks whether a society, a culture or an ethnographic object such as ‘sacrifice’ is a unit of comparison, and he notes that despite intractable problems in defining the field there is ‘a false security’ in concentrating only on empirical description (Kuper 2002: 144–6). The methodological difficulties with comparison include ‘problems of commensurability and of defining the units for comparison’ (ibid.: 146). However, Kuper observes that when we abandon broader comparisons we stop asking fundamental questions about what we have in common, and he suggests it is timely to implicate ourselves in comparison ‘without arrogating to ourselves a privileged status, as the ultimate point of reference’ (ibid.: 162).

## Comparative modes of theorization

The ethnographic text, like the museum display, plays with similarity and difference, a dynamic which is most importantly revealed in 'that moment in which the possibility of comparison exists in unmediated tension with sheer incongruity . . . a moment that is repeatedly produced and smoothed over in the process of ethnographic comprehension' (Clifford 1988: 146). Part of the French ethnographic tradition and the legacy of Marcel Mauss is to think about 'unthought-of-comparisons' (Lévi-Strauss, cited in Clifford 1988: 128), thus promoting an understanding of the political possibilities of ethnography and moving beyond solely empirical and descriptive work. To write ethnography is to be engaged with the production of incongruities, to be willing to be surprised and to dispense with interpretative syntheses. Ultimately, this volume reconsiders the orchestra as a coherent ethnographic domain to show how ensembles around the world are connected through repertoires, the movements of musicians and historical processes, as well as separated by the specificities of musical practices and geographic contexts. Taking into account shifting geopolitical backdrops complicates the relationships between places and orchestras as does the ethnographic display of orchestras at the Cité de la Musique. In highlighting orchestral practice as a global phenomenon, this volume engages with comparative modes of theorization to move beyond geographically bound ethnographic case studies. As contemporary ethnographic scholarship engages with globalization, transnationalism, cosmopolitanism and the new technologies of cultural transmission, the comparative approach is reappearing alongside regionally focused studies despite methodological and conceptual difficulties (see Holy 1987 and Gingrich and Fox 2002). This volume heeds Holy's observation that there is no 'comparative method' but 'varying styles of comparison' (1987: 2), and it takes up Gingrich and Fox's call for the resumption of comparison in view of renewed critical self-awareness and changing global conditions (2002).

Comparison is one of the foundations of ethnographic research. It was a hallmark of ethnography until the 1950s. Comparative modes of theorization were developed by researchers in various geographical and scholarly traditions. The early twentieth-century scholarship of the Berlin School of Comparative Musicology was concerned with human universals and systematic study on the largest possible scale. The Finnish geographic-historical method, which influenced traditions of folk music scholarship in Europe and beyond, focused on how traditions were transmitted across geographic areas by using comparative techniques. In the USA, the anthropologist Franz Boas championed ideas about cultural relativism and argued against evolutionist views of cultural development and the science of 'race'.

During the 1950s, cross-cultural studies based on statistical information, quantitative processes and objectivist epistemologies became more prominent,

and comparison no longer played a role in formulating universally valid generalizations (see Holy 1987: 8). Comparison was further undermined by the disciplinary self-inspection of the ‘crisis of representation’ during the 1970s and 1980s. Yet, there are renewed interests in comparative modes of theorization, which are now divorced from notions of tracing origins or obtaining objective, statistically based results in search of grand theory. Within anthropology, Gingrich and Fox note the contradiction between concept and practice. The concept of comparison seems to be out of fashion, but as a practice comparison is in use everywhere. In emphasizing the legitimacy of comparison, they write that ‘If people all around the globe are reacting to comparable conditions, it becomes a more obvious challenge for scholars to compare how people react and what results culturally from their reactions’ (2002: 7).

While methodological difficulties with defining ‘orchestra’ are related to problems of comparison, this volume does not dwell on questions about which kinds of orchestras we should be comparing or the theoretical purposes of comparative approaches. Instead, it is more aligned with one of the key achievements of comparison, in holding the potential to bring into focus historical and geographic connections. In revisiting earlier scholarship, it is worth noting that comparative modes were seen as being able to ‘tie connecting threads’ (Hornbostel, cited in Ringer 1991: 194). An example from this volume concerns narratives of steel orchestral histories, which locate the circulations of people, labour and cultural practices across the Atlantic Ocean, thus linking Africa, the Americas and Europe (see Gilroy 1993). Steel orchestral histories concern the recovery of the past and emphasize its embodiment in the gestures and choreographies of performance (Helmlinger 2001) and its narration through personal testimonies (for example, Goddard 1991). Through the dissemination of large ensemble practices in colonial settings, steel orchestra histories are connected with those of symphony orchestras (see Chapter 17 in this volume) and military bands (see Reily and Brucher 2013). Comparison brings into focus the historical connections between seemingly disparate examples.

Connections (historical and comparative) are also made for political reasons. One example is the Global Fever Orchestra, which experiments with musical traditions of circumpolar indigenous populations and builds on earlier musical collaborative projects such as the Sámi traditional vocal genre, joik, and symphony orchestra concert given by the Sámi singer Mari Boine and the Norwegian Radio Orchestra (in March 2012).<sup>12</sup> These kinds of orchestral connections draw attention to minority politics, colonial legacies and social justice issues by asserting the value of musical practices once prohibited, such as Sámi joik or African diasporic drumming. (Moreover, albeit tangentially, these examples have not been mentioned together here accidentally since northern European indigenous politics drew on African diasporic political writing; see Ramnarine 2013.) Indigenous politics played out in orchestral projects combine the symphonic and the traditional (see the chapters by Curkpatrick and Wilson, who introduce

examples from the Pacific in this volume). Such examples enrich a global perspective on orchestras by emphasizing how we might understand contemporary musical collaborations based on indigenous and orchestral musical traditions within the frames of colonial histories and postcolonial political aspirations.

Dealing with the global offers one way of thinking about place, though my interests lie in moving beyond a place-bound perspective to look at transnational orchestral entanglements. Drawing together this volume's specific examples of orchestral practices in Europe, the Caribbean, South Asia, South East Asia and the Pacific is a way of furthering comparative and transnational enquiry. I bring within the same frames of analytical reference, for example, chapters on symphony orchestras in Britain and film orchestras in India to enable a more complex portrait of interconnected musical practices to emerge. In this endeavour, it is instructive to ponder Peacock's question about the 'prejudices' that generate comparisons (2002: 45). I have found much conceptual resonance in the new histories of empire, which provided the inspiration for looking at orchestras in relation to historical connections as the basis for changing geopolitical cultural relationships. Biography and memory play an important role in these new histories (alongside the reconsideration of archive materials), thereby presenting methodological parallels with the ethnographic turn to research at home. Several chapters in this volume deal directly with issues around orchestras in imperial, postcolonial and decolonizing contexts, thus relating to debates in imperial historiography.

A sensitivity to prejudice in comparison is important given that orchestras have featured in ethnographic displays from colonial exhibitions to museums. They have represented otherness and imperial expansions (Corbey 1993) on the one hand, and disseminated orchestral practices through musicians' mobility on the other. A Javanese gamelan performed at a world exhibition in Paris in 1889, followed by the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra in 1900. The Trinidad All Steel Percussion Orchestra (TASPO) performed at the Festival of Britain in 1951. TASPO musicians like Sterling Betancourt stayed in London and developed steel orchestra musical life in Europe (Ramnarine 2007: chap. 3). An Italian violinist, Raffaello Squarise, accepted a position as leader of the orchestra of the New Zealand and South Seas Exhibition 1889 and stayed in Dunedin for more than fifty years, becoming a leading musical figure (Murray 2005). The Javanese musician Sumarsam participated in a World Exposition in Osaka in 1970 (Sumarsam 2013: 6) and later became a gamelan teacher and academic in the USA, writing a book about cultural encounter, intercultural exchange, gamelan music and western colonialism in nineteenth-century Java (Sumarsam 2013). In the *Cité de la Musique*, the ethnographic display is described (following perspectives offered by Simha Arom and Claude Lévi-Strauss) in terms of representation, social awareness and aesthetic appreciation. Nearby, in the Louvre, the political project of ethnography is articulated as a need for global

perspectives on cultural artefacts in the ‘reparation of injustice’, a stance that has emerged in a decolonizing era.<sup>13</sup>

## The chapters in this volume

This volume draws on the contributions of an international team of researchers who address key questions such as: What are the musical relationships within orchestras? What is the social and political agency of a musical collective? How do imperial histories inform orchestral histories? What is the relationship between ‘orchestra’ and ‘audience’, and how are audiences co-performers? How do cultural policies, organizational processes and technological developments influence orchestral practices? The chapters are based methodologically on ethnographic techniques (fieldwork, virtual data, participant-observation, musical learning, interviews and conversations) and historical techniques (archive work, oral histories, memory and biography). The volume is organized in three parts centred on these themes: community and capital in orchestral contexts, intercultural orchestral collaborations, and decolonizing and post-colonial orchestral practices. These thematic areas overlap, and the chapters, taken as a whole, contribute to global perspectives on orchestras.

Part 1 of this volume opens with Fiona Palmer’s chapter, which sets a frame for thinking about global perspectives on orchestras in relation to imperial histories by examining one of the oldest concert-giving organizations in Europe, Liverpool’s Philharmonic Society Orchestra. This was founded in 1840 by a stockbroker. Drawing on materials from the Society’s archive, Palmer considers internal and external orchestral hierarchies, and asks questions about the extent to which core values were dictated by the personal interests of the leading figures in the Society. By probing the social expectations and financial structures relating to the Liverpool Philharmonic’s regulations, committees, income, expenditure, venues, audience, performers, repertoire and programming, Palmer contextualizes the issues facing people who promoted ‘the Science and Practice of Music’ in the prosperous commercial and imperial port of Liverpool in the north of England. Mobility, labour conditions, cultural governance and economic interdependence in Britain’s imperial trading concerns provide appropriate points from which to begin an exercise in developing global perspectives on orchestras.

Henry Johnson’s chapter provides a contemporary, postcolonial case study about organizational and social influences on orchestral performance practices.<sup>14</sup> Johnson discusses the ways in which collective orchestral creativity is determined by social capital and community considerations in the Southern Sinfonia in Dunedin, known as the ‘Edinburgh of the South’ in New Zealand, to further our insights into how orchestral collective creativity is based on a nexus of musical and nonmusical collaborations.

Several chapters examine broad themes relating to repertoire choices, orchestral hierarchies, community engagement, musical collaborations and intercultural projects. Shannon Dudley, in Chapter 3, considers how musicians in Trinidad and Tobago's steel orchestras (also called steelbands) draw on different models of orchestral practice in the government-sponsored Panorama steelband competition (which was established in 1963). One of the most significant musical and organizational changes that Panorama introduced was to elevate the status of the arranger. Arrangers take into account the active participation of Panorama audiences, in the form of dancing, exclaiming or even playing along with a bottle and spoon, or iron. While they borrow structures like theme and variation or sonata form to create extended forms, they must also make consistent reference to the calypso they are arranging, and engage audiences with exciting rhythmic breaks and cyclical 'jams'. Symphonic techniques of orchestration also coexist or compete with polyrhythmic textures inherited from African Trinidadian percussion ensembles like *tambo* bamboo. Fifty years after the beginning of Panorama, this intersection of diverse musical models and actors has shaped the musical outlook of thousands of pannists. Panorama's performance model has been reproduced and formalized in school steelband programmes and competitions.

Christopher L. Ballangee focuses on collaborations between steel orchestras and *tassa* bands in Trinidad and Tobago, indicating how these ensembles reflect the interconnected historical legacies of slavery and indentureship in the Caribbean. The steel orchestra's history is closely aligned with African Trinidadian achievements, and it has been a symbol of Trinidadian national identity since the mid-twentieth century, a notion made official with the declaration of steelpan as the country's national instrument in 1992. *Tassa* is an equally widespread element of the Trinidadian soundscape with *tassa* bands providing accompaniment for a range of Indian Trinidadian sacred and secular events. Ballangee explores musical, cultural and ideological counterpoints relevant to notions of collective and national identity as expressed and challenged in the debate over a recent push to make the *tassa* drum a co-national instrument alongside the steelpan. His chapter highlights how interculturalism is connected with nationalism and multiculturalism.

In Chapter 5, Ananay Aguilar discusses how orchestras respond to industry, technology and media practices through a case study on the creation and development of the orchestra-owned label LSO Live by the London Symphony Orchestra. Musicians in Edwardian London were determined to preserve the deputy system, which enabled them to accept the highest-paid jobs in a system of free trade. They founded the LSO as a new cooperatively run orchestra (Morrison 2004: 12–18). In a contemporary example of the orchestra's entrepreneurship, Aguilar focuses on how LSO Live increased the orchestra's independence both artistically and managerially and, in doing so effectively, also multiplied its local and international reputation. As an example



of entrepreneurial managerial culture, LSO Live has been imitated around the globe.

Part 2 of this volume focuses on intercultural orchestral collaborations to further develop themes emerging from the first part. It begins by highlighting improvisation as a dimension of intercultural orchestral creativity. Samuel Curkpatrick's chapter discusses an intercultural collaboration between Wägilak songmen from Australia's Northern Territory and the Australian Art Orchestra, which is contextualized within colonial and postcolonial histories. This collaboration is a project called *Crossing Roper Bar*, which seeks an intermingling of perspectives to encourage a new, malleable approach to orchestral performance in Australia. It does so by placing improvisation at the centre of what Curkpatrick describes as 'conversational performance'. Curkpatrick introduces aspects of Wägilak *manikay* (song) as realized in *Crossing Roper Bar*, showing how novel approaches to *manikay* performance are rooted in the dynamic textures of Yolŋu ceremonial practice. Musical collaborations between orchestral and *manikay* musicians demonstrate how performance can generate social interactions and provide models for rethinking community relationships on a broader scale. The *Crossing Roper Bar* collaboration is respectful. Amid the cultural diversity of contemporary Australian society, it suggests new creative and postcolonial possibilities that emphasize socially relevant orchestral music-making.

Jonathan McIntosh's Chapter 7 investigates musical collaborations between Balinese and non-Balinese women in Ubud, Bali, who participate in the women's international gamelan group based at the Pondok Pekak, a cultural centre which provides a well-known institutional context for this intercultural project (also see McIntosh and Ramnarine 2016). Contemporary tourism and an increase in the number of western expatriates living in Bali have established gamelan ensembles as important sites for intercultural music-making. McIntosh discusses how the intercultural women's group raises issues about interculturalism and gendered performances, and how the group overcomes challenges associated with accompanying dance performance.

Histories of the internationalization of the gamelan ensemble narrated within the discipline of ethnomusicology highlight tours to world fairs and colonial exhibitions, the influence of gamelan music on European and North American composers, and university practices. But this story of the spread of the gamelan ensemble is a partial one. Matthew Isaac Cohen complicates this story by looking at musical impressions of Java and Bali in interwar America. He examines the Polish composer and pianist Leopold Godowsky and the American composer Henry Eichheim, both of whom approached gamelan music to convey impressions of a distant land in the manner of the travelogue.

Eero Hämeenniemi contributes to this volume as a composer. He is a classically trained Finnish composer, who has extensive experience of working with musicians from western classical, Indian classical, folk and jazz backgrounds.



He examines some of the possibilities of intercultural collaborations by focusing on the internal workings of the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra preparing for the premiere (in 2013) of his composition *Yaadum uure*, a work involving South Indian Carnatic performers. The Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra was known as ‘Sibelius’s orchestra’. The conductor and composer Robert Kajanus recruited orchestral musicians from across Europe, and he promoted Jean Sibelius’s works in concert tours, including *Finlandia* (1899) at the 1900 Paris World Exhibition. In the 1930s, Kajanus recorded Sibelius’s symphonies with the London Symphony Orchestra, when early recording technologies could begin to capture large-scale orchestral works.

Today, recording technologies are vital to orchestral sustainability and they enable orchestras to reach new audiences. One of the markets for orchestral music stems from the Indian film industry. The Indian film orchestra features in a range of musical, community and industry practices. South India is home to a thriving Tamil film industry as well as to the classical Carnatic music tradition. Over the last three decades, Chennai has hosted an entertainment industry that has produced the largest number of feature films worldwide—the vast majority in the Tamil language. Tamil film music permeates the soundscape of the entire state of Tamil Nadu, in both public and private spaces. Against this background, Mekala Padmanabhan’s Chapter 10 offers glimpses into how Tamil film music directors, orchestral musicians and technical personnel, both past and present, navigate the practical, artistic and aesthetic demands of music-making in a collaborative context.

The Mumbai-based Hindi film orchestra is another significant example, and as part of the Bollywood film industry it is perhaps the best known globally (also see Booth 2008). It has had a dramatic impact on local music-making in north India. Local ensembles called orchestras (or ‘orchestra dance parties’, ‘orchestra dance companies’ and ‘musical groups’) often perform Bollywood music and dance items. These orchestras have swept through the musical and performance landscape from Bihar to Punjab since the 1990s, and they have been incorporated into local performance genres (Brahma Prakash, personal communication, 8 February 2012, Delhi). But musical interactions in the world of Indian film orchestras have a colonial history extending across continents. Anna Morcom’s Chapter 11 charts the meaning and status of the western orchestra in Indian cinema from the silent era through the post-independence period to changes since India’s liberalization from the 1990s onwards. Morcom demonstrates how western classical music became interwoven with Indian postcolonial modernity through the cinema even though it was not adopted in mainstream musical life. Bradley Shope’s Chapter 12 discusses jazz orchestras in Bombay during the 1940s and 1950s, thus further revealing different kinds of historical connections. These jazz orchestras provided many of the necessary musical resources to produce cabaret scenes in Hindi-language films. African American jazz musicians who lived in India inspired musicians in urban centres

to perform in local jazz orchestras, which ultimately blossomed into a jazz cabaret economy based on recording in film studios, interacting with film music composers, performing in films as backdrop dance band musicians, and ghost composing and arranging.

Intercultural orchestral projects are implicated in rethinking social and political identities. These include decolonizing and postcolonial ones, as explored in Part 3 of this volume. Oli Wilson's Chapter 13 explores the cultural, political and creative contexts that underpin the prominent New Zealand popular music artist Tiki Taane's collaborations with an orchestral string section and an indigenous New Zealand performance (*kapa haka*) group. The collaboration was for the production of the *With Strings Attached: Alive & Orchestrated* album and television documentary released in 2014. In this collaboration, Tiki subverted dominant representational practices concerning New Zealand cultural identity. The politics of identity are explored further in Shzr Ee Tan's Chapter 14 on 'ethnic' orchestras and multicultural policy in Singapore. These state-sponsored orchestras have been emerging in Singapore since the 1980s following the professionalization of its first symphony orchestra in 1979 and a governmental strategic plan to establish related amateur orchestras rooted in the imagined Chinese, Indian and Malay traditions of the island's multicultural population. Largely formed under the wing of a statutory board known as the People's Association, these orchestras promote the nationalist trope of active citizenry, which Tan examines in relation to sociocultural engineering through music, particularly in the ideological application of the western symphonic model on a range of small ensemble and solo traditions connected with South Indian, Southern Chinese, Indonesian and Malay performing arts.

Cultural policy and programming are central themes in Benjamin Wolf's Chapter 15 on British symphony orchestras, which have been partly subsidized by central government (and thereby accountable to institutions like the Arts Council of Great Britain) since the 1940s. Wolf explores the programming of music by living composers and the more recent inclusion of works by composers who were interested in cross-cultural fusions.

Cultural policy, ideas about musical value and heritage projects shape orchestral practices in various contexts. Barley Norton's Chapter 16 examines these themes in relation to Vietnam's court orchestra. Prior to the fall of the Nguyễn dynasty in 1945, the primary purpose of Vietnam's court orchestra was to perform at royal ceremonies in the Imperial City of Hue. Ceremonies such as the Nam Giao sacrifice, during which the orchestra performed while the king made offerings at an altar dedicated to the spirits of heaven, were elaborately choreographed rituals of royal power. The beginning of the Franco-Vietnamese War and the collapse of the court in 1945 resulted in the dissolution of the court orchestra. The orchestra was not reestablished until the late 1980s, and since then various efforts have been made by the Vietnamese state and international agencies to revive court music. Today, tourists visiting the Imperial City

of Hue can hear orchestral performances in the restored Duyệt Thị Đường Royal Theatre, and reenactments of royal rituals feature prominently in the Hue Festival. Norton considers the historical significance of the court orchestra as a symbol of state power and describes how court music has been tied to contemporary sociopolitical and commercial projects centred on the promotion of intangible cultural heritage and tourism, as well as in Buddhist rituals.

The final chapter in this volume (my own) is explicitly comparative. It explores how orchestral practices in various postcolonial contexts raise issues about trans-imperial aesthetics, the cultures of decolonization and interdependent musical practices. By adopting comparative, ethnographic and reflexive views of orchestral practices (in Britain, Trinidad and Tobago, and India), this chapter explores memory, history and the articulation of different subject positions in debates about orchestras. I ask how political and cultural borders are orchestrated anew in the transitional politics of decolonization. On the basis of multisited ethnographic work, I juxtapose several kinds of orchestras (the symphony, steel and Indian film) to highlight themes of empire, heritage, reclamation and the traumatic, as well as transformative aspects of memory. Some of the most useful theoretical tools for thinking about these issues are offered by postcolonial theorization and the new histories of empire. These disciplinary theorizations have focused on (re-)constructions of national identities, individual mobility and policy-making, and they have also critiqued centre-periphery geographic models of colonial power. This chapter emphasizes both the political aspects of post-colonial orchestral practices and musicians' creative engagements with various musical traditions. Thus, we are brought back to the idea of comparison as a political project, notably expressed by the Louvre as the 'reparation of injustice'. The chapters in this volume on orchestras can be read through the frame of comparison, at least partly. This frame offers perspectives on how the cultural legacies of European imperialisms shape contemporary relations within and between nation-states as played out in orchestral practices, on the importance of cultural governance in creative processes, and on the sociopolitical potential of cultural and performing institutions. This frame also encourages us to look beyond Europe's cultural legacies and to approach ensemble practices globally. Cumulatively, the chapters contribute unique insights into the world of orchestras, and this volume aims, thereby, to stimulate further research.

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PART 1

**Community and capital  
in orchestral contexts**





## Cultural demand and supply in an imperial trading centre

### DEVELOPING THE LIVERPOOL PHILHARMONIC SOCIETY ORCHESTRA IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY

Fiona M. Palmer

British imperial history provides a lens through which to consider global perspectives on the development of orchestral provision and its practices. Liverpool was pivotal to the commercial predominance enjoyed by the British Empire in the mid-nineteenth century. A place of passage and economic importance, Liverpool's location made it vital to imperial trade. The thriving port provided a gateway for the distribution of such commodities as sugar, rum, palm oil and tobacco. Many of its prosperous merchants engaged in cotton brokerage and manufacture. Some of these merchants were instrumental in the evolution of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society (founded in 1840). At the time of the Society's inception, the institutionalized orchestral landscape in Britain was fragmented outside London. In the main, opportunities for instrumentalists beyond the metropolis were seasonal and attached to festivals and special enterprises. Liverpool's inhabitants had long been accustomed to large-scale music festivals and musical entertainments of diverse types, but the new Society in admitting a limited clientele to its concerts was elitist and self-serving.

Liverpool was one of the most significant trading ports of the empire (see Milne 2000). Much has been written about the exponential increase in population in the town during the nineteenth century, including its many temporary visitors.<sup>1</sup> Migrant communities of Irish, Welsh, Scottish and overseas origin accounted for 32.8 per cent of the population in the 1851 census (see Pooley 1977). A full gamut of economic fortunes was found in its streets, from the dire living conditions in over-crowded and disease-ridden slums to the opulent wealth enjoyed by the local mercantile aristocracy.<sup>2</sup> Liverpool was the cosmopolitan gateway to the USA for trade and leisure, and although its role in the

markets was altered by the prohibition of slave trafficking in 1807, the town's mercantile and commercial prosperity was considerable in the nineteenth century (see Richardson 2005; Tibbles 2005). Shipping and the trade in sugar, rum, palm oil, tobacco, cotton brokerage and manufacture boomed. Indeed, the concepts and operation of hedge funds and futures originated with Liverpool's brokers, who capitalized on the advent of the faster negotiation offered by telegraph communication. The pace of escalation in the cotton trade up to 1860 was swift. Hall states that from the forty-five cotton broking firms in the port in 1829, the number had increased to 322 by 1860 (Hall 2004: 340). This explosion of supply invested the town with enterprise in the hands of brokers whose business instincts were, in a number of cases, to directly shape the development of the town's Philharmonic Society.

### Forces at play

This exploration of the internal and external spheres of influence governing the development of the Society's orchestra focuses primarily on the 1840s and 1850s and provides new insights into the interwoven histories of orchestral practices and commerce in the north-west of England.<sup>3</sup> This discussion considers the broader marketplace, particularly the question of Manchester and its orchestral activities, and probes the inner workings of the Liverpool Philharmonic Society. Through an evaluation of the multifaceted circumstances encountered by the Society's elected committees, it illuminates the concerns that shaped the orchestra's progress. It exposes working practices and conditions, including the differences between professional and amateur status, and the division of interest and control between the businessmen who dominated the decision-making and the emerging remit of the Society's conductors. Internal and external pressures relating to venue ownership, purpose, status, quality and accessibility dictated the manner of the Society's trajectory. These circumstances in turn determined some of the opportunities for orchestral musicians to be based in the north-west of England with enough work to sustain a livelihood. The Society's archives reveal the negotiating styles adopted by musicians in the early 1850s. There is also evidence of the management's handling of pay bargaining and disciplinary problems, including the ranking of section members.

Working between the two centres of Liverpool and Manchester became easier following the opening of the linking railway in 1830. The advancing infrastructure of the railway network made travel to and from London and Birmingham and within the north easier: the employment circuit opened up for peripatetic instrumentalists who managed mixed engagements for multiple organizations.<sup>4</sup> From October 1849 Charles Hallé conducted the long-standing Gentlemen's Concerts in Manchester, bringing new players and expectations into the orchestra.<sup>5</sup> As we shall see, the pressure to improve standards