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Burma, Kipling  
and Western Music

*The Riff from Mandalay*

Andrew Selth



# Burma, Kipling and Western Music

For decades, scholars have been trying to answer the question: how was colonial Burma perceived in and by the Western world, and how did people in countries like the United Kingdom and United States form their views? This book explores how Western perceptions of Burma were influenced by the popular music of the day. From the First Anglo–Burmese War of 1824–1826 until Burma regained its independence in 1948, more than 180 musical works with Burma-related themes were written in English-speaking countries, in addition to the many hymns composed in and about Burma by Christian missionaries. Servicemen posted to Burma added to the lexicon with marches and ditties, and after 1913 most movies about Burma had their own distinctive scores. Taking Rudyard Kipling’s 1890 ballad ‘Mandalay’ as a critical turning point, this book surveys all these works with emphasis on popular songs and show tunes, also looking at classical works, ballet scores, hymns, soldiers’ songs, sea shanties and film soundtracks. It examines how they influenced Western perceptions of Burma, and in turn reflected those views back to Western audiences. The book sheds new light not only on the West’s historical relationship with Burma, and the colonial music scene, but also Burma’s place in the development of popular music and the rise of the global music industry. In doing so, it makes an original contribution to the fields of musicology and Asian Studies.

**Andrew Selth** is an Adjunct Associate Professor at Griffith University and the Australian National University. He has been studying international security issues and Asian affairs for over 40 years, as a diplomat, strategic intelligence analyst and research scholar. He has published six books, including *Burma’s Armed Forces: Power Without Glory*.

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The Riff from Mandalay  
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Andrew Selth

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If a man were permitted to make all the ballads of a nation, he need not care who should make its laws.

Andrew Fletcher of Saltoun (1655–1716)

True music must repeat the thought and aspirations of the people and the time.

George Gershwin (1898–1937)

Strange how potent cheap music is.

Noel Coward (1899–1973)

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# Glossary

## Western musical terms<sup>1</sup>

A cappella	Literally, ‘in the church style’, i.e. sung without musical accompaniment
Air	A term used between the 16th and 19th centuries to describe a song or melody, but later applied to a variety of classical vocal and instrumental compositions
Ballad	A strophic narrative song, usually of a romantic or sentimental nature and often sung solo
Barcarolle	A piece of music said to be composed in the style of folk songs favoured by Venetian gondoliers
Big band	A type of music ensemble originating in the US in the mid-1920s and popular during the swing era, usually consisting of 15 to 25 musicians playing brass, rhythm and woodwind instruments.
Broadside	Also known as broadsheet, a single piece of inexpensive paper with words printed on one side, sometimes with a woodcut illustration, common between the 16th and 19th centuries
Cancion	Originally a popular genre of Spanish music that influenced Italian light opera and other song styles emphasising feelings and emotions
Catch	A song in which two or more voices sing the same or similar melodies, but begin at different times, often to produce puns or humorous phrases
Charleston	A dance popular in the 1920s, performed to ragtime jazz music and characterised by a quadruple time rhythm
Dirge	A song or lament expressing mourning or grief
Ditty	A short, simple song or poem
Film score	Music composed for use in a movie, either as incidental or background music, to help make up the soundtrack.
Film song	A song composed specifically for use in a movie, often released separately as sheet music and/or a recording

Folk song	A traditional song which has evolved, often through oral transmission, and is widely felt to convey the 'essence' of a country, race or period
Foxtrot	A ballroom dance developed around 1914, performed to music in common time at about 30 to 32 bars a minute
Glee	A type of part-song originating in eighteenth-century England, sung by three or more (usually male) unaccompanied voices
Hymn	A song of praise, joy or thanksgiving to a deity, usually written in metrical verse in lines of regular length
Idyll	A literary description in prose or verse of happy rural life, applied by extension to a musical composition of a peaceful, pastoral character
Intermezzo	A term occasionally used as the title of a movement, usually of a light character, contained within a larger work
Jazz	A style of music of African-American origin characterized by a strong but flexible rhythmic under-structure, typically involving solo and ensemble improvisations on basic tunes and chord patterns
Jazz Age	Popularly taken to be the period between the end of the First World War in 1918 and the beginning of the Great Depression in 1929
Jig	A type of lively folk tune and/or dance in compound metre
Jive	A fast-paced form of swing dance developed in the US during the 1930s
Lament	Any piece of music expressing grief, usually at the loss of a friend or famous person
Lyric	Usually the words of a song, especially used of popular twentieth-century song and musical comedy
March	A composition in regularly accented, usually duple metre, appropriate to accompany military movements and processions
Masque	A type of courtly entertainment dating from the 16th century, used to celebrate special events, consisting of dancing, speech and song
Medley	A selection of pieces linked to form a single light-orchestral concert work
Music hall	Genre of theatrical entertainment popular in Britain during the 19th and early 20th centuries, featuring a variety of musical and other acts
Musical comedy	A play or film, usually having a light romantic story, that consists of dialogue interspersed with singing and dancing
One-step	A free form ballroom dance popular at the beginning of the 20th century

Operetta	Light opera, 'light' in terms of both music and subject matter
Oriental	'Of the East', used to describe the often imagined attributes of countries stretching from northern Africa and the 'Middle East' to 'India beyond the Ganges', i.e. the 'Far East'
Polka	A genre of ballroom dance music which originated in central Europe in the middle of the 19th century
Quickstep	Martial music for a march in quick time, also a ballroom dance in quadruple time dating from around 1927
Reel	A type of folk dance and/or folk tune
Revue	A type of popular multi-act theatrical entertainment that combines music, dance and sketches (until 1907 usually written as 'review')
Rumba	A complex form of Afro-Cuban dance popular in the 1930s and 1940s
Riff	In various popular music styles, a short melodic, rhythmic or chordal phrase, repeated over changing melodies
Rhythm and Blues	A genre of popular African-American music that originated in the 1940s
Screamer	A colloquial term for a short upbeat march intended mainly for use in circuses
Shanty	A song sung by sailors during the 19th century, usually to accompany labour on board sailing vessels, hence 'sea shanty'
Shimmy	A dance popular during the 'jazz age' in which the lower body is held relatively still, while the shoulders are shaken back and forth
Stanza	A unit within a larger poem, in popular vocal music typically referred to as a verse
Strathspey	A type of dance tune, in simple quadruple time, named after a district of Scotland
Swing	A form of music that developed in the US in the 1930s, characterised by a strong rhythm section, medium to fast tempos and lilting melodies
Swing era	Usually taken to be the period between 1935 and 1946, when big band music was most popular in the US and elsewhere
Tango	A partner dance that originated in Latin America in the 1890s and became popular in Europe and America during the early 20th century
Two-step	A dance form popular before 1911, initially a variation on the waltz

Vaudeville	Theatrical genre of variety entertainment popular in North America from the 1890s until the 1920s
Verse	Generally considered to be a single line in a metrical composition, but also used to describe any division or grouping of words in such a work
Waltz	A ballroom dance developed in the 18th century, performed to music in triple time with a strong accent on the first beat

## Burmese Musical Terms

<i>anyein pwe</i>	A live variety show, usually encompassing light music, dance, dialogue, dramatic skits and slapstick comedy
<i>copy thachin</i>	‘copy song’
<i>hne</i>	double reed pipe, or oboe
<i>kyi waing</i>	gong circle
<i>linkwin</i>	cymbals
<i>pattma</i>	large drum
<i>patt waing</i>	drum circle
<i>pattala</i>	bamboo xylophone
<i>pwe</i>	A broad term covering a range of performative events, including festivals, live theatre, spirit propitiation ceremonies, rituals, offering events and parties
<i>saing waing</i>	traditional Burmese orchestra
<i>sandaya</i>	piano
<i>saung gauk</i>	arched harp
<i>tayaw</i>	violin
<i>zat pwe</i>	A traditional dance drama based on the Buddhist <i>Jataka</i> tales, but often including musical performances, dialogue and comedy routines

## Note

1. The definitions of Western musical types given in this list rely heavily on Alison Latham (ed.), *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), supplemented by various on-line sources. The explanation of Burmese terms draws on a variety of sources, including J.R. Brandon and Martin Banham, *The Cambridge Guide to Asian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 13–18; and Gavin Douglas, *Music in Mainland Southeast Asia: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 39–54.

# Abbreviations

ABMP	American Baptist Mission Press
AFRS	Armed Forces Radio Service
AM	amplitude modulation
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BBS	Burma Broadcasting Service
BESA	Bengal Entertainment Services Association
BMP	Burma Military Police
CBI	China-Burma-India (Theatre)
CD	compact disc
DVD	digital video (or versatile) disc
ENSA	Entertainments National Service Association
FM	frequency modulation
HEIC	Honourable East India Company
HMV	His Master's Voice
ICS	Indian Civil Service
INA	Indian National Army
KLM	<i>Koninklijke Luchtvaart Maatschappij</i> (Royal Dutch Airlines)
LM	long metre (or loud music)
LP	Long Play
MGM	Metro Goldwyn Mayer
MP	Member of Parliament
POW	Prisoner of War
R&B	rhythm and blues
RPM	revolutions per minute
RSO	Rangoon Symphony Orchestra
SEAC	South East Asia Command
SEARC	Southeast Asia Research Centre
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council
SPDC	State Peace and Development Council
TV	television
UK	United Kingdom
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
US	United States (of America)
USO	United Service Organisations
VD	venereal disease

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# Foreword

*Gavin Douglas*

It is an honour to write a foreword to Andrew Selth's examination of Burma-inspired popular music. With dozens and dozens of examples, Andrew provides exciting insights on how Western conceptions and misconceptions of Burma were formed during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The mass production of sheet music and, later, of 78 rpm recordings and film, spread images and ideas of foreign cultures around the globe, making an indisputable impression on how these far-off places came to be understood.

Rudyard Kipling's poem 'Mandalay', its numerous musical settings and the countless songs that it inspired, provides a poignant jumping-off point for understanding this phenomenon. Drawn from Kipling's three-day visit to Burma in 1890 (never reaching Mandalay) the poem had immeasurable influence on Western understandings of a country that was not well known in the English world. Books and news reports on Burma contained limited, often inaccurate information that Kipling's ballad would supplement. This portrait of a country of golden pagodas populated by shy, reserved girls pining for their white men reappeared countless times in song, art and film, and constructed long-standing images of the Far East, Buddhism, Asian women, and colonial power that continue to this day. The poem and its descendants helped to create public perceptions of Burma and by extension European beliefs of colonial relations.

Andrew Selth is one of the most prolific writers in the Burma studies community but he is best known in the arenas of foreign affairs and policy analysis. With his deep and highly regarded knowledge of political and military issues what would possibly compel him to write a book on music? As an ethnomusicologist trying to understand Burma's musical traditions, I became familiar with Andrew's work (particularly his comprehensive bibliographic work) early on in my efforts to understand the cultural and political terrain in which those traditions were found. Music, in Burma, and everywhere else, does not exist in a vacuum, but is embedded in the economic, political and religious lives of those who use it. Music has meaning, function and power only insofar as it connects to other social domains.

Throughout this work Selth shows that attention to recurring images and themes informs how people come to conceive of a place and of a people. Music, songs, poetry, film and other mass-mediated culture lay a foundation for how people perceive, conceive and comprehend. This work on popular



songs logically extends from Selth's recent writing on Western cinematic depictions of Burma and the contributions they make (both positive and negative) to engagement with the country. Like cinema, song traditions plant vivid images in the minds of the populace that help mobilize engagement. Such work on expressive popular arts logically intersects with analysis of foreign relations at large. Perception informs policy. And as perceptions change so too do foreign relations.

*Burma, Kipling and Western Music* connects humanities scholarship with social science work and will be welcomed by those interdisciplinary scholars whose work bridges between the arts, the humanities and the social sciences. For cultural historians it contributes to a growing body of work (in film, literature, photography) concerned with how Burma was viewed during the Victorian and Edwardian colonial eras. More broadly, it offers a multitude of examples for those who are interested in the construction, manipulation and dismantling of race, religion and gender stereotypes.

Lastly, for the music aficionado and the historian, this book is a fun read. I found myself breaking from the narrative again and again to search down recordings of particular pieces. Some songs are insightfully moving, others silly and playful: some are evocative of a specific period of time and others have a strong historical persistence. The span of this study – from the first Anglo-Burmese war (1824) to Burma's independence from Britain (1948) – encompasses a period of vast changes in the colonial relationship, in musical and popular taste and in the contexts for engagement with popular music. My congratulations and thanks to Andrew for capturing the echoes of these songs and for turning our attention to their influence.

Gavin Douglas, Associate Professor of Ethnomusicology,  
Head, Department of Music Studies,  
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro

# Acknowledgements

This book has been great fun to research and write. It has permitted me to set aside my usual academic preoccupations with foreign policy and security issues, pursue a range of personal interests (such as Rudyard Kipling, George Orwell and vintage music), and to relate them to Burma, a country that has fascinated me for more than 40 years. It has also given me the opportunity to shine a little light into several dark corners of Burmese history that are yet to be investigated closely by Western scholars. In all those ways, it has been an enjoyable personal journey. However, a project like this can never be undertaken alone and along the way I benefited from the help of many others, including several specialists in fields with which I was not familiar. I am grateful to them for their help. Not all can be named here, but there are some who deserve special mention.

As he has been for so many Burma-watchers, and for so long, *Sayagyi* David Steinberg of Georgetown and Johns Hopkins universities was a wonderful source of inspiration, advice and practical support, and for this he has my gratitude. Thanks are also due to my old mate Kim Jackson, who read an early draft of the book and offered comments based on his encyclopaedic knowledge of popular Western music. Drawing on his own extensive collection and recordings on the Internet, he also prepared two CDs of Burma-related songs, to help bring to life some of the old sheet music I had collected over the past decade. Along the way, I benefited from the expertise and advice of Nick Cheesman, Chit Win, Gavin Douglas, Nicholas Farrelly, Charlotte Galloway, Ian Holliday, Charles Ipcar, Ward Keeler, Stephen McCarthy and Jim Saville. I am particularly indebted to Gavin Douglas for contributing a generous foreword to this book. I should also mention Catherine Raymond of the Burma Studies Centre at Northern Illinois University, with whom I discussed this project when it was still in its early stages.

While I was researching this book, members of staff of the National Library of Australia in Canberra were attentive and helpful, as always. Their efforts to help me obtain copies of rare sheet music from other libraries, including some located overseas, were much appreciated. For their support in this and other Burma projects undertaken since I joined the Griffith Asia Institute in 2006, mention must also be made of Russell Trood, Leong Liew, Andrew O'Neil, Michael Wesley, Meegan Thorley, Kathy Bailey, Robyn

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As always, my greatest debt is to my wife Pattie, who has encouraged and supported my interest in all things Burmese for more than 30 years. Over the past two years, she has probably learned more about Burma's musical manifestations, and listened to more Burma-related music, than she ever really cared to. I owe her much more than can be recorded here.

Needless to say, any errors or omissions are my responsibility alone.

Parts of this study were first presented at a seminar entitled 'Kipling, "Mandalay" and Modern Burma (Myanmar)', held at the Griffith Asia Institute in Brisbane on 20 March 2014. I wish to express my appreciation to all those who attended the seminar and made helpful suggestions for further research, particularly John Butcher. An article about the project subsequently appeared in the Griffith Asia Institute's *Newsletter*.<sup>1</sup> An early version of the third chapter, on the creation and musical adaption of Kipling's ballad 'Mandalay', was accepted for publication in *The Kipling Journal*. The City University of Hong Kong's Southeast Asia Research Centre (SEARC) posted a working paper online that explored similar themes.<sup>2</sup> With a few small changes, this paper was later published as an article by the *Journal of Burma Studies*.<sup>3</sup> I should like to acknowledge my debt to the editor of the *The Kipling Journal* and its contributors, in particular Brian Mattinson, whose data and advice were invaluable in the preparation of the working paper, articles and chapter. The SEARC also posted online a working paper based on the first chapter of the book.<sup>4</sup> This was subsequently published as an article by the *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*.<sup>5</sup>

As might be expected, given the passage of time and the ephemeral nature of many of the artistic works surveyed in this book, it has been very difficult to identify, track down and seek permission from the holders of copyright on all the songs and theatrical works cited, where they are not already in the public domain. Every effort has been made to do so, however, and apologies are offered to any copyright holder whose work has inadvertently been used without the appropriate acknowledgement or clearances. Any person or institution who believes they are in that position is invited to contact the author or publishers, so that the necessary formalities can be completed.

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*the City of Mahagonny* by Bertolt Brecht and Kurt Weill; Penguin Random House for use of a song reproduced in Aung San Suu Kyi's *Letters From Burma*; the Random House Group Ltd and A.M. Heath and Co., for permission to reprint a poem taken from *The Complete Works of George Orwell*, edited by Peter Davison, © the Estate of the late Sonia Brownell Orwell, published by Secker and Warburg; and A.M. Heath and Co. for use of an unpublished poem by George Orwell entitled 'The Lesser Evil', copyright © George Orwell 1924, reprinted by permission of Bill Hamilton as the Literary Executor of the Estate of the late Sonia Brownell Orwell.

From the Devirra Group, permission was granted to cite the lyrics of four songs, as follows: 'When Buddha Smiles', words by Arthur Freed and music by I.H. Brown, © 1921 Warner Bros. Inc.; 'Let's Take a Walk Around the Block', words and music by Ira Gershwin, Harold Arlen and E.Y. Harburg, © 1934 New World Music Company Ltd; 'Rollin' Home', words by Billy Hill and music by Peter de Rose, © 1934 Shapiro Bernstein & Co., Inc.; and 'Meet the Sun Half Way', words by Johnny Burke and music by James Monaco, © 1940 Santly-Joy-Select. In addition, lyrics from the songs 'Mad Dogs and Englishmen', 'I Wonder What Happened to Him' and 'I Like America', all by Noel Coward, copyright © NC Aventales AG, have been reproduced by permission of Alan Brodie Representation Ltd ([www.alanbrodie.com](http://www.alanbrodie.com)). Lyrics from 'Calling Me Home Again', by Vera Buck and Perceval Graves, copyright © 1935 by Boosey and Co. (London) Ltd, have been reproduced by permission of Boosey and Hawkes Music Publishers Ltd, print rights administered in Australia and New Zealand by Hal Leonard Australia Pty Ltd ABN 13 085 333 713 ([www.halleonard.com.au](http://www.halleonard.com.au), all rights reserved, unauthorised reproduction illegal). Also, the lyrics of 'Moon Over Burma', written and composed by Frank Loesser and Frederick Hollander in 1940, have been cited courtesy of the publisher, Sony/ATV Music Publishing Australia.

Canberra  
May 2016

## Notes

1. 'On the Road to Mandalay', *Griffith Asia Institute Newsletter*, Vol. 15, No. 2, Winter 2014, pp. 1–3, at [http://www.griffith.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/637760/Newsletter-Two-2014-web-version-2.1.pdf](http://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/637760/Newsletter-Two-2014-web-version-2.1.pdf).
2. Andrew Selth, 'Rudyard Kipling and "Mandalay"', *The Kipling Journal*, No. 358, December 2014, pp. 47–58. See also Andrew Selth, *Kipling, "Mandalay" and Burma in the Popular Imagination*, Working Paper No. 161 (Hong Kong SAR: Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University of Hong Kong, January 2015), at [http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/Resources/Paper/15011914\\_161%20-%20WP%20-%20Dr%20Andrew%20Selth.pdf](http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/Resources/Paper/15011914_161%20-%20WP%20-%20Dr%20Andrew%20Selth.pdf).
3. Andrew Selth, 'Kipling, "Mandalay" and Burma in the Popular Imagination', *Journal of Burma Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, June 2016, pp.105–48.
4. Andrew Selth, *Orientalism, "Burma Girls" and Western Music*, Working Paper No. 165 (Hong Kong SAR: Southeast Asia Research Centre, City University

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of Hong Kong, February 2015), at [http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/Resources/Paper/15022417\\_165%20-%20WP%20-%20Dr%20Andrew%20Selth.pdf](http://www.cityu.edu.hk/searc/Resources/Paper/15022417_165%20-%20WP%20-%20Dr%20Andrew%20Selth.pdf).

5. Andrew Selth, 'The Road to Mandalay: Orientalism, "Burma Girls" and Western Music', *Journal of Research in Gender Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2016, at <http://www.addletonacademicpublishers.com/contents-jrgs/738-volume-6-1-2016/2742-the-road-to-mandalay-orientalism-burma-girls-and-western-music>.

# Introduction

As a fledgling diplomat posted to the Australian embassy in Rangoon in the 1970s, I always felt uncomfortable when, at a party or dinner, some of my colleagues or their partners would break into a chorus of Rudyard Kipling's 'Mandalay'. My embarrassment was more acute if there were Burmese guests present, as it seemed to me in rather bad taste to be reciting (or, if the evening had been a convivial one, singing) a ballad that the locals could find patronising, if not offensive. Reflecting on this many years later, it struck me as remarkable that Kipling's poem and its musical settings had made such an impact on the Western imagination that even now they are not only considered entertaining but, more to the point, are still seen as evocative of Burma. It has been more than 125 years since the ballad first appeared, but new versions of the song are being recorded. Also, despite all the changes that have taken place since, both in Burma and elsewhere, it is still being cited in connection with a wide range of artistic works.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the ballad's familiarity, however, little is popularly known about Kipling's short visit to Burma in 1889 and the work it inspired. A number of common beliefs about Kipling's relationship with Burma, including that he once lived there, sailed on the Irrawaddy River and actually visited Mandalay, are incorrect.<sup>2</sup> The grand hotel in Rangoon which in some sources claims him as an illustrious former guest was not opened until a decade after his sojourn in the city, which, according to Kipling, was so brief that it was 'countable by hours'.<sup>3</sup> Even less is known about the extraordinary impact that his ballad had on popular music over the 50 years following his visit, and how all the works it inspired indelibly coloured views of Burma and the Burmese in the Western world. These images were surprisingly persistent and many of them survive to the present day. Indeed, the role of Western music in shaping perceptions of the country and its people is a lacuna in modern Burma studies that demands closer attention. This book is a first attempt to try and fill that gap in our knowledge, and in the scholarly literature.

All that said, it is important to understand what this study is, and what it is not.

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### Scope of the study

First, this book aims to identify relevant compositions and look at the way in which Burma has been portrayed in popular Western music between 1824 and 1948. This period stretches from the outbreak of the First Anglo-Burmese War through two more Anglo-Burmese wars and the Second World War to the declaration of Burma's independence from Britain in January 1948.<sup>4</sup> The study cites musical works about Burma, or which had some connection to Burma, as a way of illustrating different styles, subjects and themes. It also gives examples of other works to help provide snapshots of the different communities for whom music in and about Burma was in some way significant. However, the study does not claim to be either authoritative or exhaustive. Nor could it be so, without a great deal more research. It is likely that hundreds of musical works written during the period under review made reference to Burma, in one way or another. Despite my best efforts over several years, I doubt that I have managed to track them all down. Some have probably been lost forever.

Second, Kipling's ballad 'Mandalay' is identified as a key turning point, not only for the composition of popular music about Burma, but also for Western perceptions of the country and its people. To help support this contention, the history of the ballad is examined in some detail, and its influence tracked through the decades that followed its composition in 1890. A number of reasons are offered to help explain its remarkable impact over the years, but it is acknowledged that none completely account for the way in which Kipling's brief stopover in Burma and subsequent ballad captured the popular imagination to the extent that it did. To explore this issue further would have required more time and space than was available here. To help readers in their own consideration of this mystery, however, references have been made to Kipling's other writings and their relevance to Burma, not only in the Victorian and Edwardian eras, but during the Second World War as well. I have also included some comments on 'Mandalay's' current popularity and Kipling's continuing relevance to developments in Burma.<sup>5</sup>

Third, this study is deliberately broad, rather than deep, in its coverage. While its focus is primarily on 180 or so musical works specifically related to Burma that were produced between 1824 and 1948, it also mentions other songs and tunes that were heard during that period, to put them into historical context. For example, while not 'popular' *per se*, early church music in Burma is also surveyed, to help set the scene. Classical music is not covered in any depth, although here too relevant works are mentioned, to provide a more rounded picture. Military music is also considered. However, this study is not about music as such. I am an historian by training, but not a cultural historian. Nor am I a musician, or a musicologist. Although it offers some broad observations on the subject, drawing where possible on the work of experts, this book does not examine the actual musical form and sound of any works mentioned. My primary sources are the lyrics, sheet music cover art and recordings of the period. Nor does it offer any new theories

about the place of Burma-related songs and tunes in popular culture. Those important tasks await scholars with the appropriate qualifications.

Fourth, to provide a wider historical and socio-cultural context, particularly the impact of technological changes in the entertainment industry and the globalisation of musical styles in the early 20th century, there is some discussion of the nature of Western music heard in Burma before and during the Second World War, and the role it played in the lives of both the foreign and local populations. As far as possible, I have drawn on first-hand accounts of these developments to convey the contemporary mood. However, this book is not intended to be a study of Western music in Burma, whether it be the music enjoyed by Europeans in the country before 1948 or the Western music adopted – and adapted – during the colonial period by Burmese musicians. Nor is it a study of Burma's own music, either in its classical form or in its various modern manifestations. For information on those subjects, it is recommended that the reader consult authorities such as Gavin Douglas, Ward Keeler and Heather MacLachlan.<sup>6</sup>

Explored to its fullest extent, this subject is potentially vast. Even an introductory survey such as this risks straying into a host of other areas and academic disciplines. Apart from weighty topics such as the natures of imperialism and Orientalism, and their relevance to Burma, it raises a number of important questions to do with race, religion and gender during the Victorian and Edwardian eras. It also opens issues such as the evolution of popular music in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, the impact of the West on Asian countries, and the way that such contacts were in turn reflected in fashions and tastes in the West. It is relevant to the globalisation of the music industry through records, tapes, radio and films, and the development of mass culture. There are also, of course, numerous links to the history of Burma and Greater India, including the effects of Christian missionary activity and British colonial rule on traditional Burmese society.

While in some cases the subject of brief digressions, such matters can only be alluded to in a study such as this. However, extensive notes, a list of relevant musical works and a comprehensive bibliography have been provided to help guide anyone interested in following up these and related issues. It is hoped that, inspired perhaps by this initial effort, other Burma-watchers, cultural historians, gender experts and musicologists will undertake the more specialised studies that are required to give such matters their due.

## Burma and names

A note about names is required, partly to explain the various terms used but also to acknowledge the political sensitivity surrounding the use of certain titles.

The historical name for the country in its own language is 'Myanma' (or 'Myanmar') although the name 'Bama', derived from the majority *Bamar* ethnic group, has enjoyed a long history. During the 18th and 19th



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centuries, the country was known to most English speaking peoples as 'Burmah', sometimes spelt 'Bermah' or 'Birmah'. After the United Kingdom began to conquer and annex parts of the country in the early 19th century, the shorter spelling of 'Burma' was increasingly used. For example, the name 'Lower Burma' was adopted after the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, and the Indian province of 'British Burma' was formally created in 1862.<sup>7</sup> Even so, the old version of the English name remained common and could be found in newspaper stories and on official maps of the country as late as 1885, when Mandalay fell. After Upper Burma was annexed in 1886 'Burma' increasingly became the norm, although some official bodies were still using 'Burmah' at the turn of the century.<sup>8</sup> A few large commercial enterprises, such as the Bombay Burmah Trading Company (founded in 1863) and the Burmah Oil Company (established in 1886), kept the old name and use it still.<sup>9</sup>

When Burma regained its independence from the UK in 1948, 'Myanmar' was the name of the country used in the vernacular version of the new constitution, while 'Burma' was used in the English language version. The formal name of the country (in English) was the Union of Burma. Following a national referendum, a new constitution was adopted in 1974 and the name of the country was changed to the 'Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma'. After the armed forces crushed a nation-wide pro-democracy uprising in September 1988, the official name was changed back to the 'Union of Burma'. In July 1989, however, the new military government changed the country's name once again, this time to the 'Union of Myanmar'. At the same time, a number of other place names were changed to conform more closely to their original pronunciation in the Burmese language.<sup>10</sup> In 2008, after another referendum and promulgation of a new national constitution, the country's official name in English was changed yet again, this time to the 'Republic of the Union of Myanmar'.<sup>11</sup>

Most countries, the United Nations and other major international organisations have accepted the latest names. A few governments and some opposition groups, however, still cling to the old forms, largely as a protest against the former military regime's refusal to introduce a genuinely democratic system of government. They also claim to subscribe to the opposition movement's stated belief that the country's name can only be changed by popular mandate.<sup>12</sup> In this study, the better-known names, for example 'Burma' instead of 'Myanmar', 'Arakan' instead of 'Rakhine', 'Rangoon' instead of 'Yangon', 'Irrawaddy' instead of 'Ayeyarwady', 'Moulmein' instead of 'Mawlamyine', and 'Bassein' rather than 'Patheingyi', have been retained both for editorial reasons and ease of recognition. They were also the names used during the colonial period. 'Burmese' has been employed as an adjective for the country and to denote both its population and national language. Quotations and references, however, have been given as they originally appeared. Also, formal titles introduced after 1989 have been cited in their current form. Such usage does not carry any political connotations.

As Martin Smith has pointed out, 'Burma is one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world'.<sup>13</sup> The current government officially recognises 135 different ethno-linguistic groups, divided into eight major 'national races'. However, some authorities have identified many more. As noted above, the dominant ethnic group is the *Bamar*, or (in English) 'Burmans', which has long made up about two-thirds of the population and been concentrated in the central Irrawaddy basin. During the 19th century, however, the term 'Burman' (or 'Birman') was often used by foreigners to describe all local inhabitants (with the exception of those of Indian and Chinese extraction), regardless of their actual ethnicity. Outside of that historical usage, 'Burman' is used in this book only in reference to the *Bamar* ethnic group.

The term 'Eurasian', to denote someone of mixed European and Asian parentage, or their descendants, was widely used in Burma until 1901. After that time, the term 'Anglo-Indian' gained ascendancy and was used in official documents, such as the 1911 national census. However, in this study 'Eurasian' is used in its original form to avoid confusion with the use of 'Anglo-Indian' during the 18th and early 19th centuries to describe British citizens who lived and worked in India (including Burma). With the framing of the Government of Burma Act in 1935, to prepare for Burma's formal separation from India in 1937, the term 'Anglo-Burman' was officially adopted to describe someone of mixed European and Burmese heritage. However, it is not used here.<sup>14</sup>

Between the 16th and 19th centuries, Ava (or Inwa) was the capital of Burma four times, including for three periods under the Konbaung Dynasty (1752–1885).<sup>15</sup> In 1859, the royal capital was moved 21 kilometres up the Irrawaddy River to Mandalay. Until then, the British recognised Ava as the seat of national power. During the 18th and 19th centuries Burma was often called the 'Kingdom of Ava', or simply 'Ava'. After the UK dispatched troops to Mandalay and completed its three-stage conquest of Burma in 1886, the colonial port city of Rangoon was confirmed as the administrative capital of the country. It had been the capital of Lower Burma since 1852. Rangoon remains the commercial capital, but in October 2005 the military regime formally designated the newly built city of Naypyidaw (or Nay Pyi Taw), 320 kilometres north of Rangoon, as the seat of Burma's government.

## Definitions and conventions

A few definitions and explanations are necessary to clarify some of the terms used and to set the broad parameters of the study.

In this book, 'the West' or 'the Western world' is generally taken to mean the UK and its English-speaking colonies like Canada, Australia and New Zealand, as well as the US and the countries of Western Europe. It is acknowledged that this term, like its twin, 'the East' (or 'the Orient'), reflect essentially outdated Eurocentric concepts that are open to challenge

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on various grounds. However, both labels, and derivatives like ‘the Far East’, have been retained for convenience. Also, they were commonly accepted between 1824 and 1948.

Most of the period under review has been collectively described by historians and others as the Victorian and Edwardian ‘eras’. These names are derived from the reigns of the two British monarchs, Queen Victoria (who was on the throne from 1837–1901) and King Edward VII (who reigned from 1901–1910). However, it is widely accepted that the historical periods in question are loosely defined and extend beyond those dates.<sup>16</sup> The First Anglo-Burmese War, for example, was fought in 1824–1826, when George IV was king. From 1910 to 1936, George V was the king of the UK and the British dominions, and Emperor of India. After Edward VIII abdicated in December 1936, George VI took the throne and was king when Burma regained its independence in 1948. He reigned until 1952.

There is no accepted definition of ‘popular music’, a term which can cover a number of musical genres having wide appeal. In this study, it is broadly applied to music that is ‘conceived for mass distribution to large and often socio-culturally heterogeneous groups of listeners’, and has been well received.<sup>17</sup> This covers both instrumental and vocal works, produced either individually or as part of larger projects, such as musical comedies, operettas, ballets and classical concerts. Since the end of the 19th century, the popularity of particular songs and tunes has tended to be measured in terms of sales of sheet music and recordings. Such statistics can be very helpful, but it needs to be remembered that commercial indicators of that kind do not take into account more intangible factors such as the frequency of informal performances, for example in private homes, attendances at stage shows and the sizes of audiences for films and radio broadcasts. Also, during the period under review, the means by which music was distributed and appreciated underwent major changes.

I have italicised the names of publications, movies, shows and major works such as operas and musical comedies that contain more than one ballad, song or instrumental piece. Individual poems, songs and tunes, however, have been identified by the use of quotation marks. For both larger and smaller works I have added the date of their composition or first performance, where known. This is in part to give a sense of historical time and to indicate changing tastes, but also to help differentiate between songs and tunes that have the same or similar titles. Where a work has no readily identifiable author or date of composition, then it is mentioned without either. This is the case, for example, with regard to some of the hymns and regimental marches noted in the first section of the study, which looks at Western music related to Burma before the publication of Kipling’s ballad ‘Mandalay’ in 1890.

Where possible, the full details of Burma-related songs and tunes are given, including their place and date of first publication, recording or performance. However, in some cases the only sheet music or record that

could be consulted was a reprint or a later version. Some musical works were republished in Australia, for example, after first being released in the UK or US. Other works are known only from recordings, for which sheet music does not seem to have survived or been made publicly available. Also, the details of some live performances have been very difficult to track down. All these problems have been acknowledged, where relevant. In citing specific compositions, I have followed the usual convention of listing the lyricist(s) first and the composer(s) of the music second. This should not be seen as implying any preference for one over the other, in examining the works under review. Indeed, the relative importance of the words and music often varied between works, and between different historical periods.

Where contemporary sources have provided transliterations of Burmese phrases, or the names of Burmese hymns, songs or musical compositions, they have been cited verbatim. It should be noted, however, that even now there is no agreed system for the romanisation of words and phrases in Burmese which, to add to all the usual difficulties, is a tonal, pitch register and syllable-timed language. In most cases, the transliterations provided in books and articles appear to be attempts by various authors to render phonetically words and phrases they have overheard. Not all are accurate, by current standards. The same applies to words and phrases taken, or adapted, from other languages, such as Hindi and Urdu. It is recognised that not all conform to modern styles and conventions.

## Notes

1. For example, 'The Road to Mandalay' was sung in 'Rumpole and the Show Folk', an episode of the Thames Television series *Rumpole of the Bailey*, starring Leo McKern (Series 2, Episode 3, 1979). It was based on the short story 'Rumpole and the Show Folk', in John Mortimer, *The Trials of Rumpole* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979). See also the TV movie *Road to Mandalay* (1991), directed by Ken Russell; the song 'The Road to Mandalay', with words and music by Robbie Williams (London: EMI Music Publishing Ltd, 2001); Randle Mainwaring's autobiographical book, *On the Road to Mandalay* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword, 2007); and John McGrath's stage production, *The Road to Mandalay: A Musical Play for Schools* (Edinburgh: Fairplay Press, 2008).
2. See, for example, Emily Ford, 'Burma holds its first global literary festival', *BBC News*, 4 February 2013, at <http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-21322997>; and Christopher Hart, 'Pop goes Burma's taboos, as girl band dyes its hair while Aung San Suu Kyi visits Britain', *The Telegraph* (London, UK), 23 June 2012, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/burmamyanmar/9351025/Pop-go-Burmas-taboos-as-girl-band-dyes-its-hair-while-Aung-San-Suu-Kyi-visits-Britain.html>.
3. Rudyard Kipling, *From Sea to Sea* (New York: Doubleday, Page and Co., 1909), p. 208. See also Andrew Selth, 'Burma and the Kipling mystique', *New Mandala*, 31 March 2015, at <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/newmandala/2015/03/31/burma-and-the-kipling-mystique/>.

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4. During the Second World War, Burma was nominally independent after August 1943, but was effectively under Japanese control for the three years or so it was occupied. After Japan's defeat in 1945, Burma fell under British military, and later civil, administration until it regained full independence in 1948.
5. For detailed and wide-ranging discussions of Kipling, his works and wider influence, see the website of The Kipling Society (founded in 1927) at [http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/soc\\_fra.htm](http://www.kiplingsociety.co.uk/soc_fra.htm).
6. For studies of traditional Burmese music and musical instruments, see Gavin Douglas, 'Myanmar (Burma)', in John Shepherd, et al. (eds), *Continuum Encyclopedia of Popular Music of the World* (London: Continuum Publishing Group, 2003), Vol. 5, pp. 196–202; Ward Keeler, 'Burma', in T.E. Miller and Sean Williams (eds), *The Garland Handbook of Southeast Asian Music* (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 199–221; and Douglas, *Music in Mainland Southeast Asia*. For an examination of more modern music in Burma, see Heather MacLachlan, *Burma's Pop Music Industry: Creators, Distributors, Censors* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2011).
7. After the First Anglo-Burmese War, Britain annexed the provinces of Assam, Arakan and Tenasserim. Arakan was administered by the Honourable East India Company (HEIC) as part of the Bengal Presidency but the British Commissioner in Tenasserim answered directly to the HEIC government in Calcutta. After the Second Anglo-Burmese War in 1852, Britain annexed Pegu province, and formally took possession of all 'Lower Burma'. Assam never became part of British Burma.
8. For example, 'Burma Police' replaced 'Burmah Police' on police force accoutrements around 1901.
9. In some quarters, the old usage was employed well into the 20th century. See, for example, Leslie Shakespear, *History of Upper Assam, Upper Burmah and North-Eastern Frontier* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1914).
10. See, for example, D.I. Steinberg, *Burma/Myanmar: What Everyone Needs to Know* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. xx–xxii.
11. Arguably, the name of the country did not formally change until March 2011, when the military regime was dissolved and a new government was formed according to the 2008 constitution.
12. See, for example, 'Suu Kyi: It's Burma, not Myanmar', *Sydney Morning Herald* (Sydney, Australia), 23 November 2012, at <http://www.smh.com.au/world/suu-kyi-its-burma-not-myanmar-20121123-29wll.html>.
13. Martin Smith, with Annie Allsebrook, *Ethnic Groups in Burma: Development, Democracy and Human Rights* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 1994), p. 17.
14. J.C. Koop, *The Eurasian Population in Burma*, Cultural Report Series No. 6 (New Haven: Yale University, 1960), pp. 1–2.
15. It was also the capital of the Kingdom of Ava, which ruled Upper Burma between 1365 and 1555.
16. See, for example, 'Two Worlds', *History.blogspot*, at <http://twoworlds-history.blogspot.com.au/p/victorian-and-edwardian-whats.html>.
17. Philip Tagg, 'Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice', *Popular Music*, Vol. 2, No. 41, 1982, p. 41.

# 1 Setting the scene

Over the past 75 years or so, a growing number of scholars and commentators have tried to answer the questions: how was colonial Burma perceived in and by the Western world, how did people in countries like the United Kingdom (UK) and United States (US) form their views, and how were they manifested?

As is often the case, historians led the way, not only by informing Western audiences about developments in Burma but also by describing how European contacts over the centuries gave rise to a wide range of myths and misconceptions.<sup>1</sup> Other social scientists made useful contributions. In 1985, for example, Josef Silverstein discussed the portrayal of Burma in a number of novels by European and American authors.<sup>2</sup> Clive Christie and Stephen Keck later surveyed the travel literature produced during the colonial period, and weighed its impact on Western perceptions of Burma.<sup>3</sup> In 2002, Deborah Boyer searched through Victorian-era periodicals for references to Burma and its role in the British Empire.<sup>4</sup> In 2009, this author examined the way in which Burma had been represented in Hollywood movies and how this might have influenced views of the country.<sup>5</sup> Others have commented on the paintings of Burma and Burmese people produced by British artists during the colonial period.<sup>6</sup> Engravings, photographs and picture postcards also influenced the way in which Burma was seen in the UK, US and elsewhere.<sup>7</sup>

To date, however, no one has looked in a systematic way at how Western views of colonial Burma were influenced by music, particularly popular music. Indeed, music has been absent from almost all overviews of the country.<sup>8</sup> This is surprising, as during the 19th and early 20th centuries songs and tunes were powerful cultural vectors, highly influential in shaping not only attitudes to domestic developments but also perceptions of foreign places and events.<sup>9</sup> As well as live performances, both in public and in private, broadsides and commercial sheet music were important means of conveying ideas about the countries and peoples that were being conquered as part of Britain's second great burst of imperial expansion. The transmission process rapidly increased in scope and pace after the turn of the 20th century, encouraged by the development of gramophone records, commercial radio

stations and ‘talking’ pictures. Music became an even more important vehicle for reflecting – and influencing – popular perceptions.

This phenomenon has been recognised by cultural historians and musicologists in other fields, but so far its implications for Burma appear to have escaped their attention.<sup>10</sup>

One reason why Burma seems to have been overlooked as a discrete subject for analysis in this regard is that it was never seen as a noteworthy example of wider historical and socio-cultural trends. The 19th century was a time of far-reaching political, economic and social change. It was also a time of vigorous Western expansion into other parts of the world, including the so-called ‘Far East’. Even before popular music became a significant factor, and was recognised as such, vivid images of the ‘Orient’ had been formed in the West through novels, poems, paintings and operas. In all these and other mediums, such as fashion, considerable attention was given to the role of Oriental women and their (often imagined) attributes and characteristics. In some respects, they became emblematic of the West’s perceptions of, and approach to, foreign lands and people. Burma was not well known to Western populations, and so played a relatively minor part in all these processes. In its own way, however, it conformed to broader patterns.

To understand these developments, it is helpful first to survey the way in which Western countries perceived the Orient during the imperial era and, secondly, to look more closely at how Burma (and Burmese women) played a role in the formation and demonstration of such views. Of particular interest in this regard is Burma’s relationship with the UK. For, not only did Britain lead the world in many ways during the Victorian and Edwardian eras, but it was one of the first to embrace the Orientalist paradigm. Of all Western countries, it also took the closest interest in Burma, which it conquered in three wars spanning almost the entire 19th century. The UK thus provides a useful lens through which to look at all these developments, and to set the scene for a more detailed examination of Burma-related music during the colonial period.

### **The West and the ‘Orient’**

The 100 years between 1815 and 1914 have been described as the UK’s ‘imperial century’. During this period, most of which coincided with the reign of Queen Victoria, Britain consolidated its hold over India and acquired control over vast new territories in Africa, Southeast Asia and China.<sup>11</sup> While driven as much by commercial imperatives as by political and strategic interests, this expansion was clothed in the rhetoric of a philanthropic mission. Influenced by social Darwinism – the application of biological concepts like ‘the survival of the fittest’ to entire societies – and emerging theories of eugenics, the British were convinced that they had a special role to bring peace, order and technology to the lesser races of the world. Different approaches were taken by the Conservative and Liberal



Parties but, to quote a character in George Orwell's 1934 novel *Burmese Days*, successive British governments saw themselves as 'torchbearers upon the path of progress'.<sup>12</sup> By 1881, Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli could claim with some justification that Britain had 'stamped its diligent and methodic character on the century'.<sup>13</sup>

Britain's profound sense of imperial destiny, and the support given to this notion by 'white' colonies like Australia, New Zealand and Canada, inspired songs such as 'It's the English-Speaking Race Against the World'. Made famous in the late 19th century by the renowned music hall performer Charles Godfrey, the song began:

We're brothers of the self-same race,  
Speakers of the self-same tongue,  
With the same brave hearts that feel no fears  
From fighting sires of a thousand years;  
Folks say, 'What will Britain do?  
Will she rest with banners furled?'  
No! No! No!  
When we go to meet the foe,  
It's the English-speaking race against the world.<sup>14</sup>

The British believed that they had won what Cecil Rhodes called 'the lottery of life', and represented rationality, energy, cultural superiority and technical skills.<sup>15</sup> Their colonial subjects, in Africa and Asia at least, were considered much less fortunate. They were invariably characterised as lawless, listless, undeveloped and unpredictable, sorely in need of the UK's civilising presence. It was also believed that this role had the blessing of The Almighty for, as Rudyard Kipling wrote in 'A Song of the English' (1893), 'He hath smote for us a pathway to the ends of all the earth'.<sup>16</sup>

Particularly after the evangelical revival of the late 18th and early 19th centuries, these views were appropriated by Christian missionary organisations, both in the UK and US. As Jeffrey Franklin has argued:

On the frontlines of empire, missionaries in Burma or Ceylon recognised Buddhism as the primary competition and understood explicitly that British occupation was wedded to Christianizing those populations. The alignment between religion and empire meant that to question the superiority of the Christian faith was tantamount to questioning the God-given right of the British to govern Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists.<sup>17</sup>

Indeed, in the eyes of many at the time, missionaries acted as the 'religious arm' of colonialism. Some recent historians have been less charitable, describing them as the 'ideological shock troops for colonial invasion'.<sup>18</sup> As Brian Stanley has argued, neither claim rings entirely true,