Musicological Brainfood
Tasty Bite-Size Provocations to Refuel Your Thinking

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Mission Statement

"The mission of the International Musicological Society

- is to connect every musicologist to the world community of musicology
- by embracing the study of music in all its diversity
- and advancing musicological research across the globe
- in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration."
Global musicology is a provocation. It is not just a matter of including the Other but allowing the Other the chance to change the way we understand ourselves. In this issue of *IMS Musicological Brainfood*, we consider how a global perspective challenges music theory and music history. Its alterity both distances us from what we assume we know, and encourages us to see how our identities are so connected with the Other that it is entirely feasible to write a history of Western music without Western music as the focus. Also, for the first time, we have a group-authored article; as the scholarship becomes more global, the interconnections across time and space that define the object of study, make it difficult to contain expertise in a single author. The global is just too complex: is group scholarship itself a symptom of global musicology?

“Global” is hot. Witness: global history of ideas, global history of philosophy, global history of science, global medieval studies, global history of music, etc. Laudably, the recent and various global-historical turns have been accompanied by self-critical reflections on the methods and motives of such global expansions. Of course, global-historical perspectives are nothing new to music studies: consider Al-Farabi’s *Kitāb al-Mūsīqī al-kabīr* (tenth century), François-Joseph Fétis’s *Histoire générale de la musique* (1869–77), or Sourindro Mohun Tagore’s *Universal History of Music: Compiled from Diverse Sources, Together with Various Original Notes on Hindu Music* (1896). While it would neither be desirable nor expedient to rehabilitate such obsolete historical methodologies, it would, as Reinhard Strohm has argued in a recent *Brainfood* provocation, be an equally fatal error to abandon history altogether. At the same time, there is little to be gained by retracing the rich body of work produced by our colleagues in the field of ethnomusicology. From the specific perspective of the history of music theory, rather, the global turn brings with it a new set of challenges and opportunities.

Recently, a group of us met in Frankfurt at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics under the auspices of the Research Group Histories of Music, Mind, and Body, to share our ongoing work in the history of music theory. Our aim was to consolidate mounting interest in diversifying the scope of available music-theoretical sources. Some of us presented work in the history of Western theory, while others brought to the table Chinese, Arabo-Persian, and comparative perspectives. During the course of the meeting, we found ourselves reflecting on an essential similarity of method: our goal of broadening the scope of music-theoretical inquiry required us to distance ourselves from concepts that we had long taken for granted, and interrogate aspects of musical experience long held to be beyond question. The concept of the musical note, techniques of listening, metrical hierarchies, philosophical approaches to attention, the purpose of textbooks, and the nature of musical metaphors: all of these suddenly seemed open to radical redefinition. The study of musical cultures or theories of music that are geographically, chronologically, or otherwise distant from the ones in which we have been trained in-
evitably produces both obstacles to—and unexpected opportunities for—understanding. The fruitful, if at times challenging, outcomes of such defamiliarization encouraged us to consider the role of distance in delimiting and shaping our research, and to contemplate various possibilities of expanding and diversifying the corpus of historical theoretical-aesthetic texts and materials available for study.

For example, we interrogated the concept of the musical note, a construct so familiar and fundamental to Western musical theory and practice that it seems that it has always just been there. But even fundamental concepts have histories, and in the West that of the note was apparently lost for a time following the dissolution of the Roman Empire. Its ninth-century rediscovery through the musical writings of Boethius and other late-Roman authors laid the foundation for a new, hybrid music theory that creatively adapted the speculative theory of antiquity to the practical goal of disciplining liturgical chant by means of a rational understanding of its pitch content. But the Carolingians’ concept of the note as the “element” of music diverged in important ways, we learned, from that generally accepted by modern scholars.

We also undertook an expedition into the sonic world of medieval Persian music. It was an unsettling, un-notated experience: all that remains is literature, poetry, and manuscript illuminations, whose lavish exuberance brought the absence of sound into stark relief. Instead of getting hung up on the unanswerable question, “What did the music sound like?,” we considered a model of “re-mediated listening,” of attending to sound through different media, not in order to hear long-vanished musical practices, but in order to investigate the role of the auditory in Persian cultural practices. Such listening is not merely the historical artifact of a modern perspective on pre-modern, un-notated musical traditions, but rather a mode of engagement already embedded in medieval Persian poetry and philosophies of listening. These observations can have fruitful analogues in other kinds of writings dealing with, rather than in, music, and along the way they have the capacity to expand notions of listening, sound, music theory, and musical practice.

We also considered parallels between Chinese and Greek music-theoretical traditions. For someone familiar with the myth of Pythagoras and the hammers, for example, the story told in *Lüshi Chunqiu* (吕氏春秋) of how Ling Lun traveled westward to cut pitch pipes and discovered the twelve *lü* will certainly ring a bell. Yet pitch pipes are not monochords, nor are the *lü* equivalent to any Greek tuning system, despite the two full centuries of misunderstandings that resulted from Joseph Roussier’s *Essai sur la musique des anciens* (1770). Still, both founding myths gesture toward complex conceptual networks linking mathematically conceived scale systems with matters of aesthetics, politics, and cosmology.

Finally, we raised a glass to the first volume of the *Lexikon Schriften über Musik*, a series edited by Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann and Felix Wörner. In an effort to expand the canon of music-theoretical and aesthetic-critical texts, the series will devote a third volume to writings from across the globe. The editors hope their project will help cultivate awareness of, and accessibility to, the rich heritage of music-theoretical and music-aesthetical texts outside Western cultures, with the goal of helping pave the way for more inclusive, global thinking within the German-speaking musical community and beyond. The series itself will soon be complemented by critical, commented editions and translations of texts. Numerous treatises have already been identified and selected for inclusion in the printed volume, and the editors plan to commission digital versions of many of these in a subsequent stage of the project.

Be it from the “aha!” moment of an unexpected similarity or surprising difference—a moment neither to be naively embraced nor summarily dismissed—such recontextualizations invited us to unsettle well-known certainties and so to revisit, reassess, and reconsider. This is certainly true for scholars focused on “Western” music theory and aesthetics. Perhaps it is for others as well. As Yoshihiko Tokumaru reminds us, “every culture can and should be studied from every division of musicology.” Throughout our conversations we found ourselves longing for a future that would better enable interactions and collaborations across linguistic borders. This could include...
• support for translations and critical editions;
• new forums and research groups;
• crowd-sourced bibliographies of global or comparative music theories;
• the creation of a global history of theory pedagogies; or
• expanded paradigms of what music theory can entail.

Even as we begin to imagine how these ventures might take shape, we are aware that there are practical and intellectual considerations we cannot yet articulate. If broadening the archive of historical musical theory and aesthetics is to be productive, it must entail shifts in scholarly practices and institutional conventions. It will require openness to different conclusions and new, perhaps unexpected results arising from global networks and encounters that decenter the experiences with which many of us, as Western scholars, are more familiar.

We challenge ourselves to work beyond what we have previously assumed to be borders. We encourage our professional societies to consider papers and sessions that sit at the boundaries of disciplines such as history, philosophy, sociology, and anthropology. We aspire therefore to an intellectual openness to new models of scholarship, new methods of collaboration, and new platforms of exchange. Because we cannot anticipate the blind spots and pitfalls of this undertaking, we aim to cultivate a humble exuberance toward materials, both new and familiar. We are acutely aware of how much there is to learn and are eager to begin learning in order to facilitate the enrichment and expansion of our histories of music theory.

What next: If this Brainfood provocation has struck a chord with you, consider contributing to a crowd-sourced bibliography of music-theoretical texts. We have posted a contribution form on the SMT/AMSH History of Theory Study/Interest Group’s website, and all contributions (visible in real time here) will be added to the bibliography publicly available on the History of Music Theory resource page. If you would like to feature the contribution form on your own websites or social media, we will gladly provide the code. An initial list of the texts that will be included in the Lexikon series can be found here; and we all welcome additional ideas as well as suggestions for collaboration! Please write to us.

Signed
• David E. Cohen (Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics)
• Roger Mathew Grant (Wesleyan University)
• Andrew Hicks (Cornell University)
• Nathan John Martin (University of Michigan)
• Caleb Mutch (Indiana University)
• Carmel Raz (Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics)
• Melanie Wald-Fuhrmann (Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics)
• Felix Wörner (Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics and Basel University)
• Anna Zayaruznaya (Yale University)

References

The Working Group Future Histories of Music Theory, convened by Carmel Raz and Nathan Martin as a project of the Research Group Histories of Music, Mind, and Body at the Max Planck Institute for Empirical Aesthetics, Frankfurt am Main, aims to foster discussion around recent and emerging trends in the history of theory, including global and material histories; cognition, embodiment, and affect; and digital and empirical methods. The group sponsors workshops, seminars, research residencies, and publication projects with the aim of advancing research on historical music theory in the broadest sense.
Rethinking Early Modern “Western Art Music”: A Global History Manifesto

David R. M. Irving

I’ve long been struck by how historical musicologists working on what they call “Western Art Music” (in English, at least) consider the conceptual boundaries of their subject to be self-evident. There are conventions for studying, performing, and listening; a standardized or at least codified set of genres, instruments, and voice types; and a central canon of notated works, accumulated or recovered over the period of more than a millennium. Western Art Music (WAM) is understood to have specific geographic origins, but it is also believed to possess a capacity to transcend physical and social boundaries. Widespread belief in the transcendental potential of this art form has extended to aesthetic and philosophical domains, leading to a prevailing view of WAM’s “universality,” and the autonomy of the musical “work” and of “absolute music.”

The art form is thus implied to have immanent hegemonic potential. WAM is commonly imagined as unique, exceptional, essentialist—and yet somehow “universal,” accessible, and a form of cosmopolitan currency. In public discourse (and some scholarly discourse) a number of practitioners, critics, and patrons think of these conditions applying uniformly to more than a millennium of “Western” practice, reflecting in some ways what Lydia Goehr has termed “conceptual imperialism”: the tendency since circa 1800 to project and impose new ideals retrospectively onto historical understandings of the past, “to make it look as if musicians had always thought about their activities in modern terms.”

In the early modern period, however, notions of the object and function of “art music” were radically different from those we ascribe to that concept today, many of which are inherited largely intact from the Romantic era.

The idea and concept of WAM—grounded largely in the canon and the work-concept—is arguably inapplicable for repertories and practices from before circa 1800, and to stretch back that concept and apply it to early modern repertories and practices is both misleading and problematic. Just as ethnomusicologists seek to study musics in their contexts and relativistically, that is, on their own terms, it behooves the historical musicologist to approach earlier music practices according to their own time-bound concepts, and not anachronistically. As Matthew Gelbart has trenchantly observed:

we cannot unproblematically apply the idea of art music without distorting history before the end of the eighteenth century, [but] we cannot ignore it (and its shaping of judgments and historiography) after the turn of the nineteenth century in some circles, and after the mid-nineteenth century anywhere.

A great deal of music lies beyond the boundaries of normativity we have constructed around our largely score-based understandings of WAM; we can immediately see the desires for an idea of normativity in such a label as “Common Practice.” Earlier repertories also challenge this notion: Kay Kaufman Shelemay and Kirsten Yri have used examples of contemporary and recent “early music” practice in Europe and North America to question whether “early music” can even be considered “Western Music,” given the deep dimensions of hybridity and cross-cultural exchanges inherent in medieval and early modern music.

It is important to acknowledge the qualitative difference of European music in the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries—the first truly “global age,” in which tangible and sustained longitudinal networks of exchange first arose—especially with guidance from researchers in historical performance practice who look to a world of diversity before the rise of broad patterns toward standardization in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The early modern period coincides with the first age of European overseas colonialism and the rise of the major seaborne empires to global dominance. From circa 1500 to 1800, Span-
ish, Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English forces seized land in the Americas, Africa, and Asia and established colonies and commercial outposts by force (but occasionally by treaty or coercion), as did various companies of Sweden, Denmark, and other nations. Significantly, they did so armed with a great deal of technology, forms of militarism, and musical instruments absorbed from Asia over the period of many centuries prior to the first “Columbian exchange”; the material trappings and accompaniments of early modern European hegemony did not arise ex nihilo. Even the Western European polities and nations that did not embark on overseas expansion were involved: they profited from investment or political and commercial alliances with those that did, effectively engaging in a form of “complicit colonialism.” The systematic extraction of natural resources in the Americas, underpinned by the trans-Atlantic slave trade, enabled Europeans to achieve their longstanding dream of entering the Asian market, with means that became gradually more aggressive. In the eastern Mediterranean and the borderlands of Eastern Europe, trade by Western European nations with their contiguous neighbors continued, especially the Ottoman Empire and Russia, but through the early modern period the terms of engagement changed dramatically, owing to the wealth and the territorial expansion accrued through overseas colonialism. Immense wealth flowed into Western Europe, causing unprecedented economic growth and triggering the start of a widening global wealth gap (what economic historians call “the Great Divergence”). These contexts had a profound impact on all aspects of musicking.

Thus WAM—if we can call it that—has been entangled with the rest of the world’s societies for the last half-millennium, to varying degrees, and in different shapes and forms. It cannot be studied in a vacuum; it must be situated in a global ontological framework of connected histories. Here a global history approach becomes indispensable. It is important for historical musicologists not to misunderstand what is meant by “global history of music,” thinking, for instance, that it means just studying musics of the past outside the traditional locus of Western Europe. The global history approach is not simply a matter of shifting the spotlight to a niche of unstudied musical practice somewhere in the world; rather, it is an interpretation and analysis of large-scale frameworks, connections, comparisons, and exchanges that explicate and elucidate a specific action or process. Another way to put it is to think of “global history” approaches to music as a form of macro-history: the study of large-scale patterns and processes that elucidate the actions and structures underpinning localized or shared practices. I would contend that historical musicologists and/or (ethno-)musicologists cannot embark on new critical approaches to “world history” or “global history” without first taking stock of significant methodological developments and epistemological reflections in sister disciplines, especially the well-established field of global history. An assessment and critique of theoretical work that has been ongoing since the last decade is fundamental for the development of approaches that are appropriate for the disciplines of historical musicology and ethnomusicology.

Our colleagues in history and its subdisciplines have already made a significant distinction between approaches to “world history” and “global history”; the latter is a relatively recent disciplinary development, with many works since 2000 bearing this term and the *Journal of Global History* being established in 2006. Jürgen Osterhammel and Niels Petersson have defined the two fields in the following way: “‘World history’ is the history of the various civilizations, especially their internal dynamics, and a comparison of them, whereas ‘global history’ is the history of contacts and interactions between these civilizations.” Economic historian Patrick O’Brien on the other hand, in his prolegomenon for the first issue of the *Journal of Global History*, sees global history as a history of either connections or comparisons, pointing out that historians tend to emphasize and exaggerate differences as well as points of conjuncture. Applying these ideas to music involves some methodological challenges, especially given the profound disciplinary shifts in the twentieth century that have arisen from a deliberate and self-conscious rejection of comparativism, and a move toward self-enclosed relativistic studies (i.e., the move from comparative musicology to ethnomusicology). A “world history” of music would attempt
to make a comprehensive survey of the music traditions of all human societies, involving large-scale collaborative work; “global history,” on the other hand, could be seen as a critical approach to connections and patterns emerging from worldwide intercultural contact, existing in many forms.

Yet in spite of clear evidence of unprecedented levels of global movement and intensive cultural interactions through music for the past half millennium, WAM is still often seen as a culturally exclusive and elite art form, owing in large part to the ways in which it is represented in academic and public discourse, and in reverential and museum-like performances. It is often assumed, by default, to represent the pinnacle of indigenous Western European musical expression, and to embody a pan-European creative disposition. Joseph Kerman famously wrote in 1985 that “Western music is just too different from other musics, and its cultural contexts too different from other cultural contexts.”

The still-dominant tendency toward circumscribed and autochthonous narratives of musical transition in Western Europe has long obscured the question of external cultural influence, except in the case of musical exoticism (embracing Orientalism). I locate this tendency within the ideas of essentialism, exceptionalism, and Eurocentrism in music historiography and discourse, and the continuing desire by musicologists, ethnomusicologists, and independent scholars to see WAM as “exceptional” and “unique,” rather than thoroughly contingent on global processes and constitutive of a clear set of environmental, social, political, economic, intellectual, and religious circumstances.

Until relatively recently, the overwhelming trend in mainstream historical musicology and ethnomusicology has been to see the phenomenon of Western musical impact throughout the world as a unidirectional process of cultural imposition and coercion. There seems to be an implicit assumption underlying much discourse, which could be summarized as follows:

Western Art Music, which developed in a kind of cultural vacuum, wielded a powerful influence over the rest of the world’s musics, but at the same time remained untouched by the rest of the world—with the significant exception that it chose, selectively and on its own terms, to incorporate exotic elements through textual, visual, and sonic representations.

It is thus assigned an essentialized agency that sets it apart from all other forms of musical practice; it is seen as a force that can influence other cultures, but which is impervious to outside influence, except when it chooses actively to engage with its Others. Part of this is due to the longstanding scholarly focus, during much of the twentieth century, on WAM as a canon of “works” rather than cultural practice, and the “whitewashing” of much music historiography and discourse, which has occluded the presence of ethnic Others in the formation of what we now call WAM. It is time to look beneath works and focus on cultural practice, the global operations of Western Europe, and the reverse impact of the world on Western Europe.

So how did Europe’s global projects of colonialism, trade, and scientific enquiry impact on concepts and practices of music in early modern Europe, beneath the level of self-conscious exoticism? I say “beneath exoticism” rather than “beyond exoticism” (Timothy Taylor’s attractive formulation) because although the principal paradigm for studying European engagement with the rest of the world has been the analysis of musical exoticism, I would contend that this is the surface level of engagement: European works made predominantly by Europeans for Europeans. Of course, the underlying discourses of these works have entered into a feedback loop that reinforced attitudes and stereotypes and injustices; for us as musicologists, though, our overwhelming focus on cultural representation and its attendant discourses arguably diverts us from asking how deeper degrees of global interconnections and in many cases economic hegemony have shaped and influenced the making of WAM itself. What, precisely, are these substrata of external influences on musical practice? They include: hidden hybridities that have been so thoroughly naturalized and normalized—we could say indigenized—within European practice that their exotic origins are forgotten (instruments, dances, genres, performance styles);
nialist exploitation that provided the bountiful economic support and patronage of large-scale musical activities in Western Europe; materials of music (such as woods and metals) that were incorporated permanently into the instrumentarium; and—through the beginnings of global music ethnography and criticism—the reflexive processes of oppositional self-definition that shaped European philosophical perspectives on music, especially concepts of “modernity” from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries. The encounter of Europeans with the world fundamentally changed the way Europeans thought about themselves, and their musics. All these phenomena were set in play through the unprecedented expansion of global movement and worldwide social interaction in the early modern period.

WAM is caught in a paradox: that of claims for uniqueness being pitted simultaneously against clear evidence of its internal (and internalized) hybridity. Many discourses surrounding WAM have included narratives of exceptionalism and essentialism, belief in its potential to attain cultural universality, and its capacity to effect ethical and moral improvement. Meanwhile, critics of WAM underscore its cultural contingency as an artistic product of the European elite, its association with hegemony and cultural imperialism, and the exclusionary nature of discourses about this music that are based on race, class, politics, and religion. Yet both sides of the debate contain fallacies, since WAM—in its practices and materials—is arguably a hybrid, global phenomenon, which emerged from the very conditions of worldwide exchange that gave rise to the concept of “the West” itself. WAM was crafted and conditioned through the long-term absorption of ideas, practices, and materials across cultures throughout the world over the past half-millennium. The rise of this music to a position of prestige, and its gradual commodification, is intertwined with the rise of material wealth within early modern Europe, and the rise of material wealth in Europe can in turn be attributed to overseas colonial empires, and the complicit colonialism of internal European trade. While other disciplines in the humanities have already critiqued the idea of “the West” as a monolithic entity, musicology has only relatively recently begun to tackle the ontological issues that underpin the defining adjective of its very object of study. It is time to rethink ideas of “the West” in music history as unexceptional and thoroughly contingent on global patterns and trends. Let’s write global histories of musical practices within or derived from Europe that eschew or at least go beneath the concept of Western Art Music.

References
1 As Mina Yang pointed out, “classical music adherents often characterize the music of Bach and Beethoven as a universal language that transcends historical and geographical boundaries and stands apart from the complex realities of politics. Recent scholarship strongly challenges this assertion, divulging classical music’s complicity in nationalist and racialist projects of the last two hundred years, and argues that Western music’s ‘universal’ qualities have been invoked in the past to avow the superiority of European culture.” Mina Yang, “East Meets West in the Concert Hall: Asians and Classical Music in the Century of Imperialism, Post-Colonialism, and Multiculturalism,” Asian Music 38, no. 1 (2007): 2.
4 Susan McClary has aptly described the eighteenth-century emergence of tonality as a “historical anomaly, a myth of common practice . . . , [and] a blip on the screen that stands . . . in need of cultural analysis.” Susan McClary, “Editorial,” Eighteenth-Century Music 6, no. 1 (2009): 5.


Thanks to Nicholas Tochka for his input on the expression of this idea. Nicholas Cook writes: “‘Western music’ refers to a classical tradition now most strongly rooted in Asia, and a popular tradition that is in reality a global hybrid. . . . The concept of ‘the West’ . . . goes back no further than the late nineteenth century. . . .

And as much as its antonym ‘non-Western,’ it [the word ‘Western’] is an essentializing term, suggesting a homogeneity that is largely spurious.” Nicholas Cook, “Western Music as World Music,” in *The Cambridge History of World Music*, ed. Philip V. Bohlman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 89. In my current work I am endeavoring to trace the internalized hybridity and heterogeneity of European music further back by several centuries.

Richard Taruskin sets out the geographical and cultural scope of *The Oxford History of Western Music* as follows: “Europe, joined in Volume 3 by America. (That is what we still casually mean by ‘the West,’ although the concept is undergoing sometimes curious change: a Soviet music magazine I once subscribed to gave news of the pianist Yevgeny Kissin’s ‘Western debut’—in Tokyo.)” Richard Taruskin, *The Oxford History of Western Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1:xiii. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, in their edited volume *Western Music and Its Others*, state that they decided “to refer to the longstanding concept of ‘Western music’ while distancing ourselves from those traditions of analysis which have taken such a category for granted, or which have privileged it, or both.” Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, “Introduction,” in *Western Music and Its Others*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 47, fn. 1. For a more recent take on the idea of Western Music, see Cook, “Western Music as World Music.”

David R. M. Irving holds a PhD in musicology from Cambridge University and is an ICREA Research Professor at the Institución Milà y Fontanals—CSIC, Barcelona, from March 2019. His research spans from music in early modern intercultural exchange to early modern global history and historical performance practice. He is the author of *Colonial Counterpoint: Music in Early Modern Manila* (2010) and is currently working on a monograph titled *How the World Made European Music: A Global History of Early Modern Synthesis*. He is co-general editor of the forthcoming Cultural History of Music series from Bloomsbury (2021) and, from March 2019, co-editor of the journal *Eighteenth-Century Music*. 
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*Musicological Brainfood* is a fresh intermittent IMS dish—an “amuse-bouche”—that may delight or possibly perturb you. These pithy, informal paragraphs are cooked up by leading musicologists to advance, refresh, or reinvigorate different aspects of our field; and they are anything but bland. Remember, these are “provocations” with flavors designed to prod, needle, and pinch your brain. They are not meant to be representative, and they are surely not official or definitive. Enjoy!