

## CHAPTER 1

# Thinking about Music



*If you can speak you can sing; if you can walk you can dance.*

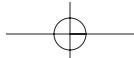
*(Zimbabwean Shona proverb)*

*All over the world, people make music meaningful and useful in their lives.* That statement encapsulates much of what ethnomusicologists are interested in and offers a framing perspective for many ways of thinking both about people and about music. In this chapter I shall explore each word in the statement with two purposes in mind: to suggest new ways you might think about music that you regularly hear, and to begin to expand your musical horizon. Because this is a teaching book, I shall also begin by speaking briefly about the transmission of music, the ways it is taught and learned.

## PEOPLE

**Music Makers.** Who makes music in our familiar world? Music makers are individuals and groups, adults and children, female and male, amateurs and professionals. They are people who make music only for themselves, such as shower singers or secretly-sing-along-with-the-radio types, and they are performers, people who make music purposefully for others. They are people who make music because they are required to and people who do so simply from desire. Some music makers study seriously, while others are content to make music however they can, without special effort.

To think about music makers globally, you might ask whether music makers are regarded in any particular way in a particular place. At one end of a spectrum, some societies expect people who make music to be specialists, born into the role or endowed with a special capacity.



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At the other end of that spectrum, in some societies it is assumed that the practice of music is a human capacity and that all people will express themselves musically as a normal part of life.

Local terminology is a clue to the ideas held about music makers. When you hear or use the word “musician,” to what sort of music maker are you referring? When I ask this question of students in my courses, most reply with an impression clearly derived from the sphere of Western classical music. In this volume, however, I use the word **musician** more generically, to cover all people who experience music as a practice (figure 1.1).

Many questions about musicians embed them in their musical context. Who makes music with whom? Who learns music from whom? Who is permitted to be a teacher? Who can perform where? Who can perform for whom? Is anyone prohibited from making some particular type of music, and if so, why? Who plays which instrument, and why? Do musicians have high cultural status (i.e., is their music making highly valued by a group)? Do musicians have high social status (i.e., a high ranking in the society)?

**ACTIVITY 1.1** *Make an inventory of music makers in your individual context. Do you ever make music? Do your friends? Some family members?*

**Listeners.** When I speak about people making music meaningful and useful in their lives, I include people who “just” listen. They are, after all, most of the world’s musically involved population. Listeners, like musicians, are consumers of music. They are the audience to which performers cater—patrons who are willing to pay to hear performances and buy recordings.

Answers to questions about listeners reveal a great deal about the musical context in which they live. Do they prefer to listen alone, or is listening a social activity? Is it more expensive to listen to one kind of music than another, and if so, what does that mean for the listener? Are certain types of listeners associated with certain types of music? Is a listening audience restricted by gender or religious belief or membership? Does a listening context foster immediate interaction between performer and listener?

**ACTIVITY 1.2** Agree or disagree with this statement: *listening to music is different from hearing music. Think of that mood music in the elevator, the background music in shops, the radio playing to keep the painter company in the apartment next door.*

## MUSIC

*In Terms of Sound.* I am standing at the edge of a body of water, the ripples sounding alternately like gentle lapping and heavy crashing waves. Nearby, hammers and electric saws are punctuating the air. Above me, soaring and dipping and singing a variety of songs are goldfinches and mockingbirds and cooing doves. The wind whistles across the land. Car horns toot in the distance. In this wonderful soundscape there is melody and rhythm. Can any of that be called *music*?

**ACTIVITY 1.3** To begin thinking musically, think about sound. Conduct some field research: taking pen and paper with you, listen for thirty minutes to the soundscape around you and keep a record. Any sound—a motorcycle roaring by, a cluster of people laughing, sounds of nature, the whirring of an elevator's approach, the selection on the radio of a passing motorist, the music you choose to play. Some of the sounds you hear must be what you would automatically call "music." Articulate how you distinguish between what is and what is not music.

In fact, what is music? The ethnomusicologist John Blacking defined it as "humanly organized sound" (1977), but I suggest that we take that statement one step farther. "Music" is not only a thing—a category of organized sound, or compositions—but also a process. Every known group of people in the world exercises their creative imaginations to organize sound in *some way* that is different from the way they organize sound for speech.

*Calling Something "Music."* Having a word for a particular aesthetic category of organized sound that I as an individual think of as

**FIGURE 1.1**  
*Collage of music makers.*

*1.1a: Street musician:  
Youth playing  
didjeridu. (Photo by  
Lisa McCabe)*



*1.1b: Street musician:  
Man playing electrified  
lute. (Photo by Lisa  
McCabe)*



1.1c: Marika Kuzma, Director of Choruses, University of California, Berkeley. (Photo by Peg Skorpinski)

1.1d: Two members of a Chinese music troupe in Bangkok, Thailand. The writing on the drum stand says "Disciples of Lüang Pù Seng, Kalayaan Temple, Thonburi." The stand displays a photo of and offering to their teacher, who is a monk. They are performing at a blessing ceremony for the opening of a new music store, called Dr. Sax, owned by music professor Dr. Sugree Charoensoek. 1989.

(Courtesy of Deborah Wong)



1.1e: Irish session: seisun in Ocean View, Miltown Malbay Co. Clare. Michael Falsey (pipes), Mary Anne Sexton (accordeon), Gabi Wolff (flute). (© Peter Laban, Miltown Malbay Co. Clare)

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"music" is by no means universal. None of the hundreds of First Nation groups have a word for "music," for instance. It is not set apart as a category; it is just there, and everyone participates in it. In India the word for music, *sarigita*, is used to encompass dance as well as music. In other places a word for "music" refers only to instrumental music. In the Islamic worldview, the mellifluous recitation of the sacred Koran (CD track 1), which many non-Muslim listeners have called "music," is not considered *musiqua*; *musiqua* is a category encompassing **genres** (that is, types of music) associated with secular life. Clearly, just because something sounds like music to me, I have no right to insist that it is "music" to someone else. It is the local or even personal idea that counts.

Christopher Small has taken the position that music is not a thing at all, but an activity, something that people do, and ethnomusicologists generally concur. He calls doing music "musicking": "to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing" (1998: 9). He sometimes—and I always would—extends musicking to all the activities about which I wrote above under "People."

*Musical Values.* If I, in my American culture, use the expression "that's music to my ears," you will know that I have heard something I want to hear, or in terms of sound, something beautiful. Ideas about beauty are one aspect of a set of artistic values referred to as **aesthetics**—in this case, music aesthetics. Those ideas are not necessarily shared, even within one society. A letter to an editor about Trinidadian **steelband** encapsulates the obvious fact that a beautiful sound to one person is abominable to another (CD track 2, figure 1.2):

Can beating is pan beating in any language and in any form. It does nobody any good, and when it is indulged in all day all night, day in and day out, it is abominable. . . . If it must continue and if by virtue of its alleged inherent beauty and charm it will someday bring popularity and fame to the island and a fortune to the beaters, then by all means let it go on—but in the forests and other desolate places.  
(C. W. Clarke, *Trinidad Guardian*, 6 June 1946)

While individual ethnomusicologists have personal ideas about musical beauty in terms of the quality of the sound (**timbre**) that is cultivated, it is a tenet of our field that we will keep our ears and minds open and respect the fact that many timbres are considered beautiful.



FIGURE 1.2 *Steeldrum*. On left, Tom Miller, tenor pan. On right, Alan Lightner, double seconds/pan. (Photo by Kathleen Karn)

Aesthetic ideas are also expressed in terms of process, through the way music is composed and performed. In many folk music traditions in China each performer will “add flowers” by embellishing and varying a melody, resulting in a personal style and voice. Amateur music groups, especially, expand on that process to shape a collective “sound” (CD track 3). The Venezuelan artist Cheo Navarro articulated the aesthetic of *salsa* as “the rhythmic feel” resulting from the well-performed interlocking rhythmic patterns of the timbal, conga, and bongo drums (Berrios-Miranda 1999; figure 1.3, CD track 4). In North Indian instrumental performance, a shifting relationship is desired between the two primary ensemble members—melodist and drummer—with the drummer shifting from supporting accompanist to soloist to competitor as a performance selection is improvised.

The aesthetically ideal process for performance of some types of Western classical music, on the other hand, is that a received (i.e., pre-composed) piece of music will be reproduced with a high level of technical proficiency coupled with artistic expressivity; the composition will not be changed to any great extent. In contrast, the aesthetic process in-



**FIGURE 1.3** Salsa drummers. From left to right: on bongo, Shannon Dudley; on timbal, Greg Campbell; on conga, Marisol Berrios. (Courtesy of Marisol Berrios)

volved in most popular music permits artists the freedom to render a piece in very distinctive ways.

Aesthetic ideas have a great deal to do with the nature of the musical content, and those same ideas might obtain in dance as well. In West African traditions, short segments (facets) are highly valued: Kpelle dance movements consist of short, quick, tightly orchestrated steps, for instance. In much African drumming, short rhythmic patterns are repeated in close coordination with other short rhythmic patterns, as an example from CD track 5 demonstrates. It is the process of interlocking the short segments that creates “the music”; the musical experience is a social experience. If, as in Christopher Small’s terms, musicking ar-

ticulates our ideal of human relationships, then this African aesthetic provides a wonderful example.

For many people, the highest value of music is placed on affect, that is, its expressive capacity. As one of my students put it, "It is music that makes me want to dance, or feel. It not only reminds me of times I have felt emotions, but it prompts me to feel emotions" (Lyndsey Brown, 2001). The first time I consciously thought about the tremendous power of music for affecting emotion was years ago when I watched the classic movie *Ben-Hur*. The chariot race between Ben-Hur and his adversary was nearing its climax. With whips cracking, horses' hooves pounding, chariot wheels clashing, crowds and the orchestra roaring, we in the theater could hardly stand the tension. Suddenly, the sound system failed. Without the furor of the music egging us on, the action on, the race looked silly, for the emotional impact of the scene was expressed by the music. Contrasting utterly with that were the feelings that welled up in me as I heard "Taps" and the American national anthem as I stood with other countrymen in the military cemetery in Manila, the Philippines, where I was just after President Kennedy was assassinated in 1963. Yes, music has the power to move our hearts and minds.

**ACTIVITY 1.4** *It is not always easy to express in words why you like or value a kind of music or a performance. Try it, with one piece of music you really love.*



Student Lucia Comnes: "I feel that the youth in my community are drawn to this music [reggae] and culture because it is liberating. We are about to inherit this monster that is our society—including the government, the educational system, the work force, the media, the capitalist philosophy, the technology, the developed civilization, the destruction of the earth, the inequality, the separating illusions of racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, etc. and the list goes on—I often find this overwhelming, confusing, and terrifying. When the communities at home and at school are not strong or secure,

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*we yearn for another place that speaks to us deeply, a place that brings us to a higher consciousness. Reggae culture provides this for many—a place where people are brought together through music, music coming from the heart, speaking to the power of the people, music that is alive and encouraging, fulfilling and in the spirit of celebration” (2001).*

Student Aron: “There is another subject to be very critically thought about, reflecting on the upper-middle-class white audience, joining or co-opting a poor black protest. This is not really talked about and there is so much to be addressed. As a white middle-class kid myself who listens to a lot of dance hall and reggae, I am constantly checking in with the fact that I can’t call it mine. So reggae causes me to think. When you’re in clubs and there are white and black audiences grooving to reggae, it is a lot more apparent and you are confronted with this” (2001).



## MEANING

That music is meaningful, no one doubts. However, great debates have ensued over whether the meaning resides in musical materials themselves or is ascribed to musical materials by someone for some particular reason. Is there something really martial about the music played by a brass band as an army marches by, or is that an association we have learned? Does a lullaby really put a child to sleep, or is it something else such as loving attention that lulls the child into secure rest? With most ethnomusicologists, I think the latter: people make music meaningful, whether that meaning is individual or communally agreed upon.

**Music and Textual Meaning.** Melody set to words constitutes much of the world’s musical repertoire. Perhaps it is because everyone can sing, with or without an instrument. Perhaps it is because of the capacity of music to heighten the expressivity of a text. In the Baroque period (c. 1600–1750 C.E.) of European music, composers used what was called “word painting” to heighten expressivity in quite literal ways—a falling melody on the word *morire* (to die), for instance. Blues singers

in America improvise expressively to elicit even more meaning from already meaningful texts.

Another reason for singing texts is the license it gives musicians to say something not permitted in ordinary speech. A great deal of covert and overt political protest has been delivered in song. In “Calypso Freedom,” Sweet Honey in the Rock reminds listeners of the necessity of the civil rights movement of the 1960s while renewing the protest in 1989 with new text set to an old song (CD track 6).



**ACTIVITY 1.5** *Find a song of political protest. Transcribe the lyrics and then listen to the musical setting. Do the musicians use the music in any purposeful way to deliver the message of the text?*

Through the ages narrators have told their tales musically. The Texas-Mexican *corrido* is a genre that has proven to be an effective avenue for protest, as well as a narrative. “The Ballad of César Chávez” (figure 1.4, CD track 7) relates an important event in American history: the march of that famed Mexican American leader in the struggle for rights for



*El Corrido de César Chávez*  
*En un día siete de marzo*  
*Jueves santo en la mañana,*  
*salió César de Delano*  
*componiendo una campaña.*

*Compañeros campesinos*  
*este va a ser un ejemplo*  
*esta marcha la llevamos*  
*hasta mero Sacramento.*

*Cuando llegamos a Fresno*  
*Toda la gente gritaba*  
*y que viva César Chávez*  
*y la gente que llevaba.*

*The Ballad of César Chávez*  
*On the seventh day of March*  
*Good Thursday in the morning*  
*César left Delano*  
*Organizing a campaign.*

*Companion farmers*  
*This is going to be an example*  
*This (protest) march we'll take*  
*To Sacramento itself.*

*When we arrived in Fresno*  
*All the people chanted*  
*Long live César Chávez*  
*And the people that accompany him.*

*Nos despedimos de Fresno  
nos despedimos con fe  
para llegar muy contentos  
hasta el pueblo de Merced.*

*Ya vamos llegando a Stockton  
ya mero la luz se fue  
pero mi gente gritaba  
sigan con bastante fe.*

*Cuando llegamos a Stockton  
los mariachis nos cantaban  
que viva César Chávez  
y la Virgen que llevaba.*

*We bid good-bye to Fresno  
We bid good-bye with faith  
So we would arrive contented  
To the town of Merced.*

*We are almost in Stockton  
Sunlight is almost gone  
But the people shouted  
Keep on with lots of faith.*

*When we arrived at Stockton  
The mariachis were singing  
Long live César Chávez  
And the Virgin of Guadalupe.*

(The selection on CD track 7 ends here; following is the remainder of the corrido.)

*Contratistas y esquiroles  
ésta va a ser una historia  
ustedes van al infierno  
y nosotros a la gloria.*

*Ese Señor César Chávez  
él es un hombre cabal  
quería verse cara a cara  
con el gobernador Brown.*

*Oiga, Señor César Chávez,  
su nombre que se pronuncia  
en su pecho usted merece  
la Virgen de Guadalupe.*

*Contractors and scabs  
This is going to be your story  
You will all go to hell  
And we will go to heaven.*

*That Mr. César Chávez  
Is a very strong man  
He wanted to speak face to face  
With Governor Brown.*

*Listen, Mr. César Chávez,  
Your name is well known  
On your chest you well deserve  
The Virgin of Guadalupe.*

**FIGURE 1.4** Song text: “*The Ballad of César Chávez*.” Texas-Mexican corrido. (From *Las Voces de los Campesinos: Francisco García and Pablo and Juanita Saludado Sing Corridos about the Farm Workers and Their Union*. Reproduced with permission from the Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology, UCLA, FMSC-1.)

migrant farmworkers. In spring 1965 the first major strike against grape growers took the form of a march from Delano, California, to the state's capital, Sacramento, to meet with then-Governor Edmund “Pat” Brown. Because of the religious orientation of Mexican culture, the march be-

came a nexus of the religious tradition of pilgrimage and the contemporary form of demonstration. References to the Lady of Guadalupe allude to a major shrine in Mexico, the Basilica of the Lady of Guadalupe.

Among the narrative genres that link music to text for the expression and heightening of meaning, musical drama is perhaps the single best example. In Balinese theater the nexus between music and the narrative both in terms of mood and action is so close and so familiar to audiences that the dramatic meaning is automatically remembered when the same musical material occurs without words in a nontheatrical context.

We might assume that a sung text is meant to be understood. Not necessarily so! Even when a Central Javanese **gamelan** (ensemble) includes vocalists, the text they sing may not be immediately intelligible. Not only do their voices blend into the greater ensemble sound, but the poems are usually in old Javanese language that few listeners know (CD track 8; figure 1.5). For the few who can understand, the meaning lies both in the text itself and in the singing of it; for the less knowledgeable, the meaning lies in the recognition that an old text is being sung, in the assurance that tradition continues.

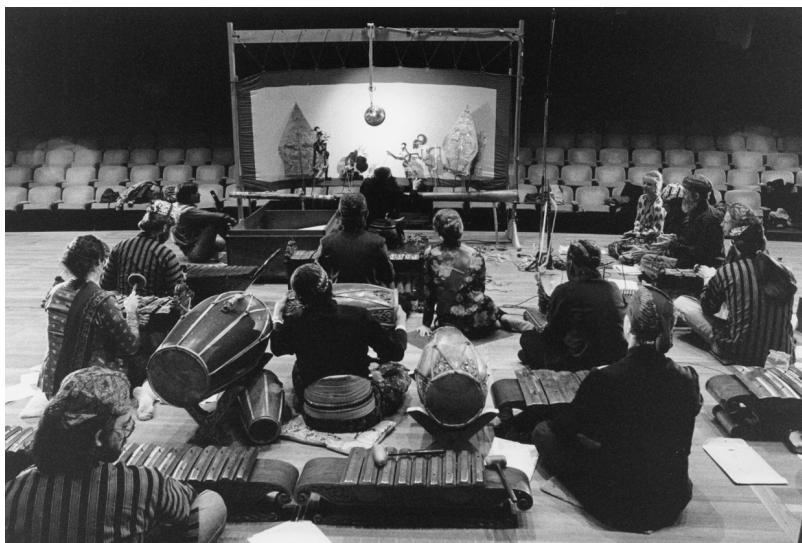


FIGURE 1.5 Central Javanese gamelan playing for wayang kulit (*leather puppet play*). (Photo by Kathleen Kam)



Sometimes melody is sung to text that is not linguistically meaningful—syllables such as “fa la la” in English carols. You might hear people use the phrase “meaningless syllables” for such text, but ethnomusicologists no longer do so. Syllables assumed to be meaningless have been found upon further investigation to be archaic language, or mystically meaningful. Instead, ethnomusicologists refer to the syllables as **vocables**, suggesting their function in the music. The text of CD track 9, a Navajo corn-grinding song recorded in 1940 with the lead singer Joe Lee, in Lukachukai, Arizona, consists completely of vocable phrases.

*Aghei ha yana ghei aghei  
Aghei yolei yolei hanei-hana  
O—weya hena a nana  
Aghei ha yana ghei aghei*

*Aghei ha yana ghei aghei  
Aghei yolei yolei hanei-hana  
O—weya hena a nana ghei aghei  
Aghei ha yana ghei aghei.*

The opposite of texted song without linguistic meaning is **program music**—instrumental music without a text that is treated as if it had one. With its many narrative genres and operatic styles, Chinese music, even instrumental music, is very text-oriented. A title such as “Plum Blossoms” is subject to interpretation, but each instrumentalist may express it differently. The “text” is not in the musical sound but in the musicians’ and listeners’ meaningful interpretations of the title.

**Music as Text.** In a subtle pairing of melody and text, the singer of the Alha epic in North India might deliver the bravado words of a warrior to the familiar melody of a woman’s song genre. The bravado words are a text certainly, but so is the musical commentary on his womanly personality. Such subtlety requires a knowledgeable audience to be understood.

As that example illustrates, music can acquire meaning from the situation in which it is made or heard, and then become a kind of text in itself. Its meaning is then “situated.” Once you have learned to associate the melody of “We Shall Overcome” with protest, for instance, you do not have to hear any text to understand its situated meaning. A person in Korea who says, “I’m going to an orchestra concert tonight,” has immediately asserted an association with a type of music that has high cultural status in Korea as well as in Western cultures; even the mention of orchestral music is a kind of subtext.

Another example of situated meaning: my favorite theory about the reason that we continue to hate or love (if not get stuck in) the popular music of our teenage years is that we absorbed that music when we were experiencing love and other emotions intensely as adolescents. It

is not only the style of the music that stays with us but also the memory of the meaning it had at that crucial time in our lives.



*Student Lisa McCabe: "Music helps me understand myself. I know if I instinctively want to hear a certain sad song, that something must be bothering me. Or if I want to hear a song that reminds me of home, I miss my friends."*

*Student Shanesha Brooks: "I find that if a song that I wouldn't normally listen to is playing on the radio during a time when I am having a good time, it is attached to that time and therefore it has more meaning than it would otherwise have."*



## USE

Music is also meaningful because it functions in some way in people's lives. Music defines, represents, symbolizes, expresses, constructs, mobilizes, incites, controls, transforms, unites, and so much more. People make music useful in those ways.

I have asked many people about the place of music in their lives. Many have replied: "Oh, I'm not interested in music at all." Then they admit regularly listening to music in their cars, occasionally going to a performance, dancing on a date, exercising with a Walkman, or otherwise putting music into their lives. This they may categorize as enjoyment, as entertainment rather than musical activity. However they regard it, they are making music useful.

Music can be made to function in multiple ways. As a mode of interaction among people, it serves a social function. Arousing public sentiment is a political function. Praising God is a spiritual function. Creating a romantic mood is an affective function. Untold numbers of people make a living from music—from paid performers to students who work in music libraries and record shops. Students in one of my courses had these comments to add: "Involvement in music looks good on a college application; that's a status function, a statement of self-worth." "Music helps me understand other people and their actions, to place myself in another person's shoes." "It's a stress reliever." "It quiets my anger and otherwise improves my mood." "Music helps me fo-

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cus while doing repetitive tasks.” “I remember things through song.” “I use music to escape from chaos!”

One of the most significant uses to which people put music is to express an identity. Performers do this to establish an individual identity as a musician, of course, but music can also be emblematic of a group—a college, as in a school song; a sporting team, as in “We Are Family” (as “claimed” by the 1979 Pittsburgh Pirates baseball team); a heritage group, as in the Polish polka or the blues; a nationality, as in a national anthem. The meaning of such music is highly situated and useful for purposes ranging from contestation to solidarity.

**ACTIVITY 1.6** *Think about the music in your life. Does it have some meaning for you, beyond its musical qualities? How do you use music? Can you distinguish between its meaning and its function?*

In the real world and now in the virtual world, however, music can be heard in vastly different places and at any time. It can easily be experienced as utterly decontextualized—divorced from its time and place, cut off from its original makers, meanings, and uses as musicians collect sounds from all over the world to create, as the singer Marc Anthony put it, “world music in a Long Island basement” (Buia 2001: 10). We can no longer assume that ethnic musical materials will serve as markers of particular ethnic identities, for example. Such globally shared music (or “global music,” as most ethnomusicologists call it) is constantly recontextualized by those who listen to it, given new meanings, and made to perform new—as well as the same old—functions. Other musical boundaries are being superseded as well. Musical ownership is challenged by sampling. Boundaries between musical genres such as jazz, rock, and classical are routinely breached. The creative process continues as music and music making become what people want them to be.

## TRANSMISSION

One of the most crucial factors for music anywhere is the process by which it is taught and learned. The means by which this happens are oral and visual (usually referred to as written). In ethnomusicology we

have become increasingly careful to distinguish between oral and aural transmission. **Oral transmission** takes the perspective of the teacher and implies interaction between teacher and learner. **Aural transmission** takes the perspective of the learner, who hears the music through some aural source. Written transmission depends on notation of some sort; a number of systems exist that have been developed according to need. In this section I shall briefly address these processes of transmission.

*Oral and Aural Transmission.* Most music is learned aurally—both by intentional listening and by osmosis, that is, by absorbing what we hear around us. This was already the case before the early twentieth century, when radio and recordings expanded the potential material that was available for learning. The mass media are without doubt the single greatest teaching force, playing an enormously significant role in the transmission of musical knowledge.

Where music is taught primarily by oral transmission, the teacher plays a significant role, as a repository of knowledge and technique, the individual responsible for musical quality, and often a guide in life (as the Indian *guru* is). The availability of recordings can change the degree of dependence of a pupil on a teacher, as well as the degree of control a teacher has over musical knowledge, but personal instruction provides a qualitatively different learning experience. Student-teacher relationships vary greatly. Particularly where music is being transmitted orally, but within a written tradition as well, a teacher might or might not be willing to make verbal explanations, preferring instead that the student listen, watch, and do.

A student of mine, Nontapat Nimityongskul, told me in 1999, "There are two main ways we can keep music. One is to write it down. The other is to know it in your heart." Nontapat raises an issue concerning oral and aural versus written transmission. Will music learned aurally be remembered and preserved? Quite possibly it will fade from memory, unless one or all of three conditions exist. The first and most necessary condition is that one intends to remember the music precisely as learned. This is a matter of personal or group motivation. The motivation would exist, for example, when there is a fear that incorrect rendering will cause some disaster.

The second condition is a system for learning the music so thoroughly that it is not likely to be forgotten. The most evidently successful such system was devised for the chanting of religious texts that have survived in Hindu Indian culture since the Vedic period (roughly 1500–500 B.C.E.). Without any reference to written materials, the chants have been transmitted from Brahmin priests to young Brahmin boys through un-

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told numbers of generations. The teaching priest has his pupils repeat the sentences of the sacred text, using a well worked out memorization technique: using patterns that arrange the words of sentences in different order, the text is repeated endlessly until truly absorbed. Among the several patterns, the *krama* pattern is a simple one: *ab, bc, cd, de*, and so on. Each letter (*a, b, c*, etc.) indicates a word (CD track 10). Thus the sentence “Why am I doing this?” would be chanted as follows: “Why am / am I / I doing / doing this?” With innumerable repetitions, you will remember the sentence well.



**ACTIVITY 1.7** Listen to CD track 10, the teaching of Vedic recitation, until you can follow these patterns. The line of text is: “*Devīm vacam ajanayanta devās tām vīsvarūpāḥ paśavo vadanti / sā no mandreṣam ūrjāṁ duhānā dhenur vāg asmān upa suṣṭutaitu*” (“The gods gave birth to the goddess of speech, spoken by animals in all forms; this cow, lowing pleasantly, who gives strengthening libation with her milk, as speech when well spoken should come to us”). First the priest reads the line as a normal sentence. Then he announces each pattern and recites the line in that pattern. (Endings of some words change, by the Sanskrit rules of connection.)

*krama pattern:* ab / bc / cd / de / ...

*mālā pattern:* ab / ba / ab / bc / cb / bc / cd / dc / ...

*jatā pattern:* abbaab / bccbcb / cddcccd / deedde / ...

Once you understand this technique, make up your own short sentence and subject it to the patterns. Memorized in this manner, it is no doubt a sentence you will remember for a long time.

The third condition is a system of reinforcement: a system that assures that memory of the music will be periodically renewed. “Oldies” radio broadcasts perform this function; recurring music in a religious calendrical cycle does as well, such as carols sung at Christmas or prayers chanted at Passover. In some situations, the responsibility for reinforcing memories is taken by institutions. In Java (Indonesia), musicians at the royal courts hold rehearsals expressly to maintain musi-

cal compositions and choreographies that are transmitted mainly through oral tradition. Referring to something written is another way to renew the memory periodically.

The best way to maintain musical memory is to have a sound recording available, for so much is excluded from even the most comprehensive system of notation—sensual vocal production that is characteristic of a style, for instance. Preservation was an unintended achievement of the recording industry when it began to record all kinds of musics in the early twentieth century as a way to sell the new phonograph machines. Using that technology, ethnomusicologists, folklorists, and some anthropologists have been motivated to preserve the world's musical treasures, and there are now numerous sound archives around the globe. Touching stories circulate about groups whose traditional music no longer exists for some reason—radical change from international influence or memory loss where no system of reinforcement was in place—but recovery and revival is possible through recordings that someone deposited in an archive.

*Written Transmission.* The nature of a notation system depends on the purpose people intend it to serve, and numerous types are in use around the world. If any musician wants to write a brief reminder of music already held in memory, a minimalist notation will suffice, recording only the musician's choice of crucial information. A musician who wants to prescribe in writing what someone else is to play or sing needs a detailed, prescriptive type of notation. That is the intention of Western staff notation.

Between minimalist and prescriptive notation lies the notation for the Chinese zither-type instrument the *qin* (pronounced “chin,” figure 1.6). Like other **tablature**-type notations, it is intended to transmit per-

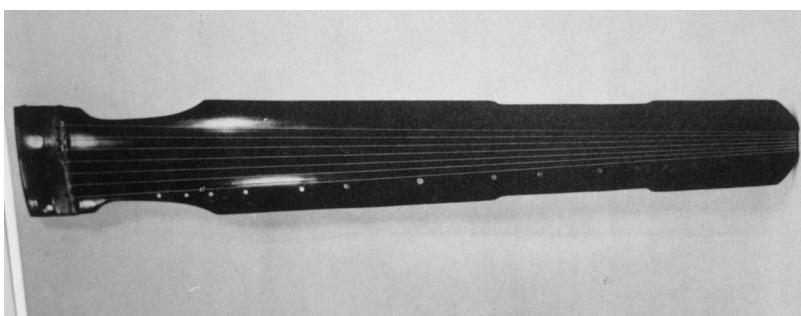


FIGURE 1.6 Chinese *qin*. (Courtesy of UCLA Ethnomusicology Archives)

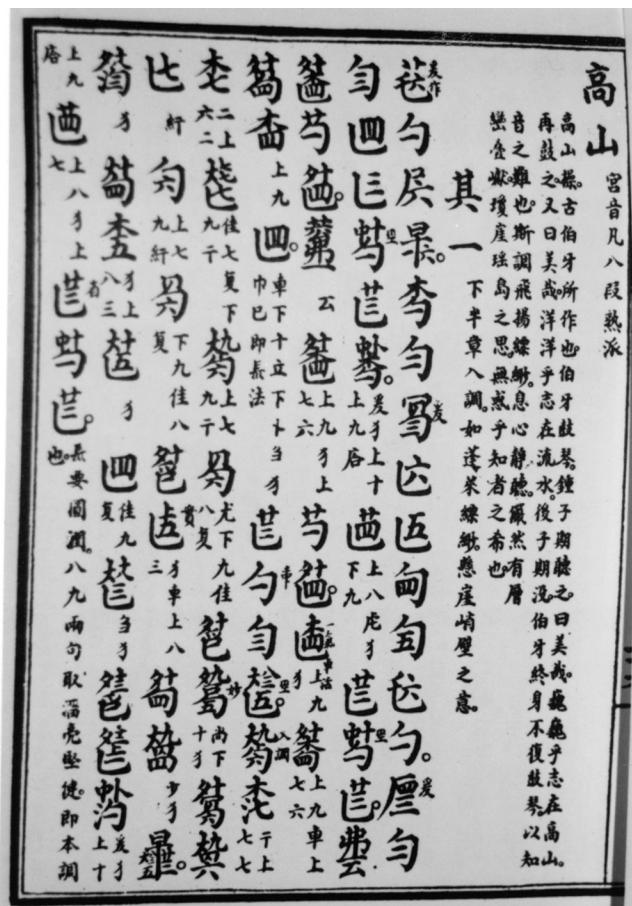


FIGURE 1.7 Qin notation of “High Mountain.” (Courtesy of UCLA Ethnomusicology Archives)

forming instructions. Reproduced in figure 1.7 is the beginning of a piece, “High Mountain.” The title of the piece is written on the far right column, and some information about it is given in the ensuing columns toward the left. Written Chinese language starts at the right, top to bottom; the notation of the piece follows that pattern, beginning in the seventh column, toward the middle of the page. Basically, the notation specifies left- and right-hand playing techniques and the strings on which they are to be executed. Figure 1.8 shows the right-hand tech-

<i>At the beginning of the piece (Column 1) only right hand techniques are required.</i>	
	Thumb pushes the string and comes to rest against the next string without sounding it.
	Middle finger pulls the string.
	Thumb pulls string with nail.
	"Chord" from 2 simultaneous techniques.
	Index finger pushes string with tip of fingernail.
	Middle finger pushes string with tip of fingernail.
	Index finger executes two L in succession.

**FIGURE 1.8 Right hand qin techniques.** (*Chart by Jane Chiu, Viet Nguyen, and Pamela Han*)

<i>Numbers indicate the string(s) on which the technique is executed.</i>	
一	1
二	2
三	3
四	4
五	5
六	6

FIGURE 1.9 Chinese numbers. (Chart by Jane Chiu, Viet Nguyen, and Pamela Han)

niques required in the first column of notation of the piece. Figure 1.9 shows the Chinese numbers used to indicate the six strings of the instrument. Figure 1.10 shows how the techniques and numbers are combined in the notation.

	Thumb pushes string 6.
	Middle finger pulls string 1.
	Thumb pulls string 6 with nails.

FIGURE 1.10 Techniques and string numbers combined in qin. (Chart by Jane Chiu, Viet Nguyen, and Pamela Han)

**ACTIVITY 1.8** Try copying at least half the notation in figure 1.7, to experience the flow of it. Then, using the guides in figures 1.8 and 1.9, try following the instructions it gives, playing some stringed instrument.

What does this notation not tell you? That is, what is left for the teacher to transmit, or the player to interpret? This notation is descriptive, rather than prescriptive.

Notation is a kind of access to information. Whereas in an orally transmitted musical tradition the teacher controls whether or not a pupil may learn something, writing the music down makes it more accessible to greater numbers of people. Unlike in Western music, where all voices and instruments use staff notation (though a few instruments, notably guitar, also use a specialized tablature), in Japan each traditional instrument has its own system of notation. Standardized notation assumes that the music is to be shared among the general music-

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1. The basic unit is a staff of five lines (≡); staves meant to be read simultaneously are joined by a vertical line at the left margin.
2. Individual musical sounds are represented by notes. ♩ ♩
3. Pitch is indicated by placing notes both on staff lines and in spaces between staff lines.
4. Melodic contour is visible: Even if pitches cannot be identified, the rising and falling of the pitches can be followed.
5. When multiple musical parts are intended to be sounded together, they are aligned vertically.
6. Rhythm is shown by altering the appearance of notes. “Black” notes (with filled-in noteheads) are of shorter duration than “white” notes. A flag on the stem (↑) attached to a note shortens the duration. Additional time on the pitch is indicated by a dot after the note. For example:
  - ♩ = 1 count
  - ♪ = ½ count (half-counts are often linked by a beam ♩♩)
  - ♩ = 1.5 counts
  - ♩ = 2 counts
  - ♩ = 3 counts
7. Meter (grouping of counts) is shown by vertical lines called bar lines. The space between two bar lines is called a measure. (In “Aloha Oe” each measure consists of four counts.) See chapter 3.

FIGURE 1.11 Basic Guideline to Western Staff Notation

reading public, whereas the Japanese system is tailored to in-group exclusivity.

The five-line **staff notation** system is so detailed that it requires a literacy that is specifically musical. With colonialism, however, its use was disseminated so widely in the world that it now constitutes a kind of international musical language. Because learning some of its basic principles can be of great help as a tool for musical communication, I give a brief guide here. An explanatory list of a few basic elements is given in figure 1.11, and others are added in figure 1.12, a sample of Western notation featuring a portion of the song “Aloha Oe,” composed by Queen Liliuokalani of Hawaii (1838–1917).

An adage often voiced by one of my former teachers, Mantle Hood, is one I endorse: “A written tradition is only as strong as the oral tradition that supports it.” If you have tried to read any notation system

**ALOHA OE.**  
SONG and CHORUS.  
Composed by H.R.H. LILIUOKALANI

Tempo:  
Moderato speed

Key signature:  
Here, G major

Moderato.

Time signature:  
C = common time,  
4 / 4

Five-line staff

Dynamic markings:  
crescendo, decrescendo

Voice

Piano

One count rest

Accidental  
(G sharp)

Three staves linked

nihii a - e - la ka na - hele E ha - ha - i ana

als sie durch die Baü - me schwebt Folgt mit Trau - er ihr die

on it gli - ded through the trees Still foll' - wing ev - er the

Slur

Two staves played on same instrument (here, piano)

Half count rest

Treble clef

"liko," Pu - a A - - hi le - hu - a to uka. . . . .

"liko," Die A - - hi - hi le - hu - a des Thals

"liko," The A - - hi - hi le - hu - a of the vale . . . . .

Bass clef

Copyright 1884 by LILIUOKALANI.

Tie

End of section

**FIGURE 1.12** Western notation through “Aloha Oe.” (with the assistance of Joseph Dales)

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without some further verbal explanation and hearing what is notated, you can recognize that to be true. In the end, an interplay between the oral/aural and written transmission of music is the reality for many musicians.

In this chapter I have introduced briefly the interests of ethnomusicologists in exploring how people all over the globe make music meaningful and useful in their lives. Instruments through which people make music are the subject of chapter 2.