From Jalsah to Jalsā: Music, Identity, and (Gender) Transitioning at a Hīǰṛā Rite of Initiation

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Abstract. This article investigates the connections among music-making, identity, and belonging within the context of a jalsā, a celebratory rite of initiation for a hīǰṛā (South Asian "third gender" individual) entering her gharānā (family). Drawing connections to A. J. Racy's (2004) analysis of ṭarab (ecstasy) performance in the West Asian jalsah (informal gathering), the article reveals how music-making within the larger architecture of the jalsā--in particular the liminal period in which the hīǰṛā "passes through" to become nirvāṇ (liberated)--enables the visceral embodiment of values concerning hīǰṛā social transitioning and self-understanding. I argue that the discourses and performance practices involved in becoming hīǰṛā enact a strategic essentialism through the sanctification of different relational configurations of identity within gharānedar society. This gives shape to a symbolic representation about what it means to be hīǰṛā that is ambiguously cited, multiplicative, and materially unavailable for those from outside the community who seek to enter, define, or otherwise control it. This article is accompanied by a one-hour film that was edited to convey the physical and emotional sensation of a nirvāṇ hīǰṛā's journey.

Out of Thin Air: Configurability, Choreography, and the Air Guitar World Championships

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Abstract. In annual air guitar competitions, performers choreograph routines that simulate and exaggerate gestures needed to play "real" guitar. Before competitions, they edit and alter popular music to facilitate routines. Based on fieldwork at local and national competitions in the US and the international competition in Finland, my research demonstrates connections between remix aesthetics offstage and choreographies onstage, where competitors configure, conjure, and consume popular music. Rather than viewing competitions as evidence of uninhibited interpretive agency of popular music consumers, I argue power differentials emerge where identity, sensibility, and acquired skills determine types and degrees of participation possible for practitioners.

Engendering Musical Ethnography

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Abstract. Between 2007 and 2015, in a series of trips ranging in length from two to ten months, I conducted ethnographic research with rappers in Dakar, Senegal. Drawing on those experiences, this article explores how primary modes of ethnographic knowing and being are nurtured outside spaces of musical performance and asks how a consideration of gendered moments that are not, per se, research moments--the time spent with families, the eating of meals, the engagement with social norms of

greeting and hospitality, but also the often fraught encounters with strangers --might shift our understandings of the nature of the musical fieldsite. Modeling a gendered ethnography of music, I make the following claims: First, models of ethnomusicological fieldwork that center on friendship and participant observation, in their explicit emphasis on collaborative musical performance, implicitly spatialize musical fieldsites even as they redefine them as experiential. Second, such models prioritize music-centered relationships while obscuring the complexity of power dynamics at play in intercultural research. Finally, both the experiential fieldsite and ethnomusicological research models --and the overlaps and disjunctions between them--actively engender the researcher in ways that necessarily inform fieldwork outcomes.

Instrument in Tow: Bringing Musical Skills to the Field

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Abstract. Entering the field with previously-attained musical skills may help facilitate initial immersion. However, it may also deceptively signal to informants that an ethnographer is fluent in local intersocial practices. Reflexivity about this disjuncture can be an analytic tool within ethnographic methodology. I draw on field research in eastern Tennessee to show how my fiddling skills positioned me within ongoing social and musical encounters, despite my lack of more nuanced cultural knowledge. I treat the resulting confusion as valuable data in a case study on classed sociomusical interaction and self-making.

Performing Desire: Race, Sex, and the Ethnographic Encounter

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Abstract. Drawing from ethnographic field research in northwestern Ghana, I investigate the public discourse of desire by recounting the experience of a personal relationship. I dislocate presumptions about dichotomous power differentials between the researcher and researched, and instead investigate the complex, sometimes contradictory navigation of human relationships. I argue that the performance of desire is understood only through a culturally intelligible lens that in this case exposes the mechanisms that inform gendered and racialized subjectivity. Navigating the terrain of desiring and being desired, and the culturally specific terms through which desire is produced directs us towards a relationally constructed understanding of subjectivity.

An Audience of One: The Private Music of the Chinese Literati

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Abstract. China's qin music is historically associated with the literati, who play primarily for themselves as a private activity. While they consider the meaning and significance of the music more important than communicating the musical sound to an audience, they nevertheless also enjoy it as expressive art. This paper argues that in playing privately, the player turns inwardly toward himself rather than outwardly toward an audience. In such a performance environment, music and musicality need to be assessed by criteria different from those commonly accepted, which are based on the supposition that music is a social activity with the primary goal of communicating to an audience.