

Chapter

4

KEY WORDS

acculturation
enculturation
fleádh cheoil
guru-sishya parampara
media landscape
oral, written, aural, and
electronic transmission
solfege

Learning Objectives

After successfully completing this unit, the student will understand that:

1. Recordings have dramatically altered the ways in which music is listened to and stored, and provide a new medium for learning. Nevertheless, musical transmission is still intrinsically connected to people—to the listening teaching, creating, and collaborating that occurs between musicians, within families, between teachers and students, and between performers and audiences.
2. Musical enculturation is based in families and local communities, and provides the foundation for more formal instruction.
3. Master-apprentice traditions, which were common in many music cultures into the twentieth century, persist in a modified form in the contexts of private music lessons and institutional learning.
4. In many cultures, musical mimicry is one step for music students, in a learning process that ultimately leads to the creation of a mature, individual style.

Television Program

Transmission

Audio Selections

18. Tabla demonstration in Teental: bols.
Ray Spiegel on tabla

Transmission: Learning Music

“Perhaps all music, even the newest, is not so much something discovered as something that re-emerges from where it lay buried in the memory, inaudible as a melody cut in a disc of flesh. A composer lets me hear a song that has always been shut up silent within me.”

JEAN GENET

Transmission refers to the passing on of tradition. The process of learning one's cultural traditions is called enculturation, and this goes on informally from the time a person is born. Musical enculturation includes listening to lullabies, singing nursery rhymes, listening to the radio and/or other listening devices, singing “Happy Birthday”—the sum total of our informal musical experience. Alongside such informal transmission, musical traditions are also learned formally, in the context of apprenticeships, lessons, classes, and schools.

Societal and technological change transforms processes of transmission, and musical learning has undergone profound changes during the

twentieth century. Musical learning in the contemporary world involves all kinds of media: oral, written, and digital. From remote villages to urban centers, these media interact in a complex new cultural web.

In this chapter, we explore musical transmission as it occurs in a variety of contemporary musical cultures, including classical music in the West and in North India, singing in the Bosnian highlands, Irish traditional music, jazz, and rock.

The term *transmission* is often used to describe the handing down of tradition from one person to another or from one generation to the next. In the field of ethnomusicology, the term refers to musical communication: the processes by which musical traditions are inherited, learned, shared, and passed on. Alan Merriam, one of the first ethnomusicologists to focus on musical transmission, proposed that we view musical sound as the “end result of a dynamic process,” in which learned concepts lead to learned behavior which results in musical structures and presentations.¹

Learning a musical tradition is an individual experience involving personal choices and the development of cognitive and physical skills. It is also a social process conditioned by collective history and personal memory.² Each musician works through socially sanctioned models of form, style, and technique in order to ultimately find his or her own voice. These models are embedded in the fabric of social life, and exist in relationship to other aspects of culture, including politics, economics, gender issues, and aesthetics. Transmission involves who is allowed to be a musician (and in many cultures, musical roles are gender-linked) where musical learning takes place, how and from whom musicians obtain their skills, what instruments are played, and the repertory that is being taught.

While transmission refers both to the teaching and learning of music and to the ways in which music is stored, preserved, and passed on, in this chapter we will focus primarily on the former: the different processes by which musicians learn and inherit their tradition. Scholars have categorized these methods as oral, written, and electronic transmission. *Oral transmission* is the process of learning through imitation directly from an exemplar of a musical tradition; *written transmission* involves the use of notation and/or theoretical texts; and *electronic transmission* involves the use of recordings and computers, and now the world wide web, in the learning process.

Music Transmission Processes

- Oral
- Written
- Electronic

Although musicians in some cultures still learn solely through oral transmission, music students in many societies have access to a combination: oral and electronic, oral and written, or the use of all three. Musi-

cians often switch from oral to written to electronic media without any sense that some change is involved.

The teaching and learning of music varies significantly from society to society, but until the recording age, the process had one thing in common worldwide: people learned directly from each other by watching, listening, imitating, and through formal or informal lessons. With the advent of electronic technology in the twentieth century, people were also able to listen to and learn from recordings from all over the world that froze individual musical performances, allowing people to listen to the same musical material over and over again. Recordings dramatically altered the ways in which music was listened to and stored, and provided a new medium for learning. Nevertheless, musical transmission is still intrinsically connected to people—to the listening, teaching, creating, and collaborating that occurs between musicians, within families, between teachers and students, and between performers and audiences.

THE LEARNING PROCESS

Although we do not all consider ourselves to be musicians, almost all human beings learn music. Much of this learning is informal. Children's games which incorporate singing and movement are common in many African cultures, and lullabies seem to be a global phenomenon. In the United States, children sing nursery rhymes with their parents, game songs such as "Ring Around the Rosie" with their friends, and Christmas carols during the holiday season. We sing patriotic songs in school classrooms and at athletic events, and absorb popular songs from radio and television broadcasts and piped-in music in supermarkets and doctors' offices. This informal acquisition of musical knowledge, along with other aspects of one's culture, is called *enculturation*.

More formal music instruction takes a variety of forms. In many societies, professional musicians have traditionally passed their knowledge on to future performers in guild-like societies, in a master-apprentice style of training. Such guilds have often been restricted to members of families in which music is a hereditary occupation; in such cases, musical knowledge is passed on from parent to child, uncle to nephew, and so on. The modern phenomenon of private instruction in piano, voice, violin, guitar, and the like is in some ways an adaptation of traditional apprenticeship, modified to fit the structures of contemporary society.

We may view informal enculturation and formal discipleship as two ends of a continuum which includes a wide variety of approaches to learning music. Students of a demanding piano teacher in America or Europe,

or a *sitar* teacher in India, may have to practice several hours per day in order to prepare for their regular lessons. Members of school bands or orchestras may take private lessons on their instruments to acquire the technique to be able to join an ensemble. School choruses and church choirs require the formality of fixed rehearsals and public performances, but the singers are not generally considered “apprentices” of the conductor, and they might not practice the music as individuals between one rehearsal and the next. Rock and jazz musicians may or may not receive formal training from a private instructor, but they often acquire musical knowledge by imitating the playing of performers they observe in concerts and see and hear via CD’s, audio and video cassettes, records and the internet, television and DVD’s. We learn music in many ways, and there are respects in which every person’s musical education is unique.

The process of learning to sing or play music is very much like the process of learning to speak a language. This insight is central to the somewhat revolutionary educational concepts of Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, one of the most important figures in twentieth-century music education. Dr. Suzuki based his method of teaching the violin on the idea that training in music should parallel, as closely as possible, the learning of one’s mother tongue. A thorough study of the “Suzuki technique” is beyond the scope of this chapter, but in thinking about processes of learning music we would do well to bear in mind Dr. Suzuki’s basic premise: the acquisition of musical knowledge parallels the learning of spoken—and sometimes, written—language.

We will begin our examination of ways of learning music by considering traditions in informal enculturation.

LEARNING BY INFORMAL ENCULTURATION

Informal learning occurs in a wide variety of contexts. For most people, the family is the first locus of musical education. Children hear lullabies, nursery rhymes, and holiday songs sung by their parents and siblings, joining in as the songs become familiar. Older family members provide models for the behavior of young children, and the children, grandchildren, nephews, nieces, and younger siblings of musicians often absorb musical skills and knowledge by observation and imitation.

In village societies, where the family is part of a closely knit local community, musical neighbors also provide role modeling for young singers and players. For villagers in highland Bosnia, group singing is a sort of

social ritual for young people passing into adulthood, and children and young adolescents learn to sing by observing their elders. In Irish communities both in rural Ireland and in urban settings around the world, a natural affinity develops between older “tradition bearers” and young players, who learn both repertory and musical behavior by seeking out the company of senior musicians.

Informal musical enculturation includes listening to music both actively and passively. As active listeners, we may set out consciously to learn a song from a tape or digital playback device. As passive listeners, we are often bombarded with electronically reproduced music at home, in supermarkets, offices, subways, streets, and automobiles. Even when we consciously or subconsciously try to block out background music, it affects us, as when we suddenly catch ourselves in the supermarket, humming along to a song which we were not even aware of hearing.

In some societies, informal learning is the principal means of musical transmission, but even in cultures where formal instruction predominates, enculturation provides the foundation upon which more structured training is built. Lessons and classes may be supplemented by informal sessions of discussion and music-making, which provide important opportunities for deepening and testing skills in a more relaxed setting.



▲ Teens singing hymns in church.

Singing in the Bosnian Highlands

In Bosnian Highlander culture, children often start singing at an early age, but not by formal instruction. Instead they imitate what they hear from their elders in the village in the evening or what they hear at a village fair. Boys and girls start singing together in same sex groups at age six or seven, practicing the adult repertoire that they've acquired by listening and osmosis. Mirjana Laušević observed that this practice of singing is part of later courtship rituals in which group singing plays a fundamental role:

In patriarchal Highlander culture, men and women do not sing together. Singing is a very important part of courtship rituals. And people will start singing at a very early age, but not in public. They will sing out in the meadows. They will sing up in the hills. They will sing away from the adults. . . . But up to the point when they're ready for courtship and marriage, they will not sing in the village. They will not sing out in the public in front of the adults.



▲ Bosnian Becárac singers

So it often happens, for example, a group of girls, when they feel ready for courtship and for marriage, subsequently they will suddenly one night decide to start a song in the village. And it's almost like an initiation rite, in which they will present themselves to the rest of their community, and they'll present themselves through the song. . . . And often mothers would say they were really surprised. But once their daughters started singing in public, they will pay more attention to them. They'll comb their hair, put nice clothes on them, and they'll (give them) jewelry so that they can get the attention that they're trying to get.³

Learning Irish Traditional Music

In other cultures, informal learning takes place very much within the family environment, functioning as an important component of musical transmission. In Ireland, for example, many musicians talk about the importance of parents, uncles, aunts, and neighbors as the primary source of their repertory, style, and techniques. By extension, musical transmission is considered personal—musicians celebrate the human links in the passing on of a song or tune more than they discuss playing techniques. Because most repertory is learned orally, musicians often cite the particular person from whom they've learned each song or tune in their repertory, including material learned from artists on recordings. Family musical lineages are still most highly valued in this system of personalizing repertory.

Because most music-making used to take place in the home, children learned first by listening to their elders. More formal learning might take place through lessons with a family member or neighbor, but the emphasis was on learning by doing rather than on years of apprenticeship. Recordings also played an important role in the transmission of traditional Irish music. American recordings made during the heyday of ethnic recordings in the 1920s by the great Sligo fiddlers, Paddy Killoran, James Morrison, and Michael Coleman, and the piper Patsy Touhey, have had a great impact on playing styles ever since, in both Ireland and America. In isolated areas in Ireland, recordings often served as a vital means for introducing new repertory and new techniques.

Although published tune collections have long been part of the Anglo-Celtic fiddle tune repertory, the format of these collections has contributed to the continued reliance on oral transmission—passing music down from musician to musician. For the most part, collectors have consistently presented tunes as single melodic lines without indications of performance practice, including instrumentation, ornamentation, variation, and improvisation. Because these aspects of performance practice are what breathes life into a musician's playing, it is generally acknowledged that one cannot learn Irish music from a book. Therefore, while tune collections have served as an important means of preserving and disseminating the ever growing tune repertory, musicians themselves tend to learn orally or “by ear”—from other musicians, recordings, and sessions.

There are, however, many new contexts for the transmission of traditional Irish music in the late twentieth century. While the family and home were, until recently, the locus of informal music sessions and socializing, the pub is now the preferred venue for music making. Both children and adults can study at local traditional music schools or at a variety of one week summer schools, such as the famous Willie Clancy Summer School held each July since 1972 in Miltown Malbay, County Clare.

In the context of the Willie Clancy week, students attend instrumental, singing, or set dance classes every morning, listen to and/or participate in the pub sessions that take place virtually around the clock, and attend daily concerts. There are also two public dances or céilís per day, which feature live bands and set dancing. The week's immersion in music includes formal classes and listening time, but the informal and spontaneous sessions, which bring together musicians of different ages, degrees of skill, and even nationalities, are where much of the learning and sharing take place. Because the school also functions as a week long festival, it attracts musicians from all over Ireland, Europe, Australia, Japan, and the United States, who come just to play in the sessions.

Competitions are also held at the local, regional, and national levels for musicians, singers, and dancers of all ages. Beginning in the early 1950s, these competitions, called *fleádh cheoil* (pronounced “flah kee-ol”), were organized by *Comhaltas Ceoltoiri Eireann* (pronounced “Koltus Keeoltoree Erun”), a new institution founded to promote Irish traditional music and dance, as well as the Irish language. Comhaltas has 400 local branches in Ireland and ten other countries and a pyramidal system of competitions, culminating in an international competition and festival.⁴

There are tens of thousands of people who participate in the competitions each year and many of them are children. For some, these formal-

ized rites of passage are considered an essential means of preserving and promoting the tradition. For others, the organizational model of competitions represents the antithesis of traditional music performance. There seems to be no question that the fleádh cheoils have stimulated a great deal of interest in Irish music, and for many musicians, the contests are regarded, not as serious competitions, but as an excuse to get together and enjoy informal music-making in the sessions that inevitably spring up around any Irish musical gathering.

Transmission in Jazz

Jazz has traveled a long and complex road since its inception near the beginning of the twentieth century. Even from the early years, people have learned to play jazz in a number of different ways. In terms of the use of notation, it is best described as a mixed tradition, in which all players learn some of their art by ear, some never use notation, and some make extensive use of written scores for both learning and passing on their music.

The portion of a traditional jazz performance which is most often notated is the melody or "head," which serves as a point of departure for variation and improvisation. Early players often learned the basic tune by ear, and by definition, their improvisations were not written down. The proliferation of jazz recordings created an interesting paradox regarding improvised solos; once an impromptu performance has been given a fixed form on a record, tape, or other digital device, it is then possible to study, learn, memorize, and notate it.

By mid-century, the study of recorded solos had become a common means of aural transmission. The creation of jazz programs in universities and conservatories pushed this process still further, and now it is possible to buy books containing note-by-note transcriptions of the improvisations of renowned players such as saxophonist Charlie Parker or guitarist Django Reinhardt. Many students practice exercises from instruction books which guide the reader through the fundamentals of jazz improvisation. They are introduced to the intricacies of swing or bebop style by memorizing the transcribed solos of past masters. These developments are part of a broad shift in the nature of jazz culture, involving, among other things, a change in venues from inexpensive bars to posh concert halls.

An Eclectic Tradition. Jazz has always drawn on popular music. Much traditional jazz consists not of the performance of a repertoire unique to the genre, but rather of a special stylistic treatment of popular songs, often called "standards." Early jazz players improvised on the stan-

dards of their day, and contemporary jazz musicians grow up listening to all kinds of music.

Jazz saxophonist Josh Redman recalls that as a young child he heard not only jazz, but also the Beatles, Mozart, Indian, African, and Indonesian music, Aretha Franklin, and the Temptations. It took him some time to discover his particular attraction to his idiom and instrument:

Coltrane's music was alive for me from the beginning, Sonny Rollins's music was alive, Charlie Parker's music was alive, Dexter Gordon, Cannonball Adderley—these are musicians that I listened to from a very young age.

But as I listened more to those musicians, I began to develop more of a sense of what jazz was as a distinct style, and what made it special, and the more I listened to jazz the more I developed a special relationship to that style of music, as a listener. And then when I started playing saxophone, immediately I found that the jazz style of music, the jazz language, the jazz idiom was the style that I felt the most comfortable with, and the style that I wanted to explore the most as a musician.⁵



▲ Joshua Redman

The Jazz Language. Redman goes on to describe the jazz language:

Jazz is a language . . . that has been defined and refined over a period of about a hundred years, and anyone who is trying to be an improviser in jazz has to be familiar with that language. . . . The language consists of many different things. It consists of certain melodic fragments, which have almost become clichéd . . . but the language of jazz is also the harmonies, being familiar with the harmonies, knowing how the melodies relate to the harmonies. The language of jazz is also rhythm abstracted from harmonies; you know, there are certain rhythms which are at the core of jazz. The swing rhythm is at the core of jazz.

The language of jazz is basically a familiarity with the history of jazz, and the way in which musicians have interacted, and the ways in which they found common ideas to relate to one another with.⁶

After describing the elements of the jazz language—motifs, harmonies, and rhythms—Redman stresses that familiarity with the genre's history and the ways in which musicians interact are essential components for understanding jazz. We may view history and contemporary interac-

Elements of Jazz Language

- Motifs
- Harmonies
- Rhythms

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Elements of Jazz Language

- Motifs
- Harmonies
- Rhythms



▲ Charlie Parker

tion as two poles which generate the electricity of jazz today. The player must reach back into history to acquire the language, but he must find something new to say, in a culture of contemporary musicians, to keep the idiom alive and growing.

Modern musicians may learn the elements of jazz in a number of ways. Some players learn jazz by studying for years with private teachers, playing in bands, and eventually enrolling in a program at a university or conservatory. Some begin by learning classical music, and then switch to

jazz after they have already acquired some facility on an instrument. Many musicians learn jazz by listening repeatedly to recordings of their favorite musicians and then trying to imitate the style and content of recorded performances. Recent decades have seen a burgeoning of available recordings, so that in some cases we can compare a single player's improvisations on a given piece of repertory over a period of decades of performing. Redman describes the value of such study:

To hear how Charlie Parker might have improvised over "Ornithology," one of his tunes, ten, twenty times, to hear the way in which those improvisations changed and the way in which they stayed the same, to hear the way those improvisations may have changed in the course of one studio session, or over the course of fifteen years of Charlie Parker improvising—that can give us more knowledge and more insight into Charlie Parker's process, or the process of any master jazz musician.⁷

Although the availability of archival recordings and notated materials gives contemporary jazz students an advantage in studying the historical practice of jazz musicians, these materials also make the learning experience for modern players radically different from those of the past masters whose performances they are studying. "Getting it right," for a bebop player in the 1950s, usually meant playing something in a new, daring way, *avoiding* repeating past performances note-for-note. If a player in 1998 succeeds in performing a transcription of a bebop solo forty years after it was recorded, can we then say that she is "getting it right"? The player must balance the principle of historically-informed playing against the enduring jazz ideal of spontaneity. Redman describes this conflict:

Right now, as jazz musicians, we are confronted with a virtual glut of material. There are so many recordings of so many jazz musicians out there, there's so much historical information that it can threaten I think, at times, to overwhelm us. And we can get so obsessed with finding that new Charlie Parker recording, you know, with hearing everything from the past, and studying everything from the past, that we lose sight of the ultimate goal of jazz, and the ultimate goal of any music—which is to create something meaningful, and emotional, and honest, in the present.⁸

Speaking the Language. However one goes about learning the rudiments of jazz, one must ultimately begin “speaking” this musical language by improvising with other musicians. In the context of jam sessions, the player develops a personal voice and style by entering into a musical dialogue with other players. Each improvisation involves learning and listening: sometimes a less experienced player is challenged and instructed by jamming with a more senior musician; other times, the exchange is between near-equals. After discussing the virtues and pitfalls of learning jazz repertory and style by studying recordings, becoming a virtual “apprentice” of recorded masters whom one may never have met or heard in a live performance, Josh Redman talks about the process of transmission as it occurs in person, at the side of other performing artists:

There's a very important tradition of jazz that has nothing to do with the records, with the recording technology, and that is the tradition of learning at the side of a master musician. You know, not learning from a record which you put on and take off, but learning from a musician who's right there next to you, who's making music with you, who is sharing his or her knowledge and maturity with you.

There's the tradition of going to the clubs and hearing the music played live, there's nothing to substitute for that, and I think it's important that even with all the information that's out there technologically, with all the recordings that are out there, we never lose sight of the fact that ultimately jazz is about human beings interacting, telling each other stories both verbally and musically, and sharing with each other as people at a particular time in the present tense.⁹

Interacting with other improvising musicians often creates strong emotional ties between the players. The musician must learn the language, the motifs, harmonies, and rhythms of jazz in order to be able to communicate, but for many players the essence of jazz lies not in its

history, but in the act of communication. Josh Redman says, "Ultimately jazz is about the interactions of the different members of the band, the community of the band, and the way in which the band members relate to each other as musicians." In these relationships, transmission is a constant, multi-directional process, in which each player both learns and teaches. Within the "community of the band," Josh Redman says:

The connection that you have to make in order to play music, the act of cooperating with someone musically, the act of communicating with someone musically so that you can together make a meaningful, coherent statement, that's a very spiritual act, and it's a form of spiritual education in a way.¹⁰

Transmission in Rock: Rusted Root

Jazz, which began as an African-American musical genre near the turn of the twentieth century, has had a profound effect on music around the world. American and European classical composers began borrowing harmonic, rhythmic, and melodic elements of jazz during the first quarter of the century. Popular music owes much of its formal vocabulary to the contributions of jazz musicians, and listeners and performers around the world have become devoted aficionados and exponents of the jazz tradition.

Rock and roll, America's second major contribution to the world's popular musics, also sprang from an African-American musical genre: rhythm and blues. During the 1950s, the first rock recordings of artists such as Bill Haley and the Comets, Buddy Holly and the Crickets, and Elvis Presley introduced white Americans to the musical language of rhythm and blues—a twelve-bar, three line song form, with an infectious beat and an ensemble usually consisting of voice, guitar, bass, piano, and drums.

Like jazz, rock is an eclectic, improvisational genre. Early recordings stuck close to their rhythm and blues roots, but over the decades, the rhythms, forms, and timbres of rock have been adopted by musicians across the popular music spectrum, so that today it is very difficult to draw a clear line dividing rock from other genres such as country and western. Rock lyricists have frequently moved out of the familiar subject matter of light-hearted love songs into "serious" composition, expressing themes related to politics, civil rights, religion, and philosophical issues, and rock composers draw on a myriad of musical influences, from J. S. Bach to the music of west African drum ensembles.

The "Media Landscape" of Rock. Unlike jazz, which underwent a transition from primarily live oral transmission to a learning process that frequently involves the extensive use of recorded performances as

models, rock was “born and brought up” in the age of a mature and dominant recording industry. Jim DiSpirito, drummer with the popular rock band Rusted Root, remembers learning to play the drums while listening to recordings on headphones:

I always have this really nice memory of when I first started to really get into music, and started to think, “Boy, I’d sure like to play, you know, . . . that would be fun. And I remember you know, sitting on my bed with my drumsticks and my black t-shirt on, and puttin’ on headphones, ’cause you know my parents were in the next room, and listening to AC-DC records and Led Zeppelin records. And, you know, just smacking the bed as hard as I could with these drumsticks, . . . and dust is flying all over the place. And just like going through record after record and like, a whole evening would pass and I would . . . take the headphones off and not even realize any time has passed. And . . . for me that was as close to a spiritual experience as I ever found, even more than going to church. It was something that I knew, like if it could take me out of time and it could take me away from all the pressures of being a kid, then . . . there’s some real magic there.”¹¹



▲ Jim DiSpirito

The proliferation of personal listening devices, including cassette, CD and MP3 players, has transformed processes of transmission. Each student has the potential of living in multiple soundscapes, including live performances (the only medium available until the late nineteenth century) recorded music played in a common listening space, such as a home, office, store, or car, radio and television broadcasts, and the extremely private space enclosed between a pair of headphones. Students who wish to learn to play rock often take lessons with experienced music teachers, but much learning goes on in other contexts, and no rock musician may be said to be the exclusive product of apprenticeship to a single master.

As Jim DiSpirito says,

The media landscape is very different than in India, where the oral tradition specifically comes from one teacher and the information is passed orally. Modern American culture is much more eclectic, . . . because the student, a guitar student has so many different teachers, if you will, to choose from, given that so much is really learned through sound recordings.”¹²

Like jazz musicians, rock players often learn to improvise by first memorizing solos from commercially available recordings, and as in jazz, this process seems to contain inherent contradictions. If improvisation is the goal, then why do we try so hard to reproduce a performance, note

for note? If personal expression is the aim, then why do we work so diligently at mimicking the playing of other performers? These questions are particularly intriguing in the context of another issue: the association of rock with rebellion against conservative cultural values, and particularly against the constraints of Western classical music.

Finding One's Own Voice. For the most successful students of rock and roll, mimicry seems to be an early phase in their musical growth, followed by the search for an original voice. Rusted Root vocalist and percussionist Liz Berlin describes her learning process, not as one of imitating other vocalists, but as an effort to break through her early classical training to develop new vocal timbres and techniques:

I think that I learned to play rock music by making it up, trying to make something new. I was raised with a classical voice training, and, you know, sang a lot of classical music when I was younger, and then—you know, when I learned to play the guitar, moved on to folk music, and started making up folk songs. But then when I joined the band it was just a whole new spectrum. . . . A lot more was possible and, I really, sort of rebelled against a lot of my training, to try and find places in my voice that were new and interesting. And places that, you know, I had to create sounds that I didn't hear on the radio at the time.¹³

The contrast between imitating recorded performances and trying to create something new illustrates a fundamental principle that rock musicians share with performers in many genres. They create their art in the context of a dynamic polarity between emulating the sound of admired performers and searching for one's own unique style.

Perhaps the notion of rock as rebellion against earlier classical training reflects something of the cultural roots of rock and roll. Rhythm and blues developed out of African-American traditions, which had always included an important place for improvised singing and playing. European classical music, and particularly the playing of Renaissance lutenists whose instruments were forerunners to the modern guitar, also has an old tradition of improvised playing, but by the twentieth century the art of improvisation had largely vanished from the Western classical tradition. When African-Americans played rhythm and blues, this was an expression of a continuing tradition, but when white Americans first took up jazz, and then rock and roll, the artistic freedom of the music represented a new frontier for many of the performers.

Returning to Jim DiSpirito's early practice sessions, drumming on his bed while listening to recordings, we find an example not only of modeling



▲ Liz Berlin

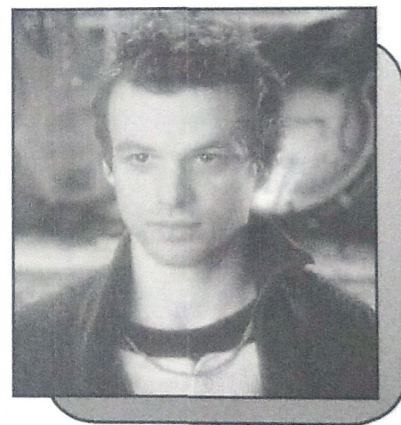
one's playing after that of recorded artists, but also of a search for a personal style. Rather than playing a single passage over and over to try and mimic every aspect of a drummer's playing, he played along with the recordings, "sitting in" as an extra member of the band. In this context, one inevitably combines the process of imitation with that of creating something new. He refers to this learning process as "learning through remembering," "learning by accident," and "pooling it from your being." Such expressions suggest that the source of musical knowledge is ultimately neither tangible, nor external like a record, tape, CD, score, or teacher, but an inner resource located in the memory and being of the musician.

"Birthing" a Song. Transmission refers not only to learning to sing or play an instrument, but to all the ways that music "travels" from person to person. In the Western classical tradition, we think of music as originating with a composer, who then transmits his compositions to the performers via the medium of a written score. They then transmit the music to the audience via the medium of performance.

In some cultures, such as those of the Kaluli of Papua, New Guinea or the Suyá of Brazil, repertory is thought to originate, not with human composers, but with extra-human agents such as animals and spirits. Even in the West, not all composers are comfortable with the idea that they are the single author of a given composition. Michael Glabicki, songwriter with Rusted Root, says "I often feel I'm being led to a song, [as] opposed to creating a song or writing a song." He goes on to describe this process in some detail, beginning at the point that the song has begun to have a shape of its own:

At that point, that's where the struggle comes in, because it becomes even harder at that point to have something sitting in front of you and still remain unattached from it. . . . I continue at that point to bring it into the world, to birth it, to have it grow up in front of me without having influence over it. And I am not the owner of it; I am the keeper of it.¹⁴

Continuing with the imagery of "birthing," Michael Glabicki observes that "often as you raise a child, it's not the parents that raise the child, it's the community around the child. So I'm always open to being shown ways to help that song grow. And that's bringing it to the band." When he brings a new idea for a song to the band, Michael Glabicki conceives of the song as "sitting in the center of our circle, and we are sitting around it. I have a certain perception of it, being the songwriter, that I see from here. You know, I can see maybe a little bit more than everybody else." As the musicians begin to experiment with accompaniments, harmonies,



▲ Michael Glabicki

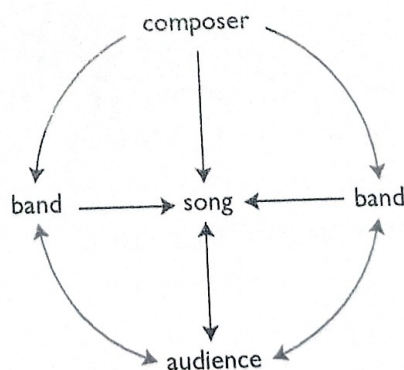
variations, and improvisations, the band "discovers" the song, taking the songwriter's original contribution as a point of departure in the creation of a new entity which is independent of any single author.

For Rusted Root, the creation of the song continues in performance, with the audience providing the ultimate contribution. Glabicki describes this process:

At the point of performing it, the audience gives to it. . . . You can visualize it as a tree. Back to when I receive a seed of it, I bring [it] till it's about this big, you know. And then I present it to the band, and then we work on the foundation of it, the trunk and the stronger branches of it. And then at that point we start to go into the thinner branches and the leaves.

And then when you perform it, it starts to change all different seasons, and change colors, and leaves change, and leaves become bigger and more textured, and then the wind starts to come and create a picture around it. And . . . then it becomes this wholesome world view, how this tree relates to this person, this person, and this other tree, and this other tree, and then it gets much bigger. . . . You truly realize that there's something bigger happening, and you know that, you know it's not your song anymore, it's gone.¹⁵

We may envision the creation of a Rusted Root song, then as a circular process, with various parties contributing in a process of mutual exchange:



To be sure, not all rock songwriters take the non-possessive stance expressed by Michael Glabicki, but several aspects of the process he describes—nurturing the nascent composition, collaborative creation, and the ultimate completion of the process in performance—are common to the experience of many rock and roll musicians.

LEARNING BY APPRENTICESHIP

In the tradition of apprenticeship, professional musicians learn their art by becoming disciples or apprentices of a master-teacher. In a number of societies, apprentices are either literal or symbolic sons or daughters of their teachers. The actual children of the master benefit from twenty-four hour contact with their teacher and his art, absorbing nuances of musical behavior not only in formal lessons, but also by observation and osmosis. Non-relatives who become disciples of such a teacher often move into the mentor's home for several years, so that they too can have the advantage of full-time immersion in the life and art of a musician.

North Indian Classical Music: The Guru-Sishya Parampara

Traditional discipleship in Indian classical music takes the form of the *guru-sishya parampara* (master-disciple tradition). Historically, musicians in India prior to the twentieth century tended to come from three streams of society: families for whom music or dance were hereditary occupations; members of the aristocracy who practiced music as amateurs; and "musician-saints," for whom music was a path to God. Aristocratic and "saintly" musicians were often highly-respected members of society, but professional musicians were usually regarded as low-caste artisans employed by the temples or courts. Professionals might earn great respect for their artistry, develop a reputation as highly spiritual performers of religious music, and even become gurus of aristocratic patrons who became their musical disciples, but they still were regarded as "beyond the pale" by much of Indian society.

Whether a music student was a young aristocratic amateur or the child of a professional performer, the traditional setting for music instruction was the *guru-kula*, literally meaning the "master's household." Disciples or "sishyas" would undergo a formal initiation ceremony, in which a thread tied around the student's wrist symbolized his adoption as a lifelong student and member of the guru's musical "family."

From this point on, the sishya moved into the guru's home, where the disciple performed domestic chores such as cooking, shopping, and cleaning, all the while observing the teacher's practice and instruction of advanced disciples. After some time, the guru might decide the student was ready to begin formal training. Lessons took place at the teacher's pleasure, at any hour of the day or night. After several years, when the student had reached an advanced level, he would accompany his guru to

performances, carrying instruments, tending to his teacher's comfort, and playing or singing with the guru on stage, learning the art of performance at the mentor's side.

Female performers in the courts and temples were often born into families of professional musicians, or sometimes were "offered" as children by non-musician families to temples as "servants of God," to be trained as temple performers. Women played an important role in the transmission of music in the courts and temples, both as virtuoso performers, and sometimes as unacknowledged teachers of younger performers. Formal training took place in discipleship to a male guru, but informal musical enculturation often took place in the company of the sishya's mother or aunts. The low social status of professional musicians prevented most upper-caste girls from entering musical discipleship until the twentieth century, when courtly patronage came to an end and a new, urban middle-class became the main patrons, students, and eventually, professional performers of Indian classical music.

Foreseeing the extinction of courtly patronage, Indian musicians and musicologists in the early twentieth century began holding public concerts, establishing music schools, and publishing books of musical repertory, theory, and history, to ensure the survival of the music after its traditional patronage base no longer existed. These strategies, and the development of the Indian recording and broadcasting industries, seem to have been successful in introducing Indian classical music to a newly developed culture of middle-class listeners and performers.

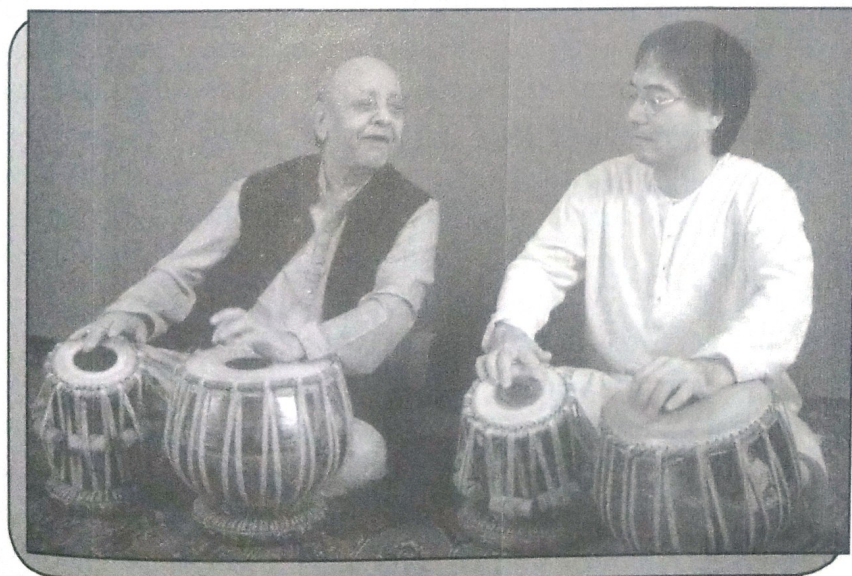
Contemporary students seldom live with their gurus, and service in the teacher's home has largely been replaced by the payment of tuition fees, but other aspects of the guru-sishya parampara survive. Devotion to the teacher, a close, almost familial affection between guru and disciple, and a strong emphasis on oral, rather than written instruction, remain the foundations of musical instruction in India, and these qualities often persist even in institutional training. Serious performers still regard several years of intensive, personalized instruction as an indispensable part of a professional musician's education, and students who aspire to become professional performers often supplement classroom teaching in a music school or university by taking lessons with their personal gurus.

New Contexts for Transmission. Around the turn of the twentieth century, Indian classical musicians began performing in Europe and America. This activity intensified dramatically in the late 1960s, when several American universities began employing Indian musicians on their teaching faculty. The eminent North Indian instrumentalists Ali

Akbar Khan and Ravi Shankar each established music schools in California, where Ali Akbar Khan has resided and taught for many years. He also founded schools in Calcutta and Switzerland. Some American disciples of the faculty of the Ali Akbar College of Music have been studying for close to thirty years, and a number have made inroads as professional or semi-professional performers in India. Cross-cultural discipleship in the jet-age has created some interesting variations on the tradition of the guru-sishya parampara, as illustrated in the following quote from Ray Spiegel, an advanced American disciple of tabla maestro Ustad Alla Rakha:

When I got a chance to be near him (Alla Rakha) I would go . . . to the airport, and learn in somewhat of an old-fashioned method, which is not paying tuition but going and doing work or seva, service to the guru. . . . So I had no money, but I would go and meet him and sleep on the floor of his hotel, and take care of errands and help out with driving, cooking, shopping, cleaning—anything.

And when he felt like it, he would teach me. These lessons were not formal. He never wrote anything down for me. In fact I never sat in front of him with drums. He only would recite compositions to me, and then I was expected to remember them, and at a later time write them down. . . . So it requires a lot of memory, and you have to be on your toes at all times, because you don't know when you're going to get a lesson. It could be in a restaurant, it could be late at night while he's in bed, it could be in the car in rush hour traffic in New York City on the way to the airport. But when it occurred to him to teach, that's when it was time for me to learn. So I did that for about, almost twenty years.¹⁶



◀ Ray Spiegel and Ustad Alla Rakha.



Ray Spiegel illustrates the tabla bols for the 16-beat rhythmic cycle known as teental.

The substance of Ray Spiegel's training—serving the guru, learning at the master's pleasure, living at times in the guru's household, memorizing compositions verbally before either playing or notating them—corresponds to that of the traditional guru-kula, but the settings—hotel rooms, taxis, and airports—represent a radical departure from the ways of the past.

Ways of Learning. Ray Spiegel was able to memorize compositions without actually playing them at the time of learning because Indian musicians and dancers use a system of mnemonic syllables in learning rhythms, drum strokes, choreography, and melodies. For tabla players, these mnemonic syllables, called *bols*, meaning literally “words,” represent particular drum strokes. “Dha, dhin, na, tin, tete, kata, gadi, gena”—these are examples of bols that tabla players use to memorize drum compositions set in the *talas* or rhythmic cycles of Indian classical music.

Singers and players of melodic instruments such as the sarod, sitar, and bamboo flute use a set of mnemonic syllables called *sargam*, which are exactly analogous to the *solfege*, “do, re, mi,” of Western music. Singers may first learn a song using the syllables “sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha,” and “ni,” before actually singing the melody with its poetic text. Instrumentalists often learn to sing instrumental compositions called *gats* in *sargam* before attempting to play them on their instruments, and instrumental teachers frequently teach melodies by singing, rather than playing. This approach helps the student to internalize a composition before actually attempting to play it, and it emphasizes a key concept in Indian musical aesthetics. Indian aestheticians regard vocal music as the fountainhead of the arts, and instrumentalists are expected to emulate the motion and phrasing of the human voice in playing their instruments.

Before an Indian musician can begin learning actual compositions for voice, melodic instruments, or drums, he or she must gain a basic mastery of the notes and fundamental instrumental techniques. Singers and instrumentalists begin by practicing exercises called *paltas*, which train them to produce a variety of melodic patterns throughout their vocal or instrumental range. They then proceed to simple compositions in basic *ragas*, the melodic modes of Indian classical music. These compositions are often followed with numerous *tans*, fast passages created by the guru to provide the sishya with examples of correctly formed improvisations.

Students may memorize hundreds of such prototypes, creating a stockpile of rhythmic and melodic patterns which the disciple will later draw upon in his or her own spontaneous creations. Eventually, this training is intended to bring the student to a level of mastery and maturity in which



◀ Buddhadev Das Gupta

she can compose and improvise melodies that correctly reflect both the complex melodic and rhythmic grammar of Indian classical music and the performer's own, individual creative imagination. Sarod player Buddhadev Das Gupta describes the training process from the guru's perspective:

When you teach music, any kind, vocal or instrumental, you have first of all got to make your disciple or pupil go through the notes. And he has got to get the notes correct, then various combinations of notes which are called *paltas*, in our terminology. And then he is started off with a simple *gat* in a relatively uncomplicated raga.

At first, all his lessons, just like a school boy, are written down in a book. Gradually, just like learning a language, when he has got all the words and sentences and grammar all stacked up, here he goes over to improvisations or impromptu playing. This stage may take, you know, years for somebody to attain. But ultimately you have to free yourself from the slavery of the book and written-down instructions. And then only you are really a performing musician.¹⁷

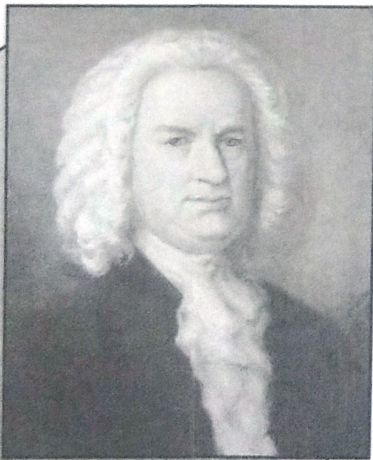
Each guru teaches not only a repertory of compositions and the basic rules of raga and tala, but a stylistic approach that is peculiar to his own particular family or teaching lineage, which in North India is called a *gharana*. Every Indian classical musician, therefore, must create a personal style, which at one time adheres to the melodic and rhythmic grammar of the broad tradition, reflects the stylistic approach of his particular lineage or school, and reflects his own, personal creative approach.

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▲ Fifth graders from the Jewish Educational Center's Elementary School Choir sing holiday songs.

© The Art Archive/Corbis



▲ Johann Sebastian Bach

Western Classical Music

Western classical music, like Indian classical music, received its early patronage from courts and religious institutions. Singing was an essential part of worship both in Jewish synagogues and in the Christian church, and cantors and choir-masters held important places in the liturgical hierarchy. Music was also an important aspect of courtly life, where musicians were employed to play martial music before battles, to sing ballads celebrating the triumphs and virtues of their patrons, and to play dance music for royal entertainments. The quality of a court's musicians reflected the glory of the resident patron, so musicians were commonly retained as regular members of aristocratic establishments. Musicians, like other artisans, formed guilds which in some measure controlled the transmission of musical knowledge, and

professional musicians naturally tended to pass their knowledge and profession on to their children.

Musicians, such as Johann Sebastian Bach, learned the theory and technique of performance and composition from the masters of preceding generations. They applied their knowledge as employees of either the Church or the courts, often moving from one church or court to another in the course of their careers. Although musicians often passed their knowledge on to their children, discipleship did not take on quite the formal character it had in India, nor did stylistic schools and teaching lineages become linked with a single court as they did in the *gharanas* of North India.

The eighteenth-century creation of the modern nation-states, a new emphasis on individualism, and the development of industries based on the division of labor had profound effects on the culture of Western classical music. With the crumbling of the aristocratic order in the revolutionary environment of late eighteenth-century Europe, musicians came to embody a new, democratic ideal of individualism, while at the same time appropriating some of the charisma and respect formerly reserved for the nobility. The "labor" of music-making became increasingly specialized and hierarchical, with pride of place reserved for composers, conductors, and virtuoso soloists. Composers, such as Ludwig von Beethoven, whose predecessors had been regarded as craftsmen in the royal "workshop," rose to a position of independence and prominence. The composer was no longer a mere craftsman, but an artist with a distinct and individual voice.

Most modern students of the piano are probably unaware that they themselves are links in one or another historical chain of transmission reaching back perhaps to the time of Beethoven. Masters of the piano, such as Franz Liszt, imparted not only repertory and technique, but also a distinct and personal stylistic approach to their students. Their students in turn passed on something of that approach to succeeding generations, down to the present. These chains of transmission may be regarded as stylistic schools, but in a much freer sense than that of the nineteenth-century North Indian gharanas. In India, transmission was carefully controlled by families in an active guild system under viable courtly patronage. In Europe, the guilds and the courts were essentially things of the past.

Learning the Piano. Modern Western classical pianists undergo a kind of training which in some ways parallels the master-disciple tradition of classical Indian music. The pianist, like a sarod player, undergoes many years of private instruction, in which he or she first acquires a basic knowledge of the notes, practices technical exercises, learns simple and then more complex compositions, and gradually absorbs the aesthetic approach of the teacher or teachers, ultimately going on to develop a style of his or her own.

For most Western classical pianists, formal musical training begins in childhood, in the form of weekly private lessons with a piano teacher. The piano, unlike orchestral and band instruments, is not often used in school music ensembles, so young piano students concentrate on solo repertory and seldom becoming involved as pianists learning or performing in institutional settings. Many young pianists in the United States compete in local or state-wide competitions, whose organizers attempt to set broad technical standards for the grading of young performers, but many students never become involved in competing, and piano teachers are free to teach unencumbered by a prescribed curriculum. Serious students may continue to study for their entire lives, and those with professional aspirations often major in music at a college or music conservatory.

Mary Jo Pagano, who teaches piano in New York City, describes her approach to training young students:

I mainly teach young children up till they're ready to go to college . . .
I have to cover notation. I have to teach them how to read the music.
I have to teach them their hand positions, how to execute things.

My focus is a little bit different in, say, a nine year old, than in a seventeen year old. I teach them how to be relaxed, and how to use their arm weight, and to produce good sound and try to bring out the melody as opposed to the accompaniment.

I'm also very concerned that they begin at a very, very early age [to learn] the musical concepts. A phrase is understandable by a small child, but a lot of people forget to mention that. So I really try to talk about phrasing, as early as five years old—so that it's not something that they kind of have to learn later. That it becomes the language, because music is a language, and if you don't learn to speak in sentences, if you get caught up in the little words or the little notes, then you don't have music.¹⁸

▼ Mary Jo Pagano and student



Like sarodist Buddhadev Das Gupta, Mary Jo Pagano begins by teaching her students the basic notes and the way of producing them on her instrument, but unlike Indian classical musicians, her beginning pedagogy also emphasizes notation. This fundamental difference reflects a basic distinction between Indian and Western classical music—Indian classical music is largely improvised, but the Western classical piano repertoire consists of a large number of notated pieces.

In Indian classical music, the guru teaches repertoire and interpretation all at once, by demonstrating phrases, which the student then imitates. The guru teaches the entire fixed portion of the repertoire by rote, note by note and phrase by phrase. In Western classical music, the teacher tends to present repertoire and interpretation in two phases: first, giving the student access to the repertoire by training them to read music, and second, showing the student how to bring the music to life by demonstration (playing for the student) and discussion.

For those Western music students who do not proceed beyond the beginning stages of study, the notes on the page may remain just that—isolated sounds, which ultimately make no sense together. Therefore, Pagano tries from the very beginning stages of study, to instill in her students a sense of phrasing, the way in which notes combine to create meaningful melodies. Like many good teachers, she combines the two phases of instruction in Western classical music in a single, integrated process.

Learning to interpret musical scores does not end with learning how to read notes and rhythms. In every performance, musicians must make decisions about tempo (velocity—fast, slow, or somewhere in between), dynamics (loud or soft), attack (accented or unaccented), note duration (short, disconnected notes, or smooth melodic lines) phrasing (the grouping of notes into meaningful melodies), timbre (tone quality—piercing

and bright, or warm and dark), and the balance between the different simultaneously sounding parts in a multi-voiced texture.

Composers during the Middle Ages and Renaissance gave no indications regarding these aspects of their music, so modern musicians must study the history of early music practice to be able to make informed decisions about how to interpret early music scores. Baroque composers such as Vivaldi, Bach, and Handel began to give indications of tempo and dynamics. Classical composers such as Mozart wrote in still more interpretive directions, and many twentieth century composers, such as Igor Stravinsky, gave detailed and explicit instructions as to how they wanted each note in their scores to be played.

Western classical musicians spend their lives studying score interpretation, in part because there are endless ways of playing a single piece of music. The composer's indications tell us only so much; the rest is up to the performer. Violinist Timothy Ying compares the freedom of a Western classical musician, playing from a written score, with that of an improvising jazz musician:

I think one of the misconceptions that people have about Western classical music is that because the notes are written down, there's somehow less freedom in performing it than there is in an art form like jazz, where there's actual improvisation going on. And it might seem like that at first, but actually, there's a tremendous amount of artistic expression going on within this music. Because even though you have that limited parameter of following these specific notes . . . there's an infinite variety in the number of ways that a given passage can be played.

For instance, you can have the same passage of music, and one person could play it very nobly and heroically, and then another person could play that very same passage of music and bring out the more thoughtful and reflective quality of it. And the interesting thing is, both of those qualities are there in the music, but these two performances bring out different aspects of the same masterpiece. So it's like taking a gem, and looking at it from first one way, and then you look at it from another way. And it's still the same gem, but you're seeing different aspects of it—different facets of it. And that's the wonderful thing about hearing two different people play the same piece.¹⁹

Teachers often use metaphors, like Timothy Ying's example of the gem which can be viewed from different directions, to discuss musical ideas with their students. Mary Jo Pagano recalls that her piano teacher, Leon

Fleisher, used the image of a house to explain his approach to musical form:

I remember him often saying, "Don't begin with the detail. Begin with the large structure. You don't want to build your house around the furniture. You want to have the house, and then you want to put the furniture in the house."²⁰

The "house" which Leon Fleisher described is the entire structure of a piece of music. At an advanced level of study, the pianist strives to understand all the aspects of this structure, so that she knows exactly how each musical detail contributes to the whole.

Ultimately, although Western classical musicians learn their music from printed scores, the music has no real "life" on the page. The musician brings it to life by making it audible, and for performer and audience alike, the thrill is in the hearing. In this respect, Western classical music is no different than musical traditions in which transmission happens primarily through oral means. Some teachers of Western music, such as Dr. Shinichi Suzuki, believe that rote learning should play an important part in the early training of classical musicians, and advanced students, for whom score-reading has ceased to be a problem, may do most of their learning by listening to the playing of their teachers and other performers. Mary Jo Pagano comments on the primacy of sound in learning music:

You can't learn it [musical technique] from books. And most importantly, unlike other disciplines, music is . . . sound. And to describe a sound in words is so much more difficult than a demonstration by a great artist. Once you hear it, whatever those words were that the teacher was trying to explain to you . . . it becomes completely apparent, because you can hear it.²¹

SUMMARY

Musical transmission refers to all of the ways in which music is passed on from one person to another, one generation to another, or one culture to another. Musical enculturation, the process of learning one's own music culture, usually begins informally, with listening and perhaps singing among relatives and friends, at home or in one's local community. In many cultures, formal musical education is based on a master-apprentice model, in which one becomes a performer by undergoing prolonged training under the guidance of an established artist. Aspects of traditional apprenticeship persist in the form of private instruction and institutional learning in settings ranging from local music schools to university music departments and conservatories.

Musical learning has been transformed internationally by the spread of electronic media, which allows contemporary musicians to hear and study the performances of musicians over a century of recorded music around the globe. The spread of recording technology has greatly increased the pace of *acculturation*, the learning of music across cultures. Listeners who first hear the music of India, Ireland, or the European classical tradition are sometimes inspired to study the performance of new musics, and it is not uncommon to find Germans playing Irish music, Japanese playing European classical music, or Southeast Asians playing rock.

Alongside such cross-cultural adoptions of musical style, many contemporary genres consist of syntheses of several traditions, resulting from the mixing of immigrant populations around the world. The meaning of the term "world music" varies greatly, depending on who is using it, but it is significant that it was coined shortly after the mid-point of the twentieth century. Internationally, contemporary musicians and listeners are members of an increasingly global web of music cultures.

POINTS TO REMEMBER

1. Transmission refers to the passing on of tradition. The process of learning one's cultural traditions is called *enculturation*, and this goes on informally from the time a person is born. Musical enculturation includes the sum total of a person's informal musical experience.
2. Musical traditions are also learned formally, in the context of apprenticeships, lessons, classes, and schools.
3. Musical learning in the contemporary world involves three kinds of media: oral, written, and electronic. Oral transmission is the

process of learning through imitation directly from an exemplar of a musical tradition; written transmission involves the use of notation and/or theoretical texts; and electronic transmission involves the use of recordings and computers in the learning process.

4. Although we do not all consider ourselves to be musicians, almost all human beings learn music.
5. Musical learning has been transformed internationally by the spread of electronic media, which allows contemporary musicians to hear and study the performances of musicians over a century of recorded music around the globe. The spread of recording technology has greatly increased the pace of *acculturation*, the learning of music across cultures.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What is enculturation? What is musical transmission?
2. How are musical traditions learned?
3. What are the three kinds of media that are part of musical learning in the contemporary world? Give examples.
4. Although not all people consider themselves to be musicians, does everyone learn music?
5. What are some of the ways that musical learning has been transformed internationally by the spread of electronic media?

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. How does informal enculturation differ from formal musical training?
2. What are the main features of the guru-sisya parampara?
3. Compare the training of a Western classical pianist with that of an Indian sarod player.
4. How is learning to play jazz like learning a language?
5. How has the transmission of Irish traditional music changed over the last century?
6. What is the role of the media landscape in the training of rock and roll musicians?

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