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Author(s): Bennett Reimer

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Selfness and Otherness in Experiencing Music of Foreign Cultures

By Bennett Reimer

Northwestern University

On an early summer day in 1986 I sat in the gymnasium-like rehearsal room at the Liaoning Province Opera School in Shenyang, a large city in Northern China, in the region traditionally called Manchuria. The advanced opera students were going through several scenes from a traditional Beijing (Peking) Opera, and I was completely absorbed in the music and the acrobatic displays. I had been in China three months, studying the music education system of that country from pre-school through conservatory levels.¹ During that time I had heard Chinese opera often, in performances, rehearsals, practice rooms, and studios. Conservatory teachers and students had demonstrated the particular kind of singing style it employs and had even made several attempts (futile, it turned out) to get me to sing that way.

Toward the end of the rehearsal a young woman dressed in Western-style sweats and sneakers came out to perform a scene: if she were walking across an American campus she would be indistinguishable from the many Chinese college students in our country. As the orchestra at the side of the room started up she began to sing, solo and with other singers, all of them acting in the typical stylized way these operas are performed. I was riveted by her performance. Everything in me, as a musician, an educator, a writer on musical experience, a newly sensitized listener to (if not performer of) this music, told me that I was witnessing something extraordinary—a

quality and intensity of music making I had seldom encountered in a lifetime of musical involvements. I sat transfixed.

When it was over, I turned to the old man sitting next to me, the director of the school, who is one of China's experts on this musical genre. "Tell me about that young woman," I said. "Ah," he replied. "She is a most remarkable person. She is already very famous throughout China. She is going to be among the very best opera singers in China's history. Such a person comes along only a few times in any century." So I was right. I exulted.

I have pondered that incident many times since it occurred, trying to understand what it implied about the nature of musical experience as being both intensely personal and intensely social and contextual. In one sense, I owned the experience I had. All that makes me who I am, not only as an individual but as a product of the Western culture in which I have been steeped, came into play as I experienced that performance. The meaning of what I experienced could only be meaningful as a function of the complex meaning systems—musical, cultural, personal, professional—that define my particular selfness. As all who have travelled to the far corners of the world have discovered, sometimes to our dismay, we inevitably take ourselves along on the journeys.

But in another sense the music I heard defined my experience. That music, including the dramatic setting in which it functions, is itself a meaning system, its sonorous gestures embodying a culturally laden complex of implicit connotations, a rich amalgam of socially shared subjectivities, and a historically embedded set of significations. I had been

Bennett Reimer is the John W. Beattie Professor of Music Education and Chair of the Music Education Department at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois.

given an extraordinary opportunity to be inducted into the musical and social contexts of Chinese opera, but that certainly did not make me Chinese: nothing could. Will not the fact that this music is a product of a culture other than my own always be a determinant of my experience of it? To what extent, then, can my experience of it be congruent with that of a native Chinese?

Such questions have been thrust upon us with increasing force in recent years as we struggle to include in music education the many musics comprising the multimusical culture of America, in which practically all musics of the world have gathered in sometimes uneasy cohabitation. We need not travel abroad to encounter foreign music: it surrounds us. Even within the culture of the West there are so many diverse styles and types of music that few can be familiar with (feel "in family" with) all of them; some are bound to be "foreign." We have been importuned for at least 25 years since the Tanglewood Symposium, and recently with mounting fervor, to become more multimusical, to the point of questioning whether the heritage of Western concert music deserves any privileged or significant place in the literature we teach.² So the questions beg for attention as to whether or to what degree it is possible for people from different cultures to share the same or even similar meanings from various musics, whether we deceive ourselves to think that efforts to be "multicultural" can be more than window-dressing, whether we as individuals or the profession as a whole can cope with the daunting philosophical, sociological, political, psychological, musical, and educational conundrums entangled within this deeply complex issue.

Certainly all these questions cannot be addressed in a single article. I intend, however, to touch upon some of the issues needing

ongoing, focused attention if we are to achieve more than a superficial understanding of the many complexities entailed in cross-cultural musical experience.

The complexities are raised by the existence of two seemingly opposed positions. One position is that our selfness is largely limited to the culturally familiar, and that, concomitantly, all otherness is dominantly other. While perhaps we can share some small measure of other cultures insofar as they are related to our indigenous one, the

circle of meaning in which we are capable of operating is severely circumscribed. Furthermore, in order to achieve the depths of meaning of which we are capable, we need a set of limits on the breadths of meanings we incorporate, to avoid the kind of facile dilettantism that dabbles in a little of this and a little of that with only superficial understanding.

This position is widespread in American culture at all levels. People, it is often said, are at home in the world only within the shelter of a highly defined culture. They may venture out into the world of other cultures during the day and evening, but at night, when the psyche requires homecoming, the cloak of immediate cultural family is what provides it. In truth,

cultural sharing in America does seem to be largely an activity of daylight and the evening hours. When it is time to go home, a retreat to the safety of social uniformity often occurs, both physically in where people live, and psychologically in how they live. We have, perhaps, more instances of fully integrated families and neighborhoods than many if not most countries, but even in cities, where such integration is most likely, cultural enclaves seem to be the rule.

There is a positive and a negative side to the reality of cultural homogeneity. On the positive side is the comfort and strength one

“
One must go
beyond one's
present self,
through sounds
being encountered,
to a self
not yet known
but discovered
through the
decisions one is
led to make by
the act of
creation.
”

“As all who have travelled to the far corners of the world have discovered, sometimes to our dismay, we inevitably take ourselves along on the journeys.”

receives from having a defined home base from which to encounter and understand the larger world. That base, derived first from the home in which one was reared and later from the interrelated system of similar homes defining a subculture, provides a sense of self so powerful as to warrant the term “soul.” Soul food, soul rites and rituals, soul music, is that which lies at the root of our identities, nourishing us at the wellsprings of our selfness. We are who we are in large degree because of the home we claim in a bewildering world, and that home is a culturally defined one. Music is a powerful agent in forging such a definition.

The negative side to cultural individuality is separatism, or what is often called particularism. In that view community is defined according to the separate history and present condition of each particular social group, the separateness being a function of the oppressive forces that have marked the group as being different. Self identity then relies on the safety one’s cultural enclave provides from threatening forces outside it, that safety requiring the protection of the enclave by strict adherence to its tenets and its cultural practices. The soulfulness of being a member of a cultural family becomes imbued with a pressing political purpose, inevitably affecting the psychology of membership in the direction of segmentation from the larger society.

We are now witnessing the resultant conflicts of particularism in education, in the presence of ideological extremism based on cultural divisions.³ This is perhaps inevitable given the realities of racial and ethnic tensions in American history. But another aspect of that reality is the existence of an ideal beneath the politics—an ideal of a shared American culture that is by nature also multicultural, in which people’s spiritual identification with a subculture is defined by that spirit rather than by their need for protection. Clearly we have not achieved that ideal. That accounts for much of the complexity in the task of creating a music educa-

tion program that honors and reaps the benefits of both the selfness of cultural identification and the otherness of cultural diversity.

The second position often encountered about the issues of our multimusical American culture focuses on otherness as an aspect of selfness. It stresses the universality of musical experience, claiming that all cultural musics are manifestations of a single human need for the meanings music uniquely provides. Otherness, this position claims, is primarily stylistic, and can be managed by exposure to a variety of musical styles along with background information about how each music works within its cultural setting. Selfness, while no doubt influenced by particularly familiar musics, can be expanded to include one’s sharing of all the other musics one encounters in whatever attempts one makes to encounter them. Music education should be one of the major influences on the catholicity of young people’s tastes, helping introduce them to the many musical styles they might otherwise not have the opportunity to incorporate into their personal repertoires of experience.

As in the position stressing selfness and cultural identification, the second position, stressing an open sharing of musics other than one’s own and an identification with all the musics available in the larger culture, also has both positive and negative sides.

The positive side is the reality that music is a panhuman phenomenon, existing always and everywhere to serve particular human needs. Those needs, it may be argued, stem from the possession by all human beings of a common nature. The playing out of that shared nature, however, takes many diverse forms. That fact unfortunately has led some people to assume that the diversity of cultural behaviors, customs, beliefs, styles of thinking, and so forth, demonstrates that there is no common human nature. It has also led to the claim that each human being is entirely able to choose what he or she will become, free from any defining essence in a shared human nature. Such posi-

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tions render futile any attempt to find universally existent human characteristics underlying an activity such as music, and each culture’s music would have to be regarded as being *sui generis*.

As Mortimer Adler explains in a recent book on such issues, we can concede the role of culture in determining the patterns of human behavior. “Since there are no instinctively determined patterns of human behavior, as there are in social insects and other lower animals; since all human behavior is learned behavior, which is not the case in other animals—it follows that the way human beings have learned to use their minds determines how they behave. Their different styles of behavior reflect acquired differences in mentality—in the ways their minds have been shaped by experience and by nurture.”⁴ But such concessions, he claims, do not in any sense contradict the other aspect of human reality—that there exists “a specific human nature and a common human mind shared by all persons regardless of the subset of human population to which they belong and regardless of their idiosyncratic individuality.”⁵ There is a level of the human condition that is both transcultural and transpersonal. Unlike other species, in which many if not all patterns of behavior are predetermined by actual innate endowment, behaviors of humans are based on innate endowment of *potentialities*. All human communities and cultures share the same desires and needs, the same potentialities of sensibility and memory and imagination and intellect, even though these shared characteristics are nurtured differently under different social conditions.

What the cultural anthropologists are describing when they report diverse patterns of human behavior in different subsets of the human population are all nurtural differences. These nurtural differences exist as acquired behavioral habits or dispositions. Underlying diverse habits are the same natural powers or potentialities. Nurtural differences should never be interpreted either as natural differences or as a basis for denying the existence of a common nature. All

the forms of racism and sexism with which we are acquainted have been prejudices bred by the error of attributing to nature what are only the products of nurture.⁶

Music, I would suggest, is a paradigm case of the validity of Adler’s position. The diversity of musics of various cultures reflects nurtural differences in the human being’s innate propensity to create meaning systems by using sounds purposively deployed. The variety of deployments is vast: the potential to so deploy sounds is inherent in the human creature. And the belief that purposively formed musical sounds are humanly meaningful is ubiquitous. As Robert Walker asserts in his book about culturally diverse musical belief systems,

What can be confidently asserted is that all cultures tend to believe that their respective musical practices reflect their respective value systems as both symbols and as more than symbols. They regard musical sound as intrinsically possessing certain powers that pertain to the most important things in life—whether to a notion of scientifically defined perfectness or to the source of ultimate power and creation itself emanating from a spirit world The place of music in the belief systems of all cultures suggests that music itself must be, to some degree, systematically organized, just as the society to which the music contributes such a powerful force is systematically organized.⁷

The view stressing the universality of music (not the universality of any particular musical belief system or particular cultural practice but the universality of the human potential to find music individually and culturally meaningful) provides a basis for communion both within and across cultural boundaries. The otherness of foreign music is precisely why we need to attend to it in an attempt to integrate what we can of it into our own experience. If it were not other, there would be no issue to discuss. But that otherness consists of particular playings out of the universally shared trait of musicality, and we can explore those particularities with some measure of musical and educational coherence. We can assume, as a working hypothesis, that all musics will involve the powers of the human

mind to structure sounds, to be able to perceive those structures, to find them subjectively compelling as individually experienced and as a socially shared experience. Music always engages the human imagination, the human capacity for skilled control of the body to produce sounds sensitively, the ability to remember sounds both within particular musical events and across the many events comprising a style. To make musical sounds, all cultures use both the voice and a variety of invented instruments to extend what the voice can do. All cultures recognize both continuity and diversity in musical performances and products, ranging across a continuum stressing continuity (Japanese, Chinese) to stressing change (some African societies, North American Plains Indians).⁸ It may even be the case, as suggested by the work of recent music theorists, that many intramusical processes—the particular uses of pitch, attack, duration, intensity, timbre, to form groupings, metrical structures, hierarchies of events, and so forth—operate in some way in all musics.⁹

Even in terms of belief systems about music and the arts there are often striking similarities among some cultures that would otherwise seem, on the surface, to have little in common. The separatist tendency to bifurcate the world, assuming that there is ours and then all the rest which must be entirely other, misrepresents by its lack of subtlety the reality that cultural differences are often differences in degree rather than necessarily in kind. It is simply too facile to think that Western art consists of one thing, and that all other art is entirely another; this grossly misrepresents a far more complex set of interrelations.

Let me cite as an example the art of the Yoruba people (now some 18 million) in southwestern Nigeria, who represent an ancient culture divided into city states much like those of ancient Greece. A recent exhibition of masterworks of Yoruba art spanning nine centuries, displayed at the Art Institute of Chicago (February 10 to April 1, 1990), presented the following explanatory note displayed at the entrance to the gallery (copied in its entirety):

The Yoruba have developed a vocabulary of aesthetic criticism for discussing works worthy

to be called art. The Yoruba have the concept of “*oju-inu*”—the inner eye—the insight—of the artist, and the artist’s discernment or understanding of the subject portrayed. The term “*aju-una*” refers to the design consciousness of the artist, to the originality of the composition. “*Ifarabale*” denotes the artist’s reason, self-control, and composure, reflected in the mastery of the instruments with which the sculptor, blacksmith, potter, beadworker, or weaver works. Viewing a work, knowledgeable members of the community will comment on its sensitivity and perceptiveness (“*imoju-mora*”) and on its enduring qualities (“*tito*”).

Surely Yoruba art has its authentic being in its own vision of the human condition. But just as surely that vision has a good deal in common with that held in the Western world. Access to the experience of Yoruba art would be aided by an understanding of its similarities with Western art as well as its differences from it.

This may be the case, to some lesser or greater extent, with every culture’s art, even if at the opposite end of the continuum where similarities are not apparent. Fundamentally, all art springs from the same source in the common human condition of sentience—of being conscious of one’s self in a world of others and of being capable of exploring the shared experience of being a self among others through humanly created, perceptible forms. The positive aspect of the position focusing on the universality of art is that it provides a basis for believing that sharing of foreign musics is at least possible.

What, then, is the negative aspect of this position? The image of a continuum, on which some musics are quite similar to others and some are very dissimilar, raises the issue of degree. To what *degree* is it possible to hope to share the distinctive characteristics of the culturally different musics existing on a continuum of similarity and dissimilarity from one’s own? The negative aspect of the universalist viewpoint is its tendency to gloss over the real and important differentia that constitute the uniqueness of each culture’s music, and that precisely such uniqueness constitutes the essential character of each music. We should want to preserve rather than dilute the differences in each music because every difference is a lens through which we are provided a glimpse of the hu-

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man condition that only that particular music can provide. Each such glimpse is precious. No matter where on the continuum, the differences themselves are essential for each music to be experienced for what it genuinely is, as differentiated from others anywhere else on the continuum. So a focus on the distinctive characteristics through which a culture’s music manifests itself, as much as on any similarities, would seem to be required if we are to confront the authenticity of that music.

That, of course, exacerbates the distinction between self and other. To the degree that one focuses on distinctiveness one is confronted with more and more otherness. To the degree that one focuses on universals, one approaches the self but with less of a genuine confrontation with the being of the other. We are thrown against the fundamental dilemma inherent in being selves among others.

But are we prone, perhaps, to overestimate differences among musics, making the dilemma seem more vexing than it really is? Can we not project our own system of musical thinking on another and assume that it will overlap a little or a lot, as the argument for universality suggests is possible? Can proper and determined effort take us a long way toward being able to share more otherness than we might fear we cannot, especially if we make the effort in a willing and open spirit?

Probably not easily and not entirely. While Walker recognizes underlying unities among culturally diverse musics, as mentioned previously, he also makes the argument that differences are fundamental and real, and that music is a particularly difficult phenomenon to grasp when one is not a member of its culture:

The situation of the outsider trying to understand unknown musical sounds and behavior is similar to that experienced by anthropologists when they seek to investigate some unknown

culture. Music poses problems in this regard because its sonic structural and symbolic systems obey different laws from those of language, or those of visual art, making it a most difficult form of communication to understand from the outside. . . . Unlike the sounds of language or the shapes of visual art, the sounds of music relate only to music. . . .

The general problem in music thus hinges on the difficulties experienced by the outsider attempting to decode communications that are known by the insider—someone who has grown up with the musical code. More specifically, the problem in music concerns decoding and understanding the significance of the particular choices of sound made by each musical culture, which tend to be very different from each other [I]t is in such choices that cultural belief systems are reflected. One understands the choices in terms of the belief system, not the other way round, and in such understanding lies the key to the musical and cultural significance of musical sound.¹⁰

Although much about Walker’s position deserves a closer examination than he provides, certainly it is a given that much more is involved in musical understanding than can be gained at the level of sheer sonic analysis. One can reasonably claim, as he does, that the search for universals has been fixated at the level of formalistic dissection.¹¹ But that does not in any way negate the role of those “particular choices of sound” that make each culture’s music sound the way it does as systematically organized, as Walker demonstrates by his own recognition of important shared qualities among all musics including, essentially, qualities of form. It would seem to be necessary, in order to appreciate the cultural distinctiveness of a particular musical practice, to investigate both its cultural context and its musical existence as sounds organized in particular ways. The interaction of the two is where the deepest insights can be found about both distinctiveness and commonality, I would argue. Every music will manifest both its distinctness to its culture and its universality as music in that

interaction between its general cultural contexts and its particular musical features and their organization. Neglecting either factor, or their interactions, is likely to yield a skewed and incomplete picture of the reality of any music. A “social studies” approach to studying music will not be sufficient. Neither will sonic analysis.

This view is expressed precisely by Marcia M. Eaton, who, after a careful examination of several issues relating to both context and criticism, offers the following summary (presented in terms of the visual arts but intended by her to apply to all the arts):

1. In discussions of art, information about context (history of production) draws the viewer's attention to certain intrinsic features of things.
2. The features to which attention is thus drawn are considered worthy of attention in some aesthetic tradition(s).
3. Aesthetic traditions are those which identify intrinsic features that yield delight upon perception and reflection.
4. Objects whose intrinsic features repay sustained perception and reflection are aesthetically valuable.¹²

Yet, useful as this may be in drawing attention to the need to balance an experience of music by including both an awareness of its cultural context and of its musical individuality, the act of awareness itself must be understood to be contextually embedded. That is, one cannot simply add contextual information to a piece being experienced as if it was contextless. The experience itself—the perceptual awareness of what is being heard—is itself a function of what Jerrold Levinson calls “appropriate construal” within a musical-cultural context of meanings.¹³

The embeddedness of music in cultural habituations applies to Western music as well as to any others. For example, to correctly or relevantly construe Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, Levinson argues, a “comprehending listener” would have to hear the music as tonal, as symphonic, as Romantic, as roughly in sonata form, as specifically Brucknerian, as a series of connected events including responses to tensions and releases and expectations and fulfillments, as an act of performance, as being gestural and emotional, and as having wider resonances (mythic, nature-loving).¹⁴ Listeners outside the culture of this music, unable to incorporate such

construals in their experience of it, could not be said to “understand” it. One's understanding need not be at the level of verbalizations: musical understanding is essentially nonconceptual in the sense of not having to be verbally mediated.¹⁵ Understanding is tacit and intuitive, resting fundamentally on a history of aural absorption. We need to be able, to some degree, to internalize musical events (Eaton's “intrinsic features”) as events occurring within a tradition. While all music is musical, all music is also culturally conditioned and must be construed as such if it is to be understood.

We find ourselves confronting what seem to be several overlapping yet divergent forces. Selfness is real. We cannot simply shed the culturally derived beingness of our selves whenever we might choose to. Nor should we want to—it is, after all, what defines us as individuals and provides us with an identity. We can savor that identity without building separatist walls around it to isolate it in order to keep other selves safely out. Those other selves are also part of our lived world. We know that all other cultures share the universal human condition and all manifest that condition in the phenomenon we call music. That phenomenon is identifiable as such despite its diverse manifestations—it is comprised of many features common to all cultures. But the diversities are precisely what provide each music with its particular selfness. In the distinctiveness of each culture's music lies both its authentic being and, inevitably, its otherness for those not members of that culture.

The seeming impasse created by the coexistence of selfness and otherness can be addressed in a meaningful way by a notion found useful in the philosophy of both natural and social science—the notion of incommensurability. In his book exploring the dilemmas caused by both objectivism and relativism, the philosopher Richard J. Bernstein traces the development of ideas that have altered our understanding of the nature of rationality in scientific inquiry, leading us to recognize that rationality is historically situated, serves practical ends that are humanly defined, and involves choices and judgments.¹⁶ In social science

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as well, hermeneutics, the practice of interpretation, plays a defining role. Both in natural and physical science we are faced with the necessity to understand orientations and practices different from our own. How is it possible to do so?

In the natural sciences, thinkers such as Thomas S. Kuhn and Imre Feyerabend have raised the issue of different paradigms—competing schools of thought about how to construe the world and how science should be conducted. It would seem impossible for any dialogue between proponents of different paradigms to take place, or for any genuine understanding of each different paradigm to exist, given the fundamentally different premises of each. Bernstein traces the complex (and often convoluted) issues entailed, and concludes that “. . . rival paradigm theories are logically *incompatible* (and, therefore, really in conflict with each other); *incommensurable* (and, therefore, they cannot always be measured against each other point by point); and *comparable* (capable of being compared with each other in multiple ways without requiring the assumption that there is or must always be a common, fixed grid by which we measure progress).”¹⁷

This position from the natural sciences can apply as well to the fields of sociology and anthropology. As Feyerabend explains in an example of trying to understand the art of a long dead culture such as that of ancient Greece, we are not reduced, by virtue of the archaic Greek style and world view being incommensurable with those that have replaced it, to being able to only dumbly contemplate it with no hope of understanding it. We can indeed gain valid insights about ancient Greek art by the skillful application of comparisons and contrasts, and in order to accomplish this we must both preserve the selfness of us who are making the judgments, and the otherness of what we are attempting to understand. “The basic presup-

position here is that we can understand what is distinctive about this incommensurable style and form of life—and we do not do this by jumping out of our own skins (and language) and transforming ourselves, by some sort of mystical intuition or empathy, into archaic Greeks. Rather, the analysis proceeds by a careful attention to detail—to the various ‘building blocks’—working back and forth in order to appreciate and highlight similarities with and differences from other styles and forms of life.”¹⁸

Accomplishing this requires that we avoid two extremes. One is to assume that differences are so complete that we can only stand in mute ignorance before an example of art from a past or different culture. The other extreme is to facilely project our own beliefs and attitudes onto the foreign art. In between, if we apply patience, insight, imagination, and attention to detail, we can develop understandings that are, at the least, defensible if not incontrovertible.

Further, the very act of doing so not only leads us to reasonably valid interpretations of foreign art, but also helps us become, through our attempts to understand their distinctiveness, more sensitive to and critically aware of our own particular biases and presuppositions. Here also there are two extremes to avoid—the romantic fantasy that what is foreign is also necessarily superior, and the reverse, which is that our own position is the truly correct one:

For at their best, Kuhn and Feyerabend show us that we can understand the ways in which there are incommensurable paradigms, forms of life, and traditions, and that we can understand what is distinctive about them without imposing beliefs, categories, and classifications that are so well entrenched in our own language games that we fail to appreciate their limited perspective. Furthermore, in and through the process of subtle, multiple comparison and contrast, we not only come to understand the alien phenomenon that we are studying but better come to understand ourselves. This openness of understanding and communication goes beyond dis-

putes about the development of the natural sciences; it is fundamental to all understanding.¹⁹

The fundamental requirement for understanding is to take into account what exists outside ourselves. This seems to me the major factor in the need for all people to encounter and to try to understand musics both from their own culture and from those with which they are less familiar. Encountering any music honestly, openly, and sympathetically requires an act of expansion of the self, because every musical experience presents one with something outside one's self needing to be assimilated. This applies as well, I would argue, to the creation of music through composing, performing, or improvising, in that to do so authentically one must go beyond one's present self, through sounds being encountered, to a self not yet known but discovered through the decisions one is led to make by the act of creation. Even when a performance is of a ritual music fully ingrained, the performance requires an adjustment of the self at that moment to the needs of the musical practice—an adjustment of one's self to demands from outside the self. And when listening to music composed and/or performed by other people, one is confronted with what is "fundamental to all understanding," the bending of who one is to the demands of something exterior to oneself.

The same process is in operation in all human relationships: In each act of relationship our selves are confronted with and must sympathetically adapt to the reality of an other. Music manifests powerfully this fundamental reality of human consciousness—that we exist in a world of meanings we experience alone in our own skins, while also being capable of recognizing and being influenced by the coexperience of those with whom we share the world. The expansion within us of that coexisting world is thus an expansion of our selves. Every act of musical experience expands our inner world. The experience of foreign musics does so dramatically, in forcing us to push beyond the circle of assumptions more easily accommodated within a familiar system to a circle incommensurable with the familiar yet understandable through sympathetic effort. In studying the musics of others—especially for-

eign others—we come to a deeper understanding both of our selves as individuals and our selves as relative to other systems of being we can experience meaningfully.

As I listened to the rehearsal of traditional Chinese opera in Manchuria, I was aware of the growth I had undergone over the three months since I had arrived there and had first been introduced to this operatic tradition. My initial experiences were so saturated with my Western heritage and its tacit presumptions about appropriate vocal tone color, instrument timbres, melodic variety, harmonic interest, and so on, including acting style being appropriately based on a realistic model, that it was difficult for me to even begin to respond empathically. It was only with growing insights about and awareness of its cultural functions and history, its connectedness with language and myth and social values, and its intramusical and dramatic techniques, that it began to be accessible to me through the barriers of my own very different musical and cultural belief system. I wanted to be open to its otherness, but at first I found myself resistant to yielding something of my selfness. As I managed to yield, I found myself becoming more and more intrigued by the very differences—contextual and musical—I had at first found so difficult to assimilate within my own experience. I discovered that I did not have to give up who I am, and that in fact I could not do so, but that I could be something I never was before in adapting myself to a way of experiencing quite new to me. My selfness was not abandoned: it was expanded. The foundation of my self remained what it had become, and I did not then and do not now deceive myself that I was listening as a native. But I was listening as a different foreigner—one who had become able, I think, to internalize some measure of the authenticity of this very other genre into my own broadened subjectivity.

I was also aware of the many changes taking place in Chinese opera, and in all Chinese traditional musics, as a result of recent unprecedented influences from the West. So powerful are Western cultural and artistic incursions into Chinese life that many there feel that the old ways may soon be lost or so

altered as to become essentially different from what they were. In the nine conservatories in China, the Traditional Chinese Music departments are overshadowed in support and prestige by the Western Music departments; and throughout popular Chinese culture, especially in the more up-to-date cities, Western influences are ubiquitous and powerful. Fewer young people want to attend Chinese opera, and everyone professionally engaged in it fears that it is fast becoming an anomaly. So changes are being made. The orchestra I listened to that afternoon had several electronically amplified instruments ("To appeal to young people"), performances are bypassing some of the less dramatically active sections, more excerpts of the "popular" segments are being presented, and so forth. So what I heard in China was very much a genre in process of significant change, ironically in response to and in the direction of the belief system I represented and that I was trying, with some measure of success, to adapt to theirs.

This phenomenon of growing Western cultural hegemony is, of course, occurring throughout the world. Within our United States boundaries there seems to be a continuum of effects as foreign musics and Western musics come into contact with one another. At one end of the continuum the overwhelming availability of Western musics can so erode the viability of some foreign musics as to cause them to become progressively weaker as a cultural force and eventually to be abandoned. This possibility adds special poignancy to our task of helping to preserve the variety of musics immigrants have brought and continue to bring with them.

At the other end of the continuum has been a heightened sense of urgency during recent years about that preservation effort, and an increasing acceptance of ethnic self-identification as being a healthy posture for Americans to take. There are many points along the continuum, adding greatly to the complexities of the issues we face as music educators. My personal experiences of the benefits to my self in encountering foreign musics, and my growing understanding of the theoretical bases for how and to what degree such encounters are possible for everyone,

lead me to hope that members of the music education profession will continue to address these issues wholeheartedly and thoughtfully, both in theory and in practice.

Notes

1. My work in China was part of a research exchange program sponsored by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund and administered by Harvard Project Zero and the Center for U.S.-China Arts Exchange at Columbia University. For a report of the entire program, see *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 23:1, Spring 1989, which includes my "Music Education in China: An Overview and Some Issues."
2. A clear example of this view is given by Austin B. Caswell, "How We Got Into Canonicity and What It Has Done to Us," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 25:4, 1991. A summary of Caswell's paper, and a response to it by Michael L. Mark, is presented in the *Philosophy of Music Education Newsletter*, 3:1, November, 1990.
3. For a trenchant discussion of this situation, see Diane Ravitch, "Multiculturalism Yes, Particularism No," *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, October 24, 1990.
4. Mortimer J. Adler, *Intellect: Mind Over Matter*, New York: Macmillan, 1990, p. 136.
5. Adler, pp. 136-137.
6. Adler, p. 138.
7. Robert Walker, *Musical Beliefs*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1990, p. 195.
8. Bruno Nettl, "Music of Other Cultures," in Bennett Reimer and Edward G. Evans, *The Experience of Music*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972, p. 387.
9. This is particularly suggested by Fred Lerdahl and Jay Jackendoff, *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983.
10. Walker, pp. 12-13.
11. Walker, p. 4.
12. Marcia M. Eaton, "Context, Criticism, and Art Education: Putting Meaning into the Life of Sisyphus," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 24:1, Spring 1990, p. 105.
13. Jerrold Levinson, "Musical Literacy," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 24:1, Spring 1990, p. 25.
14. Levinson, pp. 19-20.
15. Levinson, p. 24.
16. Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983.
17. Bernstein, p. 86.
18. Quoted in Bernstein, p. 90. An interesting discussion of the implications and limitations of the notion of incommensurability for educational research is offered by Steven I. Miller and Marcel Fredericks, "Postpositivistic Assumptions and Educational Research: Another View," *Educational Researcher*, 20:4, May 1991.
19. Bernstein, pp. 91-92. 