

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES ON MUSICAL DIVERSITY

Address for the European Music Council, Friday April 21, 2006

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There is no scarcity of music and there is no scarcity of musical diversity.

I just worked out that on any day in my city, I can probably hear 50 or 60 genres of music on free to air radio. A good record store probably can offer recordings of hundreds of genres. And goodness knows how many musics are available online on my computer.

In my country, more than 80% of the population is listening to the very narrow range of genres of music provided by the multinational music industry and its giant marketing machine. However, if they have only a little bit of curiosity, these listeners can also find whatever music is currently on the periphery of the pop world – electronica, drums’n’bass, country, folk and so on. Even at that level, there is considerable musical diversity.

So as the Americans would say: ‘Whaht’s the prahblem?’

Well, some of the very processes that make this music available to us can also make it vulnerable. In the midst of such plenty, we will hardly notice if little bits drop off here and there and disappear.

It may not change my musical life too much if Finnish yoicking or Tibetan throat-singing disappear, but one thing we do know is that if we can hear any of this music on a recording, it’s because someone loved it enough, found it important enough, to make that recording. If we start talking about the possibility that one of those musics will disappear, the person who made the recording is likely to get a bit emotional and so are the musicians.

When Norman Lebrecht starts talking about the imminent disappearance of western classical music he is really enjoying himself and at the same time making a good living. But I am likely to become somewhat anxious -- not so much because I am worried about a diminution of musical diversity on the planet, but because classical music is important to me and I want to keep it around. If I like to grumble to my friends, and who doesn’t? -- I might grumble about the threat to classical music and I’ll find a few that agree with me and we can have a great time grumbling together.

Then we find a jazz lover who fears the imminent demise of jazz and he has some jazz grumblers. So the classicals and the jazzers get together for a joint grumble and if one of us is a journalist or is politically inclined we can start to grumble in public.

And then Felipe de Leon visits from the Philippines and he is grumbling about the threats to some traditional genres of Filipino music. So then we publicly grumble about losing classical music and jazz and Filipino traditional music and suddenly someone who has just read about the threat from the loss of biodiversity realises that we can say we are losing musical diversity. And that sounds much more important than 'I'm worried that my local jazz joint may close next month', so now we have a really big and noble cause.

So that's the comic strip about musical diversity.

The point I want to rescue from the comic strip is that in the face of our extraordinary daily experience of musical diversity, I think that people start to talk about the loss of diversity when a music they love and find important is under threat. It's an emotional thing. We may externalise it and build principles around it, but at the core it's emotional and somehow personal.

I am going to talk about a number of contexts in which the loss of musical diversity becomes an issue. Firstly, we will look at some effects of globalisation – the flood of western pop music, the commercial force behind it, the international trade manoeuvres to beat down the defence of local cultures, and the world's protective response through the new UNESCO Convention for cultural diversity. I touch briefly also on UNESCO's long history of concern about cultural diversity. Secondly, we will look at the loss of musical diversity if traditional musics disappear. Thirdly, the issues around policies concerning the cultures of immigrants. Fourthly, the threat to diversity through state censorship and suppression of music. And finally, some economic issues that can affect musical diversity.

Globalisation and the onslaught of pop

The thing that has probably activated the most concern about musical diversity is globalisation. People in non-Western cultures face a tidal wave of Western pop music, backed by the wealth and marketing power of enormous Western multinational corporations. It's not only non-Western cultures that feel this. Most Western countries also find themselves engulfed by this music. The fear is that we will be reduced to some sort of homogeneous global musical glug, with the loss of everything local and distinctive.

We wouldn't be quite so agitated if the young showed some flicker of resistance. For many, even the use of the word capitulation would be an exaggeration. The kids in the less developed countries have seen the luxury of the Western life style on the television and not surprisingly, they want to get close to it. Most kids in the west also respond only to the marketing. They are not going to prefer the music of their own country on the basis of patriotism or principle.

The elders who resent this foreign onslaught are in many cases worried about the survival of their traditional musics. For the kids, that is the music of yesterday and not of interest – perhaps even slightly embarrassing. I will come back to that.

It is as well to remind ourselves that the main beneficiaries of this trade have been a handful of multinational corporations. I used to think ‘Oh well, boys will be boys. Corporate bosses will be corporate bosses. We are just seeing the free, untrammelled entrepreneurial spirit at work, controlling as much of the market as possible, buying up the competition, squeezing out every last dollar of profit.’”

It’s not quite that innocent.

I was involved with putting music’s case to the Australian government during its negotiations for a so-called free trade agreement with the USA. I discovered that there was no mystery about the origins of the US policy with regard to culture. It came straight from the entertainment industry. The official industry body includes as members the multinational record companies or their US offices (remembering that most of the major record companies are not from the USA). This industry body made many public pronouncements about its priorities and these clearly showed up in the official policy stance of the US government.

It is the audiovisual sector that is the special interest of the USA. The USA position in trade negotiations was initially for the removal of all preferential treatment for local music and television productions.

The US has had some difficulty in getting agreement to this and other agendas in the *multilateral* negotiations under the World Trade Organisation. To get around this obstacle it is negotiating a succession of *bilateral* treaties which may cumulatively collapse the problem in the WTO. In these treaties, it seeks to remove any local regulations to protect and promote local music or audiovisual productions. In many cases, such regulations and subsidies are necessary simply to support valued cultural activities that could not survive from earnings in the local market. Sometimes the regulations are intended to ensure that local culture can survive the onslaught of cultural exports from the US and other big net exporters of entertainment.

We have an interesting example in South Korea. Korea has built a successful film industry by requiring that 40% of the country’s cinema screens should show Korean movies. Over a period of years Korea attempted to negotiate a free trade agreement with the USA. The US insisted that it would not accept the screen quota. According to people in the Korean film industry, Korean resistance was met by an ultimatum from the US that unless the screen quota was changed, the entire trade negotiations would be disbanded. Recently, the Korean government capitulated and the quota was reduced to 25%. In a minute, we’ll see why the US might have compromised.

More typically, governments support local film or music production by requiring that some minimum percentage of radio and television broadcast time be devoted to local productions. The US argues that this is 'trade-distorting' and unfair because US productions are excluded from those programs. However, in the agreements with, for instance, Chile and Australia, the US has agreed to accept the local content quotas at essentially their current levels, recognising, it says, the cultural value to our countries.

This actually is deceptive. It does not really indicate an agreement with the cultural argument. It is based on a conviction that free to air broadcasting is about to become obsolete. The US objective is to remove protective regulations from all forms of digital delivery.

The sections of the Australia / US agreement that deal with digital content and new media allow Australia to regulate in favour of local content but under such extraordinary constraints and conditions – including what amounts to a requirement for US consultation and approval – that it will be virtually impossible to negotiate. Without such regulations, we fear there will be a loss of local content and therefore musical diversity. If your country is negotiating a trade agreement with the USA, expect a similar demand.

More broadly, the effect is that the dimensions of the cultural life of one country are constrained by the trade ambitions of another country. Let me turn that into a personal statement. 'I don't want the culture of my country weakened because the corporations in your country want bigger profits. Whoever you are.'

It is because of the threat to culture from international trade liberalisation agreements that the General Conference of UNESCO last year passed the *Convention for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions*. Let's call it the Convention for cultural diversity. As you no doubt know, the vote was 148 in favour to two against, with four abstentions. The two votes against were the US and Israel and the four abstentions could be seen also to be US client states, my own country Australia shamefully being one of them. The lobbying by the US beforehand was extraordinary and one might see the vote being in part a vote for cultural diversity and cultural sovereignty and part a vote against being pushed around.

The Convention can be seen as having two aspects. In the first, it asserts the right of signatory states to protect and promote their own cultures. It does not require them to do so but simply, as I said, asserts their cultural sovereignty, to use the increasingly familiar term. If a number of states maintain their own music in this way, then when we put them all together, we will see a diversity of musics. This would be so even if they each had only one music.

In the second aspect, the Convention *encourages* states to protect and promote a diversity of cultures within their borders. There would be very few states that would not want the right to assert their cultural sovereignty, but there might be quite a number that are not so keen on encouraging cultural diversity within their borders. This might explain why signatories do not have to undertake to foster internal diversity. We might say that they undertake only to be encouraged to do so.

The Convention was conceived by the international group of cultural ministers, named the International Network for Cultural Policy. The cultural ministers proposed to UNESCO that it should take their concept and give it the status of an international agreement.

Nevertheless, UNESCO has had an interest in the cultural diversity issue virtually since its inception after World War 2. Katerina Stenou has written an interesting paper tracing this history. Initially, UNESCO was concerned not with promoting diversity so much as ameliorating it. Cultural difference was seen as contributing to armed conflict. UNESCO wanted to ameliorate this source of conflict and its solution was to promote greater education about cultures, leading to greater understanding between them. Cultures that better understood and appreciated each other were much less likely to go to war.

One might guess that this perception forms at least part of the background for the continuing push for a multicultural music curriculum in schools. We can appreciate each other's cultures through our musics. Of course, in the half century since UNESCO was formed, we have entered the new world of communications and to the desire to avoid conflict might be added the personal and economic advantages of a broad cross-cultural understanding.

UNESCO's perceptions evolved as the world changed. In the 50s and 60s, as colonial states gained their independence, UNESCO changed from a policy of bridging cultural difference to celebrating it. The unique cultural identities of the new states became part of the justification for their independence. The states were regarded as unitary and so cultural diversity was still seen to exist between states rather than within them. This is consistent with the mandatory aspects of the recent Convention and the assertion of cultural sovereignty. In the 80s and 90s UNESCO's interest moved increasingly to cultural democracy and multiculturalism within national borders. This is reflected in the optional aspects of the Convention, those encouraging support to cultural diversity within national borders.

The threats to traditional musics

I'm sure that when UNESCO was encouraging this diversity within borders, it had in its mind the survival of traditional cultures. When I first mentioned the effects of globalisation, I noted that one of the fears is that the international hit parade will

deal a death blow to local traditional musics. There are other important reasons that traditional musics are in difficulty.

Essentially, as I understand it, the problem is that traditional musics grew out of particular life circumstances and societal structures. These are changing with the incursions of new technologies and the drift to the cities. So the traditional bases for the musics are lost and they begin to fade.

Fearing the permanent loss of these musics, some countries have embarked on enormous programs to record and document them. I have accounts of such programs from Vietnam and China, for instance.

But simply to put the music into a museum is not a satisfying solution for many people from these countries. IMC had a regional meeting in Asia in 2004. There was much discussion of this issue. The despairing complaint was that the traditions are being lost because the young simply are not interested. They want the music that comes from the present, is fashionable, cool. Traditional music is yesterday's music and is perhaps from a world with which they would rather not be identified.

The solution most often proposed was to teach the traditional musics to children in school. I know that this is a priority in Africa also.

That certainly seems like a good idea but I wonder whether it will result in a return of the traditional musics to everyday musical life. That, it seems to me, would be the preferred outcome. But if these musics really are to have a solid footing, do they not need to have a living basis in contemporary society? And since society has departed from the old traditions, would that not require changes in the music? Would the supporters of the traditions find that acceptable or would they see it as worsening the problem? Would we have an increase in musical diversity, or a loss?

Migration, assimilation and multiculturalism

Let us look at another aspect of globalisation. Mostly, we think of globalisation as movements of goods or services, or money, or electrons over the internet. But there is another very important aspect of globalisation and that is the movement of people. In part, this movement is for tourism and travel, which bring to us some direct experiences of other cultures and other musics in their home countries. This surely must increase the audience that is open to unfamiliar forms of music.

But perhaps even more important is the movement of people for the purpose of migration. We can infer that this has been going on over the entire history of human existence, but it has greatly accelerated in the last half century. The result is that many countries have very large recent immigrant communities, sometimes of great cultural diversity.

Whether this diversity is brought to the light of day can depend a lot on government policy. In the years after World War 2, the reigning philosophy was for assimilation. Immigrants should abandon their old cultures and apply all their energies to assimilating themselves into the culture of their new country. 'E pluribus unum' says the motto on the US coat of arms. One from many. Assimilation was a policy promoted by UNESCO in its early decades. The objective was to have a population unified around a country's culture and values. This is the present policy in a number of European countries. I think the French policy where everyone is a French citizen with the same rights but differences not especially recognised, probably could be categorised as one of assimilation (or integration).

In many countries, assimilation was supplanted by a policy of multiculturalism. National unity is still an objective, but cultural differences are recognised and their expression is to an extent encouraged. I have some experience of the policy of multiculturalism in my own country where, for instance, the national arts funding body has long had a policy specifically directed to the financial support of diverse cultural expressions based around the cultures of immigrants.

If our objective is the promotion of musical diversity, then clearly multiculturalism is a more appropriate policy than assimilation. Given that the world now delivers us daily experiences of cultural diversity, we need to welcome and accommodate difference. As UNESCO already knew in the late 1940s, the more we know about each other, the better we are prepared to live together fruitfully and in peace.

State suppression of diversity

We have noted that some states are unlikely to respond to the entire agenda of the Convention for cultural diversity. Some are likely to ignore the invocations to promote musical diversity within their borders. And despite the very forthright prohibition on use of the Convention to abridge human rights, some signatories will be continuing to suppress various aspects of musical expression. Sometimes, the purpose may be to assert the dominance of a specific cultural group.

We could look quickly at the several forms of this repression. Firstly, there is the complete ban on musical performance in some areas governed under some form of religious fundamentalism. I have read statements by musicians in Africa to the effect that they would put their lives at risk if they continue to practise their art. So the very existence of those musical forms could be endangered.

Perhaps the most common form of suppression or censorship is the result of offence taken to song texts rather than to the music itself. Most frequently, texts are censored or songs are banned because they offend some notion of societal values, for instance through references to sex or violence or uses of language that are deemed unacceptable. These offences may not be seen as a threat to political

power. More seriously, there is the suppression of song texts that criticise the political masters.

Thirdly, there may be political suppression of some forms of the music itself. We all remember the stylistic requirements on composers in the USSR under the strictures of socialist realism. This was a direct suppression of a form of musical content per se. In other cases, a particular form of music may come to be associated with a disapproved political group and its performance even without text can be forbidden.

The response to such causes for the loss of musical diversity must, one would think, be a part of a larger political movement. But the first step is probably to expose the problem. There is a wonderful website based just across the water in Copenhagen that sets out to do this. Take a look at www.freemuse.com if you would like to be kept in a constant state of agitation and outrage.

Killed by the economics

I would like to turn briefly to the economic issues causing a loss of musical diversity.

Many traditional musics are performed simply as part of community life and in that sense, do not have an economic basis. The services of musical experts are not traded. Some traditional musics, on the other hand, are performed for a fee by professional musicians. If the fees are no longer available, this obviously will weaken the practice of the music.

In the developed world, there is a very clear economic basis for musical practice. In the world of pop music, musical content is dictated by economic considerations. If the musician wants the support of a record company, she or he has to play the music the company wants. Diversity is constrained. Of course, there are many musics on the margins of the pop music world that do not have a solid economic base and perhaps this accounts for the great fluidity of musical genres as various experiments and offshoots appear and disappear again.

Perhaps the western music most at risk for economic reasons is the classical music. It seems to me that fundamental to the survival of the classical music world is the orchestra. As we know, the orchestra in the form we most listen to is an organisation from the nineteenth century – large and labour-intensive. In an age when technologies make the production of everything else increasingly more efficient and its cost ever cheaper, to depend upon the labour of craftspeople is financially problematical. The orchestra's labour costs increase faster than general inflation and so there is an increasing gap between what it can earn and what it must pay out.

The orchestra cannot survive without subsidy and in most countries this comes from governments. Democratic governments can subsidise only with the consent of the electorate. If the electorate does not care about classical music, or is hostile to it, the subsidy is at risk. If the subsidy disappears, the orchestra disappears. If the orchestra disappears, how long can the music survive as part of our breathing lives? We clearly are facing this predicament.

Conclusion

Let us run quickly through the arguments I have made here. I noted that our actual experience is that we have access to an astonishing diversity of musics. We start to talk about musical diversity as an issue mainly when a music in which we have a personal interest is under threat. Our personal interest might be in the music itself or in the music as part of our identity or as a symbol of something to which feel a loyalty.

We went on to look at various types of threat to musical diversity. A number of them had to do with globalisation. The relentless tide of Western pop is feared as a force for homogenisation and the loss of local musics. We looked at the commercial forces behind this music and how they are deployed as international trade agreements are being negotiated. The UNESCO Convention for cultural diversity is a new international instrument to attempt to counter the forces for trade liberalisation with arguments for the defence of culture.

The onslaught of pop culture is a threat to traditional musics, but there are others that arise from changes to the support structures in society. We conjectured about appropriate ways to maintain these musics.

We noted that globalisation means not only the movement of goods and services but also people. Whether governments adopt policies of assimilation or multiculturalism can determine whether the musical wealth brought by immigrants is available to enrich the cultures of their new countries.

We looked at how musical diversity can be suppressed by governments for reasons of public morality or political dominance. And finally, we saw that musical diversity can be threatened simply by the disappearance of the economic support base for a musical genre or through market failure.

Any one of us probably will experience only a very small part of the world's musical bounty. We probably will not notice the loss of a song here, a musical form there. But remember, in a world changing so fast and so unpredictably, the next music lost might be the one *you* love. This great diversity is a treasure that must not simply be left to its fate.

