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# A Glimpse into Globalization and Musical Instruments in the Last Half Century

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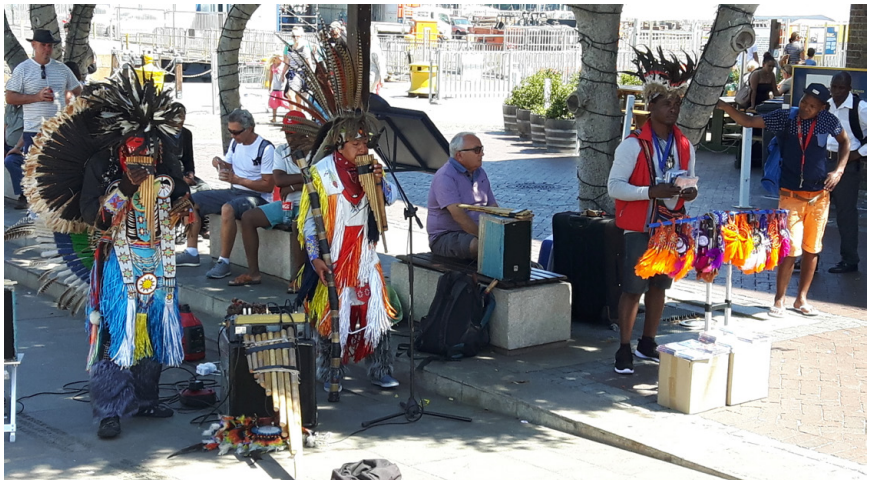
I settle into my favorite chair in my home study, luxuriating in the strains of a bandoneon melody flowing from my speakers. The melody woos me away from my time and place—from the year 2020 (and my island home on the Canadian Atlantic) to an imagined 1930s all-night tango in Buenos Aires. This broadcast is hosted by a Budapest-based tango junkie, and livestreams to the world every day via the web. I may never meet the other listeners around the world, but I revel in the idea that we share the same passion for this music.

Like many musical experiences in our lives, my private musical moment contains layers of globalization—both historical and immediate. In this case, the bandoneon's sound has traveled the world before reaching my ears: from the instrument's central European origins, to migration of its European bearers to South America in the late 1800s, from there proliferating throughout the world with the advent of commercial sound recordings in the early 1900s (resulting in a global tango craze). In the past half century, the instrument itself has been perpetually re-invented in sound, construction, and meaning through new communities, contexts, and technologies, especially with the emergence of virtual spaces for sharing knowledge and creating community. I can search tango enthusiast groups with the click of my computer button or attend local live tango events—and dance to a live or recorded bandoneon player—even more quickly than an airplane can transport me there. The bandoneon has become quite the global traveler!

But the bandoneon is not alone in being a traveler. Consider the global interest in Japanese *taiko* drumming, with ensembles outside of Japan now numbering (by some estimates) in the hundreds. Or consider that *djembe* drums are now ubiquitous on global stages and street corners, reaching far beyond the West African communities with whom the drums were once primarily associated. Performers blend multiple practices, instruments, and attire in performance, and they travel the globe presenting their own take on tradition. For a multitude of reasons (too many to



Street performers from the Americas at a tourist attraction in Capetown, South Africa. A blend of solo instruments from a variety of origin communities performs to pre-recorded backup music: an Australian *yidaki* (digeridoo) and Andean panflutes. Note the blend of indigenous North and South American ceremonial clothing worn by the musicians, and a person at right selling paraphernalia, including their sound recordings. Author's photo.

cover in this essay), humans feel compelled to access, learn about, listen to, create, evoke, or make music on instruments from around the world. In this pursuit, we might work with a creative musical palette as large as we can imagine.

This essay briefly introduces globalization's impact on musical instruments as objects of study, as craftwork, as commodity, and as symbols of community or identity. Globalization has been a formative process in the making and re-making of music cultures since humans began traveling. Through global networks of travel and communication, humans share knowledge of instrument making, repair, buying, selling, and playing. The bandoneon is just one among countless examples illustrating how musical instruments are enmeshed within networks of globalizing sounds, knowledge, contexts, and communities.

Globalization is pervasive. It is at work in our economic, political, cultural, and personal lives. Though its workings are often identifiable, it remains an open-ended concept. The meeting of previously unconnected musical practices has been called many things: cross-fertilization, influence, exchange, hybridization, integration, fusion, borrowing, adaption, appropriation, theft, or exploitation. Here, I write about "globalization" simply as the process of encounter and interaction between musical in-

strument practices from (seemingly) distinctive locations in the world.

When it comes to music, the idea of globalization seems to engender both positive and negative feelings, often dependent on context and power relations. For centuries, the movement of people, knowledge, and commodities occurred through a recognizable imperialism: the expansion of a central power through conquering territories, people, and resources. Knowledge, people, and commodities circulated across the globe through conquest. One example is the migration of instruments to the so-called "new world" with European colonizers or enslaved peoples, and the subsequent processes of subjugation, adaption, or interaction between instruments and musical practices of colonized and colonizing populations. Depending on location in North, Central, or South America, people have experienced between two hundred and four hundred years of musical instruments shifting in physicality, context, and sound as a result of colonization.

Recently, culturally suppressed communities (for example, musicians of indigenous heritage) have revitalized, reclaimed, re-invented, or questioned their cultural practices in light of centuries of cultural colonialism. They have researched the instruments and ceremonial objects currently held by museum collections, or consulted archival sound recordings. In such cases, the results of their efforts might re-create, replicate, or draw from early post-contact sounds. Global museum organizations, including the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), support indigenous communities' access to physical or archival collections—even supporting repatriation efforts that see those instruments and ceremonial objects move back into the hands of their original communities.

Twentieth- and twenty-first-century forms of globalization appear new, but share some traits with older forms of globalization through colonialism and imperialism—particularly ongoing issues of cultural domination and power inequality. Newer forms of globalization might appear less overtly disempowering, but there are still power dynamics at work through entities such as the commercial music industry, professional networks, online communities, and performance stages.

### *Knowledge Networks*

The last fifty years have seen significant shifts in professional networks and knowledge communities that uphold musical instruments as vital to the human story and for our shared wellbeing. These networks and communities are able to assemble and disperse information around the world with a speed previously unknown, to ever-expanding networks of people. The international reach of these organizations was part of founding mandates in times of political and cultural suffering. They aim to facilitate global perspectives, connect professionals, and foster collaborations on topics of importance to their members. Examples include UNESCO, the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), the International Committee of Museums and Collections of Instruments and Music (CIMCIM), and specialized study groups for organology within ICTM and the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM).

These larger networks are complemented by region- or type-specific interest groups. Examples include the Music Box Society International (MBSI), a group with regional chapters across the USA and Japan, or the *Entente Internationale des Maîtres Luthiers et Archetiers d'Art* (EILA)—and there are countless others. The emergence of virtual communication and air travel (faster than previous methods of international travel) mean that these groups reach a geographically expanding community of experts and enthusiasts at ever-increasing speeds. Organizations may not have included global dialogue among their founding mandates, but their activity and membership now often span the globe, thanks to the ease with which members can discover, access, and participate in activities.

### *Made Locally, Sold Globally*

Globalization has impacted how instruments are created, bought, and sold. Rapid communication has meant increased access to instruments and information for collectors, enthusiasts, musicians, museum collections, and dealers. Online auction or purchasing, and global delivery allow smaller makers and dealers to extend their market reach, and in some cases gain international reputation.

One of the biggest changes has been the standardization of form and design. The nature of manufacturing—and the consolidation of multiple

companies under larger transnational umbrella companies—has in some ways led to a standardization (some might say a watering-down) of construction for instruments and for parts used in maintenance and repair. The emergence of brands and models such as Martin's "standard" acoustic guitars or Gibson's "Les Paul" electric guitars—combined with their desirability and availability—has meant that smaller makers have had to carve out niche markets for themselves as providing a particular sound or playability. From another perspective, global communication platforms have allowed instrument makers and repairers to exchange information and solutions. The breadth and speed of knowledge sharing has changed the nature of innovation and troubleshooting.

On the other hand, people have taken the opportunity to make specific adaptations to internationally popular instruments, creating entirely new constructions that are unthinkable absent the global flow of knowledge and practice. A personal favorite dates back about a century. "Arabic accordions" are standard European accordions modified to create quarter-tone pitches so that they can play maqam-based melodies (melodic modes of the Near East). More recent examples of local adaptations to global instruments use local resources to create well-known instruments, such as bands in the Philippines that create symphonic or marching band instruments from bamboo, or the "Recycled Orchestra" from Cateura, Paraguay, who create instruments of the symphony out of discarded household items. In each case, the new physical formations suit a locally desired sound or social function.

### *Globally Defined Sounds*

Sounds and communities have shifted to take on new virtual forms and occupy virtual spaces through the emergence—and now ubiquity—of the internet. Sound recording technologies have intersected with online distribution in very interesting ways. Technology has created zones for international creative interaction. Instrumentalists from one part of the world do not have to be in the same location as other musicians to create a sound recording. The sounds of musical instruments from around the world are now available for sampling, video games, reproduction, and reinterpretation on stage and in the recording studio. We live in a time of global circulation of sounds, detached from their original sources.

As people access and share music online, the expectations and demands of listeners have changed. Musicians have, in turn, changed their practices. Specific instrument sounds, contexts, and perceptions of "local" or "national" instruments can be traced to global performance trends such as the "early music" and "world music" scenes. Both scenes emerged and expanded their reach during the 1960s and 1970s, and now have staged festivals and performances around the world—Europe being the biggest market for both, and North America a close second. Just by considering where the largest markets are located, it has been noted that economic affluence and market demands have strongly influenced both scenes.

For early music, the proliferation of consorts and choral groups in the past half century has put renaissance and baroque music back in the public eye and imagination. Video productions and sound recordings have influenced a "performance practice" of their own, as musicians search for the past and then distribute their interpretations through live performance, video, and sound recordings. Instrument makers, too, joined in the quest for the past; many turned to restoration of old instruments or replicating historical methods and designs. I may perhaps unveil my own interest in (and perhaps bias towards) wind instruments by mentioning the Von Huene workshop in Boston, founded by the late Friedrich von Huene. The workshop is one among many modern makers of historically inspired medieval, renaissance, and baroque instruments that are now played by musicians around the world. Whereas the "early music" movement was, at one point, confined to a small group of people, today it spans a global network of festivals, post-secondary programs, and summer programs.

The early music scene is, in some ways, driven by consumerism. If there were no market for early music recordings, recordings might not have been made. A larger slice of the global music consumer "pie," however, is occupied by the "world music" scene. World music typically brings together individual musicians to perform their "traditional" music, or integrates several musicians from several musical traditions to co-create new sounds or repertoires. Individual festivals (notably the annual World of Music, Arts and Dance or WOMAD festival) and record companies focus specifically on this phenomenon. In turn, the world music phenomenon has influenced (one could argue it has simultaneously distorted and inspired) the sound and makeup of musical instruments. From one perspective, this type of musical globalization has resulted in a "watering down" in terms

of scales, temperament, etc. European-style, eight-tone major and minor modes undermine modes that are not easily accommodated on "Western" instruments such as the piano, or may seem jarring or challenging to "Western" ears (a consideration when one surveys the location of the primary markets). In some ways, the industry has supported problematic notions of "national" music—one that implies musical practices as aligning with political boundaries: "In Mali they play kora; in Switzerland the alphorn is the national instrument." The industry plays on romanticized and essentialist ideas of how humans behave musically, and what sorts of instruments are symbolic of our heavily geo-politicized world.

## *Ongoing Conversations*

With the advent of the internet, communities with shared interests have emerged and communicated with a speed and regularity previously unknown. This has had immense impact on musical instrument makers, enthusiasts, musicians, and consumers. The idea of globalization presents interesting points to ponder. We witness how knowledge, objects, and practices that seem geographically separate can dwell within the same virtual spaces. Some have described this phenomenon of simultaneous local/global identities as the "global village." We access music online, connect with fellow instrument enthusiasts and experts, and participate in globalized knowledge communities, interest groups, and industries of limitless reach and opportunities. To pursue an interest in musical instruments is to participate in global villages.

Musical instruments occupy an interesting place in conversations about globalization. They fall within intersections of personal taste, commodification, and perceptions of how tangible/intangible heritage should or should not be used or altered. Some people perceive globalization as having a capacity to unify, by bringing people and ideas together for a shared purpose. On the other hand, globalization has been identified as the cause of disintegration and the watering-down of music cultures and knowledge, or the re-entrenching of false yet powerful perceived differences between groups. It aids both proliferation and reinterpretation of styles and sounds. We use global platforms—from "world music" stages to Facebook groups—to represent and question the instruments of our leisure time, professional lives, and communities.

At the time of publication, we are caught in the midst of a global pandemic—during which many of us have endured months of at-home quarantine and reduced travel. As a result, many of us have accessed and participated in music activity for entirely new reasons and in new ways. Experiences of quarantine have inspired a proliferation of musical instrument activity in the "virtual" realm, as humans seek to bring comfort or be comforted by one another. Symphony orchestra players perform *ensemble* from their individual homes. Famous rock musicians collaborate with enthusiasts around the world. Online teaching and learning has become the rule, whereas person-to-person had previously been the idealized method (with "virtual" learning treated as supplementary). Virtual communities, performance, and knowledge sharing have become standard practice around the world. This shift will, no doubt, have implications for musical instruments as objects of communication and social cohesion. It is both daunting and exciting to consider where this recent shift will take us.