

Music and Manipulation

Bob van der Linden

Brown, Steven and Ulrik Volgsten eds. 2006. *Music and Manipulation. On the Social Uses and Social Control of Music*. New York, London: Berghahn Books. 376 pages. ISBN 1 57181 489 2

Among human beings (and animals), music has always been a key mode of communication, being able to influence individual and group behaviour and to create social cohesion as well as conflict. Rhythm, harmony and melody manipulate and can be manipulated. The interdisciplinary anthology under review contains theoretical analyses by sociologists, humanists and psychologists about the use and control of music in society. It is the first volume 'to address the social ramifications of music's behaviourally manipulative effects, its morally questionable uses and control mechanisms, and its economic and artistic management through commercialisation, thus highlighting not only music's diverse uses at the social level, but also the ever-fragile relationship between aesthetics and morality'.



Music, censorship and colonialism

In 1953, the Indian government founded the National Academy of Music, Dance and Drama in New Delhi for the preservation and development of these arts. The main nationalist themes propagated through this institution were unity through diversity and the cultural and moral uplift of the population through art. For the same reason, the Indian government founded institutions like the Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, and made use of its monopoly over All India Radio (and later state television) to disseminate national music. By broadcasting Indian classical music on the radio, the government not only aimed at improving the public's knowledge of music but also manipulating its taste. The harmonium, for example, was banned from the radio until the early 1970s. In the footsteps of Rabindrinath Tagore

and Western ethnomusicologists like A.H. Fox Strangways and Arnold Bake, the Indian government declared that the instrument's fixed-pitch did not confirm Indian flexible intonation, and therefore was harmful to both singer's and audience's perception of musical refinement. Likewise, songs from films that contained elements derived from Western popular music were banned from radio on moral grounds. Alternately, to breed the idea of unity through diversity, All India Radio frequently broadcasted manipulated sessions of Indian folk music, whereby arrangements of the traditional song were recorded with studio musicians.

The comparison between India and Pakistan is interesting. Like Christendom, Islam has an ambivalent attitude towards music. The Quran does not mention anything at all about the making of music but it is generally forbidden by the *ulema* on the basis of the *hadith*. Even so, though the Muslim clergy solely legitimizes the quasi-mystical chanting of the Quran and the call to prayer, music is played in numerous Islamic folk and art traditions. A good example is *Qawwali* music of South Asia, originally sung and played at the shrines of Sufi saints (which often also serve as music schools): this music, made famous in the West by the Pakistani singer Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, is based not on the text of the Quran but on Sufi poetry. As in Independent India, it seemed that initially the Pakistani government was going to support the broadcast of classical music. Yet the clergy's opposition to music prevented this, mainly because the texts of many of the classical songs were connected either with Hindu deities or with the separation of lovers. Accordingly, the Pakistani government adopted a more easy-going attitude, with the result that the market for classical music gradually diminished and popular (mainly film) music became utterly dominant. In 1974, however, the government did establish the Institute of Folk Heritage in Islamabad, which among other things did much for the conservation of Pakistani folk music.



*Traditional Indian musical instrument
(www.hinduwisdom.info)*

Since the late 19th century in particular, music censorship and canonization largely took place under the banner of nationalism. Folk music collection, and on its basis the creation of an authentic national music style, was undeniably crucial to this universal process. While in the West this process generally led to modernist developments in music (partly because of Orientalist and ethno-musicological scholarship), musical progress in the non-West remained much under the influence of (neo-) colonialism.



Sitar player
(www.songsofonath-onwilson.com)

The hegemony of Western music in colonized cultures led to the subsequent decline of traditional music-making because of its relegation from central ritual and social functions to 'native' and 'tribal' contexts, such as entertainment for tourists or celebration of the past. The performances of *gamelans* (orchestras) on Bali and, as discussed by Helen Rees (2000), Naxi music in China's Yunnan province are only two examples. Alternatively, one of the positive effects of colonialism, for instance, remains the introduction of the Western violin in South Indian Karnatic music (Meunier 2006; Weidman 2006).

Consensus and conflict

Governmental and religious music censorship is just one of the themes discussed in *Music and Manipulation*. All contributors consider music as a communication system, and take the social production of music rather than music itself as a starting-point for the understanding of the relationship between music and society. Music can create both consensus and conflict as it is 'a major tool for propagating group ideologies identities, and as such serves as an important device for reinforcing collective actions and for delineating the lines of inclusion for social groups' (p.2). Importantly, while being part of a trans-national entertainment industry, music today has become a significant economic commodity. On the whole, the role of music in contemporary society raises moral questions in relation to censorship, propaganda, commercialisation and globalization. Following a preface by the editors and an introduction by Steven Brown, the book is divided in two main segments: eight chapters subdivided in three parts on the social use of music ("Manipulation by Music") and five chapters in two parts on the social control of music ("Manipulation of Music").

In the first part, "Music Events", Ellen Dissanayake draws parallels between 'the evolutionary (biological) process of "ritualization" in animal communication and the ritual (cultural) uses of musical behaviour in human rites or ceremonies' (p.32). Despite the commerciality of music today, she believes that 'it is still possible in music to set aside, to some degree, everyday knowledge and experience so that... we can enter an "extra-ordinary" state, sometimes even feeling transformed' (p.51). Peter J. Martin argues that going to a modern classical, jazz, pop or any other concert shows signs of formalized ritual and reinforces identity. Ulrik Volgsten, then, emphasizes that both the language around music, that is culturally internalized by the listener and mass media provide increasing possibilities for musical manipulation. In part two, "Background Music", Adrian C. North and David J'Hargreaves unsurprisingly make

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clear that 'it is extremely difficult to predict how customers or staff will react to a particular piece of music because any response to music is determined by three interacting factors, namely, the music itself, the listener, and the listening situation' (p.17). Steven Brown and Töres Theorell question the validity of the dogma that "good music is good for you". In their opinion, twentieth century music therapists and musical healers of all times and places uncritically 'ignore social factors such as listening context, personal history, culture, and even species; in other words, all ignore music as a communication system' (p.143). Likewise, the idea (based on experiments with rats!) that listening to the music of Mozart enhances performance of spatial reasoning tasks completely overlooks personal and cultural differences. Undoubtedly, music can 'produce immediate physiological and psychological effects on people' but 'the extent to which there is a deterministic relationship between a given musical parameter and its effect, independent of cultural mediation and individual experience' remains to be questioned (p.143). In part three, "Audiovisual Media", the essays by, respectively, Philip Tagg, Rob Strachan and Claudia Bullerjahn, consider the



*Traditional musical instrument
(www.hinduwisdom.info)*

manipulative potential of music that occurs in a wide range of mass media – including film, television, commercials and music videos – as well as at music events and as background music.

In part four, "Governmental Industrial Control", Marie Korpe, Ole Reitov and Martin Cloonan focus on religion and government as the two main agents of music censorship. Besides the former Soviet bloc, Nazi Germany, South Africa and the United States (where jazz and rock music have been called the work of Satan), they also refer to the extreme cases of music censorship in Iran under Ayatollah Khomeini and in Afghanistan under the Taliban. Afterwards, Joseph J. Moreno

discusses the bizarre employment of music during the Holocaust and Roger Wallis deals with the industrial control of music (i.e. the world of music copyright and the recording industry). In part five, "Control by Reuse", Ola Stockfelt looks at the moral questions surrounding the re-use of music. Closely related, Ulrik Volgsten and Yngve Akerberg investigate the pros and cons of music copyright and, for example, ask themselves: 'who would find it logical to pay a fee to Einstein (or his heritors) every time "his" knowledge would be used for something?' (p.355). In the epilogue, the editors reconsider the ambiguous relationship between music and morality without giving any definite resolution.

The light of Asia

Music and Manipulation is a timely book that, despite the overtly theoretical and repetitive style of writing, sets a standard for a new field of study and therefore deserves to be read widely. On the whole, disappointingly, the authors do not provide precise explanations about music's powerful effects on people but, even so, their contributions contain fascinating material for further study. Moreover, the issues dealt with solely concern Western musical practice and their treatment in the light of musical development in Asia would surely extend our knowledge of music as a mode of communication. Much research is still needed in relation to the emergence of music as a commodity in a global market in the Asian context. In fact, perhaps more than in the West, it is the market rather than religion and/or state that controls (and censors) musical life in Asia today. The endless production of illegal CDs, DVDs and videos as part of a global music market certainly stands in clear opposition to the Western feudal vision of property, of which music copyright is part. And how to explain the overall success of background music and Karaoke bars in Asia? What are the musical manipulations behind Bollywood music and why is it always played so incredibly loudly in Indian buses? Equally, the controlling developments and changes in musical style and sound, musical



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behaviour and musical conceptualization as a result of colonialism merits further scholarly investigation. Recently, Gregory D. Booth (2005) wrote about the (colonial) history and social role of Indian wedding bands. Likewise, for example, a study about the influence of Christian hymnody and the harmonium on north Indian popular music traditions or one about the manner in which Sikh sacred music was canonized under colonial rule would be welcome.

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