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I was asked to write about why and how I use music to talk about religion in my teaching, but upon reflection I realize that, as an ethnomusicologist, I usually think of it the other way around: I use religion to talk about music and performance. More precisely, I am interested in the interconnectedness of music (and dance) performance with other aspects of social and culture life, not only beliefs and values, but also social organization and identity formation, politics and power, and the ways in which all are articulated through space and time. Issues of religion are woven throughout most of my courses on world music and dance, even when the course is not explicitly about them. Most cultures construct their central beliefs and values, often including those about music, in terms that we might define broadly as religious (sacred, supernatural, spiritual, shamanic, and so forth), and music and dance performances are intrinsic to the practice of religion throughout the world. As an ethnomusicologist, I also inevitably consider the music-religion connection in cross-cultural terms. In my courses, students are continually moving from 'self' to 'other' until the two become blurred or even disappear. If I'm lucky, a diverse student population jump-starts the process from the beginning. My objective is to use cross-cultural interpretive themes as the threads that hold together courses that (impossibly) cover the world.

My approach is also ethnographic, privileging oral traditions and understandings shaped in the process of field research: observations, interviews, participation in performance, lived experience. It is this ethnographic approach, especially as we apply it to the study and teaching of musical performance, which underscores the latter's relevance for the study and teaching of religion. Both music and religion, as they are practiced and experienced, are fundamentally performative. Their very existence depends on continual re-articulation, re-creation, and

renewal. What prompts cultures so often to use musical performance to mark the sacred and musical ideas to ground systems of belief is precisely what make music so relevant to the teaching of religion: performance actualizes, localizes, and socializes. Its enactments invite transformations, whether of traditions, meanings, or states of mind. Religious performances cast belief systems as emergent, creative, and dynamic — and immediately relevant.

Musical Performance Localizes Religion

Music and dance performance, like ethnography, privileges the local and the particular. This principle is surely relevant to our teaching, particularly when we seek to understand religions with unifying scripture-based doctrines that lend themselves to easy essentializing. As Judith Becker observes in her article "Tantrism, Rasa, and Javanese Gamelan Music":

For the most part...the role of music in religious practices is not scripturally defined. Its function comes about through age-old custom and is part of 'common,' unreflective understandings. (15)

When considered through the frame of music and dance performance, religious practices can be seen as locally situated and contingent processes through which people continually evaluate, reflect upon, and even challenge beliefs and values.

Musical Performance Actualizes Beliefs

Musical performance actualizes beliefs, often multiple and shifting. Musical performance makes possible renegotiation of meaning because of its special properties; it is ephemeral, fluid, malleable, and multivocal. Lawrence Sullivan, in his introduction to *Enchanting Powers*, refers to music's ability to attract multiple meanings as "omnidimensional:" a "mimetic capacity to attune itself to other realities or provoke other realities into resonating in tune with it" (9).

Musical Performance Socializes Religion

With its power to attract and affect, musical performance also works to unite groups of people both physically and psychologically and, when combined with movement of any kind, kinesthetically as well. Performance, like religious practice, is experienced socially, intertwined with multiple identities (gender, ethnic, age, class, occupation) and hierarchies of social power. Musical performance in the context of ritual performance often makes social relations and roles explicit, even refining them as ideal models of natural and supernatural order — for both religious communities and the students seeking to understand them.

Musical Performance Plays at/with Social and Conceptual Boundaries, Including, Potentially, Our Own

Related to all of the above is the ability of musical performance — and musicians — to cross and confound otherwise discrete social and conceptual categories. In many parts of the world, such as Africa and the African diaspora, India, Indonesia, and indigenous Oceania, the musical performances that accompany religious practice are polysemic, intended to be understood simultaneously as music, entertainment, theater, transformative ritual, sacred metaphor, spiritual messenger, and transcendent vehicle (to paraphrase Judith Becker). A cross-cultural consideration of religious musical performance inevitably throws students' own conceptual categories, such as the discrete Judeo-Christian domains of sacred and secular, into sharp relief. They have only to be reminded of Christian rock, gospel-blues, or the concert oratorio to understand that, even in their world, musical performance is boundless, crossing and blurring (if not erasing) conceptual boundaries, mediating the movement of ideas and meanings across them.

An ideal course on music and the sacred would place students in the midst of the performative intersection of music and religion, doing their own ethnographic research in religious communities around them. But that model doesn't always suit the college constraints of time and travel. Still, when my students have chosen to do ethnographic, experience-based research, especially when it leads them to unfamiliar religious ground, their experiences have been richly rewarding, sometimes even transformative.

Ethnographic research confronts students with many challenges of belief, meaning and understanding, whether it is encountering Native American concepts of song ownership and exclusivity or the startling incomprehensibility of unfamiliar music itself. As Claude Levi-Strauss noted and Lawrence Sullivan quotes in his introduction to Enchanting Powers, "...music is the only language with the contradictory attributes of being at once intelligible and untranslatable" (1). Musical performance's magical, malleable, polysemic power can both engender understanding and confound it. It is no wonder, then, that ethnomusicologists have turned to religion, considering it to be as important to understanding music as music is to understanding religion.

References

Becker, Judith "Tantrism, Rasa, and Javanese Gamelan Music" in *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's Religions* .
Lawrence E. Sullivan, ed. 1997.

_____. "Earth, Fire, Sakti, and the Javanese Gamelan" *Ethnomusicology*. Fall 1988.

_____. "A Musical Icon Power and Meaning in Javanese Gamelan Music" in Steiner, ed. *The Sign in Music and Literature*
. 1981.

Resources

A few examples will illustrate in more detail how attention to musical performance can open understandings of religious practice and belief. Judith Becker's writings on music and religion in Java are particularly effective in the classroom. She speaks about musical structure in accessible terms, contextualized within broad ideas about belief, ritual, cosmology and cultural change. In her articles, "Earth, Fire, Sakti, and the Javanese Gamelan" and "A Musical Icon: Power and Meaning in Javanese Gamelan Music," Becker explains how the musical instruments and sound structures of the Central Javanese court gamelan are iconic of deep

cosmological concepts of power, space, and time. Her more recent article, "Tantrism, Rasa, and Javanese Gamelan Music" considers the Tantric Buddhist and Sufi underpinnings of the aesthetics of the Javanese court gamelan, exposing layers of powerful coincidences of musical and religious beliefs that will come as a surprise to students more familiar with gamelan music as the sound-track for television ads or the happy, shimmering sounds on a CD. She explains how belief has shaped the very aesthetics of musical perception of court gamelan, and how performance itself has been considered a spiritual practice. Gamelan performances confound our often unquestioned categories of sacred and secular. Over time, they have mediated the assimilation of ancient Tantric Buddhist/Indie beliefs and more recent Sufi beliefs in central Java.

Becker's writings, as is true of all of those dealing with musical performance and religion, benefit from illustration with the sounds and sights of performance. Linking audio and video recordings with articles and monographs in ethnomusicology, though, is still a challenge. For audio recordings of Javanese gamelan, I recommend some Nonesuch re-releases: *Javanese Court Gamelan: Gamelan of Pura Pakualaman*
;
Javanese Court
Gamelan: Gamelan of Pura Magkunagaran
; and
The Sultan's Pleasure: Javanese Gamelan and Vocal Music
(Music of the World). There is a good discussion of Javanese court dance in the textbook *Dancing: The Pleasure, Power, and Art of Movement*
(1992), which is accompanied by an eight-part video series. The 30-volume *JVC Video Anthology of World Music*
(1990) also includes several selections of Javanese musical performance, the best of which is excerpts from a shadow puppet (wayang kulit) performance filmed in Java.

Until recently, much of the writing about music and Islam has focused on the doctrinal polemic concerning its propriety. But recent ethnographic studies of musical performance in Islamic contexts have challenged that singular view of Islam, revealing its localized practices and multiple meanings. Two such studies are worth noting. The first is the classic study by Regula Qureshi of qawwali (ecstatic Sufi) performance in South Asia (*Sufi Music of India and Pakistan*, 1986). Qureshi's is a close ethnographic study of the dynamics of qawwali performance and its central roles in activating ecstatic experience and enacting social hierarchy. Audio recordings by traditional groups such as the Sabri Brothers and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan are widely available on the RealWorld label from the UK. Qureshi's own videotapes have not yet been released, but performances on the video
Nusrat! Live at Meany, A Concert of Qawwali
(Arab Film Distribution, Seattle, WA) are effective, though not filmed in a religious ceremonial context. I like to supplement Qureshi's study with articles by Hiromi Lorraine Sakata ("The Sacred and the Profane Qawwali represented in the Performances of Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan,"

The World of Music
36/3, 1994) and Philip Bohlman ("World Musics and World Religions. Whose World?' in *Enchanting Powers*
, 1997) These articles focus on the world music' phenomenon and traditional qawwali practitioner, the late Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, who became a force in the global marketplace of popular fusion music without relinquishing his own sense of the sacred purpose of his performances.

Finally, I highly recommend the recent, award-winning book by Virginia Danielson, *The Voice of Egypt Umm Kulthum, Arabic Song, and Egyptian Society in the Twentieth Century*
, (1997) and the film based on that book,
Umm Kulthum: A Voice Like Egypt
, produced and directed by Michal Goldman (available from Arab Film Distribution). Both works are grounded in excellent historical and ethnographic research. The story of the thoroughly modern and wildly popular female singer Umm Kulthum is ideal for localizing a discussion of music in Islamic contexts. Her life at once defies all stereotypes about Islam, music, and gender, and yet her popularity and enduring value to generations of Arabs rests on her deep knowledge of religious vocal art.

I could cite many more examples of ethnographically based studies of musical performance that would work to localize, actualize, and socialize religious practice in the classroom. Audio recordings of many of those that follow are widely available, and short video examples of many can be found in the video series *Dancing* (a production of thirteen/WNET and BBC-TV)and the *JVC Video Anthology of World Music*
. Look for the writings of Katherine Hagedorn on the music and dance of Afro-Cuban Santeria, playing at the boundaries of religious practice and tourist art ("diss. from Brown University, book forthcoming from Smithsonian Institution Press). The video Oggun (Center for Cuban Studies, NYC, c1993) illustrates her points nicely, though the opening scenes may not be suitable for a classroom audience. David McAllesters large body of writings on music and the religious life of the Navajo is engaging and accessible for undergraduates. His chapter in the book *Worlds of Music*
(ed Jeff Todd Titon, 3rd ed 1996, accompanied by CD set), in which he discusses music of a full range of Navajo religious practices, traditional, Christian, and the Native American Church (or peyote religion), is a good entry for the undergraduate. Charles Capwell has written the best account of music and its connection to ritual life of the Bauls of Bengal in eastern India, a syncretic community of mystic musicians (
Music of the Bauls of Bengal
, 1986). Deben Bhattacharya's film
Waves of Joy
(video-forum) works well in conjunction with Capwell's book. Finally, Kay Kaufmann Shelemay (
Let Jasmine Ram Down: Song and Remembrance Among Syrian Jews
, 1998, with CD) and Ellen Koskoff (forthcoming book on gender in Hasidic performance

traditions) have both researched Jewish music in New York City and its mediation of the boundless continuities of Jewish thought with the exigencies of local culture.