

NEGOTIATING ‘THE WEST’ MUSIC(OLOGIC)ALLY

On **Monday 11 and Tuesday 12 April 2011**, the Musicology Departments of Utrecht University, and Royal Holloway, University of London, will jointly host a conference at **Utrecht University** addressing ‘the West’ in music(ologic)al production and consumption.

The destabilisation of ‘the West’ as a self-perceived entity has marked the last decade at nearly every front – economically, politically, and culturally. Meanwhile, questions about ‘the West’ as a category for construction and political deployment have significantly broadened research agendas in the humanities, unravelling the ways in which various artistic, literary, scholarly and popular media have been complicit in the cultural politics that have shaped, and continue to shape, the global infrastructure we experience today.

In music scholarship, too, the conceptual and geographical centre of ‘Western music’ has become unsettled, as has its prerogative over moral and aesthetic value. If ‘Western music’ ever did refer to a self-explanatory category of aural experience, it is no longer an unchallenged phenomenon against which ‘others’ can be perceived separately. Yet, ‘the West’ still figures in many day-to-day representations of music. It also inheres structurally in today’s fields of music research, as institutes, disciplinary societies and journals generally continue to reflect major divides in terms of methodology (anthropological/historical), repertoire (art/folk/popular), and music practice (written/oral).

This conference seeks to address this situation by probing beyond it methodologically. Postcolonial analysis in the classic sense – i.e., exposing imperialist agendas in the West’s representations of its ‘others’ – has been criticised for being limited by the way it perpetuates the West/non-West dualism, and for being more concerned with reproving ‘the West’ than with other strategies. If this critique is appropriate, what would be an alternative way of analysing the power politics that inform musico-cultural production?

Questions that might inspire, but by no means are intended to limit, the discussion are:

- In which ways did/do music(ologic)al discourses and practices reflect, if not shape, the formation of the idea of ‘the West’ as a political and/or cultural integrity? What, by whom, under which circumstances, and to which purposes, was/is claimed to be ‘Western music(ology)’?
- How have the ideologies and practices pertaining to ‘Western music(ology)’ been transmitted across the globe? How did they interact with existing music(ologic)al practices? Which aspects were rejected, adopted, transferred, translated, and institutionalised? What was viewed from a non-Western perspective as associated with ‘the West’?
- How have conceptions of ‘Western music’ changed as contexts have shifted between, for instance, competing nation-states, the Cold War polarity, and current challenges to the neoliberal economic paradigm from the rapidly evolving economies of China, India, and the United Arab Emirates?
- How is ‘the West’ located, mediated, and negotiated in record studios, film music, commercial tunes, radio broadcasting, at festivals, or on concert stages? How does it feature, for instance, in

‘world music’, a site of musical production and consumption putatively distinct from the ‘Western’ mainstream?

- How does ‘the West’ relate to present-day conflicts between cultural preservation and modernisation, as played out on and between, local, regional, national and global levels?
- How does ‘the West’ appear in the music histories taught across the globe? Do these histories conflict or do they meet with a postcolonial consensus, if any such consensus exists?

Submission

Abstracts limited to 300 words should be sent before 1 October 2010 to Harm Langenkamp, Utrecht University (h.j.m.langenkamp@uu.nl). Please attach your proposal as a ‘doc’ or ‘pdf’ file without mentioning your name or affiliation, providing full contact details in an accompanying e-mail only. As we are looking specifically for contributions that tackle methodology, applicants should make clear what contribution their paper will make in this regard. Submissions from applicants affiliated to institutes that do not reimburse their expenses for conference participation are welcome. Although guarantees cannot be given before January, efforts will be made to acquire a limited number of travel grants. Please also note the possibility of combining research visits, as the conference is scheduled to follow the annual meeting of the British Forum for Ethnomusicology (7 to 10 April 2011).

Procedure

Applicants will be informed of acceptance by 15 November 2010 at the latest. In order to maximise discussion we have chosen the seminar model: selected speakers will be asked to distribute their papers two weeks in advance of the conference, and then present 15-minute summaries at their session. After each presentation, there will be 15 minutes for discussion, and each day will be closed with a round table discussion which offers the opportunity to engage more deeply in the issues raised. The publication of (a selection of) the papers in a collected volume will be considered.

Organising Committee

Rachel Beckles Willson, Harm Langenkamp, Barbara Titus.

Programme Committee

Christopher Ballantine (University of KwaZulu-Natal); Rachel Beckles Willson (Royal Holloway, University of London); Karl Kügle (Utrecht University); Joseph Lam (University of Michigan); Laudan Nooshin (City University London); Tina K. Ramnarine (Royal Holloway, University of London); Barbara Titus (Utrecht University).