

The role of musical diversity in redefining music: Towards rich and meaningful life experiences

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Music scholars are well aware that music is a fluid phenomenon. Music redefines itself through time and space. New genres of music are being created, and new ideas are being incorporated into contemporary musical experiences. Musical boundaries are being built and rebuilt, broken and re-broken. This presentation focused on the role of musical diversity worldwide in redefining music. It also examined how musical diversity and redefinitions of music might lead to rich and meaningful life experiences for all.

Humans by nature are born and raised within their cultural boundaries. Throughout their formative years, they are likely to experience from within their environments. They learn from the people and events around them. Their definition of music is constructed. As increased global awareness, intellectual growth, cultural transformation, media transmission, and technological inventions occurred across the world, our knowledge of music has dramatically expanded in the last century. This has created a massive amount of musical knowledge beyond anyone's lifetime of learning. One's definition of music is not limited to what they know as they grow up anymore. The definition of music is challenged after the formative years when "new" and "never-exposed" musical traditions come to one's life. Musical parameters that are significant in one musical tradition could be diluted in another musical tradition. Each musical tradition emphasizes some selected aspects of music is, at the same time, de-emphasizing other aspects of music. The more diverse musics one has experienced, the better idea one has in forming a complete definition of music.

There is a basic question about why humans need musical diversity. The response could be a composite of these elements: cultural expression as a human right, learning about the world is human nature, what we know about the world form a basis for cultural expression, and cultural expression is part of what we learn. Cultural expression and learning interact with each other and form a cyclical model. Both cultural expression and learning bear the same qualities: being part of human nature, practice since birth, and being a human right. Cultural expression and learning operate within a boundary. Diversity comes from outside of this boundary and leads to more learning, which enriches cultural expression. Diversity also contributions to the same cycle in other cultural boundaries to enrich their learnings and expressions. Diversity enriches this fluid cycle and reinforces the redefinition of music.

Redefinition of music is not limited to changes in eras and geographic spaces any more; it is desirable throughout one's lifespan. The more complete definition of music one develops, the richer and more meaningful life experience one has. "A rich and meaningful life experience": Isn't this desirable for all humans? Isn't this a right of all humans? Isn't this what parents want to give their children, and teachers to their students?

I suggest that redefining music should be a musical activity, like listening. One should go through the cultural expression-learning cycle as many times as possible, then move outward to as many cultural boundaries as possible, emphasizing on the learning of music outside of one's cultural boundary. Redefining music is a way to work toward rich and meaningful life experience.

Through a lifetime of redefining music, one would develop abilities, understandings, and sensitivities for a full range of musical possibilities which humans are capable of producing.

Cross-cultural adaptation would be cultivated. These cross-cultural encounters would go beyond the sensitivity to the surface properties of music to include the deeper understanding and adaptation of varied aesthetic values. Humans become more appreciative of differences in ways of music making, ways of thinking, and ways of living. There would be constant flexibility and expansion in one's musical life, which leads to rich and meaningful life experiences for all (i.e., both self and others).

This idea supports the Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions in its objectives, guiding principles, and specifically Article 10 (a): "Parties shall encourage and promote understanding of the importance of the protection and promotion of the diversity of cultural expressions . . . through educational and greater public awareness programmes." The "educational and greater public awareness" programmes in this Article point directly to the learning portion of the cycle, which cannot be broken in the expressive process.