

Chapter 5

Unfamiliar Sounds? Approaches to Intercultural Interaction in the World's Musics

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The notion of 'familiarity' in the title of this book suggests associations with the known, secure, embodied or predictable.¹ 'Familiar', in early English usage (for example, by Shakespeare), was also sometimes synonymous with 'domesticated' or 'tame'. Its etymology clearly relates to the idea of 'family', and similarly evokes ideas of shared experience, cultural competency, social intimacy or nostalgia. These ideas might be seen to lie at the heart of identity and culture. Meanwhile, the familiar also carries connections with the mundane, dull or everyday, suggesting a potential lack of challenge, excitement or imagination. In contrast, the 'unfamiliar', which always exists in dialogue or tension with the 'familiar', typically evokes connections with the unknown, unpredictable or 'other'. In turn, this often entails associations with danger, insecurity, anxiety or alienation. Yet, unfamiliarity also suggests excitement, challenge, novelty, innovation and liberty, and is often associated with creativity and the imagination. In this context, it is hardly surprising that throughout music history musical creativity and inspiration have widely been connected with danger and unpredictability. (By music history I refer to all musics, in any time or place, and whether documented or not.) Although socially powerful, beautiful or affective musical expressions must necessarily include familiar elements, their very potency is often associated with dark, mysterious and unpredictable realms – unfamiliar territories of the body and psyche encapsulated, for example, in the imaginary figures of the siren (Austern and Naroditskaya 2006), jinn (Neuman 1990, p. 64) or spiritguide (Roseman 1991).

The effective balancing of the familiar and unfamiliar seems to be at the heart of most successful music making and communication. Indeed, might this even be a universal? Accordingly, Steven Feld observes (in conversation with Charles Keil) that 'as music grooves, there is always something new *and* something familiar' (Keil and Feld 1994, p. 23). It is often precisely the distinctive, unanticipated or even idiosyncratic elements an individual or group brings to a performance,

¹ I use familiarity and unfamiliarity in this chapter as 'thinking tools'. From a more critical etymological perspective, their Latinate root and its histories of usage can, of course, be seen to be shape the semantic space they occupy in culturally specific ways.

or composer to a piece, that mark it out as musically engaging.² However, let us not forget that the degree to which the introduction of unfamiliar elements is welcomed varies immensely according to context and tradition. It is also important to stress that such elements – which may be seen to reflect the identity of the performer(s), whilst possibly representing a form of alterity to certain listeners – must be adequately framed within the familiar. We often welcome, and even celebrate, unfamiliar elements when introduced into a familiar environment in which we feel secure, in control, and are able to orientate ourselves. However, predominantly alien environments (musical and other), in which we are unable to recognise, reproduce or respond appropriately to structures, patterns or modes of expression, or in which our ignorance or powerlessness is made manifest, may provoke feelings of insecurity, disorientation and anxiety, as well as negative evaluations.

Perceptions of the unfamiliar depend on subject position and it is important to consider how other people might perceive or conceive of the music that you or I consider familiar, as well as how you or I might perceive or conceive of music that we consider culturally unfamiliar. Clearly, each reader will have their own graduated, shifting and context sensitive conceptions and perceptions of familiar and unfamiliar musics, certain aspects of which I probably share and others which I do not. I wish to avoid reducing familiarity and unfamiliarity to a binary, equivalent to the problematic ‘self/other’ dichotomy, because musics are rarely, if ever, entirely familiar or unfamiliar. Rather, our musical engagements tend to consist of points on a continuum (or even on a more complex 3D kind of matrix), with particular dimensions of any given musical encounter being more or less familiar. In other words, there are aspects of any musical performance, however culturally close or distant, with which we are likely to feel degrees of both unfamiliarity and familiarity.

In this chapter I want to suggest that the notions of familiarity and unfamiliarity are not only fruitful ways for thinking about music more generally, but that – when applied to relations between musical expressions from around the world – they throw up a range of challenges to commonplace assumptions. In particular, I wish to use this as an opportunity to question how we might approach the idea of ‘unfamiliar sounds’; this is the focus of the first half of the chapter, which is divided into two main parts (each consisting of several shorter sections). What might make certain musical sounds unfamiliar? A simple, initial, answer is likely to be that they have not been part of a given listener’s (musical) environment. Yet, this immediately throws up more complex questions about the agency, opportunities and motivations of the listener, which inevitably involve, for example, identity, power, politics, ideology and gender. Are all musics approached in the same way or is there a tendency for some, especially those viewed as

² This point is sometimes more easily appreciated in the case of performance from notation, as in the case of Chinese Guqin music (Yung 1987, p. 85) or a Chopin piano Prelude (Cook 1992, p. 124).

culturally distant, to be rendered unfamiliar or unknowable by a presupposition of difference? As we keep asking these questions, we are in turn drawn to consider the cultural construction of musical aesthetics, and the challenges presented by aesthetically unfamiliar sounds, both from distant locations and from close to home. I end the first part of the chapter by considering the historical development of communications and especially audio technology. Has the ubiquity of World Music (following its rise as a marketing phenomenon in the late 1980s) rendered the idea of musically unfamiliar cultures obsolete? The second part of the chapter looks more specifically at music perception and paradoxically suggests that, from such a perspective, musical unfamiliarity is a consequence of cognition. It goes on to consider some of the perceptual challenges involved in learning to perform culturally unfamiliar musics. Finally, whilst acknowledging the powerful sense of cultural and perceptual consensus and stability that often surrounds musical performance, I explore the relevance of what I call *creative misperception* to histories of music making. A key point to emerge from many discussions in this chapter is that a neat bracketing of features common to some notion of ‘non-Western’ musics, which somehow differentiate them from the equally problematic idea of ‘Western’ musics, is entirely inappropriate. Indeed, I begin Part I of the chapter by contesting the use of the all too familiar term ‘non-Western’, followed by an overview of ethnomusicology’s complex relationship with notions of the familiar and unfamiliar.

Part I: Conceptualising Unfamiliar Sounds

Resisting the Familiar and Ethnomusicology’s Paradox

My invited remit for this chapter was to focus on ‘non-Western’ music and to provide an ethnomusicological perspective. However, like many other terms whose very familiarity and apparent utility deter critical reflection, I wish to start out by resisting the term ‘non-Western’. Albeit a handy, catch all, expression which is widely used in ‘Euro-American’-derived discourse (including quite regularly by ethnomusicologists), it is ambiguous, problematic, anachronistic and unhelpful. Even if, arguably, well employed as a weapon of postcolonial critique of former decades, its relevance for the 2010s is doubtful. Evidently the significance of ‘non-Western’ resides in its duality with the ‘West’, a malleable but increasingly destabilised imaginary and target, often historically linked with ‘whiteness’, Christianity and claims of superiority and rationality – it is ‘always a fiction, an exercise in global legitimation’ (Trouillot 2003, p. 1). The ‘West’ has been deployed and employed in a multiplicity of geo-political projects and, despite its anachronistic connection with scientific, epistemological or economic superiority, will probably retain its currency for a good many decades to come (Bonnett 2004, pp. 163–4). Even if too much is invested in the idea of the ‘West’ for it to be superseded any time soon, a reality check on the relevance of the

term ‘non-Western’ to the study of music is a more realistic goal, and one with considerable benefits for a more holistic music scholarship.

Maintaining the duality Western/non-Western encourages us to overlook, or simply exoticise or fetishise, the interpenetration of the world’s various music histories and to ignore the musical realities that surround us (Taylor 2007). What relevance do such terms have to conceptualising a Taiwanese concert pianist, a British Asian Bhangra artist, or the sounds of the Istrian *dojkinje* (Croatian double flute) which – although European – would strike most British listeners as culturally remote? Another uncomfortable aspect of the totalising tendency of the word ‘non-Western’ is that it implies an identity defined by exclusion, absence or deficiency rather than contribution. In his book *Beyond Exoticism*, Timothy Taylor (2007, p. 7) contests the idea of a unitary and essentialist ‘musical Other’, arguing instead for closer historical, cultural and social examination of how people construct their ‘others’, sometimes through music. Similarly, Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) observes that:

The “us and all of them” binary, implicit in the symbolic order that creates the West, is an ideological construct ... There is no Other, but multitudes of others who are all others for different reasons. (p. 27)

In short, rather than encouraging us to engage with people around the world as equals, starting from the position of common humanity, the term ‘non-Western’ presupposes difference, re-inscribes the boundary line in us/them, and often presumes an implicit hierarchy.³ Instead of lumping familiar and unfamiliar cultural expressions into well-worn binaries such as ‘Western’ and ‘non-Western’, we need to learn to be much more specific in the ways we articulate experience and knowledge about the world’s various musics and our own individual and subjective relationships to them. An important point to emerge here, as regards this volume, is that familiarity can easily become complacency. Accordingly, the unfamiliar can pose not only perceptual, aesthetic and intellectual challenges, but also potent political ones.

Following the adoption of the title Ethnomusicology in the 1950s, this field of scholarship was almost exclusively dedicated to the study of ‘culturally unfamiliar’ musics. Indeed, my own extensive research in the Bolivian Andes (Stobart 2006), over the past 25 years, might be seen to fit this traditional paradigm. However, since the late 1980s, and in part responding to the reflexive turn in anthropology (Clifford and Marcus 1986), ethnomusicological research has increasingly included case studies that are both more familiar and geographically closer to home. For example, Bruno Nettl (1995) researched his home music institution and Stephen Cottrell (2004) studied the London freelance music scene in which

³ See Agawu (2003, pp. 151–71) on the theme of contesting difference. However, strikingly throughout this highly critical chapter, he maintains the use of the term ‘non-Western’.

he was professionally involved. Accordingly, many involved in ethnomusicology today are likely to insist that their field of study is defined by methodology rather than object of study (Stobart 2008). Indeed, the research of a high proportion of current ethnomusicology graduate students focuses on musical phenomena that are relatively familiar, close to home or easily encountered on the internet; what they share is the use of ethnographic approaches. This methodology typically involves acquiring familiarity with particular musical practices and with the people involved in them through close participation and observation. In short, it might be argued that, despite its stereotypical and ongoing association with culturally distant musics, ethnomusicology in the 2010s is more defined by familiarity (also in the sense of rapport) – as its central methodological contribution – than unfamiliarity.

Nonetheless, ethnomusicology – alongside anthropology – has not found it easy to shrug off its historical associations with the unfamiliar or exotic; nor up to now has it been entirely in its interests to do so. Indeed, ethnomusicology has occupied a paradoxical position, on the one hand contributing to the deconstruction of difference by rendering unfamiliar musics familiar, but, on the other, constructing difference – often unintentionally – by presenting the musics studied as unfamiliar, exotic or ‘other’.⁴ This is hardly surprising given the common human tendency to notice or dwell on the unfamiliar, remarkable and memorable; to catch people’s imagination and interest, or even make an ‘original contribution to knowledge’ (as doctoral students are required) through identifying things that are different, rather than examining what is the same, already known or familiar. As Roger Keesing (1989, p. 460) has observed for the case of anthropology, ‘the reward structures, criteria for publishability, and theoretical premises of our discipline [mean that] papers that might show how un-exotic and un-alien other people’s worlds are never get written or published’.

Even though, as noted above, the primary research of many ethnomusicology doctoral students focuses on familiar musics from close to home, the employment of ethnomusicologists in university music departments usually remains predicated on the teaching of ‘culturally unfamiliar’ or ‘world’ musics. Undoubtedly, the exposure of students to a variety of the world’s musical cultures is immensely valuable in terms of widening musical and other horizons and raising awareness of new possibilities. However, another key benefit is its potential to encourage students to reflect on the familiar – the particularities, constraints and conventions of their own musical practices and experiences. Yet, perhaps this is also the greatest challenge. For example, whilst usually happy to write about the ritual nature of musical practices in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Africa or South America, many students find it hard to accept that, for example, the conventions of a European classical concert are also rituals. In other words, students often struggle to see the continuities between their own familiar musical practices or experiences and those of geographically distant cultures. Yet of course, they are

⁴ In part this reflects the methodology of balancing so-called ‘emic’ and ‘etic’, or insider and outsider, perspectives (Nettl 2005, p. 228).

far from alone in experiencing such – at least, initial – blindness or even resistance to the idea of cultural continuity. They simply reflect a much wider tendency to presuppose difference (Agawu 2003).

The Politics of Particularity: Cultural Meaning and Identity

In Renaissance and later accounts of global exploration, European travellers and the indigenous people they encountered are periodically reported to have used music as a means to establish contact. Where no mutually intelligible language was available, performing music to one another sometimes contributed to the initiation of peaceful relations (Woodfield 1995, p. 101). While these musics undoubtedly took radically different forms, their very existence and expression presumably communicated to both parties a sense of common humanity. However, such musical exchanges did not always function as a universal language; they sometimes led to fatal misunderstandings. For example, during Abel Tasman's voyage of exploration to New Zealand in 1642, his Dutch crew failed to recognise that the Maori's chants in a 'rough hollow voice' and trumpet sounds (probably a *putatara*) performed to them from their canoes were intended as a challenge to the strangers and an invitation to fight (see Figure 5.1). Neither did the Maoris appreciate that the welcoming tunes played by the Dutch trumpeters in reply were of peaceful intent. Only were the consequences of this mutual musical misunderstanding made apparent when a rowing boat, containing seven unarmed Dutch sailors, was launched a few days later and immediately attacked by two Maori canoes. Four sailors were killed and the three others only escaped by swimming back to the ships (Lodge 2009, pp. 626–7). Ethnographic detail does not permit us to be sure how much this dramatic incident can be attributed to a lack of musical familiarity, but the particularity of the respective musics and cultural traditions is clear. Growing up within and acquiring familiarity with particular musical environments evidently lead us to hear, interpret and contextualise sounds in particular ways.

This encounter presents the two musics as if they were mutually unintelligible, much in the same way as languages. However, the sounds of music, unlike those of language, are primarily concerned with expression rather than communication, and are neither arbitrary signs nor usually effective means for conveying specific or propositional meanings. Rather, a key aspect of music's power lies precisely in its semantic ambiguity and flexibility, which enable it to 'mean different things to different people, different things at different times, or even to mean many things at once' (Slevc and Patel 2011, p. 111; Cross 2008). Musics that are culturally unfamiliar can sometimes provide us with immense aesthetic, sensory and emotional enjoyment and afford a range of meanings, even if these are quite different from those experienced by a person for whom such music is deeply familiar. Yet, unfamiliar music can also potentially communicate hostility, and provoke a sense of confusion, fear or alienation.

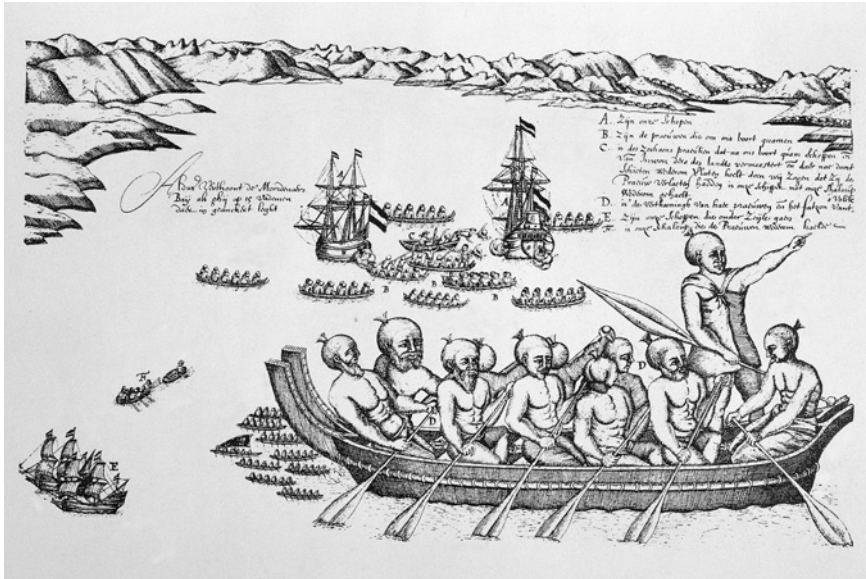


Figure 5.1 Isaac Gilsemans, *A View of the Murderers' Bay* (1642)

Source: Reproduced with the permission of the Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand, PUBL-0086-021.

It is unclear from the account of Tasman's encounter whether the Maoris heard aggression and challenge in the sonorities of the Dutch trumpets. Unlike visual images, musical sounds literally surround or immerse the listener, imposing their temporalities, and invading the subject's physical and temporal space. We can close our eyes, but not our ears, and even so-called 'civilised' societies continue to use music for torture (Cusick 2006). Unfamiliar musics can signal alternative or conflicting temporalities, values and ways of ordering or understanding the world, which may be heard as noise, 'disorder', a threat to order or alterity. Sometimes such musics can instil terror in the hearer, whereas for people who identify with or who are familiar with these sounds they may be perceived as beautiful and convey a sense of solidarity. For example, in his 1609 *Royal Commentaries of the Inca*, Garcilaso de la Vega includes a description of the historical defeat of the Andean Huanca people by the Inca king Pachacuti. According to Garcilaso, the Huancas worshipped dogs, took immense delight in consuming their flesh, and even made a form of horn (*bocina*) out of their heads. These dog head horns were played during the Huanca's feasts and dances, and produced a music that was sweet (*suave*) to their ears, but when used in battle stunned and terrified their enemies. As Garcilaso observes, 'they said that the power of their [dog] god brought about these two contrary effects: to them it sounded good, because they honoured him,

but it bewildered their enemies and caused them to flee' (Garcilaso de la Vega 1609, Book 6, Chapter 10, my translation). It is notable that Garcilaso specifically relates this contrast in perception to belief or ideology – belief or non-belief in the Huanca's 'dog god'.

More generally, the association of musics with particular ideologies, belief systems, values or identities can sometimes provoke a powerful sense of aversion, alienation or negative evaluation among those who do not identify or empathise with them, which may involve a suspension of listening or disengagement (Stokes 1994). Such processes of avoidance can lead certain musics, even when produced close to home, to be rendered unfamiliar or simply to be heard as noise. Heavy metal music is an obvious example of a sub genre that is deeply appreciated and closely identified with by some, but because of its associations and sonic exterior, is often avoided or dismissed as 'noise' by others, for whom it thereby remains unfamiliar. However, musics have also often been rendered unfamiliar through processes of exclusion. For example, the development and practice of art music genres in, for example, India, China and Europe, were usually – historically at least – restricted to the privileged classes and their musician employees. This privileged position, and relative freedom from concerns with subsistence, provided opportunities for cultivating familiarity with highly elaborated and extended musical forms and sometimes dilettante study and performance. Yet, for a broad spectrum of the population such musics remained unfamiliar (Booth and Kuhn 1990, p. 423), just as class or caste affiliation ensured that much vernacular music remained unfamiliar to elite groups. Thus, rather than being a given (as it is often perceived), musical unfamiliarity can be, and often is, a product of wider social and cultural processes, involving, for example, identity, politics, ideology, economics, gender, ethnicity, class and religion.

Attitudes to intercultural engagement are also inevitably influenced by some of these factors, alongside the power dynamics accompanying global and historical processes, such as colonialism. The perception that music is 'unfamiliar' may have much less to do with cultural distance than a lack of motivation to engage with it, sometimes in turn reflecting the ascription of low or undesirable cultural values. For example, the number of Europeans and North Americans motivated to acquire performance skills in the musical traditions of other cultures is very small compared with that of people from elsewhere who dedicate themselves to European–American classical and popular music traditions – sometimes to become world-leading exponents. It is also notable that the local or indigenous musics of many of these latter musicians remain deeply unfamiliar to them. Often, only later, after spending time away from their country of origin, do such musicians begin to engage with the music of their homeland and come to view it as interesting, valuable or part of their cultural identity. On the one hand, the motivation to engage with unfamiliar or culturally alien musics often concerns the cultural capital and aspirations with which these musics are associated. On the other hand, such motivation may reflect political agendas or a wish to explore alternatives, new challenges or creative opportunities. In turn, this may reflect dissatisfaction with

more familiar music, or a desire to objectify, develop or reinvigorate it. Indeed, the culturally unfamiliar sometimes comes to represent a key creative resource, possibly stimulating a kind of collector mentality or the reification of musical phenomena which then stand out, or 'figure', against the 'ground' of the familiar. Thus, whilst cultural unfamiliarity may sometimes motivate a tendency to suspend listening or to disengage, at other times it may focus and intensify the listener's attention. As noted previously, it is often unfamiliar elements in an otherwise familiar piece of music that emerge as the most salient and remarkable features, commanding attention and interest, and perhaps provoking a sense of excitement or emotional potency.

The world's diverse music histories abound with, and might be said to be characterised or motivated by, the practice of acquiring more or less familiar musical elements, ideas or resources from other people or cultures and modifying them to conform or appeal to the receiver's tastes. When the musical resources in question are considered culturally distant or unfamiliar and adopted from a position of power, this process is often dubbed 'exoticism' or 'orientalism' (for example, Locke 2009; Said 1978). In these cases, the faithfulness and extent to which unfamiliar cultural resources are imitated or incorporated vary immensely. For example, the forms taken by 'exoticist' European classical music to invoke unfamiliar or exotic cultures may have little or no basis in the actual music of the culture represented. The sounds index the unfamiliar or exotic, but in reality they are often familiar and stereotyped semiotic codes used to evoke exotic imaginaries that may themselves have little basis in cultural reality. In other words, familiar codes may come to represent the idea of cultural unfamiliarity.

In turn, these same codes for the exotic, alongside stereotypical or homogenised versions of the culture that stress the unfamiliar – sometimes labelled by outsiders as 'true' or 'authentic' (Diamond, Cronk and von Rosen 1994, p. 44) – may come to be adopted by the people they are purported to represent, as a form of 'strategic essentialism' (Spivak 1987). Thus, for example, indigenous Americans whose own cultural traditions do not include notably exotic or unfamiliar features are likely to appear to dominant settler society as disappointing, inauthentic or corrupted (Conklin 1997; Dueck 2005, pp. 170–71). Once again, this reflects a widespread tendency, noted above, to presuppose difference (Agawu 2003), especially by metropolitan populations when they encounter or conceptualise culturally distant peoples. Nonetheless, with the rise of identity politics (especially since the early 1990s), many self-identified ethnic or cultural groups have been deeply occupied in defining their cultural uniqueness and exploring the benefits, especially in terms of economics and rights, that such distinct resources might hold for them (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009; Brown 2003). Indeed, communities who lack adequately distinctive and marketable musical or other forms of cultural resources or heritage – in other words, who appear too familiar – may be seen to be at a disadvantage.

Challenging Aesthetics

Our social and cultural environments inevitably lead us to become attentive and receptive to particular forms and ways of structuring musical sounds, which in turn underlie the ongoing development of our aesthetic appreciation and values. Although, as noted above, social processes often contribute to the unfamiliarity of particular musics, it is also evident that certain musical phenomena provide greater challenges for intercultural listening than others. For example, the polyphonic singing and yodelling of Central African forest peoples, such as the Mbuti and BaAka, is immediately appealing to many Europeans and North Americans. The minor divergences of such music's pitch intervals and vocal sonorities from Euro-American models are usually heard as charmingly unfamiliar, rather than as unpleasant or aesthetically challenging. However, instrument sonorities, vocal timbres and tuning systems developed in other parts of the world are sometimes much more demanding for Euro-American ears. Indeed, such musics are notable for their absence, at least in an unmodified form, from most World Music marketing. For example, the strident high-pitched women's singing of some indigenous groups of the Bolivian and Peruvian Andes is not always perceived as immediately attractive by North Americans and Europeans – although many of my own students greatly enjoy emulating these vocal sonorities. Similarly, the various forms of panpipes and flutes played in this region tend to be blown strongly, exploiting the upper register, to produce what outsiders typically characterise as 'harsh' or 'dissonant' timbres. During field research in the Andes, I found that these rural musicians had little aesthetic appreciation for the lyrical and virtuosic recorder music I played to them, pieces that had received acclaim in the UK. My Andean friends were unimpressed with the gentle and expressive 'fluty' sound, suggesting instead that I 'blow more strongly'.

What these same musicians particularly appreciated when they played their own *pinkillu* flutes (see Figure 5.2) – which were probably modelled on European Renaissance recorders – was the strong vibrant timbre that they referred to as *tara* (Stobart 1996b). From a European scientific perspective, the beating sound of *tara* is literally 'dissonant' or inharmonic. It results from a combination of instrument construction and performance practice where, as my hosts put it, the flute speaks 'with two mouths', producing a double (multiphonic) timbre consisting of two sounds pitched approximately an octave apart, but not precisely, so as to create a beating effect (Stobart 2006, p. 215). Significantly, the concept of *tara* was closely associated with notions of social harmony and abundance, and was contrasted with a much less appreciated thin 'fluty' sound, referred to as *q'iwa*, also produced by these flutes. Whereas the acoustically 'dissonant' *tara* sound was widely connected with social harmony, the 'fluty' *q'iwa* sound was linked with social dissonance (Stobart 2006, p. 216). For example, the word *q'iwa* was applied to string instruments that would not stay in tune, awkward-shaped objects that did not fit or people who were mean or selfish, whereas *tara* was related to two people walking together, double objects or things that were in balance (Stobart 1996a).



Figure 5.2 A *pinkillu* flute consort performing in a llama corral during the feast Carnival, Wak'an Phukru community, Macha, Bolivia

Source: Photo by author.

The simple point I wish to stress here is that musical expressions of 'harmony' and 'dissonance' are socially constructed. Accordingly, such constructions, and the types of aesthetic preferences they entail, do not necessarily communicate across culture. What might be heard by an Andean rural musician as harmonious, vibrant and abundant, may well be perceived by an outsider acculturated into a different musical environment as harsh, 'dissonant' and even 'unmusical'.

This sense of cultural particularity, as mutually unintelligible musical aesthetics or taste, was baldly expressed by Charles Darwin in *The Descent of Man* (1871):

so different is the taste of the several races, that our music gives not the least pleasure to savages, and their music is to us in most cases hideous and unmeaning. (p. 333)

Darwin's conception of the music of 'savages' was probably largely based on his encounters with the indigenous people of Tierra de Fuego during his voyage to South America on the *Beagle* in 1832, an experience that was critical to the development of his theory of evolution (Desmond and Moore 1992, p. 133). We cannot be entirely sure what Darwin heard, but a series of recordings of songs performed by Lola Kiepja, who is presented as the last of the traditional Selk'nam people of Tierra del Fuego, may at least give us a flavour. The songs were recorded

by Anne Chapman and appear on two LP discs entitled *Selk'nam Chants of Tierra del Fuego, Argentina* (1972, 1978). In his review of the discs, Dale Olsen (1980, p. 289) observes that the 'casual listener will undoubtedly find the songs in these two albums hopelessly repetitive'. Although close listening is rewarded by the revelation of musical intimacy, subtle and varied tone colours, rhythmic complexity and the use of microtonal intervals, there is little in the vocal quality, melodic gestures or rhythmic cadence of these unaccompanied songs that the average Euro-American listener will find immediately attractive or meaningful. Indeed, I can well imagine less culturally open-minded (or politically correct) individuals today dismissing these sounds as 'hideous' – as did Darwin. Nonetheless, many Euro-American listeners might well find the sounds of certain experimental or atonal musics produced close to home even more sonically unfamiliar – or more 'hideous and unmeaning' – than, for example, many of the world's indigenous musics. In other words, we need to be careful not to assume that cultural distance can be neatly mapped onto musical aesthetics or sonic unfamiliarity.

The challenging aesthetics and sense of unfamiliarity provoked by much experimental music is often deeply political in motivation. They intentionally defy familiar musics, as sounds that are perceived to represent the status quo, convention or complacency. Yet, it is striking that people do not usually refer to such unfamiliar sounds as 'exotic'; their unfamiliarity comes from within rather than from outside. According to Jacques Attali, music is used by power to create an illusion of harmony in the world, making people forget the general violence. It is also used to *silence* or censor all other human noises 'by mass-producing a deafening, syncretic kind of music' – in other words, music that is mass mediated and familiar to the majority (Attali 1985, p. 19). Thus, rebellious musics may often be seen to exploit and celebrate precisely those unfamiliar sounds or 'noises' that familiar hegemonic musics attempt to censor. Examples abound, including the British punk movement or the diverse inharmonic sounds incorporated into the compositions of Brazilian composer and instrumentalist Hermeto Paschoal (Lima and Costa 2000). The unfamiliar sounds of experimental or rebellious music may be seen – among those who identify with them – to provoke what might be characterised as a kind of political or ideological listening. Thus, to create, perform or listen to music that is constructed as aesthetically 'difficult' or unfamiliar, in relation to accepted or mainstream musics, may sometimes be seen as an expression of solidarity with (or rejection of) particular ideologies, politics or values. Indeed, for those committed to such projects or ideologies, these 'unfamiliar sounds' may come to symbolise integrity and to be experienced as beautiful. Some of these kinds of processes are beautifully charted in the documentary film *Hanoi Eclipse: The Music of Dai Lam Linh* (2010) by Barley Norton, which features the controversial Vietnamese band Dai Lam Linh.

The kinds of ideological listening described above also partly explain the large audience that developed in Europe during the late 1970s and 1980s for the previously unfamiliar (but aesthetically approachable) sounds of Andean neo-folklore music, especially in the form of Chilean 'New Song'. For many people in Europe,

engaging with this music was a way to express solidarity with Chilean victims and exiles following the 1973 coup by Augusto Pinochet, the dictatorship's censorship of such sounds affording them special potency (Morris 1986). However, I also want to suggest that the sounds of culturally unfamiliar musics, especially when encountered in audio recordings, are sometimes attractive precisely because they do *not* entangle the listener in the music's ideologies, politics or broader contexts, dynamics which sometimes constrain our listening nearer to home. Paradoxically, this means that, despite the social inequalities that so often surround the production and circulation of culturally unfamiliar musics, they are often heard as novel, fresh and free of ideological baggage. They liberate listeners from the constraints of the familiar and offer a sense of utopia or innocence. Thus, in recordings of the polyphonic singing of the BaAka Forest People (Central African Republic), Euro-American listeners tend to hear a sense of peace, naturalness, humour and community, rather than the jealousies, disease, hunger, anxiety and conflicts with agriculturalist villagers that underlie such people's lives and performance (Locke 1996, p. 130). Paucity of contextual or linguistic knowledge may also mean that problematic aspects of unfamiliar musics, such as unacceptably homophobic or racist lyrics, may pass unnoticed. In short, unfamiliar musical sounds can, in some contexts, be intensely political – explicitly employed to challenge the familiar or conventional – but in others they may be perceived as apolitical, as offering a sense of ideological liberation or nostalgic return to an imagined innocence.

From Unfamiliar to Ubiquitous?

The sensation of unfamiliarity associated with musics of distant cultures has undoubtedly been, and sometimes still remains, heightened by the challenges and dangers of travel. Furthermore, interpretations of encounters with such cultures have often been informed by existing imaginaries of the unfamiliar, such as the utopian and fantastical accounts of Amazons from *Mandeville's Travels*, which in turn drew on Greek myth (Klarer 1993). Yet, these early musical encounters, even if sometimes with fatal consequences, were characterised by direct human contact. By contrast, the majority of encounters with culturally unfamiliar musics over the past century have occurred via recorded media. Although such mediated listening vastly reduces the risks associated with travel (Taylor 2007, p. 206), the separation of sounds from their sources also entails an absence of direct human engagements. While such so-called 'acousmatic' (Chion [1983] 2009) or 'schizophonic' (Schafer [1977] 1994, p. 90) listening might be seen to open up new spaces for the imagination, beyond the constraints of lived human interactions, it might also be seen to restrict opportunities to develop mutual understanding. Indeed, Ross Daly advocates replacing recordings of World Music with a greatly increased quantity of live performance. For him, 'any attempt to approach the various musical traditions of the world has to involve an appreciation of the musicians themselves' (Daly 1992 cited in Aubert 2007, p. 55). Arguably, however, this problematic space for the imagination or re-interpretation offered by audio recordings is in part

offset by other factors surrounding developments in communications. Migration, travel, tourism and the circulation of knowledge about other cultures enable vastly expanded opportunities for intercultural interaction and understanding that could not have been imagined several decades, let alone a century, ago. In this context it is interesting to consider two statements about the reception of unfamiliar or exotic musics made respectively in 1934 and 1990:

Nowadays, with ample gramophone records of exotic music and recently published books of musical research, our sources of information are many and inexpensive. There is no longer the necessity for the appalling ignorance that darkens our musical life and for the prejudices that arise out of that ignorance. (Grainger 1934 in Blacking 1987, pp. 151–2)

It may be a natural human tendency to label unfamiliar musical traditions as primitive, barbarian, the chirping of birds, or meaningless, but the continually increasing speed and intensity of intercultural communication in the twentieth century has shown such ethnocentric value judgments to be indefensible. (Booth and Kuhn 1990, p. 411)

Grainger's words date from the time that 78 rpm discs of music from unfamiliar cultures were just becoming available in the UK, while Booth and Kuhn were writing soon after World Music marketing had become big business and the internet was in its infancy. The variety of culturally diverse music available to us in the 2010s, at the click of an internet search engine or from an online store, has grown exponentially, but does this mean that people have become more tolerant of culturally unfamiliar musical sounds or that ethnocentric value judgements and prejudice have diminished?

Dependent on context, it would be possible to argue both for and against the proposition that culturally unfamiliar musics are more accepted today. Developments in communications mean that an extraordinary range of culturally diverse musics, and information about them, is certainly widely available. However, although an almost unimaginable multiplicity of localised musical expressions from around the world is available on Youtube, finding particular examples usually requires local or specialist knowledge. For example, to locate the music videos of Gregorio Mamani that feature indigenous music from the Northern Potosí region of the Bolivian Andes (Stobart 2011), specific key words, such as the name of the artist, genre or instruments would be required. My simple point is that internet searches tend to be confined to familiar linguistic and cultural territory – and it is in the economic interests of internet search engines to keep it this way. While in many respects musical sounds from around the world have become ubiquitous, the versions that dominate mass media tend to be carefully selected so as not to offend or disturb generalised sensibilities.⁵ While some are

⁵ Key actors here include artists, record companies, distributors and broadcasters.

immediately approachable (as mentioned above), others that might challenge mainstream sensibilities are sometimes blended with familiar musical resources; in this form they may then potentially add spice to the music or evoke other people, times or places. For example, a World Music hit – which might seem almost as unlikely as the Selk’nam songs of Tierra del Fuego – was created when the New Age pop group Enigma combined sampled excerpts from a 1989 recording of a Taiwanese aboriginal song with synthesiser sounds and a disco beat to create *Return to Innocence* (1993). The song, which explicitly used unfamiliar vocal sounds to invoke nostalgia for modernity’s loss of innocence, was selected as the theme song for the 1996 Atlanta Olympics and received very wide circulation (Tan 2008, p. 222). Anahid Kassabian has argued that such blends of exotic and familiar sounds, as also offered by the Putumayo recordings heard in Starbucks coffee shops, do not – as some scholars of postmodernity would have it – collapse the distinction between ‘here’ and ‘there’. Rather, she suggests, they enact a kind of *distributed tourism* (or *distributed subjectivity*) where the difference between ‘here’ and ‘there’ is actively maintained, to create a kind of ‘entangled space’ of being ‘t/here’. However, this experience is much the same whichever part of the world the coffee shop is located in (Kassabian 2004, pp. 219–21). We might also question the degree to which such ubiquitous forms of background music, which often create ambience without receiving close listening, can be said to be truly ‘familiar’.

Part II: Perceiving Unfamiliar Sounds

Music Perception and the Unfamiliar

Although perhaps counter-intuitive, it would appear that perceptions of musical unfamiliarity intensify with cognitive development. Infants exhibit an extraordinary ability to discriminate speech sounds, including almost every phonetic contrast. Yet, with cognitive development over the first year this ability declines as infants increasingly focus their attention on familiar acoustic dimensions relevant to the linguistic environment (Maye with Werker and Gerken 2002). According to Lynch and Eilers, similar culturally specific perceptual reorganisation for musical tuning also begins to affect infants’ perception between 6 and 12 months (Stevens 2004, p. 434). Just as adults’ perception of speech sounds becomes constrained by the phonetic organisation of the speaker’s native language (Maye et al. 2002), so it seems their ability to perceive tonal relations that do not match the ‘tonal schemata’ developed during musical acculturation is reduced (Lynch and Eilers 1991, p. 122). In his theory of auditory scene analysis, Bregman (1990, p. 641) suggests that we actively and constructively process auditory information using ‘schemas that incorporate our knowledge of familiar sounds’ (in Clayton 2008, p. 139; also see Chapter 2). For the case of both music and speech, such schemata may be seen, on the one hand, to greatly increase our ability to perceive and process

patterns of sound encountered in familiar cultural environments, but, on the other, to constrain our ability to distinguish unfamiliar patterns of sound encountered in other cultural environments.

Such learned perceptual dispositions would seem to impact on a variety of the ways in which people perceive culturally unfamiliar music. For example, besides the effects of pitch recognition mentioned above, various experiments have demonstrated that subjects' recognition and memory of musical structures, and their ability to predict or reproduce them, are more effective in culturally familiar than unfamiliar musics (Ayari and McAdams 2003, p. 191; Eerola et al. 2006; Morrison, with Demorest and Stambaugh 2008). Also, while certain aspects of temporal processing appear to be universal, such as working memory and biases towards particular periodicities, attentional foci or behavioural timing (Cross 2008, p. 150; Nan, with Knösche and Friederici 2006, p. 179), the structuring and perception of rhythmic relations vary considerably across culture. For example, the inability of outsiders to identify an underlying beat or pulse, which is often unmarked acoustically, in certain African or African-derived musics is well documented (Temperley 2000, p. 71). This has led artists such as Yousou N'Dour from Senegal to include an acoustic cue in his recordings of Mbalax music for the international market to enable foreign audiences to identify and move in time with the dance beat. This helps avoid the sense of disorientation, sometimes encountered by African musicians on international tour, when audiences perceive and dance to a different pulse from that structuring their performance.

Issues concerning cross-cultural differences in the perception of pulse have also emerged from my research in the rural Andes, analysed in a paper with Ian Cross (Stobart and Cross 2000). When European subjects were asked to tap along with Quechua language 'Easter Songs' from Northern Potosí in Bolivia, with very few exceptions they treated the songs as anacrusic: as if in 6/8 time with a quaver upbeat. By contrast, the tapping of all Quechua-speaking Bolivian subjects, even when unfamiliar with the genre, treated the songs as non-anacrusic: as if in 2/4 starting on the first beat (see Example 5.1). Interestingly, several of the Bolivian subjects also tapped along with recordings of anacrusic (6/8) British folk songs, perceiving the anacrusic upbeat quaver as a downbeat. (To my ears this tapping initially sounded random, but measurement using computer software demonstrated that it was regular.)

Our analysis also considered the role of production, such as the strumming of the mandolin-like *charango* that accompanies Easter songs (see Figure 5.3). This sometimes created rhythmic ambiguity by stressing the up-stroke of the strum, while the down-stroke, which coincides with the footfalls of the dance (or *tactus*), is sometimes silent, not striking the strings. Both the *charango* up-stroke and the sung rhythms of the songs also tended towards asymmetric proportions (averaging a 2:3 ratio), adding further rhythmic instability that we interpreted in terms of keeping the performance exciting and 'on the edge'. The Andean participants' rhythmic perception, and their ability for rhythmic 'play' that

Example 5.1 Easter song perception: (a) by European subjects (6/8 upbeat);
(b) by Bolivian (Quechua-speaking) subjects and performers
(2/4 on beat)

(a) Claps of European Subjects

Ta - ki - ri - ri - lla - sun wi - ri - tay

(b) Performers' Footfalls

Ta - ki - ri - ri - lla - sun wi - ri - tay



Figure 5.3 *Charango* players of Easter songs in Sacaca, Bolivia

Source: Photo by author.

often seemed to contradict acoustic cues, may also have been facilitated by the stress rules of the Quechua language. The primary stress in Quechua falls on the penultimate syllable (and is thus moveable, depending on word length), but an unmarked secondary stress falls on the first syllable, acting, we have proposed, as a kind of perceptual anchor.

An important point to emerge here is that the same musical sounds can not only afford different associative meanings for different people, but also that – according to the perceptual dispositions of the hearer – the ways in which the patterns and structures of the sounds are heard may be strikingly divergent. In turn,

this can lead to differences in bodily responses as well as to broader conceptions of how the music is organised. Indeed, might listeners be said to be hearing quite different musics? According to John Blacking:

Music can communicate nothing to unprepared and unreceptive minds, in spite of what some writers have suggested to the contrary. The power of music as music must depend in the last resort on people's perceptions of specific patterns of melody, rhythm and texture, and on the bodily sensations and responses that these elicit. (Blacking 1987, p. 30)

Even if questions about the ontology of music and its presentation as almost exclusively aural might arise from this statement, Blacking is clearly right to stress the body as the primary locus of our engagements with music. The only problem with the first part of Blacking's statement is that culturally unfamiliar musics almost always communicate *something*. This may not be the same as would be perceived by people who are deeply familiar with the music in question, but it is *something*, not *nothing*. I will return to this point in more detail below. However, at the time Blacking was writing, there were good historical, ideological and political reasons to make such a statement. It encouraged serious consideration of the perceptions, knowledge and musical meanings shared by marginalised and discriminated groups, such as the Venda with whom Blacking undertook extensive research under South African apartheid, against which he was an outspoken critic (Byron 1995, p. 16). It also challenged ethnomusicologists not to rely on their own subjective perceptions or presumed meanings, but instead to become deeply familiar with the musical cultures they studied through extended ethnographic research. As Titon (1996, p. xxiii) puts it, 'as much as possible, an unfamiliar music should be understood at the outset in its own terms: that is, as the people who make the music understand it'; an objective that may involve considerable perceptual challenges.

Challenging Perceptions and Performing the Unfamiliar

In ethnomusicology, the acquisition of familiarity with the musical culture under study through learning to perform has long been viewed as a crucial research methodology (see also Chapter 7). The issues surrounding the development of such performance skills have received considerable discussion, especially in the wake of Mantle Hood's classic 1960 essay 'The Challenge of Bi-Musicality'. While for the casual listener perceptual divergences in the reception of culturally unfamiliar music may pass almost unnoticed, for those attempting to engage more closely with, participate in or reproduce such musics, mismatches in perception may throw up considerable challenges. Many examples of these perceptual problems and the sense of disorientation they sometimes provoke are found in the ethnomusicological literature. For example, David Locke describes his own disorientation when first trying to achieve polyrhythmic synchrony with other

parts in (African) Ewe drum music, and expresses sympathy for his US students who, when trying to do the same, ‘would break down in tears of frustration and self-doubt’ (Locke 2004, p. 169). Similarly, Ali Jihad Racy reflects on his US students’ problems when playing microtonal intervals in Arabic music, and the tendency for beginning students to play ‘neutral’ intervals too flat:

Are they in fact hearing the neutral interval as a flat note, as being “minor-ish”? Or do they hear it properly but cannot play it as such because some acquired control mechanism is holding them back? Are their minds “correcting” the intervals by fitting them to a familiar intonational paradigm? This might be like learning French or any foreign language and realizing you are speaking with an accent. You know what the native speakers sound like and probably can imitate them if you really try. But somehow your self-consciousness is standing in the way of your loosening up. You need to get rid of the inhibitions. I wonder if taking a course in acting would help my students play microtones better. (Racy 2004, pp. 160–61)

Long ago, Mantle Hood (1960, p. 56) also observed that the ‘tendency of Westerners to “correct” unfamiliar intervals, usually without being aware of doing so, can itself be corrected only by repeated exposure to listening and by singing’. To ‘correct’ unfamiliar acoustic patterns in this way highlights a general cognitive propensity, noted above, to assimilate sounds (and other information from our environment) into familiar categories or schemata, which are sometimes very durable. Gerhard Kubik even goes so far as to suggest that:

Hearing habits in the field of the recognition of note systems, once learned, are apparently irreversible. Someone who has “grown up” into a given note system from childhood onward perceives the note material of a foreign musical culture always in relation to his own patterns. Musicians brought up in Western musical culture, for example, hear the equiheptatonic scales of Africa instinctively in relation to the known diatonic scale, and equipentatonic systems as C, D, E, G, A. Even a major effort of will cannot change this perception process. (Kubik 1979, p. 242)

Nonetheless, it would also seem that with adequate repetition and immersion – and possibly even acting classes! – certain of these perceptual challenges can be, at least partially, overcome. This has obvious parallels with learning foreign languages after childhood, where varying degrees of competency can be achieved according to context, motivation and aptitude. However, even when immersed exclusively in a second language environment over many decades, it is quite rare for mother-tongue characteristics to be entirely undetectable in a person’s second language.⁶

⁶ It should also be noted that long-term immersion in a second language environment may also modify aspects of speech in the person’s mother tongue.

According to Hood (1960, p. 56), when learning foreign musics, students without previous musical training probably have an advantage over those who have received advanced proficiency in their home musical culture. Aubert (2007, pp. 75–6) even presents such prior expertise as a ‘handicap’. As perception and cognition are apparently influenced even by passive exposure to music from childhood (Drake and El Heni 2003), presumably music specialisation into adulthood leads to increased culture-specific adaptation and refinement. Might this mean a corresponding reduction in the cognitive potential to process certain unfamiliar parameters of foreign music cultures? Or, alternatively, might prior investment in specialised skills, which inevitably incorporate (competing) musical values, serve to reduce the student’s flexibility in approach or attitude? Students without prior specialisation may have less existing commitment to particular musical values and thus less to lose. In short, the challenges to music learning for those students who have already acquired specialist music skills may be both perceptual *and* motivational, albeit sometimes unconsciously.

In this context it is notable that, for Hood, learning to perform musics from other cultures was ultimately a means to develop musicality (Hood 1960, p. 59). John Baily (2008, p. 118) has suggested replacing Hood’s concept of ‘bi-musicality’ with the notion of ‘intermusability’, which helpfully escapes the implication of two musics learned from childhood (as suggested by ‘bilingual’) and shifts the focus to abilities. What is also significant about this term is the way that, rather than implying two ‘mutually unintelligible’ musical languages, it suggests the possibility of overlaps and continuities in skills, competencies and other forms of musical experience. Might this mean a more flexible attitude to intercultural engagement and participation, and a move away from discourses of cultural exclusivity? As Laurent Aubert observes:

one meets performers all over the world fully qualified in Western classical music, jazz or rock. But the reciprocal, if it is true, is only rarely accepted. As soon as it is about *flamenco* or Gypsy violin, African percussion or Indian *sitar*, someone will retort that “they have it in their blood”, that “it is necessary to have been born in that place” to play like that. What is going on here? Is there a universal music accessible to all, and yet other music that is “intransmissible” because it emerges from innate predispositions? (Aubert 2007, p. 7)

Histories of Misperception, Transmission and Creativity

Modes of musical behaviour and perception are often reproduced and maintained by a consensus that divergence from the culturally familiar is ‘wrong’. Music learners everywhere experience social pressure to conform to such accepted norms, where transmission is sometimes underscored by formal pedagogy. From this perspective, the perception of Bolivian Easter songs by Europeans as anacrusic (mentioned above) is ‘incorrect’ or a form of ‘misperception’. However, listeners may be

entirely unaware that their perceptions do not match those of the people producing the music.⁷ Nor does this necessarily diminish their appreciation of the music or restrict its reproduction or transmission, albeit in a perceptually reinterpreted form (for example, Manuel 1988, p. 21). Thus, from a broader perspective we might question the degree to which a given mode of cultural hearing can always be said to be ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’. I would like to take two aspects into consideration here: power dynamics and cultural mixing or adaptation.

Firstly, as Agawu (2003, p. 164) reminds us, ‘categories of perception are made, not given. Every act of perception carries implicit baggage from a history of habits of constructing the world’. Thus, we need to consider how notions of power and authority impact on hierarchies of perception and misperception during transmission processes. Whose perceptions dominate in given contexts? As noted above, musicians reproducing elements from unfamiliar musical traditions will often automatically ‘correct’ sound patterns to fit their existing acculturated schemata or categories. With continued transmission such reinterpreted perceptions can become accepted, potentially even leading to the marginalisation or demise of particular ways of hearing. The wide dissemination of the equally tempered diatonic scale is an obvious example, its transmission in part underwritten by music technology. However, if attempts to reproduce unfamiliar intervals are guided by a figure of authority (such as Ali Jihad Racy in the case of Arabic music), alternative types of perceptual sensibility and values may develop. As regards rhythm, I have encountered several published transcriptions of Andean music where the transcriber has misperceived the metric organisation of the music. Performances based on such notations, doubly imbued with authority through both notation and publication, would doubtless be based on the transcriber’s misperceptions. Similarly, I taught an Andean song to British students for many years before realising that I had misperceived it as anacrustic.

Secondly, as regards cultural mixing, it is inevitable that the diverse borrowings, appropriations, parodies, assimilations and other forms of interaction, participation and transmission that have characterised music history, have involved direct or indirect exchanges between music makers with differing perceptual dispositions. Shifting our focus away from unequal power relations between participants, I wish to speculate on the ‘creative’ dimension of many intercultural encounters and reinterpretations, what I will term *creative misperception*. When musical elements are acquired from another cultural source they tend to be reconfigured (to a greater or lesser extent) according to the performers’ perceptions, discrepancies sometimes passing unnoticed or emerging as foci for creative elaboration. Thus, in the context of hip-hop samples, Michael Krimper (2010) observes how, when

⁷ Arguably, a lack of awareness of such perceptual discrepancies is increased by recording technology’s schizophrenic separation of sounds from their sources. However, from another perspective, the potentially limitless repetition enabled by such technology (especially when digital) may be seen to fix and give authority to particular performances in turn limiting divergences (or perceptual mismatches) in the transmission process.

engaging with unfamiliar sound materials, his ‘most creative ideas emerge in ... uncanny moments of misperception’. Also, perceptual discrepancies between musicians during intercultural performances, whilst sometimes potentially disturbing interactions, may in other contexts fuel creativity and provoke imaginative responses. Charles Keil’s notion of ‘participatory discrepancies’ seems relevant here (although his discussion of the concept is not directly related to perceptual dispositions): ‘Music, to be personally involving and socially valuable, must be “out of time” and “out of tune”’ (Keil 1987, p. 275). Both the ‘culture of correction’ and the cult of the composer, which often accompany performance from music notation and formal music pedagogy, may sometimes be seen to work against the ‘participatory discrepancies’ that result from interacting subjectivities and perceptions in performance. For example, in collaborative compositional processes (found, for example, among many rock bands) individuals may find the musical ideas they offer misperceived by others. Such musicians often realise that relinquishing authority over an idea – and their perception of it – is often necessary for it to be taken up by the rest of the group and incorporated into a collaborative composition. Similarly, when I demonstrated a melody to a group of rural Andean panpipe players with whom I was playing during a feast, they misperceived various aspects. Rather than correct them, which would have seemed pedantic, I relinquished authority and a new and very satisfactory piece emerged.⁸

The diverse mismatches in perception that accompanied the ways African, European and Indigenous peoples borrowed, appropriated or assimilated one another’s mutually unfamiliar musical resources during the colonisation of the Americas provide a broader historical perspective on such processes. For example, the famous Argentine musicologist, Carlos Vega, observed that, when indigenous South American singers applied their own ‘rhythmic system’ to the performance of a Spanish song, a ‘hybrid’ would have resulted (Vega 1941, pp. 495–6). Just such a hybrid song genre is to be found in the *mestizo huayño* of the Bolivian Andes, which Ellen Leichtman (1987, p. 170) has described as ‘a blending of Indian [Indigenous] and European rhythmic understanding’. Although musical fusions and adaptations have been widely discussed in the literature – especially when accompanying racial and cultural *mestizaje* or ‘mixing’ (Moehn 2008; Wade 2000) – much less attention has been dedicated to the mismatches of perceptions that surely shaped such processes. Albeit largely speculative and difficult to demonstrate empirically, *creative misperception* has surely been fundamental to music history and has much potential for future research.

⁸ In this context it is notable that such musicians refer to the creation or acquisition of new music with the Quechua verb *q'iwiy* – ‘to twist, stir or remix’ (Stobart 2006, p. 244).

Conclusion

This chapter has taken the form of a reflection on the notion of musical unfamiliarity, and its repercussions, from an intercultural perspective. A chapter of this length can only hope to scratch the surface of this hugely complex theme, but I hope nonetheless to have opened up lines for future enquiry and debate. Although specifically invited to write from the perspective of 'non-Western' music and ethnomusicology, I have argued that a more holistic music scholarship – which better reflects global reality in the 2010s – would benefit from dispensing with the polarising term 'non-Western'. I have also observed that, although ethnomusicology is widely identified with the study of the unfamiliar, its methods are in many respects more characterised by the acquisition of familiarity, achieved through close ethnographic observation and participation. My approach has been both to explore the unfamiliar in music – its challenges and opportunities – and to question what social, cultural and cognitive processes lead music to be perceived as unfamiliar.

An important point to emerge is unfamiliarity's internal tension; its potential to provoke, on the one hand, anxiety, insecurity or fear and, on the other, a sense of excitement, novelty or revelation. It is also clear, and perhaps a musical universal, that for music making to be engaging and socially meaningful, the unfamiliar must be adequately framed within, or balanced by, the familiar. Cultural isolation or separation undoubtedly lies behind much experience of musical unfamiliarity, as especially evident before the rise of global communications systems. Indeed, it was questioned how much the ubiquity of global sounds resulting from modern technologies impacts upon musical familiarity and intercultural understanding. However, I also suggested that a range of social processes, including class, race, gender, ideology, politics and economics, or the presupposition of difference, often contribute to rendering certain musics unfamiliar. In addition it was shown that unfamiliar musical sounds may be used to political ends, but conversely may be perceived as liberating precisely because they do not entangle listeners in politics, ideologies or the concerns of daily life. In line with my resistance to the idea of the 'non-Western', I have questioned the assumption that cultural distance can somehow be neatly mapped onto musical or aesthetic unfamiliarity. Thus, many British people may find aspects of certain musical phenomena from close to home in the UK less familiar than specific genres performed, for example, by indigenous people in the Amazon.

The second half of the chapter focused more specifically on music perception and began by noting that an infant's ability to identify a diversity of sounds diminishes with cognitive development; in other words, with such development (or cultural specialisation), the perception of unfamiliarity increases. It is evident, from a range of studies of intercultural music perception, that subjects' musical operations and processes (such as pitch, rhythmic or structural recognition, or memory) are more restricted in culturally unfamiliar musical environments than familiar ones. I also considered, in some detail, a study of intercultural rhythmic

perception focusing on a specific Andean song genre. The tendency of British and Andean (Quechua speaking) subjects to perceive, and tap along to, the pulse of these songs in fundamentally different ways was related to a range of factors, including the stress patterns of the Quechua language. This led to discussion of the perceptual challenges that ethnomusicologists face when learning to perform culturally unfamiliar musics. Students sometimes experience a sense of confusion, owing to mismatches of perception, or may 'correct' unfamiliar intervals or other patterns to fit their existing perceptual dispositions. Finally, I briefly speculated on how mismatches of perception might have impacted on intercultural musical borrowings, especially in the context of broader histories of colonisation and migration. Power relations undoubtedly shaped whose perceptions were accepted in given contexts, but I also make a case for what I call *creative misperception*, the idea that perceptual mismatches in intercultural contexts may have provided, and continue to provide, an important creative focus for the development of musical styles and genres.

Overall, I hope this chapter contributes to a more nuanced approach to understandings of the familiar and unfamiliar in music, and, in particular, that it encourages an attitude of openness and enquiry to the challenges and creative opportunities of musical unfamiliarity. Rather than approaching the musically unfamiliar as 'Other', and presupposing difference, it should perhaps provoke us to listen more carefully, to engage and seek understanding. Whilst this may involve perceptual disorientations and challenging aesthetic terrains, if such engagements are treated as encounters between equals, they are likely to be deeply enriching – both for ourselves and for our relations with many other people around the world ...

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