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Music Education and the Other

”TO KEEP WHAT YOU DID NOT HAVE, AND MOVE FORWARD...”

(DAVOOD, 25, COMPUTER SCIENCE STUDENT—AND STUDENT AT THE PERSIAN MUSIC SCHOOL IN MALMÖ)

This article is based on a fieldwork research at the Iranian-Swedish Association music school in Malmö. The purpose was to contribute to the development of knowledge of music education in multicultural environments. This was done by mapping the strategies and attitudes that direct the activities in a small music school that has grown and taken shape outside the Swedish structure of municipal music schools.

Physically, there is very little distance between the Malmö Academy of Music, a higher education institution where the author teaches, and the Iranian-Swedish association's own music school. But on a conceptual level the distance contains a larger gap. The two institutional settings, located opposite each other on the same street, serve as an illustration of the co-existing models of teaching that exist in most multicultural societies: the formal setting, publically financed, and the non-formal setting, typically operated by volunteers, who are “enthusiasts”. These contrasting arenas each have their own sets of underlying values, epistemologies and different traditions for the transmission of expertise. The relationship between the two settings could be one of inspiration for both parts, depending on the quality and nature of the contact. This article focuses on the non-formal setting, with the purpose of highlighting the attitudes of the students towards learning about music and music making.

The objective of widening participa-

tion in higher education has been given high priority in Sweden, since a democratic society needs to give all citizens equal access to education if it is to remain truly democratic. Despite heavy investments in various programs to change the present situation the results are quite poor. An evaluation made by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket, 2007) determined that few universities can show visible results. Students from minority backgrounds were still unevenly distributed to different types of educations—or no further education at all. Art education is no exception (Furumark, 2004). The present study does not try to reveal all the reasons for this phenomenon, but aims at giving insights from the immigrants' own perspectives.

In order to listen to the insiders, to give the “emic” description (Herndon, 1993) I played my way musically into the field, by joining the Iranian music school as one of the students during the 2008–2009 school year. My position as a co-student and co-musician served as the door opener to semi structured interviews, designed to give information for the general questions underpinning the investigation: What do we know about the needs of people who participate in non-formal school settings in multicultural areas, as expressed by the teachers and the students themselves? What do we know about the music schools outside the academies and the municipal music schools? From these broader questions the following research question has been chiselled out: What driving forces motivate the students and how are these

expressed in their musical learning?

The opening of this article gives a general background to different approaches and projects concerning music education in multicultural societies and research paradigms. It is followed by theoretical perspectives on intercultural music education, with special attention to the notion of “the Other”. In the section on method and procedures the relationship between the researcher and the researched is discussed, again pointing out implications of how we listen to the Other. The results section is organised according to the categories that developed from the empirical data and the theoretical background: identity, longing for music, hybridity, learning, nostalgia, surprises, confrontations and imaginary homelands and future. The discussion leads the content in these different categories back to the original research question. It also sums up by pointing out the idea of *learning from* as opposed to *learning about*—different approaches to the Other.

BACKGROUND

This section provides an introduction to some of the dilemmas with which music educators and researchers are confronted when working in unfamiliar educational arenas and practices. The first subsection describes the demands placed on music educators concerning their abilities to solve the challenges, exemplified by projects and policies. The second subsection focuses on the relationship between formal and non-formal learning settings while the final subsection examines the relationship between various research paradigms.

Demands placed on music educators

The accessibility, kinds and functions of music education in multicultural schools and societies are discussed all over the world. In Australia a number of reports and projects have examined the accessibility of music education, and the relationships between the arts and society (Dil-

lon, 2006). In the USA, projects like the Chicago Arts Partnership in Education (CAPE) has documented school projects where the arts subjects have been used to promote innovative relationships between schools and communities, and to encourage cultural health (Bamford, 2006). In Sweden, the Canadian programme Learning Through the Arts (LTTA) was introduced in cooperation between the Kista district council, the Royal College of Music in Stockholm and the Royal Conservatory of Music (RCM) in Toronto.

In addition to projects like these, aimed at promoting culturally healthy societies, a large number of music projects have been initiated with the clear purpose of integrating minority groups into multicultural societies. However, research shows that a process of integration though music education is neither simple nor self-evident (Berkaak, 2006; Fock, 1997; Knudsen, 2007; Thorsén, 2003, 2006). In a global perspective it seems clear that societal changes triggered by globalisation offer challenges to music educators in increasingly heterogeneous classrooms. These challenges require new policies and attitudes to pedagogy, values and teaching strategies. The present study seeks to contribute to increased awareness of the ways music education can be used in minority groups, and how these learning environments can be related to formal music education.

In this context it is also interesting to note that the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, ratified by Sweden in 2006, entails serious obligations on the part of music educators:

Article 7—Measures to promote cultural expressions

1. Parties shall endeavour to create in their territory an environment which encourages individuals and social groups:

(a) to create, produce, disseminate, distribute and have access to their own cultural expressions, paying due attention to the special circumstances and needs of women as well as various social groups, in-

cluding persons belonging to minorities and indigenous peoples;
(b) to have access to diverse cultural expressions from within their territory as well as from other countries of the world. (Unesco, 2005)

The need for research in this area is obvious: a great deal is done on a practical project level, and there are international policy documents calling for attention. For an overview of this see, for example, the Australian digital platform for collaborative research eMERGe (emerge-community, n.d.).

Communication between formal and non-formal settings

As formal settings are publically funded, they should also serve the entire community. In a multicultural town such as Malmö with its 286 000 inhabitants and 171 nationalities, this diversity would be expected to be reflected in the students, both at the municipal music school and at the Academy of Music. However, both institutions still have a great deal to do to achieve broader recruitment. Hofvander Trulsson (2004) shows in her study that only 16% of the students at the municipal music school have foreign background, while 40% of the 11-year old children in Malmö are of non-Swedish extraction (both parents born abroad).

This is not a local phenomenon, as Schippers (2010) states, conservatories need to be prepared to reflect on their content, methods and values. "These are at once the flagships of global music education, and the setting that need to be scrutinised most in the light of cultural diversity" (p. 110). Schippers defines formal settings for music transmission and learning as "programs and structures regulated by governments, in which the institutional environment consequently has a strong influence" (Schippers, 2010, p. 100) and non-formal as settings as ones where "the relationship between teachers and learners are organised by senior musicians themselves" (Schippers, 2010, p.

100). In this study the focus is on a typical non-formal setting, but with the formal setting of the Malmö Academy of Music as the horizon, or mirroring arena. There are other ways of describing this dichotomy. As Szego (2002) states, no label is value-free, and the formal education is inherently ethnocentric and tied to institutional contexts. She therefore suggests "intentional" and "incidental" learning, distinguished by the intent to remember and how well defined the procedures are in "intentional learning". However, even these systems may not stand out as separate in the everyday lives of learners.

The curricula used within formal higher music education can be viewed as "a crystallisation of educational philosophies" (Schippers, 2010, p. 111) which in most cases leads us back to influential Western philosophers emphasising analyses and structure and referring to Western art music. As most institutions are slow in adapting to new ideas, this has resulted in a situation that Schippers (2010) describes as truly problematic, calling for more communication between the formal and non-formal settings:

If community music builds on structures and enculturation processes that are naturally supported in the community (as opposed to superimposed), formal music education may increase its effectiveness by observing, emulating and collaborating community music's most successful incarnations. (p. 106)

The present study represents an effort to achieve such a communication. It also contributes to the discussions on the relationships between the formal and informal sphere (see for example Folkestad, 2006; Sæther, 2003; Green, 2001; Szego, 2002).

Communication between research paradigms

The problematic situation described above also calls for communication between different research paradigms. Music educa-

tion research has traditionally maintained a strong link to the discipline of psychology and thus an emphasis on experimental procedures, but more so in Anglo-American than in Scandinavian research. However, some of the most suitable and powerful research tools for collecting data on cultural practice and experience fall under ethnography and ethnomusicology. But, as Szego (2002) argues, while music education often has disregarded the issue of ethnocentrism in both choice of research questions and methods, ethnomusicology has often omitted questions of musical transmission.

Szego also points out another difference between the two paradigms: While the ethnomusicologist seeks the “thick description” and to globalize local concepts with the aim of *understanding* practices, the music educator more often has the aim of rethinking or *changing* practices. Different ontological and epistemological starting points for research projects lead in different directions, but there might be good grounds for connections:

Transmission and learning are socially constituted and culturally specific, but they are not determined by culture in any absolute way. Individuals working within the structure of transmission systems are certainly guided by those structures, but learners also exercise agency by manipulating them to their own ends and needs. (Szego, 2002, p. 724)

THEORY

Postcolonial theory claims that immigration to Europe and the USA has led to completely new identities that challenge the relatively homogeneous cultures and give rise to new questions about citizenship, power and the increasing political influence of culture. In this process, Said (1999) suggests that intellectuals have special duties: bibliographical, epistemological and dramatic. The bibliographical duties consist of offering alternative sources,

texts and evidences. The epistemological duties consist of offering new ideas that contradict prevailing discourses, for example on the meaning of “us” and “them”. The dramatic duty is about creating arenas, dramatising the questions and making them visible. In this project the Iranian-Swedish music school in Malmö is such an arena.

Learning about or learning from

One trend in the discussion on cultural diversity in music education in recent decades is towards exoticism. The Western eye and ear tend to see and listen to the exotic Other:

Epistemologically our approach to foreign cultures initially lumps them into a single category; we begin by dividing the world into categories of “ours” and “not ours”, into “familiar” and “strange”. (Nettl, 2005, p. 10)

This creates a moral dilemma; the Other is admired, but we want it to remain exotic. It seems as if Western civilization has a need for undistorted, authentic, sustainable and traditional societies—implying that the Other should not strive towards development such as taking over modern music forms. Cultural diversity in music education is basically a question of relationships between people. In this educational context, Todd (2008) questions the idea of a common ground and common actions and calls for the recognition of differences. She points out the dimension of violence that is present in all teaching, and reminds us that the teacher who thinks that he or she has understood the Other might simply just have forced the Other into the teacher’s world view. According to Todd (2008) the issue of relationship is expressed in two different approaches: learning about and learning from. Learning *about* implies that:

- we think that we can understand the Other,
- we think that by acting right we can

free ourselves from moral and political demand, by playing down the internal differences in the Other, we meet the Other with low respect.

Learning *from*, on the other hand, implies an awareness that:

- we cannot understand,
- we cannot assimilate,
- the process of learning needs to be part of a relation before it can start,
- there is a risk of losing one's own epistemological security when meeting the Other,
- there must be an open mind, expressed in passivity, or a more humble attitude.

The in-between of cultures and strangers

It is difficult to find any democratic society without conflicts regarding the relationships between public institutions and cultural minorities. As all liberal democracies by definition have promised equality, such conflicts are more or less inherent. There are a few alternative scenarios; either the minority groups claim their difference and distinctive characters, and demand for rights of self-determination, or similarities are claimed, leading to demands for equality and civil rights. The dilemma for the multicultural society is whether it should recognise its citizens as individuals or by their collective identities (Taylor, 1994). Taylor's proposal of mutual recognition (1994) has been criticised for excluding subcultures and cultures of migration. Bhabha (1996) claims that minorities are within all of us—there are no fixed, whole, local cultures. On the contrary all cultures are global and coloured by migration, with subcultures that are “infected” by and linked to each other, both like and unlike. Thus he introduces the concept of hybridity and the in-between of cultures.

Appiah (2006) argues for a balance between respect for particulars and the ancient tradition of believing in a common humanity, as for example expressed in the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights. His concept “cosmopolitanism” combines the universal concern for

all humanity with a respect for legitimate difference. Realising that this concept tries to combine clashing values, it is presented not as a solution, but as a challenge.

One of the challenges, apart from for example falling into moral relativism, is how to achieve true conversation, a conversation that allows exchange of ideas, while at the same time not trying to agree on a hierarchy of universal values. Cosmopolitanism in Appiah's version involves habits of co-existence, of living together. To develop a “cosmopolitic” conversation is a condition for respectful co-existence, and allows for both integrity of one's own beliefs and different rationales for the involved partners—strangers—in the ongoing communication.

Spinning the continuous tale

In postmodernist terminology, we live in a world of “borrowing”, where music created at one place for a certain purpose, can immediately be used at a different place and for a different purpose. Although music is created by the people who first use it, music as experience lives its own life. Music constructs our identity by the experiences it offers, including body, time and community. These experiences make it possible for us to place ourselves within imaginary, cultural narratives (Frith, 1996). Instead of thinking of “immigrant music” as a genre that immigrants use to express their values, Frith (1996) suggests that music, as an aesthetical practice, creates an understanding of both group relations and individuality. Music is a tool for identity, feeling and memory and thereby helps us to construct. In other words: “Music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is, a technology for spinning the apparently continuous tale of who one is” (DeNora, 2000, p. 63).

With these perspectives in mind, the natural next step is to introduce the methodology chosen for this study. Throughout history, ethnography has been part of the discourse on colonialism. It has defined

cultures, given names to people, told them who they are and what they can become (Clair, 2003). It is therefore a risky enterprise to follow that path, but interpretative ethnography offers new alternative routes.

METHOD

One underlying assumption in the qualitative research paradigm has to do with the relationship between the researcher and what is being researched. The researcher is not seen as separate from the object, but as a part of the reality that is being studied. The qualitative paradigm also leans towards methods that are sensible and adjustable to the many value systems that can be expected in a process where people are involved. The most common methods, which are also the methods used in this study, are participant observation and open or semi-structured interviews.

The theoretical insights regarding learning *about* versus learning *from*, *listening* as a relationship, and *knowledge* as a relationship (Kvale, 2009; Todd, 2008) have been reinforced by my own contribution; *playing music* as a relationship. My observations and interviews were accompanied by my own violin lessons at the Iranian-Swedish music school. These lessons also served as a prerequisite for conversations and interviews, two overlapping activities.

Yet as a researcher, I am not free from what Clair (2003) calls in-built ironical problems. An ethnographer is someone who creates an expression of what a culture is. The form describes the ethnographer while the ethnographer describes the Other. The only way of overcoming that irony is to recognise the complexity and try to be aware of it during the research process, from planning to collecting data and writing the report. In this study some of this in-built complexity is presented under the subheading "surprises" in the results section.

Procedures

The ten students interviewed span a wide

range of ages, from 7 to 56. The proportion of male to female was 50/50, which reflects the situation at the music school that has about 15 students this semester. There is only one teacher: the same person who initiated the school. The exact number of students is not known to the teacher, and is not regarded as something that really matters. Students come and go, some are there every weekend, and some come every now and then. The approximately five students that I was unable to interview are the students who are not regular members of the "community".

The music school has an organisational structure that is completely different from the municipal music school with its normally 20 minutes of individual lessons. The Iranian-Swedish school is open every Saturday and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. During this time span the teacher walks around and gives his time and advice to the students who are all more or less dispersed in the different rooms, in a locality that is not very well suited to the purpose. I spent my first four visits/lessons just observing and playing, sometimes talking a little with some of the other students.

The language used at the school and between the students is Farsi, but all of them also speak Swedish. I do not speak any Farsi. Thus in one way I was a complete outsider, which was even marked by my choice of instrument, violin. I made a deliberate choice not to try to learn to play the Persian violin, the *kamancheh*, since I wanted to reduce the time devoted to technical questions and focus on the actual melodies and on playing together. Since the violin itself does not prevent me from playing the "blue notes" necessary in the Persian scales, or *modi*, I asked the teacher if he could accept me as a student, even if my Western *kamancheh* produces a different sound. He had no objections.

The study period consisted of 13 consecutive weekends I spent at the school. On the fifth week I began to record my semi-structured interviews, according to the themes that developed as a result of my observations, lessons, and initial con-

versations. I had a loosely formulated set of questions. Sometimes I asked them, but at other times they were simply answered by the stories the students told when talking about their music making. The basic questions were for example:

What does music mean to you?
 What is your earliest music memory?
 What is the Persian music school to you?
 Do you play in other contexts?
 Your musical history?
 How long have you been staying in Sweden?
 What is your relation to music?

Six of the students were interviewed individually, during the opening hours of the school. Four students joined the school in the middle of the semester, they were taught as a group and I also interviewed them as a group. All data from the students was collected in the autumn semester of 2008. The recorded interviews were transcribed and analysed using the Transana software.

The interviewed teacher and students gave their written agreement to participation in the study and are represented under pseudonyms:

Participant	Age	Description
Siroos	48	Teacher
Aria	56	Medical doctor
Davood	25	Computer science student
Leyla	26	Preparing for biology studies at university
Pari	52	Sick-listed former dressmaker
Neli	7	Primary school student
Sina	14	Secondary school student
Amir	51	Engineer
Naser	56	Engineer
Roya	44	Nurse
Farid	44	Bio-medical analyst

Table 1: Description of participants

As the information in the table shows, most of the students have higher education and employments that reflect good economic status, which is characteristic of the Persian immigrant group in Sweden (SCB, 2009).

Analysis

The transcribed interviews were coded according to categories deduced from the empirical data, with inspiration from the theoretical perspectives. The categories formed “collections” in the Transana software, and in the inductive process each “clip” in the different collections was assigned keywords, that are searchable in the material. I have here chosen to build the text in the results section using the categories as subheadings. The order of the subheadings is derived from the following figure, which indicates the number of “clips” in respective “collection”:

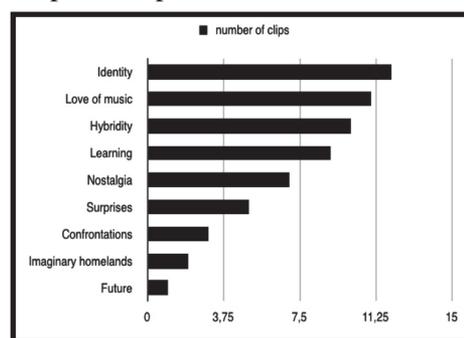


Figure 1: Number of clips in each category.

The keywords that emanated from each collection give a concentrated hint of the content in the text that follows in the result section:

Category	Keywords
Identity	exile, harmony, at the heart, communication, proverb, priorities and we-feeling
Love of music	love, the first strong experience, internet, feelings, priorities, life and retrospection
Hybridity	change, generations, genres and the middle
Learning	adaptation, parent pressure, internet, classical, reading, practicing and atmosphere
Nostalgia	longing, roots and denial
Surprises	good to know, success, instrument, coincidence and language
Confrontations	ugly, pressure, marriage and tiresome
Imaginary homelands	redefinition, the shah
Future	not music

Table 2: Categories (“collections” in Transana) and associated keywords.

The category “Surprises” comprises sections of the interviews where my own preconceptions were contradicted or revealed.

RESULTS

This section begins with some short quotations from the field notes, with the aim of introducing the atmosphere at the Iranian-Swedish music school. The following subheadings emanates from the analysis of the interviews, each subheading represents one of the categories. Guided by the research question, the story presented here aims at giving a voice to the people involved at the Iranian-Swedish music school.

The scene: *Peaceful. One of the female students is sitting in the large room with a football table game, table tennis, a stage, a piano and some computers. She is playing the santur. I am given a place in the left corner, far from her. There is music coming from behind a closed door. Siroos, the teacher, says welcome and continues to one of the other students. In the little room past the room we are in I can see the chairman of the Persian Swedish association. He is doing administrative work. The tar-student is practicing a beautiful tune. He tells me that he plays in a Swedish hard rock band (...). After a while the teacher comes and they play a long composition together, including a vocal part that he sings. Very beautiful. The teacher has played the composition, bit by bit, until the student has memorised it all.* (field notes, 080907) (...). *I sit down on the sofa, bring out my fiddle and start playing the tune that I almost know by now. Siroos criticizes my intonation. He offers tea and a new tune that sounds as Swedish as a Persian tune can. Nice “slängpolska,” I think, not being able to leave my own frames of reference.* (field notes, 080921)

Identity

“We are like waves—if we stop moving, we will die”. (Pari)

Reading through all the transcribed interviews, I find many examples of how

the students at the music school relate to it, in a way that resembles the notion of “spinning the continuous tale” (De Nora, 2000). I also use the notion of identity according to Frith (1996), suggesting that music helps us construct our identity, and that music as an aesthetical practice creates understandings of both group relations and individuality. The sections of the interviews that illustrate this concept were coded with the keywords exile, harmony, at the heart, communication, proverb, priorities and we-feeling.

Pari describes herself as the eternal student, and seems to be the most devoted in the group. She comes early and leaves late. To her the school is everything, it has given her a new life: “I used to be isolated, now I know everyone.” She likes the atmosphere at the school. This is also stressed by others. Listening to music from Iran gives Aria a feeling of home: “Yes, it’s comforting, it’s my harmony, yes a feeling of home.”

Even Aria spends most of the weekends at the school, besides which he plays for at least 30 minutes at home, every day. He listens to music all the time, most of it from Iran. Pari turns on the Internet radio first thing in the morning, and listens only to Persian music until late at night. Their relationship to both the school and the music is strong: “During these 15 months I have only been absent once. That was because I had to travel. Otherwise I have been here!” (Aria).

Aria’s children are not very interested in Persian music, but Aria thinks this is natural. He says it takes a profound knowledge of Persian literature, poetry and culture to understand classical Persian music, and since his children have grown up in Sweden they lack that competence. He does not try to impose his interest in classical music from Iran on his children, while other parents obviously think that such parental pressure may be worthwhile.

Neli, the youngest student, is at the school because of her mother: “My mother knew the teacher and wanted me to start.” Neli has strong family support. Sometimes

the sofa at the school is full of family members, reading the newspaper, drinking tea or listening, while Neli plays and practices. Neli likes playing music, but prefers listening to English or Swedish music, and is also planning to learn the piano and the guitar.

Sina, 14, says playing setar makes it possible for him to communicate with his grandparents: "Well, you know, it is hard to explain, but when I play guitar for my grandparents, they don't understand."

Most of the students seem to have developed their interest in Persian music while in exile. "Earlier I only listened to Western music, but when I moved to Sweden I started to listen to music from Iran" (Roya). Davood played the recorder at the music school in Teheran as a little boy, (just like many children in Sweden), and moved to Sweden as a rock-listening teenager. He has recently married a Swedish woman and bought a house, and he has started to play Persian music. Even Leyla did not pay much attention to Persian music until she moved to Sweden 6 years ago.

"To me it does not matter where I live, but it is important to know the music and language of your home country. If you know that, it does not matter where you are" (Leyla). She also stresses that it is not only the music that matters to her when she is at the school, it is also meeting the other students, "others like me" (Leyla). Davood uses the music when he feels an urge to be by himself: "You play when you feel that you have to be by yourself, you walk into a corner, sit down and play."

This feeling of wanting to be with others or by yourself should not be confused with nostalgia. Pari says that the school gives her a feeling of "being at home" while being in Sweden, and she is happy with that. "It is peaceful here, you can listen to music [laughs]. I don't want to go back, not even as a tourist" (Pari).

Love of music

"And I had it [the setar] 24 hours a day. I played when I woke up in the morning,

and I went to sleep with it in the bed." (Davood)

When talking about their reasons for starting at the Persian music school, most of the students tend to touch their pure love for or longing for music. The keywords used to code the clips in the interviews were thus love, the first strong experience, Internet, feelings, priorities, life and retrospection.

The quotation from Davood above illustrates how he learned to play the setar during one of his visits to Teheran. His grandfather was very sick, and Davood used the music as a way of dealing with his grief. Davood remembers when he, as a 15-year old boy, heard someone playing the santur. "I thought that one day, one day I will play that myself." Many years later, after moving to Sweden, he heard about the Persian music school and found his way back to the music from Teheran.

Davood's need for music is so strong that he often has two sound-sources on. "I listen to music on my computer even when the TV is on (...). It drives my wife crazy." When he studies mathematics the music is on, "but if I study physics or chemistry I need to concentrate more, then I turn the music off." Just like Davood, Aria says that classical Persian music has a magical impact on him. It is so important to him that he leaves the computer on all day to be able to listen to music on the Internet.

The group of beginners who started in the middle of the semester say that they have been wanting to come to the school for more than 5 years, and now that their children are a little bit older, they can allow themselves to realise this dream. It is not a longing for their home country that is the strongest desire: it is the wish to play music. Leyla chooses to spend all her weekends at the school, even when she has other homework that could or should be done. "It is very important to me, on the weekends it is only this, nothing else!" Pari has wanted to play since she was a little girl, but has only had the opportunity in exile: "It was not regarded as some-

thing a girl should do.” To Pari music is life and she cannot imagine life without it: “It would not be worth living.”

Hybridity

“To keep what you did not have, and move forward...” (Davood)

The keywords used for the sections where the interviewees talk about how they move between different identities are change, generations, genres and the middle. These sections also illustrate how the Persian music, and the activities at the school are part of this constant process of change. Aria is well aware of the fact that people in his generation, those who have experienced the previous regime, have a different relationship to classical Persian music than for example his own children. This does not bother him. He thinks it is natural to change and to adapt to where you are. “It would have been good if they could share my experience—but they experience other things [laughs]” (Aria).

Davood also talks about change as something natural: “You change all the time, and with music you also change.” To him, music is a way of keeping the change alive, a way to “keep what you missed.” Neli, the youngest student has a natural attitude to hybridity. She just thinks it is fun to play santur, and she is planning to continue until she knows it well, but also wants to play other instruments, and other genres. Sina, 14 years old, has a lot of Swedish friends and goes to a Swedish music class, but likes playing something from his home country (Iran), too. He was born in Sweden and only speaks Persian with his father. “Well, you know, I guess I am in the middle, not Swedish, not Persian.”

Learning

This section deals with the learning that takes place both within the framework of the Persian music school and outside it, at home. The keywords used here are adaptation, parent pressure, Internet, classical,

reading, practising and atmosphere.

Most of the learning at the school takes place in the traditional master/apprentice tradition. Siroos moves between the students who are in the different corners in the rooms at the association’s locale. The teapot is always on in the kitchen section, and the students meet over improvised breaks. Although the school is open between ten a.m. and two p.m., there are no formal “lessons”. Most of the students tend to use the time to practice and play, in a concentrated but relaxed way.

(...) Siroos has a music theory lesson with the new group of students and Leyla. Sina, who plays the setar, and I are in the inner room. It seems as if we have our places here, me on the sofa and him just outside the little storeroom for instruments. He sometimes plays and sometimes reads the newspaper. I review all the tunes that I should know by now (...). (field notes, 081116)

Aria, the doctor, is on sick leave, and enjoys not having to work every weekend. It gives him time to listen and practice a lot, apart from all the time he spends at the school. Siroos mixes his teaching methods. Sometimes he just plays and the students learn by heart, and sometimes he gives them the printed music, but not all the students know how to read music. Most of the time the tuition is one-to-one, but in the context of the school, where everything happens in more or less the same room, it is not very private.

Davood likes the way the school is organised: “I think it is very good that we have the opportunity to come here and learn to play an instrument, to be able to spend 10 hours every weekend doing that. The atmosphere is good, you take a break when you want to, and there is time to play, and Siroos also has time to come around, there is enough time for him to meet everyone a couple of times, and make sure that there are no mistakes (laughs).”

Listening is crucial to Aria, and it is a theme that occurs in many of my conversations with the other students. Pari, for example, never turns the Internet radio off, and has changed her listening habits:

“Well, you see, you listen in another way: I cry with joy when I listen to music, it has affected me deeply. My taste for music has changed: Before I used to listen to all kinds of music, but now I don’t think all music has the same value.”

The devotion to music, expressed under other categories as well, is also clear when the students talk about their own learning process. Davood for example bought his setar during a visit in Teheran. He had no teacher, but a book with tunes and a friend who showed him where to find the different notes on the neck of the instrument. For the first month he spent all his time with his new instrument, alone, but happy. “It was very good, the time I had there, all alone, with the setar in my hand.”

The Internet is a good source of inspiration and learning. Sina downloads films and music from the rich cyberspace environment that the Iranian community in the US has created. YouTube and Google are his natural tools for expanding his repertoire. Sina, who describes himself as in the middle—not Swedish, not Persian, also plays the guitar at the municipal music school, and can compare the two school forms. He is happy with both, but thinks that the guitar lessons are too short (most lessons at the municipal school are 20 minutes). Most of the weekends I find him at the school. He seems to spend many hours there: “Yes, in fact, many hours. You know, you play and you learn new tunes and sometimes maybe another person comes and plays tombak, the drum you know, that makes it even more fun, it is very nice, I like this a lot.” Sina can also compare how it is to be at school in Teheran and in Malmö since he spent a few years in Iran. “There is no leisure time in Iran, only homework, it is worse than in Sweden. I don’t think I ever went to a concert in Iran.”

Nostalgia

“You feel traditional music, there is something in it, you relate it to your home

country, something you miss, there is quite a lot in that music that you connect to this longing for your home country, there is a lot in it.” (From the group interview)

Some of the older members said that they miss their home country, and that being at the music school is a way of coping with that longing. This feeling was not, however, shared by all the interviewees. The keywords in this section are longing, roots and denial. To the group members, playing Persian music is definitely an act of nostalgia. “Yes, we are sitting here, longing” (Roya). Going back to visit family and friends for short periods does not help, she said.

This aspect is important to the teacher as well. He loves his culture and his home country and when he listens to the group talking about their longing, it reminds him of a poem talking about a man who asks the wind to take him to a place where nothing else can take him. “To me, I am flying when I play music,” he says. I ask him if he is flying from something or to something:

“Well, when you fly from something, you fly to something,” was his answer.

Davood and Pari did not want to talk about nostalgia. As earlier stated, Pari does not want to go back, Sweden is her home, and music makes her feel at home too. Davood, 25, thinks it is a matter of age, rather than pure nostalgia. “When I was younger I could not stand some of the tunes we are playing now. When you get older you are more mature, and you want to know more about this music.”

Surprises

There are quite a few places in the data where the conversations took unexpected turns. Expectations may be the place where you find your own preconceptions and prejudices in the most concentrated form. Therefore I have chosen to include one example here as a way of reflecting upon the dynamic and sometimes problematic relationship between the researcher

and the research material.

The relationship between Western music and classical Persian music was a theme in many of the interviews. Most of the interviewees told me that they used to listen to Western music while they lived in Iran, and that they developed their interest in Persian music later, while in exile. Still, somewhere deep in my unconsciousness, I must have nourished a picture of exotic, oriental Teheran. At one point in the interview Davood told me that he played the flute in the music school as a little boy. This revealing passage from the transcript shows my picture of Teheran as exotic:

Researcher: Was it a ney-flute?

Davood: No, it was one of these plastic flutes, in three pieces.

Researcher: Oh, a regular recorder?

Davood: Yes, I think so.

Researcher: Does everyone play that?

Davood: Yes, everyone starts with that in Iran.

Researcher: But that is not a Persian instrument.

Davood: No, no, you have that here too.

Researcher: Yes, of course, I was just so surprised!

Apart from my assumption that they would play ney-flutes in the municipal music school in Teheran, my remark that it is not “a Persian instrument” also shows that I had “forgotten” that in Malmö you do not start with “nyckelharpa” (keyed fiddle), “sälglöjt” (willow flute) or traditional Swedish fiddle-playing.

Confrontations and imaginary homelands

As expected, being an outsider in contemporary Swedish society and at the same time delving deep into the music of one’s homeland, creates some tensions. The keywords here also indicate that: ugly, pressure, marriage, tiresome and redefinition. In the interview with Davood he described himself as successful, but there are also

some sequences that point towards a growing dissatisfaction on the part of his Swedish wife. For example: “And I am very proud of myself, that I come here and play this. But I ought to spend more time with my wife. Because she also works full time. And there is not so much time for us to meet since I come here every Saturday and Sunday (...) So there is not much time to see my wife.”

In fact, only a few weeks later, Davood stopped coming to the school, probably because his pregnant wife finally won their debate. Another point of tension is the difference between different age groups in their relationship to Persian music. It was Neli’s mother’s idea that Neli should start at the music school. Neli likes playing santur, but she thinks Persian music is ugly:

Researcher: You don’t like Persian music? But you like playing the santur?

Neli: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Researcher: But that is different?

Neli: Yes, it is—when they sing it sounds ugly in Farsi.

Researcher: You think so?

Neli: Mm.

This touches on the concept of *imaginary homelands*. Aria talks about the music that used to be popular on radio and television. He listened to it a lot and he knows that his relationship to that music today is coloured by his strong memories from that time. Now when he has time to listen to this music, he goes back in his mind to a time that he cannot share with his children, but which is important to him, although he knows that times have changed. Pari, as mentioned before, talks about music as something that makes it possible for her to be at home wherever she is. It creates an imaginary home. Rozita, who used to listen to rock and pop when she lived in Iran, has now started to listen to and play classical Persian music in the creation of her imaginary homeland. Davood, the computer scientist, was the one who verbalised this process in the

most poetic way: (...)”to keep what you did not have” (...)

Future

In this final, small category, the keyword is *not music*. None of the interviewees at the music school had any ambition to continue with a professional career as a musician. The older students already have well established careers in other fields, and the younger ones think that a life as a musician will not be a good life. To Sina, doing homework is the most important thing:

Sina: You know, homework is most important, of course. After year nine in school I will not continue with music.

Researcher: Is that what you have decided?

Sina: Yes, because then I will continue with more homework and get a good job.

Still, he says he will not abandon his music. Sina claims that later, when he has achieved his position as an engineer or a scientist, he will have time to play again. Being a music teacher is not an attractive idea to him: “Our music teachers have told us that they studied at the Academy, but as you can see after that they became nothing, they are just teachers, nothing great.” Still he spends all his weekends at the school and wishes that he could stop growing older, so that he did not have to stop playing his music.

DISCUSSION

For music teachers the whole idea of “learning from” (Todd, 2008) poses new questions. You can learn to play new instruments and new repertoire by using different methods. Learning how to meet the Other is not as simple since it demands that everyone involved is prepared to reshape their own context. It also implicates that it is not only form and content that needs rebuilding, it is we, all of us.

This study should be seen as an attempt in that direction. The purpose is to contribute to the development of knowl-

edge on music education in multicultural environments, by listening to the Other. The research question emanated from the broad purpose of mapping strategies and attitudes that direct the activities at the Persian music school – a school outside the formal Swedish educational institutions: What driving forces motivates the students and how are these expressed in the musical learning?

The 59 clips from the interviews that were made between my lessons fall into nine different categories, as described above. The two largest of these are “identity” and “love of music”. The content in these categories is in some cases typical of what DeNora (2000) describes as spinning the tale of who you are. Pari turns on the Internet radio first thing in the morning and listens only to Persian music, much like Aria who devotes much of his time to downloading music onto his computer. Most of the students only started to listen to Persian music after moving to Sweden, as a way of reminding themselves of who they are, or of creating a new identity by trying to keep what they did not always have, as expressed by Davood.

What appears to be a very strong motivating factor is the urge, need or longing for music. Davood told the story about how he fell in love with his setar and how he drives his wife crazy by always listening to music, sometimes with two different sound sources on at the same time. The group of beginners have waited for the children to grow up, so that they could start playing, and Leyla spends all her weekends at the school because it is important to play. To Pari music is everything, music is life!

The younger students play other (Western) instruments as well and seem to have a natural understanding of being between cultures. Sometimes there are Swedish students at the Persian music school, but they were not present during my visits. These students come just for their interest in Persian music they developed when Siroos taught at the intercultural project week at the Malmö Academy of

Music and introduced them to Persian music.

The relaxed atmosphere, the many hours of tea-drinking, practising, learning, playing and talking are what attracts the students. Would this kind of learning environment be possible to create within a formal institution? The Malmö Academy of Music has tried to create something like it, by including project weeks and field work periods in the curriculum, periods when the students are invited to and confronted with other kinds of music, other attitudes towards learning and other contexts. Another way of approaching the complex situation would be to do what has been done in Oslo, where the municipal music school has incorporated some immigrant music schools, but without changing their way of teaching.

When it comes to the problem of widening participation mentioned in the introduction to this article the question is what the municipal music school or the Malmö Academy could learn from the Iranian-Swedish school, that would help recruit students in a wider, more inclusive way. To most of the students at the Persian school it would probably not be an alternative to come to 20-minute lessons on the tar at the municipal music school. For the younger students at the Iranian music school, a professional career as a musician is not at all part of their plans for the future. Certainly for the older participants in this study, the school serves as a tool for the creation of a home, a home made by music that they sometimes had not even listened to before going into exile. ■

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- • •
- Santur** is the Persian hammered dulcimer.
- The tar lute** is one of the most important instruments in the Persian tradition.
- A slängpolska** is a traditional Swedish dancing tune in 3/4 beat.