

Sandeep Bhagwati

EUROLOGICAL ART MUSIC (EAM)* has often seen itself as the end-game of all possible music traditions: all other musics are fondly perceived as being “on the way” towards its *avant-garde* position. However, in his book *Philosophy of Music* (1987), Indian singer-musicologist Ritwik Sanyal accorded EAM another role—as anti-music, a bitter drop in the ocean of universal indo-centric music. EAM musicians need to accept that theirs is just one tradition among many, that what they call “universality” and “contemporaneity” in EAM are, in fact, pre-emptive power grabs on the future of music. What they call “newness” and “genius” are ways of excluding community traditions through asymmetries of historicity and individuality. Being truly “contemporary,” however, would mean acknowledging different modes of meaning within diverse creative ecologies. Many musics made today are the result of a widely distributed, collective authoring process that may include trans-generational practices, improvising performers, discerning audiences, computer hardware and software, musical assistants, curators, and, of course, composers. Basing the curating of newly created music on the nineteenth-century model of the genius composer and their work is an increasingly limiting strategy.

This also applies to cultural policy concerns such as decolonization, gender equity, and music technology. Here, headcounts may be helpful to raise awareness, but they are not enough: focusing on composer-authors is already a eurological predilection. Not diversity of personnel, but a diversity of musical expressions, tools, techniques, languages, and traditions may bring new relevance to current creative music events.

In order to get there, I propose the following: 1) *Get rid of all ideological terms for music made today* (i.e., contemporary music, world music, new music, etc.); these terms are toxic. Find a term specific to your type of recently created sound events. 2) *Create multiple simultaneous levels of participation and presentation.* Participation does not have to mean dumbing down. Many

musical works comprise various levels of difficulty, and recent technology affords new, live interaction options. Create entry points for all audience members, including those who would like to just listen. 3) *Curate practices, not only works:* a sit-still-and-listen concert with masterworks is great but not the only social situation in which sonic events can be enjoyed as music. Other listening practices may not require the concept of “the work” at all. 4) *Abandon the radial view of the world, embrace rhizomatic provincialization:* Gerardo Mosquera once observed that the world consists of cultures that curate and those that are curated upon. Break this logic. Be a node in the rhizome of musical traditions. This means being a stop on a journey and not, like a centre, aspiring to be the logical end of all possible journeys. This means acknowledging and retransmitting the many influences and connections that determine one’s own agency, to forge strategic alliances with the nodes of other musical traditions, accepting their aesthetic regimes as equally pertinent to the future of music.

As its introductory gift, EAM might offer its most valuable insight: to think of music not as entertainment or as a commodity, but as fundamental research. Time and again, EAM has successfully negated the relevance of economic metrics for the cultural significance of its art. To know how to build viable shelters from the storm of monetization that devastates all cultural activity may yet, next to the many wonderful musical experiences EAM can give us, prove to be its second most valuable contribution to the musics of this world. ¶

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* This is the more precise term for what many call Western New and/or Art Music, Contemporary Classical Music, or Avant-garde Music. It refers to all musical practices that trace their lineage to European Art Music traditions, their instruments and orchestras, their concert formats, and their focus on composed, written music—and that use them to make freshly conceived music today.