If You Can Say It, You Can Play It:

An Investigation into the Use of Oral and Aural Pedagogy in New England Liberal Arts Colleges and Universities, Centering on Wesleyan University in Connecticut and Saint Michael’s College in Vermont.

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Preface:

I have been studying music since the day I was born. From my first breath I was exposed to the songs that my parents sang to me, whether little original pieces, or lullabies to soothe a crying baby, or the folk songs that they performed together for others. For me, as it has been for many people, this was the method through which I learned what music was, through which I began to love and learn my first songs.

It wasn’t until much later in life that I started to learn about notation and what it meant to “read music.” I have a distinct memory of being very confused when I first heard that term, thinking: “how can you read something that comes out of someone’s mouth or instrument?” When I was first given sheet music, I was in third grade, and I was told that when the dots on the page were higher up on the lines that meant I was singing higher, and when they moved down, my voice should do that, too. All of this made sense, but it didn’t really help me to learn anything about the music — I would still just listen to my teacher and sing back what he sang to me.

I started studying piano in fourth grade and began to learn terms like major third, minor second, and ideas like what a scale is and how it is constructed. Since then, I have studied Western theory throughout the years in different capacities, understanding more about what it takes to compose a piece of music in various Western styles. More relevantly, I learned to identify notes on the piano with notes on the page, and to connect those notes with
rhythm and position in my vocal range when I sang, even if I still relied more heavily on my ears than on my eyes to guide me through the music.

During my gap year, I traveled to several countries including The Republic of Georgia, Spain, and Senegal. All three nations have very rich musical traditions, and all of those musics are very different from one another; I was very lucky to learn a little about them while I was abroad. In Georgia I studied with a group called Zedashe, whose membership comprised traditional folk and religious musicians from around the country. While I was in Spain, I spent a good bit of time at a flamenco club where I started to learn to play the cajón (a wooden, box-shaped percussion instrument that is traditionally played in a flamenco ensemble) from some of the musicians there, and also from a group of street performers that I met and joined for a short time. Finally, in Senegal I studied traditional drumming with rhythms from Senegal, Guinea, and Mali.

All of these different musical forms were taught to me almost exclusively by ear, so it wasn’t until recently (mainly during my time here at Wesleyan) that my sight-reading and sight-singing skills reached any kind of semi-proficient level. I found that my lack of experience in theory, and poor sight-reading skills, put me in a difficult position when I first entered Wesleyan’s Music department. I felt that I had to work very hard to even achieve passing marks in my theory classes, a struggle which made me question my legitimacy as a prospective music major. But as I followed my
interests deeper and deeper into the non-Western traditions of music that were
offered at Wesleyan, I found that I had a much greater affinity for them.

This realization made me think about the reasons that I found myself having a higher aptitude for those kinds of musics, and particularly the percussive arts. I realized that there was a significant difference in the method of education between my Western music classes and the courses in the non-Western arts, and the key was in the use of visual stimuli. When I was singing with choirs on campus, I was expected to be able to learn the various pieces through the sheet music that was handed out. There was a certain speed at which the classes moved and, in order to keep up, the members either needed to be able to sight-sing at least moderately well, or spend time with friends who could help them learn the melodies. Meanwhile, in my non-Western music classes, I found that the learning was based on memory and on listening to the music in order to learn it, as opposed to reading it from a piece of paper.

This prompted me to wonder how other students responded to the different methods of teaching music, and how various teachers experienced teaching in the different methods. Further, it led me to consider whether there is, objectively, a “better” method — or is it just a question of individual experience and/or background? Do the different methods of teaching work best if combined? I decided that the best way to investigate deeper into this string of questions was to interview the people to whom the questions pertained most: students and teachers at Wesleyan and other institutions.
Introduction:

Education is a highly personal process that is influenced from both sides of the pedagogical relationship — student and teacher. Both parties may have different perspectives on the material, or may understand the subject matter very differently. Music education is no different, and in fact, could be more apt to have differing takes on the material, as so much of the music of the world is open for interpretation. While that means that there are, in fact, a considerable number of methods for teaching or learning music, there seem to be two primary paths that people follow with varying degrees of strictness. Those are: Oral, or Aural Pedagogy, and Visual Pedagogy.

In order to investigate the differences between these two tracks, I decided that I should try to experience what it was like to teach music in both ways, and also to give students the chance to study through both methods. This also created an opportunity for both myself, as an instructor, and my peers, as students, to reflect on and respond to the aspects of each method of instruction which worked best for each of us in our respective roles.

In the student forum that I led last semester, I had a choir of approximately twenty-five students from various majors, geographic locations, and musical backgrounds, who came in knowing that they would be learning through a combination of aural and visual teaching styles. My co-instructor, who is also my sister, and I selected a large number of songs from many different countries including the Republic of Georgia, the United States of America (in contemporary, shape-note, and folk styles), the United Kingdom
(England and Scotland, more specifically), South Africa, Nigeria, Ghana, Spain, and several others. Each of the different styles of music called for a different approach in order to teach as traditionally as possible, while also exposing us all to the two tracks of pedagogy. Many of the people in the choir had never participated in making music from many of these genres, and it was very interesting to see how they adapted or changed their approaches (or did not) depending on which music we were singing at the time.

The next layer of labor that went into the following findings was to develop a very basic questionnaire that I could give to the students of the forum as well as other students from Wesleyan and Saint Michael’s College in Vermont. These questionnaires were distributed after my recital and returned by students over the ensuing weeks; the answers ranged from personal narratives that had little to do with the original questions, to very succinct responses that addressed only the questions on the form and did not elaborate much more than that. Finally, I developed a similar survey and set of interview questions geared toward teachers. Some of the professionals answered the questions through text, and I had the chance to interview others directly. These conversations and narratives have been invaluable to my investigation.

In this paper I will not attempt to determine which pedagogical style is a “better” one. Instead I will investigate the use of oral and aural pedagogy both in traditional and academic settings, and discuss the differences and effects of teaching through those methods in comparison to the use of visually-centered pedagogical forms.
Definitions

Oral Pedagogy: education through speaking, repeating speech, syllabic patterns or vocal representations in order to learn.

Example: *do re mi fa*, or *dokong ko dokodoko donkong ko*

Aural Pedagogy: education through listening, and repeating the phrases that the student hears.

Example: “the folk process,” learning songs by listening to them on the radio, learning music though listening to your teacher play it first.

Visual Pedagogy: studying music through a system based primarily on visual representation of the resulting music.

Example: Western classical music, shape-note music, exclusive use of sheet music in the classroom.

These definitions are self-developed for use in this thesis, and by no means should be seen as an attempt to codify or establish ownership of the terminology. They, instead, should function as touchstones for their use as vocabulary in this essay.
Chapter 1

West African Drumming

The experience of learning music is definitely something that is based on the particular individual involved. It is influenced by the student’s tastes, his relationship with the teacher, her musical background, and many other attributes that may change the way that someone approaches the educational experience. In my investigations, it was very interesting to see how different students and teachers perceive aural and oral pedagogy.

In traditional West African drumming, rhythms are taught almost exclusively through oral and aural methodologies. A teacher will present a rhythm through either a selection of verbal syllables, or through playing it in front of the students themselves first. When I first began studying Guinean and Malian drumming at age nine, I was told by one of my teachers: “If you can say it, you can play it.” This was the message that I carried with me from then on. If I could form the sounds and rhythms in my mind, and through my voice, then I could translate them through my hands (or sticks) onto the drum. If I could not do so initially, with time and practice it would be possible to make it happen, and as I became more proficient at playing the *djimbe*, it would take me less and less time to learn rhythms.

This is the method that I now use to teach this style of drumming, especially with beginner students. I spend the first three to four sessions just
having them speak the syllables, and then play the basic three tones of the
drum in practice patterns so that they get used to associating the verbal sounds
with the appropriate hand positions and tones.

The syllables that my teachers used with me and that I use with my
students are not traditional; they were created by a man named Babatunde
Olatunji, a Nigerian Drummer who is often credited with helping to pave the
way for more forms of African drumming to come into the USA. The syllables
are Pa Ta, Go To, and Gun, and they correlate, respectively, to the three
primary sounds of the djimbe: slap, tone, and bass. While there are other
sounds that can be made, and that are used, these are the most basic and
fundamental. The use of these syllables means that I can communicate to
students that the first djimbe part for the rhythm Kuku is Pa Gun Goto, Pa Gun
Goto, and they can translate that through their hands into the appropriate
sounds on the drum. This does complicate things by adding terminologies that
students have to learn, but the simple syllables are much easier to say at faster
paces than the full words that describe the tones. This is a great example of
Oral Pedagogy, and one that reaches further than just the line of teachers that I
first studied with.

At Saint Michael’s College in Vermont, V. Josselyn Price teaches
Ghanaian drumming and other traditional percussive traditions such as Haitian
drumming. When she was asked for her thoughts on the advantages of
aural/oral pedagogy, she said:
“I use both oral and aural techniques. Teaching Ghanaian music – and dance – using Ghanaian mnemonic and sonic concepts has multiple advantages. First, it communicates musical information without the need for students to rely on constant reference to a written score, which I believe tends to support disengagement from the moment. Secondly, the syllables we use communicate the drum strokes, which can help students to connect the various components of a piece as we work on it – lead, response, and dance – and learn each part faster.”

(Price)

As Professor Price notes, there are some very important benefits to be derived from the aural tradition in the music she teaches, particularly in helping to keep students constantly involved and engaged. When students need to refer to a visual aid to recall what they should be playing, they cannot focus entirely on what they are doing; instead, they are splitting their focus between translating what is on the paper into notes, or strokes.

Professor Abraham Adzenyah says that there are intrinsic impossibilities in trying to accurately represent the many Ghanaian rhythms with any kind of notation:

“It's very complex; it's a very complex subject. And even Nketia who was my former director, who was the director of the African studies in Ghana, Legon – at the University of Ghana Legon – he is a scholar, and he always referred to, if you take the rhythms one
by one, yes you can write it in Western notation; but if you put them
together in an ensemble, it doesn't work because of the cross rhythms
that I refer to literally as linguistic, it doesn't work.”

(Adzenyah)

He said that the drum patterns in Ghanaian drumming are linguistic in
nature and conversational in structure. This presents another problem with
notation and using visual representations — is it ever really possible to capture
the nuances of a conversation when it is written down?

While Ghanaian drumming has no written component, this does not
mean that there are no visual aspects to learning the rhythms. When learning
the techniques needed to play correctly, students observe their teachers and
peers and learn to imitate the way that the more experienced players position
their hands on the drums or drumsticks; they learn to mimic the movements
that will help them to play for longer periods of time, and they learn to identify
visual signals from the lead drummers as to when a change, or a stop, might be
coming.

Brian Dukehart, a student at Saint Michael’s College, said he finds that
at this point in his studies (he has been studying for a few years) he has found
that the most potent tools for him are, in fact, aural and visual in nature, but
that all three pedagogical styles have played a very key aspect in his learning
process.
“All three of these learning forms play a role in learning music. For me, a percussionist, the visual and oral learning forms are the best way to learn a new piece, because they subtract from the piece all aspects that are not expected of me. In the oral stage (don’t get your hopes up, Freud), a phrase is spoken and I copy it verbally, without knowing its context to the rest of the piece of ensemble. In the visual stage (assuming it’s a response drum), I match the orally-learned sound into the visual cues of the lead drum. It is then that I can begin to hear the response without it being played and my hands can fix that open space.

At this point in my drumming, the oral stage of my learning is often passed over and I can, during a performance of a piece, use visual and aural cues to learn an otherwise alien response. Once it has reached the aural form of memory, that response stays in my memory the longest of the three.”

(Dukehart)

All of these examples indicate that notation is not a part of the learning process, and that it is, in fact, impossible to notate a full ensemble together and still capture the essence of the piece that it is trying to represent. However, many people have attempted to notate various ensemble pieces, some more successfully than others. One particularly successful transcriber is John Myers, a senior music major here at Wesleyan, who has developed a strong visual
device that can often depict a Ghanaian rhythm very accurately. He believes that:

“Some notation styles can give the musician a fuller idea or representation of what is going on throughout the piece, from part interactivity to overall dynamic/metric/harmonic arcs.” (Myers)

(In John Myers’ notation of the song Sitchi, each line on the grid represents a different supporting instrument. From top to bottom: bell, kagan, tamelin 1, tamelin 2, tamelin 3, apentima [first iteration of the supporting part])

In Myers’ grid notation system he displays parts together so that the relationship among the basic rhythms can be visualized and analyzed without having internalized them all, to the point of being able to do the same thing in a student’s mind. He has used it to analyze two of the more difficult rhythms together, but has successfully notated as many as seven different instruments on the more straightforward and/or mono-meter pieces.
A question that arose for me while looking into this type of music and its instruction here in the U.S. was — why is it taught the way it is? Why is it taught primarily through aural and oral methods? I believe that the answer is tradition. Teachers tend to teach in the way that they were taught when they were students.

“I’m not sure I’ve experienced too many different methods of teaching and learning Ghanaian music, to be honest – I’ve taught as I was taught, and my U.S. professor did the same in the fashion of his Ghanaian teachers.” (Price)

There are lineages of teachers in many forms of music, whether Western art music, South Indian classical music, or Ghanaian drumming. The values of the teacher are often passed down to the student; there is a clear bond that can form between a teacher and a close student that can border on the familial in nature; sometimes we are lucky enough to have our teachers within our family, as Professor Adzenyah did.

“I started at a very early age. I played with my daddy, my daddy had his own music with his children. So we performed with our daddy, and that’s where I started learning how to play the music, learning to play the drumming, singing, and dancing with my daddy. But when I started my formal education, then all of the schools in the 50s, in the 40s and 50s, were minded by missionaries, so you were not allowed to play any indigenous drums. You were only allowed to sing in the
school choir, or in the school marching band, and do what the school wants you to do.”                                (Adzenyah)

But he found that simply being told that he couldn’t play his music would not remove his passion for the tradition that was in his blood.

“… but that’s your music: I have mine, and I would love to play it. That makes me who I am! And, no, they didn’t want me to. I did all I could, and I was able to maintain it, play it once in a while here and there. When they caught me, when I was caught, they beat me really bad in the school, whipped me good. But I was a stubborn kid, so I didn’t stop… so I did it my way. I said, if you catch me, you catch me; if you don't, I'm gone, so I played hide-and-seek with them until I graduated.”                     (Adzenyah)
Chapter Two

Taiko

Since coming to Wesleyan University, I have discovered a passion for taiko which begins to approach my devotion to West African drumming. This Japanese style of percussion demands that total focus be given to the act of playing, and that the relationship between the musician and the instrument be one of mutual respect. It is traditionally taught through the use of rhythmic syllables in an oral and aural tradition, but is at the same time a very visual art form that uses movement and positioning as a central part of its performance technique.

At Wesleyan, we study a particular form of called kumi daiko. This is a more recent development in the musical style which was created in the 1950s by Daihachi Oguchi (Rooney), in which several taiko are played together by an ensemble of musicians, as opposed to the older solo festival tradition. In this genre of taiko music, one of the most important elements is an invisible connection between the musicians called kumi. Kumi signifies togetherness, unity in movement, sound, thought, and purpose. When a taiko ensemble has strong kumi, its sound is more powerful and more dramatic, and altogether stronger.

In my experience with taiko I have learned through a combination of different styles — oral, aural, and visual included — but for me, the most
important and effective modality has been oral pedagogy. Mark H. Rooney was the first taiko teacher at Wesleyan, and he instructed solely through oral techniques, making the entire ensemble speak the syllables several times before ever trying to play the rhythms on the drums themselves.

Mark believes that the process of learning through oral pedagogy has several advantages that create a stronger ensemble in the long run. He believes that through this method students internalize the music faster and more thoroughly, getting a deeper, better understanding of the music. He also commented on the fact that teaching through the use of the oral process allows students with no formal music background not only to participate, but to excel at the art form. Finally, and most importantly in this case, he believes that it develops strong listening and aural observational skills, which are the cornerstone of any kind of ensemble music, especially those without a conductor (Rooney).

While it would be very possible to transcribe the rhythms through Western notation techniques; it is also possible, and both common and effective, to notate them through the oral syllables used to teach the rhythms: Don, Kon, Ka, Ra, Su, Ku, Tsu, and others in a similar fashion. Each syllable represents a different kind of stroke and sound. The piece below is a composition called Yatai-Bayashi which originates from the Chichibu-matsuri festival, but has been transformed for the stage by the world-renowned performance group Kodo.
LONG VERSION (Nagai Te)

dorodoro DON dorodoro DON
dorodoro doKO- Nko DON
su doro doKO- Nko DON
dorodoro doKO- Nko doKO- Nko doKO- Nko

(O-Nami)
DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO (x 6.5 or 26 beats for NAGAI TE or x5 or 20
beats for MIJIKAI TE )
doKO- Nko
DOKO DOKO DOKO DOKO (x5 or 20 beats for NAGAI TE or x4 or 16
beats for MIJIKAI TE)

doKO- Nko DOKO DOKO
doKO- Nko DOKO DOKO
doKO- Nko DOKO DOKO
doKO- Nko doKO- Nko DON
dorodoro doKO- Nko doKO- Nko DON
tsudoro doKO- Nko DON
dorodoro doKO- Nko doKO- Nko DON ***for MIJIKAI TE (short version)
skip to (short ending) or (relay ending) ***

DOKO- N DOKO- N

doKO- NKO- Nko DON DOKON

doro doro DON
doKO- NKO- Nko DON DOKON
doro doro DON
DOKON
doro doro DON

doKO- NKO- Nko DON
sudoro doKO- Nko DON DOKON
doKO- NKO- Nko DON
sudoro doKO- Nko DON DOKON

(***short ending***)
DOKO- N DOKO- N DOKON
doro doro DON doro doro DON doro doro DON
DOKO- N DOKO- N DOKON
doro doro DON
doKO- NKO- Nko DON DOKO- N DON! (short ending)

(****relay ending****)
DOKO- N DOKO- N DOKON
While this notation is not effective in teaching a student who has never studied *taiko* before, it is very effective at showing a novice, intermediate, or advanced player how to play the song rhythmically, regardless of previous experience with traditional Western notation. While many *taiko* players of the old traditions do not know how to read Western music, many Western-trained musicians are drawn to the powerful sounds of *taiko*, and will compose or transcribe songs in the Western style. Below is a transcription of Tetsuo Naito’s composition *Nanafushi*, originally played by Kodo.

In this notation, it would be very possible for me or another person versed in Western music to follow along and play the rhythms shown, but someone who had not had that previous exposure would be lost without a teacher. Through teaching this music orally and aurally, the limiting factors of notation disappear, and the music is accessible to anyone who can obtain a teacher.
Nanafushi

Tetsuro Naito

pitch indicates R and L hands

pitch indicates approximate pitch of drum

solo over C; cue end with 2nd ending

pitch indicates R and L hands

pitch indicates approximate pitch of drum

pitch indicates R and L hands

geisha ballad; focus gp to ff
Chapter 3

South Indian Classical Music

One musical system that I had never been exposed to before I came to Wesleyan was the music of South India. I was not particularly interested in Indian music and I didn’t pay much attention to it throughout my freshman year, until I heard some of my friends practicing solkattu one night. I was thoroughly impressed by this rapid-fire syllabic percussion that was so alien to me. When I asked where they learned it, they pointed me toward the Intro to South Indian Music class that is co-taught by Professor B. Balasubrahmaniyan and Artist in Residence David Nelson. What I began to learn in that class made me begin to realize how little I knew about the music that was available in the world, and started me down a track of percussion that would revolutionize my perception of rhythm.

In South Indian music we can find some of the most rich and structured aural and oral traditions: students sit at the feet of their teachers for hours on end, repeating phrases of a song on their instrument. Balu teaches the South Indian voice classes at Wesleyan, and in our interview he recalled his time studying with his teachers as exciting and sometimes very difficult — repeating each phrase several times, being stopped and corrected, and then beginning the phrase again. He said that the process was a slow one, but very thorough and
necessary in order to learn the music at a performable level.

“Since this music is not notatable – you can’t bring all the
details on the paper so this type of Indian music the best way to learn is
through ear.”  

(B. Balasubrahmaniyan)

There are simply too many details within the tonal structure of South
Indian melodies to address them in most forms of notation, but some teachers
have even stricter lines that they won’t cross. For example, one of Balu’s
teachers, T. Brinda, not only wanted him to learn aurally, but also refused to
allow him to record her, saying:

“If you want, I can sing [it] 1000 times, but don’t record it,
don’t write it — record on your brain.”  

(Balasubrahmaniyan)

Balu’s other teacher, T. Viswanathan, was not entirely of the same
school of thought. While he taught his Indian students primarily through the
traditional methods of repetition and aural/oral pedagogy, he developed a
unique and sophisticated notation system to help Western students learn the
music, especially since they were already trained to look at a paper in order to
learn.

T. Viswanathan would write the syllables representing the pitches of
the raga within box shaped measures, and above them he would place small
letters with varying numbers of lines above them, representing the oscillation
pattern of the gamaka for that note. Students who learned how to read this
music would then have a road map to guide them through the learning process,
but unless they had studied with Viswa, and now Balu, they wouldn’t know what to do with the notation.

(An example of Viswanathan’s notation style. Given by B. Balasubrahmanian)

“Even though Viswa gave this notation to us he would insist – listening is the main thing – this [it] is for reference. In the Indian set-
ups I am talking, I don’t know how he taught the Westerners, the non-
Indians. For us, he used to say: ‘this will help you to understand all the
details, but you need to listen to that carefully even though you have
the notations.’” (Balasubramaniyan)

Now that he is a teacher here at Wesleyan, Balu has decided to follow
the method that T. Viswanathan established, giving students both the notated
music for the compositions they are learning, and the aural education through
class sessions and audio recordings. He said that he made the decision to keep
it this way because it had worked so well for his teacher before him, and he
has found that it continues to do so today.

David Nelson is the teacher at Wesleyan who leads the classes in the
South Indian classical percussive arts. David did not start his musical
education through this system, though; he came to find it in college while
studying abroad in South India. He found musicians who began teaching him
through the traditional pedagogical methods, oral transmission through a
system called solkattu. This system uses vocal syllables to represent physical
strokes on the drum. The syllables are recited in various rhythms to practice
the different pieces of the drum solo section of a song. Students need to learn
about the rhythmic intricacies of South Indian music so that they can
implement them more effectively on the drum.

While David was taught in the traditional manner of listening and
reciting, he also developed a notation system could help him to document what
he was learning, and would later help many other students to learn the art form as well. Though David does include this notation in his classes, he does not use it by itself — he believes that notation is best used in conjunction with other forms of pedagogy.

“If you’re only using notation, and only reading what’s on the paper, and that’s the extent of your understanding of the piece, chances are you’re not a very interesting musician or teacher. Notation should be only one part of an integrated approach.” (Nelson)

That being said, he also believes that visual learning can help students in a lot of different ways, especially through a combination of inner visualization and memorization, and transcription.

“Written material can be extremely powerful. My current favorite example is the lead sheet. You get the tune, and you get chord symbols. Now you have to invent a realization of the tune that’s true, not only to the spirit of the piece, but to your imagination. Then you play it in all twelve keys. The notation is quite transparent, pointing the way rather than serving as a destination in itself. I may write out a korvai in phrases, but I almost never write it out in tala. The tala could be different, the gati could change, and then the meaning of the thing has changed.

Really, there’s a visual component to nearly anything we think. There’s a guy who just wrote a book about how memory athletes
(people who compete in memory events) learn to memorize long strings of things. Turns out they make internal visualizations that help them. If you can get people to develop inner visualizations of music they’re trying to learn, they’ll get it in a powerful way. This is one reason I often ask people to learn from the end of a piece backwards. If they’re having problems, it’s often because their inner image has errors in it. When they learn it backwards they have to re-work their inner visual image, and the new one is usually more accurate.

Transcription is an extremely powerful visual tool. You can’t write it down without understanding its structure. Conversely, transcription reveals gaps in your understanding. Even if I have notation for something, I encourage students to write it out for themselves. Pieces I have learned this way are mine forever.”

(Nelson)

As someone who has studied through David’s methods, I can attest that the use of transcription and visual representation as a reference point definitely aided in my experiences learning solkattu and konokol (performance-based solkattu) thus far.

In David we can see a musician and teacher who has studied in the traditional manner, and adapted that with a few changes to more efficiently teach students in an American, liberal arts, collegiate setting. This kind of institution is one where students busy themselves with many different
activities, and many different kinds of thinking that are presented with great intensity in lectures and classes. In the constant bombardment of information and experiences that is common in both the American collegiate life and the digital age in general, information is transferred into our minds at such high speeds that it often gets jumbled around and lost. When students are kept busy just trying to sort out where different pieces of information belong in relation to each other, it is incredibly difficult to devote the time and focus that is really needed to learn something as complex as South Indian percussion completely by ear. The use of notation creates a road map that can help a student to recall what he learned and utilize it on her own as well as in the room with her teacher.
Chapter Four

Student Forum Experience

During the fall semester, 2010, I taught a performance class that centered on choral music from around the world. I took this class as a chance to create a study group for my thesis research and, with the help of my sister, selected a large group of songs from a wide variety of genres and nationalities that we would later teach to my choir; but, more importantly, it was music that we could teach through a variety of pedagogical techniques. We selected music from countries that traditionally taught through aural and oral methods that we could imitate, but also chose music from traditions that have been transmitted mainly through written notation.

I have often thought of leading a choir at some point in my life, and so I was very excited to see what it was like. I found it to be engaging, challenging, and very rewarding. I had taught music to small groups before, but never to a group of this size, or tried to cover such a variety of musical styles.

My choir was composed of people from all over campus, some of whom did not have much, if any, vocal or musical training or background. This meant that they did not know how to read sheet music, and that their primary tool for learning would have to be their ears. This put them at a serious disadvantage whenever we were singing a song that was being taught through sheet music, since such a piece was typically taught at a faster pace,
sometimes even just singing through it right from the start. They had to rely on
the members of the choir in their section who had strong sight-reading skills to
carry them through the piece until they had heard it enough to memorize their
parts. It was also very interesting to see the difference in reaction from the
primarily aural learners and those who were more experienced visual learners
when we were learning songs outside of their comfort zones. Generally
speaking, the aural learners tended to be more timid and less confident when
we were learning songs through visual stimuli. Meanwhile, the visual learners
seemed to get a bit frustrated when learning music aurally, not because they
weren’t able to learn the pieces, but instead because of the speed at which the
songs would be taught — they were used to moving faster through music as
opposed to phrase-by-phrase, line-by-line.

When leading a song with sheet music, a teacher is able to simply
conduct while the singers read through the piece, but for the most part this
means that students are really paying attention to their own line, and where
their next note is in comparison to the one that they are singing at the time.
This tunnel vision makes it hard to bring the different vocal parts together into
one sound — the singers don’t hear the big picture of the sound, even if they
can see it in front of them on the paper. While a group may be able to sing
through the music earlier in their exposure to the piece, they are oftentimes
bound to the music, having less self-confidence and being almost unable to
engage their surroundings (be it the conductor, the audience, their fellow
singers, or the space that they are in) because they are looking down at their notation.

Ian Coss, a student at Wesleyan University and a member of my thesis choir, made an interesting observation about his experiences learning music by ear:

“When you learn something by ear, it is impossible to get lost in the music. Even if you drop a note or mess up, you know immediately you've made a mistake and can feel your way back into the music. If you get lost in the notation, it is much harder to get back on board because you have lost the thread of your part and can't intuitively feel how it fits with the other parts.” *However:* “Another thing I've noticed about music learned by ear is that I often can only play it starting at the beginning. I know the whole piece, but it is procedural memory, so I need to play the beginning in order to know how to play the end. Sometimes, I can recall a piece that I have forgotten by playing from the beginning over and over again just to build up momentum so I can break through to the next section.” (Coss)

It is fascinating that the pedagogical process can affect the memory a student has of a piece so much.

It was also interesting for me to be the instructor using aural methods. As an instructor, it is far easier to simply hand out a piece of music and let the students sing the notes in front of them, correcting them when necessary — the
responsibility for the accuracy of the piece falls on the student and the person who transcribed the music. When teaching through aural methods, the responsibility falls on the teacher to know all of the lines to the best of his ability, and communicate them as accurately and clearly as possible to his students. The end result of a musical pedagogical process is always the shared responsibility between teacher and student, but what lies in the hands of each participant shifts depending on the method of transmission.
Conclusion

To write a conclusion to this kind of investigation seems a little unwarranted, because there is no right or wrong answer to the questions I have been asking. I entered this investigation not knowing exactly what I would find. I had my own opinions about what each kind of pedagogical approach would bring to the table, and what the benefits or drawbacks of each style would be. What I found was that, while there are some trends in people’s perceptions of these methodologies, every student is different and every teacher is different. Each individual has her own thoughts on what works best for her as a learner, and for how she thinks that her students learn best. These ideas are constantly shifting based on new experiences people have on either side of the pedagogical relationship.

The general consensus from my research is that many students see aural or oral pedagogy as a track toward getting a fuller, more thorough and encompassing perspective on what a piece of music actually sounds like. These methods tend to make students retain the piece in their memory for a longer period of time. They allow students to engage with their surroundings, and to be present in the moment, as opposed to focusing on the music in their hands. They also represent a more inclusive approach to music, making it possible for those with or without any previous experience or musical background to learn and share in the art form.
At the same time, these methods lack any kind of permanent structure or record, making it the responsibility of those who know the art to pass it down through the generations. There is a danger in this process that the music will change, and eventually become drastically different from what it once was. Given that these methods depend on direct transmission from teacher to student; there is an added danger that the music will become less potent. It is rare that a student can attain all of the knowledge of his teacher, and so information is lost through each consecutive generation, creating an ever-diminishing cycle. Aural and oral methods are also slower in nature. They are based on repetition, and often require that the student be present with the teacher (at least at the beginning), and require more time and dedication from both the student and teacher in order to move forward.

In visually-based methods of pedagogy, we see strengths in other areas. Notation creates a permanent (or at least semi-permanent) representation of the music that allows the authenticity of a piece to be transmitted through many generations without any drastic alterations. It also creates a road map so that students can practice on their own, regardless of whether they have the material memorized or not. These material representations also allow music from all over the world to be taught anywhere: a teacher no longer has to travel to South Africa to learn a traditional anti-apartheid hymn. Instead, you can buy the sheet music and learn it in the comfort of your own home. The use of notation has greatly increased the accessibility of music, making it available to many more people.
However, if a teacher simply gets the sheet music for a particular piece, she could still teach it incorrectly. Is her pronunciation right? Has the notation influenced her to make the rhythm of a song more “Western” in nature? Her students will never know. Visual learning is a faster track to performance, but it also encourages a reliance on the notation which impedes the memorization process and keeps the musician from interacting outside of the paper. Notation is also limiting, in that it requires previous training in order to access it.

Western notation has become a musical staple, but it is not practical or effective at notating many kinds of music. As a result, some musicians have had to develop their own notation for music that doesn’t fit into the standard Western framework; but there, again, students must learn how to read that new type of notation before it can help them.

Both approaches have benefits, and both have drawbacks that make them imperfect. In the end, there is no “right way” to teach music: it isn’t about choosing one of these methods and sticking with it. Instead, it is about finding a median, a combination of methods that can most effectively be used by students and teachers alike for the music that they are learning at the time. I am eager to continue developing my own path toward sharing music, and am excited to see what others will share with me, and how they will do so.
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My Choir, you are all the sunshine of my life! You all are champions, and I could not have done any of this without each of you. The time that we got to share together made my life more full, and I hope it was the same for you. May your lives be as rich as you have made mine, may they be musical and fruitful beyond compare.

Everyone who came to my show, thank you so much for your overwhelming support, we had a wonderful time singing for you all.

My housemates, what can I say? “Setting goals and accomplishing them.”
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Appendix A: Teacher Interviews

Interview with Abraham Adzenyah (Wesleyan University)
From Gomoa Obuasi, Central Ghana

**** Some words may be inaccurate due to limited knowledge of foreign vocabulary, please refer to audio samples for most accurate data.

Donovan Arthen: Thank you for taking the time to do this with me. Could you please say your name, your home country, your home province, and the village where you’re from?
Abraham Adzenyah: My name is Abraham Adzenyah. I’m from Ghana; I’m from the central region, from Gomoa Obuasi, so in the central region

DA: Thank you. So, what do you see as the advantages of learning in an oral or aural tradition — learning through listening or through speaking of these rhythms that you teach?
AA: What was the question again?

DA: What are the advantages?
AA: Yes, I have taught for a while, for 42 years here at Wesleyan. I have tried different ideas, different methods and systems of teaching my students. At first I started with the oral, the way I learned it at home and at the University, in the School of the Performing Arts, whereby we'd start with the bell and the teacher would introduce the rhythm to you — whether it's a hand technique or stick technique — and then he would ask you to play. But using the bell as the key, because the bell underlies the various rhythms that we play. So you listen to the bell, and then you play your rhythm. That’s how I learned it.

So when I came to Wesleyan, that’s how I started — starting with the bell and then introducing the various rhythms to my students for them to learn. But the idea here was to absorb or mimic what I introduced to them, to play exactly the way I demonstrated to them. Some of them were fast learners – they were able to learn it and then would play. But then I’d struggle, because I didn't have the insight; because the fact is that, because of the Western students, their background — their music background — it was difficult for them. But by the same token, they tried, they did very well, you know, they sided with me and did very well at that time.

But as time goes on, then I realized that I’ve been playing with a lot of musicians, renowned musicians, jazz musicians, funk musicians, and all that. They played my music, in particular kpanlogo and gahun, and they wondered where the one was, and I always asked them, "what do you mean by one?", when they used that term. And they said, the one is where, in the Western music, that’s where you start your music, the point of reference in the music.
And I said, well in Ghanaian music there is nothing like that, we don't count it – the music you learn it by oral, the traditional way. And that gave me an idea, so then I gave a talk about it and came up with the idea that another method and style of teaching — but teaching the old method, using the old method to teach: I see [that I should] use some kind of nonsense syllable for them about the rhythm, how the rhythm sounds — I will use some nonsense syllables. But then later on, I came up with the idea that I should come up with something that would be close to the Western musicians’ backgrounds, so that they would be able to grasp the rhythms and also be fast learners; that's when I came up with the idea of the pulse in the music.

So the pulse, I came up with so many names: I referred to the pulse as downbeat, upbeat, heart beat, invisible conductor, it all refers to the pulse, in the ensemble. But I'm using these words for them, to open their minds about what I'm talking about, about the pulse. So, I came up with that, and then also was able to develop more nonsense syllables about the rhythms that we play. For instance, in gahun, which has been the core of the music that I teach here, I would start the gahun, and that idea came to me and I said: the gahun, the basic rhythm, it's a language we're talking. In general, the way the music works is a language, it's call-and-response, it's a conversation within the ensemble. We use the instruments to talk.

So, I had that idea, and I said okay, this is a family engaged in a dialogue; therefore, it's a question and answer. So the idi would ask a question, one of the instruments would say, “how you doing?” And then I translated that sound to the English language. “How you doing?” is the open strokes and then the mute would say, “how you doing today?,” which is two mute. And then the other instruments would answer, which is the sogo, would answer, which has two notes open and the mute. So the open would reflect "Fine" to answer the question. "How you doin'?" "Fine!" That's the open note, that's one note; and then I would tell them, no, you've left something out, which is the magic word: which is “thank you”! When anybody asks you a question, and you answer, you add that “thank you”, which is two mutes. So it goes direct with that word. So one idi plays the word “thank you”, two mutes. So one idi asks the question “how you doing?” “Fine, thank you.” And now that's a conversation, and this is repeated over and over again. And then within that ensemble, that gahun ensemble, the kanganu, I referred to the kanganu as the “baby” in the family. Sogo maybe a sister or brother, but the idi is the mother in the ensemble.

So, in the family, where you have a younger child, if the baby wants something — the child wants something from the parents — and you are not responding, you are not attending to what he wants or she wants she will start crying and saying, “Mama, dada, dada, mama,” when the baby is learning how to speak their first language that came across to them; you know, “mama, dada.” And when they need something, they would use this language — that's the kanganu rhythm which is two notes: dada, dada, dada, mama, mama,
mama. So the three rhythms — dada, mama, gaga — cut through the *kidi* and *sogo* rhythms. So they sum up these two rhythms so nicely, they blend these two rhythms nicely and then therefore they have a conversation. And then you come to the *axatse*, the rattle, which the fast rhythm — this is my own approach, how I played the *gahun* music: the fast rhythm of the *axatse*, which is my introductory rhythm, to reflect the pause which is four against the bell, the bell pattern. That is the pause, has a nice conversation with the *kanganu*, so the *kanganu* said, *dada-um, dada-um, dada-um*, etc.; and then that’s the conversation, this is what I call a conversation within the ensemble. And this has helped a lot to speed the learning process using these nonsense syllables [...] it's a linguistics: you're talking together, sharing ideas.

And then the *atsimevu* is the daddy: when he comes in, everybody pays attention to the daddy when the daddy talks. And then here in *gahun*, the *atsimevu* — the lead drum — literally directs the dance, or choreographs the dance. And also the *atsimevu* within the set, the *atsimevu* would call the *sogo* and the *kidi* on a dialogue which also may change the dance movements, because the *atsimevu* is directing the dance, so it may change the dance movement along with the *sogo* and *kidi* where it’s a must that they should respond or react to the *atsimevu* rhythm. Therefore, playing, you really need to open your mind, you really need to hear, because of this conversation going on; and also play the pulse. You really need to relax, to internalize all these rhythms in you. You need to hear it, so that, should anybody make a mistake you may know, right away you know that so-and-so is making a mistake: we are not together, because it's a sharing of ideas. So that's what I've come up with, and it has really helped the learning process.

Therefore when they're learning, when they're learning to play, they learn these linguistics within the ensemble. They need to hear, train their years, so they can hear the conversation; and then the call from the lead drum they should be able to hear, to interact with the lead drum and that makes the music work very well. So, with these nonsense syllables, this has helped the students and I’ve been using this in other ensembles. For them to understand how the *atsimevu* works, or how it calls them on a dialogue, I will play some of the cues — which I now call it the cue; I will use nonsense syllables saying the first rhythm, which is a preparation to warn the supporting drums that they should be ready to interact or to answer the *atsimevu*'s question. I will say, dingere, dingere, dingere, which is one-hand, one-stick technique on the drum. It’s not an actual roll, but it's in that neighborhood — dingere, dingere, dingere. And then they also need to react with that rhythm, whereby with my strongest hand, which is the stick, they replay that note together: one, bum, bum, bum, responding, and then they are left, they are using two sticks, they are left stuck with the mute, so it's: bounce-mute, bounce-mute, bounce-mute, along with my call. Then, I will introduce the next rhythm and they should be able to respond. So if I'm playing that *zegede, zegede, zegede, zegede-ya, zegede-ya, zegede, kidi, kidi* — that's the response of the supporting drum —
kidi, kidi. And when they are familiar with the nonsense syllables that I am using, then they will be able to answer my question and this has been very fluent, the learning process.

DA: So teaching this music is like teaching a language in itself.
AA: Oh yes, it's a language by itself, literally, it's a language. And then also I encourage them to come up with their own, develop their own, which may help them to understand the structure, how the music works as a group, as a family. And I refer that we are a family, in a society, that we are sharing our experience together. So this is what I have been able to come to lately, in fact I am even writing on this, how I've been teaching this music in the Western setting.

DA: Thank you, thank you so much. One of the things that I've found recently that a lot of people feel is that, when they learned something like this, when they learned something by ear, when they do it through speaking or through listening, they find that they have it very strongly in their memory for a certain period of time, but that then they start to forget. Has that been your experience with your students? Do you feel that your students commit this to memory in the long-term, or do you feel that they have to sort of re-learn it every time?
AA: Some of them remember their rhythms, and that is even after graduation, when they continue to play, it sticks. It happens to me. Having been here, what I'm playing is just the tip of an iceberg, I play just a little bit. If I were to be in Ghana, I'd be playing a lot, and these rhythms — I call them a vocabulary — so what I'm teaching here are just the basics. And I don't play it often, therefore I even tend to forget, myself. And some of my colleagues, yes, they agree with me, saying yes, if you don't play it often you tend to forget. So, the same to the students: when they learn it, some of them are able to maintain it, and they play it even after graduation, they continue to play. That will stick with them. But others, after graduation, or even learning after the class, they go home and some of them may forget, and then when they come we have to go over it again. So, it takes some time. And, because it's a language — it's a rhythm, but it's a language — so they need to know the language, how to use the language just like in the English language you have the learning of nouns, pronouns, adjectives and all this and that. It's similar to what I'm saying: you use nonsense syllables, and the rhythm may be a noun, but the nonsense syllable may be an adjective or whatever, this kind of thing. So they need to really understand it, and then also have a passion for it. Otherwise, from here they go out and it goes away, they forget.

DA: So the motivation behind learning it is really important, obviously.
AA: Oh, yes. If you really have a passion for it, you need to continue. Then that would be with you after even graduation. And I think this is what has happened: that's why some of them, my students, are teaching in various schools; some have their own private groups that perform here and there, promoting these art forms.
DA: Like Dr. Hartigan over at UMass Dartmouth.
AA: Yes, Hartigan, David Locke, Robert Levine, Joe Galliota, Richard Hills, Bob Becca, Russell Hardinberger, all these, that's what happens, they are promoting this art form.

DA: Do you feel that there are some things that could be contributed to this music via writing things down? Do you think that there are some advantages to having written music?
AA: It's very complex, it's a very complex subject. And even Nketia who was my former director, who was the director of the African studies in Ghana, Legon – at the University of Ghana, Legon – he is a scholar, and he always referred to, if you take the rhythms one by one, yes, you can write it in Western notation; but if you put them together in an ensemble, it doesn't work because of the cross rhythms that I refer to literally as linguistic — it doesn't work.

DA: Because in the Western notation you'd have to have different meters representing different parts, which interrupts the conversation.
AA: Absolutely. So, it doesn't work. But if you take the single instrument, and then write the rhythm of one instrument, how it's played, demonstrate in it, write in it, that's fine; but you cannot write them in an ensemble manner. You can't write the piece, no, as in the West you have the piece for orchestra and everybody is looking at his chart, playing — no, this wouldn't work.

DA: In your own experience, obviously, before you were a teacher, you were a student. And I wonder when do you feel like you first started to learn music, not necessarily in a school — do you remember the first time you feel like you were learning music, or has it been forever?
AA: I started at a very early age. I played with my daddy, my daddy had his own music with his children. So we performed with our daddy, and that's where I started learning how to play the music, learning to play the drumming, singing, and dancing with my daddy. But when I started my formal education, then all of the schools in those days in the 50s — in the 40s and 50s — were minded by missionaries, so you were not allowed to play any indigenous drums, You were only allowed to either sing in the school choir, or in the school marching band, and do what the school wants you to do.

DA: So you were limited to more of a European or a Western music?
AA: Yes, Western music, rather than your own traditional music. That was a challenge for me because, there I was, full of this traditional music, and even pop music, and then all of a sudden they said, no, you can't play them. But what helped me was that I was the vice of the school marching band, I was the second leader of the school marching band and I was very good, oh yes, with the school marching band. So I played in that, and I also helped in the school choir, so that helped me. I made a deal with them, the authorities, that if I'm doing all this for the school, why couldn't I play my music? And they said no,
no, no, no, no, you cannot do that. If it's piano, yes; if it's Western music, that's what we want. And I said, yeah, but that's your music — I have mine, and I would love to play it. That makes me who I am! And, no, they didn't want me to. I did all I could, and I was able to maintain it, play it once in a while here and there. When they caught me, when I was caught, they beat me really bad in the school, whipped me good. But I was a stubborn kid, so I didn't stop, it didn't stop me because my parents didn't have money to educate me, so that's what I did: I played here a little bit, make a little money here and there to support myself in school. So I said all that to them, that's what I used to do to support myself because my parents don't have the money. They were able to pay my tuition, but when it comes to the everyday money to use in everyday, to buy a [...] outfit, a [...] outfit and all that, I have to provide all those. So, that's why I am playing this music, I make a little money there, and that helps. So they were very strict, but I was very stubborn when it comes to the music, so I did it my way. I said, if you catch me, you catch me; if you don't, I'm gone, so I played hide-and-seek with them until I graduated.

DA: Did you live at the school? Or did you live at home with your family?
AA: No, no, this was a day school, I lived at home and I'd go to school. No, it's not a residential school.

DA: So at night you were able to play your music.
AA: Oh, yeah. After school I played with my peer group on the sidewalk or in the open space, or whatever. That's how I learned it more, I had my own group within my peer group, and we played on empty cans, empty bottles, whatever — anything that could make sound. That's how we practiced, because, unless I played with my daddy, then I played on a rightful instrument. But here I was, I was in school, they didn't want me to play. So my daddy wanted me to have a formal education, so he said no, if that be the case, then I shouldn't play at all.

DA: Okay, so then after your day school, you went to the performing arts university?
AA: No, no, no, after I finished, then before I went to the school of performing arts, and then continued from there. I had already finished my elementary school, so here I was, but even at the school my intention was to earn a diploma in music. But the year that I entered, they recruited me into the national dance company, so I had the opportunity to learn this art form. I went to a different region, learned the music; they invited the musicians to the school who taught us the music, but they taught us the traditional way, and that's how I was exposed to all these drums. That's how I learned it.

DA: And when you learned, the teachers — I remember you've said before — that they were very strict and that only certain people could play certain kinds of drums or certain parts. I know you said especially the Ewe teachers were very, very protective of the atsimevu, obviously...
AA: Oh yeah, there were Ewes, but there was one head — the person who brought the Ewe drums into the school. So he was the one who headed the Ewe repertoire. Then Idrusu brought in with Damba Takai, and Bambaya. He is the one who was the head of that music from the north, and Kosimadu was the head of the music from the Akan – from Sitchi, Sanga, Kete – all that. Asama was the one who brought in the *kundum* from the Asmana hunter. For every region that we had their repertoire, there was a specific person who was the lead, who led that region, who had that instrument. Kakaba from Lubi who brought the xylophone, you know Jili music to the school, and Mr. Fatatadi was Ega and he was the *darja* of the Palago, the Woka the Dega repertoire. So that’s how it was, and therefore I was considered with...I call him my cousin or my brother, Asama, who was from the Fanti area, so we teamed up and that’s how it was.

But the person who brought the Ewe instrument didn’t want anybody to play the lead drum, the *atsimevu*, even if you were Ewe, a drummer — no, he doesn’t want you to touch it, so that was a tough challenge to us, but I learned it by rote, I played it. Our artistic director, Opoku, asked him specifically to teach me the Ewe drum, the lead drum; which he did, but as soon as he realized that I was doing very well, I am able to play it, then our next meeting he would mix it up, he would change the rhythm — because as I said, there are millions of these rhythms, so he would mix them just to confuse me. So I realized that, so when I am playing, I know the rightful rhythm, and I would intentionally make mistakes, and then he thought I wasn’t paying attention, but that’s how I learned it.

DA: *So you had to sort of sneak your way in.*

AA: Oh yeah! That’s what I did. And some of these rhythms, because I was there and we played it for a long period of time, it sunk in. Although I wasn’t playing, I watched the technique of playing and absorbing the rhythm, just like a computer, putting it on my mind; and then, if he’s not there, then I would sneak and play it, and practice it. Until I came to Wesleyan, and then I started playing it. And even then at that time one [...] visitor, Mihea, he was amazed that I was playing the *atsimevu*, because he never saw me playing it while I was in Ghana — no, the Efo wouldn’t allow you (the person who brought the instrument, we would call him Efo, meaning an elderly person). So Nketia was amazed when he saw me playing the Ewe repertoire, especially the lead drum.

DA: *And Nketia was the director of the...*

AA: …was the director of the...no, he was the director of the African studies – the dance company was under the African studies.

DA: *I have one more question for you: I’m finding it interesting to see what role music plays in the life of different people who have learned music differently – either based on their cultural upbringing, or just the way that music is in their life, and what it does. So I’m wondering what role does music play in your life, and in what context. Obviously, I know*
you could talk about this a lot, but — some of the things I’ve heard from other people — are professional, recreational, but also spiritual, therapeutic. How do you see music in your life, what role does it take?
AA: Ghanaian music, first and foremost, is history. Literature, linguistics and intelligible text. When you play the drums, especially our music, Nketia always mentioned that we play the music for a reason, for a purpose: be it recreational, social, wedding, naming ceremony, ceremonial, funeral celebration, annual festival, for these occasions. So, when we perform the music, it is for a specific occasion that we perform. The music played a leading role in all these aspects, therefore it is part and parcel of our way of life. I remember very well that our first president said in one of his speeches, that, as an African, your identity is your music. The music is the cornerstone of your identity as an African, so that is another way of putting it. Therefore it is a history. Having said that, the lead musicians, any lead musician may come from a musical family, because in the olden days in the past, it is your father who will teach you this art form, or your uncle, or your close relative. It was unpaid career, or unpaid duty, but it was prestigious: “Oh, he’s a drummer!”

Then, because your scale is not just the drum that you play, you need to know the history of your people; the music that you play is the history of the people: the Adiz, the ancestors, what they did, their history and all that, and then intelligible texts which you may say verbally — you may quote it verbally when you are speaking. For instance, when a chief or a head of a regional […] speaks when there’s a gathering, he speaks everyday language, but to make his speech have depth and carry weight, he will quote an appropriate proverb to make his long story short and sweet. Therefore, as a musician, you need to learn this; and some musicians learn that separately, while they are learning how to play, they learn the intelligible text separately, and then they learn their drumming for the dances also separately. But some of them they learn it both together — learning how to play for the dances, and learning the intelligible text. These intelligible texts are not written, it’s oral, therefore you parents are the ones who will teach you the intelligible text; or an elderly people, you may learn it from them, from these elderly people.

And also when you play, there are ancestral spirits — kings, chiefs and the people who have played on this instrument — their spirits join you while you are playing. And most of these musicians are also herbalists. They know the herbs, they are able to heal, they’re able to cure, because in the olden days there were no hospitals, so they know the herbs to do so many wonderful things, and that also affects the drummer — his wisdom, his knowledge. Therefore, he is able to perform so many rituals of everyday life, within our everyday life, and by so doing, and if we are really good — from a musical family who has knowledge of all these — yes, when you play, if you are really playing, you are able to heal people, you are able to cure people with your music. Because when people come, they join you, they free their memory. Here, when I first came, I’d be hearing people saying, “Oh, I have a headache,
I’m stressed out…” — there’s nothing like this in Ghana, because, you talk to anybody, you meet anybody on the street you talk to them, and plus when we play we come together and we share common ground. So, if you are stressed out, there is a performance, you come, you dance, you sing — it’s gone. And even having been here, my music has been able to heal some people, and they were amazed. So the music is therapeutic. Yes, it can heal — if you are really, really into it, yes, it will heal you.

DA: So, it seems that this music, it isn’t that it plays one role, it’s that it plays so many roles…
AA: Oh yes, several roles! Even when I was a kid, and when you loose your teeth – ooh! You have the tooth in your hand, and then all your peers will come and then clap and sing along with you. You show that tooth to the peer group within the community, and everybody will sing (sings the song), clapping and singing. That song is therapeutic – that song will reinforce a healthy new teeth that may come out. That is how my parents translated it to me. That’s why you sing “so and so lost his teeth,” and then you sing behind him….it helps, it is therapeutic, it will reinforce healthy new teeth. The same applies to somebody who wet bed. The people who pee on bed, when you pee you do that and they bundle your mat around you — the mat that you sleep on, that you wear it, you pee on it, they will bundle you — and the kids in that neighborhood will come around you (sings) and they will parade you within that community, and our people say that is therapeutic. When they do that, from that day onward that’s it, you will never pee on bed again. And some of them refer to, when you do that you have shamed the person, so he won’t do it again, but our parents would translate that as therapeutic.

DA: So the music brings together the community in creating medicine.
AA: Of course! The sound, the music itself, it’s so powerful — they create all this at the appropriate time, at the right time.

DA: So the music has its place and it has its time and that’s when it gets played?
AA: Absolutely, even why here – that’s one of the reasons when I started my group, the Talking Drums, that it became so popular. Any time we played, and if the weather forecast says, “oh, it will be raining,” and we’d be playing at that time, and it would be so clouded and I’d bring my talking drums out — out, so I could see the skies and play a certain rhythm. Before I finish that rhythm, the clouds would give way to the sun. The sun would come up and we would complete the festival before it would rain. And that made talking drums so popular. The people who witness that, they said, “oh, when talking drum plays it doesn’t rain”; and so even if it started drizzling, and if they are there, the rain will stop, and people didn’t understand. That’s the power of the music!

That is the intelligible text that I’m talking about – we talk to the Creator – if you have learned it and you know it, yes, you can ask permission that this is what’s going, we are here to entertain the people, so therefore, permit us to finish it
before the rain comes. And if it’s the right fortune, if you know exactly what
you’re doing, yes. Jay Hogarth was so critical about it, he said, when he first
came here: “Oh, no, I will never believe it.” And I played it right here, he was
coming from the music department — it was a commencement, and we were
going to play for the commencement. It was clouded, it was going to rain, I got
into the weather forecast. So I brought my *tumpa*, and then, right there he was
coming and he saw me: I played it, and then — *whew!* — the clouds gave way to
the sun, and he screamed so hard! “What!? Now I’ve witnessed it, and I believe
it!” At first he thought it was funny, that I was making it up, but then he saw it
and he believes it. That is the power of the music!

**DA: So the music, in a way, is life?**

**AA:** That’s it – music is Life! In light of that, when my daughter Elizabeth was
very young and attending kindergarten, her music teacher had an accident.
She was a pianist — very good, she knows how to work with children.
According to the family, they spent a lot of money but she couldn’t stretch the
arm to play the piano the way she used to; so on that side, her hand was at her
side and she’d shift it herself to play the piano. But because she was very
good, the school did not terminate her position.

In 1972, there was a lot of money in the system, so they organized a workshop
for me to teach the teachers from all over the United States to come to Wesleyan
to learn my music, so they could also pass it on — whatever they would learn
from me they would teach it in their various schools. So this woman was one of
the teachers who came. Some of them came from Arizona, California, all over. I
had fifteen at the time. That was for six weeks. I started teaching them the *axatse*
rhythms, songs and all. So the lady says, “Abraham, I cannot play the drums
because of my hand.” And I said, “Don’t worry, you can try the *axatse* rhythms,
the simplest rhythms that I’ll be teaching.” And we started singing — I taught
them the songs, chanting and playing the *axatse*, and all that. First week, second
week, third week, we were singing the way we’ve been singing here, you know;
really, they mastered the song, so everybody was so happy. Before I realized, this
woman has stretched her arm and she’s saying, “Abraham, Abraham, you have
healed me! You have healed me! Look, I’m able to stretch my hand!” The whole
class, everybody started clapping and screaming. So happy! And so she said I
have healed her, and I said, “No, it’s your belief — your belief in what we are
doing. Therefore, I am just a channel. God used me as a channel, and through
me, through everybody here in this room — that’s why you are healed: you
believe in the music, what we are doing, that’s why you are healed. Oh boy, she
couldn’t believe it and her family was so happy! And those are some elements of
this music, the way this music operates.

**DA: Thank you, etc. Is there anything else you want to say?**

**AA:** I hope that it works for you — keep it up!
Interview with B. Balasubrahmaniyan (Wesleyan University)  
From Chennai, South India

**** The audio file that held the beginning of this interview was corrupted and so the transcription was only able to cover what remained intact.

**** Some words may be inaccurate due to limited knowledge of foreign vocabulary, please refer to audio samples for most accurate data.

Donovan Arthen: Ok, so you were saying that because it goes straight into your mind that you get the details more. so what else do you see as the advantage of learning orally?  
B. Balasubrahmaniyan: That is the basis for this, not only for singing, because even in those days they don’t use paper, really, so if you want learn – songs, even a poem — they learn though ear so that’s the great thing about advantage to automatically it goes to your ear and you memorize it by singing several times. Sometimes, after a few months or a few years, then notation will help you as a kind of reference. Since this music is not notatable – you can’t bring all the details on the paper — so this type of Indian music, the best way to learn is through ear. So this type of notation is a long process, you can’t become a performer very soon. I studied with two teachers individually; one was from the last generation, his teaching methodology was to provide the notation and the song text based on […]. In the oral tradition, one disadvantage is that you have to sing what your teacher sings, and sometimes the words can be a mistake; but here it’s not like that, because he’s giving those notation of the text to you so you can reference several books. So that is one advantage, you can see the words and the grammar and that is an advantage of having the notation – you can learn quickly – but you have to have that kind of understanding of notation or it doesn’t mean anything. Also you learn from the great advantage of singing with all the other students. If, for instance, there are ten students, before you get your turn you really understand half of the music — because even if it’s a group lesson the teacher will ask you to sing individually — so before your turn comes, you already will have learned the melody because some student will make a mistake and the teacher will correct that. So from that, you will learn quickly. Two people interacting — same music as with 5-10 students, so it’s kind of a competition. Before that student sings, we have to sing it correctly, and with that kind of attitude, you automatically learn […] system.

DA: So when you were learning, did you find that it came easily? When did you start learning to sing these songs in phonetic music?
BB: Phonetic music, I started a little later. Usually the kids will start when they are 7 or 8, but I started at 14 or 15; but before that, I used to hear music a lot and my father used to sing the D songs, like Thhh and all that. So I developed the listening habit not only with classical music, but all kinds of music, popular music and all that. My teachers, they... I had the capacity to understand the details very much, so that helped me, it just naturally came to me. Even in our class at the University of Madras, not everybody got this quality to understand this. It changed from person to person.

DA: And so you first started learning by hearing the music your father would sing and then you started learning through the institution. When did you start learning with the woman you studied with?
BB: That was in my late twenties, before that I studied in the university in a school set-up, individually also. As I said before, the grasping talent naturally was there with me, so even before going to Madras University I already learned the basic things like XX. When I went to university they taught those things again, but it was not new for me.

So in my late twenties I learned from those two teachers. The great thing is, since we were mature at that time in learning and performing, that music was very easy. This was a very special music tradition, so their repertoire and their singing style and details, you can’t find it in another school within the South Indian tradition. So in the beginning we struggled for the songs, we couldn’t understand properly. We couldn’t understand properly because it’s a complete different style – a very sophisticated style, so in the beginning we felt a little hard. That was a workshop they started in 1990. Viswa and Tibishuan, they both taught us. Tibishaun, he already comes from the same family, he helped us with the notation, so that helped us to understand Brinda style also. So even if I say listening through ear or oral tradition will take you to easy understanding, but in the beginning you have to have something to help you understand what’s happening.

DA: A road map?
BB: Yeah, it’s a six-month workshop that Viswa did. He showed us how to understand this music with the notation. In the beginning that was also difficult to understand, because the notation system we follow right now, it will give the notes, but it won’t give how to oscillate the gamaca. But Viswa, he described everything he did — so, for instance, the gamaca also – how fast, how slow, everything he described. He called this “descriptive notation,” and that was something completely new for […] music.

DA: Like what you give us in class, with the lines over the gamaca and the squiggly lines to show how fast.
BB: Actually, Viswa developed this when he was teaching to Jarnigans and Jody. He was teaching the first time for the non-Indians; they crescendo, so you are singing da but it’s not in tha – so then he realized, and he invented with non-Indians how to notate Indian music in detail.
But in this generation, I know how to use that, of course in our group — that workshop Noah conducted – we had eight members in that, so we know what’s happening in that part that nobody else would know.

**DA: It’s really a unique notation that not many people understand.**  
**BB: They won’t understand because there is not that kind of learning system in India. So he developed that for non Indians. If he was teaching to me, that was different, so we won’t follow all the details because he knows that I understand.**

**DA: Did you find that when you were studying — either with him or your other teachers or in the University — that the people who did not have such a natural gift for listening relied more on their sheet music, or were they told that they had to learn it by ear?**  
**BB: Even though Viswa gave this notation to us, he would insist – listening is the main thing – this is for reference. In the Indian set-ups I am talking, I don’t know how he taught the Westerners, the non-Indians. For us, he used to say, “This will help you to understand all the details, but you need to listen to that carefully even though you have the notations.”**

**DA: So now that you’ve become a teacher here, and you’ve been teaching non-Indians here for years, what approach do you usually use?**  
**BB: I follow the same pattern that Viswa used because it worked right from my coming here, so I started with…in fact, it was after 2003. I was not completely… but I forgot this system, so when I came here I started learning how to revise it – how to learn to teach it. So I worked on a few compositions. Now I can read any music Viswa’s written. So now, if I want to teach them a new song, other than Viswa’s composition, I know how to write the details — it’s so natural. When I teach the students, I use the same method. If I teach Indian students, that’s different, so I don’t use this notation.**

**DA: Do you just use singing and repeating?**  
**BB: Yes – of course the notations are available now in the book form, so you can bring the book, but I will teach them mostly learning by ear.**

**DA: When you are teaching Westerners, do you give them the sheet music first?**  
**BB: Um-hmm.**

**DA: Do they learn by using the sheet music at first, or do a lot of students try not to use the sheet music?**  
**BB: I give both, actually – the audio material as well as the sheet music, so that helps because, although the sheet I give, but they have to listen to the music.**
DA: Because otherwise they are guessing…
BB: Um-hmmm.

DA: The next question I have is about the role that music has played in your life – you are a professional musician, you perform and teach, but how do you feel that music plays into the rest of your life — recreation, spiritual, any other way?
BB: First of all it gives some pleasure for me, for myself, when I keep singing those songs that I learned and also when I sing it to audience. That interaction makes you feel proud of yourself, and also interacting with the other musicians is a wonderful time when you sit on the stage as a performer. As an individual, when I practice I think of my teachers and think of the greatness of the music. For instance, if I sing my teachers’ repertoire — because nobody knows that repertoire, only a few of us know it — so when I sing it properly just like my teachers, I love that moment.

Apart from my own music or my teachers’ music, I listen to a lot of Hindustani music, so that, as a listener, is a different experience. I love Hindustani music a lot, not only vocal, but instrumental.

DA: I have a question about performing. When you are onstage with a violinist and a […] or any combination of musicians – in some traditions there is a conversational aspect. One thing I’ve noticed in concerts and from classes with you and David is the sort of relationship between these instruments, and I wonder how does it translate musically, but also, culturally-speaking, in the relationship between a singer and a violinist or a percussionist.
BB: It’s kind of sharing your knowledge – a kind of friendship there. Especially with David – you know we practice twice a week during the semester. So the practice and the […] of the practice in the classroom or do that on the stage – it’s kind of sharing things. Sometimes, some days I will ask David because, since he’s a […], sometimes he knows these things more than me, especially since it’s a rhythmic part. Sometimes the violinist, he comes from the outside. Sometimes we don’t give a chance for him because he may make us mess up, so David and I sing it straight away. It happened a few times here when we invited the violinist outside.

Most of the melodic content is common to the violinist or to me. Style may differ from person to person. Ragas — the same notes, but the style must be little bit different. But when he comes from the outside and we want to treat him the same, culturally means …

DA: I guess I wonder…for instance, in African drumming, when the lead drum makes a certain call, there might be a certain response – there is a conversation each part interlocks with. So I wonder if the music that you and the violinist exchange in the improvisational sections, if that is similar
– or if it is more technical, or where it comes from. With the drums, it’s a cultural folk art form and yours is a classical one, but it feels like there are undertones that maybe I don’t know.

BB: Here, as you said, the violinist wants to do best during the conversations – not just a call and response, so I want to do something. It’s kind of a competion, again. Whatever I know, I want to enforce on that. Some musicians, especially the vocalist, main artist, they always expect the violinist to play the same patterns that the main singer do – I don’t expect that, because he comes form a different type of approach. It’s kind of like walking on the fire, or…

DA: It’s tricky…

BB: It’s really tricky. It’s kind of a healthy conversation between the two artists.

DA: Challenge each other to friendly one-upmanship. By trading back and forth more complex patterns and melodies, you are helping each other to improve as musicians.

BB: But sometimes, if you are performing very chaste music — if the other artist, the accompanying artist, he is also an important person in the ensemble — if he plays some very nasty music, some cheap music, you’ll get booed. That happens many times because, umm… mostly the youngsters in these days they’ll form a group — like same violinist, same group of everybody. So they all know what to expect from each other. Sometimes it is boring. In my performance, he played some phrases that it was so cheap.

DA: Oh, that’s no good.

BB: You know it happens, you can’t expect the same thing from other artists. But of course, David and I, we know what we are doing. Any song…if I’m going to sing a new song, he will understand quickly because you know we have…

DA: Yeah, well, I remember in your concert at the festival that you had realized that there was a problem in the program, so you needed to change something, and I remember seeing it and saying, “oh, okay, that’s a good change;” but it still seemed seamless between the two of you because he knows what to expect from you and you know what to expect from him. Do you feel like this music fosters these kinds of ensembles? You were saying that nowadays people create these groups and travel around. Is that the traditional way of doing it?

BB: Yeah, you know it’s been a long time in the music scenario. In those days, […], who is a famous singer, he and […] most of the concert they… of course they share with other musicians, also but most of the time it was these two in the concert. The concert experience is really a difference, because sometimes you will practice and practice and practice and go to the stage and nothing will come to your mind. Sometimes it is frustrating. Sometimes you don’t practice
anything and go to the stage, and whatever you think, everything will come on
the stage. These kinds of experiences I have heard many times. I have
practiced a lot, but I have missed many things in concerts — but it happens to
many people.’

**DA:** Sure, and it happens in many kinds of music, not just cultural. Well,
thank you so much! Is there anything else that you feel might be useful in
my thesis?

**BB:** Yeah, my teacher, one thing I asked her was whether I should record her
lessons, and she said, “If you want, I can sing it 1000 times, but don’t record
it, don’t write it — record on your brain!”

**DA:** So she really placed the emphasis on your memory, and making sure
that your memory is what was there.

**BB:** Because she learned like that — she used to learn every day one song. But
she studied like a […] sister, she stayed with her guru for four years. First two
years, she has to practice the basic exercises; then after that she used to learn
one composition. That’s not easy at all.

**DA:** No, yeah.

**BB:** You would know more than four-hundred for T. Viswanathan Kritis, just
T. Viswanathan. So that kind of repertoire — she never liked recordings. So
whatever we have available is concert only, chamber music. She never gave
any recordings, she was very particular about that. She also mentioned that
you see people playing music in teashops and barbershops, and she said she
didn’t want her music played there.

**DA:** So she was very particular about where she performed.

**BB:** She never did PR work to get public. She was kind of a wonderful
woman, full of principles, so she never asked for any recommendations…
nothing.
Interview With David Nelson (Wesleyan University)

Name: David Nelson
Home Country: USA
Home State/Province: Massachusetts
Hometown: Minneapolis, current residence Northampton, MA

What do you see as the advantages of an aural or oral pedagogical tradition?
Are you assuming no reading at all? The main advantage of using spoken syllables or working through repetition of taught phrases is that the body is engaged. Every sense you use to learn something adds a dimension to the material. If you’re using eyes (imitating the teacher or reading), ears (hearing the pattern) and body (singing, playing, reciting), your whole body/mind is engaged in the process. Methods like the old school Indian training, where students were not allowed to write anything, helped develop extremely sharp hearing and the ability to absorb large structures by making the student grasp underlying principles. If you learn something this way you cannot forget it; it’s very powerful memory training.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
There are only disadvantages if you need to communicate it to someone else. Such an approach requires tremendous effort and dedication, especially at first. In an American college setting, where we have limited access to students who have a zillion things to do, you wouldn’t get very much done. But what you DID get done would be there permanently.

What do you see as the advantages of a visual pedagogical tradition?
Again, only written? As in, here’s a Bach piano piece. Learn it and play it without deviation from what’s written. I don’t know whether such an approach actually exists. Written material can be extremely powerful. My current favorite example is the lead sheet. You get the tune, and you get chord symbols. Now you have to invent a realization of the tune that’s true, not only to the spirit of the piece, but to your imagination. Then you play it in all twelve keys. The notation is quite transparent, pointing the way rather than serving as a destination in itself. I may write out a korvai in phrases, but I almost never write it out in tala. The tala could be different, the gati could change, and then the meaning of the thing has changed.

Really, there’s a visual component to nearly anything we think. There’s a guy who just wrote a book about how memory athletes (people who compete in memory events) learn to memorize long strings of things. Turns out they make internal visualizations that help them. If you can get people to develop inner visualizations of music they’re trying to learn, they’ll get it in a powerful way. This is one reason I often ask people to learn from the end of a piece backwards. If they’re having problems, it’s often because their inner image has
errors in it. When they learn it backwards they have to re-work their inner visual image, and the new one is usually more accurate.

Transcription is an extremely powerful visual tool. You can’t write it down without understanding its structure. Conversely, transcription reveals gaps in your understanding. Even if I have notation for something, I encourage students to write it out for themselves. Pieces I have learned this way are mine forever.

**What do you see as the disadvantages?**
Used in the way I just described, there aren’t any. If you’re only using notation, and only reading what’s on the paper, and that’s the extent of your understanding of the piece, chances are you’re not a very interesting musician or teacher. Notation should be only one part of an integrated approach.

**Describe the difference in experience between learning through oral/aural instruction vs. learning through written or visual stimuli.**

**How fast do you learn it?**
Me, or anyone? It depends on the person. I’ve been working by ear for so long that my reading skills are not as strong, but I do cultivate inner visualizations.

**How fast is it committed to memory?**
I have to work by ear and inner imaging to memorize, but I’m fairly quick now.

**How well/thoroughly do you learn it?**
How much time do I have?

**What are the learning devices that you rely on if not the visual representation?**
Solkattu is of course my favorite. Working backwards from the end. “Dizzy” claps (I showed you this in 212).

**When Learning in the different methods but in one genre of music, how has your experience differed?**
Not sure I understand the question.

**Were you involved with music as a child?**
Yes, every day. My dad was a decent amateur trumpet player who’d been in a Chicago National Guard band as a teenager. He taught me trumpet, which I played in school, in church, and in the Minneapolis Youth Symphony. We had regular piano lessons. My mom taught my brothers and me close harmony singing by ear. We sang and played as a brass quartet in churches and revival meetings throughout the Midwest. My dad started a little band made up of the kids in church who were learning instruments. We accompanied the congregational singing and played a special offertory and little incidental things here and there. At that time there were no transcribed parts for the various instruments, so we all read from the hymnal. This meant that most of
us were transposing. The kids who could read decently (me for example) got bass clef parts, so we were transposing those. Since the trumpet is a B-flat instrument, I was always reading up one step. This meant adding two sharps (C to D, e.g.), or dropping two flats (B flat to C, e.g.). If the key was a sharp key and the transposition was going to be tricky, say from D to E, dad would signal the piano player to change to the corresponding flat key so that we were dropping flats instead of adding sharps. So we had an experience of notation as extremely flexible, that we could use to our advantage.

What kind of educational style did you experience mainly as you grew up? 
Public school through 9th grade, then private high school

Now that you have had exposure to both of these methods, do you have a preferred method of learning?
Depends on the music and the situation, but I always end up memorizing, which is to say getting a whole-body understanding

Is your preferred the method that you have more or less experience with? 
More.

What kind of role does music play in your life? And in what context? 
Professional? 
My profession is performing, teaching, and writing about music, so it dominates this aspect.

Recreational? 
Well, we PLAY music, right? So there’s always an enjoyment component. And some music is REALLY about fun. Why else would we have three iPods in a two-person home?

Spiritual? 
I never know exactly what this means. I don’t subscribe to any philosophical or religious content as a belief system, so it’s not about that. But in India there’s the notion of music as a form of yoga, by which they mean a linking of physical, mental, and concentrative faculties into a unified effort. This is very closely related to what happens in meditation, which I have practiced for many years now, and which I gather most people would think of as spiritual. And one does experience states that reveal the fundamental interconnectedness of everything through both meditation and music, sometimes even sitting alone practicing.

Other? 
About a year ago I bought an electronic piano and have been teaching myself jazz harmony with the help of a good book. This gives me, every day, the sense that I’m upgrading the wiring in my brain. I don’t know where it’s going, and I have no particular agenda for it. But I think it’s improving my mental health. So, mental health.
Interview with Mark H. Rooney (Wesleyan University)

Name: Mark H Rooney
Home Country: USA
Home State/Province: (originally MA)
Hometown: Washington DC

What do you see as the advantages of an aural or oral pedagogical tradition?
- Better, deeper understanding of the music
- No formal music training needed
- Internalizes the rhythms
- Develops listening and aural observational skills - key to playing within a group

What do you see as the disadvantages?
- Generational loss
- Accuracy depends on ability of learner
- Maintains the music as an individual experience

What do you see as the advantages of a visual pedagogical tradition?
- Reproduction closer to original composer’s music
- Can be learned quicker
- In taiko, copying one’s movement can be critical for understanding technique and aesthetics

What do you see as the disadvantages?
- Tends to keep a distance between learner and music - a “middleman”, the visual aspect (sheet music or even a visual recording)

Describe the difference in experience between learning through oral/aural instruction vs. learning through written or visual stimuli.

How fast do you learn it?
Personally, I can learn faster through the visual.

How fast is it committed to memory?
My own training and upbringing has taught me a largely visual method of learning so my mind can often “see” what is written on a piece of paper. However, this is a short-term memory that tends to fade quickly.

How well/thoroughly do you learn it?
Learning through oral tradition forces my mind to create memory of music conceptually which stays with me longer since it is a fabrication of my mind.
What are the learning devices that you rely on if not the visual representation?
My mind creates patterns in everything, no matter how chaotic. Creating a series of patterns, often complex, is the method that my brain has chosen to learn music (and drive me slightly nutty...). These patterns are sometimes simple but are always conceptual.

When learning in the different methods but in one genre of music, how has your experience differed?
In taiko, I started learning visually and that worked for a while. After moving to Japan, I found that very few taiko players were also musicians so taiko music was not written as much. Also, with a language barrier, the vocal element was our common language so we were able to communicate music through the kuchishowah (or kuchishoga, depending where you learned it). I found that through the oral process (though difficult to use at first - like learning a second language), I was didn’t just know the order of rhythms but understood them - their pattern, their nuances, their relation to other parts of the songs and what others were playing, their relationship to the ji, the basebeat.

Were you involved with music as a child?
Yes.

What kind of educational style did you experience mainly as you grew up?
I learned piano by ear as a young child - I think this influenced the rest of my music learning. My father taught me basic theory (mostly chord structure which I still refer to in my head to this day) then I started learning violin via the Suzuki method at age 8. Suzuki did not emphasize reading music and greatly appealed to me. After that, I learned music in a Western tradition on the trombone, trumpet and piano as well as vocal music. However, sight-reading was not natural to me and to my European piano teacher’s great chagrin, I could not learn songs assigned to me unless he played in once for me first. I have since composed, arranged, learned and taught music using a combination of both methods.

Now that you have had exposure to both of these methods, do you have a preferred method of learning?
For taiko, at least, I strongly believe that teaching and learning orally and aurally is the best method. I have had the experience of teaching many different demographics of people taiko. I once taught taiko to a class that was used to learning taiko off a sheet of paper. In fact, without the visual representation of the music, they were unable to play the songs. The music remained external for them. They also weren’t able to apply technique to their playing because all their focus was on recreating what they saw on the paper or blackboard.
I DO find that writing down rhythms can be helpful for people as they are then able to represent the rhythms in a pattern that they create themselves and therefore understand. It helps to have that reference when they are not in a class as well but I prefer to have the reference be a recording of something rather than a written representation.

**Is your preferred the method that you have more or less experience with?**
I now have much more experience in my preferred method. Is that what you’re asking?

**What kind of role does music play in your life? And in what context?**
**Professional?**
Music IS my profession. Or at least, a large PART of my profession. However, I think that education is a larger part of my profession.

**Recreational?**
Always. Music is a way for me not only to relax but to interact with many of my friends.

**Spiritual?**
Well, some would say that taiko is my religion...

**Other?**
Taiko has provided me with a job, a girlfriend, great opportunities to travel, many of my friends (around the world) and an outlet of expression and exercise - taiko is synonymous with my life.
Interview with Josselyn Price (Saint Michael’s College)
Name: Josselyn Price
Home Country: United States
Home State/Province: Vermont
Hometown: Weybridge

What do you see as the advantages of an aural or oral pedagogical tradition?  
I use both oral and aural techniques. Teaching Ghanaian music – and dance – using Ghanaian mnemonic and sonic concepts has multiple advantages. First, it communicates musical information without the need for students to rely on constant reference to a written score, which I believe tends to support disengagement from the moment. Secondly, the syllables we use communicate the drum strokes, which can help students to connect the various components of a piece as we work on it – lead, response, and dance – and learn each part faster.

What do you see as the disadvantages?  
I’m not sure I see many disadvantages, but one challenge is to help students (in my college demographic) be bold enough to speak out loud. They tend to be shy, and sometimes don’t believe that the syllables will help them coordinate or understand the process of a piece.

What do you see as the advantages of a visual pedagogical tradition?  
It’s imperative for students to see what certain strokes and sounds look like, and be able to copy them. It’s also important to get them used to visual communication, since sometimes rhythmic parts will tempt a student to “tune out” – so in addition to helping a student know they are in synch, visual cues can help an ensemble learn to keep connected to each other, and to the dancers.

What do you see as the disadvantages?  
We are a visual culture, and it can sometimes be challenging for a student to use their ears and self-knowledge to play a part. Rather, they often wish to copy what that see. So it’s important to help them understand the difference between staying connected visually vs. being dependent on another person’s motions.

Describe the difference in experience between learning through oral/aural instruction vs. learning through written or visual stimuli. How fast do you learn it?  
Singing, or speaking, rhythm tends to relay information MUCH faster than visual. But both are needed.

How fast is it committed to memory?  
Again, engagement through sound helps much faster. I can teach a part to students in a day with syllabic translations, vs. the multiple viewings of a video or my actions would support.
How well/thoroughly do you learn it?
My Ghanaian teacher often says that if I cannot get a part, I need to learn to speak it first. I don’t think he ever uses visual cues to help solve a problem. Similarly, with my students, the need for them to seriously learn the syllables and strokes of the drum are necessary to continue developing as an ensemble. The visual cues do not factor in with such weight.

What are the learning devices that you rely on if not the visual representation?
I use MP3’s of separate parts for students to study when not in class; in class, I use a mixture of visual and aural cues.

When learning in the different methods but in one genre of music, how has your experience differed?
I’m not sure I’ve experienced too many different methods of teaching and learning Ghanaian music, to be honest – I’ve taught as I was taught, and my U.S. professor did the same in the fashion of his Ghanaian teachers.

Were you involved with music as a child?
What kind of educational style did you experience mainly as you grew up?
My main influences were medieval and renaissance choral music. I was taught to read notes on a page, and to sing back in a way that reflected the teacher’s aural examples. But notation was heavily emphasized.

Now that you have had exposure to both of these methods, do you have a preferred method of learning?
If I was still conducting choral music, I’d use more visual pedagogy. But for Ghanaian music, I follow Ghanaian tradition (oral/aural).

Is your preferred the method that you have more or less experience with?
More, definitely.

What kind of role does music play in your life? And in what context?
Professional?
I am a college professor, teaching both ensemble and lecture courses in world music.

Recreational?
While not as frequently as preferred, I do play Ghanaian and other percussion for fun with others - usually at my home or friend’s homes.

Spiritual?
Percussion and rhythm, song and dance are the main components of my spiritual practice, with is an eclectic blend of traditions. It is also my main form of personal expression. When someone asks me “what is your religion?” – my answer is “I am a musician.”
Appendix B: Student Interviews

Interview with Brian Dukehart
Name: Brian Dukehart
School: Saint Michael’s College
Graduation Year: 2011
Home Country: United States
Home State/Province: MA
Hometown: Topsfield

What do you see as the advantages of an aural or oral pedagogical tradition?
One on the best aspects of Aural learning is that it can be done in large groups without attracting attention (until the playing begins, of course). Rather than asserting a mnemonic structure (do, re, mi, etc.) the learning individual creates their own system, making the learned form more fluid and adaptable to other situations.

In contrast Oral learning amplifies the fundamental, the mechanic, form. Rather than hurling the Mona Lisa at a toddler and saying “here, copy this,” which is what the aural form seems at times, is stresses the mastering of a fundamental language before applying it to a function.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
The disadvantage of the aural system was just suggested above; at times it can lend itself to an extreme where the listener can not fathom how what is being heard is created. While it stresses individual interpretation while simultaneously stressing the repetition of the same sound or phrase, this lack of foundation can lead to poor technique and the originality of a musical parrot (someone who can only play songs they have heard over and over again).

Oral learning can similarly reduce an individual’s sense of originality is the speech repetition is emphasized to a height where it overshadows application. Similar to Aural learning mishaps, it can lead to an absolute purging of an individual’s originality if never applied freely to a form.

What do you see as the advantages of a visual pedagogical tradition?
Visual tradition is a great accompaniment to both the Oral and Aural systems, more so in the later form. While in the Oral form it simply aids the individual in observing how the framework is pronounced (which often times is mnemonic towards its application). In the Aural form it serves in place of the Oral. Take guitar for instance, rather than learning orally how notes sound and chords function, the aural learner hears how they sound and visually see how the sound is made by the musician. Without this visual aspect, the future
guitarist would have no idea how a D chord looks on the frets of a guitar (let's hope that the guitar was in tune as well, or else our little fictitious learner would be completely lost.

**What do you see as the disadvantages?**
The disadvantage to visual learning is that it can draw the player's attention away from the music itself (Ray Charles had this happen to him a lot). Like the disadvantage to aural learning where the player could only mimic songs and never understand their composition, the misaligned visual learner can similarly only copy what they see. What if suddenly the little fictitious learner's guitar does go out of tune?

**Describe the difference in experience between learning through oral/aural instruction vs. learning through written or visual stimuli.**
All three of these learning forms play a role in learning music. For me, a percussionist, the visual and oral learning forms are the best way to learn a new piece because they subtract from the piece all aspects that are not expected of me. In the oral stage (don't get your hopes up, Freud), a phrase is spoken and I copy it verbally, without knowing its context to the rest of the piece of ensemble. In the visual stage (assuming it's a response drum) I match the orally learned sound into the visual cues of the lead drum. It is then that I can begin to hear the response without it being played and my hands can fix that open space.

At this point in my drumming, the oral stage of my learning is often passed over and I can, during a performance of a piece, use visual and aural cues to learn an otherwise alien response. Once it has reached the aural form of memory, that response stays in my memory the longest of the three.

As a child, I learned music through the visual and aural process after the sixth grade; it was easier for me and faster, so I let my oral learning fall to the wayside. As I recently began to reacquaint myself with western music theory, I'm finding that I stunted myself greatly by not understanding the western mathematical musical system. I’m struggling to force myself to learn a foundation that my intuition simply skips over, so much so that I can not allow myself to watch a piece being played before I attempt it, otherwise I’ll have committed it to memory visually and aurally before I try to interpret little dots lounging on lines into sound. Oral learning teaches the fundamental basics of a musical style and is paramount to understanding that style’s basic modes and characteristics.

Written learning is one of the most abstract ways to learn music. Because music is a conversational art form and writing is individualistic in nature, it is very difficult, if not impossible to be the solitary form of learning. Writing can help the learner formulate their own concepts of how a musical piece or genre is interpreted by the self; in its strongest form, it occurs after the oral stage of
learning, during the Aural of visual processes. Written learning should hopefully be a combination of what the learner has absorbed in class and that the learner has taken from their outer knowledge and incorporated it into the class. This serves to both give the teacher insight into how their teaching is being learned, and to allow the learner a way to solidify what they are learning into their general knowledge. For me this is one of the last forms that once completed, cements the piece into my memory in an abstract yet tangible form.

**Were you involved with music as a child?**
One of my first memories as a child was playing my father’s guitar around Christmas time; by “playing” I mean that I was finding all the different places of the body that I could tap with my thumbs to create sound. It was sometime around then that my father started keeping his guitar in a high place and I was given two sticks and this rubber circular pad that I was supposed to hit. I can remember being told that it was a drum even though it looked as much like a drum as a plate did and I learned very quickly that plates are, in fact, not drums.

I sang a lot as a child, especially in hallways because of the echo, but this stopped around middle school for some reason or another, perhaps because I had recently began to drum and singing in drum class was like crying in baseball amongst my peers. My drum teacher, Rodger Brocklebank, never picked up on my change in middle school from oral to visual learning. He saw that suddenly my progression through the blue Vic Firth drumming book accelerated, and with that my coordination and speed, but it wasn’t until senior year of high school that he realized what I had done. I learned to improvise by imitation, calling out references from one piece into the improvisation during another, and this was what got me caught. At the time it wasn’t at all bad, nor have I ever considered it a mistake, rather a gift, until I recently began to attempt to understand western music.

**What kind of educational style did you experience mainly as you grew up?**
**Now that you have had exposure to both of these methods, do you have a preferred method of learning?**
**Is your preferred the method that you have more or less experience with?**
I find that the African music tradition that I have been exposed to pairs itself well with my learning style. Rather than being based in an arithmetic structure like western music, one that takes far more oral learning to ingrain in one’s memory the abstract foundation of its being, the Ghanaian music is based on the concept of a conversation. The support drums outline a landscape, a facticity, a background that supports the conversational dialogue between the lead and response drums. Using visual and aural learning, I can learn this style enjoyably and quickly. Though there is an oral context to the learning of this music, it is never taken out of the context of the music itself.
What kind of role does music play in your life? And in what context?
This is the section that has taken me a long while to write; in conclusion, music plays a diverse and integral part in my life in that I have no idea why I am drawn to it as much as I seem to be. As a child and still at times today, music serves as an escape – from society, reality, etc. In this sense I would say that it serves as a religion (of the western sense). In an Eastern sense, music serves as a conduit, an assistant to other acts. There is music that helps me read and music that helps me drive, music that I run to and music I habitually whistle when I hike or ski.

In a solitary sense, music serves as both a source of enjoyment and confusion and it is for this reason that I study it academically. As a source of study, music intrigues me in how it relates to others. For me the enjoyment of examining music comes from the way that music effects those playing, listening, or somewhere in between. There is also, of course, the learning and performing aspect which challenges me both physically and mentally to communicate without words an affirmation of what I do and why I enjoy it so much. I am currently working to translate an Ewe (Southeastern Ghanaian) musical piece, *Togo Atsia*, into language and at the moment all I know is one saying- “my pants are torn but I drum anyway.” For the past year since I heard this, I have tried to take this phrase into my approach to music, even though I have yet to learn its surrounding context. Neither the state of my leggings nor whether they match my hosiery changes what I feel in a social construct driven by music that appeals to the surrounding collective, whether it is a drum circle, a concert in America, a celebration in Ghana, or just a small group of friends.
Interview with Ian Coss

Name: Ian Coss
School: Wesleyan University
Graduation Year: 2011
Home Country: USA
Home State/Province: MA
Hometown: Northampton

What do you see as the advantages of an aural or oral pedagogical tradition?
When you learn something by ear it is impossible to get lost in the music. Even if you drop a note or mess up you know immediately you’ve made a mistake and can feel your way back into the music. If you get lost in the notation it is much harder to get back on board because you have lost the thread of your part and can’t intuitively feel how it fits with the other parts. Obviously when you learn something from ear you never forget it. Playing or singing from memory is just more fun; your eyes are free from looking around and your mind can focus on the music in a different way.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
Mostly just that it is slow and unless you are learning something with only [one] part, there are always people waiting around for other people to learn. It also depends on a teacher who knows the music inside and out. Some music just doesn’t make sense to learn by ear. Perhaps because it is too long or the individual parts aren’t very musical on their own. Another thing I’ve noticed about music learned by ear is that I often can only play it starting at the beginning. I know the whole piece but it is procedural memory, so I need to play the beginning in order to know how to play the end. Sometimes I can recall a piece that I have forgotten by playing from the beginning over and over again just to build up momentum so I can break through to the next section.

What do you see as the advantages of a visual pedagogical tradition?
I think shape-note music embodies all the best features of visual pedagogy. Four strangers can get together and sing as many different songs as they have time to get through. It is fast and in a way more democratic than oral tradition: everyone has equal access to all the parts rather than depending on a teacher or guru. Notation also allows for music of incredible scope and complexity. I don’t think you could teach an orchestra all of Wagner’s Ring Cycle by ear. Sometimes I will use notation just to help me clarify my ideas because it is hard for me to hold many parts in my head at once.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
It is easy to be stuck in the sheet music even when you don’t need it anymore. It is often harder to listen to other musicians when you are focused on sheet
music. You are more likely to forget the music or mess it up in performance...I find playing from memory eliminates a lot of anxiety associated with performance.

Describe the difference in experience between learning through oral/aural instruction vs. learning through written or visual stimuli.
Learning by ear takes much greater concentration if I want to pick it up quickly. Obviously you can learn passively as well: if you hear a song enough times on the radio you just know it. In many ways I think this passive absorption is ideal, I have been trying recently to listen to recordings of gamelan/indian music I am learning. I will just listen every day and not worry about actively learning it. Balu says he will just put a song on his iPod and listen to it 100 times before he actually tries to learn it. At that point the music is deeply ingrained. When I am actually working with my teacher I am very focused, not just letting the sound wash over me. I will use little memory devices...for example, the beginning of a gamelan piece I am learning sounds like a reggaeton beat. Once I start playing that first pattern the rest of it just comes. Learning by from the page can be kind of satisfying once you get the hang of it, I have only begun to feel comfortable reading music in the last couple of years. I enjoy the challenge.

Were you involved with music as a child? What kind of educational style did you experience mainly as you grew up? Now that you have had exposure to both of these methods, do you have a preferred method of learning?
I started singing in 5th grade and started taking piano lessons soon after. I learned to read music but had relatively little experience with it before college. Really the bulk of my musical experience has been with pop music. I think most of us tend to forget about pop music when thinking about oral tradition. But if I think about the number of songs I know that I have written or played in bands, it is a pretty incredible amount of material. I think that background prepared me for the kind of intensive oral education I have had at Wesleyan. I can't say that I have one preferred method, I think they are both suited to different kinds of music.

What kind of role does music play in your life? And in what context?
I would say mostly recreational and professional. I wouldn't say religious, although depending on your definition of religion it could be. Music doesn't mediate my relationship with the divine but it is central to the way I view my life and the world. Music is often social for me...my best friends have always been the people I played music with. It is also private. I find great comfort in sitting and playing music by myself, writing songs that no one else ever hears...
Interview with Isobel Arthen
Name: Isobel Arthen
School: Mt Holyoke College
Graduation Year: 2014
Home Country: USA
Home State/Province: MA
Hometown: Worthington

What do you see as the advantages of an aural or oral pedagogical tradition?
Generally there is an opportunity to learn every part of the song, (whether you are trying to learn it or not it stays in your head somewhere). Because of that, you get a full picture of the song and how it all fits together. Also, because it is learned through repetition and memory, it stays in your head longer and can be pulled up from the back of your mind years later without any reminder of sheet music—it might just take one word of the song, or even an image of the setting in which you learned it to bring it all back to the surface.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
Well, songs do have a tendency to change, (whether it is someone teaching a song they learned orally or the same teacher teaching it differently) which can be confusing to some people (although I think it adds to the character of the song—it’s oral tradition—it happens), but it can be problematic especially if the song is in an unfamiliar language, because messing up or changing words is different from changing a note in the base line accidentally. Also, it can be more difficult for people to pass a song along if they did not study every part than it is to hand out sheet music that can be shared.

What do you see as the advantages of a visual pedagogical tradition?
Like I said above, sheet music can be shared and passed on, which is very convenient for teaching. Also, for groups that know how to sight read, it can be a faster teaching process. For the theory minded people, it probably helps to have the chords laid out on a page to understand the flow of the piece and see the big picture.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
First of all, it only works for people who can read music, which can be limiting. Second, often times sheet music can actually block people from memorizing a song, listening to other parts, and understanding the piece as a whole. It also allows for less flexibility when teaching or performing a song—the notes, dynamics, repeats and tempo are all already written in—they can be changed, but that gets confusing, and you might as well just teach it by ear!
Describe the difference in experience between learning through oral/aural instruction vs. learning through written or visual stimuli. How fast do you learn it?
Speaking simply of my own experience learning and not teaching, I think it probably takes the same amount of time to teach me orally as visually (depending on the song of course).

How fast is it committed to memory?
Definitely memorize by ear faster.

How well/thoroughly do you learn it
I think I learn more thoroughly by ear, but more accurately by sheet music in general.

What are the learning devices that you rely on if not the visual representation?
To begin, watching the teacher’s hand denoting whether the notes move up or down helps a lot, then I rely on listening to the other parts to see where mine fits in.

When learning in the different methods but in one genre of music, how has your experience differed?
Often times it depends on the complexity/length of the song.

Were you involved with music as a child?
Yes.

What kind of educational style did you experience mainly as you grew up?
Mainly oral/aural.

Now that you have had exposure to both of these methods, do you have a preferred method of learning?
I appreciate both, and would choose different methods depending on the circumstance.

Is your preferred the method that you have more or less experience with?
What kind of role does music play in your life? And in what context?
   Professional?
   Recreational?
   Spiritual?
   Other?
   All of the above?
   Please elaborate...

Singing is part of who I am, I find it hard to say what role it plays, because it is present in so much that I do, and it is hard to isolate it to any specific parts of
my life. I suppose you could say I have sung professionally, (although probably semi-professional is probably a better description) and for me, it is about sharing music that I love with others, and using it as a way to bridge cultures—everyone understands music. It doesn’t matter what language it is in, it has the ability to cross barriers and reach people on every side of every issue, country, religion or profession. That is a very special thing. Singing with a professionally-minded and experienced group of people is a very different world than what I am used to and what I grew up with. There is a degree of precision of tuning and blending that allow us to take audiences to another world through our music, which is really gratifying.

However, music is not all about precision—some of my best times have been at friends parties, singing into wooden spoons so loud that we cannot even hear if we are at the right pitch or tempo anymore, in fact, we are probably at 3 different pitches and 5 tempos at any given time, our voices are cracking, and we aren’t quite managing to hit that high note, but we are having a blast and it is bringing us together.

Or, when sitting around a kitchen table with dear friends, singing a meaningful song, and suddenly we find ourselves hushed in the middle of a verse, our harmonies mingling perfectly above our heads, and then we emerge into the chorus singing so loudly and determinately that our message raises the rafters of the house we are in. Finally, we finish, and sit quietly as the remnants of our song settle in the air around us, and the room is filled with pure love and genuine peace. We have shared something priceless and very intimate, something that can never be replicated by us or anyone else—we are again connected by song.

Or when, standing in a circle under an open sky, 500 people of all ages, from different places, let out a tone, so rich and full that you can feel it around you. You cannot separate your voice from the person next to you. We are not making a perfect chord, we are not singing in a particular key, we are not using any proper ‘technique’. But the power of our combined voices gathers in the center of our circle, rises into the air, and disperses, travelling to all corners of the world. Again, we connect.

That is what singing is about. It needs no instrument. It needs no written music. It needs no training. It is naturally in us—a way we communicate, a way we open ourselves, and a way we connect.
Interview with John Myers
Name: John Myers
School: Wesleyan University
Graduation Year: 2011
Home Country: United States
Home State/Province: Massachusetts
Hometown: Winchester

What do you see as the advantages of an aural or oral pedagogical tradition?
These kinds of teaching traditions more effectively commit what is being taught to memory. It is an experiential kind of learning, one that reinforces the group-dynamic of a musical ensemble. It makes the learning process a performative act, rather than just preparation for some later 'real' performance.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
For musicians trained to read notation, this process can seem slow. Those used to sight-reading and getting a full sense of the music the first time through may see this process as wasteful of their time. If the ensemble is hoping to be performance ready in a short amount of time, these teaching traditions may not be the most appropriate.

What do you see as the advantages of a visual pedagogical tradition?
With visual notation, the individual, rather than the group, now sets the bar of how much is learned/how quickly. Some notation styles can give the musician a fuller idea or representation of what is going on throughout the piece, from part interactivity to overall dynamic/metric/harmonic arcs. Though parts are harder to commit to memory, they are easier to play/sing. These traditions are also important for posterity’s sake; without written notation, there is no guarantee that the music will live on for future generations.

What do you see as the disadvantages?
The overuse of visual pedagogical tradition can give a musician the impression that the music exists on the page, and it is the act of notation which creates/finalizes the musical gesture. This is wrong in two senses: First, the music exists only in its playing/hearing/participation and not on a piece of paper. Secondly, musical expression is a liquid form which should be able to be recreated and reimagined as musicians/composers/conductors/ensemble leaders see fit; no one should feel tied down to the specific representation written down on a piece of paper.

Describe the difference in experience between learning through oral/aural instruction vs. learning through written or visual stimuli. How fast do you
learn it?
Written/visual is a faster learning process than oral/aural instruction.

How fast is it committed to memory?
This is hard to say, but I would probably lean toward oral/aural as a faster process of memorization.

How well/thoroughly do you learn it?
Also hard to say, because oral/aural allows for a full understanding/reproduction of a specific part, but visual representation can provide for a fuller overall understanding through analysis.

What are the learning devices that you rely on if not the visual representation?
Repetition and focused listening.

When Learning in the different methods but in one genre of music, how has your experience differed? I have found that with more methods used, my understanding/appreciation will increase. It is easier to 'get inside the music' with aural/oral techniques, but from a scholarly standpoint, it is easier for me to analyze from notated forms.

Were you involved with music as a child?
Yes.

What kind of educational style did you experience mainly as you grew up?
In starting to learn new instruments, I used mainly notated materials, but as I advanced on these instruments, oral/aural techniques seemed to work their way into my learning process. Singing was almost exclusively taught orally when I was young.

Now that you have had exposure to both of these methods, do you have a preferred method of learning?
I do not have a preference, and I think different idioms require different teaching techniques, or, more accurately, idioms are defined by the way they are taught and/or codified.

Is your preferred the method that you have more or less experience with?
What kind of role does music play in your life? And in what context?
    Professional?
    Recreational?
    Spiritual?
    Other?
    All of the above?
    Please elaborate...
Music fulfills all of these roles in my life. Being such a vast and hard to define subject, it is hard to find any aspect of life or thought which couldn't qualify as music in one sense or another. I have performed professionally, and as the main subject of my studies, I take music very seriously at times. Mostly though, being paid to play still seems odd, as I enjoy playing just for the sake of playing. Performing for an audience is a powerful and worthwhile act in its own right, and getting paid to perform almost diminishes this feeling; I liken it to prostitution. Music has fulfilled a recreational role in my life as long as I can remember, easing the daily tensions and meaningless sociabilities through a truer kind of communication than language. The performative act allows the musician to be who they really are, using true expression, as opposed to playing the role society and language requires of them. In more recent years, music has begun to define a spiritual role in my life as well. Through the long intense sessions of repetition in Ghanian drumming to the quite tranquility of Javanese Gamelan, music allows the mind to flow into another realm, and appreciate or see things in a different light. These forms have been the most spiritually intense for me, but with the help of psychedelics and deep focus, other idioms have been able to take on spiritual qualities as well.