INDIAN FUSION MUSIC IN NEW YORK CITY:
NAVIGATING SPACE, PLACE, AND IDENTITY

By
Bridgid Marie Bergin

Faculty Advisor: Su Zheng

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Fieldnote and Reflection: July 23, 2016
Traveling to the 24 Hour Brooklyn Raga Massive Ragas Live Festival
12:00PM—The Ragas Live Festival has started with Brooklyn Raga Massive’s Ravi Shankar Tribute, however, I am still in the sweltering apartment I am subletting on Coney Island Avenue and Cortelyou Road in Ditmas Park rushing to get everything packed in my bag to head over to Pioneer Works in Red Hook. I quickly look up the directions once more on Google Maps—B68 to Prospect Park SW/Bartel Pritchard Square, transfer to the B61 headed towards Downtown Brooklyn Fulton Mall via Red Hook, get off at Van Brunt St/Pioneer St. “Okay I got this.” I quickly run down the stairs to get outside to catch the bus, which is thankfully just a few feet away from the apartment. I wait for the next B61 bus to come, which is scheduled to arrive at 12:41PM (note: the MTA bus really has no schedule).

With some down time, I decide to take some pictures. I pass the Punjabi Fashion store, full of vibrant fabrics, and silks, to then turn onto Dorchester Road. “Wow,” I think to myself “I see what my parents were talking about.” Off of the side streets of this road I see the million dollar homes awkwardly set off from Coney Island Avenue. I am amazed by the stark differences within a neighborhood, just between two roads! I walk back over to the bus stop, right at the intersection of Dorchester and Coney Island Avenue. I look over to “my” apartment, wondering why I thought it was a great idea to sublet an apartment above a storefront during the hottest period of the summer.

In a way, it brought me closer to the Brooklynite identity that both my parents held so dear to their heart even though they had moved to Massapequa (Long Island, NY) once I was born. My mother from Gerritsen Beach, and my father from Flatlands, both would hang out in Ditmas Park, around where my apartment was, when they were teenagers. When I mentioned the address of the apartment I was subletting I remember my mother questioning me, “Wait, on Coney Island Avenue? Between Cortelyou and Dorchester? Seriously?! No way, you are not living there.” I was confused, I had already visited the apartment. It was not the nicest place, but it would do for the month and a half I would be there, plus it was the cheapest option I could find. I protested against my mother’s negative attitude, which my mother just called out as being naïve. She just went on to state, “Ya’ know that’s on top of a storefront, right? Ya’ gonna have waterbugs and cockroaches, I’m tellin’ ya’. Believe me I used to hang out over there. There used to be garbage all over the place. Dumpsters.” I was dumbfounded (although my mother turned out to be right about the bugs). When I had walked down Cortelyou Road there were tons of “hipster” bars, restaurants, and no garbage everywhere. My father chimed into the conversation, “Yeah Bridg! Sharon used to live above that Key Foods over there, across from the laundry mat. I
wonder if its still there…John and I used to hang out at George’s Diner! That’s gotta still be there. Hah!” Who knew that I picked the neighborhood where my parents had so many memories. However, this was not an out of the ordinary conversation. Whenever I would tell my parents about different venues I was going to see a show like Pioneer Works in Red Hook, or ShapeShifter Lab in Gowanus, they would react very surprised, in disbelief, “You’re going to Red Hook? Why? There’s nothing there! … They made an arts space over there? What does that even mean?... Bridgid, you need to be careful.” Nostalgia would just then pour out of my parents, amidst their warnings and precautions for getting over there. Ultimately, my knowledge and mind map of Brooklyn has been very much informed by my parents’ nostalgia and memories from the past. When I walked through these same neighborhoods, however, my experiences of space and place were very different. This experience of NYC is interwoven in the presentation of NYC, specifically Brooklyn, as an actor in the story of Fusion musical practices.

Finally, the bus arrived. I really did not want to miss the 1:00PM set, featuring Akshara, however, I realized I was definitely going to miss it when I got off at Prospect Park SW/Bartel Pritchard Square and started running with another woman to catch the B61 bus as we saw it slowly pulling away. Although frustrated, I remembered that the festival was being broadcasted on WKCR 87.9FM. I got my phone out and tuned in: “Next up, Akshara. 23 hours left at 159 Pioneer Street.” I listened as they announced the ensemble while they were setting up. I giggled to myself when they referred to Sameer Gupta as “DJ Ragalicious.” The B61 came and as I got on as Akshara began to play. I heard Arun Ramamurthy on violin playing an alapana, sollkattu performed by mridangam player Bala Skandan, then blended with the playing of dulcimer virtuoso, Max ZT. It was so interesting to hear this on the radio from my phone as the bus continued to get filled after each stop. I was in a listening zone. I continued to listen as I got off the bus. I walked down Pioneer Street and could hear the music from outside, while also listening to the radio stream. I slowly took off my headphones. I still heard a continuous stream of music featuring violin, mridangam, bansuri, kanjira, hammered dulcimer, and tabla. I decided to wait a few minutes before actually entering the venue to walk around the space, to see how the neighborhood may have changed since my last time being at Pioneer Works in March. The Doc company condos, the harbor. Pioneer Works seemed different in the daylight, like the Chanel advertisement which was shot in front of the innovative arts space, featured in the March 2016 Vogue issue. I entered the space, which I could now hear the droning of fans (no air conditioning), headed towards the back and was met with clear soaring sounds of Akshara. I finally arrived to the 24 Hour Ragas Live Festival at Pioneer Works in Red Hook, Brooklyn…
I first heard of Brooklyn Raga Massive (BRM) in the summer of 2015 when I was taking group Carnatic voice lessons in Manhattan with veena player and vocalist, Nivedita ShivRaj. Every Tuesday night I would have my voice class from 4:30-6:00 followed by a private veena lesson from 6:00-7:00. One Tuesday night my group voice lesson was moved to 6:00. Usually I would walk back to Penn station in order to catch a train back to Long Island on my own at 7:00 but this time I was able to talk more with one of the women in my class who was actually a jazz singer with previous Carnatic vocal experience. As we left, she asked about my educational background as well as why I was taking lessons with Nivedita and more generally why Carnatic music. I mentioned to her I received a Bachelor’s degree in music from SUNY Potsdam-Crane School of Music in May where I had the opportunity to have a short study abroad experience in Chennai in the summer of 2013 as part of an “Exploring the Arts of South India” course. I further explained how I connected with Nivedita in the summer of 2014 as I was working on an independent undergrad project/thesis focusing on gender in Carnatic music, specifically related to female veena musicians. As part of the project I decided to learn how to play the veena and have been taking lessons ever since. I mentioned that I was going to further my research on this topic in grad school at Wesleyan University in the fall to work on a master’s degree in ethnomusicology. This is the usual response I give people when they ask me, with a puzzled look on their face, why I am studying Carnatic music and how I became interested in it. Almost all of Nivedita’s students are from an Indian background, so many are a bit surprised when they see me—a white American—in the room for the
first time. After my explanation she mentioned to me that I should check out Brooklyn Raga Massive, an organization who hosted a concert every Wednesday night that featured a fusion of many different styles of music but mostly focusing on Indian classical music. As we reached the end of the street, I thanked her for her suggestion and turned right to get to Penn station as she turned left. Unfortunately, I did not take this opportunity of attending these events that were so close to me. Little did I know that I would eventually come to encounter BRM again through working on a seminar paper that would inspire this work on navigating what can be referred to as Indian Fusion Music.¹

My interest on this topic came out of the conversations I had with female veena players in completing my undergraduate thesis. In almost every interview, each mentioned their ventures in collaborations with other musicians and music genres, referring to it as Fusion. For example, when discussing her musical experiences in India versus the United States, Nirmala Rajasekar (renowned veena virtuoso) mentions “it is when I traveled that I started to interact with other different types of music which I didn’t have this opportunity in Chennai and Bangalore” (Rajasekar, phone interview with author, May 13, 2015). Without a break she segued in discussing how she approaches collaboration with other musicians:

I try to make handshakes happen between genres. It takes lifetimes to study one particular art form. I will need many more. Similarly, every single genre: classical, Western, traditional—any kind of music, I am a firm believer—many many lifetimes of getting under skin to not do it superficially. We have notes that we can work with,

¹ I will be using the term Fusion throughout this work. Even though the musicians themselves resist this label and my own use of the term may seem like a perpetuation of the system that they are against, it is used to engage with this exact tension.
everyone has that opportunity to take each others notes...we look at the mountain and call it a mountain way, we get to that mountain, it may be different. [That’s] how [I] start collaboration, to be cognizant of what is going on around me and make it work...while still staying true to the raga...[and] bridging elements of the gamakams.

Rajasekar went on to tell me about her work, performing a charanam with cellist Michelle Kinney followed by playing a piece by Irish composer Danny O’ Neil, mentioning that it was “incredibly fast for a veena player but I love that piece.” She has even ventured into Afro-Blues with clarinet and saxophone. She states, “[I am] not thinking about ragas, my side of things. I am thinking about how do I enhance this, how do I play this on veena. What kind of feel do they want me to bring to it? Bridging the elements of gamakams. Is it appropriate? I try my best to not step on anyone’s toes when doing pieces not Carnatic, not Indian.”

Such a conversation like the one I had with Nirmala, came up again and again as I talked to other musicians throughout my senior year at SUNY Potsdam. I would discuss this topic with my veena teacher, Nivedita ShivRaj, often during my lessons, wondering about her own compositional approach for her band Charanams. However, it was not until I was in my first Ethnomusicology graduate seminar at Wesleyan University that I began to question my own experience with Carnatic music and what some label as Fusion. In this seminar I had the assignment to write a mini-ethnography. I used this opportunity to focus on the idea of a “first encounter” in fieldwork and finally attended a BRM concert. When I decided to go to the BRM event on November 25, 2015, I was excited because I realized that 1) I can finally go see this organization that everyone was telling me about, and 2) I was going to be able to see Fusion music performed live. However, then I realized this was not my
first encounter with Fusion music. In fact, my first live encounter with this music was during my short study abroad experience in 2013. Our music and dance classes were held at Vruksha Montessori school in Chennai. While there our guru, Srinivas Krishnan, organized a Carnatic performance for us which included violin, mridangam, and kanjira. As we sat down for the performance I noticed that the violinist, Embar Kannan, was playing on a five-string electric violin, a technological innovation that did not necessarily fit within the classical Carnatic tradition. Furthermore, in the middle of the performance, Srini pulled out a cajon and started to play rhythmic patterns which imitated the mridangam. My first encounter experiencing Carnatic music live was actually a first encounter with a version of what some may label as Fusion music. Through experiencing the traditional I was also exposed to a different music genre, unintentionally. This made me question how do we exactly define Fusion music? In this case I experienced Fusion by the instruments being played but also the place it was performed in. I was an audience member within a non traditional space, in a school—a public space separated from the classical venue of a concert hall in the area. My next live encounter would then be a concert I curated for Nivedita’s band, Charanams, featuring veena, Carnatic vocals, electric guitar, soprano saxophone, cajon, and tabla who performed in a theater at SUNY Potsdam, NY. My reflections on these encounters, close relationship with Nivedita, and my own affinity to Carnatic music inspired me to complete this project on Indian Fusion music in New York City.
OBJECTIVE

The discussion and discourse concerning Fusion music in ethnomusicology is lacking. In fact, in some works, there is a resistance to using this term.\(^2\) Hybridity, multiplicity, and titles of “[music genre]+[music genre]” are found throughout academic writing. However, when looking at the marketing details of musicians who work in the realm of crossing over styles of Indian music and other music genre (Western classical music, jazz, music of West Africa, Afro-Cuban, etc.) they or the organizations who sponsor and promote their concerts typically use the term “fusion.” In a way, the term Fusion music is used in a colloquial sense as opposed to a serious, professional practice recognized by academia. However, the discussion and use of the term Fusion becomes more complex as musicians themselves prefer to resist such labels overall—an attitude of resistance to the music industry. In relation to the contestation of the term, Niko Higgins, whose work focuses on Fusion music in Chennai, argues that “rather than being a reason to overlook fusion, fusion’s contestation loads it with meaning and makes it a rich, unexamined site of expressive culture” (2013:1).

I contextualize Indian Fusion music in New York City in regards to time and space by specifically focusing on musicians who are part of Brooklyn Raga Massive (BRM). BRM defines themselves as a “New York registered 501C3 arts non-profit dedicated to the Indian classical musicians of Brooklyn, NYC.” The organization

even brands itself as being part of this “indigenous,” “critical mass” specifically in Brooklyn as featured by their logo, reminiscent of the MTA subway signs. They aim to bring Indian classical music to an urban environment outside of traditional performance spaces, creating in their words, a “raga renaissance.” Their collaborations infuse a range of different styles of music—jazz, Caribbean, West African, electronic, etc.—and bring the sense of raga into an experimental realm. Relationships of social categories, genres and space take place within the intercultural practices of BRM. Non-traditional performance spaces, individuals’ voices, and instruments serve as conduits for connection and intercultural mediation to reach a collaborative solidarity. In the following chapters, as I maneuver through the entanglement of multiplicity that is intrinsic of these musicians’ identities and their music, I focus on Brooklyn as being a live actor in the network of musicians and the venues they perform in. The “raga renaissance” has a clear relationship with the gentrification processes that continue to take place in the areas that they perform and the constitution of identity and place.

My analysis of the inner workings of the Indian Fusion music scene specifically in New York City differs from Niko Higgins’ work where Fusion in Chennai brought something uniquely South Indian by the idioms employed by musicians. But here, in NYC, there is something that is said to be uniquely NYC (or Brooklyn) by members of BRM. Therefore, from this positioning of their music being uniquely NY, one moves away from the ethnic component of the music and moves towards a geographical and symbolically affective component. From reading the three
words of “New York City,” an image enters into ones’ mind, whether it be a memory, a cosmopolitan view, the food, etc. It is a place inscribed with memory and nostalgia to give it meaning. BRM’s connections to raga, Fusion, and NYC provide a central hub or network for the performance of Indian music and a complex link to “Indianness” and the Indian diaspora. In navigating through this complexity via an ethnographic and analytical lens, this project engages with the overlapping spheres of affinity, choice, and belonging. Furthermore, although a contested term, I analyze how Fusion music pushes the limits/boundaries of the notion of not only a “traditional” musical genre but genre in itself. I question notions of identity, space, and place as well as the definitions of genre and community as informed by the musical practices of BRM. I focus on three areas of analysis: different formations of community and collaboration, effects of gentrification processes, distinctions of space/place/non-place and links to the Indian diaspora. Ultimately, I begin to break down the language of pre-conceptions that comes with inquiries on this type of music and instead, focus on what is truly coming out of the music in the moment, within the musical practice itself. It is not about the words themselves but instead the experiences and practices of this assemblage and the musicians who are a part of this network or scene.
FIELDWORK & METHODOLOGY

My position in my fieldwork stood within the hyphen of participant-observer, insider-outsider both in regards to the place of New York City and interacting with BRM. Although it felt as if I was carrying out fieldwork “at home,” it was more of a pseudo-home. Mostly it was actually not home at all. As noted at the beginning of this introduction, while I am a New Yorker, I am from Long Island and my parents are the true Brooklynites. While I had traveled to and from Brooklyn, Manhattan, and Queens multiple times, I was still very much an “outsider” in the places I would walk through and the venues I would participate in as an audience member. My knowledge of gentrified neighborhoods in Brooklyn comes from anecdotes provided by my parents as they relate to these neighborhoods not so much territorially, but through their memories. Every time I entered such neighborhoods like Red Hook, Gowanus, Dumbo, and Park Slope, I carried the thoughts of my parents. This instilled an interesting perspective for myself. It felt as though I had a link between the past and present as I walked the same streets that my parents walked on but they were clearly different. I walked on streets surrounded by music venues and arts spaces which my parents could not imagine being there. I had to continuously be aware of this perspective in order to not bring judgment to the spaces I was entering, to experience them for what they were in that specific current moment of time.

How was I able to step into this network myself? In November 2015 I started to informally research what BRM was about via their website, Facebook page, and Instagram feed as I was writing about them for a mini-ethnography project in my
Practicing Ethnomusicology seminar. Utilizing these social network platforms as a form of virtual fieldwork proved to be vital throughout my research to understand BRM as a collective and network, and served to be one of my key research methods.\(^3\)

I briefly met violinist Arun Ramamurthy, one of the co-founders of BRM, at his concert with Bala Skandan at Shapeshifter Lab in Gowanus, NY on November 25, 2015. In early March 2016 to late July 2016 I took lessons with Arun in order to learn Carnatic violin techniques on viola. Lessons would take place over Google Hangout as well as in person when I was back in NY. As a student, I had the great opportunity to learn how Arun approached music making and the idioms he employs. During this time, I attended multiple BRM concerts specifically at Pioneer Works and the Rubin Museum. From late May to August 2016 I interned for the Rubin Museum and World Music Institute, institutions who presented Brooklyn Raga Massive concerts. My role as an intern provided an interesting position for me in regards to gaining accessibility to the “behind the scenes” work for promoting BRM and seeing the marketing processes that were at times in tension with the musicians’ rhetoric.

As noted at the out set of the introduction, I lived in Ditmas Park, NY from July to August 2016 in order to have the experience of living in Brooklyn and to have easier access to the venues in which BRM performed. Personal contact with Arun subsided in late July, causing a void for a true connection with BRM considering I am not necessarily a professional musician myself nor a collaborator within the group.

However, I took this gap as an opportunity to focus on my position as an audience member throughout my fieldwork. Additionally, the gap led to larger conclusions regarding not only my own positionality but also BRM’s position within New York City’s musical and cultural landscape which will be discussed in the final chapter.

In addition to ethnographic work, I conducted textual analysis, drawing on materials from the Village Voice, The New York Times, and National Public Radio (NPR) which featured: reviews of BRM concerts, interviews with musicians involved in BRM, and stories and reports speaking to the shifting demographics of Brooklyn. I kept record of programs, event descriptions (featured online, in print, and on social media sites), as well as promotion/marketing materials for concerts which exhibit a tension of musicians’ rhetoric with the music industry. With these methods, bibliographic research plays an important role in order to better contextualize this project within the history of this type of music, ethnomusicological literature, and theoretical frameworks in order to better understand and present the musical practices and musicians discussed.

CHAPTER DESCRIPTIONS

In Chapter 1 I situate my project in a multilayered context including history, academic literature, and theoretical frameworks and is therefore broken into three sections respectively. Drawing largely from Peter Lavezzoli’s *The Dawn of Indian Music in the West: Bhairavi* (2006), I discuss the historical context of collaborations of Indian classical music specifically in the West with: jazz (the John Coltrane legacy
which BRM directly continues as exhibited by their Coltrane Tribute concerts, and John McLaughlin), rock (George Harrison and Mickey Hart), and experimental music (La Monte Young and Terry Riley). A challenge with discussing Fusion music is that it does not necessarily fit into the traditional categories or discourses prescribed by academic literature and ethnomusicology. I move on to present important works within the ethnomusicological literature that deal with Fusion music. Particularly I examine case studies in Korea, Indonesia, Canada, and India. This section addresses inquiries as to what is generally happening with this concept within the realm of ethnomusicology and the significance of its misleading absence in the ethnomusicological canon. In this chapter I will discuss the following areas: general attributes which scholars describe related to Fusion music (i.e. accessibility/easy listening quality), diffusion of Fusion, genre(s), identity, and authenticity anxieties. This then leads into the last section of this chapter which focuses on theoretical frameworks which I use to come to a better understanding of this music and BRM. I begin with a brief description of musical multiplicity (Slobin 1993; 2007) and Kevin Fellezs’s (2011) brief yet significant use of the concept of liminality to discuss jazz-rock fusion. I then further examine anthropological concepts that are relevant to the performance of Indian Fusion music. I use theories of liminal and liminoid (Turner 1969; 1974), transgression, play (Huizinga 1949), and flow (Schechner 1985; Turner 1979) in relation to performativity so that this musical form of Fusion can be analyzed with the help of these anthropological concepts. In doing this, I believe a more solid theoretical conceptualization of Fusion can be attained and a contribution
can be made to the absence of the theorization of this practice. I address the theoretical frameworks of space/place and the notion of urban assemblage in Chapter 3.

After contextualizing my project, Chapter 2 introduces Brooklyn Raga Massive and focuses on the collaborators that are part of this collective as well as those who lie outside of the collective. Interviews and musicians’ bios are included in this section to better understand the thread of multiplicity that is intrinsic to their music identities as well as their own thoughts on the term Fusion music. In order to present the importance of venues as being vital characters for the presentation of this music and BRM’s collective identity, Chapter 3 interweaves frameworks pertaining to space/place, urban assemblage theory, and scene with ethnographic data. Specific attention to the music itself is presented in Chapter 4 where I focus on BRM’s rehearsal and performance of Terry Riley’s In C at the Museum of Modern Art. Finally, I conclude with remarks reflecting on material that has been presented in the body of my project. This project aims to contribute to a dialogue concerning the intricate complexities of Indian Fusion music including anxieties of authenticity, contestation of the term, and identity.
CHAPTER 1
CONTEXT OF PROJECT

The set’s centerpiece was something called “Looking Out, Looking In,” and it bore DNA traces of the great Indian jazz-fusion group Shakti.4

The guitarist Rez Abbasi, who was born in Pakistan but raised in Southern California, approaches the process of cultural fusion with deep seriousness but also a spirit of play. In his own groups — and with cooperatives like the Indo-Pak Coalition, an excellent trio featuring Rudresh Mahanthappa on alto saxophone and Dan Weiss on drums and percussion — he adds his dynamic, brisk voice to the modern-jazz dialect.5

“FWIW I hate the word fusion, google f word rudresh” (email correspondence, December 2016, Rudresh Mahanthappa)

The word “Fusion” is culturally loaded with a multitude of contested meanings and opinions concerning the definition of the term in relation to music and performance vary. Many musicians who are labeled as “cultural fusion artists” by promoters actually push to completely reject the term and label. Saxophonist Rudresh Mahanthappa argues that his music is an extension of Charlie Parker and John Coltrane as opposed to celebrated “fusion” projects like Mahavishnu Orchestra and Shakti.6 Although Fusion seems like an open-ended term, it actually does not necessarily capture what musicians are actually doing. I arrive to this issue as it constantly came up in the academic literature on this subject and it came from

musicians’ dialogue of addressing and/or rejecting this label. In this chapter I discuss the actual label of Fusion as it implies a sense of rigidity in regards to a required label and with that, an imposed category—an imposition of limits of what a musician can and can not do. In other words, the very act of labeling the music denies aspects of the music itself—its fluidity, and embrace of newness and uniqueness. The question is then how does one discuss this music better? In order to begin to address this question, I start this chapter with the historical context of Fusion music in the West, moving to the academic context of Fusion being discussed in other parts of the world to better inform theoretical understandings of the practice, which will then lead into the last section where I will focus the theoretical frameworks used in this thesis to discuss Fusion music.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

“Fusion.: A term which came to be substituted for jazz-rock from the mid-1970s and which is applied predominantly to that style, but which has also been more generally applied after that period to closely related syntheses of jazz and soul music, jazz and pop, jazz and funk, jazz and light music, and jazz and folk music.” (Subject entry, Oxford Music Online)

The term Fusion has multiple and contradicting histories, definitions, and opinions. Additionally, Fusion music is by no means a new trend as it has a rich historical precedence. Within the musical context, many state the “fusion trend” began with Ali Akbar Khan’s 1955 performance in the United States. This was particularly the foundational point for Indian music to enter into rock and roll in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the larger “jazz-rock fusion” genre. In 1965, George
Harrison played “Norwegian Wood” on the sitar. Other rock bands like the Grateful Dead, Incredible String Band, the Rolling Stones, the Move and Traffic followed The Beatles lead in integrating Indian influences and instruments, therefore developing the trend of fusion. In the same year of 1965, Joe Harriott (Jamaican-born saxophonist) and John Mayer (Indian-born composer-violinist) formed Indo-Jazz Fusions in England. The group was a “double quintet” of five Indian and five jazz musicians improvising over precise raga structures composed and arranged by Mayer.7 Peter Lavezzoli states, “[This] was the first collaboration of its kind—and the first time the word ‘fusions’ had been used to describe such an amalgamation of two musics” (2006:305). However, somehow this history is left out within the traditional definition of Fusion in Oxford Music. In this definition there is no place for Indian classical music. I present a different story.

Ravi Shankar playing at Woodstock in 1969 was the ultimate event for Indian music’s recognition in the West on a mainstream level (specifically within a rock context). Shankar also had clear influences on jazz musicians like John Coltrane, who is attributed as the jazz musician who implemented Indian music elements.8 Lavezzoli makes a strong statement mentioning, “[j]azz embraced the Indian tradition like no other Western music, and the relationship has continued to flourish” (2006:267),

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7 There are varying opinions as to the success of this album and the music they created. Many, however, would agree with Lavezzoli’s statement that “rather than a marriage, it feels like a blind date” never really “achieving a true fusion of Indian music and jazz” (2006:307). Three albums resulted from this collaboration with Mayer: *Indo Jazz Suite* (Atlantic 1966), *Indo Jazz Fusions Volume 1 and 2* (Columbia UK 1967 and 1968).

8 Coltrane was introduced to Shankar (in person) in 1964 and Shankar began to teach him about Indian music around this time.
which again, is largely attributed to John Coltrane’s legacy. Coltrane became involved in the study of Indian music and spirituality in his later years. Carl Clements’ study (2008) focuses on the development of Coltrane’s personal style from the early 1960s to the end of his life in 1967. Starting in the late 1950s, Coltrane started to use a modal approach “releasing his music from the confines of jazz chord changes,” Clements states. With a greater sense of freedom, Coltrane explored other forms of structure leading him to study Indian and non-Western scales and modes (Clements 2008:156). Coltrane, however, was not only interested in Indian music but also in Indian religion and philosophy, as evidenced from his titles of compositions and albums in the mid 1960s, such as: “India” (1961, Live at the Village Vanguard), “Psalm” (1965, A Love Supreme), and “Om” (1965, Om). He studied the writings of Paramahansa Yogananda and Mohandas Gandhi. He was also aware of South Indian spiritual teacher and philosopher Krishnamurti and practiced yoga. Other titles like Selflessness (1965), Meditations (1966), and Ascension (1966), evoke Hindu or Buddhist imagery or concepts, though they can also be associated with various other non-Indian mystical religions (Clements 2008:158-160).

After Coltrane’s death, Alice Coltrane (pianist, organist, harpist, singer, composer, swamini, and wife of John Coltrane) gravitated strongly toward Indian music and spirituality. While her approach to modal jazz would further John Coltrane’s musical and spiritual concerns, Lavezzoli states, “[Alice] specifically espoused Indian spirituality more than anyone else in jazz by a wide margin, dedicating much of her music to Hindu deities and various manifestations of her
guru” (2006:291). She became a lifelong disciple of Swami Satchidananda, adopting the name Swamini Turiya Sangitananda, which translates as: the Transcendental Lord’s highest song of bliss. Her album *Radha-Krsna Nama Sankirtana* (1976) consists entirely of gospel tinged devotional chants including: “Govinda Jai Jai,” “Ganesha,” “Hare Krishna,” and “Om Nama Sivaya.” In *Transcendence* (1977) she has both instrumental pieces (“Radhe-Shyam,” “Vrindavana Sanchara”) and vocal chants (“Sivaya,” “Ghana Nila,” “Bhaja Govindam”). She refers to Egyptian imagery and spirituality with pieces like “Blue Nile” in *Ptah, the El Daoud* (1970). However, it is in her album *Journey in Satchidananda* (1970) where Alice Coltrane’s most direct incorporation of Indian musical values can be heard (ibid).9

John Coltrane’s music continued to open people’s ears to those who followed in his footsteps, most notably the British born guitarist John McLaughlin who had played with Miles Davis and Tony Williams before becoming a disciple of Indian spiritual guru Sri Chinmoy (Lavezzoli 2006:10-11). The Mahavishnu Orchestra of John McLaughlin further engaged with the idea of jazz-rock fusion including Indian musical and spiritual influences thus leading to McLaughlin working with L. Shankar, Zakir Hussain, and others in the formation of Shakti in the mid-1970s. Clements refers to John McLaughlin as “a major figure in the fusion of jazz and Indian music” (2008:167). Lavezzoli expresses a similar sentiment as he states:

Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan popularized Indian stringed instruments in the West, but jazz and rock audiences discovered one of their own in McLaughlin, who

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9 Lavezzoli goes on to analyze specific pieces from this album along with previous tracks mentioned.
adapted the Indian string techniques to an instrument that crossed all boundaries in Western music: the guitar. (2006:331)

He further focuses on the spiritual appeal to which McLaughlin expressed, following Coltrane’s lead. According to Lavezzoli:

with Shakti, the spiritual properties of Indian music emerged with the visceral and ecstatic…Shakti embodied a vibrant, youthful energy. Not merely a juxtaopposition of East and West, Shakti was sui generis as an ensemble—a complete integration of jazz with North and South Indian music, with the fire, beauty, and intensity that redefined both jazz and Indian music for a new audience. A new genre was created in the process. (2006:332, emphasis added)

Lavezzoli continues to focus on the impact of Indian classical musicians on Western musical practices via a connection of spirituality and the music itself in his work. He mentions many musicians from Europe and the U.S. who created musical connections between jazz and Indian classical musicians mostly from North India. Besides John Coltrane, John Mayer, Joe Harriott, and John McLaughlin, Lavezzoli also discusses Bud Shank, Don Ellis, Dave Brubeck, Duke Ellington, Charlie Mariano, Don Cherry, and Collin Walcott as musicians who were part of projects which fused elements of Indian classical music and jazz. George Harrison, Mickey Hart, David Crosby, Roger McGuinn, and Bill Laswell are also mentioned as examples of popular musicians’ involvement with Indian classical music leading to a small focus on composers from Western classical music by focusing on Philip Glass, La Mounte Young, and Terry Riley. Lavezzoli presents Ravi Shankar as the common connecting point for musicians’ contact in not only fostering their own

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10 Garry Farrell’s work (1997) is another significant source on the historical and musical precedent of this thesis. Niko Higgins (2011) extends this lineage of academic work as well which is discussed at length in the next section, “Ethnomusicological Context.”
understandings of Indian music but also their self-immersion and expression of the music with their own music projects, as briefly discussed above. It is this very history of Indian music in the West where the musical practices of Brooklyn Raga Massive directly fit into but also break away from which will be presented in the following chapters.

**ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL CONTEXT**

As seen by Oxford’s definition of Fusion and my brief historical contextualization of the practice of Fusion, the term is specifically contextualized within the jazz and rock genres in the West. Oxford’s definition does not even mention anything to do with Indian classical music’s relationship and influence on rock and jazz. This is a point that falls out of Western literature. In public discourse Fusion is continuously referred back to jazz as the foundation or refers to jazz as one of the main genres being “fused”: jazz-rock, Indo-jazz. What is interesting is that in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, academia and ethnomusicologists continued to use terms like hybridity rather than fusion to describe such practices or “experiments.” Additionally, it was with a focus on what was happening in the West. Although still from a Western point of view, I turn to recent work in the academic discourse (in the past ten years) on the term “fusion music” within a cross cultural perspective, going beyond the West as the place for the performance of this practice. Particularly I examine case studies in Korea, Indonesia, Canada, and India. This section addresses inquiries as to what is generally happening with this concept within the realm of
ethnomusicology and the significance of its misleading absence in the ethnomusicological canon. I will discuss the following topics: general attributes which scholars describe related to Fusion music (i.e. accessibility/easy listening quality), diffusion of Fusion, genre(s), identity, and authenticity anxieties. The main questions I address are: where exactly in academic discourse is this term Fusion being used? What music is being discussed? How is the term conceptualized as a product, genre, or category versus as a practice or process? What is Fusion’s relationship to hybridity?

In my analysis of case studies of Fusion music practices, the following key words continuously circulated in the discourse: mixture (cultural mixing), a combination, blend, synthesis, acculturation, a contested practice, a paradox, hybridity, ambiguity, fluid, experimental, two (ore more) genres together, created by the instrumentation itself, created by the ethnicity and identity of the performers themselves, and as liminal (an in between category). There is a sense of celebrated “newness” that is attached to successful iterations of Fusion music performances which is showcased by a cosmopolitan worldview for the media and advertising industries. Ethnomusicologist Niko Higgins, in his work on the practice of Fusion music in Chennai, India (2013), mentions how Fusion relates to other concepts theorized in anthropology: syncretism (Herskovits 1966), bricolage (Levi-Strauss 1981), creolization (Hannerz 1987), and hybridity (Bhabha 1994). He states that these are the prominent categories from the last several decades which “attempt to grapple with the cultural effects of movement and change” (7). The lineage of Fusion music
as an intellectual concept clearly has its roots within these concepts. Furthermore, it seems to come out at a time where scholars were faced to understand practices within an era of hyper mobilization. In other words, these terms, including Fusion, came out of a period where scholars had to deal with the effects of globalization and diaspora. Fusion also connects to when the record industry label of “world music” began to explode. Higgins particularly takes after Bhabha’s (1994) concept of culture as “in-between spaces” as he suggests “that musical practices like Fusion similarly do not exist in a hybrid vacuum but are inseparably interwoven with other ‘cultures’” (7). He takes this viewpoint of Fusion in his study where he analyzes “the Chennai-based practice of Fusion to show how the concept of fusion was at once related to a global practice of cultural mixing and made up of distinctive elements that musicians characterized as uniquely South Indian” (10).

FUSION + IDENTITY, ETHNICITY, LOCATION

A specific identity and/or ethnicity is usually linked to discussions of Fusion music. Niko Higgins, for example, situates Fusion music in Chennai as being “characterized as uniquely South Indian,” further adding, “what made Fusion in Chennai unique, was that musicians who performed Fusion were mostly trained in Karnatic music, which gave their Fusion a decidedly South Indian identity” (2013: 9). In a way, a sense of authentic identity and foundation must be present for one genre

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11 This project uses Niko Higgins’ work as a fundamental backbone for exploring Indian Fusion music in NYC.
or identity to then be in dialogue with another for Fusion to occur as evidenced by Higgins (2013), Sutton (2008, 2011), Hirji (2015), and Montero Diaz (2016). Even by looking at the titles of these works and names of particular Fusion music practices—Korean Fusion Music, South Asian Fusion Music in Canada, Fusion music in post-war Lima, Indo-Jazz Fusion, Fusion in Chennai—there is a clear link to identity, ethnicity, and location.¹²

R. Anderson Sutton (2008, 2011) presents Korean Fusion Music as a “hybrid musical combination of Korean instruments, vocal styles, and repertory with music originating in other parts of the world” (2008:1).¹³ He further emphasizes the importance of the expression of a Korean identity as he states, “in Korea, music identified as ‘fusion,’ with very rare exception, combines elements conceived to be ‘Korean’ with others that are (or may be) conceived to be ‘not Korean’” (2011:4). According to Sutton “what Korean musicians produce under the general rubric of ‘fusion music’ (p’yujon umak) is often immediately recognizable as Korean not so much from musical form, melody, or even from rhythmic pattern, as from instrumental timbre” (2008:1, emphasis added). The timbre of the two-stringed fiddle haegum has taken a dominant role as the “quintessential Korean ‘sound’ in

¹² While my project deviates away from the concepts of identity and ethnicity as being the unifying elements for Fusion music practices, I believe it is still important to present these case studies in order to see how these concepts are used and applied.
¹³ Sutton’s use of hybrid in relation to Korean Fusion music is further discussed later in this chapter. This positioning shows how Sutton uses the term Fusion to evoke a particular genre/category in which hybridity is the process that creates it. In other words, Fusion is a product of hybridizing processes. Sutton states: “Fusion music, because of its overt hybridity, naturally lends itself to ambiguous interpretations with regard to genre identity” (Sutton 2008:20).
contemporary fusion music” (ibid:1). Sutton refers to musicologist Lim Misun to further haegum’s place in Korean fusion music as it is “the most Western sounding of all traditional Korean instruments and for that reason (among others) fits well with fusion music” (4). Sutton continues to present haegum’s “fit” within fusion music and how it is particularly representative of a Korean identity. While it has a greater capacity than other traditional instruments to play Western scales it also has the capacity to still “sound very Korean” (with its raspy, buzzing sound quality) and at other times very Western like a violin (8). In my own interpretation of Sutton’s presentation of the instrument it seems as though the instrument itself sounds a sense of “in between” identities, a sense of liminality which contributes to its fit in Korean Fusion music. Sutton concludes his discussion about the role of this instrument in Fusion by stating:

haegum in the hands of many contemporary players is gaining its popularity by becoming less itself, less Korean, more Western. How this can at the same time bring new popularity to nonfusion kugak, as so many fusion musicians proclaim as their motivation is hard to determine and may well be a false hope but fusion music itself is finding a place in the Korean musical world, not as foreign import, but as something many feel to be Korean and modern at the same time. (20)

Through Korean Fusion music’s “easy listening” quality, it is a gateway to interact with more traditional forms of Korean music and connect with traditional Korean culture. In other words, a traditional sense of Korean identity is made accessible to consume. Sutton uses this point to argue that Korean Fusion music “is an important response to the unsettled cultural terrain of contemporary Korea…[and] is an important site in the creative struggle for the future of ‘Korean music’” (2011:4). As I will demonstrate in this thesis, Sutton’s work is directly related to and reflective of
the inner workings of the Indian Fusion music scene in NYC.

Faiza Hirji continues this trope of the importance of an [identity/ethnicity]-ness to be a part of Fusion music (2015). Specifically, she studies the production of Afro-Asian music in Canada and its possibilities for political and cultural alliances via the expression of Fusion music. Hirji states that her “respondents revealed the diversity of South Asian fusion music in Canada, as well as its role in contributing to a hybrid identity and challenging what it means to be South Asian” (318, emphasis added). Ethnic identity, cultural identity, and locality are intertwined in Hirji’s account. An expression of a hybrid identity is the main attribute of the Fusion music she discusses within a fusion of popular music genres including bhangara, rap, and a turn to hip hop for desi youth culture in Canada. In questioning informants in their processes of making music and musical expression, Hirji states, “the consistency that seemed to emerge was a definite impression that their musical production and consumption were influenced significantly by their presence in the third space (Bhabha), although they did not employ this terminology” (326). Bhabha’s third space is used by Hirji to evoke how hybrid identity’s place is within this sense of liminality.

Fiorella Montero-Diaz explores the ravages of war in Lima as one of the main factors fuelling a white upper-class desire to integrate with the broader Peruvian

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14 Elements of exotic pop music are also discussed.
population through popular intercultural fusion music (2016).\textsuperscript{15} The aftermath of the war created a conflict between white upper classes, the mestizos (people of mixed white and indigenous heritage), and the Andean/Amazonian indigenous and native populations. Música fusion Peruana (Peruvian fusion music) and música fusion are the terms used by young middle-class and upper-class Limenos (18-35 years old) when describing blends of any music considered traditional Peruvian with foreign genres (192). Montero-Díaz’s exploration of fusion music amongst the young Limeno white upper classes expresses an emphasized link to class identity and sociality. These “fusionists” engage in mixing indigenous musical forms with the popular forms for cultural mediation within the context of political conflict between the two classes. Specifically, Montero-Díaz illustrates “how fusion music in Lima opened spaces for white upper-class youth to reimagine their own identities and negotiate their collective sense of culpability in the wake of the war” (193). Additionally, she “examines how fusion music in Lima articulates white upper-class alternative ideals and sensibilities into collective transformative power and how this translates into political action” (194). A yearning for togetherness and a collective pursuit for a more cohesive identity is permeated by this “fusion boom” in order to fulfill a conflict transformation. Montero-Díaz states:

Fusion musicking creates ‘liminal spaces’ (Bergh 2010: 207; Turner 1967: 93-111) where ‘ideal relationships are imagined’ (Small 1998: 13), and even enacted while the music lasts. Fusion facilitates intercultural contact and interactions (e.g. cross cultural collaborations), the white upper class listening to Andean performers,

\textsuperscript{15} Between 1980 and 2000 Peru was engulfed in an internal war between the state and two armed groups, the Shining Path and the Tupac Amaru Revolutionary Movement. Her article is informed by interviews conducted during fieldwork in Lima during 2010-2011.
conversations between performers and audiences and within the audience about the war and people’s role in it and Lima’s future. (196)

Engagement with fusion musical practice by the white upper classes who have felt like distinct individuals, according to Montero-Diaz, “are now achieving the opposite, feeling part of the wider Lima, *blurring their individuality by belonging to ‘the people’*” (206, emphasis added). In this case study, fusion music has a purpose for intercultural mediation. Negotiations of class, whiteness, and race take place through the musical process and are heard in the musical performance. Both musicians and audience members play a role in mediating social conflict by engaging with this fusion music as Montero-Diaz uses the term “fusionists” to describe them. In this case, the fusion music that is occurring is *intercultural*. Ambiguity and blurring occurs with the performance of fusion music resulting in a collective identity and even, what can be argued, a sense of regional, intercultural identity for Lima, Peru.

**DIFFUSION**

In the case studies previously discussed above where a sense of identity is emphasized through Fusion music, there is a theme to define one cultural identity and what is “not” part of that particular identity. Sutton (2011) for example questions what is actually being fused with markers of a Korean identity to then create Fusion music. An interesting observation of his is that the style of most of the Fusion music is only in the one dimension of instrumental timbre whereas most of the harmonies, rhythms, melodies, and repertory itself are simply jazz. Jazz is viewed as “not” Korean and therefore playing jazz on the haegum leads to a sense of fusion musical
practice. Such a point brings up another main theme that is a part of fusion: diffusion. There needs to be an element of music (genre) diffusion in order for “cultural mixing” to occur.

There is a lot of scholarship on the diffusion aspect between the West and India. As discussed in the historical context section, there has been a general discourse on the movement of India’s music influence on jazz. But what of jazz to India? Recently Niko Higgins (2013) and Tanya Kalmanovitch (2008) discuss the presence of jazz and attributes of Fusion music in India. Kalmanovitch specifically focuses on “Indo-Jazz Fusion.” She observes that by the beginning of World War II, professional jazz performers in Asia, Europe, Australia, and South America had adopted and adapted jazz in their own countries. She states:

The impact of these early localizations of jazz can also be seen to have laid the groundwork for the ‘globalization’ of American music in the 1980s. Widely touted at the time as a revolution bringing together disparate sounds, ‘world music’ fusions of American and non-American music had in fact been taking place since the beginning of the twentieth century, as performers adapted and incorporated jazz into local music forms. A range of national and ethnic identities have encountered and impacted jazz, and jazz had served as the site of articulating local identities and resistance to local and international hegemonies. (13-14)

Therefore, Kalmanovitch focuses on the discussion of the emergence of “a genre of Indian-jazz ‘fusion’ in the 1970s and 1980s, in which jazz and Karnataka musicians increasingly appeared as collaborators in musical transculturalism” (42).

Kalmanovitch situates fusion music as a category, a music genre which includes jazz and Karnataka music in contact with each other. Additionally, at the heart of her

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16 The “creation” of Western Fusion music has been discussed by Kevin Fellezs in *Birds of Fire* (2011).
discussion she argues that India came to play a major role in jazz (referring to the Coltrane legacy) as it came to represent ‘the spiritual’ in jazz and “differentiating the philosophical, moral, and artistic content of jazz, from that of popular music” (42).

Instead of representing indo-jazz fusion as a Western product/genre she mentions that her work is “a scholarly treatment of the recent consolidation of ‘fusion’ as a distinctly Indian genre of instrumental performance with considerable appeal among the Indian middle class” (167, emphasis added). Higgins (2013) treats fusion music in Chennai in a similar way, however, he does not necessarily emphasize the jazz component. What Carnatic musicians refer to as Fusion in South India is not a fusion with jazz (18). According to Higgins, “where a jazz influence is present in South Indian fusion it is likely to be the music of Weather Report, Return to Forever, and Mahavishnu more than Louis Armstrong, Charlie Parker, and John Coltrane” (251).¹⁷

However, what about the diffusion of jazz to other areas of the world to create fusions? David Harnish and Jeremy Wallach (2013) investigate the career and musical development of Krakatau, “a unique jazz/ethnic fusion group” from West Java, Indonesia. In their analysis of two of Krakatau’s instrumental songs they reveal how the band is “rooted in electric jazz composition and improvisation with a commitment to traditional Sundanese instrumentation, timbres, and performance practice” (116). Harnish and Wallach specifically situate Krakatau’s music within the “genre invasion” or global spread of jazz. Particularly in the 1980s there was a “move

¹⁷ Dhirendra Mikkhail Panikker (2010), Arathi Govind (2014), and particularly Sandra Janette Evans (2014) also discuss the specific connecting point of jazz and Carnatic music in India.
toward jazz-rock fusion as figures such as Indra Lesmana, Candra Darusman, Jopie Item, and the first incarnation of Krakatau produced sophisticated, radio-friendly music that combined jazz with pop” (117). Since the early 1990s “Krakatau has produced a deliberate and foregrounded hybrid music of electric jazz and Sundanese gamelan music, which mixes multiple elements and escapes easy definition” (118). Harnish and Wallach include a footnote with their mentioning of electric jazz since this particular style is itself simply called fusion. They go on to mention:

To avoid con-fusion, since Krakatau already plays an “ethnic fusion” music, we avoid this term. Additionally, we agree with Mark Gridley’s contention (1991, 328) that the music commonly referred to as “jazz-rock” fusion should really be called jazz-funk fusion. Hence, much like the Miles Davis electric bands of the late 1960s and 1970s, Krakatau’s music is heavily influenced by funk and R&B. (131)

Therefore, what really characterizes Krakatau’s fusion music is the fact that it “is founded primarily upon a broadly defined jazz aesthetic and references Sundanese characteristics and ambience” (127).

FUSION’S RELATIONSHIP/TENSION WITH HYBRIDITY

What comes out of this fusion of gamelan and jazz is also a hybrid, according to Harnish and Wallach as they state, “the four albums that mark Krakatu’s ‘microtonal’ fusion music are mixtures of instrumentally backed vocal songs and pure instrumentals. In any hybrid music, it is essential to look at the two (or more) streams in the new product and determine if the music is a balance between the two or if one stream tends to dominate” (2013:124). For Krakatau, some pieces foreground gamelan, and others jazz. Here we see the terms fusion, hybrid, and mixture come
together to describe Krakatu’s music. Harnish and Wallach are not the only scholars who have used these terms together as evidenced by Faiza Hirji’s (2015) presentation of fusion music serving as an expression of South Asian hybrid identity in Canada. Fiorella Montero-Diaz’s (2016) article is found under the keyword “music hybridity” in the *Ethnomusicology Forum*, not fusion, even though her article makes no mention of the term hybridity besides her bio which states “her research explores music hybridity.” Are we then to think Fusion and hybridity can be used synonymously? What do we make of this fusion-hybrid mixture? Is Fusion music then a sub genre of a hybrid music form?

Some scholars situate Fusion as including hybridizing processes. Sutton in his description of the general rubric of fusion music for Korean musicians mentions how in the “last twenty years musicians specializing in performance of Korean traditional music (kugak) are drawn to participate in *hybrid musical combinations* of Korean instruments, vocal styles, and repertory with music originating in other parts of the world” (2008:1, emphasis added). Echoing the sentiment that Fusion music escapes any sort of easy definition, Sutton states, “Fusion music, because of its overt hybridity, naturally lends itself to ambiguous interpretations with regard to genre identity” (ibid:20). Sutton seems to frame Fusion music as a category that has elements of hybridity as he continues to mention in a later work that “what is obviously fusion now, if it persists, becomes a stabilized norm, a genre or set of genres which can later be subject to further hybridizing processes” (2011:12). Hybridity makes up what fusion is according to Sutton. Sandra Janette Evans (2014)
in her discussion of “Carnatic jazz intercultural music” echoes this as she states “music that hybridizes elements from Indian music with jazz and/or other Western music genres is often called fusion” (xvii). She goes on to argue that “the label Carnatic jazz intercultural music describes the music in these case studies more precisely than fusion, which could mean Western jazz-rock, or many different hybrids of Indian musics with other musics. Due to its common usage, fusion is sometimes used as a genre label in this exegesis” (ibid).

Evans preference of using Carnatic jazz intercultural music as opposed to Fusion begins to touch on the contestation of the term. Higgins (2013) mentions that although it is a largely contested term, it is an expressive culture within itself which calls for the importance of studying its practice. However, other scholars do not necessarily agree and push for certain musics as not fusion. Pete Steele focuses on recent compositions by composers Wayne Vitale, Michael Tenzer, Evan Ziporyn, and Andrew Clay McGraw. The works are intercultural in form and content but, as Steele states, “in these pieces ‘fusion’ and ‘intercultural encounter’ are framed as complex and often paradoxical acts, demanding simultaneous identification with the ‘Other,’ while remaining ever cognizant of its immanent difference” (2015:190). Furthermore, “these works may be seen as a critique on the nature of fusion and hybridity. While fusion connotes synthesis, this ‘coming together’ is often fraught with political tensions, power dynamics, gaps of knowledge and creates misunderstandings” (ibid:191). For Steele, Fusion’s contestation is due to its inherent paradoxical expression: expressing cultural mediations yet emphasizing differences. However, his
intent of using hybridity and fusion together is unclear as he seems to use the terms interchangeably. Specifically, there is a moment where he refers to Colin McPhee’s *Tabuh-Tabuhan*, written in 1936. Steele states that this was

> the first major ‘fusion’ work for gamelan and Western instruments. The work is now considered a landmark of musical hybridity. Credited as the first Western composer to bring ‘authentic’ Balinese music into the symphonic form, McPhee introduced Balinese music to American audiences as a quintessential representative of ‘the new.’

While it seems that the terms are used synonymously, I interpret this section as implying that to be a landmark of musical hybridity a sense of authentic-traditional-“other”-music must be present. Hybridity is not so much a dirty word as is “fusion.”

Fusion’s contested legacy as the “dirty F word” is especially prevalent in literature discussing Indian-American jazz with Vijay Iyer (pianist) and Rudresh Mahanthappa (saxophonist) as seen in the work of Dhirendra Mikhail Panikker (2010) and Arathi Govind (2012). In referencing Iyer’s work, Panikker mentions how Iyer—while aware of his own hybrid identity—has distanced himself from the mainstream Indian-American community criticizing the superficial cultural tapestry of the Desi (South Asian diasporic) scene. Within the Desi scene, the music is usually characterized as “world beat,” Bollywood, and Western pop forms which, Panikker states “are in contrast to the art music traditions in jazz” (12). Iyer deals with the broader formal properties of Indian classical music (Carnatic’s rhythmic language,

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19 However, Steele (2015) does argue that the composers’ works he discusses indeed critique ideas of multiculturalism and the fact that fusion and hybridity can not in fact successfully happen.
forms, phrasing, melodies) on a structural level but still avoids overtly “Indian” sounding music (13). Panikker states, “by focusing on rhythm and avoiding the clichéd melodic and timbral elements of Indian music, Iyer has created a unique hybrid musical language free of explicit Indian reference…[and] Iyer insists that his work does not represent a musical collage or ‘fusion’” (13-14, emphasis added). It is worth noting that Iyer creates this “hybrid musical language” within the context of jazz music. He sees himself as a jazz musician, not Indian musician. For Iyer or Mahanthappa, for their music to be called fusion is in a way an insult as they see their work as an extension of the jazz idiom, not John McLaughlin’s Mahavishnu Orchestra or Shakti. Panikker articulates this sentiment clearly in the following footnote:

There have been many Indo-jazz fusions including the Mahavishnu Orchestra, John Mayer’s Indo-Jazz Fusions, and others. While these cross-cultural experimentations were novel in their time, many have either blatantly overstated their “exotic” elements or lacked sufficient musical depth. Both Vijay Iyer and Indian-American saxophonist, Rudresh Mahanthappa have avoided the term “fusion,” for its synthetic connotation, often calling it the “f” word. (14)

Arathi Govind (2012) continues to analyze both Vijay Iyer’s and Rudresh Mahanthappa’s work as an expression of hybridity, as she clearly states in her title “It’s not fusion.” She is the only author that I have read who clearly distinguishes her use of the term hybridity versus fusion. In demonstrating how Iyer and Mahanthappa choose to emphasize different aspects of their hybrid identities depending on the musical context, Govind states that throughout her work she refers to hybridity as implying “an identity made up of several different cultural components that directly resulted from being a second-generation immigrant. These cultural components can
be combined in myriad ways, and hybridity implies neither an even distribution nor a fixed construction” (4). She also differentiates hybridity from fusion “in that “the musicians’ goal is not to consciously combine disparate music-cultures, but rather to create a music that reflects the intricacies of their realities” (ibid). According to Govind, Fusion refers to “the idea of two or more ‘pure’ musical genres being merged together in a way that emphasizes the contrasts between them. In this context, it is unrelated to Indian fusion, a genre of Indian rock music, and jugalbandi, the combination of Carnatic and Hindustani music” (ibid).

Although there is no general definition for the use of Fusion, there are ways to navigate the use of this term in relation to musical practices and to evoke a set genre/category. I organized this section into three sub-sections in order to best understand Fusion’s intellectual lineage in ethnomusicology: identity, ethnicity, and location; notions of diffusion; and fusion’s relationship/tension with the concept of hybridity. For some there is a perceived “exotic” element that comes with the term Fusion which leads to the negation of its use. For others, Fusion hints at an interesting expression of liminality; a process of musical mixing which allows for intercultural mediation and dialogue; and a product which serves as a gateway to engage with the different traditional musics that are present. While Fusion escapes easy definition and is loaded with multiple meanings, expressions, and contested opinions, it is nonetheless a traditionally unexamined notion in ethnomusicology. With work that continues exploration within Fusion, greater contributions can be made to ethnomusicology as a whole in regards to re-thinking traditional concepts, like
hybridity, which have been discussed thoroughly. In order to fill in the gap, I now move onto theoretical frameworks used for this project.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS: BRIDGING THEORY AND PRACTICE**

Using the term Fusion to describe music continues to be a contested practice, which lies at the issue of labeling and marketing strategies. Ideas of keeping something fresh, and creating something unique and new are attached to ventures in Fusion. Such attributes are essential to this music—fluidity, uniqueness, newness—which oppose the rigidity of concepts or labels. As mentioned to me in conversations with some musicians, the practice of fusion or crossing of music styles can be interpreted as a transgression of traditional music practices. Furthermore, musicians speak to situating themselves within a sense of liminality in order to properly engage with multiple music genres and have a successful performance. These musicians are able to connect with other cultures via music because they are set within a sense of liminality, a transgressive performance space. Another factor of a successful Fusion performance (which is articulated by informants’ statements and Higgin’s work) is the element of mastery and virtuosity. These elements are embodied to then have a successful spontaneity of improvisation and performance, which is an important characteristic of this type of music.

Therefore, to better describe this music, its attributes (as some are discussed above) and escape from traditional classifications and structure, I will engage with concepts of the liminal, performativity, and play. Specifically, I present senses of both
musical liminality and spatial liminality that are part of the practice of this music as evidenced by Brooklyn Raga Massive performances. As I report on and navigate through conversations I have had with musicians, these theories contain great possibilities to truly explain what I am hearing and explaining in this project. However, it should be noted that there are points where there are theoretical gaps as the theory itself is from about fifty years ago. Therefore, I develop and build upon theoretical resources in anthropology that will ultimately contribute to further discussions of Fusion music in order to better express musicians’ ethos.

VICTOR TURNER’S STRUCTURE/ANTI-STRUCTURE, LIMINALITY, & COMMUNITAS

By verbal and nonverbal means of classification we impose upon ourselves innumerable constraints and boundaries to keep chaos at bay, but often at the cost of failing to make discoveries and inventions: that is to say, not all instances of subversion of the normative are deviant or criminous. (Turner 1969:vii)

Turner’s statement on the means of classification which society imposes on facets of life makes me think of the broad classifications of music within Western scholarship. According to Elizabeth F. Barkley in her textbook Crossroads: Popular Music in America, music is categorized into three broad categories: art (or “classical”), folk (or “traditional), and popular (2007). While none of these terms are satisfactory nor should they be taken as official, hierarchies are still created regarding not only musical reception but musical structure itself.20 With “serious art music”

(mostly including classical music forms) comes written notation and/or sophisticated structural and theoretical considerations. The distinction of the two is also perpetuated by where the music is performed and heard; there is a set place where it is appropriate to hear classical music as opposed to pop music. The borders of the two regarding the music itself have been blurred as seen in forms of jazz, when classical composers include folk tunes in their “masterworks” (Bartok, Mahler, Beethoven), and when “pop musicians” quote and sample classical repertoire (Frank Zappa, Muse). Places of listening to “serious art music” have changed as well, as one can go to a bar to see an Indian classical music performance rather than a temple or community center. Blurring of such borders involves senses of transgression and a taboo juxtaposition, which are articulated in the very practice of what has been labeled as Fusion. What lies at the heart of such transgression and taboo is the sense of the dialectic relationship of structure and anti-structure. In what follows I relate musical practice to the social practices in which Turner focuses upon.

In The Ritual Process (1969), Victor Turner outlines how society is the product of the dialectical historical relationship between ‘structure’ (society’s status and role differentiation, behavioral norms and cognitive rules) and ‘anti-structure’ (those regions of experience in culture—outside, in between, and below structure), between the ‘fixed’ and ‘floating worlds’ (1969:vii, 201), corresponding to

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21 In my discussion of Victor Turner’s concept of structure and antistructure as well as liminality and communitas I aim to relate these concepts to musical structure. I use structure and antistructure as my introductory framework in this chapter to clearly present an understanding of Fusion music in relation to anthropological concepts. A sense of musical structure/antistructure is further presented in Chapter 4.
‘indicative’ and ‘subjunctive moods’ (1984:21). Turner gravitates to focus on the experiential realm, recognizing society as open ended and becoming. Society’s (re)production is dependent upon the “organized moments of categorical disarray and intense reflexive potential” (St John 2008:4). Such moments are the liminal—a breach from structure, a realm of pure possibility. Turner particularly discusses the theme of liminality and communitas which is first represented in what Arnold van Gennep (1906) has called the “liminal phase” of *rites de passage*. This is within the context of ritual processes of “traditional” pre-industrial societies. In my reading of Turner’s definitions of liminality and communitas, I re-contextualize these terms for music performance on a stage: the transportative (and transformative) quality of liminality where power is made available to improvise but only in a liminal state and with the spontaneous iteration of communitas.

Turner defines liminal entities in terms of ambiguity, betwixt and between, and being neither here nor there. He states:

> [t]his condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space…it is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life. (1969:95)

In his discussion of liminal entity attributes, Turner focuses on liminality and the ritual powers of the weak. There is a theme of a stripping off of preliminal and postliminal attributes in this process (in the context of *rites de passage*/initiation rites). Specifically, “the neophyte in liminality must be a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate, on which is inscribed the knowledge and wisdom of the group, in those respects that
pertain to the new status” (103). Turner also mentions how there is a factor of a mystical power that comes within this transition. I later argue that a musician is in this state once on stage, outside of the rehearsal, performing on stage as a blank slate for the music to flow. What emerges out of the liminal period is an unstructured, undifferentiated communitas which is defined as “a relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals” (131) and emerges “where social structure is not” (126). Elements of spontaneity and immediacy contribute to communitas being “of the now” (113). Another attribute of communitas is that it is seen as “dangerous and anarchical” to the “structure.” In reference to Mary Douglas (1966), “that which cannot be clearly classified in terms of traditional criteria of classification, or falls between classificatory boundaries, is almost everywhere regarded as ‘polluting’ and dangerous” (quoted in Turner 1969:109).

These elements relate directly to Fusion being referred to as a “dirty” word. Not only does it not fit a mold or traditional categories/boundaries imposed upon musical genres, it has a “polluting” quality. Nivedita ShivRaj, speaks to her own

22 New status relates to transportation/transformation which discussed by Schechner in regards to theater which is discussed later in this section.
23 See Chapter 4.
24 While not necessarily a part of BRM, Nivedita has collaborated with musicians in the collective like Jay Ghandi and Bala Skandam. She is a composer, performer, and educator (having her own organization the RagaChitra Foundation). Her band Charanams is a project of hers to express her own style of using Carnatic music as a foundation to then include elements of other musical styles. In conversations about her band and her thoughts on Fusion she goes back and forth on the use of it. She prefers to refer to her band as a blending of styles together. However, the blend is more of instruments rather than the music itself. In other words, “Western” instruments like the saxophone and guitar play Nivedita’s composed melodies which are rooted in the Carnatic music tradition, all based on ragas and written in Carnatic notation.
experience of creating her crossover band Charanams. She mentions that there is a “political purity of Carnatic music” and when musicians would “stray into something like that [“Fusion”], [they] would be branded as moving away from tradition” even going to the extreme of calling the performer “not a musician.” While she does see a wider acceptance of blending styles starting in 2000, she states, “still some people consider this wrong, straying away from tradition.” Some people, and particularly some Indian organizations will not invite her to perform simply because she has created the band Charanams, which in their eyes is Fusion. Nivedita says, “some organizations focused on maintaining purity of music. Some organizations ask only play traditional Carnatic music, ‘not your style.’” While she does emphasize that there is a wider acceptance now she states that “still, certain people feel threatened by the Fusion music” (ShivRaj, phone interview, 2015). In the context of Nivedita’s statements, the certain people she refers to are mostly those from an older generation in India (as well as some leaders of Indian organizations in the US) who are “purists” for the music tradition. For “purists,” engagement with this style of music is seen as threatening to the traditional Carnatic music tradition. The musical structure is imbued with not only musical rules and parameters, but also social and religious moors is viewed as being tainted in some cases. However, focusing on the label of Fusion, others believe that “fusion tends to indicate a sense of compromise and

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25 The history of Carnatic music is one that is very much influenced by British colonialism in purifying the musical practice. Most Carnatic musicians in India are from the middle class, high caste, Brahmin elite. Song texts and musical theory have clear ties and symbolic meaning related to Hinduism.
collaboration is where you enhance the quality of music” (Srinivas Krishnan, personal interview 2015). In both statements I see that there is a general expression of danger related to engaging with this type of music because of its fluidity and openness, not particularly abiding to traditional structure. This music is performed within the antistructure as expressed by its attributes of liminality and communitas.

Thinking of Turner’s Liminal and Liminoid as Liminal/Liminoid

According to Turner, “one works at the liminal, one plays with the liminoid” (1974: 86). He focuses on notions of play, work, and leisure to distinguish the liminoid from the liminal. Liminoid behaviors or events come out of industrial and postindustrial civilizations. They are voluntary (as opposed to liminal rites of passage), and are undertaken because they are “fun”—therefore predicated on the existence of leisure. Leisure time, according to Turner, is associated with two types of freedom: “freedom-from” and “freedom-to.” It is a freedom from institutional obligations and regulated rhythms to then allow a freedom to “enter, even to generate new symbolic worlds of entertainment…transcend social structural limitations, freedom to play” (68). Leisure, and therefore the liminoid is where “the ludic and the experimental are stressed” (ibid). Additionally, “leisure is potentially capable of

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26 This statement seems to be in conflict with Huizinga’s theory of play. Turner presents a clear distinction, however, there really is fluidity between the two.

27 Turner’s conceptualization of the liminoid is a further development of his theory on liminality and communitas. His theoretical orientation is rooted in the experience of ritual. In this thesis I depart from the original model raised by Turner in order to better discuss Fusion. In other words, I am departing from the emphasis of a traditional ritual context.
releasing creative powers, individual or communal, either to criticize or buttress the dominant social structural values” (ibid).

The practice and process of Fusion musical performance can be understood within Turner’s defined liminoid setting. In engaging with Indian Fusion music, the performance of “mixing” or “crossing over” traditional classical forms such as Carnatic music with a popular music idiom like jazz not only pushes the limits or “criticizes” the boundaries of a traditional practice, it also reveals the values of the traditional “pure” Carnatic music practice. The dialectic relationship between structure and antistructure is clearly present in this conceptualization. The “creative power” is released within the liminality of being in between the musical structure and anti-structure—the point where the two music forms are brought together in conversation and the musician’s identity is metaphorically stripped to allow the freedom to engage in a flow of performing different musics together in order to create something new. In a way, the musician is transported with the performance while the music itself is transformed. As seen by my own description, the Fusion musical performance engages with attributes of both Turner’s definitions of liminality and liminoid. Turner makes a clear distinction between the two, but the terms are working together as liminal/liminoid.

Turner further distinguishes liminal and liminoid by relating collectivity to the liminal and the individual to the liminoid. He states, “the solitary artist creates the liminoid phenomena, the collectivity experiences collective liminal symbols…the maker of liminoid symbols, ideas, images, and so on…is privileged to make free with
his social heritage in a way impossible to members of cultures in which the liminal is to a large extent the sacrosanct” (1974:84). What is key for this distinction is the fact that the liminal is sacred, tied to ritual as opposed to liminoid. Scholars, especially in discussing sports which Turner has deemed as liminoid, argue against this distinction and critique Turner’s original theory, showing how these deemed liminoid events actually do have ritual attributes tied to them.\textsuperscript{28} I also would like to argue that looking at a music collective like BRM, while it is generated by specific individuals, it truly has a mass collective character that is tied to the liminal for the performers, especially once on the stage.\textsuperscript{29} Turner also mentions that “there are permanent liminoid settings and spaces too—bars, pubs, some cafes, social clubs, etc.” (ibid, 86). These are the same spaces in which BRM performs which brings up an element of spatial transgression. Musical and spatial liminality are present in the performance of this type of music in relation to understanding the BRM collective.

\textit{Spatial Structure/Antistructure}

The ideological construction of space and place are visible representations of a “normative” structure. A BRM performance can be a full experience of antistructure


\textsuperscript{29} BRM is referred to as a collective in articles, reviews, and on their website. In Chapter 3 I present BRM more as an urban assemblage as this term seems to better articulate what BRM is.
where it can be heard as well as seen by the space itself. Tim Cresswell (1996) argues that embodied expectations, laws, prohibitions, and prescriptions of belonging come with our senses and understandings of place in which ideology and geography clearly intersect by focusing on events that upset expectations about place and behavior. It is only through a transgression of expectations, a transgression of “the laws of place,” that we see not only what is out of place but also what is regarded as in place.

Through this transgression we come to understand not only the otherness of the space but also what is actually the norm for the social space. Appropriate and inappropriate behaviors frame this as Cresswell presents one of his central themes, “[t]he way in which space and place are used to structure a normative landscape—the way in which ideas about what is right, just, and appropriate are transmitted through space and place. Something may be appropriate there but not here” (1996:8). What is key for Cresswell’s argument is the fact that these conceptions of place are clearly not natural, “[v]alue and meaning are not inherent in any space or place—indeed they must be created, reproduced, and defined from heresy” (9). Meanings of place are created through practice where the consumption and production of place are then intertwined. Cresswell presents “action in space” as a reading of a text: “[p]eople acting ‘out of place’ suggest different interpretations. If enough people follow suit, a whole new conception of ‘normality’ may arise. In effect, the ‘reading’ of people

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30 He examines reactions to three events: graffiti in NYC during the 1970s, outcry towards a free music festival at Stonehenge during the summer solstice every year throughout the 1980s, and the establishment’s condemnation of the Greenham Common Women’s Peace Camp through the early 1980s.
acting in space is also a kind of ‘writing’ as new meanings are formed. The consumption of place becomes the production of place” (165).

BRM’s performances reflect Cresswell’s concept of space and place. In turn, using Cresswell’s argument as a lens to view the spaces in which BRM performs in, provides a better understanding of the spatial (as well as musical) liminality which is occurring. Bars, cafes, and museums are not necessarily the “traditional” venues to see a performance of Carnatic or Hindustani music (both Indian classical music traditions). Usually the performance takes place in a temple or community center. BRM’s performances in these “liminoid” settings are transgressive to the traditional norm, however, are deemed as “hip” and “cool.” Unlike the transgressions that are presented in Cresswell’s piece, BRM engages with a licensed transgression of place. It is now becoming increasingly “normal” to see musicians perform traditional music, in praise of Goddess Sarasvati, in a bar with audience members throwing back beers. However, within this transgression there is a transformation present in regards to the meaning of music and the place itself. For some a bar space or innovative arts center like Pioneer Works is transformed into a devotional space once hearing a musical piece which quotes music from a varnam that references a God or Goddess. For others, while not necessarily knowing the references to devotional texts, the music instills a sense of transcendence.

Place is created through personal connections and interventions within space. This point relates directly to Cresswell’s concept of place as something lived, experienced, and embodied, while space is something more abstract and foreign to the
individual. He discusses how a child’s room or a personal office acquires meaning through personal manipulation of the space. They then become important to the person who has altered them. Cresswell concludes that the personal construction of space, whether by the addition of a poster, framed photograph, or decorative pillow; create a space “which people have made meaningful. They are all spaces people are attached to in one way or another” (2004:7), and have thereby been transformed from abstract spaces into unique and individualized places. Abstract space has no particular markers, whereas meaningful space is analogous to the concept of place; “place is how we make the world meaningful and the way we experience the world” (2004:12). As places (like the venues BRM performs in) become the way in which one sees, knows, and comes to an understanding of the world, they also turn into sites of belonging for individuals including both performers and audience members.

June Boyce-Tillman specifically discusses “the transformative qualities of a liminal space created by musicking” (2009). In her short example of discussing improvisation in a music education class and music therapy setting she states, “[f]reed of responsibility in the liminal space we are able to play and take risks without fear of consequence” (194). Within this space an element of spontaneity arises and a freedom to play is enjoyed. In a sense, students enter a state of flow to then experience a magical moment, a sense of the divine. To further articulate this divine element that is created in the liminal space caused by musicking, Boyce states,

Music has the possibility of creating a liminal space and the perceived effectiveness of a musical experience is often closely related to this area. Insofar as music experience takes us out of everyday consciousness…and moves into another
dimension, we regard the musical experience as successful, whether we are a composer, performer, or listener. (188)

The domain of musical experience includes both performer and listener/audience member. Therefore, senses of musical and spatial liminality are not only experienced by the performer but also individual audience members.\(^{31}\)

Spontaneity that is linked to communitas’ nature arises in Boyce-Tillman’s account. It is also seen and experienced in BRM’s musical performances as related to traditional structures of music especially regarding the hierarchal forms of music (i.e. classical tradition as deemed for a higher society as compared to popular music(s)) as well as the space in which the music is performed. This is all still within the dialectical relationship of structure and anti-structure: “communitas can be grasped only in some relation to structure…communitas, with its unstructured character…might well be represented by the ‘emptiness at the center’; which is nevertheless indispensable to the function of the structure of the wheel” (Turner 1969:127). Furthermore, “communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure…” (ibid:128). The dialectic which links these concepts together becomes apparent, “[f]or the immediacy of communitas gives way to the mediacy of structure, while, in rites de passage, men are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of communitas” (129).

\(^{31}\) More information regarding space/place is discussed at length in Chapter 3 in relation to BRM.
Turner has mentioned that in industrial and post industrial societies we have lost the sense for ritual and even sacred play which is his main point for demarcating the distinction between the liminal and the liminoid. However, music—even within our modern society—withdraws a transcendent quality. “In feeling music, we feel ritual” (Huizinga 1949:159). According to Huizinga, music (as a type of play) resides outside normal time and space. It is removed from logic (or abides by its own logic) and the pure enjoyment of it actually makes it a human need. He articulates this clearly as he states, “musical forms are determined by values which transcend logical ideas, which even transcend our ideas of the visible and the tangible” (158). Ultimately, “in the enjoyment of music, whether it is meant to express religious ideas or not, the perception of the beautiful and the sensation of holiness merge, and the distinction between play and seriousness is whelmed in that fusion” (159). Within the dichotomy of broad music categorization (serious vs. popular) comes this idea of a distinction between play and seriousness. However, Huizinga argues that play can actually never be strictly defined or categorized as it is distinct from other forms of thought. He states, “the contrast between play and seriousness is always fluid” (8) considering “civilization gradually brings about a certain division between two modes of mental life which we distinguish as play and seriousness receptively, but which originally formed a continuous mental medium wherein that civilization arose” (111). The difference between play and seriousness is therefore defined by who is talking rather than who is playing. Here lies the issue of music categories and imposition of labels. They do not necessarily come from the musicians themselves which causes
tensions with terminology such as Fusion. In an attempt to truly capture the sense of freeness and uniqueness of style that musicians playing this type of music are trying to convey I continue to use concepts of liminality and communitas which lie at the edges of structure/anti-structure.

BEYOND TRADITIONAL RITUAL CONTEXTS: PERFORMATIVITY & FLOW

Putting our initial terms together we might say that liminal genres put much stress on social frames, plural reflexivity, and mass flow, shared flow, while liminoid genres emphasize idiosyncratic framing, individual reflexivity, subjective flow, and see the social as problem not datum. (Turner 1979:494)

Collectivity is not lost in the industrial/post-industrial society. For example, according to Sharon Rowe, it can be experienced in sports (2008). She argues that sports are indeed integrated into our total social processes, proving how sporting events are critical to the role liminality plays in our collective reflexivity and in supporting a context for metacommunication. Elements of Fusion music and BRM’s performances as discussed in the previous section reflect Rowe’s argument. Collectivity is not only viewed by the audience member, but indeed experienced in meaningful ways.

Flow can be communicated and experienced by the audience member, not just the performer. Within the context of theater and specifically public liminality (or public reflexivity), Turner (1979) refers to Mihaly Csikzentmihalyi in his discussion of flow. For Csikzentmihalyi, “[f]low is the state in which action follows action according to an inner logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part…we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between
self and environment, between stimulus and response, or between past, present, and future” (Turner 1979:489). Within flow the self becomes irrelevant, the actor is immersed in the flow. Additionally, within the relationship of flow to frame and reflexivity, Turner mentions, “if many forms of play or ritual occur in liminal space-time, that time is framed by rules that give credence to whatever make-believe or innovative behavior, whatever subjective action, goes on within the frame” (ibid).

Furthermore, “part of the potency of a ‘great performance’ comes precisely from this: the author reflects; the actors flow. There is a fruitful tension between the opposites. The audience is ‘moved’” (490).

Richard Schechner (1985) demonstrates how performances are created in theater and how the details of performative behavior relate directly to ritual structure by referring to Chinese and Indian theater. There are many parallels in the ways he talks about performance practice in theater to music performance. Most importantly, Schechner states, “[e]stablished genre’ indicates a record of what has found its place while performance activities are fundamentally processual: there will always be a certain proportion of them in the process of transformation, categorically undefinable” (1985: 118). Performance behavior, Schechner argues, is not free and easy as it never wholly ‘belongs’ to the performer. Taking after Schechner, rather than an established genre, Fusion music is a process where flow, consciousness processes, embodiment, and transportation/transformation take place continuously.

Schechner mentions how Brecht models his ideal actor as one who alternates “between flow and reflexivity, between ‘being the character’ and speaking about the
character” (1985:119). An embodiment of rules—including the technique of the body, the text or score, and movement—is necessary for the actor to enter the state of flow and a “betwixt and between” state of mind. I see this as an entering an I-thou relationship or performance which links to Turner’s theory of the bonds of communitas within a liminal period. Schechner articulates this clearly in his discussion of the semidivine sage, Narad-muni, in the Ramlila of Ramangar, India. The actor’s identity (Omkar Das) is intertwined with the figure of Narad-muni to the point that he is identified with the legendary figure. Schechner states how he is not Narad-muni but also not not Nard-muni as “he performs in the field between a negative and a double negative, a field of limitless potential, free as it is from both the person (not and the person impersonated (not not)” (123). Performing in between the denial of being another and a denial of not being another shows how “performer training focuses its techniques not on making one person into another but on permitting the performer to act in between identities; in this sense performing is a paradigm of liminality” (ibid).

In this example a doubling takes place: “the sense of being taken over by a role, of being possessed by it—in its ‘flow’ or in the flow of the audience’s appetite for illusion, ludus, lila: play. This surrender to the flow of action is the ritual process” (Schechner 1985:124). Here we see how the performer is not only a part of the process, the spectator also plays a part and embodies the transportation/transformation of the performance. Schechner quotes Csikszentmihalyi to describe “the steps for experiencing flow” as involving the “process of delimiting,
reality, controlling some aspect of it, and responding to the feedback with a concentration that excludes anything else as irrelevant” (ibid). The context of this continuum of flow is within performances of transportation and transformation. Schechner mentions that within a Western context transportation performances are usually referred to as “theater” and transformation performances “ritual” but he states that this separation does not hold up. Instead, these two kinds of performance coexist within the same event, as he states, “the performance—and the training leading up to it—is a point of contact between the ‘press’ (transported) and the ‘paper’ (transformed)” (130).32

Schechner’s work helps to better understand the processes of what is occurring in performing Fusion music. Mastery, technique, and a sense of liminal being are a part of a successful performance. This is articulated clearly as BRM co-founder, Arun Ramamurthy explains, “you are really trying to understand other musical cultures and you’re trying to step inside their shoes, be them, with them…only then can you really understand what it is to play that music” (personal interview 2015, emphasis added). In a way it is performing a sense of “in between” two (or more) musics, cultures. A sense of true understanding occurs within the spontaneous occurrence of communitas upon the stage between all musicians. Musical identity (in regards to the musician’s foundational genre) is still present but

32 The stage also plays an active role as “the center,” contributing to the parallel between performance process and ritual process. There is an interesting process or transition from the rehearsal to the performance on stage which I address in Chapter 4.
played with. Each musician on stage must strip or delimit themselves to enter the liminal, feel the sense of communitas, a sense of ultimate equality with each other, to enter the state of flow in order to truly create music that is fluid, open, unique, and meaningful. Some have described this as “feeling the magic.” A sacred quality is definitely a part of this. Going back to Nirmala Rajasekar’s statement in the introduction, similar sentiments arise which echo Schechner. In her statement, she speaks to the experience of entering the flow, of being fully aware of what’s going on around her—feeding into and responding to the feedback within the performance. A “freedom from” and “freedom to” quality is present. Mastery of the technique of the body and the music itself is a prerequisite to enter the state of flow and to have a successful performance. Another musician, Srinivas Krishnan, (who is also not necessarily part of BRM but has created his own collaborative projects in India and the US) articulates this point by stating:

It’s not easy. I think this is the thing: people think if you do a Fusion concert I am “compromising” my quality. On the contrary the good artists have to upgrade their sensibility, intelligence. Your intelligence quotient needs to be upgraded to make the tonal quality be so perfect in a Fusion performance. (personal interview, 2015)

CONCLUSION

Clearly there is no easy definition for Fusion music as it remains contextual (in regards to identity, genre, and location) and scholars have different approaches in situating themselves with this type of music. There are also varying opinions on certain Fusion projects. Sandra Evans points out in her discussion of the characteristics of the fusion of jazz and Carnatic music (or Carnatic jazz intercultural
music). She states:

sometimes the goal of fusion is presumed to be to represent both parent musics equally and the music can be criticized if it doesn’t meet this expectation. For example, Banks once described ‘Shakti’ s style as 90% South Indian music and 20% jazz’ (Pinckney 1989: 49). Creating a whole out of contrasting aesthetics can be challenging. According to Farrell (1997: 197) Shakti’s music is ‘one at all times.’ Claman (2002: 219) refutes Farrell’s evaluation, concluding that Shakti’s music is interesting because ‘it is fraught with tensions; it succeeds and also fails, remaining an interpretive conundrum.’ (2014:33)

After all, according to sitar player Niladri Kumar (from an interview with Niko Higgins): “one of the cultural tensions of Fusion [is]: the problems and possibilities of having no guidelines” (Higgins 2013:250). Kevin Fellezs, whose book discusses the creation of Western fusion, theorizes this point to understand Western fusion as an “overlapping yet liminal space of contested, and never settled, priorities between two or more musical traditions” (2011:8). He argues that these ‘ain’t jazz, ain’t rock’ musicians troubled genres by staying between them, creating an informal set of musical practices and aesthetics. They articulated a way of being both inside and outside of genre categories, disturbing assumptions about musical traditions, including the ways in which membership (legitimacy), mastery (authority), and musical value are ordered. The ain’t jazz, ain’t rock music of these musicians was not so much a hybrid as an in between categorization that could have conceivably been an “is jazz is rock,” as much as an “ain’t jazz ain’t rock” set of musical practices and aesthetics. Fusion’s liminality then brings up its contention (Fellezs 2011:5).33

While I see great validity in this definition to serve as a general umbrella definition, it is still very contextual to the West. As Higgins mentions this point does

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33 This point is discussed further in the next section on theoretical frameworks.
not necessarily reign true in Chennai and how musicians there talk about Fusion music. He mentions that musicians refer to ‘fusion’ to mean three different but related processes or practices:

1. The process of cultural mixing found in multiple domains of culture (like the fusion of different cuisines or styles of attire).
2. The abstracted process of musical mixing, not related to any place, tradition, or specific musical practice, and
3. The musical practice in South India that combined elements of mostly Karnatic and Western music. (Higgins 2013:5)

Once again, the definition of fusion music is clearly contextual.

In this chapter I have discussed how the concepts of liminality, communitas, liminal/liminoid, play, and flow connect together to better inform a conceptualization of Fusion music. A creation of both a liminal space and identity is present within these performances. In using these concepts, I have hoped to better describe the fluidity, uniqueness and newness which is critical for this type of music. The goal is to fully understand this music as a process rather than an end product in my thesis. As evidenced by my discussion of Victor Turner, J. Huizinga, Timothy Cresswell, and Richard Schechner, Fusion music can be viewed as a liminal period where it is regarded as almost taboo to engage with such a practice. A freeing quality within the flow is only made possible with the mastery as well as embodiment of the bounds and rules of a particular music to then allow for a spontaneous, momentous event of “magical” musical expression. Theories of play in sports then overlap with music as there is a clear tension between practice and technique with the drive for spontaneity and, (in a music context) for improvisation. Fusion escapes structure. It upsets ideologies of different planes of classification in regards to music, space/place, and
identity. Threads of these anthropological concepts will be further presented throughout this thesis.
CHAPTER 2
BROOKLYN RAGA MASSIVE & FRIENDS: FUSION?

“A Raga Renaissance Flowers in Brooklyn,” “Brooklyn’s Raga Enthusiasts Creating a Tradition,” “Artists sow seeds of ragas in the big apple,” “Raga Jazz Messengers,” and “Leaders of the Raga Renaissance.” These are the headlines used to introduce Brooklyn Raga Massive (BRM) in the press. In this chapter I present BRM and the collaborators that are part of this collective. Interviews and musicians’ bios are included in order to better understand the thread of multiplicity that is intrinsic to their music identities as well as their own thoughts on the term Fusion music. Two musicians, Rez Abbasi and Rudresh Mahanthappa, are also featured who although not necessarily a part of BRM, make a case for how BRM serves as a network or urban assemblage. I begin with an ethnography from my attendance of a BRM concert/jam in November 2015 and move on to focus on two BRM co-founders/members Arun Ramamurthy and Camila Celin leading to a focus on Rez Abbasi and Rudresh Mahanthappa.
BROOKLYN RAGA MASSIVE

Figure 2.1: BRM In C performance at the Rubin Museum, August 28, 2015, credit: Lyn Hughes

BRM defines themselves as a “New York registered 501C3 arts non-profit dedicated to the Indian classical musicians of Brooklyn, NYC.” Furthermore, on their BRM artists and ensembles section they state,

There are over 20 groups that perform within our 501-C3 non profit collective, but what is unique to us is that we have been incubating several new styles of music indigenous to Brooklyn. Chamber Ragas, Carnatic jazz, African Indian collaborations as well as having some very high level straight classical performers within our ranks.\(^\text{34}\)

\(^{34}\) At the time of accessing this information in November 2015 the information was found at the following link: http://brooklynragamassive.com/brm-artists-and-ensembles/. Since then BRM has changed their website to: https://brooklynragamassive.viewcy.com/ where the information found on the artists and ensembles section is no longer listed.
When searching through their website, specifically on their “BRM electronic press kit,” many testimonials suggest that BRM is part of a larger “Raga community,” encompassing both Indian classical music as well as musicians who are interested in fusing classical and Western music together. One comment on the testimonial page states:

Though a tradition takes years to establish itself, a group of Indian raga enthusiasts are well on their way to making one of their increasingly multi-ethnic, and hip central Brooklyn neighborhood of Prospect Heights, they call themselves ‘a collective of like-minded forward thinking musicians rooted in Indian classical music.’ And apparently there’s a critical mass of those type of people in Brooklyn right now.\textsuperscript{35}

The organization even brands itself as being part of this “indigenous,” “critical mass” specifically in Brooklyn as featured by their logo, reminiscent of the MTA subway signs.

\textbf{Figure 2.2: BRM logo from brooklynragamassive.viewcy.com}

Even from the logo one gets the sense that they are bringing Indian classical music to an urban environment outside of traditional performance spaces, and almost re-creating this type of music to serve a specific community within Brooklyn. It was from these testimonials, and further information featured on their website and social media pages, I began to wonder what and who actually defines this specific community in Brooklyn and how they fit within this larger picture of Fusion music.

\textsuperscript{35} As stated in the previous footnote this information was accessed in November 2015. The hiring section (http://brooklynragamassive.com/hiring-brooklyn-raga-massive/) is no longer on BRM’s current website (as of May 2017).
Arriving to “the field:” Shapeshifter Lab, Gowanus, Brooklyn

I decided to take the Long Island Railroad from my hometown Massapequa—transferred at Jamaica station to then get to Atlantic Terminal, where I got off to wait at the Atlantic Avenue-Barclays Center stop on the subway transit line in order to take the R downtown towards Bay Ridge (the same R that BRM uses in their logo). It was not until I was waiting underground at Atlantic Ave that I began to take note of my surroundings. I found myself becoming more aware of the people who surrounded me and how this all played into my experience. I began to pay attention to the myriad demographic representation at this subway station. Usually when I travel by subway or in the city in general, I keep my head down and do not make eye contact—stare at my phone and listen to music. But in this moment, at this specific subway station, I began to take note of the socio economic make up of the space underground. Half the people were on their phones, dressed like me or in business attire. The other half seemed like they could not even afford a phone. Such a stark contrast caused me to think about conversations I have had with my parents and friends concerning gentrification in Brooklyn. The seed was planted for something that would become a larger focus later in my experience at the BRM event. My focus and pondering of my questions were quickly interrupted as a woman screamed because she saw a rat…welcome to NYC.

As I got off the subway at Union Street I bumped into my friend who I was planning on meeting. While catching up with her, we both noticed that our surroundings were very quiet. Not many people were out, the neighborhood was nice, many buildings were being renovated and those that had completed renovations looked beautiful. Seeing such grand buildings in juxtaposition of other buildings about a block away, blurring into another neighborhood, was very interesting to observe. Again, the topic of gentrification came up this time in a casual conversation. How could we not talk about this while being in area that was part of the gentrification project? As we walked a few blocks we turned the corner onto Whitwell Place. ShapeShifter Lab was not too far down, and clearly shown since it was the only storefront that had bright lights, glaring white in the darkness. Next to the front was a metal cover with graffiti on it, something that I could not make out. I interpreted these two images next to each other as a visual representation of Brooklyn—the social change related to gentrification in the area: the rise of an elite working middle class, against the backdrop of urban, street culture.
ShapeShifter Lab launched in April 2011 (interestingly around the same time BRM was officially established). It is a 4,200 square foot performance space where they host “the world’s most innovative artists who are looking for a flexible platform to present their work.”  

I found out after attending the concert that the club is situated where Park Slope and Gowanus neighborhoods overlap. It is a space that is open for recording and session work, rehearsals, showcases, lessons, master classes,

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art exhibits, and private events. Bass player Matthew Garrison is the co-owner and
creative director with his business partner, Fortuna Sung. An important marker of this
space is that it has become “a vital part of the city’s jazz ecosystem” and one of the
growing number of Brooklyn spaces programmed by musicians for musicians and
creative artists.\footnote{Nate Chinen, “Improvised Music at a Purposeful Home,” \textit{The New York Times}, last modified May 31, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/31/arts/music/improvised-music-at-a-purposeful-home.html?_r=0.} In a \textit{New York Times} article, Nate Chinen mentions that Fortuna Sung developed the business plan for the space, getting its name from “ShapeShifter,” a \textit{fusion} album Garrison released in 2004. Journalist Nate Chinen further writes,

> The ingrained ambivalence about fusion, at least among established jazz clubs in New York, was another cause Mr. Garrison sought to address with the club. ‘Where can we play?’ he said, throwing his hands up. ‘Some of those venues, there’s just no way in. So by default, what we have to do here is the exact opposite.’ … There are other potential dangers ahead, given the rapid gentrification of the neighborhood — almost always a tough omen for jazz clubs in recent years.

The gentrification issue for spaces like ShapeShifter Lab relates to a concern of rising rent prices. In 2007 Tonic, an avant-garde hub of experimental music on the Lower East Side, closed due to the rent doubling and business not following as

> high-rise condominiums tower over the space on either side, an apt illustration of the squeeze of gentrification. In some respects, it is surprising that Tonic survived as long as it did. Facing similar rent pressures, numerous clubs have shut down in recent months…\footnote{Nate Chinen, “Requiem for a Club: Saxophone and Sighs,” \textit{The New York Times}, last modified April 16, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/04/16/arts/music/16toni.html.}

Little did I know, I was entering a space that was attempting to fight the changing tides in the economy as well as socially. ShapeShifter Lab finds itself on an obscure side street on the border of Park Slope and Gowanus in order to establish a safe space
for musicians to perform whatever style they are working with. However, there is still the looming issue of the city’s lack of financial support for not only experimental music but certain types of music that do not fit generic labels within the recording industry. Reflecting back on the music performed in the space, I now see how it plays directly into these issues. The space and sounds that are created within become one, new representative entity.

THE PERFORMANCE—REFLECTIONS OF EXPERIENCE

My friend and I entered at around 8:20PM. There was no line, nor doorman in the front. We simply opened the white door into an open space that all I could think of was “hipster.” We walked up a few steps where we were met with a man—who I would find out later was one of the co-founders of BRM, David Ellenbogen, and served as the MC for the event—collecting a suggested donation of $10. After paying we passed the bar to go to where the performance area was set up: small stage to the right, many white chairs set up in front with background lights changing between white and purple. Though we were early, there were not many people present. I turned to look to the bar and noticed Arun standing there talking to people who walked in. They seemed to all know each other, possibly friends or family. I could sense the aura of community, even more of family, present but I felt excluded from this. I was an outsider.

I went up to Arun and introduced myself. We exchanged few words and decided it would be best to have an interview over phone that Sunday after the
As I took a seat I began to become aware of the space and soundscape. There was an electronic *tambura* drone playing and light chatter that increased as time went on. I noticed children were in the audience, an interesting sight to see at a music club! The audience had a mixture of ethnic backgrounds and the clothing everyone wore ranged from casual business attire (possibly just coming out of work), casual clothes, and some wore traditional Indian clothing. The age ranged from what seemed to be 8 to 45 years old, however the majority were between 20 and 30. As more people entered I began to notice everyone knew each other! It was great to be in such a friendly, familial like atmosphere, however, and I’m sure it was obvious, I felt a bit uncomfortable not being a part of it. Some people who seemed to be regulars at these events or perhaps musicians of the “raga massive” gave some odd, skeptical looks to my friend and I, thinking “oh, these people are new, who are they?” However, did not attempt to talk to us. I did not attempt to speak to them either. Instead I sat, observed, took notes, and spoke with my friend, like a fly on the wall.

It was not until around 8:50PM when Arun and Bala Skandan came to sat on stage. David welcomed everyone and introduced the mission of BRM. He mentioned how Arun served at the center of this community. Then he announced it was Arun’s 35th birthday! This was pretty shocking to both my friend and I, as we had no idea. All the event info said on both Facebook and the BRM website was that “Arun Ramamurthy & Bala Skanda present a Carnatic set that’ll have you humming

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39 Arun and I had communicated via email about my thesis and attendance of this concert.
Muthuswami Diksitar and Shyama Sastri all Thanksgiving weekend.” My identity as an outsider was furthered by the fact that it was Arun’s birthday as I started to realize that most of the people in the audience were in fact close friends and family members. Arun thanked everyone for coming and started the program. Before each piece he would explain what he was playing, the composer, and raga it was in. Between each piece the lights would change from white, purple, red, and orange. The sounds of traditional South Indian classical music were set against a backdrop of an ethereal yet very modern aura, completely removed from its typical performance space of a classic concert hall, temple, or community center.

While Arun and Bala continued to play, some entered late. Those who entered late Arun recognized and acknowledged while on stage by a head nod, smile, or actually mouthing a “hello.” Specifically, there was a man that walked in late with a leather coat, jeans, looked a bit hipster, Brooklyn yuppie. As soon as he sat down he began to keep tala. A woman who looked very posh sat next to him with a fur coat on. I would find out later (after doing further social media research on BRM) that these two are married, and are co-founders of the organization: sarod player, Camila Celin, and tabla player, Ehren Hanson. Hanson would play in the first part of the jam session following Arun’s performance.

Throughout the performance many shook their heads in praise of the musicians’ skill. Some would keep tala but others simply bobbed their head to the

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40 BRM Facebook Event Page for November 25, 2015 performance:
https://www.facebook.com/events/909271359120777/?ref=3&ref_newsfeed_story_type=regular&action_history=null&source=3&source_newsfeed_story_type=regular
music. At one point I found myself shaking my head in agreement and bobbing my head in this collective. Many would call out to the performers, “Yeah Arun!” and other vocalizations of approval. I noticed a woman sat stage left, keeping *tala* and an eye on Arun. I recognized her. This was Trina Basu, a Western classically trained violinist who also played Carnatic music. She was also Arun’s wife. As I turned to the right I noticed many more people arrived. Some pulled over more chairs to sit and others stayed at the bar creating a light chatter as a backdrop to the music.

Immediately I noticed I was part of a supportive and relaxed environment which was created by the very people present. I wondered if this was usually the aura of BRM events and not just because it was Arun’s birthday. I felt that I was at a family gathering but in a way I also felt that I was intruding on a private event. The sense of family was not only created by the fact that it was Arun’s birthday and that it was Thanksgiving Eve; it was the fact that everyone was connected, as I would find out later on social media, talking with Arun, and attending many BRM events.

This fact was furthered during the break between Arun’s performance (which ended at around 10:20PM) and the set up for the Raga Jam. Many clustered into groups, grabbing a PBR from the bar, hugging each other, hand shaking, smiling and taking pictures together. I heard exchanges of “How have you been?!” “It’s so great to see you!” and “Oh yeah remember last week’s jam?” I write in my field notes that it is great to see such a “strong sense of community and family even. Pretty great. I feel a bit awkward though. Not sure what to do if I should move around.” It was in this moment that I realized my role at this event was an audience member. Being an
outsider created an interesting experience of truly being a fly on the wall but also created some barriers when attempting to carry out fieldwork.

The first set for the Raga Jam began to set up at 10:40PM. It featured *bansuri* player, Jay Ghandi, and *tabla* player Ehren Hanson. They practiced a bit together, and checked the sound levels with the mic. At 10:50PM they were introduced and began their “jam.” However, the jam did not seem like a typical jam I would expect. The set seemed well rehearsed and not so much improvised on the spot. The familial vibe of BRM continued to be present during this session as those in front called out words of encouragement and Hanson’s wife, Camila, sat right in front of him. Also, both Ghandi and Hanson kept focused eye contact with certain members of the audience not only because they were keeping *tala* but also because they were friends! This was very interesting to observe as it happened.

About thirty minutes later Ghandi and Hanson ended their set. Since they were running out of time to fit in all of the musicians who wanted to be part of the “jam” they invited everyone who wanted to, to go on stage ending with a total of ten musicians sharing the stage together. This seemed more like a jam, not rehearsed, but improvised. As the keyboardist played a drone, imitating the rhythmic continuance of a *tambura*, the *tabla* player was explaining *adhi tala* (rhythmic structure) to the djembe player. For the djembe player, this seemed to be his first time playing in the raga jam as he did not start playing until later on. Other instruments included: female vocalist, three guitars (one acoustic), a mandolin player who used a mason jar to create a slide guitar sound, *tabla*, metal shakers and a bodhrán. It was amazing to see
so many different instruments from different backgrounds all on the same stage working together, blending to create otherworldly sounds. In this case it was Fusion created by the very instruments that were part of the collective on stage. A sense of structure was seemingly absent.

Unfortunately, I could not stay for the full raga jam session as I had to catch a train back to Long Island and left at around midnight. Once my friend and I walked out of ShapeShifter we noticed an altercation occurring across the street which seemed to be of three people: two men and one woman. The woman was crying as both men continued to yell (I could not make out what they were saying). Their dress was in clear opposition to the attire worn in the venue just a couple of feet away. This juxtaposition was powerful to observe. My curiosity turned to danger as I wanted to know what was happening, I wanted to understand what this fight meant in the larger picture of my questioning of Fusion music, the setting of this concert, and ever present topic of gentrification. As I kept on attempting to look, my friend turned to me, “Bridgid, what are you doing?! Are you crazy, stop looking! Let’s go, you’re going to get yourself punched!” As I took another glance back over my shoulder I saw the glaring white lights coming out of the ShapeShifter Lab’s entrance front, and the fight on the other side of the street in complete darkness in front of a building not touched by renovation yet and right in front of a school’s gated playground.
ARUN RAMAMURTHY

I interviewed Arun a few days after the concert which aided in sifting through my questions and thoughts that were generated after the performance. I first asked Arun about his musical background, his influences and how he found a path to blend different styles of music. Born and raised in New Jersey, his blending of styles began at an early age since he started playing Western classical violin and from the ages of 9 to 14 he did both Western classical and Carnatic music side by side. When he was playing in orchestras, including the New Jersey state youth orchestra he says,

I found I was being [told] ‘your bow is supposed to be an up bow here not a down bow’ and everybody had to be very strict about being together. Where as in Carnatic music lessons I was having a teacher [who] was teaching how to improvise, how to be free and explore ragas. I was totally drawn into that.41

This led Arun to focus more on Carnatic music and although he is also Western classically trained, he uses his Carnatic training as his musical foundation when approaching collaborations with others.

When Arun was around 15 years old, his father met the Mysore brothers duo—Mysore Nagaraj and Dr. Mysore Manjunath—who would become not only Arun’s gurus but, in Arun’s words, his brothers. Once his father befriended them, he arranged and brought them on tour in the United States in the 90s to the late 2000s. Because of this they would stay at Arun’s house all the time as Arun reminisces:

…And they were violinists and They were really cool, they spoke the same language as my parents spoke you know everybody in Carnatic music speaks Tamil but these guys are from Karnataka, from Bangalore, Mysore. Where my family is from…So there was that very close tie there and then instantly they became like family to us and to me gurus and older brothers.

41 All blocked quotes in this section are from a phone interview with Arun Ramamurthy on November 30, 2015.
Arun mentions throughout the interview that he is *American*. For him, having these
two great gurus in his house not only fostered his musical identity but also connected
him to this heritage. He further mentions that it is the younger brother, Dr. Mysore
Manjunath, who was very influential in his quests for collaboration. As he talked
about his experience with learning from him it opened into a dialogue of his own
thoughts and approaches to collaboration with musicians from other styles:

He [Dr. Mysore Manjunath] very proactively tells me to listen to other kinds of
music, to allure other things, take it all in, ingest it and so with guidance like that I
felt comfortable opening up with that foundation from these great violinists and the
fact that I’m American. You know I grew up listening to the same stuff that
everybody else was listening to at 13, 14. I listened to alt rock and hip hop and
Wutang Clan and you know Pearl Jam and Radiohead…these are all major loves of
mine. So I think as you get older and as you get better at the instrument you’re able to
understand how to collaborate […] And that’s the key. You need to get to a point
where collaboration makes sense…Which is kind of forced collaboration when
you’re not ready for it, it’s contrived. It’s just gonna be something you’re trying to
force but when you do it, when it’s something organic it can be something where you
can take in things; you’re able to ingest it and let it come out as your style […] when
I play with different bands, different kinds of bands, I might play a little bit different
way. It’s not always conscious. Sometimes its subconscious. I listen to the musicians
around me and I play based on what they’re doing but it’s always going to be me. It’s
always going to be rooted in Carnatic but its going to be very true to my influences
and my sort of just different things I’ve heard over my life.

From such an open description of his background and influences to shape his
musical identity, we continued to have a conversation about working with others. He
mentions that in order to make a collaboration work you must find a

space for everything to make sense to everybody…that’s why it’s all about the people
you play with because some people just do whatever it takes, will bend over
backwards to try to make something really fresh and I find people in BRM are very
much like that…we’re all trying to do something new, something fresh. We’re
excited about learning from each other we’re all friends we hangout all the time.
There’s a lot of comradery there’s a lot of teaching each other, learning from each
other so we’re breeding that kind of music.
Now everything made sense from my own experiences at the BRM event. Arun’s statement validated my assumptions of the organization’s sense of community that it served more as a family, or friend network. The concerts hosted by BRM are more of social gatherings. I mentioned to him that was the vibe I got while at the event, that it seems more like a family, to which he responded, “I’m so glad you got that! That’s true!” I then asked for more information about BRM, now in it’s fifth year (as of 2016 when interview occurred):

You know we all individually have been doing a lot of this kind of work, meaning doing Indian classical music playing in NYC […] I was doing a series Carnatic Sundays at Cornelius Street Café, a great jazz club in West Village…The idea was to kind of bring our music to the people as opposed to…the thing is, Indian classical music…is in venues [like] temples, community centers, in prestigious concert halls but they are all places where the average person or the 20 something year old, 30 something is not going to actually really go to, they might never even hear about it. The idea behind Carnatic Sundays and BRM is to really bring it to the people. Do it in the jazz club, a bar where people like me and you would go grab a drink and be able to listen to music the same way we go to listen to jazz or listen to rock like the same way we listen to popular music that people want to checkout, that’s what we want to do. I did a lot of these projects for a few years before BRM actually happened. We were all doing stuff like this and it just felt at some point that there was so much happening that we were all doing so much we were all playing in each others’ band we all had our own projects that were really interesting…I was looking around like man if not just this cross over stuff this is traditional pure music at the highest level, these are really fantastic musicians anywhere you are…We just realized how many of us were around and how much was happening…everyone started hanging out more. It was this very natural thing it was bound to happen…It was just that we reached this critical mass of all these great artists, we needed to do something.

…and we started right here like 3 blocks away from my house in Prospect Heights at [a] country Western throwback bar… we did a few shows there before BRM officially started and then Eric Fraser, Sameer Gupta did a few there because they were into it and they were booking in our neighborhood. Then we did the BRM thing Monday nights. It was always the same concept. Opening band, jam session and the jam session is wide open. Since then its taken off, moved to a few different places. Have grown quite a bit.

…We always have different people coming. There’s always new people that come and play. It’s pretty impromptu. It’s not just one session where we throw everyone up there. The night last week it was kind of like that because we were running out of time and we had 10 people that wanted to play and we didn’t want to say no to anyone so we were like yeah go ahead like go play! But if we had more time we can
kind of curate. That’s an art form in itself to assess who’s there ok you guys go then you guys. That’s the goal. Difficult thing to do. No one gets turned away. We’re about cultivating this community with open arms.

Hearing the history behind BRM and the internal make-up of the organization brought everything together for my own experience. As I looked at Instagram to see pictures of these musicians working together, I found that they also meet together and jam in each other’s homes. This music is not just confined within a performance space like ShapeShifter Lab. Rather, it goes beyond into the home, because it is part of these people’s identity and who they are. Seeing this made me recognize the importance and application of virtual fieldwork (Cooley et al. 2008), I am able to see things within another field which helps further my understanding of an event and the people involved.

As my experiences at the BRM event fell into my larger questions on Fusion I decided to ask Arun his thoughts about using the term Fusion, as seen from Niko Higgins work (Higgins 2013), it is a largely contested term yet is an expressive culture within itself. How do we label such a music? Arun responded with the following:

What I think is important and what’s great about BRM and what’s important in general about doing something like this, cross over, is that you are really trying to understand other musical cultures and you’re trying to step inside their shoes, be them, with them…only then can you really understand what it is to play that music…The word Fusion I think has a bad rap…Like fusion is sort of technically the word. You’re putting things together, making them one…you’re making something new, new genre of music that I don’t want to label. I don’t want to label anything more. Like the whole title of world music to me is bogus what the hell does that mean? There’s a lot of labels because there has to be industry. But I think the core of what we are doing and what music actually means labels mean nothing because its all music, its all the same stuff and people come from different places. The same way I am different from a Carnatic violinist, born and bred in Chennai. We’re very different
people. That’s the same thing about music. You would never say me and that guy are the same thing. That’s my take on fusion.

When Arun mentions the history of Fusion having a bad rap he speaks to failed attempts at creating Fusion as “shallow ventures [may] have dirtied the word” as some “throw instruments together and play the same old music and call it fusion.”

With these attempts for Arun, “there’s nothing there that really is doing anything new.” So this idea of keeping something fresh, and creating something unique and new is attached to ventures in Fusion. His comments on labeling are interesting and caused a moment of self-reflection, as I revisited my position in the field, my research, and the field of ethnomusicology. As a researcher we find ourselves constantly attempting to categorize and label to reach an even level of understanding. By doing this, we are playing into industry processes and taking away sometimes very organic and neutral processes that need no name. Perhaps some find the term contested because of the resistance to label their own music.

FINAL REFLECTIONS

After experiencing BRM and talking to Arun, I met with a recent Wesleyan alum, Amanda Scherbenske, at the Society for Ethnomusicology Conference in 2015. We talked about our research areas and I mentioned that I have recently become interested in Indian classical Fusion music. She mentioned that she new of an organization that I may be interested in…Brooklyn Raga Massive. Scherbenske’s work (2013) has focused on improvisation artists in NYC and knew of many that were connected with BRM. The way that this organization is able to penetrate
through and create junctions with different music communities (cultures even) is fascinating. BRM serves as a foundational network in New York for the Indian classical community, with ties to other musicians in other genres, especially jazz, like Rudresh Mahanthappa. Although Rudresh has not necessarily played at a BRM sponsored event, he has worked with many of the musicians that are a part of the collective like Dan Weiss (percussionist/tabla player for Rudresh’s Indo-Pak Coalition featuring Rez Abbasi on guitar), and Arun. Rudresh’s connection to Arun ties back to Brooklyn, NY:

Arun Ramamurthy lived literally across the street from me in Brooklyn. So we used to hang out pretty regularly. And I knew his wife Trina for many years before I even met him. Actually you know what’s funny is when Kinsmen first performed back in 2005, at our premier performances we needed someone to put tala and the mridangam player at the time knew Arun. Arun took a bus from Jersey to put tala for us. It was pretty funny. So then we connected many years later. Arun and I are in very good touch still. I checked out a few things [of BRM]. They used to play at the Branded Saloon which was this little place on Vanderbilt around the corner from where me and Arun lived, so I used to run by there to check them out but it seems like they are very mobilized. They’re doing what seems to be interesting stuff. (Rudresh Mahanthappa, skype interview with author, January 16, 2017).

Furthermore, BRM is creating a hub where it is “safe” to perform music that does not necessarily fit into any label. This non-for-profit organization fosters an open community, family, and friend network consisting of people who are mostly musicians serving as both performer and audience member at events. In the jam sessions and/or concerts, the music being played and the act of participating in such performances mediates different identities coming together. A junction is created and experienced as a space of coming together, disembodied, and separated from difference.
How does one define Fusion? Can Fusion be defined by the very place? Arun’s performance at the ShapeShifter Lab was not Fusion music. It was a very formal classical Carnatic music concert with a set of seven songs that followed the formal classical program. However, the space they played in—a bar standing five feet away, lavish changing of lighting, hipster vibes—is, as Arun has mentioned, definitely not the formal classical venue for such music. Later in this thesis, I question if this brings up a contestation of space or a blurring of space which further perpetuates the shifting of sacred and secular spaces most importantly for Carnatic music given its moving from the temples to public spheres which was first only within concert halls and now at nifty, niche-like bar venues for live music. My questions enter bigger themes of environment for music and how music is performed in these spaces, in this case specifically related to gentrification.

As Higgins mentions, Fusion in Chennai is an “unexamined site of expressive culture” and “provides a unique domain to understand how musicians in Chennai represent the always-changing relations of India and the West through their discourse about music and musical sound” (Higgins 2013:1). I would argue that the same possibly reigns true in New York City. However, for musicians like Arun, it seems that participating and performing Fusion music does not necessarily present contestation but a junction rather, a place of relativity and a sense of home. As these musicians of BRM are part of their own expressive culture, I observe that they are part of a mediation of changes, relations, and contestations. However, a conundrum is created as it is within a seemingly contested sound/practice.
CAMILA CELIN

Camila Celin is from Bogota, Colombia. In Kolkata she learns from sarod player Sougata Roy Choudhury, and in New York she learns from sitar maestro Pandit Krishna Bhatt. In 2009 she was nominated for a Grammy for best world music album in collaboration with slide guitar maestro Debashish Bhattacharya. She has been an active performer in her native Colombia, the U.S. and India. Camila has composed music for several films, for theater as well as for commercials and lives between New York City and Kolkata, India.  

On March 17, 2017 I had the pleasure to meet with Camila Celin in her apartment in Prospect Heights. I heard Camila debut her Devi Tribute at Pioneer Works on March 16, 2016 at Pioneer Works. Almost a year later I finally had the chance to meet with Camila and discuss her music, her thoughts on Fusion, and learn more about her as a musician. Once I entered her apartment, we got right into discussing her musical background and fascination as well as inspiration to pursue Indian classical music:

I started playing guitar when I was 9. I was doing a lot of South American music. It was all South American music. I used to sing. I learned boleros, cumbias, all kinds of rhythms from South America and Colombia. Then I went to school, I went to the music academy. I started doing classical guitar, I did little jazz, working on technique and solfege and all of this stuff, then after that I moved to New York.

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43 In Chapter 3 I discuss Camila’s Devi Tribute project as it was part of the Women’s Raga Massive concert I attended at Pioneer Works in March 2016.
Camila quickly back tracks to when she first encountered Indian Classical music in Colombia:

We were in Colombia and a couple of musicians from the scene went to India and one of them got a tabla and the other one got a sitar. So then they came back and they came back with this tha-kha-dina method of rhythm “takadimi taka dina,” all this stuff. Everyone kind of got crazy about it. I remember just one day in the academy when I was thinking that I wanted to go the deepest I possibly could with music in my life. So when these guys came back from India it was clear to me that Indian music was the most developed art form in music in the world […] So that was always in the back of mind. I wanted to [go] to India [but] I was here in New York. I did a little bit of flamenco, little bit of jazz, just kept on doing [playing]. I played cello for 8 years, composing…so I started performing the whole time. Then I met my husband, my current husband [tabla player Ehren Hanson] and he had just gotten a scholarship to go to India to study for two years and he invited me... I was like yeah I definitely want to come to India! So everything was kind of perfect for me to come to India, that was about 11 years ago.

She then recounted that time eleven years ago in India:

The first month I arrived to India I pretty much spent it practicing in my room with my guitar. I went to study with this guitar player, renowned master Debashish Bhattacharya. I took some classes with him and he opened up my mind…He just gave me a raga. And he’s like this is the raga up and down, here’s some exercises that were more [than what] I have ever done on my instrument. I spent the next year working on that raga on the guitar. I did chords all kinds of [creating harmonies.] [I thought] ‘what can I do with this?’ and the thing that was so satisfying is, it was a scale I never would have come across in the Western tradition.

I asked Camila what raga it was that she worked on for that year. She answered, “Nat Bhairav. I’ll play it for you. Do you know it?” Before I could answer she went to pick up her guitar saying, “it’s all major. It has the minor sixth. So it is this type of thing.” She then played the raga beautifully on her guitar going up—S R2 G2 M1 P D1 N2 S—including all the nuances and gamakas of the raga. Then she came down playing—S’ N2 D1 P M1 G2 R2 S. I would later learn that this particular raga incites feelings of grandeur and devotion in the listeners. After playing through the raga she put down her guitar and went back to that time she first heard the raga, “So
then I just was like ah! This is so different and its amazing. I could just do whatever it is I do but using that scale.” Camila then went on to tell me about the second year she spent working with Bhattacharya. When she arrived for the second time he asked her what she wanted to do for the year. Camila recalls, “So I played this piece. I was improvising on it, all the chords I arranged and stuff and that was super fortunate ‘cause…he really liked it! He invited me to play on his album…and that album got nominated for a Grammy.” Celin is listed as the rhythm guitar player for Debashish Bhattacharya’s *Calcutta Chornicles: Indian Slide-Guitar Odyssey* (2008) which was nominated for the Grammy Award for Best Traditional World Music Album in 2009.

After playing on Bhattacharya’s record, Camila became more and more obsessed with Indian music. She started to listen to different masters and tried to follow them. She recalls trying to follow sitar masters on guitar mentioning “there were all these blocks because I have frets on my guitar so I was driving myself crazy.” Changing her technique to playing over the nail on the guitar for ease of sliding, she realized she still could not capture all the nuances of Indian music on her guitar. She thought of inventing her own instrument—a guitar which was fretless and had synthetic strings. Her husband, Ehren Hanson, then mentioned to her that the instrument she was thinking of “inventing” already existed—the sarod. At the age of twenty-seven she took on playing the sarod. However, her decision to take on learning a new instrument and devoting her life to the sarod came at the same time as a new spiritual practice for Camila. The spiritual connection ultimately means everything to her:
First of all, this spiritual practice kind of came about two years before I took on sarod. In those two years I was able to completely change the wiring of my brain and my beliefs. I changed my beliefs, I changed my mental patterns and I trained myself to direct my mind and think what I want to think as opposed to thoughts just thinking me.

This allowed me to take on the sarod at 27 and to be like I’m going to do it and I’m going to make a career out of it and I’m going to be good. Seven months later I performed at my own wedding! It was a bold move because all of my friends were already professionals and so I was going to go back to being a beginner and without the spiritual practice…my ego would have never been able to have done that. Impossible. But then, because of the spiritual practice…I started to learn really fast. Faster then I ever did with guitar. Things that would take me 3 years on guitar would take me a week [on the sarod]. It was tapping into something else, greater than just the human effort. So then, the first [official] concert I played was at a packed audience in Omega Institute. …That’s kind of what happened with Indian music and this is just the classical aspect.

Our conversation then moved to discussing Camila’s involvement with BRM and BRM’s journey to becoming a non profit organization. In referring to BRM as her family she mentions, “they are all my brothers and sisters. It is absolutely a family with the masters.” Camila credits Neel Murgai’s (BRM co-founder, sitarist) partner Seema to be the one who really got BRM organized. In Camila’s words,

She got us in this other mentality and then we started getting organized and we started having committees: the peer committee, booking committee, education committee, etc. We have…it’s like a monster! I mean I don’t even know…I’m in the channel I mean I get involved just with the things that I enjoy and stuff like that but it’s a full on organization that is running well.

I mentioned to Camila my own observations of BRM—of how it seems to be more of a network, more mobilized as BRM is bringing this sense of Brooklyn outside of the geographical boundaries of Brooklyn to Austin, TX, India, Africa, etc. In regards to this point she elaborates on how BRM functions as an organization/network of musicians:

It became a global organization…there are all these musicians I mean there’s people in the organization that I don’t even know! ...There are new musicians coming in constantly and so if a musician wants to get involved and wants to have a little bit of
leverage in the organization they have to come and jam—bring their instrument a lot and then volunteer, come to the meetings help out and [then] they start getting hired for bigger shows.

While talking about BRM’s functioning as an organization, I mention how the audience demographic is always different at BRM concerts. One of my main observations is how a BRM concert pulls in not just only an audience interested in Indian music but also those interested in jazz, neither or both, etc. I mentioned to Camila of how I think this speaks to how music can not necessarily be bounded by identity as she responded with a vigorous nod of the head. I then asked her specifically if that is part of BRM’s mission—to reach out to a greater audience to teach and open people’s eyes:

One hundred percent. As a matter of fact, we’re just starting a new educational effort which is to educate our followers about raga music. We’re starting these [concert] talks…and we’re going to have videos on our website that we release [which] talks about how to keep tinta, what raga this is, what to listen for, etc. Because the truth of the matter is that if one knows how to listen to this music one can get the satisfaction from it. So much to listen too. So yes it is definitely one of the things we’re into for sure. Educating the people for sure, as musicians we have to.

Camila then went on to talk about what sets her and her husband apart from the rest of BRM, as they are involved with another scene:

I think out of the bunch me and my husband are some of the ones that are in touch with a different type of scene like we’re very much in touch with the burner community and electronic house music, all kinds of stuff like that and these people…it’s hard for them to sit down for a serious music. So what we are trying to do this year is to bridge it a little bit. And make those people realize that there is great satisfaction with deep listening and it can do something to you and for you that is fruitful for your life and I think we’re doing pretty good.

It came to a point in our conversation that I mentioned the “dirty word” of fusion to Camila, asking her thoughts and feelings towards the label of Fusion:

I’m not one of those people who hate the word fusion and there’s a lot of people who are like ‘eewweehh!’ To me its like yeah sure its fusion! If I’m taking some of my
roots and then I’m fusing it with raga like…[do] you have a better word? … I think there is good fusion and I think there is bad fusion…I have not heard a lot of good fusion in India because what happens in India is that a lot of instrumentalists are solo instrumentalists so when they try to a band many times they are just like “ok, my turn!” I think that if fusion is done correctly, people study a little bit ‘what’s this about?’ And how can we interlock this thing so they work together not just throwing them in there. If you want to put congas with tabla like ‘doon da doon din ta’ where are you going to put these things? So that they don’t cancel each other out. Like compose it! And then it can be something that is tasteful. But other than that I mean sure I don’t know if I would call fusion to do Western song and then throw some timeline there…To me it’s not fusion. You’re just playing on top of each other, you’re just jamming with different instruments. Real fusion to me is really bringing them together and having some preparation, some thought is put into it.

I found Camila’s comments to be interesting. It seemed that for her composition needed to be present in order for “good fusion” to happen. Jamming for her seemed to be different. I wanted to clarify this with her so I asked “for you the approach to jamming is different then going on to a fusion project of sorts?”

Yeah. Think about it like think about it. Now there’s different levels of how much one thinks about something and that really depends on the musician and their analytical mind and stuff. Some musicians are more with just go with the feel which is kind of what I do. Somebody like my husband is thinking about what is behind theoretically [calculating] so this is a 3 and 4 rhythm and this is that and how these two can go together. For me its more I hear it and feel it out. [Then I] try to bring it together.

Although not necessarily directly answering my question, her appreciation and necessity for a thought process to be present when engaging with “good” fusion projects is telling. At least for Camila, it is about bringing two musics together in a thought out way, to have a plan and not just throw them together. A sense of mastery and embodiment of rules are then definitely present within her own musical practice and how she perceives music projects of others.

We then discussed how it is to be a woman in this music scene. I mention to her that one rarely sees female sarod players.
I think that professionally speaking it’s better. It’s an advantage being a Western woman playing the sarod because it’s almost like people are curious about it, Indians are curious about it. I have a video that has thousands of views because I look different and I feel like when people click on that video they’re like “Can this woman play? Or is she going to do a bunch of nonsense.”

Because Camila is not necessarily Indian (nor a man), she is a part of breaking down this expectation of master musicians belonging to the heritage of the music. While she does have a spiritual affinity to Indian classical music, she also has a clear mastery of the instrument, which is surprising for some to watch/hear at first. She continued to tell me that she feels that she is “a bridge between a certain type of people and Indian classical music” because she hangs out with the burner, festival community.

REZ ABBASI

“Abbasi creates a sinuous, sometimes haunting, and always evocative blend of contemporary jazz and Asian influences.” —Time Out New York

“neither Eastern nor Western, but effortlessly global ... proof that jazz can be as vital and boundary-pushing as ever.” —All About Jazz (from Asia Society promo)

Voted #1 Rising Star Guitarist in the 2013 DownBeat Critics Poll and placed in the “top-ten Guitarists” in 2015’s poll, Rez Abbasi continues to push boundaries. Born in Karachi, Pakistan, removed at the age of four to the vastness of Southern California, schooled at the University of Southern California and the Manhattan School of Music in jazz and classical music, along with a pilgrimage in India under the tutelage of master percussionist, Ustad Alla Rakha, Rez Abbasi is a vivid synthesis of all the above stated influences and genres. Making New York home for the past 25 years, Abbasi has developed a unique sound both as a composer and an instrumentalist and is considered by many to be one of the foremost modern jazz guitar players the world over. He has honed his skills with performances throughout Europe, Canada, the U.S., Mexico and India. He has performed and recorded with many jazz greats including, Grammy winner Ruth Brown, Peter Erskine, Kenny Werner, Barre Phillips, Tim Berne, Michael Formanek, Billy Hart, Marvin ‘Smitty’ Smith, Gary Thomas, Dave Douglas, Rudresh Mahanthappa, Mike Clark, Tony Malaby, George Brooks, Ronu Majumdar, Kadri Gopalnath, Vishwa Mohan Bhatt, Marilyn Crispell, Greg Osby, Howard Levy and a host of others (official bio from artist’s website).

A flexible guitarist who plays mostly fusion but can also handle post-bop, hard bop and standards … (bio from All Music).
When I had the chance to talk to Rez Abbasi via phone I first asked him when he decided and what inspired him to really engage with this expression of South Asian identity in his music. Did it first start out with his time with Alla Rakha or did it happen even before that?

When I was 18 I saw a house concert with Zakir Hussain playing tabla and Shivkumar Sharma playing the [santoor]. It was a house concert, that opened me up into this realm that I wasn’t really involved in before that because I was much more into Western music and I really only heard like Bollywood around the home and certain things at the weddings and stuff maybe some qawwali or something on that line of ghazal, my dad used to sing ghazal. So you know things like that. So here I saw a real virtuosic musician and instrumentalist. It was just quite amazing to me. From there I had to eventually grasp that side of me and…well you know I was 18, I wasn’t really a composer or anything at that time so I wasn’t quite thinking in terms of that but I think it planted a seed in me that sort of was blossoming all along after that. Going through college I studied jazz but I always had this inclination to go and check out Indian music, classical music. Around [when I was] 20 or so because I did study with an Indian classical teacher when I was 20, that kind of started the whole thing. Speaking to the planting of a seed from seeing this house concert when he was 18 years old led me to mention that within Abbasi’s projects the musical elements are not necessarily overtly Indian music. His compositions and performances are an expression of how the music and inspiration truly become integrated and embodied.

In response to this thought Rez commented:

Exactly. That’s a key right there, it’s not overt. And you know I don’t want to make it overt because it just takes away from some of the beauty, for me. Some people are into that and that’s great. But I like to really keep it as genuine and as organic as possible. And definitely sometimes, I don’t even sort of look to Indian music as a way of forming that compositional expression you know? I’m hoping its just in me by now that I don’t have to actually think in terms of Indian music while I’m writing. (emphasis added)

The conversation turned to discussing Invocation’s performance of Unfiltered Universe which is a new project that “explores Carnatic classical music from
Southern India through the idiom of jazz” (Asia Society promo). I mentioned to Rez that the element of Carnatic music seemed to be emphasized in the advertising. He responded by giving a background of previous projects *Invocation* has produced:

That project particularly we’ve done three, this is our third record. The first one I was sort of wanting to implement Hindustani music which is the North Indian music. My wife is a Hindustani vocalist [Kiran Ahluwalia] she sang on that record. I was able to sort of find a good balance between Western harmonies with sort of raga based and loosely based raga because you know we’re doing jazz so it’s really hard to retain a raga but you know she was the element that did that. So that was our first record and I really enjoyed that. The second record, I wanted it to be more informed by qawwali music which is something from where I’m from which is Pakistan and so I purposely didn’t use a vocalist because qawwali is all about like 4 or 5 vocals at the same time and again I didn’t want to do the obvious. In that sense that was the second record and it sort of highlighted grooves, and forward momentum, you know kind of things that I hear in qawwali music that are very much part of that music as well as some melodic motives and stuff. So this is the third project and it’s the idea of a trilogy. Carnatic music is the southern part of India. I sort of assimilated everything I’ve done previous and also incorporated the Carnatic…

So, it’s not just the Carnatic that you’re going to hear it’s all the other stuff and obviously my jazz and my rock influences and again there are some rhythmical punctuations…that’s what I hear a lot in Carnatic music, [these] real additive kind of rhythms and its really a rhythmically based music you know? So that’s what I wanted to do in this project…they’re not vastly different but enough. Everything is about subtly and so there are enough differences within that to call for three different records.

Although being inclusive of many different influences, I pushed to ask if he had listen to any particular Carnatic musicians or specific ragas as he was working on this third and final record with *Invocation*:

The interesting thing is by the time this project rolled around I had been playing a lot with a Carnatic dance troupe that does bharata natyam dance from Minneapolis, the Raga Mala. We had a year and a half of rehearsing and performing so that was a big influence obviously because I watched them dance to these rhythms and hearing the melodic content really helped me digest that whole sound…the dance project was also with Rudresh Mahanthappa. Ten years ago I also did a project with him with Kadri Golpanath, the great South Indian Carnatic saxophone player…and Kadri Kumari who was the violinist on that project. [That was] also influential to me…And then of course I was listening to other Carnatic music [at that time]. It’s an organic process. For me it is about implementing certain things but not rigidly, not over implying like ‘okay this is my Carnatic project and next time I’m going to do this
Speaking to his organic process in composing in these different projects, I mentioned to Rez that in the third piece he played, entitled “Thinking,” at the Invocation concert at Asia Society in December 2016, it sounded like the guitar solo had a specific use of reverb, sampling or overlay. He answered, “It’s a backwards delay that I use. I thought it really helps me to sort evoke some of this Indian influence in my own way without trying to sound like a sitar or sarod. It just brings this sound to a very modern level [where] you can imply microtones and all kind of stuff (emphasis added).” He further mentions that he wishes to withhold the sense of spiritual expression that is so much a part of these Indian musical forms, specifically stating that he’s not going to put his music “against a sitar or something like that…there’s non point of [him] playing sitar or saord so I might as well go with the flow.”

Our conversation then turned to focus on how his different projects are not necessarily fusion nor world music, however, he is still faced with the imposition of labels within different marketing platforms and newspaper reviews. I asked him what his thoughts were on this situation. He answered:

At this point it’s an age old argument. The idea of what fusion implies and if you want to [look] at the genre from the 70s which was a jazz genre and then…it’s putting me against the wall to call it fusion because some of that music I love but a lot of it I couldn’t stand. It’s not a fusion genre status it is…the idea of fusion [is] if you just de-energize it from that 70s period it’s not such a bad thing. Everything is relatively a fusion of some sort you can call it hybrid if you want. But now even that is getting overblown. We have so many influences how do you stay true to yourself and at the same time not be labeled in any certain way you know? I tend to mix up my projects a lot so really I’m very hard to label but of course people call me a fusion guitarist because that’s just the way it is. My lifespan which has nothing to do with jazz hardly and then I play in these other groups but I sort of incorporate the Indian
element and I play in sort of straight jazz groups that have nothing to do with Indian really. So you know it’s a modern age musician.

We then discussed the band Shakti where he commented:

That was a band I heard when I was 21. Someone played it for me and I loved it just because this opened guitar tuning with tabla just floored me. The second the guy put the needle on, you know back then it was obviously vinyl and so it was a beautiful sound and the textures appealed to me right away. It is an amazing band, there’s no doubt, the thing is it’s more of an Indian group than it is a jazz group by a large percentage you know 70 or 80% Indian and what I do is sort of the opposite sort of like 70% Western meaning not only jazz but orchestral music and all of those things that influence us and then I try to add that 30, not add its not like that kind of way because I grew up with it but you know I’m conscious of that 30/40% influence. And so yeah Shakti is great. But its like a guitarist went into an Indian band, you know. The main thing it lacks is harmony. Without harmony its really hard to say its jazz.

Abbasi’s comment on harmony is important. This for him is what delineates a sense of genre. He goes on to describe music as raga based versus music that intrinsically has harmony. Of course, many may agree with Rez’s own opinion/perception. He further discusses raga and harmony concerning improvisation and what brings these two musics together, a sense of mastery being key for musical expression within a certain genre:

Improvisation is one of the key components that brings any two musics together. Especially when you have jazz involved. But you know it’s very different playing over harmony than playing over one chord. There’s a huge world of difference there! You improvise on one chord all night, it can sound obviously amazing but you know, as a jazz musician I might be a little bit underwhelmed by that you know [laughs] unless if it’s a master Indian classical artist you know. Any of these masters that dedicate their entire being to sort of introducing/opening up a raga that’s a different thing.

Jazz is a critical foundation for Rez’s music. After all, one of his greatest inspirations for music is John Coltrane with his “dedication and his warped speed in terms of how fast he grew and he kept going.” Other inspirations include: Keith Jarred, Jim Hall, Alan Holsworth, and John Scofield.
RUDRESH MAHANTHAPPA

The saxophonist/composer hybridizes progressive jazz and South Indian classical music in a fluid and forward-looking form reflecting his own experience growing up a second-generation Indian-American. Just as his personal experience is never wholly lived on one side of the hyphenate or the other, his music speaks in a voice dedicated to forging a new path forward. (official bio from artist’s website)

Like Rez Abbasi, Rudresh Mahanthappa is another musician who as been labeled in accordance to his ethnicity + the F word. As mentioned in many interviews, his parents are from South India and in the 1960s moved to Boulder Colorado, where Rudresh grew up. In spite of his Indian heritage, he didn’t pay much attention to Indian music. He studied composition and alto saxophone at Berkeley College of Music. When talking with Rudresh, I started by asking him his compositional processes with different projects and how he works with both jazz and Indian music structures which led to him expressing a goal of always remaining authentic in his music:

Some things are coming from a traditional base. I mean for example with Kadri Golpanath, that’s the Kinsmen project, that was all very raga based because it had to be because that’s the world [Golpanath] knows. But generally, you know I guess some things can be raga based but…I’m always thinking about how to be authentic…I don’t know if I really position any particular approach as being more than one or the other…then there’s obviously projects like the APEX project with Bunky Green which was just—with a couple of minor exceptions—was like a straight up jazz project. But again, that was because I was working with this 75-year-old living legend of jazz.

So I think sometimes the instrumentation or the personalities you’re working with can dictate that more but as far as like some sort of artistic mission, you know I was never coming from those places in any sort of literal way. I mean I guess there is a lot of raga based stuff that’s raga based jazz that’s been written, that’s really terrible…Where it’s really kind of like ‘oh we’re being exotic and we’re playing the scale up and down’ [and something like that] I absolutely avoid.

I’m more concerned with the approach. If something can be kind of tala oriented but it’s not literally that happening, that’s much more intriguing to me and that really makes sense because I’m kind of seeing that middle space between something that is both jazz and Indian classical or that’s maybe closer to being neither than it is both.
When discussing many of his projects in past interviews there is an emphasis on how his own music is more than the “watered down ‘east meets West’” and a complete rejection of the Fusion word. As far as working with other musicians in these different projects he says, “that’s half of the compositional process is to actually find the right people to make the music happen,” because everyone he is working with are those that know about/are well versed in Indian music (concerning both rhythm and melody). I then asked Rudresh his thoughts on avoiding the pitfall of getting into exotic expressions of music and entering into the “dirty word” pitfall of Fusion. Even more specifically, I asked if he thinks it is necessary to have a mastery or virtuosity to then engage with playing with different kinds of music:

I mean I think that certainly helps but…the important thing is knowledge and respect. Often times—and you know this goes both ways—or it has happened many times where Western musicians are dealing with something non Western and they really deal with it superficially and it happens from the other way too. I mean there are these Indian musicians that really feel like they’re doing something you know Western or even jazz but they never actually even heard Duke Ellington or John Coltrane, you know? …Some people are quick to kind of throw things together and yeah, that’s where the word Fusion comes in. I mean I think its really about respect, respecting all the traditions that you are working with but also feeling like you know enough about them and to ask the right questions really and then…I mean that’s what some of this music is doing, it’s actually asking questions.

It really wasn’t until 2008 that I felt kind of equipped to start working with Indian musicians in a more formal way, particularly with that Kinsmen project because I think up until then I felt like I didn’t have, I didn’t know as much as I wanted to know number one, and I hadn’t really figured out ways in which I could create music that kind of highlights everybody and challenges everybody simultaneously, and really puts forth something that is kind of neither and both genre wise.

Rudresh’s statement of creating music that is neither and both genre wise led me to ask what his thoughts are when people call his music Indian Jazz and if he actually refers to his own music in this way:
No, I don’t even know what that means! No, I would not call it Indian Jazz. When somebody says that I always think that’s really, really hilarious. There are some really good jazz musicians from India who are playing straight up, straight ahead jazz. I mean, is that Indian Jazz? I don’t know. Yeah I mean that’s pretty rough. You know it’s…as multicultural we are this idea of global citizenry as human beings we still like to put things into boxes. There are times where I have played festivals in Europe. I think in Europe more than in the US in part of the publicity efforts, they always list where a band is from. I mean I can’t tell you how many times my band is listed and it says India. It’s a bit strange but maybe that’s some sort of exotic marketing or something.

Exotic marketing. This was an issue that I had been interested in deconstructing throughout this project. Often I would see in programs certain words and terms, like Fusion, featured to explain the music and musician’s identity, however, many would then reject this term. Of course, this is not necessarily a new issue or problem. However, I was interested in how these musicians—especially Rudresh since he has been so outspoken of his rejection of the “F word”—particularly positioned themselves in these situations of the imposition of hyphenated labels. I asked Rudresh how he dealt with such marketing dilemmas and his opinions on the labeling process in the music industry. He first answered, “Well it’s usually too late by then to think about it. To some degree I just put my head down and do what I do.” Rudresh then began to talk about audience engagement and his views on the positionality of jazz musicians:

Overall I’m more concerned with reaching a larger music loving audience than reaching a jazz audience. Again with those two albums, *Kinsmen* and *Apti* [both came out in 2008], there were a lot of people that bought those albums that weren’t really jazz fans that might not even own any other jazz records. They just kind of saw it for what it is. That’s what it kind of struck me that kind of…I mean this gets into these larger issues of how jazz musicians position themselves and you know we’re at a point where jazz musicians are playing for this limited audience that is mostly made up of other musicians or a generation that is literally dying off. And I think a lot of that has to do with trying to live some sort of jazz dream that doesn’t actually exist anymore instead of just kind of trying to figure where they fit into the world culture of 2017.
This idea of a musician figuring out how to “fit into the world” carried into a deeper conversation on labels and human nature to create cultural boxes:

…As far as these labels…I think it’s human nature. I don’t really fault human nature for having to come up with these categories and expressions. The reality is if we had the luxury of having people who take the time, we would/our music would be described in a couple of paragraphs instead of a couple of two or three words. But no one is really going to read that.

…I mean you know language does fail to some degree but I don’t really see another situation necessarily. I’m hoping that each consequent generation just kind of comes to art and music with a more open mind and I feel like that happens. If you had to say what kind of music does Gogol Bordello play I mean what would you say? I mean you could like put it in all sorts of expressions and that’s music that’s really reached a lot of people and no body really cares what it’s called. I think they’re a great example of that. And Mars Volta is another great example.

When I first emailed Rudresh, I mentioned Fusion music. In his response he opened with, “FWIW I hate the word fusion.” Despite his complete rejection of this word, I asked him if there was a specific instance where he refused the term:

Well that term is usually used to describe a lot of music that happened in the 60s and 70s that was coming from a very different place. It was coming from a very exotic place. And also coming from that, the opposite from that place that I describe where you know artists are actually dealing with a body of knowledge and respect that inhabits both cultures that they are trying to engage with. Also, that music of the 60s and 70s that you know that’s somehow attached to India, it’s just equated with things that are not really particularly deep. There’s kind of like a drug thing ‘lets get high and listen to Indian music.’ I always say Ravi Shankar playing at Woodstock was the best and worst thing that could’ve happened to Indian classical music. I still believe that. Here he was on this main stage but it had this other attachment to it that just further exoticized this art form.

Rudresh then moved on to touch upon jazz rock fusion saying, “I think jazz rock fusion is fine…I don’t really have a problem with jazz rock fusion, I use that expression sometimes more jokingly but if you talk to the musicians who were at the forefront of that they always think it’s a stupid word too.” He also made an important point mentioning that “with all of these labels, no one is thinking about [them] while
they’re actually making this music, while they’re dipping their toes what ends up being kind of these trailblazing [projects] into these new sounds. It’s the critics and historians that kind of come up with these labels.”

Our conversation then turned to focus on his recent album Bird Calls (2015) which is a tribute to Charlie Parker but puts Parker’s tunes within a new context as Mahanthappa says, “there are no Charlie Parker tunes on this album but each track is directly based on a Parker composition or solo.” I mentioned to him my observation of how although Indian influences are not necessarily overt, there are points throughout the album like on the first track where an influence can definitely be heard. I asked Rudresh if he was actively thinking about these different influences when working on this specific album. He answered by stating:

Yeah definitely but I think there is something more intuitively now that fast forward ten years later I was really thinking about this stuff in a more literal way like now it just kind of comes up. As far as the alapana kind of vibe I mean I like to open every show like that, I would open every album like that if I could, that always feels right to me. I feel like Coltrane kind of did a version of that too but that’s something I like to do. But again, that’s something like ‘oh we really heard the Indian influence in the first track but then we didn’t hear it in the rest of the album’ it’s like well, it wasn’t really about that anyway. There definitely are elements of tala. I think the way I treat a lot of rhythm is tala-like. “On the DL” is in in some sort of 17 or something like that, but I think all of those elements run through my music much more intuitively now whereas you know maybe 10 years ago I was trying really hard to deal with those [elements] literally, on a conceptual level. I think it’s just kind of in there the same way all the jazz I studied is just kind of intuitively in there as well.

Furthermore, this heightened sense of intuition and embodiment comes hand in hand with where Rudresh is at with his career. Rudresh states:

at this point in my career I also don’t feel like I have to prove anything like I don’t have to prove how Indian I am or how jazz something is I mean at this point I think…well maybe I just don’t care what anybody thinks anymore! But also, I just feel like I’ve been doing it for so long that things just come out and I don’t have to justify them and I don’t have to explain them.
I asked Rudresh to elaborate this point on not feeling like he has to prove himself. Of how this point connects to how so many in the past emphasized his ethnic identity in relation to his music. Instead of recognizing Rudresh as a jazz musician, the hyphen of Indian would be added to this music identity marker—Indian-jazz musician.

I think that there’s a lot more room in this music for people who are not white, not black, not latino, to actually say something meaningful whereas say when me and Vijay Iyer were coming up we were very much typecast even before we played a note…We had to break those barriers down not only musically and artistically but with in regard to the industry too. The record labels wanted to hear something that fit into a box that made sense among other things. So, audiences do too…for me it wasn’t like I was initially exploring my cultural identity through music. It was really seeing a lot of cultural confusion. So, it’s almost like the music was a therapy in trying to understand what it meant to be a brown person of immigrant parents living in America.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have presented who BRM is and what they do as an organization and collective in NYC. By presenting two co-founders of the group (Arun Ramamurthy and Camila Celin) one can see how members have different backgrounds and identities as being a part of this group. The musical multiplicity is clear. BRM can then be seen as a mobile network as it connects to musicians, like Rez Abbasi and Rudresh Mahanthappa, who are on the outside of this collective but have collaborated with musicians within it. For each musician there is a sense of resistance to labels and a sentiment of performing music which is “neither this nor that,” but rather a sense of in between. This sense of in between or liminality is then carried into the performances themselves within the spaces they are performed in, which will be further discussed in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 3
CONSIDERING SPACE & PLACE

Traveling to Brooklyn, Atlantic Terminal: juxtaposition of underground and above ground on train as pass through different stations—Massapequa, Seaford, Bellmore, Wantagh, etc—then we approach Jamaica station. A metal modern complex that signifies a change, transfer and ultimately transferring into the urban for the suburbanite. It seems as if it separates suburbia from the urban center. It is like a cornucopia, with the backdrop of the tall buildings that are symbolic of NYC and seeing the graveyard of the Long Island Rail Road trains and freight trains and... “Ladies and gentlemen, this is Jamaica Station. Transfer is available to Atlantic Terminal on Track 3, Track 3. Jamaica Station.” I quickly gather my things and sprint out of the train, run up the metal steps, go over the overpass of two tracks and run back down the stairway to catch the train on Track 3. I find a seat as the train leaves the metal cornucopia. I have transferred into “the urban.” (field note: March 16, 2016)

Marc Augé states, “…non-places mediate a whole mass of relations, with the self and with others, which are only indirectly connected with their purposes. As anthropological places create the organically social, so non-places create solitary contractuality” (1995:76). Jamaica train station can be seen as a non-place. Many use the train station as a means to transfer onto to another train in order to reach their desired place and, in Augé’s words, “since non-places are there to be passed through, they are measured in units of time…they are lived through in the present” (ibid:84). Even more so, it becomes a spectacle of history, site of transaction and consumption, where the pleasure of solitary and construction of the subjective self can be created (Augé 1995). On March 16, 2016, I passed through Jamaica station and Atlantic Terminal to reach the multi-arts space of Pioneer Works in Red Hook, NY to see BRM’s “Women’s Raga Massive.” To many, Pioneer Works is nothing like the non-place of Jamaica train station. In Augé’s terms, it is an anthropological place where
identity, relationships, and history is created. However, it is very much in tension with the idea of non-place. As an art gallery or music venue, it becomes a space of consumption but also a place of meaning.

This chapter focuses on a narrative involving many characters: Red Hook, processes of gentrification, Pioneer Works, and the music-creative-urban assemblage (or collective) of BRM. Relationships of social categories, genres, and space take place within the intercultural practices of BRM. Spaces like Pioneer Works serve as intercultural mediations for collaborative solidarity. I aim to follow Ignacio Fariás’ exploration of “relational, symmetrical and even flat perspectives to make sense of cities, urban phenomenon and transformations, thus challenging conventional understandings of its objects of study” (2010:1). With BRM one sees how identity and more specifically “Indianness” is not restricted to spatiality nor ethnicity. Ultimately, I show how BRM creates place within a space like Pioneer Works that is in a neighborhood that is going through a gentrification process, and how the creative industries are very much a part of gentrification.

**SETTING: PIONEER WORKS IN RED HOOK, NY**

Red Hook, an old water harbor for the porting industry, has been a part of the gentrification colonization frontier. As reflected in a 1995 *NY Times* article, this was not considered to be a reality, “Red Hook, to be sure, is not about to become the next Tribeca or even the next Williamsburg, a Brooklyn community where many artists,
priced out of downtown Manhattan, settled in old warehouses in the 1980’s.”

Red Hook was not thought to be an area that would become like other gentrified neighborhoods due to its isolated and inaccessible location. Within just a six-year time span, the *NY Times* shows how the “[…] Isolated Brooklyn Area Starts to Awaken”

during the Civil War years, while Park Slope was still farmland, the neighborhood was already a busy commercial district. Forty-five years ago Red Hook reached its greatest population, 22,000. Now it is about half that. ‘It’s a rundown waterfront village,’ said John McGettrick, co-chairman of the Red Hook Civic Association. ‘You see shadows and images of a community that once was bustling.’

However, desirable streets like Pioneer Street between Van Brunt and Richards Streets, caused values throughout the neighborhood to increase from around 1995 to the early 2000s. Journalist Aaron Donovan continues to discuss in his article (2001) that “the increase is partly the result of demand for the area by artists. ‘They’re making their way into Red Hook,’ said Benny Torres, the sales agent who specializes in Red Hook at Joe Felix Reality in Bushwick. ‘They need new space because they’re priced out of Williamsburg.’” The “shadows and images of a community that once was bustling” in Red Hook, as mentioned above by John McGettrick, are then revitalized and reconstituted. While they are resurrected, the bustling is occurring in a completely different context. Today, fifteen years later, when walking through Red

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46 Ibid.
Hook, we are still within the environment of a space off of the Atlantic Basin and Upper New York Bay, with cobbled pathways and warehouses, but the bustling community of sea workers have turned into a community of creative people and connoisseurs with a backdrop of old warehouses like the New York Doc Company on Imlay St, being re-constructed as condos (set to open Spring 2017). Instead of bustling occurring outside, it is occurring inside spaces like restaurants, galleries and multidisciplinary art venues like Pioneer Works.

Pioneer Works is a building that is around 27,000 square feet with 40-foot ceilings located on Pioneer Street and Imlay Street in Red Hook. The warehouse dates back to 1866 where for more than a century it was home to Pioneer Iron Works, one of the biggest iron machine manufacturers in the country. Founder and director, artist Dustin Yellin bought the space in 2010, started working on it in 2011 and it officially opened in June 2012. Yellin was originally going to call the space *The Intercourse*, to match the name of the arts and culture magazine he does with resident artist Joey Frank, but he decided to “instead embrace the history of the building” paying homage to the original tenant of Pioneer Iron Works in 1886. With its renovation, one can see the restoration of the building’s historic fundamental architecture while modernizing its internal systems to adapt to public use. The use of historic restoration, environmental design, and modern architecture converged in

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efforts to create the multidisciplinary space. Clearly there is a tension between old
and new in creating a balance between restoration and preservation. In a way it is an
effort to maintain Red Hook’s industrial charm which one sees disappearing with the
Est4te Four project on Imlay Street.\footnote{Est4te Four (not a typo) is the developer of this project as featured on. Their website features a focus on multiple development projects planned for Red Hook entitled as a “unifying” project named “The Point”: \url{http://estate4.co.uk/projects}.}

Yellin describes the space as “…a big Beuysian social sculpture! There’s so
much going on, you can’t keep track of it. It’s a village.”\footnote{Ibid.} He further explains in an
\textit{Interview} feature:

\begin{quote}
That is the house ethos: to cross-pollinate all these different disciplines in one place.
You go to a museum and it has this impact on your psyche. For this place, the idea is
you can go to see a show or some art or go upstairs and see six or eight different
artists working on different projects. You can go pick fruit from the organic garden
and see installations. It really pulls from different ideas that exist already, whether
those are Marfa or Dia or Black Mountain or Cooper Union or PS1—all these great
places that have come before us.\footnote{Chris Wallace, “Dustin Yellin,” \textit{Interview Magazine}, last modified May 17, 2012, \url{http://www.interviewmagazine.com/art/dustin-yellin/}.}
\end{quote}

He also mentioned that his “crazy dream is to create a kind of utopian art center
reconstituted and has different meanings when different social actors inhabit it. It
ultimately changes from day to day and hour to hour. As Fasche states, “the habitus
of place can be conceptualized as the present perception of the place’s ensemble of
economic, social, cultural, and political features and its physical structure. In this
sense the place becomes a metaphor for its space which is socially constructed and marked with attitudes” (2006:150).

As seen with the history of Red Hook and spaces like Pioneer Works, the urban frontier is in a constant motion to push out and has a connection with the creative industry. Neil Smith (1996) presents the importance of the economic theory of gentrification and the role of artists as well as the rhetoric of “urban pioneers.” His critique is still current since there is just a new reproduced cycle of gentrification, continuing an ideology of the urban frontier. The cultural production and consumption of gentrification remains rampant and is clearly seen and experienced in certain areas. Smith’s theorization of gentrification ultimately provides a foundation to view issues in Red Hook and the possible implications for musicians involved with this scene and creative industry, such as BRM. More specifically, in Gibson and Homan’s discussion of “urban redevelopment, live music and public space” (2004), their theorization of spaces and places for live music refers to Smith’s “frontier phenomenon” where the arts then play a central role in leading to “warehouse cultures” (reference to Shaw 2003).

The arts have a ‘seductive influence’ (Zukin 1995, p. viii) on urban redevelopment, encouraging creative production and consumption, and establishing a sense of ‘scene’ in localities, perhaps unintentionally simulating property values…creative producers add critical currency to these places, generating cultural capital, yet artists themselves are often displaced later in the gentrification process, as the ‘frontier’ moves through an area, and as property market dynamics limit residential choice and available rehearsal or studio spaces. (Gibson and Homan 2004:70)

This point is critical as it is central in the discussion of BRM’s residency at Pioneer Works. Ultimately, live music events “…create new articulations of place and points
of gathering in public spaces, thus re-emphasizing (or initiating) a vibrant public
sphere” (Gibson and Homan 2004:81).

CONNECTING SCENE, CREATIVE INDUSTRY, IDENTITY, AND
GENTRIFICATION

In navigating through terminology of scene, creative industry, and relations to
gentrification I turn to Johnathan Roulea (2015), Chris Gibson and Shane Homan
engages with the concept of “scene” within and around the neighborhood of
Williamsburg. His aims to understand the ways in which the music scene gravitates
around the live music venues near the “L” train stations. In “conceptualizing the
scene in relation to its mediality, that is, by approaching the L train as a media that
records, transmits and processes, information,” (566) the author shows how the train
and the live music venues that surround it shape the Brooklyn music scene and the
stories of both are deeply connected symbolically and geographically. There is a clear
DIY aesthetic that is part of the Brooklyn music scene. Rouleau’s observations and
connections of the indie rock scene, leads to a greater visibility of the scene created
by BRM and how they place themselves in certain venues geographically which
carries meaning centering around Williamsburg, Park Slope, Gowanus and Red
Hook. Therefore, I aim to underplay the role of ethnicity when discussing “scene.”

In regards to the relationship between creative industry and gentrification,
Gibson and Homan (2004) examine the use and promotion of popular music in inner-
city spaces in Sydney (specifically using Marrickville as a case study) as these spaces
undergo rapid gentrification and present a concern for creative industries. While the context is set in Australia many similarities can be seen to the situation in New York City for musicians performing in the Lower East Side and Brooklyn. Residential developers have seized opportunities for construction in inner-city areas already known as key sites of creativity, lifestyle, and “alternative subcultures,” focused around main street consumption spaces. Yet, resultant property market rises have threatened the ability of artists, musicians, and others employed in the cultural/creative industries to secure affordable housing and spaces for performances (68). Gibson and Homan present general theories of the role of creative industries in gentrification and urban redevelopment as they mention, “[c]reative producers are bound up in other ‘intangible’ or ‘tangible’ processes that feed gentrification and provide the social context of urban development strategies. Live music is a consumed product of urban residents, but also creates a sense of ‘scene’ in particular spaces, coloring one context of entertainment and inscribing meaning in landscapes” (69).

What seems to pull these theories together (and what is most relatable to BRM) is the notion of urban assemblages. Farías states, “the notion of urban assemblages in the plural form offers a powerful foundation to grasp the city anew, as an object which is relentlessly being assembled at concrete sites of urban practice or…as a multiplicity of processes of becoming, affixing sociotechnical networks, hybrid collectives and alternative typologies” (2010:2). I use the term urban assemblage to describe BRM because they place themselves in certain venues geographically which carries meaning centering around Williamsburg, Park Slope,
Bushwick, Gowanus, and Red Hook. A sense of ethnic identity and a sense of “Indianness” is freed from the constrictions and prescriptions of heritage. One enters a world of affinity and performance space where identity is ultimately blurred and an enculturated mediation occurs. Furthermore, “[s]ites are defined not by spatial boundaries or scales, but by types and lines of activity, and spaces emerge through the networks connecting different sites” (Farias 2010:6). This point lies at the heart of what BRM is—a network of musicians, artists, producers, etc. that provides a sense of community via music making. However, their sense of community lies on outside older models of community development (usually tied by socioeconomic class, race, ethnicity, age, etc). Individuals’ voices and instruments serve as conduits for connection and mediation of cultures reaching a collaborative solidarity. In Farias’ work, he “…moves towards a relational understanding of spatial formations…[which] imagines space (and eventually scale) as fields of activity or better as attributes of certain assemblages” (emphasis added, 2010:17). So it is not that spaces purely dictate sociality but that the social actors—and non-human actors—help to formulate space. The relationship is fluid. To echo Henri Lefebvre, space is not a simply empty bin but instead we are in a constant evolving dialectical relationship: we shape space and space shapes us. While authors like Tironi (2010) have pushed for “reimagining the stability of the socio-spatial formations of creative scenes, beyond the bounded notions of space informing most studies of creative production” (quoted in Farias 2010:17), I argue that the spaces that musicians perform in (in whatever scene they are a part of) truly play a role in the expression of identity and meaning of sound
created within specific contexts. It is not to say that spatial proximity and spatial fixity hold together a scene (which Tironi also argues against). Rather, it is through the process of music making and audience engagement in a venue like Pioneer Works that space is turned into a place of meaning, experience, memory, and history. This ultimately ties back to Farias’ point of spaces being attributes of assemblages—the spaces BRM performs in are attributes to express their mission and collective music identity of bringing cultures together.

Like Tironi’s (2010) work on Santiago’s experimental music scene, the evolving scene that is being created by BRM is not necessarily fixated to one place. In Santiago, “the physical spatiality of the [EMS] scene is dichotomized, with one spatial layer centered on Santiago’s official—and relatively clusterized—cultural space and with the other dispersed throughout the city, without any focal center” (Tironi 2010:40). This would be the same for BRM, as they market themselves to be a collective that is uniquely Brooklyn but have branched out to performing in venues in Manhattan and even outside of New York like San Francisco and SXSW in Austin, TX. To quote Tironi, “…the scene flows through a (intra) temporary and contingent physical spatiality” (2010:40). Again, this goes back to Farias’ point of space being an attribute for urban assemblages. However, there is still something special that happens in each different (social) space that the scene works within. For BRM, different mediations of culture and identity are created continuously and expressed. As Lefebvre states, “social spaces interpenetrate one another and/or superimpose themselves upon one another. They are not things, which have mutually limiting
boundaries and which collide because of their contours or as a result of inertia” and while there may be appearances of separation between spaces via visible boundaries like walls or enclosures, “what exists is an ambiguous continuity” (Lefebvre 1992:86-87, emphasis added). Pioneer Works becomes connected to the ShapeShifter Lab in Gowanus and La Luz in Bushwick via the network created by the urban assemblage of BRM. They are more than sites of performance. Besides musicians, producers, sound engineers and audience members—all human-actors—being characters in this narrative and network, the multitude of physical spaces and the instruments themselves—as being non-human actors—are also significant characters and points of connection.

Within this network a discussion of identity and “Indianness” must be discussed. Questions of the construction of ethnicity, identity, difference, belonging, and choice continuously come up. Such questions have been addressed by Dhooleka S. Raj (2003), Sandhya Shukla (2003), and Purnima Mankekar (2015) in their discussion of re-conceptualizing Indian diaspora within our transnational world. Raj challenges the traditional conceptions of ethnicity, diversity, identity, culture, and community. She challenges “‘the culture box’ and the ways ethnic sociocultural group identity formation over time is taken to be a straightforward reproduction of ‘culture’” (2003:6). Culture is constantly changing and the community, with whom Raj worked with, is formed processually: “individuals negotiate ethnicity; yet, they could claim a stable ethnic cultural identity” (6). Raj conceptualizes differences as

53 See programming on website.
something that requires constant interrogation as a process of transnationalism. In using “time, space, and the identification processes as spaces for interpretation to examine the ways difference is ethnicized, [she wants] to understand the experience of what it means to be in the middle of difference” (2003:7). She shows how people actively produce their identifications in spaces of difference and how transnationalism is “experienced and created by inflecting time and space into ideas of community, identity, and ethnicity to question the ways scholars and others constitute ‘culture’” (2003:24).

Shukla (2003) expands on this as she presents diaspora as a concept and a set of social formations having imagination at its core. India and Indianness ultimately has no limits as “diaspora does not exist in the borderlands of the nation but within and through central spaces of several nations” (2003:17). It is through different spheres and mediums of culture—festivals, music, film, newspapers—that migrants create India in order to negotiate life in the multicultural environments of the United States and Britain. Shukla mentions, “the ways that people describe their lives, the communities they create, and the work that represents their experiences are situated within a plethora of imagined places: at home, nearer to places of settlement, and abroad, linked in a sustained way to others in the diaspora and most of all, to India” (emphasis added, 20). Her point here relates to BRM’s mission of creating a community within the multicultural space of New York. Such a community allows musicians to find a central place to connect. The connection or “contact zone” of migrant cultures is quite literally heard through the music as many engage with
crossing over of musical styles in collaborations. In a sense, Shukla’s mentioning of imagined places becomes heard. However, this community is created to also make Indian music accessible to non-Indians and those of a younger age to engage with this music and culture by choosing to perform in public spaces that are outside the traditional classical sphere of temples, community centers, and concert halls.

While Shukla shows how India and Indianness is created through a multitude of outlets, the people at the center of creation are ethnically Indian. In her account of little Indias (Southhall and Jackson Heights) she shows how spaces make Indianness, making vivid the production of social space that Henri Lefebvre has theorized, therefore bringing an association between place and the conception of Indianness (2003:80). Within this association is also a built-in relation of race and place. But what happens when race and ethnicity become blurred? The musicians that are part of BRM are ethnically diverse, many are Caucasian but are “master” performers within the Indian classical music realm. Some musicians who seem to be Indian actually identify as American. Indianness and formations of identity are then created via sound (along with stage set up and dress). Raj (2003), Mankekar (2015), and Kahndelwal (2002), also do not touch upon the engagement of affinity culture to India and Indianness. My conception of India and Indianness then becomes more of a gravitational force when discussing BRM. It is not necessarily connected to or constrained by ethnicity but is expressed via sound and the intermingling quality of the music that is created via the collaborations that occur on stage in a multitude of spaces that they create as imagined places of India. As Lefebvre mentions, “all these
spaces, meanwhile, are traversed by myriad currents. The hyper complexity of social space should by now be apparent, embracing as it does individual entities and peculiarities, relatively fixed points, movements, flows and waves—some interpenetrating, others in conflict, and so on” (1992:88). Within the spaces BRM performs, there is not one “pure” sense of India presented. It is worked through as a current, intermingling and in dialogue with other cultures and identities.

WOMEN’S RAGA MASSIVE: March 16, 2016, Pioneer Works

I found such a current of India(ness) flowing through Pioneer Works at BRM’s event “Women’s Raga Massive.” As I entered Pioneer Works on the night of March 16th I noticed there was something different about the space compared to when I was at the venue on March 9th for “Raga and the Moving Image.” At the performance on March 9th Pioneer Street was empty, no one outside. Upon entering the audience was a bit sparse and there was more movement of audience members whispering to their friends and walking around to see the art works on display beyond the wall. By the end of the night it was just my friend and I joining a cluster of people in the audience seats listening to the jam session by the “BRM All-Stars.”

07 Women’s Raga Massive
Brooklyn Raga Massive’s Pioneer Works residency consists of multidisciplinary performances, recording sessions, educational offerings and podcasts. In celebration of International Women’s Month, Brooklyn Raga Massive honors the women that make BRM strong. The night will feature multidisciplinary performances that exhibit the diverse questions, identities and conversations highlighting women’s creative journeys. Encounter Hindustani vocal music by the acclaimed singer Falu. Experience Karavika’s “Raga Chamber Folk” string ensemble’s music, inspired by motherhood. Camila Celin’s Devi Tribute pays homage to archetypes of the Divine Feminine through song. Roshni Samlal creates texts and electronic soundscapes in
ode to heroines of the subcontinent, while artist Seema Pandya presents visual projected enhancements.
Emcee—Sethu Nair; Her-Story by Roshni Samlal; Visual Projections by Seema Pandya. (from Pioneer Works program)

On March 16th it was different. Same space, same group of performers, almost same audience demographic but the feeling of place was changed specifically with the program of the event focusing “on the women that make BRM strong.” After all, “places are actively sensed” (Feld and Basso 1996:7) and “places not only are, they happen” (Casey 1996:27). I began to relate to and actually experience what Edward S. Casey, Steven Feld, Keith H. Basso, and Tim Cresswell had written about in relation to place. This idea of how place is not bounded, it is constantly changing and different meanings are constantly being (re)constituted. The “lived body” is the medium of experiencing place, as it is “a creature of habitual cultural and social processes” leading to “place [integrating] with body as much as body with place” (Casey 1996:19, 22). I began to feel emplaced at Pioneer Works, taking part in the gathering power of place.

My friend Raquel and I arrived to the event a bit late but once we walked in I was met with the sounds of “raga chamber folk” string ensemble Karavika as they played with a backdrop of visual projected enhancements of images from Indian films, goddesses, and great Carnatic female singers like MS Subbulakshmi. The venue was packed, every seat filled, some sitting on pillows right near the stage. I noticed many videographers and photographers crawling around the stage, attempting
to not block the audience’s view but still capture as many images as possible. Seeing that there were no more seats available Raquel and I stood in the back.

![Figure 3.1: Karavika performing. Photo taken by author, March 16, 2016.](image)

On stage we watched as Trina Basu (violin/guitar), Amali Premawardhana (cello), Perry Wortman (bass), and Roshni Samlal (tabla) created music that drew upon influences of folk melodies, Indian classical compositions, creating innovative improvisations and arrangements rooted in both their cultural and musical backgrounds. I heard Karavika perform before on March 9th but this was different. Watching the entire audience fall silent as they perform, seeing intricate visuals being
projected behind them brought a different experience. Through such different experiences, place becomes “the most fundamental form of embodied experience—the site of a powerful fusion of self, space, and time” (Casey 1996:9). Place can constantly be evolving and have a spectrum of meaning depending on different contexts as Cresswell states, “place is not just a thing in the world but a way of understanding the world” (2004:11).

The theme of the tension between old and new—that has been mentioned concerning the gentrification process of Red Hook (seeing on Imlay Street the NY Doc company building being renovated to become luxury condos just down the block54) and the space of Pioneer Works itself (the history of the building and the renovation process)—was also being expressed via the music being performed and collaboration of different styles within just one group. Within five minutes I heard a classical vocal interpretation by Roopa Mahadevan of a Geetam made famous by MS Subbulakshmi (translation of song title: song that flows in with the breeze) as she sang a beautiful expository improvisation passage (called alapana in the Carnatic tradition) presenting the raga of the song. The strings provide a drone as she sings on top. Then about 3 minutes and 10 seconds in the bass sneaks in with a bass line for the whole group to join in. As Roopa sang, the sounds reminiscent of the great MS Subbulakshmi take on a modern sense as bass, violin, cello, and tabla are in dialogue with the song. Rich harmonies, which are seldom heard in Indian classical music, are created and presented to the audience. Towards the end, Roopa comes back in to sing.

54 See pictures in appendix.
The collaboration and dialogue of voice and instruments is beautiful but is clearly a way to bridge the old with the new, to make Indian classical music accessible. Even more so, the current of “ancient” India is flowing through the modern. In a way, the classical tradition is becoming reinvented and more free in the modern sense to engage with other musical styles. A relationship is present between the processes occurring in a neighborhood being gentrified like Red Hook and Indian classical-Fusion music as a reconstitution of community is happening for both.\textsuperscript{55} This tension or relationship between Pioneer Works and BRM’s performances at the venue made me think of Cresswell’s statement, “These are the hauntings of past inhabitation. This anonymous space has a history—it meant something to other people” (2004:2). Pioneer Works is not an empty space nor was it just an empty warehouse before Dustin Yellin converted it to an arts spaces. It has its own history and senses of place as mentioned earlier. The question Cresswell then poses is what to do with such spaces. He uses the example of rearranging furniture and putting up decorations within the limits of the space, thus turning space into place, “your place.” Through ones own perception and lived body experience in hearing the Devi Tribute or Karavika, there is a sense of creating ones own sense of place in Pioneer Works.

As I stood there listening to Karavika play I see Trina and Arun Ramamurthy’s son Akash run past me and Arun trying to catch up to him before he

\textsuperscript{55} Red Hook is a place where the streets were bustling as it was the busiest freight port in the world which then became more of a “run down waterfront village.” Now through processes of gentrification the area is beginning to bustle once again. At the same time BRM markets itself as creating a “raga renaissance.”
tries climbing onto the stage. As he passes me he stops to say hello, asks when I am going back up to Wesleyan, thanks me for coming and quickly gets Akash. I turn to my right and see another married couple that are part of BRM, Camilla Celin (sarod) and Ehren Hanson (tabla), enjoying the music and quietly mingling with Jay Gandi (bansuri, BRM co-founder).

When I first walked in I felt the atmosphere of intimate connection lost among the BRM community amongst the mass of people in the huge venue but now I start to see the assemblage’s intimacy is definitely not lost. I first witnessed BRM’s strong community when I attended a concert of theirs at Shape Shifter Lab in November. A much smaller venue, I saw how everyone knew each other in this community—musicians and audience members. But the role of musician and audience member was fluid as some audience members would join the stage for a jam session and the previous musicians that performed would then become part of the audience.

However, I felt very disconnected from this. I was on the outskirts of this urban assemblage. As I considered this I felt a tap on my shoulder from my left. It was Eleonore Biezunski (Yiddish singer, violinist, and scholar) who I had worked with at the Center for Traditional Music and Dance for their programming of Yiddish NY. I was shocked to see her! We quietly talked and she mentioned that she sometimes plays with the musicians that are part of BRM on side projects. As she proceeded to navigate through the crowd with her violin on her back I asked myself, was I now breaking through the outskirts of this urban, rather creative, assemblage? Was I beginning to create my own sense of place? This caused me to realize the importance
and power of gathering at a place as Casey states, “as places gather bodies in their midst in deeply enculturated ways, so cultures conjoin bodies in concrete circumstances of emplacement” (1996:46).

Later when Arun played with Falu Shah (Hindustani vocal) and Sammer Gupta (tabla, BRM co-founder) after Karavika’s set, I saw Niko Higgins (ethnomusicologist and saxophonist) go up to the stage and say hello to Arun. Then when the last group, the Devi Tribute, performed Arun sat right below the stage with Akash in his lap. Trina was on the side of stage, wine glass in hand, as she carelessly moved with the music. Akash waved to the musicians on stage as Ehren smiled back and gave a nod to Arun. Something then clicked. This scene created by BRM is hyper-mobile, connecting many people within a network of musicians, scholars, and patrons. While the community is not fixated to one space they indeed create places for these people to interact. As Indianness works as a gravitational force so does the community of BRM—not bounded by place, ethnicity nor style but instead connected through a myriad of musical styles but always in dialogue with Indian classical music.
THE MUSIC OF CAMILA CELIN’S DEVI TRIBUTE

DEVI TRIBUTE
Camila Celin          sarod/guitar
Haleh Kilmer         vocal
Roopa Mahadevan      vocal
Kensuke Shoji        violin
Amali Premawardhana   cello
Tali Rubinstein      recorder
Ehren Hanson         tabla
Rich Stein           percussion

This is a tribute to the deities in homage of archetypes of the divine feminine through song. This particular rendition is manifested as the divine stream of life which itself is, as Camila loves to say, love in motion. It’s shaped by the eternal quest that we all have towards love and the ways it shows up: compassion, creation, and expansion. I am really happy to introduce the Devi Tribute (emcee introduction).

Drones provided by the cello and violin begin the set. Roopa’s voice enters, floating on top of the constant drone. Haleh’s voice coming in as a layer on top of Roopa’s voice, a chant begins between the two voices interpolating on top of one another. However, I slowly start to realize it is more of an alapana by the two vocalists. Then, after about a minute, the voices abruptly stop, with Rich Stein playing congas starting a pulsing drum beat, a complete juncture from the exposition provided by Roopa and Haleh. The violin enters with a tune accompanied by the cello. Sarod then enters. A Yoruba chant begins, indicated by a difference in language from what Roopa and Haleh were vocalizing earlier. Recorder then comes into the sonic fabric! Somewhere Ehren Hanson joins in on tabla. All of these instruments and elements coming together, is amazing to listen to. Raquel and I sit here in awe, as audience members yell and whistle in praise of what is being performed on stage. (field note from performance)

When I had the chance to speak with Camila (almost a year after this performance) I asked her what inspired her to create the Devi tribute and, more specifically, what her compositional process is like when creating compositions for this evolving project. The initial inspiration for creating the Devi tribute came from the desire to start a band. After a spiritual journey commenced by a medicinal plant, Camila mentions that the message was clear: “you have to compose, you have to start a band, you have to open up,” says Camila adding, “then as I went into that trail it
was almost like divinely guided.” She asked herself what message she wanted to express to the world and what she was truly passionate about. Her answer was the “mystical world” leading to a tribute to the goddess archetypes. At the time she was thinking about starting this project, she went to Cuba for a tour where she was able to see many Yoruba bands. Camila told me how Yoruba is a sacred and spiritual practice. More specifically, Camila says, “so they give offerings and they sing to their goddess Yamancha which is the goddess of the oceans, [of the river] so then when you’re talking to the people who are involved with this, they say, ‘you give her offerings, you do stuff for her, and she will make it into your life.’” After working with and learning about the Yoruba tradition she decided that she wanted to create music inspired by both Yoruba deities and Indian deities.

The first tune she wrote for the project was an invocation, specifically “for the goddesses to join this place” which she did in Yoruba. She went on to mention some of the different goddesses that she focused on in this tribute:

So Durga, why did I want to do Durga? She has a raga called Durga. So it was there. Saraswati because she is the goddess of music and also there’s a beautiful raga associated with her. Kali is bhairavi which I already played on the sarod…then I did a piece that was kind of like some of the Yoruba chants. I used the scale and one of the rhythms that they used for one of their chants. So then I took the 6/8 rhythm in this scale and then I wrote some Yoruba invocations. Then, I talked to a Yoruba priest and he helped me translate it. I wrote this song like that, with those materials, myself. The Durga tune, I just asked my guru last year when I was in India to give me a composition on durga and then I arranged [it] for the band. [For] the saraswati tune I called Roopa Mahadevan [because] I wanted to have vocals. I [asked her] ‘do you have a piece in saraswati that you want to send to me and I’ll arrange it for a band?’ and she said ‘I wrote a piece in saraswati and here it is! What do you want to do?’ It was so perfect. I made an arrangement for guitar and all [the instruments].

That piece became one of the signature pieces for BRM [which] we played at Lincoln center.

As far as the composing itself Camila says “it depends” as far as the tune as to whether she principally uses her guitar to first start composing or use her computer:

That one tune, the invocation [which] I wrote in Yoruba, I took the rhythm first. So I looped something that was on the internet. I looped it on my computer and then I was just singing with my inspiration. Once that singing was there I’ll take the guitar and kind of accompany that singing or…once I start composing it just tells me where its going to go so I can start with the rhythm and the voice. Every time I would hear it because I record on computer [thinking] this needs this, now this needs space, now I can put a cello there. So that’s the process.

Our conversation turned to a discussion of the performance of the Devi Tribute in different venues. I asked Camila, “does every iterate of the Devi Tribute performance—going from Pioneer Works to the Well to Lincoln Center—I’m assuming that something different is happening in all of these different spaces, correct?” Camila answered, “very different,” and continued to elaborate:

So for one thing not all musicians are available. So like Roopa was a big force in the first but she was not available for the next one. Or Tali who was [at Pioneer Works], she’s not a side woman so she’s not good for Devi Tribute because she’s more a soloist. So then that’s changing which also, I wanted the Devi Tribute to not be a stagnant thing. I wanted it to be something that changes that has different musicians. I invite different people who can do scared singing so. The next show I had invited my friend Juliet who is a Sufi, writer, sufì practitioner and she chants things from the Quran to bring the spirit. I heard her sing about 8 years ago and I always thought about her because its true, you feel the spirit rising. I saw her at that concert after that concert [at Pioneer Works] and I invited her to the band. I said ‘bring a chant associated with goddess energy’ and then I arranged it.

Depending on the musicians Camila invites, she is constantly re-arranging her pieces to fit with the band for that specific performance of the Devi Tribute. The project is also very collaborative as seen in the compositional process itself as described by Camila. However, she always uses Western notation to write out her pieces and share with the musicians to learn the pieces.
THE ROLE OF SPACE

The importance of collaboration carries into other BRM projects. For example, Camila has been the leader for BRM’s Raga Cubana initiative. The project came about from a meeting BRM members had about their Pioneer Works curation. Someone had suggested a Raga Cubana project led specifically by Camila. Being the only latina in the whole collective, having lived and studied music in Cuba, it was meant to be for Camila to take on this project. However, she states that in creating the ensemble it was a co-creation with her and David Ellenbogen. For the first performance of Raga Cubana at Pioneer Works (April 13, 2016) David and Camila “brought in Giancarlo Luigi, who is a Puerto Rican percussionist who plays a lot with Román Díaz” which led to collaborating with master drummer Román for the Pioneer Works curation. Camila continued to tell more about the project and the music involved with Raga Cubana:

Before that happened we went to Cuba and me and Ehren had a little collaboration with a Cuban legend from there. We ended up playing in all of these halls and that was amazing! Then we did a show, we brought that master from Ciba and did a show in October at one venue in the East Village and it was awesome. So the pieces that I had written for Raga Cubana we did them for this other ensemble as well. What we’re doing here is extremely collaborative. Anybody in the band can write a piece. Sometimes we do traditional rep. that they do and then we kind of try to play it. What I personally did is that I wrote a few pieces trying to really convey the two flavors of the things because sometimes I don’t really enjoy when we just jam and somebody sells it as tradition. That to me is a little bit watered down fusion. So what I really wanted to do is that I took a Cuban rhythm…I took ason and aburelo which are rhythms that I’ve known since I was a little kid and then I wrote them out in raga. So that’s one of the two tunes we have and then Jay Ghandi wrote another tune and then David wrote another tune and we just kind of all collaborate like that.

I mentioned to Camila that I went to the sold out Raga Cubana performance at the Rubin Museum. The event was described as:
The sacred drumming of Cuba is one of the most evolved and powerful rhythmic traditions in the world. The Indian system of raga explores modal melody with a depth and breadth unmatched in the West. Combined, they are Raga Cubana.

Praised by the *Wall Street Journal* for “expanding the notion of what raga…can mean,” and dubbed the “Leaders of the raga renaissance” by the New Yorker, Brooklyn Raga Massive will collaborate with Afro-Cuban maestro Román Díaz. The *olù batá* (master drummer) is a pillar of the New York City Afro-Cuban folkloric tradition and one of the music’s great innovators. He brings with him the outstanding vocalist Melvis Santa and a full rhythm section of batá drummers.

Expect soaring Carnatic violin, bansuri, explosive percussion, and the beautiful, haunting melodies of Africa, India, and the Caribbean (from Rubin Museum website).  

She had asked me what I thought about the performance since they were “unsure” as to how it went. The stage set up alone was interesting as it led to a visual separation which then have led to hearing separation in the ensemble. Musicians coming from an Indian music foundation were on the left and those coming from a Cuban music foundation, with Román Díaz were on the right. It was not until the middle of the show where the music really came together and sounded grounded. Communication between musicians began to be present with a crossing of facial expressions across the stage and out to the audience. A spontaneous jam even occurred at the end. I asked Camila why she felt unsure about this particular performance:

> When we did the project with the Cuban master that we brought from Cuba [for the October performance in the East Village] it was just him. He’s like a jazz musician, incredible singer and piano player so it was a smaller ensemble like 5 people. You could hear the pieces more clearly, it was more intimate, and what happens with the bata it is so loud! The Indian instruments are very soft. So the mic-ing of that is a little bit tricky for us. And what also happens with the bata and what they do is that the music is meant to be dancing so what happens with dance music is that it’s a groove that repeats. But Indian music is opposite of that. It’s melody you know? So how to bring these two things together? A couple of us felt a little bit unsatisfied with

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that show in the sense we didn’t feel there was room for the Indian instruments in the jams because then it became… Camila trailed off with her sentence as she was getting to the point that the Cuban music was heard more than the Indian music elements. In order to create more of a balance of the two she mentions, “what we want to do for that is just compose more. And just curate it a bit better so that its more fun to do.” To the point of “curating it a bit better,” I asked Camila if the space itself affects the ensemble, especially with playing at the Rubin Museum where the musicians become objects of art themselves considering the museum space. I also asked Camila if that creates a differently mentality for her in these different performances:

Well I’ll say what I feel about Raga Cubana. I don’t think Raga Cubana is suited for the Rubin Museum how it is right now because people need to be able to dance. It’s dance music. We’re doing dance music. At least portions of the show are definitely meant to be danced not just listened to cause we’re just listening to that it can be a little ‘what’s going on you gotta move!’ Maybe that’s my own perception. I don’t know how different people feel about that but I feel like that when we were at Pioneer Works and people could get up then that makes it more interesting. Now unless we’re going to do what we did with the other Cuban master which is more like jazz music that is meant to be listened to carefully because there is a lot of stuff happening. Yoruba music and the bata players its trance music which is so phenomenal and so beautiful but I feel like for us to do well with it we need to think about it more, curate it more. Not just jamming.

The Rubin Museum venue space is a seated concert hall which obviously does not allow audience members to dance. For this type of music involved with Raga Cubana, spatial layout then plays a major role for the experience and communication of musical expression and tradition. Something is lost if not experienced the way it is intended.

However, part of BRM’s mission is still to take the traditional out of its prescribed space/place, as articulated by Arun Ramamurthy:
The idea was to kind of bring our music to the people as opposed to…the thing is Indian classical music was the type, is in venues [like] temples, community centers, in prestigious concert halls but they are all places where the average person or the 20-something year old, 30-something is not going to actually really go to, they might never even hear about it. The idea behind BRM is to really bring it to the people. Do it in the jazz club, a bar, where people like me and you would go grab a drink and be able to listen to music the same way we go to listen to jazz or listen to rock like the same way we listen to popular music that people want to checkout.

With that comes the initiative to interact with different audience demographics. To actually get audience members that you would not expect to go to these concerts, to actually be present. Rudresh Mahanthappa reflects on this point as he says that although he tries to treat each audience the same, he is more interested in playing in a university and place like the Asia Society than he is at a jazz club. Why? Because they reach a wider audience.

I mean for example at a university, maybe it’s a subscription series where you know somebody buys like season tickets to 8 concerts over the course of the academic year, they’re kind of trusting the programmer to be presenting interesting performing arts and they’re less concerned about genre and maybe we’re going to give them something that they haven’t heard before that will change the way they think or will move them or something! It’ll touch them somehow. Whereas you know with some jazz clubs there’s a sense that you’re having to prove yourself as a jazz musician.

The topic of gentrification is ubiquitous when discussing the venues that these musicians play in New York City. Camila was the only musician who I had officially interviewed who spoke of her own feelings towards this situation of the creative industry’s role in gentrification:

It’s a little bit conflicting because it’s like things sometimes get better you know? You have more restaurants and more culture and music venues but at the same time the rents get hacked and then the people have to move out…it’s interesting to be in a privileged position…and to be in a position where like your sole presence is going to change the lives of other people…This apartment used to be a two bedroom apartment and there was a Dominican family that was here for eighteen years and they kick ‘em out, make their life impossible and they crack the rent on me…We’re the type of people who we say ‘okay we are privileged but we need to take care of the people who are not and who don’t believe that.’ And then the more republican
views are ‘well let those people take care of themselves.’ And we say ‘yes, we want to empower them’ [but] I don’t want to look at people like victims either! It’s a little tricky.

CONCLUSION

When leaving Pioneer Works and walking down Imlay Street, I can see the Statue of Liberty beyond the barbed wire just across the bay. The night sky is lit by the tall buildings on the other side. I get this odd pleasure of the ability to see Manhattan but it is not heard. The streets of Red Hook are destitute, empty, and dimly lit. I only hear the construction tarps flapping in the wind as I pass 160 Imlay Street, where the New York Dock Company is to become a building home to seventy luxury condominiums.

The “little tricky” situation of gentrification cannot be ignored when discussing music practices and concerts attended in NYC. It is a process that goes hand in hand with the music heard in such venues. As evidenced by BRM’s residency at Pioneer Works, music making becomes a critical action that is part of Lefebvre’s notion of the production of social spaces. Specifically, the urban-creative assemblage of the BRM organization performing in spaces like Pioneer Works challenges preconceived notions of identity, space, place, and non-place. It is also a community that is part of the creative industry that becomes entangled with the gentrification process. BRM is a gravitational force that pulls the network of both human and non-human actors together.
CHAPTER 4
BRM PERFORMS TERRY RILEY’S In C

Figure 4.1: In C score from: Robert Carl, 2009, Terry Riley’s In C, New York: Oxford University Press.
“Oh Ditmas Park! Awesome, welcome to the hood!” was the warm welcome I received from tabla player and BRM co-founder Sammer Gupta as I arrived to his home for BRM’s In C Rehearsal for their upcoming performance of Terry Riley’s piece at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City. Arun had invited me to this rehearsal so I could be a fly on the wall to see the group rehearse. Sameer’s place was just a thirty-minute subway ride on the Q train from Ditmas Park to Park Slope, the same neighborhood as Arun. As I walked from the 7th Avenue subway station onto Vanderbilt Avenue I noticed a man with a violin on his back. Turned out we were going to the same place. We were the first people to arrive to Sameer’s home. As I walked in through the basement entrance, the whole bottom floor was set up like a music studio and rehearsal space, instruments around the room and a substantial recording station in the corner. I introduced myself to Sameer and mentioned that I was currently subletting an apartment in Ditmas Park. His exclamation of “welcome to the hood!” felt like an official articulation of my stay in Brooklyn for the summer considering I had just moved in two days prior to the rehearsal. I was in the hood but also very much out of the hood as I realized I was a walking figure of a temporary-gentrifier, of an outsider entangled in the fetishization of place, of the very hood Sameer was welcoming me to.
REHEARSAL

As everyone got settled for the three-hour rehearsal, Sameer turned to Adam Malouf, playing pantam.\textsuperscript{58} “You’re going to play acoustic also right?” questioned Sameer, asking if Adam could actually play cello instead of the drum. “‘Cause if you wanted to bow some stuff…part of what I want to do—Neel of course is kind of the main guy—but we wanted to give it a fact of an overarching raga performance,” said Sameer. “So we’re going to start with the earlier cells being half speed and then the further” as Sameer continues to talk he begins to play his tabla, playing foundational beats for the piece to indicate the tempo going on to say “vocalist begins to sing on top from one of the cells.” As the group continues to discuss the piece, Sameer emphasizes the point of “letting it be more spacious.” Priya Darshini (vocalist) asks questions concerning possibilities of ornamentation within the cells, changing registers, and if the tempo can be changed within repetitions of a phrase. Sameer mentions that preserving the pattern within the cells is the most important. He also says, “I think what they want to do is try to create like as much counterpoint of the ideas as possible.” They continue to discuss how within Terry Riley’s In C cells are pulled over onto other cells. Sameer, who in Neel’s absence seemed to be taking the lead of rehearsal, comments “so even if the cell is played at half speed or quarter speed it’s still cool and you can kind of change the octave in the middle. I think that’s fine. You can even do it at like triplet speed. One idea we had is that when we play it fast to play it really really quiet. So like if we go [Sameer begins to sing cell 2 in

\textsuperscript{58} Steel handpan drum.
sargam sa-ga, ma-ga, slowly then singing it faster] so when you bring that down in volume it doesn’t become overly intense rhythmically, it kind of feels like another…”

Sameer’s sentence trails off as others continue to discuss the piece, sheet music in front of them which they refer to as “the chart.”

The group continues to discuss elements of the piece, mostly throwing questions Sameer’s way. It is agreed that everyone will stay on each cell for about a minute to make the play time about 53 minutes, as they have to keep the performance at an hour at the MoMA. Amongst multiple conversations happening someone asks if they should change when they hear other people change or to change at each individual’s pace. Sameer answers, “we change at our own pace. We should try to keep attention so that you’re right within three cells of everybody. So no one is too far behind or too far ahead.” Priya asks if they are adhering to any rules. Sameer looks puzzled by the mentioning of rules asking her to clarify what she means. BRM has performed In C twice before this performance. Priya mentions that she had heard solos in one of the performances. Sameer answers, “yeah we’re going to do that! But as far as right now we’ll just go through the cells. We’re definitely adding solos. That was one of the suggestions from Terry Riley, to improvise more. Like last time we said when we get to this cell we said flute solo and everyone kind of falls back.” He continues to explain how the solo begins at a particular pre-assigned cell making sure that everyone is still within three cells of each other. Priya’s question about rules is valid as Terry Riley provides instructions for the piece quite clearly. BRM’s addition of improvised solos on top of certain cells is an additional rule added. The
improvisation is still tethered to a particular cell, not necessarily completely free nor removed from the structure of the piece.

Terry Riley’s In C is a landmark minimalist composition inspired by traditions outside of the Western classical canon. An Indian classical music influence can be heard in the piece by the emphasis on rhythmic patterns, drone, and essence of raga. Also, there is an emphasis on mode, as harmonies are created by patterns and cells overlapping each other. Riley was a disciple of North Indian vocalist Pandit Pran Nath but only met Pran Nath in 1970, six years after Riley composed In C (Lavezzi 2006:241-243). The 53 short composed melodic fragments are in C major, written in Western notation. A pulsating groove is present which pushes the music forward, never disappearing. An ensemble of musicians repeats each module or cell freely, deciding when they want to continue on their own, however, they must listen to one another to decide when a change will make most sense. Therefore, each performance is different—instrumentation, duration, density, and harmonic content (due to the variance of cell overlap)—even if it is the same ensemble performing like in BRM’s case. Composer Robert Carl frames In C in a thought-provoking way by stating, “though the notes and rhythms are all predetermined, the piece creates its own oral tradition...When one listens to In C, it’s almost as though the rest of the music doesn’t exist, that this is a certain essential music-making that’s at the root of the art” (Carl 2009:8). This idea of an oral tradition being constantly re-created in new ways brings about a new kind of improvisation, also discussed by Carl. A sense of openness is definitely present with the piece as it can last for an unspecified amount
of time. However, within this sense of openness is a series of rules and predefined relationships present for a performance of In C.

With the series of predetermined notes and rhythms, a question of “what does improvisation mean?” arises when discussing Riley’s composition and is further considered with BRM’s choice of adding specific points for solo improvised sections. Robert Carl mentions that considering each performance of In C is different on many levels, one may argue that this process is not new and different, that it is just like the improvisation that occurs in classic jazz with “a set of changes that is immutable, over which liner improvisation places a layer of personalized interpretation” (Carl 2009:9). Carl, however, pushes the uniqueness of In C and argues that it is different since every single note and rhythm is set in the score. A sense of improvisatory nature within the piece comes from the very “choices that performers make [to] shape these materials via repetition, entry/exit, and dynamics (so as to background/foreground ideas)” (ibid, emphasis added). Viewing In C as a piece which unfolds through time, the decisions musicians make concerning timing and interaction with the cells and with the ensemble as a whole is critical. Different climaxes can occur as well as forward and static movement. Harmonic content of the piece changes from performance to performance, even from rehearsal to performance, due to the musicians’ choices. BRM adds a sense of increased personal intervention to the piece by the addition of improvised solo sections, which fall more in line with the improvisation found in classic jazz or Indian classical music.
BRM’s performance of *In C* is unique as it is an ensemble of “raga musicians.” However, with that are some issues including tuning. Not every Indian instrument is tuned to C. Neel Murgai mentions during the rehearsal, “I like the idea of having a full strings section but it’s also fixed intervals in there. We have to tune together. I mean our ga’s just intonation are flat.” Additionally, Neel had to translate the sheet music to sargam so that those who didn’t read Western notation could understand it. Throughout the rehearsal, the music is discussed within Indian classical music terms. Not saying note names or intervals like C to E or an interval of a third. Instead, they are discussed as going from sa to ga, and etc. Andrew Shantz and Priya, the vocalists, also sing the notes in sargam. The bringing together of about 20-25 musicians is also a feat. As mentioned in a Wall Street Journal article focusing on BRM’s performance of *In C* in 2015, Indian classical music puts a focus on the soloist, groups being on the small side only ranging from duets to quartets. Sameer Gupta expresses the difficulty in playing within such a large ensemble in this article, stating, “To communicate with such a large ensemble was a big challenge […] For a person who practices their music in a closed dialogue of two maybe three people, to suddenly be with 25 people completely puts you out to sea.”

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“Okay let’s try it!” Sameer yells to cut through the multiple conversations happening throughout the ensemble. He starts to play his tabla, keeping a steady beat. Michael Gam on electric bass is the first to enter playing cell 1. Andrew (vocalist) then enters followed by Ken Shoji on violin. “I’m at five! … I’m at four!” More join in as people start calling out which cells they are playing. “Seven?” Sameer calls out, quickly stopping. “Okay let’s take a break for a second. So another good way to do this is to do each one in unison for now.” Michael Gam agrees, “we should do that first and then after that we should try to do it staggered consistently.” “Let’s start with seven. One, two, ready, go” Sameer calls out. The ensemble plays each cell in unison, moving on to the next under the direction of Sameer. When they get to cell 13 the ensemble needs to negotiate the rhythm as there is a different interpretation of the
rhythm and sense of understanding the meter. As they are practicing cell 13 together, Camila Celin and Neel Murgai arrive to the rehearsal. Neel points out that he wants Adam, who is playing pantam during the rehearsal, to play cello for the performance (which he did). As the ensemble approaches cell 22 Neel says “this is where it gets a little tricky.” The ensemble is no longer in unison after playing the cell twice. Sameer points out that people are “pushing the time” and tells everyone to “just relax.” The tendency to speed up carries into cell 27. They play it slower to ensure everyone in the ensemble is comfortable with the rhythm. They do the same as they get to cell 32. Some work on figuring out notes while others work on the rhythm. Sameer calls out “one and two and three aaaand” which is interesting as the rhythm is actually written in sixteenth notes. Tali Rubinstein (recorder) and Camila work out the rhythm together by saying syllables like ta, da, dum, taka, tom, etc. “Let’s take a break and look at 35” Sameer calls out as the ensemble approaches the cell. Some are counting the phrase out, others are singing the pattern in sargam. As the ensemble practices each cell together it is clear that they want to make sure they have what is written exact, learning the rules of the piece to then allow for individual choices. At cell 53 Neel directs a decrescendo and crescendo. Then the ensemble plays the tihai:

\[\text{snpnmprs snpnmprs snpnmprs ,nnpn,,nnpn,,nnpn ,nnpn,,nnpn,,nnpn} \]
\[\text{,nnpn,,nnpn,,nnpn.}\]
This is another unique factor that BRM adds to *In C*, clearly adding a Hindustani rhythmic element to end the piece.\textsuperscript{60} After they all play the tihai, Neel says “so the idea at the ending is that we don’t all play the tihai. Some of us stay on the ni pa ni pa’s [cell 53].” Sameer adds, “it would be nice if some people come in and jump out so the first playing it and then the second time you fall back. On the third time everyone does it?” Neel replies, “the thing is at the end of it we want the ni pa’s to still be going. The tihai was too jarring to end it like that without the ni pa going. The ni pa will be like a drone in a way. So the drone is still there.”

Neel then starts to talk about the solo sections and how he wants to have an alapana as the introduction to the piece. He asks everyone to mark down the solo sections: cell 12 flute solo, cell 28 sitar and sarod solo, cell 42 vocalists solo, and cell 48 tablas solo. When the first person gets to a cell where there is going to be a solo then an ensemble member knows soon after that the flute solo will start and that would be a good time to drop out. Whoever is accompanying the solos will remain within three cells of the determined cell of the solo. Neel emphasizes how they don’t

\textsuperscript{60} Tihai is a polyrhythmic technique used in Hindustani music to conclude a piece. It is a repetition of a specific group of beats three times.
want everybody to drop out but to at least definitely play quieter. He also mentions that after the vocal solos in cell 42, “it was really nice when we all sang like everybody or almost everybody sings it [cell 42] together. I mean you know its displaced but you know, until we move on.” Neel then specifically discusses the solos further: “we had a little confusion about how that’s going to work but I think we should take turns. Decide who in your section is going to solo first and take turns like that and we’ll do the same and tablas as well you can play some composition.” Tali then makes a suggestion, “could we do violins instead of flutes?” Neel responds, “we did have violin solos. A solo section string thing.” Sameer adds,

Tali were you just saying pairing the flute with the violin? Instead of a flute section and violin section? I kind of think that’s an interesting dynamic so instead of having the flutes together it could be a section of flute and violin or the flute section altogether and another section could have vocalists with the sarod or something. It could be an interesting combination like that. That could lend itself to an interesting experience for the listener to seeing the interplay across the ensemble.

Sameer, Tali, Neel, and other members of the ensemble continue to discuss this different organization of the solos for the piece. Sameer suggests for the oud and sarod to pair together for a solo but most of the ensemble mentions that the oud would be not heard amongst all the other instruments. A discrepancy happens as a result of this. Some members are telling each other what to do as far as, “I think you should solo, and you should accompany.” Sameer states, “I don’t think we should necessarily dictate too much of what individual people’s roles are. I mean like its better for people to use their own intuition of ‘okay I’m going to fall back’ or ‘I’m going to play more’ but I do like the idea of dictating two groups of two sections of putting together.” After all, it seems if the ensemble dictated everything it would not be
abiding by Terry Riley’s instructions! Neel mentions that last time they played In C the ensemble was confused by what was happening with solos, a question of soloing or improvising together. He makes it a point that he actually does want to assign solo sections and have that clear for this performance. Priya mentions that it would be nice to have “certain meeting points.” Neel responds, “well that is one of the rules of this piece that at some point we want to definitely get very loud and very soft together but also come in unison at some point and that’s a thing we improvisationally do.” Sameer follows saying, “but I think we tend to do that. I think we tend to craft it more towards unison.” Neel’s comment on coming to unison in an improvisational way seems to be an important factor of Riley’s piece. Tali also mentions how whoever is around you, you fit in with and Sameer frames it as “holding onto each other” throughout the piece. There is a transcendent quality present for the ensemble as a whole.

Sameer brings the conversation back to figuring out the logistics of the solo sections. They decide it is better to pick individuals instead of a group of instruments as then it just one person coming forward “lending itself to an easier sort of situation where people can still feel like they are free” in Sameer’s words. When Arun and Trina arrive to rehearsal after the break the group designates the solo sections and alapana of the piece clearly:

1. Start from silence moving to playing open strings
2. Begin cell 1 accompaniment as Camila (sarod) takes a solo first for the alapana and Arun then solos continuing the alapana as the accompaniment starts to move to cell 2.
3. Tabla (eighth note) pulse begins on cell 3. At this point cells 1-3 are heard, and throughout the piece everyone stays within 3 cells of each other.
4. Cell 12: Eric (bansuri, not present at rehearsal) and Arun (violin)
5. Cell 17: Tali (recorder) and Anjana (violin)
6. Cell 22*: Trina (violin) and Ken (violin)
7. Cell 28: Neel Murgai (sitar), Abhik Mukherjee (sitar, not present at rehearsal), and Camila Celin (sarod)
8. Cell 42: Andrew and Priya (vocalists)
10. Cell 48: Sameer (tabla) and Roshni Thompson (tabla)
11. Cells 52-53: crescendo and decrescendo
12. Tihai

*added during run through of piece.

Trina brings up rhythms and how to play them in the beginning. Sameer answers, “yeah it’s our own rhythms but I think what we want to do is the cells one and two let’s gravitate towards our slower interpretations of the cells so that it feels more alap-y and droney. And then Arun and Camila will play more on top of that and then when the tabla comes in then we’ll be around cell 3. Then…we’re just on our own.” After this discussion the ensemble decides to run through the piece, not playing the cells in unison this time. As members of the ensemble play cells 1-2 as Arun and Camila solo on top of them, a sense of rhythm is present, however, this is not necessarily the “alap-y” vibe that they wish to evoke. Sameer mentions “I think you guys should avoid giving a strong sense of like the pulse. It should not be pulse. Keep it feeling like an alap.”

The ensemble begins the piece again, this time holding out the notes within the cells, a sense of time not necessarily present nor felt until the tabla enters on cell 3. There are certain points where the ensemble is clearly passing a cell around like with cell 7. Or when passages are played in different octaves amongst the stringed instruments. The staggered timings and passing of phrases makes the ensemble’s performance even more interesting especially when the ensemble comes together in
unison and then slowly stagers away from each other. Some even play at half speed. Neels tells the ensemble to quiet down to allow for Tali and Anjana to be heard for their solos. Anjana begins to play and Tali responds to her phrases. Anjana and Tali approach their solo section together as call and response, the melodic lines being based off of cell 17. The solo section ends as Tali begins to play cell 18. As the ensemble starts to play cell 22 Sameer mentions adding a solo section, calling out to Trina and Ken. “Can we try that?” he says. Trina begins to solo and Ken answers. Like Tali and Anjana, the two are soloing together. When arriving to cell 28 the ensemble gets quieter as Camila begins her solo. For this section Neel and Camila take turns soloing, not necessarily soloing together. This is the same for when Adam and Priya begin to solo on top of cell 42. As Adam ends his solo everyone begins to join in singing cell 42 together—sa-ni-da-sa—going in between unison and staggered, between consonance and dissonance. It is at this point that I get chills listening to the ensemble sing this cell together. The texture starts to thin out as people begin to play cell 43 giving the effect of falling out and then growing again. Sameer and Roshni take the approach of Neel and Camila and the vocalists to their solo section, taking turns instead of soloing together. After the end of this section as more people get to cells 52-53, Neel directs a decrescendo and crescendo with his hands. It is time for the tihai. At first there is a disagreement as to when to start it but then everyone plays the tihai, a phrase played three times with Arun then improvising a bit to end the piece. Sameer comments, “the thing that was weird was that before the tihai, it sounded like everyone kind of just stopped and waited. That doesn’t sound so great.”
Neel agrees saying, “we should keep playing the pa ni pa ni, ni pa ni pa’s there.”

Sameer adds further, “I mean I don’t think it needs to be cued very much like just two or three people do it the first time, and the second time more people catch on. The third time there is a large group of people.” The ensemble rehearses the tihai again starting from the decrescendo and crescendo in cells 52-53. As they finish the tihai they all laugh as the ending is so abrupt! Everyone agrees that someone needs to hold a note at the end, to hit the sa. Sammer says, “I think the top of the sa is the main important one just to feel like we’re resolving.” They play through the tihai again: first time by sitar/sarod, second time vocalists join in and third time recorder, bass, and other instruments join in. Arun plays sa and then starts to improvise with Trina in order to officially end the piece as those that were playing cell 53 diminished to silence.
BRM’s performance of *In C* at the MoMA was the kick off of MoMA’s Summer Thursdays in conjunction with the exhibition *BRUCE CONNER: IT’S ALL TRUE*, organized in collaboration with PopRally. As noted on the event description, Bruce Conner collaborated with composers and scored his films with experimental music. Bruce Conner’s final work, *Easter Morning* (2008), has Terry Riley’s *In C* as the score. *East Morning* is a reinterpretation of footage from his unreleased avant-garde film, *Easter Morning Raga* from 1966. In the same way as Riley expanded time in his piece, Conner expands the images’ duration, gauge, and frame rate of to result in a visual transcendence.

Abhik Mukherjee and Neel Murgai, sitar; Camila Celin, sarod; Priya Darshini and Andrew Shantz, voice; Tali Rubinstein, recorder; Eric Fraser, bansuri; Aaron Shragge, trumpet; Sameer Gupta, Ehren Hanson, and Roshni Thompson, tabla; Michael Gam, dilruba; Trina Basu, Arun Ramamurthy, Ken Shoji, and Anjna
Swaminathan, violin; Adam Malouf, cello; David Ellenbogen, guitar; Kane Mathis, oud; Vin Scialla, percussion.

Terry Riley’s 1964 composition *In C*, a seminal work of musical minimalism, was inspired by the rhythmic patterns, drones, and immersive nature of raga. Under the leadership of the sitarist Neel Murgai, Brooklyn Raga Massive brings the music full circle, as the first ensemble to perform the piece with an orchestra of raga musicians. Riley himself, who has studied and performed in Hindustani vocal traditions for decades, suggested that BRM open the composition to improvisation, and the ensemble’s performances have gained a new spontaneity, beauty, and excitement. No two performances of *In C* are the same; listening to it can be a transcendent and moving experience. A globally recognized collective of forward-thinking musicians, Brooklyn Raga Massive brings together artists and audiences of diverse backgrounds. In four years and more than 200 concerts, the ensemble has been at the forefront of bringing new listeners to the deep tradition of classical raga and the creation of new musical forms.61

The performance was originally scheduled to be outside in the Sculpture Garden, however, due to rain it took place in the main lobby, right in front of the window looking into the Sculpture Garden. As the ensemble sat elevated on top of the steps, the entire lobby was packed. Audience members sat on the floor and stood on the second floor to look down. As the ensemble began to play, it was clear that this performance would be *completely* different from the rehearsal. More musicians were on stage than were at the rehearsal, vocalists and some instrumentalists were mic’d, and everyone sat next to someone different than in the rehearsal. However, what remained present was the constant motion of the musicians entering and deviating from the confinement of unison patterns via experimentations with octaves, durations of note values, and speed.

Peter Lavezzoli discusses how Riley and his peers “viewed *In C* as a sacred ritual, part of an ongoing search for higher consciousness—a search that often

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included psychedelics.” This association with psychedelic drugs is within the same historical context as the exoticization of Indian classical music in the West (as mentioned in Chapter 1 and echoed by Rudresh Mahanthappa in his rejection of the word Fusion). Lavezzoli actually points out that when Columbia Records recorded *In C* in 1968, they marketed the recording to the rock audience, “with the hallucinatory connotations described by Paul Williams in the liner notes: ‘let’s say what we have here is a ‘trip,’ a voluntary, unpredictable, absorbing experience, one which brings together parts of ones self perhaps previously unknown to each other” (Lavezzoli 2006:244). However, Sameer (as quoted in the WSJ article) mentions that the piece does take him to a transcendent place, removed from drugs, it does have a sense of sacred ritual attached to it: “The first time I played ‘In C,’ I was in another state at the end. I had such clarity after an hour of playing.”

Sameer’s comment leads to a connection between BRM’s rehearsal and performance of *In C* to Victor Turner’s theory of liminality and communitas, of structure and antistructure. As discussed in Chapter 1, according to Turner, liminality occurs when time and place is removed from its normal modes of social action. Space and time is dislocated and structure is temporally suspended. It is within this suspension where identity can then be dissolved to not only lead to new perspectives but to also represent an unstructured community, communitas. Emphasis on spontaneity, immediacy, and existence in itself gives way to this sense of communitas, providing a clear contrast to structure. Turner states, “[c]ommunitas is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through
language, law, and custom” (1966:113). However, this state can not exist without some sort of structure to (re)stabilize it as Turner states “communitas can be grasped only in some relation to structure…communitas, with its unstructured character…might well be represented by the ‘emptiness at the center’; which is nevertheless indispensable to the function of the structure of the wheel” (1966:127). It is this point which causes different performances of Terry Riley’s *In C* to keep turning the wheel. Riley’s piece is the quintessential example of a piece of music that lies “in the moment” but still rooted in structure, in Western composition. Within his instructions and composed cells, Riley has provided opportunities for personal intervention and individual musicians’ choices to break through and (re)create the music. However, this can only happen if the musicians are all in tune with one another and have a solid understanding of Riley’s instructions. An embodiment of the structure must be present in order to enter “another state at the end,” as articulated by Sameer. Turner states, “communitas breaks in through the interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure…” (1966:128). In BRM’s performance of *In C* this sense of communitas can be heard breaking through the structure as they make room for additional improvised solo sections. The playing of the cells coming together and drifting apart throughout the ensemble also lends the performance to being “at the edges of structure.” Even the idea of a suspended temporal dimension is emphasized by BRM’s decision to make the beginning of the piece more “alap-y” in Sameer’s words—to have no pulse, just a drone of open strings and a slow approach
to cell 1 within no sense of time as Arun and Camila freely solo—and by Sameer’s stress on “letting it be more spacious, you know?”

**CONCLUSION**

The freeing quality and liberated sense of the piece and performance is heightened on stage. It was during the rehearsal where members of the ensemble learned and began to embody the rules of *In C*. Priya had been worried about how to fit in with the repeated patterns, where to change tempo, how long to sing certain notes and when to move onto the next cell as she asked questions during rehearsal to Sameer and Neel. However, during the performance at the MoMA, Priya sat in center eyes closed in a meditative position. While the sheet music was in front of her she barely even looked at it! She was clearly in tune with the other musicians in the ensemble. The MoMA stage provided a center for unstructured communitas and flow to be experienced. Additionally, that performance of *In C* at the MoMA can never be felt again. It was in the moment, to be left in the past. The performance holds its own sense of suspended spatial-temporality. The structure of the piece can and is revisited continuously, the wheel always turning but going in a different direction every time.
CONCLUSION

On May 1, 2017, BRM sent its monthly newsletter entitled “Celebrating 5 Years of Concerts and Jam Sessions … and more!” opening with the following message:

Dear Friends,

I am excited to share with you that this week marks the 5th anniversary of Brooklyn Raga Massive's Weekly Concert and Jam Session. Since that first concert and jam session 5 years ago, BRM has hosted 260 featured performances and at least 700 jams! If we add in other events that we curated, then BRM has presented more than 350 concerts and hundreds of musicians over the past 5 years. I feel so proud of this community that we have built together: musicians and music lovers alike. Both are essential to keeping raga inspired music alive here in Brooklyn. To harness the power of this community even more, we made Brooklyn Raga Massive a 501 c3 nonprofit organization two years ago, which has allowed us to receive support from institutions such as Brooklyn Arts Council, Pioneer Works, Rubin Museum, BRIC, MOMA and more. As I look back on how far we have come together over the past five years, I want to take the opportunity to THANK YOU! Thank you to our listeners, our volunteers, our musicians, our donors, and all those who have rooted for us from afar. We couldn’t have done this without you. Thank you for your support! Here's to many more years of music and community! Long Live Brooklyn Raga Massive!!

With gratitude,

Neel Murgai
Co-Founder of Brooklyn Raga Massive
About a week before BRM sent out this newsletter, select members of BRM—Arun Ramamurthy (violin), Jay Gandhi (bansuri), Sameer Gupta (tabla/drumset), Neel Murgai (sitar/daft), Max ZT (hammered dulcimer), Michael Gam (bass), and Aaron Shragge (trumpet) (mostly co-founders of the collective)—played at the Kennedy Center in Washington D.C. on April 21, 2017, to open for Zakir Hussain’s performance with the National Symphony Orchestra. In their program entitled “Tradition to Innovation,” the “Leaders of the Raga Renaissance” played adaptations of works by Ravi Shankar and John Coltrane, as well as traditional pieces and an original composition by Jay Gandhi. With making their Lincoln Center debut on October 20, 2016, and their upcoming performance of a John Coltrane tribute as an opener for Pharoah Sanders at the BRIC Celebrate Brooklyn! Festival on June 23, 2017, it is safe to say that Brooklyn Raga Massive has truly become massive. With playing on more mainstream stages, the BRM I had first encountered in November 2015 has now turned into a new kind of urban assemblage. While still sticking to its Brooklyn roots, BRM has become even more mobile, playing in traditional concert halls throughout the United States, while also maintaining residencies in Brooklyn venues. The programming in the traditional concert halls, however, does not include the sounds of a weekly jam session nor a weekly jam session.

62 This performance can be viewed at: http://www.kennedy-center.org/video/index/M7159
focus on a member’s original compositions like Arun’s for example, playing “Carnatic jazz.” Instead, there is a focus on the traditional Indian classical music in order to provide a “raga journey” for audiences. Additionally, their tributes to Ravi Shankar and John Coltrane seem to be main features when BRM is advertised for these mainstream stages.

As being “Leaders of the Raga Renaissance” a thread of authenticity is clearly emphasized for BRM members, connected to raga, to Indian classical music. As Arun mentioned in Chapter 2, they are “doing” Indian classical music in New York City but in spaces that one would not expect to hear Indian classical music. However, within their programming there is still elements of Fusion like Camila’s Devi Tribute, Raga Cubana, Karavika, even Arun’s own Jazz Carnatica album (2014). In social media posts, hashtags like: indianfusion, ragajazz, ragajam, fusion, ragafusion, etc. are used to refer to BRM.\(^\text{64}\) Having the focus on raga emphasizes Indian classical music. They want to make clear that they have a mastery of Indian classical music, that there is authenticity present even if they do present “#ragafusion.” On the other side, although Rez Abbasi and Rudresh Mahanthappa are connected to BRM and have collaborated with many of the musicians who are a part of this collective, they make a point to maintain their authenticity by keeping jazz as their foundation. Authenticity is distinguished as there is a looming concern of not wanting to be connected with the bad reputation of 1960s, 1970s Fusion music.

\(^{64}\) These hashtags are used by both BRM as an organization and others referring to BRM in their posts of pictures and videos. See appendix.
It is interesting to see musicians’ differing opinions on Fusion music—ambiguous statements, at times conflicting with each other and themselves, leading to an impossible definition of what it actually is. I believe that is the point though, it is what makes discussing Indian Fusion music in New York City unique. The Oxford definition of Fusion mentioned in Chapter 1, does not necessarily relate to Rudresh’s own definition since it 1) does not even mention Indian music’s influence on the genre and 2) does not reflect the exoticism that was and somewhat still is attached to the term. As the term moves from the mainstream to the peripheral, the meaning is perceived very differently. By peripheral I mean a sub group of musicians, like Arun, Camila, Rez, and Rudresh, who are working around this genre. They are clear as to what this term means specifically to them rather than Oxford’s standard definition.

The term Fusion also challenges us as the audience, scholar, listener, or player. This type of music does not follow the formula of musical categorization; it simply does not fit. Furthermore, marketing logic and musicians’ rhetoric is in tension with one another. One way to then conceptualize it is through its experience of fluidity rather than putting it into a box as Rudresh states in Chapter 2, “I’m kind of seeing that middle space between something that is both jazz and Indian classical or that’s maybe closer to being neither than it is both” (emphasis added). The theory of flow becomes significant in this experience as it causes an altered state which lends itself to a sense of liminality. The music is infused with a liminal tint, pulling away from standard categorization. Capitalizing on the idea of collective effervescence, structure and identity is unsettled. With identity being stripped and the deconstruction
of categories, the social world becomes reorganized, refashioning the way one thinks about space, place, and identity in relation to music.

In this thesis I have used BRM as a case study to further consider what Indian Fusion music means and to re-think preconceived notions of space, place, and identity. Positioning BRM as an urban assemblage allows readers to begin to see the connecting points with other musicians who may lie outside of their network but are still caught up in the contested web of Fusion. This thesis of course only touches the surface on the topic of Indian Fusion Music in New York City, possibly leading to more questions than answers. While this thesis contributes to the little scholarship on Indian Fusion Music, I have only begun to open Pandora’s box in regards to this topic. I hope to further open and unsettle the box.


Interviews

Abbasi, Rez. Interview by author. Phone interview. Massapequa, NY. March 15, 2017

Celin, Camila. Interview by author. Personal interview. Brooklyn, NY. March 17, 2017


APPENDIX I: IMAGES

Pioneer Works
ShapeShifter Lab
Arun Ramamurthy Trio (ART) performs Jazz Carnatica. Rooted in the style of the virtuoso violinist Dr. Mysore Manjunath, Arun brings a fresh approach to the age-old South Indian classical repertoire. The Carnatic canon is remixed in this seamless integration of styles as the group expands on the traditional compositions in explosive, improvisational flights of fancy. The trio’s collaborative sound is driven by the propulsive rhythm section of drummer Sameer Gupta & and bassist Michael Gam. Arun’s original compositions pay homage to Carnatic rhythmic structures and rich tonalities while expanding the music with a modern jazz backbeat. Their debut album Jazz Carnatica has received high praise, including a selection by NPR’s Soundcheck as a top New Release.

“...a beautiful, exotic, ear-opening listening experience.” (All About Jazz)

"...a captivating and inspirational listening experience, worthy of the highest recommendation for multicultural music collections.” (Midwest Book Review)

Arun Ramamurthy, violin
Michael Gam, bass
Sameer Gupta, drums
+ special guests

Facebook Event Description of "BRM: Arun Ramamurthy Trio at Jazz Gallery," January 26, 2017
Details

In the spirit of a recent New York Times quote: “Preserving the past while blurring genres in an inventive spirit...a vital part of a flowering of Indian music in New York.”

Brooklyn Raga Massive presents an evening of raga inspired music featuring two dynamic sets by female-fronted projects. Raga chamber folk ensemble Karavika, led by violinst Trina Basu and cellist Amali Premawardhana, celebrate the release of their second CD “Of Earth and Sky” inspired by motherhood and family. Sarodist Camila Ceilin and tabla player Roshni Samlal will present a duo set of Hindustani Classical music in the Maihar and Farukhabad Gharana styles.

www.brooklynragamassive.com

KARAVIKA is a NYC based chamber ensemble, exploring the classical music of India, the folk music of the Americas, and the chamber music sensibilities of Western Classical music. Violinist, Trina Basu and cellist, Amali Premawardhana are joined by bassist Perry Wortman and collaborate with various Indian classical percussionists to form their core quartet. They were recently praised by the New York Times as “a soulful blend of classical and folk traditions from the United Stated and India”. Their 2012 debut, “Sunrise” featuring collaborative arrangements of old film and folk music from South Asia, was described by All About Jazz as “...liquid and organic beauty that...

Details

Crowned as the “leaders of the Raga Renaissance” by The New Yorker and praised by The Wall Street Journal for “expanding the notion of what raga—the immersive, epic form of Indian music—can mean,” Brooklyn Raga Massive will join Awa Sangho, one of the leading voices of West African music, for an exciting concert that crosses musical genres. The evening will exemplify the potential of Indian raga to synergize with its polyrhythmic modal sister music from Mali.

Awa Sangho, the “Golden Voice of Mali,” has worked with a who's who of the greatest African musicians of our time from to Salif Keita to Oumou Sangare.

Awa Sangho: vocals
Daniel Moreno: percussion
Michael Gam: bass
David Ellenbogen: guitar
Arun Ramamurthy: violin
Jay Gandhi: bansuri
Kane Mathis: kora
Roshni Samlal: tabla
Malick Koly: drum set

Presented with Harrice Miller Entertainment

Musical performances at the Rubin Museum are made possible by the Carlo and Micól Schejola Foundation.
BRM All-stars pays tribute to their rock favorites with raga reinterpretations. They will explore the long lost connection between 1700’s carnatic composer Tyagaraja, and 1970’s Led Zeppelin. Expect droning, psychedelic arrangements of Jimi Hendrix, Pink Floyd, Radiohead and more.

Featuring this killer band:

Pyeng Threadgill (vocals)  
Jordan Morton (vocals upright bass)  
Sami Stevens(vocals)  
Neel Murgai (sitar)  
David Ellenbogen (guitar)  
Arun Ramamurthy (violin)  
Josh Geisler (guitar, bansuri)  
Marika Hughes (cello)  
Michael Gam (bass)  
Jay Gandhi (bansuri)  
Ben Tyree (guitar)  
Vin Scialla (drums)  
Sameer Gupta (tabla)

This event is made possible with public funds from the Decentralization Program of the New York State Council on the Arts, administered in Kings County by Brooklyn Arts Council (BAC).

Camila Celin  
April 11, 2016 ·  ·  
Come this Wednesday to listen to a rare fusion between raga and Cuban music!

Brooklyn Raga Massive: Raga Cubana  
This younger collective of Indian classical players took i...  
villagevoice.com

28  
Suey Jackson  
INCRECIBLE!!!  
April 12, 2016 · Like · Reply
If you are into Indian Classical and Fusion music, check out Brooklyn Raga Massive's Launch Party tonight at ShapeShifter Lab!

https://www.facebook.com/events/586643548140354/

Neel Murgai
Classical too!

Corrected :)

Brooklyn Raga Massive
yes the first set is Classical Santoor with Tabla accompaniment! She's a really great santoorist!
Looking forward to welcoming Subhi next Wednesday, April 19, to the stage at @artcafebrooklyn!! Come experience this unique fusion of Subhi's musical roots in Mumbai and Chicago. [ticket link in profile]
@subhimusic #chicago #mumbai #jazz #hindi #fusion #brooklynragamassive

#Repost @indiacenterus with @repostapp

A taste of the amazing @brooklynragamassive playing Indian classical fusion @highlinenyc #CultureShock
brooklyn raga massive crossover... indian classical meets jazz fusion

World Music Institute shared an event.

Check out the beautiful fusion of Indian music & jazz. Brooklyn Raga Massive, the celebrated Indian classical music collective pays tribute to John Coltrane's legacy through a stunning reinterpretation of his music. Fri. 9/ 23 at littlefield. More info & tickets >> bit.ly/BRMColtrane

Brooklyn Raga Massive: John Coltrane Birthday Tribute

ticketfly.com

12 Shares
Dear friends from around the world, I'm thrilled to announce that I'll be presenting some of my works at The Well (Bushwick, NY), one of the many concerts organised by the Brooklyn Raga Massive. It's a great joy and honor to visit this vibrant, thriving community again. They're doing an incredible job bringing Indian contemporary fusion and classical music to wide Western audiences, you should absolutely check them out:

https://www.facebook.com/brooklynragamassive/

Only in New York! ;)

On this magnificent occasion, I'll have the pleasure to play with some amazingly skilled musicians living the dream in the city: Hyuna Park on keyboard, Francesco Geminiani on saxophone, Michael Gam on bass, and Peter Kronreif on drums.

Check out Red Sun’s first official video, and join us on August 24th for a massive dose of global

We’re so excited to welcome @priyism with @theepichorus the stage tomorrow night at the @artcafebrooklyn as part of our Women's Voices series! Doors open at 8 PM [ticket link in profile] ... make sure you don’t miss out on hearing Priya’s captivating voice! #womensragamassive #womenshistorymonth #fusion #indianmusic #womensvoices
Don't miss **Brooklyn Raga Massive: John Coltrane Birthday Tribute** on 9/23, featuring a fusion of traditional Indian music and jazz like you've never heard before. Purchase tix now at [http://tinyurl.com/z6qe8r8](http://tinyurl.com/z6qe8r8)

**World Music Institute**
Tomorrow night! Josh Geisler's Bansara takes the stage at Art Cafe. Featuring multi-percussionist Adam Maalouf and oud player Brandon Terzic, the music of Bansara ranges from meditative atmospheres to downtempo world fusion grooves. Raga Jam Session follows this amazing concert!

Get mesmerized by Neel Murgai Ensemble from Brooklyn!! A fusion of reggae and jazz & classical music!!
Wow! Open concerts (#Women's) #Music #Raga
Massive March 9 (#Indian Classical #International Fusion) Residency at Pioneer Works #RedHook #Brooklyn Every Week Till April end https://t.co/cHG1g3wWSr via @bkinragamassive

Brooklyn Raga Massive Residency at Pioneer Works Feb 3 – Apr 27
wp.me/p1ZveS-3MX

World on Stage–Namaskaar Foundation
➡️ Indian Classical & Fusion Jazz
August 22, 2015 ·

Classical Indian and Jazz Music Collide in Crossover Concert
http://brooklynragamassive.bandcamp.com/.../brooklyn-raga-mas...

Our 2015-2016 season begins with the Brooklyn Raga Massive Crossover, an exciting concert featuring gifted up-and-comers from the worlds of Classical Indian Music and Fusion Jazz. Dedicated to showcasing a diverse array of Indian classical music, BRM believes in expanding the audience for Indian music by breaking conventions – as you'll see in this Crossover musical event on Oct 25th.

The BRM Crossover will feature several extraordinary artists, including the versatile classical Indian musician Arun Ramamurthy, who makes soulful sounds with the Carnatic violin. Arun specializes in Carnatic music, while also pushing the boundaries of the form through genre-bending projects, including his own jazz trio and his Carnatic Sundays concert series in New York City's West Village.

Also headlining the concert is Jay Gandhi, a devoted teacher and performer who has captivated audiences
Breathtaking Alice Coltrane piece of music played by Brooklyn Raga Massive, the Indian/Jazz fusion collective I met along in my travels. Ah... Takes me back to NY city craze! Goose bumps...!!!

Blue Nile by Alice Coltrane performed by Brooklyn Raga...
Brooklyn Raga Massive (www.brooklynraga.com)
youtube.com

4

sublimey
October 27, 2015 · Like

Brooklyn Raga Massive with Max ZT and 2 others.
March 22 · Instagram · 🌊

Just getting started... it's not too late to come out and hear some amazing music by @theepichorus at the @artcafebrooklyn #womensvoices #fusion #indianmusic #womenshistorymonth #womensragamassive
Join us this Wednesday at 7pm where BRIC and BRM present Afrika Meets India: a global fusion ensemble that celebrates the beautiful sounds of India and Africa, and rhythms that will make your day! With Afrika Meets India, centuries of celebrated musical traditions dance together - and perhaps return to their common origins - as the ragas of India find common ground with African chants, rhythms and melodies.

Free with RSVP! -- http://www.bricartsmedia.org/events-performances/brooklyn-raga-massive-africa-meets-india

Featuring:
Salieu Suso - kora
Eric Fraser - bansuri
Ehren Hanson - tabla
Abhik Mukherjee - sitar
Giancarlo Luiggi - shekere
Kevin Nathaniel - mbira
Big smiles all round having witnessed some incredible musical conversations from these guys, Brooklyn Raga Massive. Check them out if you haven’t already. Indian classical jazz fusion music at its best!

Some more shots of last night’s jam session put on by Brooklyn Raga Massive. This is where jazz fusion is happening! I brought my mandolin and had a chance to sit in with some stellar musicians. My first stab at fission outside of the garage, what an elevating experience!!
Wonderful seeing old friends at the 4th anniversary Brooklyn Raga Massive concert at Pioneer Works in Red Hook, featuring Karsh Kale and a wonderful tabla sculpture by Seema Pandya....I first saw Karsh Kale at Henry Street in a duo with Talvin Singh playing Drum and Bass in the 90's. Karsh has been an innovator with electric tablas and new beats for many years, following the path led by Zakir Hussain in the 80's....with Neel Murgai, Samir Sameer Gupta, Jay Gandhi, Arun Ramamurthy, Micheal Michael Gam, Dave David Ellenbogen and many many more! a magical night of creative indian fusion....

Eric Fraser shared Kevin Nathaniel's photo.
January 3, 2015 -

We'll have special guests Neel Murgai and Sameer Gupta with us next Wednesday as Africa meets India opens a special series of Afro/Indian fusion at Art Cafe and the weekly Brooklyn Raga Massive - with Kevin Nathaniel Hylton, Salieu Suso, Giancarlo Luiggi, David Ellenbogen

Kevin Nathaniel ➤ Africa meets India
January 1, 2015 -

Africa meets India will open the Africa/India night series at the Art Cafe on Jan 7th, 2015 at 8pm, 884 Pacific street at Underhill... Continue Reading
worldmusicinstitute Members of @brooklynragamassive invite you to their tribute to John Coltrane on what would have been his 90th birthday 9/23 @littlefieldnyc tix >> bit.ly/BRM ColtraneTix trane coltrane #indianjazzfusion #indianclassicalmusic #jazz #Coltrane

brooklynragamassive #bachpan by @subhimusic playing to a SOLD OUT crowd tonight at the @artcafebrooklyn ... there might still be room if you come for the Jam Session later ... #hindifusion #IndianJazz #PopJazz #subhimusic #brooklynragamassive #brooklyn
jitesh You ever coming to the UK? subhimusic Thank you so much BRM for having us perform as part of your music series! It was a lot of fun :)
Looking for something to do tonight? Come to @artcafebrooklyn to experience the #bestmidweekmusichang with the @brooklynregasus Massive! Jay Gandhi @jaybansuri will be performing tonight at 8 PM. This show is not to be missed! And stay around after the show for the late night jam session! #brooklynregasus Massive #bansuri #indianclassical #thesource #ragajourney #ragafusion #jaygandhi

janakaselektacool pics!
littlefieldnyc @brooklynragamassive sound checking for tonight's tribute to #johncoltrane, presented by @worldmusicinstitute #indianjazzfusion

mrdaniferreira Modern indian classical music with original compositions #indianjazz #bkragramassive #lincolncenter

brooklynragamassive Art Cafe + Bar

brooklynragamassive The jam continues ... #raga #ragamassive #brooklynragamassive #ragajam #jamssession @aaronshragge @adammaalouf @priyism
miykaelah The best part of my week! #brooklynragamassive #ragajam #jamsession #musicoftheheart @artcafebrooklyn @brooklynragamassive
APPENDIX III: PROGRAMS

BROOKLYN RAGA MASSIVE

John Coltrane Birthday Tribute
Special guest: post-bop jazz pianist Marc Cary

Friday, September 23
Doors 7pm / Show 8pm
Littlefield | 622 Degraw Street, Brooklyn
For tickets visit worldmusicinstitute.org

In celebration of John Coltrane’s 90th birthday, the dynamic and hugely popular Brooklyn Raga Massive, a collective of forward thinking musicians rooted in and inspired by the classical music of India, pay tribute to his legacy through their interpretation of his music. John Coltrane remains a pivotal force in the styles of modal jazz, avant-garde jazz, hard-bop and world music. Through his truly unique music, Coltrane bridged seemingly disparate cultures the way only few figures in modern music ever did. With records like Om and songs like India, Coltrane and his legacy have led a movement towards bringing Indian music influences closer to the world of Jazz music.

WORLD MUSIC INSTITUTE

Founded in 1986 as a not-for-profit, World Music Institute (WMI) has served as the leading presenter of world music and dance within the United States. WMI is committed to presenting the finest in traditional and contemporary music and dance from around the world to inspire wonder at the world’s rich cultural traditions, promote awareness and encourage cultural exchange between nations and ethnic groups.

WMI presents at venues throughout the city and depends on public and private funding to accomplish its mission. To donate or become a member of our World Citizenship membership program, please visit worldmusicinstitute.org or call 212-279-4300

WMI programs are made possible in part by public and private funds from

heartheworld
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24 HOURS, 24 SETS
RAGAS LIVE FESTIVAL
Music for Peace, Harmony, and Community
JULY 23RD-24TH NOON-NOON PIONEER WORKS

Ashish Mukherjee
Adam Maalouf
Anjna Swaminathan
Anupam Shrivastav
Arjun Ramamurthy
Bala Skandan
Dan Weiss
Daisy Padgias
Deepal Choudhuri
Dibyarka Chatterjee
Eric Fraser
Indrajit Roy-Chowdhury
Jay Gandhi
Joshua Geisler
Kabir Bhatnagar
Kank Mathis
Kash Kale
Kalpit Pandya
Kamal Shah
Krishna Bhatt
Max ZT
Meghmayam Keshav
Michael Gam
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Neel Murgai
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Priya Darshini
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Samarth Nagarkar
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Sandip Bhattacharjee
Shamh Lahei
Shiva Gohshal
Snehasish Mozumder
Steve Gorn
Trina Basu
Uchhali Banerjee
Vincent Pierce
Vivek Pandya

Produced by NYC Radio Live, Pioneer Works and Brooklyn Raga Massive
with Support from the Rubin Museum of Art
Simulcast on WCRR 99.9 FM NY, Podcast on NYC Radio Live
Community Partners: WCRR, Hamadon, Chandra, Krishna Bhatt's Gurukul, Taalim School of Indian Music

159 Pioneer Street, Red Hook, Brooklyn
The beauty of Indian Classical Music and the Raga System around which it developed is that it is closely tied to the rhythms of nature. Each raga combines a unique sequence and pattern of notes that evoke a particular emotion or feeling. In fact, an intimate part of the expression and experience of Indian art is 'rasa' – which means extract, essence or juice. Thus, as you listen to the music throughout the festival, you are invited to allow it to wash over you and feel the different sensations and emotions that the ragas bring forth within you.

Many musicians and scholars also believe that the rasa – essence – of different ragas are intimately connected to the time of day during which they are performed, and the experience of this is heightened when the raga is performed during the particular time which it is assigned to. For example, dawn ragas tend to evoke feelings of peace, austerity and devotion whereas, ragas performed around midday, have a cooling effect, which support the performer and listener in cooling down during the heat of the day. Evening ragas are the most romantic and often evoke a feeling of longing. There are also ragas that correspond to the different seasons, and that can be performed at anytime of day during that season, for example, malhar ragas can be performed during the monsoon season and invoke the rain.
The Ragas Live Festival – known as “Radio’s Most Ambitious Festival” – began in 2012 when a community of over 50 world-class musicians came together to perform Indian Classical Music live on WKCR-FM for a period of 24 hours. Created by musician/producer David Ellenbogen with Brooklyn Ragas Massive, HarmoniX, Chhandayan and dozens of community partners, the annual event has grown to have an international impact, expanding the audience of raga with dedicated listeners all over the globe.

Roughly meaning “that which colors the mind,” ragas are musical modes or essences from the Indian Classical Music tradition. Each of these modes is associated with the mood of a specific time of day or season. This unique 24-hour raga festival offers listeners the opportunity to experience the subtleties and harmonizing effects of this ancient melodic musical system as the earth makes a full rotation on its axis. This fifth iteration of the annual festival will be the first time listeners and audiences can share the experience in person at Pioneer Works, while the city and international fans tune into WKCR 89.3 FM and the NYC Radio Live Podcast.

Supported by:

THE RUBIN
MUSEUM OF ART

Community Partners:

Afro-Roots Music Night, American Academy of Indian Classical Music, Anindo Chatterjee School of Tabla, Chhandayan Center for Indian Music, Krishna Bharat’s Gunukul, SurRadio, Radio Al Femex 89.5 Timbuktu, Mali, Taalim School of Indian Music.

Schedule

BROOKLYN RAGAS MASSIVE's
RAVI SHANKAR TRIBUTE

6:00 PM

Raga Class

Violet

Sommer

Arindam

Eric

Ping

Michael

Sand

Samarth

Krishna

AURAV KAMATH/THIRIYI

2:30 PM

Avtar Ramanuj
ty

Vidita

Sommer

Kavya

Henry

Raga

Braga

SOUTH ASIAN MUSIC

6:00 PM

Raga Bhairavi

Yati

Krishna

Rajeev

Sarah

Rajeev

SHANKAR BHAT

5:00 PM

Raga Andal

Vividha

Sanjula

Samrat

Sanjay

Anil

MINA BHAT

10:00 PM

Raga Millennials

Vidita

Sommer

Michael

Sand

Samarth

Krishna

ADAM MAKAYNOUFEH

2:00 PM

Raga Darod

Vividha

Sanjula

Samrat

Sanjay

Anil

MAX JONES/CHANDRA

11:00 AM

Raga Sindhi

Vividha

Sanjula

Samrat

Sanjay

Anil

SHANKAR

2:00 PM

Raga Mohan

Vividha

Sanjula

Samrat

Sanjay

Anil

MAX JONES/CHANDRA

11:00 AM

Raga Sindhi

Vividha

Sanjula

Samrat

Sanjay

Anil

2013