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Reimagining Music Teacher Education Programs as Multimusical Constellations

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Abstract

Through the concept of musical practices, adapted from Wenger's (1998) notion of practice within a community, this paper explores ways in which universities could develop and equalize multiple and diverse musical practices into constellations. Providing future music educators with opportunities to engage and participate in a variety of musical practices is essential, so as to be better prepared to facilitate a wide spectrum of musical experiences with their students. Such practices could include the existing staple genres of choral, orchestral, concert band, and jazz musics, but also more scarcely institutionalized genres of popular music styles, regionally relevant indigenous and vernacular musics, online musical platforms, and music production. The creativity and autonomy characteristic of these musics represent more than deficiencies to be shoehorned into existing Western art music programs: They are skills best developed in the context of actual music making within real musical practices. Equalizing the inclusion and interaction of diverse musical practices as constellations in music teacher education programs would go a long way in disrupting the hegemony of existing programs, preparing teachers to engage with and responsibly guide students in a variety of musical practices rather than tokenizing and underrepresenting all that sits outside the bubble of Western art music.

Keywords*:* diversity, equity, higher education, music teacher training, anti-eurocentrism, authenticity, communities of practice

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North American music teacher education programs face increasing criticism for their exclusionary and Eurocentric practices regarding the outcomes, spaces, and privileges that they maintain at all levels of education (Allsup & Benedict, 2008; Bowman, 2000/2001, 2007; Hess, 2013, 2015). Bowman (2000/2001) issued a critique on the tendency for music education programs to "reproduce the status quo" (p. 12) by generating musical "technicians" (p. 10) and suggested that we as music educators "must develop more pluralistic understandings of the forms musical education can take, the settings in which it can occur, and who its potential recipients may be" (p. 16). In discussing the approaches to instrumental performance education that Bowman (2000/2001) had written about, Moir (2017) stated that, "while such an approach clearly produces results, and has been doing so for generations, it should be noted that important aspects of musical learning such as creativity and autonomy are often neglected" (p. 41). While his statement certainly rings true in the context of popular music education and perhaps musical learning as a whole, it is worth considering that the problem lies not with the underdevelopment of creative skills in the existing practices of large-ensemble-based musics, but rather the absence of opportunities within the university for prospective music teachers to develop skills and engage creatively in multiple and diverse musical practices.

Attempts to remedy this issue by offering snapshot courses and small tastes of other musical cultures are surely benevolent in nature but may be more detrimental than helpful. Hess (2015) problematized this issue of tokenistic additions of non-Western musical idioms through her adapted musician-as-tourist model: Liminal, essentialized activities and brief forays into non-Western musics simply reinforce the existing dominant hierarchies. She challenged the notion of including non-Western *other* musics for the sake of fun activities (Hess, 2015, p. 339), or to provide the students and their parents with a "taste of the exotic" (Hess, 2015, p. 339). Further to

this point, Isbell and Stanley (2018) reminded us that "while many countries productively use popular music materials and pedagogy in schools (Mantie, 2013), their inclusion does not guarantee the representation of diverse styles, nor automatically mean that multiple musical traditions are authentically represented" (p. 145). Providing students with opportunities to fully participate in real, immersive experiences in diverse and authentic musical practices could expand their learning and understanding of fundamentally marginalized and token inclusions of non-Western musics.

Considering Wenger's (1998) concept of practice, developed as a theoretical context for social learning within a community, various musical genres and "histories of learning" (p. 86) emerge and persist as distinct yet interconnected communities of practice. In extending this concept to music education, it becomes apparent that choral, orchestral, and concert band traditions each have their own musical practices in which North American music education students have been participating for roughly a century to become certified music teachers and perpetuate what Detels (2000/2002) referred to as the cycle of elitist music education. North American universities that offer degrees in music education focus almost exclusively on band, choral, and orchestral practices (Asmus, 2001; Emmons, 2004; Fitzpatrick, 2013; Nettle, 1995; Reimer, 2002; Springer, 2016; Volk, 1998; Wang & Humphreys, 2009; Wicks, 1998) and as such seek to admit and produce musicians who are capable of demonstrating a high degree of fluency in this limited range of genres to the exclusion of all others.

By virtue of fixating on the insular practices of large-ensemble education, music education degree programs risk preparing their prospective teachers with an unreasonably small range of musical genres through which they can confidently broker with students. Given the vast array of vernacular, popular, and leisure-oriented musics whose practices differ widely, school

music teachers must be prepared to connect students to an increasingly wide range of musical idioms and cultures. Admittedly, this conversation is less relevant for those who are certain that their future as a music educator will never draw them or their students into a public school classroom. If we are to subscribe to the belief that all musics are worthy of exploration and immersion, however, then it becomes the responsibility of universities to develop curricula for their future school music teachers to immerse themselves in a variety of musical practices so that they might be better prepared to help students along a wider array of musical journeys.

Music Teacher Identity

Music degree programs as a whole, including those with foci in performance, composition, musicology, theory, history, production, or other specializations, could benefit from a more diverse range of musical practices offering a "learning experience that is musically inclusive and likely to a produce multi-skilled and adaptable graduates" (Lebler, 2007, p. 206). This is not to say that there is no merit in devoting one's life to a niche corner of the world's myriad musical endeavors, as many musicians have done and will likely continue to do. For many, it may be an essential part of who they are as a person. However, for those who have enrolled in a program that is by and large designed to educate and qualify someone to teach music in school systems, I believe that there is an inherent responsibility to develop skills and gain experiences in a variety of musical idioms and practices.

One of the largest obstacles to increasing diversity amongst musical practices in teacher training programs is that those very teachers may not identify with or have any interest in non-Western musical practices. Developing one's identity as an educator is largely inspired by the teachers that we have seen or imagined, as well as those that we have learned with and from (Dolloff, 1999). Given that it is entirely possible and perhaps typical that a music education

student could go through their entire musical upbringing having only learned from role models and teachers within the world of Western Art music, it is not surprising that practicing music teachers continue to employ those same genres as the basis for musical learning, or that they "may question the value or necessity of encouraging students' fluency in multiple musical languages" (Isbell & Stanley, 2018, p. 147). North American university music programs are immeasurably influential in shaping the musical identities of the teachers that they qualify. If music education programs were able to offer role models and immersive experiences in diverse musical practices and encourage applications from students with backgrounds in any and all musical genres, their music education students would be in better positions to develop multimusical identities.

Similar to Tobias's (2012) study of hyphenated musicians at the secondary level, Isbell and Stanley's (2018) exploration of postsecondary musical code-switchers is useful in developing the relationship between teacher identity as related to musical practices. They described code-switchers as "people adept at navigating multiple ways of making music, who inhabit multiple formal and informal musical worlds and who can switch gears depending on, where, what, and with whom they are performing" (Isbell & Stanley, 2018, p. 147). As in the literary origins of the notion of codes, Isbell and Stanley contended that musical codes exist on a spectrum of privilege and marginalization, unsurprisingly suggesting that classical music represents the epitome of privileged musical codes (p. 156). Although the musicians in Isbell and Stanley's study felt pride in their codeswitching abilities, they cited frequent instances of negative judgement and a lack of respect toward non-classically oriented music skills (Isbell & Stanley, 2018).

There is a dire need to interrogate the processes by which music teachers conceive and develop their professional identities. Angelo (2015, 2016) sought to define and grapple with aspects of the music teacher profession, including a case study on a music teacher bridging the gap between community and school musics and a theoretical inquiry into music teachers' professional mandates. In the former article, Angelo (2015) applauded a music teacher whose holistic approach to teaching music "eliminates traditional separations in discussions on music education, for example, those between amateurs and professionals, specialists and generalists, and instrumental music and classroom music" (p. 292). Such a calling, as frequently discussed in the latter article, is clearly praised in favor of other callings that she indicated might "not be about the pupil or society, but instead about the music educator's *self*-interest and *self*-commitment" (Angelo, 2016, p. 186).

The inseparable connection between our musical and pedagogical identities needs a balance—one that recognizes the best of both worlds and is constantly growing and diversifying. For those who have answered the calling of teaching music and find themselves guiding students within the context of a public school classroom, that calling cannot avoid being shaped by that particular teacher's musical identity. It is therefore essential that university music education programs prioritize the development of multimusical identities and diverse fluencies for their graduates, so as not to impose the same limits on those teachers' future students. Wenger (1998) suggested that

> in a complex world in which we must find a livable identity, ignorance is never simply ignorance, and knowing is not just a matter of information. In practice, understanding is always straddling the known and the unknown in a subtle dance of the self. It is a delicate

> balance. Whoever we are, understanding in practice is the art of choosing what to know and what to ignore in order to proceed with our lives. (p. 41)

In North America, the cyclic nature of the music education paradigm and the ensuing choices to ignore virtually every way of nonclassical music as a way of learning music has and continues to be a tremendous disservice to generations of musicians, music teachers, and especially to those students who accordingly chose not to participate in music at all. We ought not to confine the broader practice of music education to a meagre selection of individual musical practices. A thoughtful and concerted diversification in university music programs' practical components could provide a much needed rejuvenation to the stagnant dynasty of music education as Western art music.

Brokering and Legitimate Peripheral Participation

This multimusical and interpractical approach to music teacher training would position future educators as what Wenger (1998) described as brokers. Brokers exist at the periphery of practices, occupying space both inside and out, channeling knowledge, experience, and skills between practices. Wenger stated, "The process of brokering is complex. It involves processes of translation, coordination, and alignment between perspectives. It requires enough legitimacy to influence the development of a practice, mobilize attention, and address conflicting interests" (p. 109). Establishing legitimacy as a broker cannot be done without experience and immersion within a musical practice. The existing paradigm of music education programs bestows most prospective educators with sufficient legitimacy within the practices associated with Western art music, and enough interchangeable skills and knowledge to broker between them. In comparison, opportunities for legitimate participation in *other* musical practices tend to be extremely limited.

Participation in a practice involves more than simply learning about the practice itself. Wenger (1998) suggested that induction into a practice typically begins with "legitimate peripheral participation," which entails full engagement in practice with lessened risk, responsibility, or intensity; "an approximation of full participation that gives full exposure to actual practice" (p. 100). Looking at current music education programs would reveal generations of legitimate peripheral participation in the practices of choral, orchestral, and concert band musics. They have full access to all three dimensions required for participation in a practice: mutual engagement, use of repertoire, and negotiation of enterprise. More specifically, students have the opportunity to explore conductor–performer relationships on both sides of the podium and on a variety of classically-relevant musical instruments, discussion and experimentation with and of real repertoire that can be used in both beginner and advanced ensembles, and often some authentic school teaching experiences as well as the opportunity to take leadership roles and develop their skills as educators and role models for students.

While music education programs offer a well-rounded and comprehensive experience in the conventions of Western art music, they leave little room for "legitimate peripheral participation" (Wenger, 1998, p. 100) in any other musical practices. Wenger (1998) stated that "in order to support learning, engagement requires authentic access to both the participative and the reificative aspects of practice in concert" (p. 184). Some universities offer courses on songwriting, jazz improvisation, or the history of popular music, yet such experiences are largely reificatory in nature and offer little participative engagement in the actual musical practices they claim to represent. These opportunities are insufficient to provide prospective music teachers with the practical knowledge and diverse skill sets required to meaningfully connect their own students to real musical practices.

Building a community of musical practices involves enough sustained mutual engagement, use of relevant repertoire, and shared enterprise to establish and maintain the practice itself. A world music ensemble that runs for 2–3 hours per week for 12 weeks lacks the longevity to allow a student to immerse themselves in an actual practice. If communities of practice are, as Wenger (1998) suggested, "shared histories of learning" (p. 86), then membership must exist and evolve over time:

> The existence of a community of practice does not depend on a fixed membership.... An essential aspect of any long-lived practice is the arrival of new generations of members. As long as membership changes progressively enough to allow for sustained generational encounters, newcomers can be integrated into the community, engage in its practice, and then—in their own way—perpetuate it. (Wenger, 1998, p. 99)

While it is difficult and perhaps impossible to quantify and generalize what might be constituted as a measurable threshold for sustained mutual engagement, consider the number of hours dispersed over an entire 4-year timeframe that a music education student would spend with their peers immersed in the practice of concert band or choral music, supported by theory and history courses designed with these Western art traditions in mind. Compared to individual projects or courses based on *other* musics, it is analogous to jumping from a diving board and dipping your toe in the shallow end of a swimming pool. In order to expand upon the currently limited range of promoted musical fluencies, music education programs need to work towards de-emphasizing the practices of band, orchestral, and choral traditions, and redesign programs to establish legitimate peripheral participation in a wider range of musical practices.

Constellations of Musical Practice

It is with these issues in mind that I felt inspired to design a rough framework for a 4-year music education program based on an interpractical ethos—that is to say, between multiple musical practices. I based the framework (see Table 1) on the following principles and assumptions:

1. All musical genres and practices are worth living for and learning about.
2. Student-centered (rather than master > apprentice) learning models ought to be the default educational experience, unless a particular musical idiom (e.g., those that involve a conductor, or teaching toward virtuosity) calls for a different or more traditional mode of learning to provide students with a more authentic experience participating in that musical practice.
3. The objective is to improve North American music teacher education programs through empowering *other* musical practices to the point of relative equality. This will inevitably mean learning less about Western art musics so that there is equal opportunity and space in the timetable to pursue all musical practices.
4. In North American schools, it is still important for music teachers to have a comfortable grasp on Western art music styles, as they will have students who wish to pursue those paths.
5. Improving the capacity on a single instrument, and especially in a single musical practice, should not be strictly enforced in music education programs. Private lessons on an individual instrument should be available as an option but should not be required.

6. Technique courses for secondary instruments or families of instruments ought to be taken on a voluntary or consultative basis in informal weekly workshops run by instrumental instructors or upper-year students. Learning how to play multiple musical instruments is important, but preselecting which instruments are learned through requiring several courses on orchestra/band instruments further reinforces the dominance of Western art music and the large-ensemble paradigm.

Table 1

Example of a 4-Year Degree Outline

Year 1	
Courses	Credits
PRAC 1	1.0
PRAC 2	1.0
PRAC 3	1.0
Musical Practices Seminar	N/A
Theory: Elements of Western Musics[a]	0.5
Theory: Rhythms & Forms	0.5
Music Education: Intro & Foundations	1.0
History: One of Popular Music, Music in Canada,[b] Western Music	0.5
Total	5.5
Year 2	
PRAC 1	1.0
PRAC 2	1.0
PRAC 3	1.0
PRAC 4	1.0
Musical Practices Seminar	N/A
Theory: Western Harmony	0.5
Theory: Harmony of Popular Music & Jazz	0.5

Courses	Credits
Music Education: One of Psychology, Philosophy, History & Issues	0.5
History: One of Popular Music, Music in Canada, Western Music	0.5
Total	6.0
Year 3	
PRAC 1	1.0
PRAC 2	1.0
PRAC 3	1.0
PRAC 4	1.0
Musical Practices Seminar	N/A
Music Education: One of Psychology, Philosophy, History & Issues	0.5
History: One of Popular Music, Music in Canada, Western Music	0.5
Music Elective	0.5
Music Elective	0.5
Total	6.0
Year 4	
PRAC 1	1.0
PRAC 2	1.0
PRAC 3	1.0
PRAC 4	1.0
Musical Practices Seminar	N/A
Music Education: One of Psychology, Philosophy, History & Issues	0.5
Music Elective	0.5
Nonmusic Elective	0.5
Nonmusic Elective	0.5
Total	6.0

Note. PRAC = musical practice.

[a]For students without experience or familiarity with Western notation. [b]This course should be replaced with a course relevant to the given community.

The key difference with this framework is that it positions all the available musical practices as electives rather than requiring students to learn Western art music as the basis and offering tastes of other musics as optional electives. For any different country or university, the available practices should be different based on the musics that are relevant to a given community. There is little relevance or cultural significance for a school in London, United Kingdom, to be engaging in the practice of Canadian Indigenous musics. It leaves universities with the responsibility and opportunity to connect with the musical leaders of the surrounding community, and to develop multiple, interactive communities of musical practice within the university.

This evolving, interconnected, yet distinct collection of musical practices take the form of a constellation (Wenger, 1998, p. 128)—different musical practices connected through overlapping spaces, members, and vocational pursuits but different in terms of the artefacts, musical styles, discourses, and artistic objectives that emerge in each practice. Wenger (1998) noted that "as communities of practice differentiate themselves and also interlock with each other, they constitute a complex social landscape of shared practices, boundaries, peripheries, overlaps, connections, and encounters" (p. 118). Building a constellation of practices would not only allow individual practices to maintain their musical essence and character, but also allow the students to experience a broad and flexible array of musical practices that would help them build multimusical identities as musicians and educators. In Wenger's words,

> Our various forms of participation delineate pieces of a puzzle we put together rather than sharp boundaries between disconnected parts of ourselves. An identity is thus more than just a single trajectory; instead, it should be viewed as a *nexus of multimembership* [emphasis added]. (p. 159)

(See Figure 1 for a collection of nine musical practices that would make up a healthy and diverse catalogue in a Canadian university.)

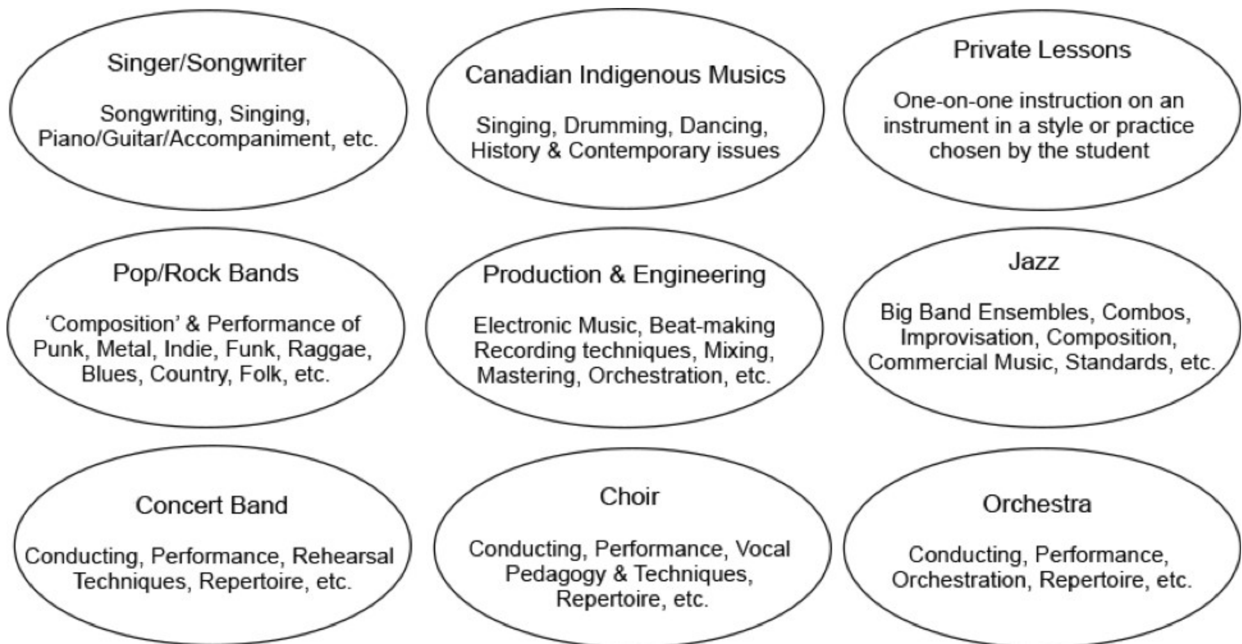

Figure 1. Some examples of relevant musical practices for a Canadian university.

Within each musical practice, there is the opportunity for students and instructors alike to dive into a particular practice as a collective enterprise. Rather than predetermined courses and examinations, students ought to be able to participate in the negotiation of their trajectories (Wenger, 1998, p. 156) to facilitate their own development and growth as musicians and educators. Were students to participate in a given musical practice for all four years, they could take on leadership roles as conductors, producers, facilitators, tutors, and coaches for the various courses or for instrument-specific technique workshops. Further sustained mutual engagement through these "generational encounters" (Wenger, 1998, p. 157) would be invaluable for the

students just beginning to engage in the practice as well as those who would be nearing the prospect of teaching outside of the university.

One concern with this reimagined framework is that it seems to reinforce the categorization of and differences between musical styles; yet it is important for music educators to have immersed themselves in musical practices that reflect as faithfully as possible the practices that exist outside of the institution. Karlsen (2010) and Lebler (2007) have given us glimpses into groundbreaking programs centered around Western popular music practices as they might appear outside of formal institutions. In her article about the BoomTown Music program in Sweden, Karlsen unveiled the need for authenticity in an informal music program based largely on group-based composition and peer-directed learning. While the article broadly questions and confronts the perceived differences of informal and formal learning in musical institutions of higher education, one of Karlsen's more specific conclusions was that students' perceptions of authenticity is a key factor in determining their attribution of value to the program of study. Lebler's (2007) research on the masterless production studio shed light on the possibilities of what music production can look like at the university level, exploring the different roles involved in task- and project-based music production at the university level. Lebler organized students into bands and gave them access to a fully functioning recording studio where they wrote, produced, and recorded music together. These are two examples of exceptional and innovative programs dedicated to, as with most classical music programs, a narrow range of musical practices. They undoubtedly challenged the domination of Western art music by their very existence, yet the issue is more complicated when considering music education programs, due to the added responsibility of having to facilitate future generations of students' musical journeys. Accomplishing the goals of the framework and its accompanying

philosophy proposed in this essay would involve harnessing programs such as the BoomTown Music and masterless production studio and organizing them into separate musical practices within the same institution, along with a collection of others. So long as the policies and philosophical foundation of a multimusical education program were to maintain the spirit of equity and diversity between musical practices, the blurring of distinctions and boundaries would only serve to improve the program as a whole. Further, encouraging student-organized musical practice courses could provide students with opportunities to exercise autonomy and independence in their musical journeys, complemented by the sage guidance of the professors and upper year students.

Despite efforts to curb the utopian ideals inherent in its development, the framework would be difficult to implement for a few reasons. Firstly, given that this framework might render some tenured or longstanding instructional positions obsolete, it would be difficult to make room to let go of professors and hire new professors or community leaders to fill in the requisite roles. Working toward such a framework could be made in smaller steps, taking into account current faculty members' diverse musical strengths and interest, as well as looking to the community for thriving musical practices. Although it would also be challenging to reorganize the university space and budget to adequately accommodate a number of different musical practices, developments in music technology over the past few decades have significantly reduced the entry level cost associated with recording equipment, software, as well as amplified and electronic instruments. Compared to a class set of wind and brass instruments, the instruments and laptops required to run most of the practices mentioned above would be much more cost effective. One other scheduling and workload-related issue might be that the reframing of the required theory and history courses toward a less Eurocentric model would likely have to

occur across the entire school or faculty of music, as music education programs tend to share the same theory and history courses as other program foci.

The objective of this project was not to suggest that every music education program in North America ought to conform to the exact guideline or course structure outlined in Table 1. The objective with the framework was to spark a stronger connection to the philosophy and ideals by which it was conceived that it might inspire positive and productive changes in university music education programs. In reifying something as concrete as a four-year-degree plan, the rationale was to generate an example that might look somewhat familiar to those involved as stakeholders in university music education and modify the practical elements in such a way that removes Western art music as the default musical practice. They are but one example of a reimagined music teacher education based on musical diversity and reflective of real musical practices.

It is imperative that music teacher education programs provide educators with opportunities to engage and participate in a variety of musical practices so they may be prepared to facilitate a wide spectrum of musical experiences with their students. Such practices could include the existing staple genres of choral, orchestral, concert band, and jazz musics, but also more scarcely institutionalized genres of popular music styles such as rock, rap, pop, musical theatre, or folk as well as regionally relevant indigenous and vernacular musics, online musical platforms, and music production. By seeking higher education institutions' surrounding communities for musical practices to engage with, professors, instructors, and prospective music teachers can all engage and learn with professionals, masters, elders, veterans, and other cultural ambassadors who can capably and respectfully guide students in their various musical engagements. Pitts (2017) said, "Music education needs to be about leaving opportunities open,

not closing them down; offering routes and role models for lifelong engagement, and articulating these possibilities for young people as part of developing and sustaining their musical identities" (p. 166). For music education students, creativity and autonomy represent more than deficiencies to be shoehorned into existing Western art music programs: They are skills best developed in the context of actual music making within real musical practices. Equalizing the inclusion and interaction of diverse musical practices as constellations in music teacher education programs would go a long way in disrupting the hegemony of existing programs, preparing teachers to engage with and responsibly guide students in a variety of musical practices rather than tokenizing and underrepresenting those that sit outside the bubble of Western art music.

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