

Global Music History as Teaching Framework: Perspectives of a Generalist

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At the time of this writing, I am presently the sole Music faculty member at an Institute of Technology that might also be understood as a four-year regional campus for a multi-campus public institution. In this capacity, I exclusively offer courses in music for non-majors in alignment with specified undergraduate general education curricular designators from within a multidisciplinary department.¹ Even before formally thinking about implementing pedagogies informed by a global music history framework, I was instinctively questioning how I might formulate coursework and approaches to music and sound that align with broad institutional curricular structures, serve our specific campus student population, and interface with other departmental and college disciplines while contributing and maintaining broad perspectives that emphasize the meanings and roles of sonic practice and listening in relation to the engagements of people, processes of movement, and expression. I learned a great deal by “doing,” and not without a fair degree of trial and error. Here, in part, I offer some of my experiences and perspectives of teaching music within a general education context from outside of the setting of an established Department or School of Music—a teaching situation that I do not believe is terribly exceptional though it is not widely depicted in the pedagogical literature.²

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1. The designators are in “The Arts and Creativity” and “Global Studies and Diversity.” “General Education Foundations,” Office of the University Registrar, West Virginia University, accessed June 27, 2022, <https://registrar.wvu.edu/curriculum-catalog/general-education-foundations-gef>.

2. For an example of a pedagogical article that does specifically tend to general educational music appreciation instruction (though not explicitly from outside of a music department), see Steven Cornelius and Mary Natvig, “Teaching Music Appreciation: a Cultural Approach,” this *Journal* 4 no. 1 (2013): 139–150. For an example in which many of the approaches to

I am privileged with and challenged by the positioning of *music* in my campus teaching context and by both the pedagogical practicalities and implications of how that music—and its transmissions, migrations, soundings, meanings, values, exchanges, boundaries—is encountered, studied, learned, and ultimately valued. My approach, as much as anything, is due to my broad disciplinary training and my perspective is largely experiential.³ While any successes I can mark are only the result of collective and collaborative efforts, in addition to these successes there have nonetheless been innumerable challenges. In response to a call to share experiences in teaching related to global music history, I find it helpful to address, first, how I have come to understand *music* in my particular context. I then reflect on some of the resonance I have ultimately found in a teaching approach informed by a global music history framework and processes of defamiliarization, as well as on how and why I have adopted such an approach.

What is “Music” in My Context?

I am currently located in southern West Virginia at the West Virginia University Institute of Technology, “WVU Tech.” Prior to completing the Ph.D. with a concentration in Ethnomusicology, my graduate studies included a masters-level concentration in Music History and Theory (historical musicology). This background—combined with experiences in international education, K-8 education, and historical interpretation and museum services—has informed my attempts to fulfill my obligation to offer a range of coursework. Presently, my classes include international students recently graduated from high school (many of whom are student athletes), though the vast majority of my students are hyperlocal to this region (whether recent high school graduates or individuals of various ages and life stages). Most students in any given term are likely to identify as both “white” and “male.”⁴ In terms of previous musical experience

methodologies, curricular design, and assessment (for undergraduate music majors) can arguably be broadly applied to other contexts, see Matthew Baumer, “A Snapshot of Music History Teaching to Undergraduate Music Majors, 2011–2012; Curricula, Methods, Assessment, and Objectives,” this *Journal* 5, no. 2 (2015): 23–47. For a more “toolkit” approach that also has broad relevance, see Erin Bauer, Alexandra Monchick, Esther Morgan-Ellis, Mary Natvig, Kristen Strandberg, and Reba Wissner, “Roundtable: Pandemic Lessons,” this *Journal* 11, no. 1 (2021): 46–56.

3. I was fortunate to be able to participate in some general educational theory coursework at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, in applied music pedagogy coursework at the undergraduate level, and in practicums and supervised teaching of general education music courses at the graduate level. These experiences were invaluable and provided me a basis on which to build.

4. Within a 2017 data report (the most recently available of such items), 77% of students enrolled in Fall 2016 are indicated as “white,” 7% as “nonresident alien,” and 44% as “women.”

and knowledge, my classes comprise students (primarily, but not exclusively, from Latin America) who have played in concert orchestra, students (including hyperlocal students) with experience in musical theater and/or marching band, and students who create, perform, and record their own music (whether through acoustic or technological means, or both). Even so, for a not insignificant number of my students, any strong recollections or current experiences of live music tend to be associated nearly exclusively with their presence in a church or in a restaurant.

The question of “what is music” is one I have previously posed as an instructor to professional graduate students and undergraduates in other settings.⁵ This has often occurred in the context of some kind of “world” music class and very typically has yielded stimulating and interesting results as it requires an unpacking of assumptions and analytical engagement with one’s background, preferences, and even biases. Given my work with this question as a pedagogical tool and my training, I thought I had some basis from which to formulate a response or at least a series of relevant questions. Yet, as it turns out, in my present context within a multidisciplinary department that offers majors and minors alongside a significant number of courses in service of institutional general-education undergraduate requirements, engaging with this question in fact demanded that I unpack and articulate my own assumptions in order to move towards a shared understanding and facilitate a sense of dialogue, cohesion, and collective investment with not only my students but more broadly with my campus.

While music programming and degrees were offered previously, my position is the campus’s first full-time faculty post of its type in decades. For holders of community and institutional memory, the presence of a full-time music faculty member may seem to signal a return to aspects of the past and, as such, raises questions such as: Where is the marching band? What about the choir? When will the performances begin? Where are the instruments? What happened to

IPEDS [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System] Feedback Report 2017, West Virginia University Institute of Technology, Beckley, WV, accessed June 29, 2022, <https://institutionalresearch.wvu.edu/files/d/9b26e7bf-092e-4c5f-a34e-6a97a5935e42/ipeds-data-feedback-rpt-2017-wvuit.pdf>. Data in another file indicates that from the time campus operations began at our present location (2016), first-time freshman have overwhelmingly been residents of the same county as the current campus (Raleigh): “First-time Freshmen by West Virginia County, 2005–2018,” *West Virginia University Institute of Technology, Headcount Enrollment, First-time Freshmen Comprehensive Report, 2005–2018*, accessed June 29, 2022 under “First-time Students,” <https://institutionalresearch.wvu.edu/institutional-research/statistical-information/wvu-institute-of-technology>. I wish to thank Rachel Bragg for her assistance in helping me to locate these reports.

5. In addition to my present position in southern West Virginia, I have taught for Stony Brook (as a graduate student) at campuses on both Long Island and in Manhattan as well as for Kapiolani Community College on O’ahu, Hawai’i.

the music books? These questions indicate certain assumptions, expectations, and values centered on a specific definition of “music,” one that assumes that music is broadly understood as something (1) acoustically sounded within a live, performed, and rehearsed context; (2) something presumably creative and expressive; (3) something that fulfills a civic function amongst the campus population and within the broader community; (4) something that utilizes specific and concrete objects and resources (such as band instruments and music books); and (5) is part of a compositional practice, notated, and likely canonic, or at least part of a common corpus.⁶

Along with questions that may indicate some shared understandings of what music is thought to be, there have been concerns shared regarding immediate impacts of the *teaching and learning* of music in a multi-use space. These concerns encompass things such the impacts on shared learning spaces – including the need for or added value of specialized technology and musical instruments in classrooms, and presumed detrimental effects from sound bleeding into other spaces. Though anecdotal, my experiences with the expectations and assumptions of non-Music faculty may suggest that disciplinary pedagogical concerns (such as those related to questions of the canon) reach well beyond the music department or major, and may arguably indicate that general education courses on music merit attention in relation to efforts to critically rethink instructional frames.⁷ The legacies of teaching, studying, and performing music on my campus, in conjunction with my background and the characteristics and interests of my students, have ultimately led me to consistently attempt to situate the study of music within a global music history framework that is both shaped by and reaching towards processes of defamiliarization.

Why attempt a Global Music History Framework in My General Education Undergraduate Context?

Global music history, as both a developing genre of musical scholarship *and* as one that may be situated somewhat distinctively across time and

6. Some of my conceptualization of these questions as that underscore an [implicit] assumption of “what counts as music to be studied” are informed in part by Georgina Born, “For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn,” *Journal of the Royal Music Association* 135, no. 2 (2010), 208–209.

7. Here, I am thinking, for example, of approaches such as those discussed by Alice V. Clark in “Uncovering a Diverse Early Music,” this *Journal* 11, no. 1 (2021): 1–21; and by Kristen L. Speyer Carithers in “Music History as Labor History: Rethinking ‘Work’ in Musicology,” this *Journal* 12, no. 1 (2022): 68–90. And though focused on music history instruction, I also find the discussions in this article to be broadly applicable in a general educational context: Travis D. Stimeling and Kayla Tokar, “Narratives of Musical Resilience and the Perpetuation of Whiteness in the Music History Classroom,” this *Journal* 10, no. 1 (2020): 20–38.

subdisciplines, appeals to me in both its framing and its implications for methodology. I perhaps most closely professionally identify as something of a “historical ethnomusicologist.” Loose conceptualizations of something akin to global music history have been informative throughout my professional development, though my use of the phrase is comparatively new.⁸ In the general education coursework for undergraduates that I currently instruct (including but not limited to “music appreciation,” “popular music,” “history of jazz,” and “world musics”), I find that the perspective of a “global music history” framework is as much or more an indication of an approach to macro-processes and perspectives as it is to demographics, geographical locations, or even influences of power or political dominance. It is an attempt to emphasize transcultural interaction and exchange rather than an attempt to “cover everything.”

In my present context of teaching a variety of general education music courses to students majoring in something other than music, I endeavor to center and trace histories and contemporary practices of musical expressions and performances through networks, migrations, exchanges, or “fluid geographical transfers”; to move beyond an “us/them” dialogic or comparative framework when students perceive such frameworks through a lens of difference; and to encourage empathetic and responsive listening with a broad reach while positioning music as an interface of interpersonal connectivity.⁹ Through our

8. In this sense I feel affinity with some of the assertions made by Martin Stokes regarding the longstanding contributions of “history-saturated ethnographic methodologies.” Martin Stokes, “Notes and Queries on ‘Global Music History,’” in *Studies on a Global History of Music: A Balzan Musicology Project*, ed. Reinhard Strohm, SOAS Musicology Series (New York: Routledge, 2008), 8–9. As a graduate student, I also had numerous encounters with Stephen Blum, Philip V. Bohlman, and Daniel M. Neuman, eds, *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History* (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1991). In a review of this aforementioned text, Veit Erlmann asserts that it “seeks to disrupt the hegemony of Western attempts at world music history and to conceive of a world of decentered, plural histories” in which music “is seen by the authors as a quintessential means of expressing difference.” Veit Erlmann, review of *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History*, *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 24 (1992), 156.

9. I take “fluid geographical transfers” from Federico Celestini and Philip V. Bohlman “Editorial: Musicology and the Discourses of Global Exchange,” *Acta Musicologica* 86, no. 1 (2014), 1.

For a broad encapsulation of the developments in the study of difference in musicology, see Olivia Bloechl with Melanie Lowe, “Introduction: Rethinking Difference,” in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kallberg (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015): 1–52. For a rumination on evolutions of framings of difference in ethnomusicology (from the 1990s), see Deborah Wong, “Ethnomusicology and Difference,” *Ethnomusicology* 50, no. 2 (2006): 259–279. As to how some of this may manifest in the classroom and curriculum, Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell cautions against dichotomies perpetuating “commodified stereotypes” of “differentiation” in a “world music” context, specifically. He is cautioning about the “racialized differentiation” in this context, but I think the caution regarding the risks of the hardening of comparative frameworks applies more broadly. Ramos-Kittrell, “Teaching Music and Difference: Music, Culture, and Difference in Globalization,” *Musicology Now*, July 10, 2018, <https://musicologynow.org/>

multiplicity of positionings in the present, we attempt to reach out to a “multi-voiced past” as a way of negotiating “globally situated histories,” even when students may initially assume their own individual and collective experiences and perspectives to be representative of some sort of larger or even universal absolute.¹⁰ In an aim to globally situate our study of musics and histories and to frame our study as broadly culturally and socially relevant, these general undergraduate courses deliberately lean on the breadth of experiences of the participants but ultimately seek to extend beyond representation or reflection of any presumed singular shared experience.¹¹

Processes of Defamiliarization

In service of a pedagogy informed by a global music history framework, I increasingly embrace processes and even an (unofficial) overarching common course outcome of defamiliarization, which Michael Dylan Foster has defined as “the effect of considering one’s own tradition through the eyes of another.”¹² I have noted it is very helpful for my students to engage a variety of approaches to facilitate a defamiliarization of even the most familiar musics, and that these approaches also remain relevant and clarifying when considering musics and

[org/teaching-music-and-difference-music-culture-and-difference-in-globalization/](https://doi.org/10.2298/MUZ1927015S). For an additionally instructive approach to a “world music” course, see also “Michael A. Figueroa, “Decolonizing ‘Intro to World Music?’” this *Journal* 10, no.1 (2020): 39–57. For both music and musicology as “interface,” see, for instance, Lukas Christensen and Daniel K. L. Chua, “Editorial: Different Points of View,” *Musicological Brainfood* 6, no. 2 (2022), 3. For more on the role and function of interconnectivity, see, for example, Chua, “Global Musicology: A Keynote without a Key,” *Acta Musicologica* 94, no. 1 (2022): 109–126. Also broadly relevant, particularly in consideration of the role of the “far-near experience,” is Sonia Tamar Seeman, “Embodied Pedagogy: Techniques for Exploring Why and How Music Matters,” in *College Music Curricula for a New Century*, ed. Robin D. Moore (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2017), 191–204.

10. The phrase “multi-voiced past” in this context is drawn from Reinhard Strohm, “The Balzan Musicology Project Towards a Global History of Music, the Study of Global Modernisation, and Open Questions for the Future,” *Muzikologija* 27 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.2298/MUZ1927015S>, 17; while “globally situated histories” is from Walker, “Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum,” this *Journal* 10, no.1 (2020), 15.

11. I find Melanie Lowe’s argument for cultural relevance in music history pedagogy to be instructive in this regard. Lowe, “Teaching Music History Today: Making Tangible Connections to Here and Now,” this *Journal* 1, no. 1 (2010), 46–47. Also of note is Louis Kaiser Epstein, Taylor Okonek, and Anna Perkins, “Mind the Gap: Inclusive Pedagogies for Diverse Classrooms,” this *Journal* 9, no. 2, (2019): 119–172. I do want to be very careful not to treat my approach to global music history as somehow interchangeable with decolonization efforts or even with attempts to reach towards equitable pedagogical practices that center inclusion, though there are certainly synchronicities across these domains. See Margaret E. Walker, “Towards a Decolonized Music History Curriculum,” 1–19.

12. Foster, “The UNESCO Effect: Confidence, Defamiliarization, and a New Element in the Discourse on a Japanese Island,” *Journal of Folklore Research* 48, no. 1 (2011), 93.

contexts that are unfamiliar. Over several classes and even across the term, such approaches might include interrogating overlapping and intertwined processes that may serve to address the following implicit or explicit questions:

- What distinctions and overlaps between and amongst processes contribute to music as something that *is* (as idea, as construction, as embodied process, as expression, as sonic phenomena, as site of negotiation and exchange)?
- What constitutes music as the *focus* (as performance, as transportive and evocative, as resonant and relevant, as artistry, but also as commodity)?
- What *technologies* serve to facilitate but also capture and re-sound that music of focus (the instruments and voices involved, the spaces in which it is practiced and encountered and recorded, the mechanical methods and media involved in recording and playback and broadcast)?
- And how do various *social and cultural values and exchanges* expressively and interpretively inform and connect these various layers of being and meaning and engagement?¹³

One specific tactic is to defamiliarize something regionally or otherwise presumably familiar by situating it within broader histories and settings. An example relevant to my present geographic location is the banjo and string band music. The banjo, in many instances, is read as a cultural signifier of a historic Americana that is nearly always presumed to be white and rural.¹⁴ I approach this material on two levels: the first is to defamiliarize something likely perceived to be somewhat familiar in order to foster deeper inquiry; the second is to more broadly do so in a way that, to quote Scott V. Linford, “contradicts the narrative of Western scholarly omniscience.”¹⁵ Specifically, a study of the banjo, with its complex transnational legacy, fosters engagement with topics such as hybridity and innovation as well as cultural appropriation and erasure. Such a study may ultimately counter and complexify some of the pervasive negative Appalachian stereotypes with which the banjo is often associated.¹⁶

13. Such an approach owes a tremendous debt to Popular Music Studies. For a summary of some of this trajectory, see David K. Blake, “Introduction: Towards a Critical Pedagogy for Undergraduate Popular Music History Courses in the Twenty-First Century,” this *Journal* 5, no. 1 (2014): 99–102.

14. A number of examples and resources related to the banjo and string band are included in Heeseung Lee, “Retracing the Roots of Bluegrass Music through an Affrilachian Aesthetic,” this *Journal* 9, no. 2 (2019): 215–233.

15. Scott V. Linford, “Historical Narratives of the Akonting and Banjo” *Ethnomusicology Review* (July 27, 2014), <https://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/akonting-history>.

16. For a discussion of some of these stereotypes and their permutations, see Emelie K. Peine and Kai A. Schafft, review of *Hillbilly Elegy: A Memoir of a Family and Culture in Crisis*, by

I have found that embracing a teaching approach informed by processes of defamiliarization in service of a global music history framework has also expanded options for topical and geographical focus. It has, for instance, meant that I can meaningfully incorporate just about any available live music regardless of what may be on the course calendar – an asset in a department without a music performance wing in an area with minimal public transportation. Even beyond the added experiential and learning value brought by “live” performance, embracing defamiliarization in my teaching has led me to confront some of my own siloed perceptions of musical traditions and ultimately enhanced my pedagogy. For example, for a(n at the time) fairly “traditional” music appreciation course during a week we were initially scheduled to consider chamber music in the nineteenth century, we had the opportunity to host a local bluegrass band in class. This live session led to discussions on processes of composition, rehearsal, improvisation, and performance, and to considerations of geographically and colonially affiliated legacies and traditions; it provided a launchpad for considerations of “folk” and “concert” music and performers (including visual representation, marketing methods, performance settings, and patronage) for a variety of ensembles and their instruments — most notably constellations of the string band and the string quartet.¹⁷ In this instance, I noted that processes of music consumption and media interaction, for example (topics on which my students generally feel initially very confident), became defamiliarized as the class reached beyond their previous knowledge in ways that challenged their initial expectations. While I doubt that I would have come to such an integrative approach that embraces processes of defamiliarization in a setting with more opportunities for live music, I do believe that I would now endeavor to apply some similar structure even in contexts in which an abundance of types of performances are available, as it opens a number of pathways for centerings and decenterings and related alterations in perspectives.

My aim for my teaching to take a global turn is admittedly aspirational, punctuated by challenges, and an ongoing quest. While my approach to implementing a kind of a global music history framework through processes of defamiliarization often embraces the local even as it seeks to emphasize connections across places and times, it seems to perhaps be somewhat related to that depicted in Annie Yen-Ling Liu’s and Blake Stevens’ opening of “Teaching Global Music History: Comparative Approaches in Chinese Historiography.” As they explain, such an approach would:

J. D. Vance, *What You Are Getting Wrong about Appalachia*, by Elizabeth Catte, *Ramp Hollow: The Ordeal of Appalachia*, by Steven Stoll, *Rural Sociology* 83, no. 3 (2018): 707–714.

17. The work of the Danish String Quartet within both “folk” and “concert” domains, for example, helps to exemplify a number of these points. Danish String Quartet, accessed August 31, 2023, <https://danishquartet.com>.

[I]nterrogate assumptions of Western superiority and other forms of Eurocentric thought in dialogue with sociopolitical and historical accounts of globalization and postcolonialism. It would give new significance to musics considered to be peripheral by removing the ‘center’ that once organized a canon of musical works. . . It would seek to . . . demonstrat[e] networks of exchange and influence.¹⁸

My goal is to continue to work toward a pedagogy that is inclusive, open, and beyond “tokenism” with a constellation of examples and case studies to foster encounters ultimately constituting a “history of many different voices” in moments and places both recognized and unrecognized, familiar and unfamiliar; where sonorous encounters foster considerations of social function, meaning, value, and purpose.¹⁹

APPENDIX Select Banjo and String Band Teaching Resources

Scott V. Linford, “Historical Narratives of the Akonting and Banjo” *Ethnomusicology Review* (July 27, 2014), <https://ethnomusicologyreview.ucla.edu/content/akonting-history>.

Features visual depictions of the *akonting* next to a historical painting of a gourd banjo along with performances on the *akonting* and descriptions of instruments’ construction and playing style. The article can additionally be drawn on to frame discussions of scholarly and historical narratives and claims (and feelings) of ownership of musical styles and instruments.

“The Roots and Branches of Virginia Music,” *Smithsonian Folkways*, Smithsonian Institution, accessed July 11, 2022, <https://folkways.si.edu/roots-branches-virginia-past-present/bluegrass/music/article/smithsonian>.

Encapsulates a relatively broad range of geographical and cultural influences and incorporates video performances ranging from the Blues to Bluegrass. The various related materials available through *Folkways* can additionally be utilized as resources for independent or small group research projects, if desired.

“Rhiannon Giddens interviewed by David Holt,” *David Holt’s State of Music*, April 9, 2015, 11:13, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H7DtIh8akk>.

18. Liu and Stevens, “Teaching Global Music History: Comparative Approaches in Chinese Historiography,” in *Listening Across Borders: Musicology in the Global Classroom*, eds. James A. Davis and Christopher Lynch (New York, Routledge, 2022), 53.

19. Madrid, “Diversity, Tokenism, Non-Canonical Musics, and the Crisis of the Humanities in U.S. Academia,” this *Journal* 7, no. 2 (2017): 124-130; Strohm, “The Balzan Musicology Project Towards a Global History of Music,” 16.

“Jim Hartel Minstrel Banjo & Rhiannon Giddens, MUSIC Episode,” *Craft in America*, December 9, 2015, 6:50, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N7SWUCpHme8>.

“Rhiannon Giddens: On the Lost History of the Black Banjo,” *A Great American Tapestry – The Many Strands of Mountain Music*, Center for Cultural Preservation, June 20, 2017, 6:28, video, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DkGSns7-e0>.

Collectively represents attention to historical instrument (re)construction, to the formation of historical (and musical and affiliate organological) narratives, and to aspects of the production and legacies of the banjo and minstrelsy on the national and international stage.

Sheryl Kaskowitz, “Before It Goes Away: Performance and Reclamation of Songs from Blackface Minstrelsy,” *The Avid Listener* (July 28, 2020), accessed July 11, 2022, <https://theavidlistenerblogcom.wordpress.com/2020/07/28/before-it-goes-away-performance-and-reclamation-of-songs-from-black-face-minstrelsy/>.

Features video performances of a few musical styles (including jazz) as well as commentary from contemporary performers (Rhiannon Giddens and Cécile McLorin Salvant) with links to additional resources (including reproduced primary source materials).