

## Threshold Concepts for Music Studies from Global Music Histories

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In a time of urgent racial reckonings, it is apparent to many that we must innovate to build a more equitable and inclusive field of music studies. Faculty members have wondered how to revise the content we offer our students in collegiate instruction—and as we are not starting from a blank slate, change often means cutting content we or others consider important. Questions about the metacognitive skills we teach have also come to the fore: in an era of disinformation, it seems important to develop students' critical thinking and intellectual independence. The growing scholarship on global music histories offers knowledge, attitudes, and skills that differ substantially from the surveys many institutions offer to undergraduate music majors, and this literature has helped my colleagues and me develop courses that encourage students to grow as flexible musicians and as engaged citizens. In this essay, I will identify some of the ways in which approaches from global music histories have changed my teaching and describe how my recent book, *Music on the Move*, translates them into an accessible resource.

I have developed these strategies as a way of amending my own education. As a white child in suburban Maryland, I learned the music taught to me in school orchestra and band programs—principally European-style classical music and British and US symphonic and marching band music, with the extra-curricular addition of big band jazz and American musical theater. Teachers dismissed popular music as unworthy of attention, and the repertoire of school ensembles was circumscribed by canonic knowledge and a seemingly limited interest in alternatives. (I will not forget the time I asked about jazz played on the violin and was scoffed at by a summer jazz band director; I eventually found Stuff Smith and Stéphane Grappelli on my own at the public library.)

These limitations were foremost a matter of social priorities. In the postcolonial United States, school music was institutionalized largely by white women who worked to secure a place for European-style music in their communities

as a marker of “civility and polish.”<sup>1</sup> The adoption of this music was part of a global ambition: early in the twentieth century, the National Federation of Music Clubs, numbering more than 100,000 members, aimed “To make America the Music Center of the World.”<sup>2</sup> In a 1923 report on the activities of the Federation's Public School Music Department, Ruth Haller Ottaway outlined a systematic program by which club members could press their communities to start orchestras in the schools for the propagation of “good music and high culture.”<sup>3</sup> They would circulate petitions to institute Supervisors of Music at the state and regional levels of the educational system; demand that local school boards hire music teachers; equip schools with phonographs; and hold music memory contests to reward familiarity with great works. Ottaway asked each participating music club to adopt the goal of “*One Hundred Towns in our State with Class Instructors in Violin in the Schools.*”<sup>4</sup> When I arrived at public school 50-odd years later, school districts routinely employed music teachers, and my education reflected the priorities that the Federation had pushed to institute.

Not much has changed. Most of the music majors I teach in a NASM-accredited School of Music at a Big Ten university in the US Midwest arrive with a musical background similar to my early training. Some cultivate a double life and perform popular music “on the side,” which they have learned independently of their music instructors or through student organizations. Many have learned a commitment to a European classical canon.<sup>5</sup> Most of these music majors will go on to be employed as teachers in K–12 schools like the ones they and I studied in: the program is oriented toward reproducing a European-derived repertoire and a set of performance practices suited to it. Sometimes the program now includes works in the Euro-American tradition that were composed by people of color; but it is still rare that school music programs abandon the band/orchestra/choir model to train students to play in Afro-diasporic or other popular musical styles. This stasis seems ever more out-of-step with the aims of racial justice that circulate in our public sphere,

1. Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *This Violent Empire: The Birth of an American National Identity* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 17. In 1957, Charles Seeger described the “traumatic character” of US cultural life: see “Music and Class Structure in the United States,” *American Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (Autumn, 1957): 282.

2. “Federation Aims,” *Official Bulletin* of the National Federation of Music Clubs, Special Festival Issue, Thirteenth Biennial Convention, Asheville, N.C. (June 1923): 4.

3. Ruth Haller Ottaway, “Public School Music,” *Official Bulletin* of the National Federation of Music Clubs 3, no. 3 (November 1923): 6.

4. Ottaway, “Public School Music,” 6. Emphasis original.

5. See Loren Kajikawa, “The Possessive Investment in Classical Music,” in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness Across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel Martinez HoSang, and George Lipsitz (Oakland: University of California Press, 2019), especially 155–59, 162–65, 169–171.

aims that are also increasingly enshrined in our universities' strategic plans and diversity action plans. By maintaining a program of study in Schools of Music that resolutely look to Europe first, we educate our students in a manner more reflective of 1923 than of 2023, one that mirrors colonial values, and one that excludes most of the music people love from the system of value they are taught.

Our musicology course sequence for music majors at Ohio State includes expected learning outcomes about musical repertoires and skills. But in recent years my primary goal for these students has been that they be able to function as musical citizens wherever they find themselves, now and in the future.<sup>6</sup> At this moment, this learning outcome seems most important:

Students will “read the room,” correctly interpreting musical and social situations they encounter in the present day and responding thoughtfully and appropriately.

This outcome implies several constituent objectives, these two among them:

- a) Students can explain multiple musical value systems and priorities, including those that differ from their own. (This objective is about perspective-taking and empathy as well as content knowledge.)
- b) Students should understand that a theory can be applied to different cases as a thinking tool and be able to apply a theory to a new case. (This objective is about analytical or “system” thinking, and it is a skill that many of our entering graduate students across the music disciplines don't yet have).<sup>7</sup>

I want our graduates to be able to size up a situation where racism, colonialism, or other forms of inequity are at work, ask smart questions, gather and assess new information, and make ethical choices.<sup>8</sup>

For example, I want the performer to have enough knowledge and empathy to decide whether to frame the performance of a piece that includes troubling

6. I owe this formulation to my colleague Ryan Skinner, whose Musical Citizenship course is the centerpiece of our newly adopted musicology curriculum for music majors at Ohio State University.

7. My thinking about what our students need to learn owes a great deal to Samuel Dorf, Louis K. Epstein, and our interlocutors at the event “But will they pass the exam?”—A Conversation about Graduate Entrance and Placement Exams in Musicology” (held via Zoom, December 2020).

8. A useful set of concepts for assessing the quality of information can be found in the Association of College & Research Libraries *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (Chicago: The Association of College & Research Libraries, 2016), <https://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/ilframework>.

racial content with contextual information, or refrain from performing it. I want our graduates to assess how institutional power and political pressures are working and decide how to act in a principled way amid those systems. I want the schoolteacher or the administrator at a nonprofit arts organization to think creatively about repertoire for concert programming and consider its appeal to various audiences—both the audiences who are historically loyal to the organization, and the audiences who have not really been invited in. And I want them to explain the value of more inclusive choices to the school board or to the board of directors who are worried about fundraising. I want our graduates to call to mind historical precedents that shaped the present situation, or are analogues to it, and use those precedents and analogues to evaluate new circumstances they encounter. I want them to notice aspects of a present-day situation that are rooted in colonial practice or racist exclusion and use what they know to formulate strategies for making music and relating to people that do the least harm and build the most good. The world we are living in demands that we cultivate knowledge and skills of this kind. The musical training I received did not do that job, and neither did the musical training I was taught to deliver.

### Threshold concepts for global music histories

To be able to do these things, our students need experience with a variety of musical repertoires and practices from the past and present; and they also need an array of disciplinary thinking skills, some of them quite abstract. In deciding what and how to teach, I have used *threshold concepts*—because this approach is closely allied to my learning objectives. Threshold concepts are a set of interpretive approaches that define a discipline: according to Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, they are concepts for “thinking through and with.”<sup>9</sup> Often threshold concepts present a specific disciplinary understanding of a phenomenon that contradicts learners' common-sense understandings. One example is that in Economics, the idea of “opportunity cost” does not correspond to our everyday usage of the word “cost”—it's a more technical understanding that points to a whole social situation and relationships between competing priorities, and the concept of “opportunity cost” has implications for how problems are approached and solved in that field.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, in Women's Studies, “patriarchy” is a theoretical tool that helps us identify the working and outcomes of

9. Linda Adler-Kassner and Elizabeth Wardle, eds., Preface to *Naming What We Know: Threshold Concepts of Writing Studies* (Boulder: Utah State University Press, 2016), x.

10. Ray Land, Glynis Cousin, Jan H. F. Meyer, and Peter Davies, “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Implications for Course Design and Evaluation,” in Chris Rust, ed., *Improving Student Learning: Diversity and Inclusivity* (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, 2005), 55; see also Martin Shanahan, “Threshold Concepts in Economics,” *Education and Training* 58, no. 5 (2006): 510–520.

a social system.<sup>11</sup> These are “threshold” concepts because each is a gateway to a discipline: once a person grasps the concept and knows how to apply it, the person has access to an analytical approach that is foundational in that discipline.

These concepts don’t come naturally: they take practice. Once a person has acquired facility with a threshold concept, though, the lights come on: they have a new lens through which they can start to see how different ideas fit together.<sup>12</sup> Jan Meyer and Ray Land explain that threshold concepts are “probably irreversible.”<sup>13</sup> Their formulation corresponds to what the feminist writer Jane O’Reilly called the “click! of recognition”<sup>14</sup>—when one’s view of the world is permanently changed by a particular experience, such that it is impossible to see things the old way ever again. As O’Reilly put it: when we undergo a change of this kind, “we have suddenly and shockingly perceived the basic disorder in what has been believed to be the natural order of things.”<sup>15</sup> This kind of understanding isn’t just understanding the idea once: it’s having the idea become a permanent part of the analytical toolkit for making sense of the world. Ideally, focusing on these concepts should help our students think like participants in the discipline—giving them access to how academic knowledge and debates are structured, and allowing them to try out roles they could play in these debates.<sup>16</sup> If we equip students with concepts of this kind, it gets them closer to being able to “read the room.”

Scholarship that engages global music histories offers us a useful array of threshold concepts for music studies. Following Olivia Bloechl, we might think of this wide-ranging body of scholarship as “entangled” or “connected” history.<sup>17</sup> The perspective cultivated in this work is useful for my purposes because it describes musical traditions not as separate developments that progress on their own terms, but as part of processes of conflict, exchange, and interconnection.

11. Holly Hassel, Amy Reddinger, and Jessica van Slooten, “Surfacing the Structures of Patriarchy: Teaching and Learning Threshold Concepts in Women’s Studies,” *International Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning* 5, no. 2, Article 18 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.20429/ijstl.2011.050218>.

12. Land, Cousin, Meyer, and Davies, “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Implications for Course Design and Evaluation,” 53–55.

13. Jan Meyer and Ray Land, “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practicing Within the Disciplines,” Occasional Report 4, Enhancing Teaching-Learning Environments in Undergraduate Courses Project, University of Edinburgh (May 2003), 4. <http://www.etl.tla.ed.ac.uk/docs/ETLreport4.pdf>.

14. Jane O’Reilly, “The Housewife’s Moment of Truth,” Ms., Spring, 1972. <https://msmagazine.com/2021/03/04/from-the-vault-click-the-housewives-moment-of-truth-ms-magazine-spring-1972/>.

15. O’Reilly, “The Housewife’s Moment of Truth.”

16. Meyer and Land, “Threshold Concepts and Troublesome Knowledge: Linkages to Ways of Thinking and Practising within the Disciplines,” 4; Adler-Kassner and Wardle, Preface to *Naming What We Know*, xi, xiv.

17. Olivia Bloechl, Editorial, *Eighteenth-Century Music* 17, no. 2 (2020): 173–76.

Histories of colonialism, empire, and tourism allow us to witness processes of appropriation, imposition, assimilation, and mixing: these processes are key features of our musical world in the present day. Telling history in this way affords opportunities for assessing the roles of social systems and of individuals, and seeing how large-scale phenomena play out in individuals’ creative lives, or vice versa.<sup>18</sup> These histories have also focused on material affordances and constraints that shape music-making: this focus can denaturalize our practices and help us think in new ways about what we do with music, and why.<sup>19</sup> Last, a history that shows the entanglement of groups of people with differing values affords opportunities for critical study of canon formation in different times and places: noticing how others change or defend their values assists us in interrogating our own.

Beginning in the mid-2000s, I developed a general education course, “Music on the Move in a Globalized World,” focusing on key concerns in global music studies.<sup>20</sup> My recent book, *Music on the Move*, works through a collection of threshold concepts from that course: colonialism, migration, diaspora, mediation, propaganda, copyright, heritage, and mixing. Each of these concepts describes a complex social dynamic: conveying each one requires multiple examples for comparison so that the student can develop a sense of the social relationships and patterns the concept names, as well as a sense of how those relationships and patterns relate to musical practices of the past or present.<sup>21</sup>

I chose these concepts because, first, they are analytical tools that enable an understanding of our interconnected world in the present. For example, if learners understand the idea of mediation, they are equipped to think about how music’s meaning is changed when its form is altered, or when it’s handed

18. Bloechl, Editorial; Gabriel Solis, “Transpacific Excursions,” in *This Thing Called Music: Essays in Honor of Bruno Nettl*, ed. Victoria Lindsay Levine and Philip V. Bohlman (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 354–65.

19. For example, Glenda Goodman, “‘But they differ from us in sound’: Indian Psalmody and the Soundscape of Colonialism, 1651–75,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 69, no. 4 (Oct. 2012): 793–822; Sergio Ospina Romero, “Recording Studios on Tour: The Expeditions of the Victor Talking Machine Company Through Latin America, 1903–1926” (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University, 2019); and Rachel Wheeler and Sarah Eyerly, “Singing Box 331: Re-sounding Eighteenth-Century Mohican Hymns from the Moravian Archives,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 76, no. 4 (Oct. 2019): 649–96, and companion website, <https://oieahc.wm.edu/digital-projects/oi-reader/singing-box-331-rachel-wheeler-sarah-eyerly/hearing-new-histories/>.

20. Threshold concepts are particular to disciplines and defined within communities of practice: it is unlikely that people across the several music studies fields would all agree on which concepts are crucial. As students need both historical and ethnographic approaches to knowledge, my selection and treatment of these concepts has drawn extensively on both musicology and ethnomusicology—as does the global music histories literature.

21. *Music on the Move* is a work of synthesis, and its intellectual debts are too numerous to name here: I encourage the reader to refer to its bibliography and notes. It is available open access at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/m613n040s>.

to a new user. If they have encountered compelling music about experiences of migration, that will help them understand people and processes they will encounter in other areas of their lives. Second, these concepts connect inquiry about the past with students' present concerns, and they can therefore be integrated into the kind of undergraduate music studies course that is common in our universities. Last, these concepts help us educate students not only as musicians but as citizens, providing them with strategies for thinking about equity, access, and justice. *Music on the Move* begins by inviting the reader to examine their own musical world(s), and what kinds of interpersonal or long-distance connections are relevant for them. The chapters that follow take up the threshold concepts, which overlap and build upon one another as the volume proceeds.

The first part of the book, entitled "Migration," describes music that moves with its makers through processes of diaspora and migration. These three chapters are delimited geographically: they take up colonialism in Indonesia; the Romani diaspora in Europe; and the African diaspora in the United States. Focusing each of these chapters on a specific interaction between peoples allowed me to introduce information about the historical reasons for the movement of people and some terms describing the blending, clashing, or appropriation of musics, while still offering enough different examples and stories to show multiple perspectives. The chapter on colonialism examines social violence and musical assimilation in Indonesia, as well as the alteration of traditions through state-sanctioned tourism and the appropriation of Indonesian musical styles by people elsewhere. Throughout these chapters, I tried to be clear about the formative power relationships engendered by occupation, the capture and enslavement of peoples, and state and corporate seizure of resources: I particularly wanted readers to cultivate empathy with peoples who have experienced duress. At the same time, I wanted them to recognize the many kinds of ingenuity with which musicians have adapted to face challenging circumstances.

The next section, entitled "Mediation," offers eclectic examples chosen to highlight specific uses of music, with the aim of helping readers see clearly the human purposes and strategies that underlie musical decision-making. These chapters address situations in which sound recording and/or political aspirations have moved music from one place to another—sometimes through educational or diplomatic travel, but often through printed, recorded, or broadcast media. The early history of recording affords a discussion of motivations for sound archiving and folk-song collection. The sound recording chapter also discusses a variety of new sound-worlds created by manipulating recorded audio, including *musique concrète*; electronic dance music; and the improbable stylistic mixes that filled the profitable market niche of "world music." Considering the role of nation-states in chapter 5 allows a re-examination of

nationalism, which had already come up in earlier chapters; this chapter also highlights the global power asymmetries that inspired processes of modernization and Europeanization in Japan and Turkey. The power of the state to constrain or support musicians (Paul Robeson, Cui Jian) or promote particular styles (mass song, heritage displays, music diplomacy) is an important theme here.

People today live in a wash of mediated and mixed music; they do not always consider where it comes from, what it represents, who put it there, or for what purpose. This middle section is meant to help the reader see the purposes and interests that underlie music's mediation and identify how and why people make different musical choices in different situations. (This idea corresponds to my learning objective "a" described above: explaining multiple musical value systems and priorities.) This section of the book also encourages readers to practice discerning how musical purposes and interests operate at various scales, from individual musicians' or communities' aspirations to the political agendas of states or empires. Being able to describe how musical processes connect with large-scale social forces is a kind of pattern recognition: it requires abstracting elements from one case and applying them to a new case. (This idea corresponds to my learning objective "b" described above: analytical or "system" thinking.) This kind of thinking is a strength of the scholarship on global music histories.<sup>22</sup>

The third section of the book, "Mashup," addresses in more detail how individual musicians' creative choices interact with global forces like migration, mediation, and neoliberalism. Chapter 6 examines several individual musicians' contrasting strategies of appropriation, with an eye toward the different meanings appropriation can produce depending on who's doing it and what they're mixing together. Chapter 7 presents concepts of copyright and ownership and shows how artists and communities in the global south have challenged international copyright enforcement regimes to create their own economic niches. Chapter 8 examines situations in which a music from one place has become localized in another place, with particular attention to several kinds of Korean American music; and to hip hop musicians in South Africa, Morocco, and Egypt. This section of the book calls attention to individuals' creative agency, which interacts with larger dynamics such as state support or constraint, the desire to connect with a distant home, and the assertion of ownership over a musical style from elsewhere. These cases, too, reflect learning objectives "a"

22. See, for example, Bloechl, "Editorial"; Solis, "Transpacific Excursions"; Hyun Kyong Hannah Chang, "Colonial Circulations: Japan's Classroom Songbooks in Korea, 1910–1945," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 27, no. 2 (2018): 157–183; and Erika Supria Honisch, Ferran Escrivà-Llorca, and Tess Knighton, "On the Trail of a Knight of Santiago: Collecting Music and Mapping Knowledge in Renaissance Europe," *Music and Letters* 101, no. 3 (August 2020): 397–453.

and “b”: by presenting related and comparable but distinct cases, I hope that readers will practice using the concepts; recognize common patterns among the situations; and get a feel for what factors are important in shaping different outcomes in different cases.

Because *Music on the Move* is not limited to one genre or style of music, but organized by threshold concepts, it invites the text’s users to bring in their own examples. It does not reflect a closed canon of valued works, but introduces ideas that readers can apply to music they care about—whether that music is covered in the book or not. For teachers, the threshold concept structure affords the opportunity to build a course that connects to repertoires not covered in the book, each of which might offer a different opportunity to apply the ideas. In some ways, this strategy resembles a “case studies” approach; here, the threshold concepts from global music history have guided the choice and ordering of cases, with the aim of creating a set of tools that equips the reader to approach music’s entangled history.<sup>23</sup>

Repetition of terms and concepts both within a chapter and throughout the volume—always in new configurations—was an essential strategy. Ideally, by the end the reader has met enough cases to have developed a sense of how certain kinds of situations generally tend to work. Michael Figueroa has rightly warned that we should take care not to make generalizations that “obscure the distinctiveness of local histories and sounds.”<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the intellectual work of becoming familiar with multiple instances of a similar dynamic seems essential for cultivating the ability to “read the room.” Encountering several related cases helps the vocabulary stick, but also helps the social relationships and human problems described in the cases start to seem familiar—and that is what makes the threshold concept useful when readers encounter it in a new situation.

### Global Music Histories and the Music Major

I developed *Music on the Move* through teaching a general education course, but I have also begun integrating these concepts into music majors’ coursework, where the balance of topics has traditionally tipped more strongly toward Europe. In teaching a survey of music before 1750, I included a substantial multi-week unit on colonialism, relying on a broad array of recent scholarship

23. On using case studies to teach music history, see Sara Haefeli, *Teaching Music History With Cases: A Teacher’s Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2022), 18–25; and Sara Haefeli and Andrew dell’Antonio, interview with Will Robin, “Sound Expertise” (podcast), <https://soundexpertise.org/teaching-music-history-with-sara-haefeli-and-andrew-dellantonio/>.

24. Michael A. Figueroa, “Decolonizing ‘Intro to World Music?’” *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2020): 45. <https://www.ams-net.org/ojs/index.php/jmhp/article/view/308>.

that interrogates global power relationships and their effects on music-making. This unit could not have been put together without Erika Supria Honisch and Giovanni Zanovello’s “Inclusive Early Music” database.<sup>25</sup> The unit was designed so that students would see several different instances of colonialism and start to understand how the big geopolitical picture affects details of music-making. Most importantly, as we examined each new case, I gradually asked them to contribute more and more of their own interpretation.

This conversation was prefigured by coverage of Iberian music earlier in the course, focusing on the multi-ethnic history of the region, long-distance connections, and music on seafaring topics. The colonialism unit introduced several different scenes of conflict. We started by contrasting musics of Spanish occupiers and indigenous Mexica and Inca peoples.<sup>26</sup> Drawing on scholarship of Bloechl, Glenda Goodman, and Katie Graber, we talked about conflict between French and English settlers and Native Americans in New England and what is now Canada, focusing on music’s role as a form of resistance and situations where Native people adopted or adapted Christian musical practices. Bloechl’s work provided a model of “counter-storytelling”; by reading the Jesuit *Relations* against the grain, she brings forward specific and vivid stories of Native peoples’ resistance to French Jesuit colonizers that show how performance was part of the conflict.<sup>27</sup> A section of Chapter 1 of *Music on the Move*, on colonialism in Indonesia, served as fodder for a comparative discussion section.

Drawing on work of Maria Ryan, Eileen Southern, Rhiannon Giddens, the McIntosh County Shouters, and the Musical Passage project, we spent two class sessions on early African American music. This lecture and discussion brought in questions of method in colonial situations: how we study this music, what the sources are like, and how we interpret those sources. My partner teacher in Spring 2021, Phoebe Hughes, relied on the work of Portia Maultsby, Travis Stimeling, and Kayla Tokar in her lecture about Black music in the colonies that would become the United States, including the suppression of drums after

25. Erika Supria Honisch and Giovanni Zanovello, “Inclusive Early Music,” <https://inclusiveearlymusic.org>. I also owe several of my choices to a repertoire list from Reba Wissner.

26. Lorenzo Candelaria, “Bernardino de Sahagún’s *Psalmody Christiana*: A Catholic Songbook from Sixteenth-Century New Spain,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67, no. 3 (2014): 619–684; Beatriz Aguilar, Darhyl Ramsey, and Barry Lumsden, “The Aztec Empire and the Spanish Missions: Early Music Education in North America,” *Journal of Historical Research in Music Education* 24, no. 1 (Oct. 2002): 62–82.

27. Olivia Bloechl, “Listening as a Contact Zone in the Jesuit *Relations*: A Global History Approach,” Lecture given at The Ohio State University, September 2019; Bloechl, “Wendat Song and Carnival Noise in the Jesuit *Relations*,” *Native Acts: Indian Performance, 1603–1832* (Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2011), 117–144; Goodman, “‘But they differ from us in sound’”; Katie Graber and Geraldine Baltzer, “‘Twas in the moon of wintertime’ not included in new Mennonite hymnal,” *Canadian Mennonite* (16 December 2019), <https://canadianmennonite.org/stories/huron-carol-new-hymnal>.

the Stono Rebellion of 1739 and the African American tradition of celebrating Pinkster Day.<sup>28</sup> These two class meetings, more than any others, helped my first-year students understand musicologists' methods in reconstructing histories from a variety of source materials.

Overall, this unit was still set up like a "survey" in that participants listened to a lot of pieces and learned some historical context that relates to those pieces. But the skill I was targeting was being able to apply the idea of colonialism in interpreting a situation. By the time we got to the African American material, students had seen several cases, and they were readily using ideas and terms from the conversations we had had before. As the unit progressed I could elicit more and more independent interpretive work from them during class discussions. I was routinely asking them to contribute their "read" on situations, and their observations were becoming more accurate and insightful. By the end of the unit they were able to draw parallels between situations we had studied and cases from their own experience that we hadn't talked about at all—this gave me some confidence that the concept of colonialism and the strategy of reading situations had stuck with them.

As an organizing principle, the threshold concept helped me to choose and organize the pieces we would study. We have moved away from using textbooks in our musicology courses for the music majors, but that decision has meant choosing new materials and crafting narratives from scratch. The utility of threshold concepts is that they give me a sense of purpose that underlies the selection of topics and materials. Here I was choosing repertory not only for its own sake, but also as music that shed light on entangled histories, with the aim of cultivating interpretive skills for reading musical style and style's social meanings. As we continue to adjust the balance between European genres and all the other music we want to cover in our music major courses, threshold concepts seem a useful way to name our guiding purposes and hold ourselves to them.

28. Laurent Dubois, David K. Garner, and Mary Caton Lingold, "Musical Passage" (2016), <http://www.musicalpassage.org/#explore>; Portia K. Maultsby, "The Translated African Cultural and Musical Past," in Mellonee V. Burnim and Portia K. Maultsby, eds., *African American Music: An Introduction*, 2nd edn. (New York: Routledge, 2015), 3–22; McIntosh County Shouters, "Gullah-Geechee Ring Shout from Georgia," performance at the Library of Congress (2011), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uxPU5517u8c>; Maria Ryan, "Hearing Power, Sounding Freedom: Black Practices of Listening, Ear-Training, and Music-Making in the British Colonial Caribbean" (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2021); Eileen Southern, ed., *Readings in Black American Music* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972); Travis D. Stimeling and Kayla Tokar, "Narratives of Musical Resilience and the Perpetuation of Whiteness in the Music History Classroom," *Journal of Music History Pedagogy* 10, no. 1 (2020): 20–38; John Jeremiah Sullivan, "Rhiannon Giddens and What Folk Music Means," *The New Yorker*, 20 May 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/05/20/rhiannon-giddens-and-what-folk-music-means>.

The students in our survey courses typically demonstrate varied levels of investment. So far, designing curriculum so that threshold concepts are highlighted and unavoidable seems to have positive effects. For less engaged students, the unit on colonialism caught their attention because the ideas we were considering were sometimes shocking, delivering immediacy and relevance they did not expect. For students who were already motivated to learn but who had been trained to see classical music as "apolitical," this unit asked them to apply prior knowledge about social conflict to music they thought was separate from it. For some, this request chipped at their silos, helping them think more clearly about what music is and does. Several students told me they had never learned that colonization was harmful, or that it mattered for music; some reflected on the role of powerful institutions and connected course material to social justice concerns in the present; and a few mentioned wanting to hold onto the style of thinking practiced in this course.

Our current generation of undergraduates seems hungry for this kind of learning—course content that helps them think about their musical and social worlds and expands their analytical toolkit. The newly adopted curriculum at Ohio State includes a course entitled *Global Music Histories*, as well as one on *Musical Citizenship*. As we continue to discern what is essential to cover, scholarship that explores global music histories has been an essential resource and a stimulus pushing us in new directions.