

BEYOND THE BINARY: THE INTERSECTION OF GENDER AND CROSS-CULTURAL
IDENTITY IN REENA ESMAIL'S LIFE AND CHORAL WORKS

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Beyond the Binary explores the intersection of gender with cross-cultural identity in composer Reena Esmail's professional life and choral music. This intersection manifests in her musical style, which accesses the resonant spaces between Western and Indian classical music. I argue that it is through the convergence of Esmail's gender identity with her cross-cultural identity that her compositions challenge gender norms and break down perceived barriers between East and West, inviting her listeners into an intersectional feminist space. This project synthesizes musicological, theoretical, and ethnographic methods, and is meant as a starting point for choral musicians and scholars to consider cultural difference and its impact on choral music. What begins as a consideration of social themes within Esmail's life and work culminates in a practical musical analysis and performance practice guide to aid conductors in preparation of Esmail's music. The compositions discussed are *I Rise: Women in Song* (2016), *Take What You Need* (2016), *TaReKiTa* (2016), *Tuttarana* (2014), and *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (2016).

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Reena Esmail (b. 1983) is becoming a powerful and prolific compositional voice. A graduate of The Juilliard School (B.M.) and Yale School of Music (M.M., D.M.A.), Esmail is best known for her compound musical style, which accesses the resonant spaces between Western and Indian classical music. In her 2013 TEDx Talk, Esmail spoke about this “hybrid language” as a means for “the fullest range of expression.”¹ Her compositions layer the intricate melodies and rhythmic complexity of Indian classical music with Western counterpoint and orchestration, weaving these concepts together and exploring diverse timbres.² This intersection allows Esmail to honor both her American and Indian identities:

While I might not ever be able to live in a physical world that contained everything that I loved and allowed me to be the fullest possible version of myself, I could at least try my best to create that world in the music that I wrote. And maybe it could go further than that. Maybe I could use my music as a vehicle to draw together some of the best Western and Indian musicians that I knew, and then create a space that allowed them to communicate using their own musical language and yet still be able to understand one another. And maybe the things they would see in one another, the mirrors they would hold up to one another, would be able to draw out new facets of their musicianship in the same way that looking at these two types of music through the lens of one another had done for me. And maybe if I could facilitate that, this universe that I had created in music, once it was realized by musicians and then shared with an audience, could begin to find its way into the real, material world.³

Esmail creates an equitable musical space in which both aspects of her cultural identity work together, informing one another. To this end, her compositional process manifests as productive conversations between musicians and audiences from two distinct cultural

¹ Reena Esmail, “Reena Esmail at TEDx SkidRow,” YouTube video, 12:38, posted December 12, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnQudZQGjWw>.

² Reena Esmail, interview with the author, phone, November 4, 2018.

³ Reena Esmail, “Reena Esmail at TEDx SkidRow.”

backgrounds. It is through the intersection of Esmail's American and Indian identities that she also reconciles her identity as a woman within the male-dominated field of composition.

The aim of my dissertation is to explore the role of identity within Esmail's professional life and her choral compositions. I argue that it is through the convergence of Esmail's gender identity with her cross-cultural identity that her compositions challenge gender norms and break down perceived barriers between East and West, inviting her listeners into an intersectional feminist space. Rather than make sweeping generalizations about musical conception for *all* women or *all* people of color in the United States, I wish to amplify Esmail's individual story, and to contextualize her experience within larger socio-musical themes. What will begin as a consideration of social themes within Esmail's life and work will culminate in a practical musical analysis and performance practice guide to aid conductors in preparation of Esmail's compositions. This project synthesizes musicological, theoretical, and ethnographic methods, and is meant as a starting point for choral musicians and scholars to consider these questions: How is cultural difference in choral music portrayed by the composer and interpreted by the performer? What does it mean to sound like a woman? How can we talk about choral music in a way that includes and honors difference? How do gender and cross-cultural identity intersect in choral music? What other aspects of identity are worth considering?

At the 2017 American Musicological Society conference, Susan McClary suggested that the marginalization of past female composers stemmed from a lack of musicological study during the composers' lives. Had women such as Fanny Hensel and Clara Schumann been the objects of scholarly attention while they were living, perhaps this would have elevated their

achievements and consequently justified their inclusion in the canon.⁴ Esmail's life and music provide an ideal case study for feminist scholars' frameworks. Not only is she a living composer; her music allows for interdisciplinary studies and the assimilation of cultural identity, two highly valued components of feminist research. McClary promotes researching living subjects in order to elevate and include those voices that historically have been demoted and/or excluded.⁵ As a feminist scholar, my goal is to empower Esmail's voice as a significant contributor to a timely conversation.

Literature Review

While Esmail has received media attention in the form of promotional articles, reviews of her music, and personal interviews, there is no scholarly work as of yet that contextualizes her music within academic discourse. My dissertation weaves together interviews with the composer, interviews with performers, and scholarly sources. This blending of voices values the experiences of performers, scholars, and the composer as equal parties in my research. The following review summarizes the conversations in musicology, music theory, and ethnomusicology thus far on the role of gender and cross-cultural identity in music. These scholars' contributions guide my research within Western and Hindustani classical realms.

In Western classical music, second-, third-, and fourth-wave feminist scholarship helps to elucidate gendered elements within Esmail's professional life and her music. Second-wave feminism emerged in the 1960s to address gender inequality within professional and domestic

⁴ McClary's was the first Women and Music endowed lecture to take place at an AMS conference. Rebecca Geoffroy-Schwinden, email message to author, April 6, 2018; Susan McClary, "Da Capo: Women Representing Women in Music" (AMS Women and Music endowed lecture, Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, November 11, 2017).

⁵ Suzanne Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism," in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

life. Musicology's response to second-wave feminism was a "search and rescue" mission that inserted gifted female composers of the past into history textbooks.⁶ While these efforts were well intended, the result was tokenism, which did not always consider the complex facets of a woman's identity and how these facets contribute to her compositional output.⁷ Current musicology, influenced by third- and fourth-wave feminism, seeks to address this schism through intersectional avenues, namely the intersection of race, sexuality, and class with women's issues.

Most instrumental to my research were writings on gendered politics in music. In *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary argues that critical musicology and theory should not divorce music from culture, but rather should recognize the ways in which gender, sexuality, race, and class affect musical conception.⁸ McClary is one of the first to employ feminist music analysis. Her contemporaries include Ruth Solie, Suzanne Cusick, Marcia Citron, and Sally Macarthur, who each provide unique perspectives on feminism's role in classical music.⁹ My research particularly draws upon Cusick's "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem." In this article, Cusick equates the separation of Mind and Body with the separation in music between scholarship and performance. This division ultimately leads to hierarchical values

⁶ Rebecca Geoffroy-Schwinden, conversation with the author, April 6, 2018.

⁷ Pauline Oliveros, "And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers," *The New York Times*, September 13, 1970, accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1970/09/13/archives/and-dont-call-them-lady-composers-and-dont-call-them-lady-composers.html>.

⁸ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991 [2002]).

⁹ Ruth Solie, ed., *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1, (Winter 1994), 8-27; Suzanne Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism," in *Rethinking Music*, edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 471-498; Marcia Citron, "Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research," *Women and New Music: A Journal of Culture* 8, no. 1 (2004), 47-60; Sally Macarthur, *Feminist Aesthetics in Music* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 2002); Sally Macarthur, *Toward a Twenty-First Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010).

placed upon music, with scholarship (the masculine Mind) prioritized over performance (the feminine Body). Cusick suggests that this conditioned worldview has crept into every aspect of our understanding and treatment of music. Influenced by Judith Butler, Cusick's solution is to re-integrate Mind with Body by subverting the inherited paradigm.

In addition to gendered politics, there are numerous all-female composer compilations that seek to elevate women's historical and present role in music. Classic examples in music history include *Music & Women* by Sophie Drinker and *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950*, edited by Jane Bowers and Judith Tick.¹⁰ A more recent addition is *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* by Christine Ammer, which includes a chapter on "The First 'Lady' Composers" in the United States.¹¹ Jennifer Kelly's *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States* compiles interviews with living female composers. Through interviews with 25 women, Kelly represents "the scene for women—varying in age, birthplace, ethnicity, and education—who are composing music in the United States."¹² Kelly's dialogic approach provides insight into the common experiences and issues facing living composers. In music theory, *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music, 1960-2000*, edited by Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft, studies the effect of serialism, cultural identity, and the relationship between text and voice in women's

¹⁰ Sophie Drinker, *Music & Women: A Story of Women and their Relation to Music* (1948; repr., New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1995); Jane Bowers and Judith Tick, eds., *Women Making Music: The Western Art Tradition, 1150-1950* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

¹¹ Christine Ammer, "The First Lady Composers," in *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1992 [2001]), 91-117.

¹² Jennifer Kelly, *In Her Own Words: Conversations with Composers in the United States* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 1.

compositions. Their collection attempts to find commonalities between contemporary female composers' language without dismissing the intricacies of their individual styles.¹³

Music scholars also re-integrate the “feminine” through embodied analysis, considering the performer's experience as instrumental to a work's meaning. Examples of embodied analyses include Hester Bell-Jordan's Master's Thesis, “Transgressive Gestures: Women and Violin Performance in Eighteenth-Century Europe” and *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* by Elisabeth LeGuin.¹⁴ Within music pedagogy, Lucy Green studies the social conditioning of boys and girls in the music classroom, and how societal treatment may explain gendered expectations and outcome.¹⁵ Jill Halstead makes a similar argument, but through the lens of professional composition.¹⁶

My own research incorporates elements of these feminist frameworks. My dissertation is based upon McClary and her contemporaries' theory that music is a product of culture. I seek to highlight the work of Reena Esmail, a female composer whose work deserves scholarly recognition. I also wish to examine gendered politics within her life and works. I examine the social biases she overcame to become a composer and I employ a gendered analysis of her music. My fourth-wave feminist agenda magnifies the ways in which Esmail's gender identity intersects with ethnicity and race, and how the juxtaposition of gender with these other cultural components impact her professional life and her music.

¹³ Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft, eds., *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music 1960-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

¹⁴ Hester Bell-Jordan, “Transgressive Gestures: Women and Violin Performance in Eighteenth-Century Europe,” (M.M. Thesis, New Zealand School of Music, 2016); Elisabeth LeGuin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

¹⁵ Lucy Green, *Music, Gender, Education* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997).

¹⁶ Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997).

In addition to Western feminist research, I also include feminist writing on Hindustani classical music. In “Professional Women in Indian Music,” Jennifer Post re-inserts women’s valuable musical role as courtesans into Indian music history.¹⁷ *The Life of Music in North India* by Daniel Neuman recounts the evolution of Hindustani music since Independence, with attention given to how these changes specifically have impacted women.¹⁸ Namita Devidayal’s recent memoir *The Music Room* provides a first-person account of what is it like to be a woman studying Hindustani voice in contemporary India.¹⁹ Amanda Weidman’s *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern* explores gendered meaning in music within the context of South Indian postcolonial politics.²⁰ All of these texts support the historical and present contributions of women to Hindustani music’s development and contemporary practice.

Amelia Maclszewski, Lalita Du Perron, Chloë Alaghband-Zadeh, and Sahil Tandon study gendered issues within Hindustani performance. In “Multiple Voices, Multiple Selves,” Maclszewski analyzes how gender impacts musical performance within four female Hindustani singers’ autobiographies, exploring how these women have accepted and rejected the social contexts in which they were raised.²¹ Perron discusses the gendered contexts of Hindustani music’s most popular forms—*thumri*, *dhrupad*, and *khyal*—and the musical elements that contribute to their gendered associations.²² Alaghband-Zadeh considers how gendered

¹⁷ Jennifer Post, “Professional Women in Indian Music: The Death of the Courtesan Tradition,” in *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Ellen Koskoff (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), 97-109.

¹⁸ Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990).

¹⁹ Namita Devidayal, *The Music Room* (Haryana: Penguin Random House India, 2007).

²⁰ Amanda J. Weidman, *Singing the Classical, Voicing the Modern: the Postcolonial Politics of Music in South India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

²¹ Amelia, Maclszewski, “Multiple Voices, Multiple Selves: Song Style and North Indian Women’s Identity,” *Asian Music* 32, No. 2 (Spring-Summer 2001), 1-40, accessed September 4, 2018, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/834248>.

²² Lalita du Perron, “Thumri: A Discussion of the Female Voice of Hindustani Music,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36, No. 1 (February 2002), 173-193.

expectations shift in Hindustani music depending upon the gender of the performer.²³ Tandon examines the use of the female perspective in Hindustani compositions' poetry. She argues that in a traditional context, the male performer assumes "the 'feminine' voice, expressing the desire of the 'masculine,'" which creates a queer (gender non-conforming) construct.²⁴ These works provide great insight into Esmail's experience as a woman studying and performing Hindustani classical music.

Embodied analysis is also a popular topic within the study of Hindustani classical music. In *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music*, Matthew Rahaim classifies embodiment within performance as both an indicator of musical shapes and an imprint of musical lineage. His research is influenced by Suzanne Cusick, whom he cites in his introduction.²⁵ Rahaim's research informed my performance practice suggestions for a Western conductor's approach to gesture within Esmail's Hindustani-influenced music.

In order for Western choral musicians to better understand Esmail's Indian musical heritage, I offer a summary of Indian music's Westernization in the East and Indian music's impact in the West. Regarding the former, Janaki Bakhle's *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* provides a revisionist history of two 20th-century figures known for "modernizing" Indian classical music.²⁶ Bakhle's research reveals that V.N. Bhatkhande and V.D. Paluskar revitalized Indian classical music while instituting sexist, racist,

²³ Chloë Alaghband-Zadeh, "Sonic Performativity: Analysing Gender in North Indian Classical Vocal Music," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 24, No. 3 (2015), pp. 349-379.

²⁴ Sahil Tandon, "Queering Indian Classical Music: An Exploration of Sexuality and Desire," *Sexuality & Culture* (2018), accessed September 4, 2018, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12119-018-9558-7>.

²⁵ Matthew Rahaim, *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani music* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

²⁶ Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

and classist values into its practice. Regarding the latter, writings by Peter Lavezzoli, Jonathan Bellman, and David Claman contextualized the many complexities within fused Western and Indian musical traditions. *Bhairavi: The Global Impact of Indian Music* by Peter Lavezzoli highlights the influence of Indian musicians such as Ravi Shankar and Ali Akbar Khan in the West.²⁷ “Indian Resonances in the British Invasion” by Jonathan Bellman addresses Indian music’s influence on 1960s British rock.²⁸ David Claman’s dissertation, “Western Composers and India’s Music: Concepts, History, and Recent Music,” examines India’s representation in the West through the constructed East-West dichotomy. He argues that certain cultural biases, such as India’s portrayal in the West as a land of spiritual wealth and exotica, impacts how Western composers incorporate Indian music into their work, oftentimes in a reductionist manner.²⁹ These writers provide many lenses through which to discuss Indian identity within Esmail’s life and music, placing her within a continued history.

At the intersection of two musical traditions, certain performance practice considerations emerge, particularly when a Western classical instrument must play Indian classical idioms. Callie Hutchinson and Nichols Gordon Swift’s dissertations explore these issues for the Western violin.³⁰ Lori Ann Kesner and Caroline Frances Rohm discuss these cross-cultural challenges on

²⁷ Peter Lavezzoli, *Bhairavi: The Global Impact of Indian Music* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009).

²⁸ Jonathan Bellman, “Indian Resonances in the British Invasion, 1965-1968,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, edited by Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University, 1998), 292-306.

²⁹ David Neumann Claman, “Western Composers and India’s Music: Concepts, History, and Recent Music,” (PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2002), accessed November 1, 2018, Proquest Dissertations & Theses.

³⁰ Callie Hutchinson, “An Introduction to Hindustani Violin Technique,” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2014), accessed September 3, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses; Gordon Nichols Swift, “The Violin as Cross-Cultural Vehicle: Ornamentation in South Indian Violin and its Influence on a Style of Western Violin Improvisation” (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 1989), accessed March 31, 2018, Proquest Dissertations & Theses.

the flute.³¹ There are no dissertations that explore the pedagogical, stylistic, and practical issues embedded within choral works and larger-scale choral-orchestral compositions that unite musicians trained in Western and Indian classical music. Esmail’s music provides a unique platform through which to explore these challenges.

Chapter Summary

Looking ahead, Chapter 2 examines gendered politics within Esmail’s professional life and gendered meaning in three choral-orchestral works—*I Rise: Women in Song* for women’s chorus and string orchestra (2016), *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* for baroque orchestra, choir, sitar, and tabla (2016), and *Take What You Need* for double choir and string orchestra (2016)—suggesting how gender appears through subject matter, style, and tonality.³² Chapter 3 provides a summary of Indian classical music’s history and transition into modernity as it relates to Esmail, an account of Esmail’s Fulbright year in India, and an analysis of Hindustani elements within three choral compositions: *TaReKiTa* for SATB chorus (2016), *Tuttarana* for SSAA or SATB chorus (2016), and *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (2016).³³ Chapter 4 explores Esmail’s intersectional style through an analysis and performance

³¹ Caroline Frances Rohm, “Ragas for the Western Flute: A Discussion of Compositions and Performance Practice of Repertoire Inspired by Indian Classical Music” (DMA diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2017), accessed March 31, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses; Lori Ann Kesner, “Krishna Meets Pan: Indian-Western Fusion in Two Works for Flute and Harp” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2006), accessed March 31, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses.

³² See McClary, Cusick, and Bloechl; Lucy Green, *Music, Gender Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sally Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010).

³³ Wim Van Der Meer, *Hindustani Music in the 20th Century* (Boston, MA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980); Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990); Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Esmail’s Fulbright year is documented in her blog (<https://reenainindia.wordpress.com/>), articles at New Music USA (<https://www.newmusicusa.org/author/reenaesmail/>), and her TedTalk at SkidRow (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnQudZQGjWw>).

practice guide for *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity*, an oratorio in seven movements, with texts on unity drawn from seven major Indian religions: Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Islam.³⁴ Musical analysis methods draw from both Western and Indian classical traditions for the purpose of performance (not theoretical academic discourse). This analysis includes exploration of performance practice issues within Esmail's cross-cultural style. Chapter 5 draws broader conclusions from the preceding analyses, and suggests that Esmail's relevance lies in her ability to gain access into the Western classical realm for marginalized voices, including women, people of color, non-conservatory trained, and particularly the next generation of Indian women composers.

³⁴ Commissioned by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, Esmail received the commission invitation in early November 2016. Yale Schola Cantorum and Juilliard 415 premiered the work in New Haven on March 3, 2017, with David Hall conducting. The two ensembles then toured India with Esmail, March 12-19, performing *This Love* in Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. See "Yale Schola Cantorum Tour to India," Yale Institute of Sacred Music News, February 23, 2017, accessed December 6, 2017, <https://ism.yale.edu/news/yale-schola-cantorum-tour-india>.

CHAPTER 2

A WOMAN'S VOICE

The deconstructive methods of postmodernism—the practice of questioning the claims to universality by the “master narratives” of Western culture, revealing the agendas behind traditional ‘value-free’ procedures – are also beginning to clear a space in which a woman’s voice can at last be heard as a woman’s voice.

—Susan McClary

Reena Esmail has memorized the history of Western music four times, most recently for her doctoral comprehensive exam in composition at the Yale School of Music.³⁵ On each occasion, repetitive stress injuries in her back, neck, and hand worsened during her study preparation. Esmail diagnoses her body’s stress as a visceral reaction to Western classical history: “I think there’s a part of me that doesn’t want to memorize the history of Western music as it was offered to me, because I’m acutely aware, as I’m watching this whole trajectory of these men unfolding, ...had I been living fifty years ago I never would have been a part of it. I never would have been invited in. And now, we’re just *barely* at the point where people like me are getting invited in.”³⁶ Since its inception, the American Musicological Society has secured the legacy of the “great” composers and determined the legitimacy of new voices. A little over fifty years ago, Ruth Crawford, a composer and musicologist, was excluded from the founding meeting of the New York Musicological Society, an event that Suzanne Cusick uses to illustrate “the power relations and cultural politics implicitly embedded in our discipline.”³⁷ Cusick states, “The New York Musicological Society entered the cultural and corporate order—became an

³⁵ All biographical information received in interview with author on November 4, 2018 unless otherwise cited.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Suzanne Cusick, “Gender, Musicology, and Feminism,” in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 472.

official and comprehensible voice in American intellectual life—by separating itself from the feminine.”³⁸

Esmail is acutely aware that this realm is not hers. The fields of musicology and composition succeeded not only by empowering the male voice as rational, intellectual mind, but by disempowering the female voice as suspect, sensual body.³⁹ This “progress” led to perceptions that academic music fields were a masculine pursuit while performance became a feminine endeavor.⁴⁰ In her chapter, “How is the composer composed?,” Sally Macarthur writes that the very idea of “the composer as autonomous, heroic creator” is a male-centric phenomenon; whether a composer adheres to the dominant musical aesthetic or intentionally denies it, they are still stuck within a system that historically has not allowed other voices to succeed.⁴¹ History that presents a one-sided, hierarchical view of music, and calls this view “universal,” results in a compositional realm that privileges the white, male perspective.

However, Esmail is aware that this realm *could* be hers. Since the 1990s, musicology has made great strides to include women’s forgotten voices. In her keynote speech at the 2012 Feminist Theory and Music Conference, Susan McClary lists the factors that contributed to successful feminist frameworks—the legitimization of popular music studies; the growing fields of queer studies, music sociology, and performance studies; the recognition of patrons, teachers, *salonnières*, and scholars as equal players in music history; most importantly, the

³⁸ Cusick, “Gender,” 473.

³⁹ See Erica Muggleston, and Guido Adler, “Guido Adler’s ‘The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology’ (1885): An English Translation with an Historico-Analytical Commentary,” in *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 13 (1981), 1-21.

⁴⁰ Suzanne G. Cusick, “Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem,” in *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (1994): 9-10.

⁴¹ Sally Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010), 43.

interdisciplinary connections between music and other academic disciplines.⁴² The cultivation of interdisciplinary approaches has most directly advanced women's inclusion in historical and professional music spheres by validating the cultural significance of their past and present work. Interdisciplinary research creates a non-binary framework through which to explore music as a product of culture, a fact that has always been true, but only recently has been claimed. Contemporary musicologists such as Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Emily Wilbourne are utilizing the concept of intersectionality to explore the "mutually formative relation among identity structures," that is, the multifarious aspects of an identity, and how these threads weave together to create a whole person.⁴³ This framework is helpful in understanding any composer, but is particularly relevant to Reena Esmail.

In this chapter, I explore gender-related issues within Esmail's professional life and gendered meaning within her compositions. Using private interviews with Esmail alongside material from feminist music scholars, I begin with a synopsis of Esmail's biography as it relates to her identity as a woman composer. This synopsis unfolds chronologically, with events in Esmail's life interweaved with relevant academic commentary. I then use both harmonic and feminist analysis to examine three choral-orchestral works—*I Rise: Women in Song* for women's chorus and string orchestra (2016), *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* for baroque orchestra, choir, sitar, and tabla (2016), and *Take What You Need* for double choir and string

⁴² Susan McClary, "Making Waves: Opening Keynote for the Twentieth Anniversary of the Feminist Theory and Music Conference," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 16, no. 1 (2012): 89-91.

⁴³ 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, 2014), 48; Emily Wilbourne, "Letter from the Editor," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 21 (2017): vii-ix.

orchestra (2016).⁴⁴ In these works, I analyze gender through subject matter, style, and tonality. I conclude with consideration of these themes' larger social significance.

The Making of a "Lady" Composer

It is not enough that a woman choose to be a composer, conductor, or to play instruments formerly played by men; she cannot escape being squashed in her efforts—if not directly, then by subtle and insidious exclusion by her male counterparts.

—Pauline Oliveros

Esmail began playing piano at age 11, and it was through her piano studies that she decided to pursue music. Esmail struggled with debilitating stage fright during her piano performances, and eventually became more interested in "behind the scenes" work. She listened intently and repeatedly to orchestrated arrangements of Broadway songs, including those sung by her middle-school role model Barbra Streisand. These arrangements, which she listened to for pleasure, were her way of understanding music's construction. Esmail considers these arrangements her first lessons in orchestration.⁴⁵

During her senior year at Los Angeles County High School for the Arts, Esmail took a composition class. Her teacher, impressed with her work, encouraged her to pursue composition. At the time, Esmail was applying to conservatories for piano performance with her sights set on Juilliard. The composition program at Juilliard required two pieces within the initial portfolio. Esmail had written exactly two pieces and submitted them. Consequently, Juilliard invited

⁴⁴ Susan McClary, "Getting Down Off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman's Voice in Janika Vandervelde's *Genesis II*," in *Feminine Endings: Music Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 112-131; Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives of New Music* 32, no. 1 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), 471-498; Hester Bell-Jordan, "Chapter 3: Gender and Gesture in Late Eighteenth Century Women's Violin Performance: Regina Strinasacchi's Violin Concerto in B flat major," in "Transgressive Gestures: Women and Violin Performance in Eighteenth-Century Europe," (M.M. Thesis, New Zealand School of Music, 2016), 43-86; Elisabeth LeGuin, *Boccherini's Body: An Essay in Carnal Musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

⁴⁵ Reena Esmail, email message to author, December 5, 2018.

Esmail on campus for an interview and audition, and asked that she present two additional compositions. Between the time of the invitation and the audition, Esmail wrote these compositions, and thereafter was accepted into Juilliard's undergraduate composition program.

Esmail reflected that a large part of her success as a young musician was stubborn determination: "The moment that someone tells me I can't do something, I will spend my whole life trying to prove them wrong...It's something that has sustained me from the beginning of my journey in music until now."⁴⁶ When Esmail was auditioning for teachers, a local piano teacher discouraged her from auditioning for Los Angeles-based piano teacher Robert Turner's advanced studio. Esmail in turn was determined to study with him, and Turner accepted her.⁴⁷ Five years later, Turner discouraged Esmail from applying to Juilliard, but Esmail applied anyway.

According to Lucy Green's research in *Music, Gender, Education*, teachers play a critical role in shaping gendered perceptions in performance and composition. Esmail's perseverance to study advanced piano despite external discouragement has gendered undertones. Green states that throughout history women soloists had "to achieve the highest level of what was agreed to be excellence, before they could be deemed even eligible to be judged on the same platform as their male counterparts: to be judged as 'musicians' rather than 'women musicians.'"⁴⁸ While more women today have achieved success as solo instrumentalists than as composers, they have succeeded not because of, but *in spite of*, their gender. Regarding composition, Green writes, "Whereas teachers abundantly described girls' composition as diligent, not one teacher described

⁴⁶ Esmail, interview, 11-4-18.

⁴⁷ "Robert Turner has been the most important piano teacher in the Western United States for over 40 years. He is a legend in Southern California." Myrna Oliver quoting Hans Boepple, obituary for Robert Turner, *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 2001, accessed November 27, 2017, <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/dec/06/local/me-12044>.

⁴⁸ Lucy Green, *Music, Gender Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 61.

girls' composition as inspired, creative, imaginative or brilliant.”⁴⁹ In this vein, when teachers discouraged Esmail's musical advancement, they in fact discouraged a woman from crossing the threshold from diligence to brilliance, the latter of which has been claimed as cerebral, “masculine” territory.

Esmail's experiences in higher education were often isolating. When Esmail began her studies at Juilliard, she realized she was “very green” compared to her peers; during these years she attended her first new music performances. Esmail was the only woman in her composition class, and one of about 5-6 women in a group of 35 composers throughout undergraduate and graduate programs. Her composition teachers were also men.⁵⁰ While her experience at Juilliard was integral to her knowledge of theory, counterpoint, and harmony, Esmail was depressed when she graduated and she wondered whether composition was worth pursuing. Esmail reflected, “I didn't know if I could be a composer...I felt in my heart I had some talent, but since I wasn't seeing any confirmation of that talent reflected back to me from the world, I began to doubt it was there at all.”⁵¹

Esmail's experiences at Juilliard corroborate research by Christine Ammer and Jill Halstead. Ammer, author of *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music*, states that one of the key components of success for all composers is social support. Historically, even if women had certain class or vocational advantages, deeply entrenched gender biases made a career in music improbable:

Even when circumstances permitted a woman to compose, she still lacked social support—sometimes she even faced active opposition. Such antagonism ranged from not being taken seriously or being treated condescendingly—one writer said women

⁴⁹Green, 217-218.

⁵⁰ Esmail, email, 12-5-18.

⁵¹ Esmail, interview with author, 11-19-18.

especially excel in writing children’s music, work that required ‘perfect sympathy with child-life’—to bald denials that a woman even can have musical talent—‘A woman seldom writes good music, never great music.’⁵²

In Halstead’s study, *The Woman Composer*, she cites “anxiety of authorship” as a crucial deterrent for women. Halstead interviews composer Rhian Samuel, who reflects that this “anxiety often translates into ambivalence: contradictory statements or actions about one’s relationship to the creative process.”⁵³ I understand the complexity of emotion present in Esmail’s educational experience, as it is not very different from my experiences as a woman conductor. There are days that I feel powerful and days that I feel defeated. The places that have been both the most instrumental to my success as well as the most damaging to my wellbeing are patriarchal institutions masked as places of higher learning.

After graduating from Juilliard, Esmail remained in New York City teaching music theory at the Manhattan School of Music, studying beginner’s violin with Ellen Rutkofsky-Heifets, and composition with Susan Botti. Esmail attributes Botti as the first teacher who understood her and knew how to talk to her. During Esmail’s studies with Botti, she wrote an a cappella choral piece called *White Key*. The 3-movement work sets poetry by Carol Muske-Duke about a woman’s grief after her husband dies. Esmail’s program note explains the premise:

A woman makes the difficult journey by plane back to her home after receiving the news of her husband’s sudden death. As she is suspended in the air between two cities, she is also suspended between two lives, between a beautiful past and the uncertain present. During the journey, her thoughts shift back and forth between these two worlds, as her mind gently unlocks warm memory spaces, only to see them fall away as she returns to the glassy coldness of the present. It is an intimate and powerful thing to be able to peer into her thoughts as she begins to parse the enormity of what has come to pass.⁵⁴

⁵² Christine Ammer, “The First ‘Lady Composers,’” *Unsung: A History of Women in American Music* (Portland, Oregon: Amadeus Press, 2001), 93-94.

⁵³ Jill Halstead, *The Woman Composer: Creativity and the Gendered Politics of Musical Composition* (Brookfield, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 1997), 166.

⁵⁴ Reena Esmail, “White Key,” Reena Esmail: Composer, accessed December 4, 2018, <http://www.reenaesmail.com/white-key/>.

Esmail set Muske-Duke's poem to express her own grief. The poet's daughter was a close childhood friend, and she grew up knowing the poet and her late husband, actor David Dukes. Esmail's early ideas of what a life in the arts could look like was shaped by her observations of this couple. Esmail procrastinated completing *White Key* for many months. She feared finishing the work meant accepting the death of her friend's father. Botti told Esmail that finishing the work would only put bookends on the story; Esmail could open up the door whenever she needed. After hearing this advice—feeling seen and understood—Esmail was able to finish *White Key*. Botti's invitation for Esmail to re-reclaim her emotional world—a world that had been previously stifled by Juilliard's "intellectual" approach to composition—was fundamental to her identity as a composer.

The autobiographical resonances in *White Key* to Esmail's own life are striking. Her program note portrays a woman between worlds at a time when Esmail was determining whether she would continue as a composer or choose another path. During these years, Esmail began practicing yoga, which she states helped her to "find [her] body again."⁵⁵ As mentioned previously, she also studied beginner's violin alongside children, an experience that she cites as giving her a renewed joy for music. Esmail considers this period in her twenties a turning point. The support she received from Botti as well as the embodied practices of yoga and performance helped re-awaken her love for music, and subsequently reignited a gritty zest for composition.

Esmail's experience unfolds a dichotomy—at Juilliard, a disassociation between mind and body that was debilitating, and a subsequent reintegration of mind and body that was critical to her success. Esmail's experience is a rich example of the Mind/Body problem in action.

⁵⁵ Esmail, interview, 11-4-18.

Cusick writes, "...when music theorists and musicologists ignore the bodies whose performative arts constitute the thing called music, we ignore the feminine. We erase her from us, even at the price of metaphorically silencing the music."⁵⁶ In order to succeed in the institutional world of composition, Esmail disassociated her body from her music. In her four years studying with Botti post-Juilliard, Esmail began to find her compositional voice, re-inviting the body—the “feminine”—back into her life.

During her master’s at Yale, Esmail enrolled in a course on Indian classical music. Her reasons for taking the course were two-fold—she was expected to and she wanted to. Throughout her life, people would often ask Esmail whether she composed Indian classical music simply because she looked Indian. Bloechl writes about this phenomenon within musicology as cultural misrecognition, that is, “The tacit expectation by many scholars that musicologists who are visible racial minorities will study their ‘own’ music.”⁵⁷ Esmail did not study Indian classical music as a child. These assumptions created an inferiority complex, as Esmail felt pressure to know more about music from a culture that was both hers and a projection of who others thought she was.⁵⁸

On the other hand, Esmail was excited about making music with people who shared her Indian and gender identities. Throughout Esmail’s life as a Western composer, she was the only Indian woman amidst a plethora of white men. When Esmail began to study at Yale, she was one of five women in a program of fifteen composers, a higher ratio than she had experienced at

⁵⁶ Cusick, “Feminist Theory,” 16.

⁵⁷ Bloechl and Lowe, “Introduction,” 8.

⁵⁸ Her father was Muslim and moved to Pakistan after the Partition of India. Her mother was a Catholic from Goa in South India, whose family lived in Kenya. Between Esmail and her parents, their household spoke 10 languages, with English as the only common language. See Reena Esmail, “Reena Esmail at Tedx SkidRow,” YouTube video, 12:38, posted December 12, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnQudZQGjWw>.

Juilliard. However, by her final year in her DMA, she was the only woman. All save one teacher at Yale was also male.⁵⁹ In contrast, most of her Indian classical teachers were Indian women. While they didn't connect musically at first, they did connect culturally. She remarked, "It is amazing to make music with someone who looks like me."⁶⁰ Esmail determined that there might be a way to blend her upbringing in the Western classical tradition with her newfound passion for Indian classical music.

In 2011, Esmail traveled to India on the Fulbright-Nehru scholarship. She studied Hindustani voice with the sitarist Gaurav Mazumdar and attended music festivals throughout the country.⁶¹ Esmail's experiences abroad had a tremendous impact on her compositional style. Esmail found that the subtle melodies and rhythmic complexity available to her in Indian classical music were better suited to her musical voice, while the counterpoint and orchestration she had learned in the West allowed her to weave these melodies together and explore diverse timbres. This style also allowed her to create a space in which she could honor both her American and Indian identities. It is through this intersectionality of Esmail's American and Indian identities that Esmail also reconciles her identity as a woman composer, a reconciliation that manifests in her compositions.

Encoding Gender in Music

For I assume...that the work of women may be different from the work of men in its encoding of gender: indeed, it seems self-evident that this should be so, since gender is a system of power relationships that is designed to give men and women different experiences in life.

—Suzanne Cusick

⁵⁹ Reena Esmail, personal email to author, December 5, 2017.

⁶⁰ Esmail, interview, 11-4-17.

⁶¹ Esmail's Fulbright year is documented in her blog (<https://reenainindia.wordpress.com/>), articles at New Music USA (<https://www.newmusicusa.org/author/reenaesmail/>), and her TedTalk at SkidRow (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnQudZQGjWw>).

What does it mean to sound like a woman? Perhaps the question should be re-phrased: how do women composers achieve their compositional voice within Western classical music, a field that historically has not recognized them in public performance settings? It would be essentialist to assume that all women composers consider this conundrum, but I can state with confidence that *many* women do, whether consciously or subconsciously.⁶² In their volume *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers*, Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft suggest two common themes that appear in women's music. These are "a common rejection...of absolute formalism (integral serialism, for example) in favor of cultivating a more flexible and intuitive voice" and "the keen desire...to reach out and connect with listeners through their music."⁶³ These themes—stylistic subversion and genuine connection with the audience—certainly resonate for Esmail. Through this analysis I wish to offer observations on how womanhood emerges in Esmail's music, in order to elucidate meaning that may otherwise be absent from theoretical discourse.

But first, I would like to present an overview of each composition. *I Rise: Women in Song* was commissioned by Sun Min Lee, the Robert Cutler Professor of Practice in Choral Arts and director of Dolce Women's Choir in celebration of the 10th anniversary of Dolce Women's Choir and the 45th anniversary of women enrolled at Lehigh University. The work was premiered on

⁶² It should also be clarified that when speaking of the "male voice" in composition, I am referring to a patriarchal lineage historically developed by men. In contemporary Western society, however, both men and women are looking for ways to work outside the inherited compositional framework. In short, one's sex is not necessary indicative of one's gender identity or one's expression of gender within music. See Lucy Halstead "Sex, Gender and Music," *The Woman Composer*, 215-251; see also Suzanne G. Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism," *Rethinking Difference*, 475-477.

⁶³ Laurel Parsons and Brenda Ravenscroft, *Analytical Essays on Music by Women Composers: Concert Music, 1960-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 7.

November 4, 2016 by 160 women of varying ages from the combined choral ensembles of Lehigh University Choral Arts.⁶⁴ The texts, chosen by Lee, are organized into five movements:

1. The Beauty of Their Dreams, Eleanor Roosevelt
2. Phenomenal Woman (excerpt), Maya Angelou
3. River Song, Arlene Geller
4. Love is Anterior to Life, Emily Dickinson
5. Still I Rise (excerpt), Maya Angelou

This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity is an oratorio in seven movements, with texts on unity drawn from seven major religions in India: Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Sufi Islam. Commissioned by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, Esmail wrote the oratorio in response to the 2016 US presidential election's divisive campaigning and consequent results. The work was also influenced by a personal experience. Shortly before receiving the commission, India denied Esmail a visa that would normally be open to any other American citizen because her grandfather had moved to Pakistan after Partition.⁶⁵ Esmail wrote *This Love* to express her concern for present events and manifest her hopeful vision for the future. Yale Schola Cantorum in collaboration with Juilliard 415 premiered the work in New Haven on March 3, 2017 with David Hill conducting. The two ensembles then toured India with Esmail (March 12-19, 2017) performing *This Love* in Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai.⁶⁶

Esmail composed *Take What You Need* in 2016 for Street Symphony, a non-profit organization founded by Vijay Gupta—a violinist, social justice advocate, and 2018 MacArthur

⁶⁴ Kurt Pfitzer, "Women Rise in Song," *Acumen*, November 8, 2016, accessed November 20, 2017, <https://www1.lehigh.edu/news/women-rise-song>.

⁶⁵ Reena Esmail, "Program Notes," *This Love Between Us*, 2016.

⁶⁶ "Yale Schola Cantorum Tour to India," Yale Institute of Sacred Music News, February 23, 2017, accessed December 6, 2017, <https://ism.yale.edu/news/yale-schola-cantorum-tour-india>.

Fellow.⁶⁷ Street Symphony's mission is "the restorative and regenerative power of music at the heart of communities experiencing poverty, homelessness and incarceration in Los Angeles County, with the vision that all people have the right to a creative and expressive voice."⁶⁸ *Take What You Need* was written for the Street Symphony Chamber Singers (a professional ensemble) and Urban Voices Project (a choir for Skid Row community members who currently or recently have experienced homelessness). Esmail structured the piece in a call-and-response format with orchestral interludes. The score for *Take What You Need* is licensed by Creative Commons and is free to download online through Street Symphony's website. It is available in various instrumentations and voicings, in order to provide accessible performances for community spaces in which music plays a different role than in a typical concert experience. Spaces that have performed the piece include prisons, rehabilitation facilities, support groups, funerals, classrooms, religious institutions, and concert halls.⁶⁹

I structure my analysis of Esmail's choral-orchestral works to explore the following musical frameworks: subject matter, style, and tonality. These components serve as the parameters through which I examine Esmail's nuanced relationship with gender, and suggest how gendered meaning sounds through her music.

Subject Matter

Esmail's choral compositions often address contemporary social issues: environmentalism, religious discrimination, classism, and women's rights. She links her music to current cultural concerns by using it as a platform to promote social justice. In this way, Esmail

⁶⁷ "Vijay Gupta," MacArthur Foundation, accessed February 6, 2019, <https://www.macfound.org/fellows/1012/>.

⁶⁸ Street Symphony, introductory note for *Take What You Need*, 2015.

⁶⁹ "About," <http://twyn.info/#intro>.

fulfills Cusick's theory that a feminist musicology will "effect social change" and address "public issues of power."⁷⁰ In addition, Cusick believes a feminist musicology includes "the right to speak with many voices."⁷¹ Within her works, Esmail yokes diverse perspectives for the purpose of telling a unified story. She accomplishes this through setting varied texts, weaving them together either movement-to-movement or in juxtaposition within a single movement.

In *I Rise*, Esmail sets texts by female American writers spanning the 19th to 21st centuries. The chosen texts feature women from diverse cultural backgrounds who lived as first- or second-wave feminists. Esmail arranges the texts to tell a story about women's collective experience—hope, empowered embodiment, communal strength, unconditional love, and unapologetic grit.⁷² This commission forced Esmail to own her identity as a woman composer in a way she had not previously.⁷³ While coaching the Lehigh ensembles on the second movement, which features an excerpt from Maya Angelou's "Phenomenal Woman," Esmail asked the choir to sing the poetry in a true first person, to sing about themselves rather than an impersonal "I." As a woman, Esmail understood the complexity of this request:

If I were a man, standing up there and saying that, it would sound so patronizing. But because I'm a woman, I know exactly how hard it is to ask a woman to say these things about herself—to call herself "phenomenal"—and they know it.⁷⁴

⁷⁰ Cusick, "Gender," 486.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Marcia Citron speaks about some differences between second versus third wave feminism in her article, "Feminist Waves and Classical Music: Pedagogy, Performance, Research," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 8, no. 1 (2004), 47-60.

⁷³ "It seems that the cornerstone of contemporary women's distrust of, and objection to, being labeled 'woman' is simply that they consciously or unconsciously do not wish to be burdened with its negative implications and double binds. This is true also of objections to the concept of female-centered, as opposed to a male-centered, musical aesthetic." Halstead, *The Woman Composer*, 167.

⁷⁴ Esmail, interview, 11-4-18.

This statement stems from an understanding that female embodiment is complicated. Asking 160 women to sing erotic and empowering texts such as “It’s in the arch of my back, the sun of my smile, the ride of my breasts, the grace of my style” is in itself a bold act, as body shaming and the general distrust of women’s bodies is built into Western cultural values. That disembodiment has even infiltrated the Western classical vocal realm in the way that we are expected to perform. This speaks to a larger issue of discomfort with bodily movement as musical gesture within Western classical voice, a trait that stands in stark contrast to Hindustani vocal performance.⁷⁵ For the purpose of this work and these women, Esmail’s gender identity serves her. Her invitation for women to claim their bodies comes from her own experience as a woman.

This Love Between Us similarly sets diverse texts movement-to-movement, comparing how seven world religions counsel on unity and kindness. Esmail adds an extra layer of complexity in each movement through her juxtaposition of the English translations with the texts in their original languages, with two exceptions. The first exception is within the Christian movement, for which Esmail sets the Bible verses in two translations, English and Malayalam. The Malayalam language is spoken in Kerala, commonly referred to as “the Christian State,” as it contains the highest percentage of practicing Christians. The second exception is within the final movement, which weaves together Rumi’s poetry with “affirming phrases in other religions,” such as “Om shanti shanti shanti” and “Amen.”⁷⁶ These exceptions are done in the spirit of the overall work—a multi-vocal exploration in which each voice depends upon the others. While I am focusing here on the multi-vocal aspect of *This Love Between Us*, in Chapter

⁷⁵ Matthew Rahaim, *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music* (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 2012).

⁷⁶ Reena Esmail, “Program Notes,” *This Love Between Us*, 2016.

4 I also suggest that Esmail’s self-made translations of liturgical texts are another way in which she asserts her feminine voice.

Take What You Need takes an entirely different approach to text setting. Written by Esmail, the poem was inspired by a picture of a community board that was shared with her by Zabie Yamasaki, a childhood family friend from her parents’ Indian community in Los Angeles, who went on to become a leading expert in trauma-sensitive yoga. The board was titled “Take What You Need,” and held little pieces of paper with words like “hope,” “care,” and “joy.” Students were invited to take a quality from the board as an intention for their yoga practice.⁷⁷ The text utilizes parallel structure to create an accessible musical format and inspire a healing message:

Take a moment. Take a breath. Take time. Take care. Take heart. Take hope. Take a step.
Take a chance. Take courage. Take charge. Take a stand. Take pride. Take joy. Take
pause. Take a moment. Take a breath. Take what you need.

In Esmail’s text setting, each phrase is repeated in a call-and-response format. In Street Symphony’s performances, the professional Chamber Singers sing each phrase first and the community-based Urban Voices Project leads the response, for which the audience is also invited to participate. *Take What You Need* creates a platform for trained musicians to perform alongside aspiring musicians and audience members. Esmail noted that within her conservatory training, she had never been taught how to compose for choirs of varying abilities within a single piece, but that this commission allowed her to explore how voices from diverse backgrounds can feel equally empowered within the same composition.

The texted sections serve as structural anchors for the instrumental interludes, which are used as open spaces for performers and audience members to answer a question posed by a

⁷⁷ Vijay Gupta, interview with the author, phone, December 11, 2018.

facilitator or to share a personal story. In Esmail's degree recital, members of Morse Chorale from the Yale Music in Schools Initiative participated. The Morse Chorale is a community-facing program targeted towards low-income schools in New Haven. The students shared reasons why they love music. One young female student said, "My passion for music is why I'm here. When I sing, I feel like I'm free to hit any note and make it my own...Singing is my special way of showing people my talent, and no one and nothing can take this special quality away from me."⁷⁸ Within *Take What You Need*, Esmail creates a space for many voices to sound.

This piece's purpose also connects to women's historical role in music, which Sophie Drinker explored in her book *Music & Women*. Drinker described women as cultural practitioners of music: "Wherever the creative power of women is a factor in the making of religious and social institutions, women have authority in such institutions, in the magic arts of healing body and spirit, and in music."⁷⁹ Esmail's *Take What You Need* is not only a musical work; it is medicine. Esmail fulfills Drinker's observation of women's role throughout history as healers.

Style

Building upon the theme of vocal autonomy present in her works, Esmail uses musical style in ways that both reinforce and challenge cultural perceptions of women. While Esmail has developed a personal style that blends her Western training with her later Hindustani classical study, she made an intentional choice within *I Rise* to subdue her Indian compositional identity.

⁷⁸ Reena Esmail, "Take What You Need," YouTube video, 11:42, posted December 2, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NMifeghQfII>.

⁷⁹ Sophie Drinker quoted in Doris Silbert, review of *Music & Women*, Sophie Drinker, *The Musical Quarterly* 2:1 (April 1948), 285, accessed December 8, 2017, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mq/XXXIV.2.285>; see also Ruth A. Solie, "Sophie Drinker's History," in *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons*, eds. Katherine Bergeron and Philip V. Bolgman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 30.

Esmail's intent was to honor the individual identities and experiences of the women whose texts she set. She believes that a person's art is inextricably linked to their culture:

When someone writes something...it is only about their personal experience. Even the language and the word choices they use, the way that the text flows, the ways they might choose to set it to music...has so much to do with the culture they're from. So it's really, really hard to separate an individual voice from the surrounding culture.⁸⁰

Esmail's recognition of cultural difference manifests through style. One can note these stylistic differences through a comparison of movements 1 and 2 of *I Rise*: "The Beauty of Their Dreams" and "Phenomenal Woman."

What struck me initially in "The Beauty of Their Dreams," a text attributed to Eleanor Roosevelt, was the tempo marking, which reads "Placid" (See Musical Example 2.1). In the instrumental introduction, Esmail creates an ethereal atmosphere through instrumentation and range. In the first four measures, an oscillating harp pattern floats alongside violins sustaining single pitches in the upper register with slight dynamic inflection. In measure 5, Esmail introduces the lower strings. The viola and bass play a minimal role while the cello sings the piece's principal theme, a lyrical triplet-doused melody that invokes a dream-like state from its first minor seventh. The instrumentation (flute, harp, and strings) and the musical setting perpetuate disembodiment as a feminine ideal.

In her article "The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments in the Western Tradition," Rita Steblin suggests that Eurocentric feminine beauty was associated with a certain disembodiment. Steblin names the harp as historically female-gendered, citing its "soft, delicate plucked string sounds" and its frequent role as accompaniment.⁸¹ These stereotypes reinforce

⁸⁰ Esmail, interview, 11-4-18.

⁸¹ Rita Steblin, "The Gender Stereotyping of Musical Instruments in the Western Tradition," *Canadian University Music Review. Voices of Women: Essays in Honour of Violet Archer* 16, no. 1 (1995): 139.

notions of the female sex as “weak and secondary.”⁸² In contrast, string instruments were gendered male because of their more embodied approach to practice and performance—the “energetic movements and facial distortions harm female grace.”⁸³ The worst string instrument for a woman to play was the cello, because “the woman would have to spread her legs!”⁸⁴

⁸² Steblin, 139.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

Musical Example 2.1: Reena Esmail, *I Rise: Women in Song*, Movement 1, m. 1-11.

Commissioned for the Women of Lehigh University Choral Arts, Sun Min Lee, conductor
on the occasion of the 10th Anniversary of Dolce - The Lehigh University's Women's Ensemble
and 45th Anniversary of Women at Lehigh University
Chamber version commissioned by Contemporary Performance Collective, Los Angeles

I RISE: WOMEN IN SONG

I. The Beauty of Their Dreams

Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962)

Reena Esmail

Placid (♩=56) A

S.
A.
Fl.
Hp. *mf*
Vln. I *mf*
Vln. II *pp*
Vla. *pp*
Vc. *mf* warm, lyrical
pizz.
Cb. *mp*

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2

S. *mf* **B**
The fu - ture be-longs to

A.

Fl.

Hp.

Vln. I *mp* **B** tutti *mp*

Vln. II *mp* tutti *mp*

Vla. *mp*

Vc. *mp* gli altri

Cb.

As a white woman born into Eurocentric privilege, Roosevelt promoted 20th-century feminine virtues associated with a certain level of disembodiment—grace, self-sacrifice, and

beauty—while also being a progressive voice within her historical context.⁸⁵ While her public politics were moderate, her private life included homosexual and polyamorous love affairs.

Historian Jennifer Reed writes:

Roosevelt created unconventional intimacies throughout her adult life, while she lived out the public persona of FDR's wife, First Lady, and mother of five. All of these identities were true as well. They just were not the whole truth of her life, and heteronormative ideology would suggest that they were. One of the primary ways that heteronormativity secures its dominance is by insisting that it is the only legitimate set of relationships that structure our lives. It erases other truths happening parallel to it, underneath it, outside of it. It is an enveloping force that shapes the story of a people in a predictable narrative.⁸⁶

Esmail reflects Eleanor Roosevelt's cultural place by creating a musical atmosphere that evokes a woman's mid-century, disembodied experience. Amidst these high, thin timbres, the cello's solo presence is striking. To my ear, the cello represents Roosevelt, an empowered—embodied—voice navigating a disembodied female world.

Eleanor Roosevelt played a similar role as advocate for a later generation of women. Aside from cultural identity, there is an innate lyricism to the first movement that honors women who initiate progress, but in a quieter, socially subdued way. Esmail has referenced certain young female composers she admires—specifically, Nina Shekhar, Salina Fisher, and Akshaya Tucker. She admires these women for their willingness to engage alongside their ability to effect real change. She believes that these are the women who will really initiate progress, and that it is her role to be their advocate. She remarked, “For them to go into this field, it better be worth their time.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Ruth Solie makes a similar argument in “Sophie Drinker's History,” 23-43.

⁸⁶ Jennifer Reed, “Queering Eleanor Roosevelt,” *The Journal of American Culture* 39, 1 (March 2016): 9-19, accessed February 14, 2019, <https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2165/docview/1852701639?accountid=7113>.

⁸⁷ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

Musical Example 2.2: Reena Esmail, *I Rise: Women in Song*, Movement 2, m. 1-12.

II. Phenomenal Woman

Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Reena Esmail

Recit (♩ = 96)

SOLO: *freely, swung - in a jazz style*

Solo(s) *f* I'm a wo-man phe - no - me-nal - ly, Phe-no-me-nal wo-man, that's___

A Groove (♩ = 96)

Solo(s) me

S1

S2 *mf* It's the fire in my

A1 *mf* It's the reach of my arms, the span of my hips, the stride of my step, the curl of my lips. It's the fire in my

A2 *mf* It's the reach of my arms, the span of my hips, the stride of my step, the curl of my lips. It's the fire in my

Fl. **A Groove** (♩ = 96) *violin solo*

Vln. I *sul pont* *pp* *mp* *simile*

Vln. II *sul pont* *pp* *mp* *simile*

Vla. *pizz.*

Vc. *mf* *pizz.*

Cb. *mf*

In contrast to Esmail’s musical depiction of Eleanor Roosevelt, Maya Angelou’s “I Rise” begins with a jazz-inspired a cappella alto solo. Esmail instructs that the solo should be “freely swung,” after which the choir enters under the tempo marking, “Groove” (see Musical Example

2.2). The altos begin pulsing a low monotone ostinato: “It’s the reach of my arms, the span of my hips, the stride of my step, the curl of my lips.” The cello and bass pluck underneath surging violins chords *sul ponticello*. The viola introduces the primary musical motive, another jazz-inspired lick echoed by a solo violin. While the flute enters later in the movement, the harp does not play at all—no room for “disembodied” instruments here. There is something inherently erotic about Esmail’s setting of this body-reverent text. The music is rhythmic, driving, rooted, *embodied*. Embodiment has been constructed as femininity’s dangerous extreme. Cusick claims that when women were excluded from musicology and composition, music’s erotic power was excluded from musical discourse.⁸⁸ Angelou’s poem re-claims the female body, an action that is likely in response to African-American women’s systematic oppression. Esmail’s setting honors Angelou’s experience as an African-American woman, and re-claims the erotic within a woman’s story.

In these contrasting depictions of the female experience, I am reminded of Susan McClary’s commentary in *Feminine Endings*, in which she explores the possibility of a woman’s compositional style:

When a woman artist chooses to create in a mode that expressly draws upon her experience as a woman, she can, for instance, do so by appropriating, subverting, or calling into question traditional images or characterizations of women.⁸⁹

In this case, Esmail appropriates the cultural backgrounds of Roosevelt and Angelou within her music as a means to empower their particular voices. It would be impossible to argue that Esmail’s voice is not present in these compositions as well. (Esmail shared with me that while composing the melodies present in *I Rise*, she would sing in an Indian classical style and then

⁸⁸ Cusick, “Gender,” 477-478.

⁸⁹ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 116.

take out the ornamentation.⁹⁰) Her voice is within the music, yet she sacrifices her signature style to allow the cultural identities of the women whose texts she set to shine. I love this thought. I consider it the trait of a woman who has found great power in her own voice, yet within her music also seeks to affirm the validity and worth of others' experiences.

Tonality

Esmail composed *This Love Between Us* in her signature hybrid style, weaving together elements from Western and Indian classical music. I examine the cross-cultural intricacies of this style in Chapter 4. Here, I focus on her progressive tonality, revealing that the Indian classical influence in Esmail's music allows her to work outside a Western-inherited patriarchal tonality.

The third movement of *This Love Between Us* is devoted to a Christian perspective of unity. In her program notes, Esmail describes this movement as “rooted firmly in the baroque style.”⁹¹ There are many baroque elements present in this work—meter, form, phrasing, idiomatic instrumental writing—but the tonality plays outside common practice harmony (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1: Reena Esmail, *This Love Between Us*, Movement 3, Tonal Analysis

Measure #s	Form	Tonality	Instrumentation
m. 1-16	A (intro)	D/d	Orchestra
m. 17-34	A1	D/d	Choir + Orchestra
m. 35-52	B	c7 → bb7 → ab7 → g	Choir + Strings
m. 53-64	A	D/d	Orchestra
m. 65-82	B	c7 → bb7 → ab7 → g	Choir + Strings
m. 83-90	A	E/e	Orchestra
m. 91-118	C1	FM9 → Eb9 → DbM9 → C9 → bb7	Choir + Orchestra

⁹⁰ Esmail, interview, 11-4-17.

⁹¹ Esmail, “Program Notes,” *This Love Between Us*, 2016.

Measure #s	Form	Tonality	Instrumentation
m. 119-134	C2	b \flat w/ C \flat pedal	Choir + Orchestra
m. 135-156	D	E \flat	Choir + Orchestra
m. 157-180	C39	E \rightarrow D \rightarrow C $\#$ \rightarrow C	Choir + Orchestra
m. 181-206	A	D/d \rightarrow E \flat /e \flat	Choir + Orchestra
m. 207-223	A (coda)	D/d \rightarrow DM	Choir + Orchestra

The introductory fanfare solidifies the music’s grounding in D, but the scalar pattern played by the violins and trumpet contains F $\#$ and C-natural, with the tenor in m. 25 introducing F-natural as well (See Chapter 4, Musical Examples 4.6 and 4.7). While the tonal center is clear, from a Western classical perspective the mode is unclear. This tonal ambiguity is attributed to Esmail’s incorporation of *raga*, the Hindustani counterpart to a scale.⁹² Movement 3, while not strictly in a *raga*, is inspired by *Raga Jog*, which as the music suggests, features both the raised and lowered third scale degrees. Esmail considers *Jog* one of her favorite *ragas*, specifically because of this lack of polarity. She remarked, “The third is so significant in Western classical music. Whether it’s major or minor is significant, because the dichotomy between major and minor is one of the most important distinctions in Western tonal practice. But to have both the major and minor third embedded into a single *raag* ...for Western musicians, it just throws your mind.”⁹³ Esmail intentionally uses a *raga* that encompasses both sides of the major/minor binary of common practice harmony.

This compositional technique directly relates to Parsons’s and Ravenscroft’s suggestion that women composers are likely to elicit creative responses to their historical exclusion from music composition. Referencing research by Ellie Hisama, they deduce that “...women

⁹² To read more about *raga*, see Chapter 4.

⁹³ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

composers' relative isolation from mainstream contemporary music circles in the first half of the twentieth century may have had the unintended benefit of liberating them to develop independent compositional voices and technical tools."⁹⁴ Here, Parsons and Ravenscroft are referring to 20th-century woman composers. As a 21st-century composer, Esmail's response to professional marginalization has been to embrace her intersectional identity, resulting a musical language that enables her unique voice.

The B section depicts a descending sequence of minor sevenths. In m. 34-35, Esmail modulates from D to c-minor-7 using the D in the contrabass as a leading tone to E-flat (see Musical Example 2.3). The cello plays below the contrabass, moving from C in m. 34 to B-flat in m. 35, which creates seventh chords in third inversion. The voices and orchestra follow suit, with the exception of the violas, which maintain a perfect fifth on D against the c-minor-7, and continue in sequence throughout this section, adding an element of polytonal dissonance. The most formulaic cadence appears only a few bars later. After arriving in g minor at the end of the polytonal minor-seventh descending sequence, Esmail cadences on D (m. 53), reprising the fanfare material from the introduction (see Musical Example 2.4). While the cadence functions as plagal, Esmail confuses our aural perception by voicing the G with a suspended C just before the cadential moment.

In the complementary musical section (m. 77-83), Esmail instead surprises us with a cadence from g minor to E/e. As one can note from Table 2.1, there are numerous unconventional harmonic transitions through the piece, despite its close ties to Western form and style. At the reprise of the fanfare near the movement's end (m. 181), Esmail does not assert tonality through repetitive perfect authentic cadences, a trope of the baroque and classical eras.

⁹⁴ Parsons and Ravenscroft, *Analytical Essays*, 7.

Rather, she affirms the tonal center through a half step modulation to Eb/eb (m. 193) that resolves back to D/d in the coda (m. 205). The uncertain modality is clarified in the final three measures with a triumphant D Major chord.

Musical Example 2.3: Reena Esmail, *This Love between Us*, Movement 3, m. 27-35.

32

27

Bsn.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

Sit. OUT

Tbl. OUT

Timp.

S.

A.

T. *f* *mf*
Owe no man a - ny-thing but to love_____

B. *f* *mf*
Owe no man a - ny-thing but to love_____

Vln. I *mf*

Vln. II *mf*

Vla. *mp* div.

Vc. *mp*

Cb. *mp*

C

Musical Example 2.4: Reena Esmail, *This Love between Us*, Movement 3, m. 44-53.

34 44 D

Bsn.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

Sit.

Tbl.

Timp.

S.
kyū - gā For he who lo-veth his neigh - bor hath ful filled the law

A.
kyū - gā For he who lo-veth his neigh - bor hath ful filled the law

T.
one a - no - ther For he who lo-veth his neigh - bor hath ful filled the law

B.
one a - no - ther For he who lo-veth his neigh - bor hath ful filled the law

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

D

In *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary provocatively suggests that Western harmony's "tension and release" formulas are reminiscent of the male orgasm.⁹⁵ McClary introduces composer Janika Vandervelde, who she argues has successfully developed a musical language outside Western conventions. McClary's analysis of Vandervelde's music is for "any composer—male or female—who has become dissatisfied with implied contents of received artistic conventions and procedures, especially the standard narrative of tonal striving, climax and closure."⁹⁶ While the movement we examined by Esmail does have some sense of "striving" through her utilization of a tonal center, she subverts masculine cadential tropes through modulations by step, polytonality, and Indian-inspired modalities.

Briefly considering Western influence on Esmail's style, the composer's love for musicals is another aspect of her identity that works itself into her harmonic language. This influence is evident in the third movement of *This Love Between Us* through her use of modulation by step as well as the abundant use of seventh and ninth chords. Esmail uses a similar tonal language in *Take What You Need*. When I asked Esmail about the musical influence in this work in particular, she replied, "My idea was to create a piece that opened up this warm space for people, and all music is contextual, so if you're trying to embrace a wide audience, it's important to use these harmonic markers that make people feel that they can identify."⁹⁷ In this context, I believe Esmail is referring to people who live in the West, but are not necessarily classically trained. Because musicals are often referred to as "light opera," not taken as seriously in the high-brow classical world, her incorporation of musical-inspired harmonies seeks to both elevate the musical tradition while appealing to a wider audience. Esmail prioritizes the cultural

⁹⁵ McClary, *Feminine Endings*, 114.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Esmail, personal email, 12-5-18.

significance of her work; her desire to appeal all kinds of people in turn affects her tonal procedures. This thought brings us full circle, connecting tonality back to subject matter and style.

“Best Brown Woman”

the truth is.
you were born. for you.
you were wanted. by you.
you came here. for you.
your existence is. yours.
nayyirah waheed, *salt*

Esmail’s music seeks to cross thresholds and unite what’s on either side. This chapter shows specifically how Esmail crosses gender thresholds, through her life and within her compositions. Esmail’s interweaving of text as well as her incorporation of Indian classical and musical influence creates compositions rooted in contemporary culture, yet outside the patriarchal paradigm. In this way, Esmail challenges barriers of gender, race, and class, while maintaining credibility and relevance in the classical idiom.

In 2014, I commissioned Esmail to write an a cappella piece for the Mount Holyoke Glee Club. I requested a closing number for women’s choir that was secular, strong, and whose subject matter did not mention flowers or unrequited love—two overrepresented themes in women’s choral repertoire.⁹⁸ The result was a work entitled *Tuttarana*, which blends the Hindustani *tarana* style, a monophonic tradition, with harmony through Western *tutti* singing. *Tarana* uses vocables—non-lexical syllables—so there is no inherent textual meaning. However,

⁹⁸ These subjects serve as tropes in the women’s choral canon. See Lindsay Pope, “Sing Out Loud: Empowering Women’s Choirs,” January 2014, <http://www.nwacda.org/article-pope-1-28-14.html>.

Esmail found new meaning from the #metoo social media campaign started by Tarana Burke.⁹⁹ She wrote to me personally to share, “Another literal meaning of *Tuttarana* is ‘we are all Tarana.’ That just punched me in the gut when I thought of it.”¹⁰⁰ This anecdote serves as additional insight into Esmail’s desire to confront “the intersectional components of oppression,” a desire that manifests in her music and is a manifestation of her gender.¹⁰¹

In 2018, the Chicago Sinfonietta premiered her orchestral work, *#metoo*. The work features a protagonist (expressed through various solo instruments) who moves through the world but keeps getting thrown off course by engaging with a system that was not designed for her success. Esmail described the work as an intentional exercise in relaxing her characteristic tightness of form and being comfortable taking up space. Esmail commented on form as a “masculine” construction, as it is “something we [women] have to fit into.”¹⁰² She considers this work the first of many steps to reconcile her own experience of sexual violence, and the calling she feels to turn her suffering into something meaningful: “The only way that these devastating experiences are going to mean something or have any resonance in the world is if I actually address them, both in my artistic practice and as a human who is part of this professional community so that a) we can find ways to heal and support the women who *have* been through it and b) other women never have to go through this shit.”¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Sandra E. Garcia, “The Woman who Created #MeToo Long Before Hashtags,” *The New York Times*, October 20, 2017, accessed December 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/10/20/us/me-too-movement-tarana-burke.html>.

¹⁰⁰ Esmail, text message to author, October 18, 2017 (11:45 am).

¹⁰¹ Wilbourne, “Letter to the Editor,” viii.

¹⁰² Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

Just as Maya Angelou takes back her body in her poem “Phenomenal Woman,” Reena Esmail takes back her voice through her music. Her musical identity confronts the Mind/Body problem,” integrating her works within a cultural context that is impossible to ignore.¹⁰⁴ From its origins until the third quarter of the twentieth century, historical musicology suggested that music transcends culture, which subsequently led to women and racial minorities’ marginalization from academic discourse. Esmail has not only inserted herself into this discourse; she has infused it with a voice born from her cultural experience:

I have a certain ideology, I am a certain person, I’ve had a certain experience, and that is a vehicle for expression in my music, but is also just who I am; and maybe that experience will resonate with certain people, and not with others who might have had different experiences.. I accept that I am putting my whole self into the situation. I am putting my brownness into the situation. I am putting my femaleness into the situation. And I think if I really own it and constantly reevaluate what my relationship is to those facets of my identity, and who my relationship can best serve, then I’m really being the best brown woman I can be.¹⁰⁵

While this chapter examined Esmail’s identity through the lens of her gender, the following chapter explores her identity through the lens of her cross-cultural heritage. These chapters are not meant to separate what truly cannot be separated. Rather, that they are meant to be read as an intersectional conversation, considering the ways in which gender informs ethnicity and ethnicity informs gender, while also acknowledging the many other spokes on the wheel that comprise identity.

¹⁰⁴ Cusick, “Feminist Theory,” 16.

¹⁰⁵ Esmail, interview, 11-4-18.

CHAPTER 3

CROSS-CULTURAL CONVERSATION

My tanpura, which stood in the corner of my dorm room, elicited rude remarks—“phallic symbol” and “voodoo object”—from some of my white American friends. I ignored the jibes and played against being exoticized.

—Namita Devidayal

When Esmail was a child, she would often eat dinner at her best friend’s house. One evening, she began eating with her hands (something that was acceptable within her own home), so her best friend copied her. When her friend’s mother saw them, she chastised her own daughter, remarking, “Only savage people do stuff like that!”¹⁰⁶ It wasn’t until Esmail saw the movie *Bend It Like Beckham* at age 20—followed by her first trip to India at age 22—that Esmail began to understand her difference within a cultural context: “It was the first time I knew that I was an Indian person.”¹⁰⁷ Throughout her childhood, Esmail maintained a public life—a way that she represented herself outside the home—and a private life—a way that she interacted with her family. Esmail described this social binary as common for children of immigrants.

These anecdotes exemplify how Esmail’s social identity as an Indian-American impacts her everyday experience. Social identity is best explained by the philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah as a three-part structure: “a classification of people as Ls is associated with a *social conception* of Ls, some people *identify* as Ls, and people are sometimes *treated* as Ls.”¹⁰⁸ Chapter 2 explored gender as a social identity; this chapter focuses on race and ethnicity—specifically, the conception, identification, and treatment of cultural difference within Esmail’s

¹⁰⁶ Esmail, interview with the author, Los Angeles, November 19, 2018.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ The Ls represent any sort of social classification into a larger group. Applied to my work, L = woman and L = Indian-American. Olivia Bloechl with Melanie Lowe, “Introduction: rethinking difference,” in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2015), 5.

life, and how these differences manifest in her music.

In the introduction to *Rethinking Difference*, Olivia Bloechl revisits the aims of difference scholarship with a particular focus on the social component. She acknowledges the cultural shifts that have occurred since this approach first appeared in the 1990s and the subsequent pushback from both liberal and conservative scholars about its effectiveness and/or relevance.¹⁰⁹ Ultimately, Bloechl argues that it is through intersectionality (of gender with race, nationality, class, etc.) that scholars can best address difference, honoring individuals as compound constructions. In this chapter, I use an intersectional framework to study Esmail's experiences as a woman of color.

In *Western Music and Its Others*, David Hesmondhalgh and Georgina Born critique the ways in which the Western classical world writes about non-Western music, offering alternatives through its compendium. Historically, when non-Western music appeared within a predominantly Western work, scholars attempted to determine how "authentic" representation was, and assumed that appropriation was done with good intentions. Hesmondhalgh and Born suggest, "Such a perspective holds the danger of treating non-Western cultures purely as a resource for the reinvigoration of Western culture."¹¹⁰ This "reinvigoration of Western culture" is an appropriate explanation for India's prominence in Western thought in the last half century. The fascination with India's yoga/spirituality, fashion, and food has given India a soft power in the West not known by many other countries. Yet, through these avenues of power India's culture is often exoticized. One only has to look at the cover photos of *Yoga Journal* to see both

¹⁰⁹ Bloechl and Loew, 3.

¹¹⁰ Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh. "Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music," in *Western Music and its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 8.

the presence of Indian culture yet the invisibility of Indian people. In *Indian Music and the West*, Gerry Farrell comments on this phenomenon in music:

Indian music has passed through the musical and cultural filter of the West in a number of ways. It has been distanced from its source by the straight-jacket of staff notation, twisted out of shape by the imposition of harmony, reduced to a few musical 'tags' in opera and parlour song, and formally altered in the recording studio. And yet, in some essential manner, Indian music has continued to be unknown in the West, and is continually being 'discovered' over and over, as if for the first time.¹¹¹

Farrell references the tokenist construction of Indian music within Western culture, a misrepresentation that has existed since these cultures' first interactions.

In *The Exotic in Western Music*, Jonathan Bellman defines musical exoticism as "the borrowing or use of musical materials that evoke distant locales or alien frames of reference."¹¹² He hypothesizes that the use of exoticism in Western music derives from "the tendencies of the West to 'read' the East not as itself but rather as an idealized object of desire, focus of evil, focus of good, bastion of purity, bastion of decay, or any of myriad other interpretations."¹¹³ In other words, the representation of the Eastern Other reveals more about Western ideology than it does about Eastern reality. As an Indian-American, Esmail seeks to rectify this paradoxical, and often disrespectful relationship. Through her own dual training in Hindustani and Western classical music, she creates pieces that honor the musical aspects of both Western and Indian traditions. In turn, she creates compositions that can be enjoyed by both Western and Indian audiences, and in which both cultures feel known.

In order to understand how Esmail is able to move beyond exoticism in her music, it is important to first place Esmail within a continuing history. In Chapter 2, I situated Esmail's life

¹¹¹ Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 1.

¹¹² Jonathan Bellman, "Introduction," in *The Exotic in Western Music* (Boston: Northeastern University, 1998), ix.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, xi.

and work within contemporary feminist frameworks, utilizing these frameworks to explore how Esmail's identity as a woman shaped her compositional style. In this chapter, I wish to set Esmail within a complementary cross-cultural lens.

Most reading this document will be familiar with Western classical music history. However, I do not expect many will be familiar with the history of Indian classical music. Without digressing, I wish to offer a broad overview of Indian classical music's unfolding with a particular focus on historical developments in the last century. This overview is offered for a couple reasons. First, it provides a context through which to adequately discuss Esmail's pluralistic identities while studying in India. Second, it establishes a common language for analysis of Hindustani elements within Esmail's music.

After an overview of Hindustani classical music's history, I contextualize this history through a discussion of Esmail, focusing on what cultural changes made it possible for her to study Hindustani classical music. I continue with a synopsis of Esmail's Fulbright year abroad, highlighting revelations that impacted her compositional language and providing an overview of key Hindustani musical terms. I follow with an analysis of Esmail's hybrid musical style within three quintessential choral works—*TaReKiTa* (2016), *Tuttarana* (2014), and *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (2016)—focusing on the use of *raga*, *tal*, Hindustani forms, and Hindustani instruments. Through these varied explorations, I wish to offer a nuanced depiction of Esmail's experience within and contribution to a cross-cultural conversation between India and the West.

India's Music History and Historiography

Music went from being an unmarked practice in the eighteenth century to being marked as classical music in the twentieth. From performing for small audiences in princely courts, musicians moved into the larger cultural public sphere to give ticketed-entry performances in modern

auditoriums. Music's content, which ranged from raucous and ribald to devotional, was rewritten into respectable fare. Music was viewed as one type of entertainment among many others in princely courts, but by the twentieth century, it had become a high art form that occupied pride of place in the national imagination. While its upper-level pedagogy remained dominated by hereditary musicians, it became possible even for respectable middle-class Hindu housewives to imagine themselves as performers. Last but not least, a modern history was authored for music. The authors of this history aimed to restore to music its ancient origins and address colonial denigrations of its native caterwauling.

—Janaki Bakhle

Because Hindustani classical music was and continues to be an oral tradition, the music's theoretical and historical development is largely hypothesized until the mid-16th century, after which documentation exists. When Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936) cobbled together a shared history at the turn of the 20th century, he revealed a preference for Sanskrit treatises and upper class scholarship over the lived experience of musicians.¹¹⁴ I will discuss this historiography at greater length, but for now, suffice it to say that little documentation on India's music history exists before the “elevation” of Hindustani classical music by Bhatkhande and his contemporary Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872–1931).

The origins of Hindustani classical music trace back to The Vedas, Hinduism's earliest foundational scripture.¹¹⁵ The *Rig Veda*, composed between 1500 and 1200 BCE, compiled over

¹¹⁴ Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 105.

¹¹⁵ The Vedas are the foundational texts of Hinduism: *Rig Veda*, *Yajurveda*, *Samaveda*, and *Athurveda*. I am indebted to Vivek Virani, Ethnomusicologist at the University of North Texas, for my understanding of Indian music history and its transition into modernity. My research is primarily drawn from my “Music of India” (MUET 5090) class notes on 1/23/18, 1/30/18, and 2/27/18. For more information about Indian music history, see Joep Bor and Allyn Miner, “Hindustani Music: A Historical Overview of the Modern Period,” in *Hindustani Music, Thirteenth to Twentieth Centuries*, edited by Joep Bor, Françoise ‘Nalini’ Delvoye, Jane Harvey, and Emmie Te Nijenhuis (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2010), 197-220; Neuman, Daniel. *The Life of Music in North India*. (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990); Aneesh Pradhan, “Perspectives on Performance Practice: Hindustani Music in Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Bombay (Mumbai),” *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies* 27, No. 3 (December 2004): 339-358; Deepak S. Raja, *Hindustani Music: A Tradition in Transition* (New Delhi, D.K. Printworld, 2005); Ritwik Sanyal and Richard Widdess, *Dhrupad: Tradition and Performance in Indian Music* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004).

one thousand Vedic Sanskrit hymns. These hymns describe the natural world, creation stories, and other Indic mythology, all of which would have been chanted. While the early chanting featured only a reciting tone, an upper tone, and a lower tone, chant later expanded to include seven notes. The *Samaveda*, written around 1200 BCE, includes composed melodies for each chant. These chants had a greater range and thus a greater expressive realm. The *Samaveda* also included instructions on breath control, timing, and rhythm.

The first musicological texts were written in the Classical Gupta Period (320–540 CE). Written by Bharata, the *Natyashastra* includes reflections on art, music, and drama. Most important to Hindustani classical music’s development is the concept of *rasa*. *Rasa* (translated as “juice” or “sap”) is a mood, emotion, or feeling. Bharata connected emotional states to musical composition and expression, linking *rasa* to *raga*. Esmail describes a *raga* (translated as “color” or “mood”) as a “scale with personality.”¹¹⁶ There is much more to consider in the definition of *raga*, but most important to this discussion is the *raga*’s emotional significance, which continues to affect Hindustani classical performance practice. Another often cited music treatise is *Sangitratnakara*, a 13th-century medieval text. The seven-volume work explores sound, *raga*, performance practice, poetry, *tala*, musical instruments, and dance. The treatise also classifies music into two categories: *marga* (spiritual/ritual music) and *desi* (regional music).

From the 11th–16th centuries, India endured many conquests—the Ghaznavid Empire (11th century), the Ghurid Empire (12th century), the Delhi Sultanates (13–15th centuries), and the Mughal Empire (16th century). The Mughals ruled India from 1526 until the British Occupation in the 17th–18th centuries. Akbar “the Great” (1556–1605) expanded the empire to cover modern-day India. During Akbar’s reign, the singer Mian Tansen served in his court at Gwalior. Tansen

¹¹⁶ Reena Esmail, Interview by Chrysanthé Tan and Thomas Kotcheff, “A Washing Machine in Dehli,” *Underscore*, Episode 8, USC Radio Group, August 29, 2018, <https://www.underscore.fm/>.

was considered the most accomplished singer of his generation. He is also credited for establishing India's music patronage system, called the *gharana*.

A *gharana* functioned as both a school and a musical style. From the time of Tansen to the mid-19th century, patronage of music centered on palaces called princely courts. Each court contained a *gharana*, a group of hereditary musicians (*khandhani* musicians) who shared a biological and musical lineage. Musical information was passed from father to son; occasionally, a talented nephew or cousin may be invited to study. Although Indian classical music sets mostly Hindu poetry, the *khandhani* musicians were usually Muslim and belonged to a low social background. The *gharana* was a lineage in which style, repertoire, and vocal/instrumental technique were transmitted through generations. In order to avoid competition, this musical knowledge was kept private within families.

Similar to Western classical music, women have always been involved in Indian classical music, but their contributions have not been as diligently recorded or acknowledged. In Jennifer Post's article, "Professional Women in Indian Music," she outlines the two main roles that women played in music—as *devadasis* ("temple dancers") and as courtesans.¹¹⁷ The *devadasis* sang and danced for the Hindu deities and also cleaned the temples. In Namita Devidayal's memoir, *The Music Room*, the author writes that *devadasis* were considered property of the temple, and were expected to be sexually available for the priests.¹¹⁸ After "the Muslim invasion" by the Delhi Sultanates in the 14th century, music shifted from sacred worship to secular entertainment. *Devadasis* were eliminated in North India while the practice continued in

¹¹⁷ Jennifer Post, "Professional Women in Indian Music: The Death of the Courtesan Tradition," in *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, edited by Ellen Koskoff (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987).

¹¹⁸ Devidayal, *The Music Room*, 210. See also Devesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

South India until the 20th century.¹¹⁹ The *devadasi* role was taken over by courtesans, the mistresses of noble men:

For many generations, professional female musicians held a defined position in a society that allowed them more social and educational freedom than any other women in India. Yet at the same time the varied types of relationships women had with men coupled with their distinctive music and dance styles, caused many in society to consider them outcasts.¹²⁰

Indian courtesans were well educated so they could converse with their high-class partners and perform as dancers and singers. Courtesans developed their own counterpart to *khyal*—the most popular music form within the male *gharanas*—called *thumri*, a highly ornamented and florid style with sexual content. They were recognized as elite artists, so much so that occasionally a male professional musician would study with a talented courtesan despite the social stigma. However, courtesans' achievements were defined through male-driven parameters and their paradoxical place in culture meant that they were afforded certain intellectual liberties while remaining low class. These women were not allowed entry into the courts' *gharanas*. Women have gained access to the *gharana* system only in the last century.

The *gharana* and courtesan traditions continued until the Sepoy Rebellion of 1857. The Sepoy Rebellion led to the nationalization of the East India Company, making India an official British colony. British colonial rule disempowered the princely courts. This economic turn resulted in the dissolution of the traditional *gharana* system as many hereditary musicians left the courts to seek employment elsewhere. The Sepoy Rebellion and the subsequent cultural changes are referred to as India's transition into modernity. This transition is marked by three main trends: the formation of a "national" culture, the classicization of Indian knowledge, and

¹¹⁹ Post, "Professional Women in Indian Music," 99.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 98.

the rising middle class. As Britain occupied India and westernized its culture, India affirmed its cultural heritage through increased engagement with history, art, and religion. British industrialization led to a new railway system. This meant that musicians were able to hear and study music from various regions, resulting in blended musical styles.¹²¹ India also sought to “legitimize” its music through notation and standardization, two distinctly Western values. The westernization of culture led to English music education systems and increased amateur involvement in music.¹²² Music transformed from a low-class profession to a high-class hobby.

Two figures are celebrated in India for evolving Hindustani music to its present-day practice and status within Indian culture—Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. Janaki Bakhle’s book *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* shines an unbiased light on Bhatkhande and Paluskar. Both were pivotal to Indian classical music’s modernization, but were also responsible for eliminating and appropriating marginalized voices, specifically those of women and Muslims.¹²³

Bhatkhande

Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860–1936) holds iconic status among contemporary musicians.¹²⁴ As a musicologist and music theorist, he wrote texts that standardized music theory and created the first attempt at a shared music history. He founded music schools and helped to establish music programs in universities, making music accessible to those who did not have connections to a *guru* or a *gharana*. He also wrote critical texts on music theory and history—

¹²¹ See Daniel Neuman, “Adaptive Strategies of Hindustani Music Culture,” in *The Life of Music in North India*.

¹²² Joep Bor and Allyn Miner, “Hindustani Music: A Historical Overview of the Modern Period,” 205-206.

¹²³ Unless otherwise noted, my research is from Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹²⁴ Bakhle *Two Men and Music*, 97.

Shri Mallakshaya Sangeetam (1909), *Hindustani Sangeet Paddhati* (4 volumes published between 1910 and 1935), *A comparative Study of the Music Systems of the 15th, 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries* (1984), *A Short Historical Survey of the Music of India* (1974), *Abhinav Raga Manjari*, and *Abhinav Tala Majari*—and compiled 1800 compositions into a volume entitled *Kramik Pustak Malika*. His outlook on education and scholarship were born of his multi-faceted identity as an upper-class intellect, a secularist, and a nationalist.

Bhatkhande's nationalist values perpetuated developments in accessible music education and a shared music history, the latter of which inspired his research tours throughout the country, seeking insight into Indian classical music's origins and evolution. As a secularist, Bhatkhande believed in the separation of music and religion. He rejected the Vedas as a viable source, and was also critical of the *Natyashastra*. Throughout his research, Bhatkhande privileged textual authority over lived experience. He sought out scholars who had read the ancient Sanskrit treatises, and who valued theoretical understanding. While he appreciated musicians for their creative ingenuity, he did not consider them worthwhile resources for theoretical history or even performance practice. He prioritized academic discourse over embodied knowledge. This preference was also class-related; the musicians that Bhatkhande interviewed were low class and uneducated, which he felt made them devoid of insight.

Bhatkhande did not interview a single woman on his research tours, and the male musicians he did interview were treated as low-class "others." In describing the priority of notes in a *raga*, Bhatkhande likened the dissonant notes to a Muslim servant:

There are those who believe that using a *vivadi swar* [dissonant note] in very small quantities is sometimes necessary, even desirable; then one can perhaps see how to do this using a different principle or analogy. Sometimes in Hindu households there are

Muslim servants, but it is necessary to affix limits on where they may enter and how much freedom they should have.¹²⁵

Another example of the erasure of Muslim contribution from Hindustani classical music is through his compilation *Kramik Pustak Malika*. While this publication granted access to compositions previously only accessible through a *gharana*, the compilation omitted authorship—the names of the Muslim musicians and their *gharanas* from whence he received the content.¹²⁶ As discussed in Chapter 2, the Mind/Body Problem has been central to the prioritization of intellect (historically the male realm) over embodiment (historically the female realm). It is clear that this binary not only invaded Western historiography, but also inserted itself into Indian historiography in its attempt to “modernize.” The colonial administration privileged the Indian literary tradition over the traditions and practices of Indian people.

While Bhatkhande was a secularist, his anti-Muslim approach inadvertently contributed to pro-Hindu ideology. In his interview with sarod player and scholar Karamatullah Khan, Khan suggested that there was no way to know the exact roots of Indian classical music, as the tradition was likely a cultural merging of Persian, Arabian, and Indian styles. This suggestion was blasphemy to Bhatkhande, as it inferred that Indian music was not solely Indian. Khan’s hypothesis that “music belonged to all countries and people” went directly against Bhatkhande’s nationalist agenda.¹²⁷

Through his establishment of music programs in universities, Bhatkhande’s work made it

¹²⁵ V.N. Bhatkhande, *Hindustani Sangeet Padhdhati* (2nd ed., Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1999), 1:23 quoted in Bakhle, *Two Men and Music*, 122.

¹²⁶ Bakhle, 126.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 112.

possible for Esmail to enroll in Delhi University during her Fulbright year abroad.¹²⁸ However, Bhatkhande probably did not envision his “egalitarian” system resulting in a woman with Muslim and Catholic religious heritage entering the university. His history textbooks and especially his compilation *Kramik Pustak Malika* serve as a basis for music education in Indian schools. Esmail utilizes Bhatkhande’s standardized notation system within her scores as a basic guide and starting point for Hindustani musicians, which makes cross-cultural exchange between Western and Hindustani traditions easier. However, this system stemmed from Bhatkhande’s westernized superiority, which valued written notation and scholarship over oral transmission and embodied performance.

Paluskar

While Bhatkhande is portrayed as an icon, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872–1931) is portrayed as a saint. A career musician, Paluskar left his *guru* and devoted his life to linking his two passions, music and Hinduism. Paluskar sought to separate music from its “dirty” ties with entertainment and to reunite music with its Hindu roots. He founded music schools in Bombay and Lahore, called *Gandharva Mahavidyalaya*, which blended music with spiritual practice. These schools maintained the guru-student relationship from the old *gharanas*, and also included Hindu devotion. While the schools in Lahore and Bombay were eventually closed, students who attended these schools founded new institutions inspired by Paluskar’s methods. These teachers and school systems are still present in contemporary India. After his death, Paluskar’s followers founded an affiliation organization to standardize music education called the *Akhil Bharatiya Gandharva Mahavidyalaya* (ABGMV). This organization provided guidelines, forms and exams

¹²⁸ Esmail actually studied in a traditional *guru-shishya parampara*, but because of the way that the Fulbright is structured, she needed to enroll in a university to make her studies “official,” another example of Western legitimization determining appropriate structures for learning. Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

to universities and music programs for teachers to assess their students' mastery of Hindustani performance.

Paluskar allowed women to enroll in his schools, and in fact named women as paramount to the survival of the Hindustani classical tradition. While on the surface his ideology sounds progressive, Paluskar did not train women to become professional musicians. Much like in the West in the 18th–19th centuries, women's involvement in music was to increase their marriageability, rather than encourage professional careers. He educated women as the “carriers of religious ideology and upholders of truth” within the home. Bakhle connects Paluskar's vision with the larger aims of Hindu nationalism:

Women were not encouraged to leave the private space of the home to go out into the world. Rather, they were being trained to carry the burden of ancient cultural and religious purity within the home and, through their role in new forms of household education, for the benefit of the world as well. They were in the home, in other words, for the sake of the religious nation.¹²⁹

Women were the propagators of Hindu values, which in part explains Paluskar's wish to separate music from entertainment. Historically, women were included in Indian classical music as courtesans, but these associations were too salacious. Paluskar simply flipped the paradigm. The role of women in music shifted from embodied temptress to disembodied religious martyr.

Although Paluskar did not explicitly exclude Muslims or Christians from his schools, his movement's association with Hinduism ensured that few minorities enrolled. Paluskar justified this lack of diversity by citing the high percentage of women and low-class *Parsi* students that

¹²⁹ Bakhle, 172-3. Similarly in 18th-century European history, women were perceived as moral compasses within the home. They were allowed to pursue music as a hobby for the sake of finding a husband, educating her children, and modeling pious cultural values. See Matthew Head, “Chapter 2: ‘If the Pretty Little Hand Won’t Stretch:’ Music for the Fair Sex,” in *Sovereign Feminine: Music and Gender in Eighteenth-Century Germany* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), 76–119.

were present. In this way, women and students from the servant class became tokens that made his exclusion of others permissible.

Paluskar was also responsible for the re-branding of Indian classical music for appreciation in Western society. In 1911, Paluskar organized a coronation ceremony for King George V and Queen Mary. Bakhle writes, “Paluskar, in effect, choreographed a new kind of mixed musical entertainment for the lay public. Instead of the performance of a single raga alone, he put together a performance of classical music consisting of short sound bites, thereby augmenting its popularity and altering its public perception.”¹³⁰ As Hindustani classical music historically consisted of concerts that were 2–5 hours long, this bite-sized presentation made the tradition more palatable to a Western audience.

While Paluskar’s inclusion of women in his schools had nationalist intentions, this shift in accessibility eventually allowed women such as Esmail to become professionals. Paluskar was responsible for reviving the *guru-shishya parampara* (teacher-disciple relationship) in his schools, the same teaching model from the *gharanas*. These *gharanas*, which were once closed to hereditary musicians, were now accessible to any student who wished to learn. In this way, the definition of the *gharana* expanded to mean only a musical lineage rather than a biological and musical lineage. When Esmail studied in India, she studied in a traditional *guru-shishya parampara* with sitar player Gaurav Mazumdar. She currently studies with Saili Oak, who is from the Jaipur-Atrauli *gharana*. When I asked Esmail what distinguishes the Jaipur *gharana*, she made a comparison based on 19th-century Western European styles: “If I had to characterize them in Western musical styles, Patiala [another *gharana*] feels French, and Jaipur feels more

¹³⁰ Bakhle, 159.

German.”¹³¹ Esmail attributes the Jaipur-Atrauli style with her conception of Hindustani music within her compositions. This style is most impacted by her guru’s guru, Hindustani vocalist Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, who is the leading contemporary proponent of the Jaipur-Atrauli *gharana*.

Lastly, Paluskar’s first attempts at re-branding Indian classical music laid the groundwork for its appreciation in the West and its fusion with Western styles. The primary exporters of Hindustani classical music to the West were Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, Vilayat Khan, Alla Rakha, and Zakir Hussein. In *Bhairavi: The Global Impact of Indian Music*, Peter Lavezzoli names Ali Akbar Khan’s 1955 recording *Music of India: Morning and Evening Ragas* as the “first time that Indian classical music was preserved for posterity with no attempts to manipulate its content.”¹³² These musicians then interacted with Western classical, jazz, and rock virtuosos resulting in fusion projects, the most popular of which were collaborations between Ali Akbar Khan and violinist Yehudi Menuhin, Ravi Shankar and the Beatles’ George Harrison, and Ravi Shankar and John Coltrane.¹³³ Indian classical music impacted Western music from all angles—classical, rock, and jazz. Lesser known is Indian classical music’s impact on minimalism; the additive rhythms used by Steve Reich and Philip Glass are from *talas* (Indian rhythmic grooves), which the composers studied with Ravi Shankar.

While Esmail acknowledges that fusion practices of the late 20th century made her work possible, she also feels that these approaches do not resonate with her. Esmail explains the difference between a performer’s cross-cultural space and her mission as a cross-cultural

¹³¹ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹³² Peter Lavezzoli, *Bhairavi: The Global Impact of Indian Music* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 2009), 5.

¹³³ Ibid.

composer:

Because I'm a composer, I see things at a more meta level than a performing musician would. I see those collaborations as saying, 'Let's have a dialogue with one another,' but not necessarily examining the spaces in which they're having the dialogue. Since the musicians are responsible for the actual interaction, it's often difficult for them to get outside of the interactive space and see how they might play with the space itself.¹³⁴

Esmail highlights her identity as a composer as a critical difference between her crossover works and those of past musicians. She also disassociates herself from minimalist composers who used Indian classical music in a deconstructed manner. She feels that this deconstruction does not allow Western or Indian audiences to hear any recognizable part of the Indian classical tradition within the resultant music. Esmail views her role as a composer to connect with her audience. When she writes a composition, she asks, "Who are the people in the audience? Can they hear themselves in my music?"¹³⁵

Contemporary Connections

India's history, and particularly its transition into modernity, affected Esmail's experience during her Fulbright year abroad. As a person of Indian heritage, Esmail sensed that her teachers expected that she would absorb musical concepts quickly. They would often speak to her in a combination of English and Hindi (even though her Hindi was mostly conversational), which was different than the way they would interact with their white students. Even as an advanced practitioner of Western classical music, her Indian teachers saw her study of Hindustani music as a "coming home."¹³⁶ These experiences affirm India's modern association between classical music and cultural heritage—the legacy of Bhatkhande and Paluskar. Esmail

¹³⁴ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

remarked that the reverse bias in the United States was even more apparent. For example, her Western-trained conservatory students and colleagues subtly questioned her ability to teach sonata-allegro form. While Indians (in India) viewed Esmail's study of Hindustani music as a reclaiming of her cultural heritage, Americans saw her Indian-ness as a barrier to her mastery of Western music.

Since Esmail was in India as a voice student, her experience as a woman was fairly easeful. She remarked, "I was another Indian girl studying Indian singing in India."¹³⁷ Paluskar's first invitation of women into music circles unintentionally opened the door for women to perform publicly. Paluskar's intent was to make music acceptable through a distancing from the courtesan tradition, and this shift in perception de-stigmatized women's involvement in music. By the 1960s, it was socially acceptable for women to perform, particularly within the lighter genres *thumri* and *ghazal*.¹³⁸ Kesarbai Kerkar (1892–1977) was one of the first women to successfully transition from the courtesan tradition to the *gharana*-trained musical form *khyal*. Her lover, a wealthy businessman, advocated for her, and eventually gained her admittance into the esteemed studio of Ustad Alladiyah Khan (1855–1946). Khan founded the Jaipur-Atrauli *gharana*, of which Esmail is a musical descendent through her teacher, Saili Oak. The intersection of gender with class is best depicted through the following interaction between Kerkar and her *Brahmin* (high class) student, Dhondutai:

When she went back for her first lesson, Dhondutai automatically greeted her teacher by touching her feet. Kesarbai held her shoulders, lifted her gently and said, "You are a Brahmin's daughter. There is no need for you to do that." But this was something Dhondutai would not compromise on—even though she knew that she and Kesarbai occupied two ends of a social order in which women were either "good" or "bad,"

¹³⁷ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹³⁸ Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India: The Organization of an Artistic Tradition* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980), 207.

respectable or indecent. These were labels that had been stuck on them by men, by society, and Dhondutai would not fall into that trap.¹³⁹

Although Kesarbai never overcame class stigmatization, she made it possible for future women to pursue singing as a serious career. According to Esmail, a glass ceiling still seems to exist for female instrumentalists in India, but female singers are socially accepted. Coming from her experiences as a composer in the West, Esmail noted that the opportunity to study voice in India without any pushback was “mind-blowing.”¹⁴⁰

I also asked Esmail about her experience as a Muslim in India. She responded, “My American-ness trumped my Muslim-ness.”¹⁴¹ Esmail was raised in a devout Muslim family, but she was not raised Muslim. While her last name indicates her Muslim heritage, she felt that her American identity superseded her Muslim identification abroad. Regardless, music is one of the few sectors of Indian culture in which coexistence between Muslims and Hindus is accepted in performance, although social segregation offstage is still commonplace. Daniel Neuman expounds on this point in *The Life of Music in North India*:

Interestingly enough, although music and God are closely connected, music and religion are not. That is, all musicians, whatever their particular religious background, agree that one’s personal religion has no effect on the performance of music. One musician, a Hindu, went so far as to say that all musicians have one religion, music, and that a religious man cannot also be a musician.¹⁴²

This absence of religion within Hindustani music may have helped Esmail feel more comfortable. As the child of a Muslim father and a Catholic mother, as a child Esmail observed

¹³⁹ Devidayal, *The Music Room*, 202.

¹⁴⁰ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹⁴¹ Ibid.

¹⁴² Neuman, 60.

her mother's rituals, which she described as "the Indian brand of Catholicism."¹⁴³ Even though Esmail was confirmed Catholic, she never entirely subscribed to the faith. She knew in doing so that she would be denying half of her family. For many years, she divorced herself from spirituality entirely, but recently has rebuilt a spiritual practice. She described her spirituality as a shift from pure, rational thinking to an embracing of the mysterious and unknown.¹⁴⁴ This perspective is not very different from what Neuman illuminates within Hindustani music's sacred values.

Now that I have placed Esmail within a continuing history—exploring how gender, class, region, and national identities intersect—I now wish to examine the musical insights that Esmail gained during her Fulbright year.

Learning a New Language

Does the fact that western melody is less developed than Indian melody mean that we can't have western counterpoint that incorporates an Indian-style melody? Does creating harmonic progression within ragas diminish their effect when each note is contextually distanced from the drone note? If so, is the novelty of the new sound worth the compromise of tradition? If one end of the spectrum is mutual exclusivity and the other end is a perfect, complementary and interdependent yin-yang, where do certain elements of western classical music meet their Indian counterparts along this scale?

—Reena Esmail

Although Esmail was officially enrolled at Delhi University, she actually studied in a private studio. This tradition is known as the *guru-shishya parampara*, which translates as the student-disciple lineage. Esmail explained, "The Western conservatory system is basically

¹⁴³ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹⁴⁴ "You know when you have antibiotics and you start to feel—after you're done—you feel your own flora and fauna kind of growing back?" Ibid.

putting the *guru-shishya parampara* in a university setting, and assigning degrees at various points...embedding one into the other is essentially what conservatory is.”¹⁴⁵ As discussed previously, music was not historically taught in Indian schools, but as a hereditary trade passed down through a family’s patriarchal line. While university study of music is possible in India today, it does not compare to the traditional, intimate setting of a *guru-shishya parampara*. Through her relationship with her teacher, sitar player Gaurav Mazumdar, Esmail studied the fundamentals of Hindustani music: *khyal*, *tanpura* drone, *raga*, and *taal*. Esmail first learned about these aspects of Hindustani music in her class at Yale, taught by Hindustani singer Priya Kanungo. Her studies with Mazumdar expanded her understanding.

Khyal

Translated as “thought” or “opinion,” *khyal* has been the most popular Hindustani form since the 18th century. Similar to the role of *sonata-allegro* in the Western classical tradition, *khyal* provides a framework to explore musical ideas. Instead of presenting a preconceived work, *khyal* blends improvisation with pre-composed material. In her article “Hindustani Music: Let It Go,” Esmail addresses differences between music practice in India versus the West.¹⁴⁶ Since *khyal* places greater emphasis on spontaneity, there is no predetermined ideal to memorize, but rather many possibilities for what might occur. Esmail wrote, “Without the constriction of the ruler to constantly measure myself against, the directions I could take in my explorations were endless. As my teacher so beautifully phrased it, ‘Music is a vast ocean—every day we stand at the shore and dip our toes in the water.’”¹⁴⁷ The ability to improvise within Hindustani music

¹⁴⁵ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹⁴⁶ Reena Esmail, “Hindustani Music: Let It Go,” *New Music USA*, October 16, 2014, accessed November 21, 2011, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/hindustani-music-let-it-go/>.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

enabled Esmail to explore far-reaching musical concepts resulting in a broader range of compositional expression.

The *khyal* has three main sections: the *alap*, the *bada khyal*, and the *chota khyal*. The *alap* is an improvisatory prelude that establishes the *raga*—the modality and its characteristic musical motives. The *bada khyal* is at a slow tempo and the *chota khyal* is at a fast tempo. Both sections contain *bandishes* followed by improvisations. Depending upon the length of the concert, the performer may also include a very slow section (between the *alap* and the *bada khyal*) or a very fast section (after the *chota khyal*). The performer may conclude with a *tarana*, a fast, rhythmic improvisation on untexted syllables.

Throughout *This Love Between Us*, Esmail uses both Western and Hindustani forms to organize her multifarious musical language. While Movements 1, 3, 5, and 7 have Western forms, Movements 2, 4 and 6 broadly outline a *khyal* performance. Movement 2 references an introductory *bol alap*. In the structure of an *alap*, Movement 2 unfolds the alto soloist's line in an unmeasured quality, moving in a circuitous melodic arc from bass tonic to the upper octave and back. Esmail sets Movement 4 as a traditional *vilambit bandish* (Hindustani composition at a slow tempo), which would work just as well within a *bada khyal*. In Movement 6, Esmail uses a verse-chorus form to organize an upbeat *bandish* and improvisation. The result is three alternating movements that use Hindustani forms that accelerate. Esmail remarked that this structure was not intentional, but we both wondered whether her compositional sense was subconsciously influenced.

Esmail wrote a couple choral pieces that emulate the *tarana*. *Tarana* is Persian for “song,” and is likely inspired by ecstatic Sufi poetry. The form has been adopted by the South Indian Carnatic tradition as well, and is often excerpted as an independent piece at the end of a

concert or dance recital. The defining feature is the rhythmic singing of vocables in a virtuosic, fast-paced vocalism. It is in this vein that Esmail used the *tarana* to write a “closer” for choir. *Tuttarana* (2014) was originally composed for the Mount Holyoke Glee Club, an adult treble chorus that I was conducting. Its name is a combination of the words *tutti* and *tarana*, an acknowledgement of its hybrid lineage. The piece is set on vocables called *bol*—a mnemonic device Hindustani musicians use for rhythmic patterns—which is a traditional element of the form. *Tuttarana* is a non-stop exploration of additive rhythms. The untraditional aspect is the exploration of homophony and polyphony enabled by eight-part *divisi*. A traditional *tarana* contains a pre-composed composition alongside improvised material. This setting for choir demands that all parts are notated.

TaReKiTa (2016) is also inspired by the *tarana*. Esmail wrote *TaReKiTa* for the Urban Voices Project, Street Symphony’s community chorus for the Skid Row community in Los Angeles. *TaReKiTa* emerged from the visceral connection and investment of the choir in a workshop Esmail led on Hindustani rhythm. While *Tuttarana* is written for an intermediate to advanced ensemble, *TaReKiTa* is an accessible alternative. The piece also features rhythmic interplay on *bol*, but instead of intense additive rhythm, *TaReKiTa* remains in compound time.

Many Hindustani forms have gendered associations. *Thumri* is considered a feminine form because of its association with the courtesan tradition, but also because of its classification as a “light” genre. Its musical content is text-based, with highly ornamented and florid passages.¹⁴⁸ In contrast, the *dhrupad* (the popular form before the *khyal*) is considered a masculine form because of its association with the *gharana* tradition. This tradition traditionally

¹⁴⁸ Lalita Du Perron, “Thumri: A Discussion of the Female Voice of Hindustani Music,” *Modern Asian Studies* 36, No. 1 (February 2002): 173-193, accessed September 4, 2018, <https://libproxy.library.unt.edu/login?url=https://libproxy.library.unt.edu:2165/docview/196887256?accountid=711>.

championed male performers, and the musical content was austere and *raga*-based.¹⁴⁹ The *khyal* is described as a chameleon, constructing both masculine and feminine meaning. Some historians have even suggested that *khyal* emerged so that women could perform.¹⁵⁰

Esmail's setting of *tarana* for a women's chorus and a choir of disenfranchised community members could also have gendered significance. According to Vivek Virani, ethnomusicologist at the University of North Texas, the *tarana* is one of the few forms in Hindustani music that is currently coded "masculine:"

While MOST Hindustani repertoire (especially the poetry itself) is more "female" in voice, *tarana* tends to be more associated with a "male" voice. That is not to say that there is anything surprising or unusual about women singing *tarana*, but that most *khyal* repertoire is romantic poetry that is considered "feminine" even when performed by a male singer, whereas *tarana* is considered strong, forceful, and masculine even when performed by a female singer.¹⁵¹

According to Virani, the *tarana* is considered "masculine" because of its aggressive display of vocal prowess. This suggestion corroborates other studies that explore gendered meaning within Hindustani performance, and how expectations differ between male and female singers.¹⁵² For example, it is more acceptable for men to perform ornamentation with wide, athletic leaps, while women's ornamentation is often more subtle and delicate. Esmail's decision to set the *tarana* for a women's chorus and a choir of disenfranchised community members is one way that she reclaims power—coded as "masculine"—for those who historically have been disempowered.

Christina Collier, a singer in Urban Voices Project, spoke about the pride she felt in

¹⁴⁹ Chloë Alaghband-Zadeh, "Sonic Performativity: Analysing Gender in North Indian Classical Vocal Music," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 24, No. 3 (2015): 349-379, accessed March 31, 2018. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17411912.2015.1082925>.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 359-60.

¹⁵¹ Vivek Virani, correspondence with the author, November 26, 2018.

¹⁵² See Chloë Alaghband-Zadeh, "Sonic Performativity: Analysing Gender in North Indian Classical Vocal Music" and Lalilta Du Perron, "Thumri: A Discussion of the Female Voice of Hindustani Music."

performing *TaReKiTa* at a Mosaic Piece by Piece event at the Los Angeles Times building. She remembers the audience's reaction as amazed by their performance: "Look at this Skid Row choir singing this beautiful music."¹⁵³ Collier's innate pride speaks to a larger aim of Esmail's music—to empower those voices that have been forgotten or dismissed. Esmail's subversion of the "masculine" within Hindustani music creates an additional layer of meaning that is united with social justice.

Tanpura

Both Western and Hindustani music favor a tonal center. While in Western music this center may shift and then return, in Hindustani music the tonal center is always aurally present through the tanpura drone. In *The Music Room*, Namita Devidayal describes her first voice lesson, during which she only sings the tonic:

I started with the first note, sa. On that first day, to my dismay, Dhondutai made me sing only the base note—the tonal pillar of Indian music which remains unchanged, constant, reliable, and stoically oblivious to the whims and fancies of other notes. It is the foundation, the first and last note, the point at which the circle begins and ends. Within the boundaries of sa, one can play out all of life's dramas and moods. But every time one gets back to it, there is a sense of closure—like coming home after a long and exciting journey.¹⁵⁴

Devidayal's experience illuminates the significance of the tonic, which has both musical and spiritual importance. Esmail writes, "The drone is a pillar of support. However complex the structure, however subtle the ornamentation, however dissonant the interval, the drone is always there, both as the cause of tension and as the roadmap to its release."¹⁵⁵ In Western music, a

¹⁵³ Christina Collier, interview with author, phone, December 5, 2018.

¹⁵⁴ Devidayal, *The Music Room*, 15.

¹⁵⁵ Reena Esmail, "Drone," *reena/in/india* (blog), WordPress, January 25, 2012, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://reenainindia.wordpress.com>.

pedal tone provides a similar function, however it is not a requirement of Western composition; rather, it is a technique to be employed. In *Ein deutsches Requiem*, Brahms sets an entire fugue over a pedal tone on D on the Biblical text, “The righteous souls are in God’s hand, and no torment shall stir them.”¹⁵⁶ The pedal tone represents the finality of this Biblical statement, a depiction that is ever-present in the Hindustani classical tradition, and has a similarly sacred intention. In Esmail’s own compositions, she honors the drone’s significance, but also explores how to appropriately contextualize the drone with harmonic progressions, and how to modulate in a way that would be acceptable to Hindustani listeners. Given the drone’s musical and religious consequence, this is no easy feat.

Esmail often incorporates the tanpura drone within her compositions’ lower voices and/or instruments. In *TaReKiTa*, the drone primarily appears in the bass. In *Tuttarana*, the drone also appears in the lowest voices, but Esmail occasionally moves the drone to a higher voice so that she can alternate melody and rhythmic motives throughout the choir. Both *TaReKiTa* and *Tuttarana* honor the drone’s unchanging effect by maintaining a key area for a long time-period.

One way that Esmail is able to maintain the drone’s foundational role, while still creating some harmonic interest, is to use modulation during structural seams. *TaReKiTa* has a parallel form plus a coda: A (m. 1-48), A (m. 49-96), Coda (m. 97-end). The piece remains locked into E until the modulation by ascending whole step to F# at the repeat of A (m. 49). Esmail then remains in F#. The modulation is made acceptable through its occurrence at a significant formal point, and the music’s repetition thereafter.

As introduced in Chapter 2, Esmail avoids modulations associated with common practice harmony. One is hard pressed to find a perfect authentic cadence in her compositions. Esmail

¹⁵⁶ Solomon 3:1 (New Revised Standard Version).

instead uses modal modulations by half step and whole step or modulations by common tone. In *TaReKiTa*, Esmail modulates by ascending whole step, a technique that is more common today in pop and musical genres and is also used in early music. There are actually many correlations between Western medieval and renaissance music theory and contemporary Hindustani practice, as both are based upon a linear conception of voice leading. In m. 48, the bass's G on beat 3 becomes a flattened second scale degree that resolves to the tonic, while the upper voices move in parallel motion from the flattened seventh to the tonic (see Musical Example 3.1). This voice leading is the same as what composers used in early music to modulate through Phrygian mode.

Musical Example 3.1: Reena Esmail, *TaReKiTa*, m. 47-51.

47

ta-ka-di-mi-ta-ka - ja-nu-ta-ka-di-mi Dha ta re-ki-ta dhum ta re-ki-ta nom ta re-ki-ta

nom ta re-ki-ta ta-ka-di-mi-ta-ka Dha ta re-ki-ta dhum ta re-ki-ta nom ta re-ki-ta

ta-ka-di-mi-ta-ka - ja-nu-ta-ka-di-mi Dha _____

_____ ta na na Hum _____

Tuttarana has more diverse musical sections, but from a broad lens it is in a rounded binary form plus a coda: A (m. 1-53), B (m. 54-103), A' (m. 104-118), Coda (m. 119-end). The piece begins in D, modulates to F at the start of B (m. 54), and modulates back to D at the A reprise (m. 104). At each structural seam (ABA'), Esmail begins with the same musical material, first introduced in m. 1-16. Esmail uses this material as a recurring structural pillar, which

enables modulation through familiar musical territory. This reprise allows Esmail to increase musical excitement through ascending modulation while maintaining the drone's function.

In *Tuttarana*, Esmail modulates from D to F. With a modulation through the chromatic mediant, one would expect "F" to be the common tone, but Esmail uses "C" instead. From m. 53-54, the Altos maintain a C while all other parts shift around this axis (see Musical Example 3.2). The result is a jarring modulation that fits because of the intrinsic excitement of the *tarana*. In the modulation back to m. 104, Esmail again uses a modally conceived technique. The soloist's voice leading from C to D (m. 103-104) guides the choir back to the home key. All parts move from a stacked F5 with a suspended 4 and flat-7 to an open fifth on D (see Musical Example 3.3).

Musical Example 3.2: Reena Esmail, *Tuttarana*, m. 49-59.

The musical score consists of four staves: des. (drone), S1 (Soloist), S2 (Soprano), and A. (Alto).
 Measures 49-53: The des. part has a melodic line starting with a *mf* dynamic. S1, S2, and A. parts have lyrics: "deem ta deem ta deem ta deem ta", "do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to", and "do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to do ki to".
 Measures 54-59: The des. part has a melodic line starting with a *f* dynamic. S1, S2, and A. parts have lyrics: "Dha tum", "Deem ta na na nom ta na na tum", "Ti ro ki to gho di go no", "Dha tum", "Deem ta na na nom ta na na tum", "Ti ro ki to gho di go no", "Dha tum", "Deem ta na na nom ta na na tum", "Ti ro ki to gho di go no", "Dha tum", "Deem ta na na nom ta na na tum", "Ti ro ki to gho di go no", "Dha tum", "Deem ta na na nom ta na na tum", "Ti ro ki to gho di go no", "Dha tum", "Deem ta na na nom ta na na tum", "Ti ro ki to gho di go no".

According to Somangshu Mukherji, Assistant Professor of Music Theory at University of Michigan, Esmail favors the modal properties within her *raga*-inspired melodies to modulate

more seamlessly by step or common tone.¹⁵⁷ These modulations often occur at natural seams in the music, making the shift from one tonal center to another more acceptable. In order to respect the drone's function in Hindustani music, Esmail maintains a key area for long periods of the music, a compositional choice that could be construed as stagnant or uninteresting. However, Esmail's creative use of non-functional harmony and imitative textures create variety in conversation with the drone.

Musical Example 3.3: Reena Esmail, *Tuttarana*, m. 101-105.

Raga

Through her daily voice lessons with Mazumdar, Esmail began to differentiate between the Hindustani *raga* and the Western scale. In addition to a set of notes, a *raga* is also the hierarchy of the notes and the relationship between the notes. Esmail refers to a *raga* as a “scale with personality.”¹⁵⁸ She wrote, “Indian music places a lot of emphasis on what happens between the main notes whereas in the west, most of the emphasis is on the notes themselves. When I practice, instead of notes, I think of each phrase as a shape.”¹⁵⁹ A *raga*'s characteristics are

¹⁵⁷ Somangshu Mukherji, interview with the author, phone, December 5, 2018.

¹⁵⁸ Reena Esmail, “Hindustani Music: Let It Go,” *NewMusicBox USA*, October 16, 2014, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://nmbx.newmusicusa.org/hindustani-music-let-it-go/>.

¹⁵⁹ Reena Esmail, “The Beginning of Lessons,” *reena/in/india* (blog), WordPress, August 30, 2011, <https://reenainindia.wordpress.com>.

determined by: the primary and secondary notes (*vadi* and *samvadi*), the sustained notes (*nyasa*), the ornamented notes, the characteristic movements (*chalan*), and the catchphrase (*pakad*).

In addition to these prescribed musical rules, musicologist Deepak Raja describes a *raga* as an archetype—a representative of shared emotion, thought, and history. A *raga* is a consensual entity, simultaneously shaping and shaped by culture.¹⁶⁰ Many *ragas* are associated with specific emotions, deities, historical figures, times of day, or seasons. Esmail recounted a moment in which she was singing a *bhajan* (devotional song) in *Raag Malhaar*:

It is in these moments when all my regular identities fall away, when I am no longer a western classical composer, or a fulbrighter [*sic*], or any of the usual labels I am quick to identify myself by: I am just one of millions of Indian girls, standing on a balcony in the rain, singing a *bhajan*. There is nothing separating me from my past or from the culture I know not in my conscious mind, but in my bones.¹⁶¹

What Esmail describes is connection to a shared cultural memory that the *raga* evokes; in this case, a connection to the rainy season and romance, typically associated with *Raag Malhaar*.

While Western music historically connected emotional states with key areas (a framework codified by the Baroque-era Doctrine of Affections), these relationships no longer dictate to the Western composer. Within the study of Indian classical music, however, the *raga*'s emotional context is a persistent variable. Esmail grapples with this philosophical distinction when learning *Raag Basant*, a *raga* associated with spring:

As a western musician, I have constantly wondered whether there was something inherent in certain sounds that begged specific emotions, or whether the pairing of particular sounds with the same emotions over generations created a sort of Pavlovian effect on the culture of listeners. For instance, the first time someone heard the I-iii-I-iii chord progression, did tears well up in their eyes? Or was it the constant pairing of that

¹⁶⁰ Deepak Raja, "Perspectives on 'Raga-ness,'" *Deepak Raja's world of Hindustani Music* (blog), July 17, 2017, accessed February 3, 2018, <http://swaratala.blogspot.com/2017/07/perspectives-on-raga-ness.html>.

¹⁶¹ Reena Esmail, "Malhaar," *reena/in/india* (blog), WordPress, September 2, 2011, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://reenainindia.wordpress.com>.

with sorrowful parting scenes in movies that made an audience (largely unaware of the progression's musical mechanics) respond predictably to it on a purely emotional level?

Brought into this context, I wonder if spring just brings up a different range of associations for Indians than it does for westerners, whether the same associations are expressed differently in music, or some combination of both.¹⁶²

While in Western classical music there is a link between collective emotion and musical patterns, this connection stems from harmonic progressions. In Indian classical music, the *affekt* is determined by the relationship between a monophonic line and its drone. Within her own compositions, Esmail honors the *raga*'s musical and social meaning within homophonic and polyphonic textures.

Esmail's compositions are sometimes *raga*-conceived and other times *raga*-inspired. In her *raga*-conceived works, Esmail seeks to honor all components of a *raga*. In order to create vertical textures while still honoring the *raga*, Esmail often uses what Mukherji referred to as the *raga*'s "intervallic properties," meaning the movement between notes that is common to a particular *raga*.

In both *TaReKiTa* and *Tuttarana*, Esmail wrote in *Raga Jog*, a *raga* that has become popular in recent decades and is usually sung between 12 and 3 am.¹⁶³ *Jog* is often used in the "lighter" genres of Hindustani classical music, which contain fewer rules and allow more melodic freedom. In *Tuttarana*, Esmail follows the rules of the *raga* closely, including its characteristic twists and turns. The scale features both flattened and natural third scale degrees (*Ga*). In *Tuttarana*, Esmail best portrays this feature in melodic interplays between the Soprano 2 and Alto, where both F# and F natural are used interchangeably (see Musical Example 3.4, m.

¹⁶² Reena Esmail, "Spring," *reena/in/india* (blog), WordPress, April 8, 2012, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://reenainindia.wordpress.com>.

¹⁶³ Joep Bor, *The Raga Guide: A Survey of 74 Hindustani Ragas* (Monmouth, NP: Nimbus Communications International Ltd., 1990), 90.

16-21). From a Western perspective, this creates an ambiguous modality that is neither Major nor minor.

Musical Example 3.4: Reena Esmail, *Tuttarana*, m. 14-22.

The musical score consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system covers measures 14-17, and the second system covers measures 18-22. The vocal parts are labeled S1, S2, and A. The lyrics are written below the notes. Dynamic markings include *f*, *mp*, and *fp*. The time signature is 8/8. The key signature has one flat (B-flat).

In homophonic passages within *Tuttarana*, Esmail bends the rules. *Jog* has a natural fourth scale degree (*Ma*) and does not include the second or sixth scale degrees (*Re* and *Dha*). However, in m. 4, Esmail introduces both a natural *Re* and sharp *Ma* (see Musical Example 3.5). The result is a dissonant block chord that with bi-tonal implications (D5 against E Major) or a D5 with an added second and sharp fourth. Esmail later employs both a flattened *Dha* alongside a flattened *Re* (m. 15), but these are treated as non-chord tones within a harmonic context that solidify the piece’s final of D.

Another way that Esmail achieves polyphony in a *raga*-conceived composition is through canonic imitation. Imitation is a shared component of Hindustani and Western music. Within a Hindustani performance, there is often a secondary instrument that imitates the singer’s line. In

This Love Between Us Movement 2, Esmail features the oboe and sitar in direct conversation, with the sitar player responding to the oboe's fixed line. Esmail remarked that to a Western musician, these un-notated moments in the sitar's part look like a cop-out. In actuality, it is Esmail's way of respecting the sitarist as an improviser, creating a necessary framework while opening a door for individual expression.

Musical Example 3.5: Reena Esmail, *Tuttarana*, m. 1-5.

Esmail also uses imitation as textural gestures. In *This Love Between Us*, she often introduces a melody that is then repeated by other voices/instruments in an overlapping cascade. A great example of this technique is in Movement 1, m. 21-28 (see Chapter 4, Musical Example 4.2). The sitar player introduces a melody in *Raga Kafi* that is then imitated one measure apart by the first then second violins. Esmail uses this same technique in Movement 5. The tenor and soprano soloists introduce their melodies in *Raga Yaman*. The strings imitate the tenor in augmentation an octave above, while the sitar directly imitates the soprano in the same octave (see Chapter 4, Musical Example 4.12). Esmail uses imitation to honor the *raga* as a monophonic, melodic tradition, while providing textural interest through voicing and orchestration.

When Esmail is not composing in a particular *raga*, she uses *raga*-inspired properties to

create new modalities. In Movement 2, Esmail uses the notes within a Phrygian scale, the complementary *raga* of which is *Bhairavi*. However, Esmail does not compose in *Bhairavi*, as she is not using *Bhairavi*'s melodic properties to conceive of her melodies or orchestration. Esmail's study of *raga* has given her creative liberty to explore new modalities and to create her own properties and regulations. She explains her approach through a language metaphor:

If I don't naturally speak English, I'm going to try to get all the grammar correct and be very sure that everything is exactly in its place. If I'm truly a native speaker of English, I'm going to use English the way that I want to use it—to loosen up the structures and put my own mark on the language. I am a practitioner of Western music. I am, to a certain extent, a practitioner of Hindustani music...I have a solid grasp on the expressive properties of these languages, so I am now more interested in having the latitude to make these languages into vehicles of expression. So there are many things I do that are purely musical decisions because I just happen to like the way something sounds, and this is one of them.¹⁶⁴

In this movement, Esmail prioritizes her own authoritative voice over *raga* prerequisites, using aspects of both Hindustani and Western technique to create a unique harmonic language and musical context.

Taal

Throughout Esmail's documentation of her Fulbright year, she does not write about *taal* except anecdotally. Esmail recounted a meaningful story about learning a *bandish* in *Jhaptal*. After a teacher taught her the *bandish*, a tabla player (who only spoke Bengali) visited. Her teacher left the room, and the tabla player began to play with her, inviting Esmail to improvise. Esmail's initial panic subsided when she realized that the tabla player was communicating through his eye contact and body language:

Indian musical communication is much more than a sniff on the upbeat – it is a constant visual dialog between players (the fact that there is no music to look at almost mandates it). I slowly loosened my concentration on the beat, which up until that point, I had been

¹⁶⁴ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

keeping rigidly with my right hand on my knee, and started to watch him play, listening to how my melody fit into the resultant *bols* (strokes), and let my body find its own way to sway in response to the unfamiliar rhythm.

Slowly, I began to pick out the difference in the sounds of the *bols*, and then began to place where I was in the *taal* (rhythmic cycle). He gestured dynamically as he played, and I began to realize what beats he was showing me: *Here is the Khali, the middle of your phrase. Now I am coming to the Sam – I'm almost there... Here it is!* As a conductor guides their orchestra effortlessly, inevitably into the perfect placement of their phrases, the tabla player guided me smoothly through the phrases of the *bandish*. I could barely believe what was happening: I was sliding into the *Sam* right on time every time!¹⁶⁵

Esmail's experience speaks to the importance of body language in internalization of a *tala*, as well as the downbeat's significance in determining structure within a complicated rhythmic interplay.

Esmail uses *tal* within her own compositions to create micro- and macro-structures. In *Tuttarana*, Esmail employs many different *talas* side by side as an exploration of additive rhythm.¹⁶⁶ The result is a playful mixed meter that is much easier to hear and feel than to read through notation. Esmail also utilizes *tihai* at formal cadential moments. A *tihai* is a rhythmic pattern that repeats three times, with the final note ending on the downbeat (*sam*). For example, the Soprano 1 and Soprano 2/Altos converse in a two-part *tihai*, with the Soprano 1s singing a descending scalar sequence that resolves on a structural downbeat (see Musical Example 3.6, m. 41-45). Esmail uses a similar *tihai*-inspired concept in the Coda, also in the Soprano 1 (m. 123-128), which leads to the final cadence.

In *This Love Between Us*, the tabla performs traditional Hindustani *talas*—*teental*, *jhaptal*, and *rupaktal*. In Movements 1 and 3, the tabla performs in sections, while in Movements

¹⁶⁵ Reena Esmail, "Universal Language," *reena/in/india* (blog), WordPress, February 29, 2012, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://reenainindia.wordpress.com>.

¹⁶⁶Esmail, text message with Esmail, May 2, 2018 (9:05 pm).

4 and 6, the tabla plays for the entirety. In Movement 4, which is in *jhaptal*, the tabla player is featured as a soloist. Although the piece appears to be in 5/4, *jhaptal*'s larger structure lasts two measures. In Movement 6, the tabla plays the entire movement in *rupaktal*, giving the tabla player freedom to improvise within the groove. Again, these longer periods of improvisation are ways in which Esmail honors her Hindustani instrumentalists and their musical tradition.

Musical Example 3.6: Reena Esmail, *Tuttarana*, m. 40-48.

The musical score consists of two systems of three staves each. The first system (measures 40-44) has a Soprano part (S1) and an Alto part (A) with lyrics, and a second Soprano part (S2) with rhythmic accompaniment. The second system (measures 44-48) continues with the same parts. The lyrics are: 'Tī ro kī to gho dī go no dhā' (S1), 'Dhā ghā dī go no dhā ghā dī go no dhā' (S2), 'Tā nā nā nā nā nā nā nā nā nā de re nā nā deem tā deem tā' (S2), and 'dō kī to dō kī to' (A). Dynamics include *f*, *mf*, and *mp*.

Performance Priorities

During her Fulbright studies, Esmail discovered a distinction between the performance priorities of Western and Hindustani classical traditions. While Western classical music values accuracy over communication, Indian classical music values communication over accuracy. In Western classical music, the exact re-creation of a work is valued most highly; depending upon the virtuosity of the work, achieving the bare minimum of accuracy can be a feat. Esmail continues:

Indian classical music is also incredibly difficult, to be sure. But accuracy is only the very beginning of mastery. True mastery is not about following instructions as much as finding the most innovative ways to push right up against the boundaries of the form through improvisation. And that very impetus to be innovative comes from the desire to communicate with and please your audience. As beautifully rendered as your phrases may be, they are only complete with the approval and enjoyment of those who listen – a feature that is given much less weight in western music.¹⁶⁷

Esmail's challenge is then to fully capture an improvised tradition within pre-notated compositions.

While *Tuttarana* and *TaReKiTa* are “fixed” compositions, they are written in an improvisatory style. Each phrase must sound like it is a sparkling idea, ripe with possibility. When I next perform *Tuttarana*, I will emphasize the improvisatory nature of Hindustani classical music, and encourage the students to look at this piece through the lens of expressive communication rather than perfect accuracy. Within *This Love Between Us*, Esmail creates space for improvisation through her open-ended writing for the sitar and tabla players; she even incorporates improvisation in the strings through frequent aleatoric passages. In these ways, Esmail does an extraordinary job of allowing these two priorities to coexist within her compositions. This coincidence is an expression of her cross-cultural identity.

Esmail also uses her prestige and success to empower future musicians. Through her organization, Shastra, which she co-founded with Payton MacDonald, Esmail creates opportunities for musicians to study and write crossover music. MacDonald remarked, “We both had this mutual interest in developing and supporting musicians like ourselves who are working between the traditions.”¹⁶⁸ Esmail and MacDonald co-facilitate festivals, symposiums, and summer workshops, which attract composers, performers, scholars, and educators. MacDonald

¹⁶⁷ Reena Esmail, “Studies in Perfection,” *reena/in/india* (blog), WordPress, February 28, 2012, accessed May 2, 2018, <https://reenainindia.wordpress.com>.

¹⁶⁸ Payton MacDonald, interview with the author, phone, November 14, 2018.

reflected on the organization's ability to create a "nexus point" through which diverse professions within music can meet and learn from one another.

While the organization thus far is primarily geared toward Western musicians crossing over into Hindustani music, Esmail and her teacher, Saili Oak, recently taught a workshop in Mumbai for Indian musicians wishing to learn more about Western classical music. Oak said that the Indian musicians were skeptical at first, but by the end of the workshop they were singing in four-part harmony.¹⁶⁹ Through Shastra, Esmail not only wishes to create shared spaces between Hindustani and Western music, but also opportunities for Hindustani and Western musicians to "listen" and learn from one another.

Conclusion

Through this chapter, I illuminated a history that allowed Esmail to occupy a space in between Indian and Western musical cultures, and I analyzed how this cross-cultural context unfolds in her music. The intellectual prowess and deep care that Esmail takes to create music that respectfully explores the spaces between Hindustani and Western classical music has already had an impact on the contemporary classical world.

Somangshu Mukherji includes Esmail's music within his music theory course at the University of Michigan, called "The Theory and Analysis of Non-Western and World Musics." The class studies Esmail's String Quartet (2013), which features four different *ragas* in its four movements. As a dual-trained musician, Mukherji enjoys the piece not only for its intentional Hindustani writing, but for its ability to reclaim tonality as an intellectual pursuit:

The way she's able to incorporate [Indian melodies] into Western writing, where tonality has been seen as passé or old-fashioned for a while. It was hard to do an openly,

¹⁶⁹ Saili Oak, interview with author, Los Angeles, November 18, 2018.

unabashedly tonal composition for string quartet in the Western contemporary scene without it being dismissed for various historical and aesthetic reasons.

To write music that is openly and unabashedly tonal, but at the same time does not minimize some of the difficulties in writing Indian music for Western instruments in a Western genre. These are non-trivial compositional challenges, and the way she's able to overcome them to write music that sounds organic and beautiful and wonderful to listen to, but at the same time is original and cerebral, and doesn't minimize the intricacies of Indian melody, but at the same time uses them in ways in which they seem not-cliché in a Western, tonal sense.¹⁷⁰

Mukherji's description of Esmail's music as both "organic and beautiful" as well as "original and cerebral" is the integration of "feminine"- and "masculine"-coded musical characteristics. I can't tell you how many times musicians described Esmail's music as the perfect blend of head and heart, a resolution to Cusick's Mind/Body Problem. In Esmail's ability to create music that is tonal *and* intellectual, Esmail breaks down gender norms by defying gendered expectations.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Somangshu Mukherji, phone, December 5, 2018.

CHAPTER 4

THIS LOVE BETWEEN US: PRAYERS FOR UNITY

“A Musical Microcosm”¹⁷¹

*It took me a long time to realize that one could not—and must not—
question faith. Each of us has our own way of making a pact with life.*
—Namita Devidayal

The purpose of this chapter is to provide analytical insight and performance practice guidance to conductors, trained in the Western classical tradition, who wish to perform Esmail’s music. Thus far, I have contextualized the composer within socio-cultural trends, examining the impact of gender and ethnicity on Esmail’s professional life and compositional language. While these larger social contexts create a container in which to understand Esmail’s music, there are also practical considerations to a crossover composition’s successful preparation and performance. Through the lens of a single work, I will put theory into practice. This chapter focuses solely on Esmail’s oratorio, *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (hereafter referred to as *TLBU*).

The Yale University’s Institute of Sacred Music commissioned *TLBU*, and David Hill premiered the work in March 2017 conducting Yale Schola Cantorum and Juilliard 415 at Alice Tully Hall, with subsequent performances in India. The work has received critical acclaim. Below are two reviews; the first review is from the premiere performance and the second is from the Los Angeles Master Chorale’s West Coast premiere in November 2018:

Reena Esmail...related elements of classical Indian music to the symphonic tradition, utiliz[ing] advanced Western compositional techniques, all with an orchestra and chorus versed in the stylistic and technical demands of the Baroque era. The results were

¹⁷¹ Title taken from Reena Esmail, interview by Danika Paskvan, “A Musical Microcosm,” *The Juilliard Journal*, March 2017, accessed October 19, 2018, <http://journal.juilliard.edu/journal/109501/musical-microcosm>.

extremely successful. *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* is a powerful work of music.¹⁷²

Ms. Esmail's musical style is unabashedly melodic, a beautifully seamless fusion of Western and Eastern (Indian) classical traditions, featuring Baroque trumpets in the Christianity section and the sitar and tabla in others. The vocal soloists, all excellent, intoned melisma on ancient texts that alternated between ecstasy and contemplation. The choral singing was graceful and ingratiatingly spirited throughout. At times, it seemed Music Director Grant Gershon presided over the mixed orchestra not as a conductor, but as a Zen master of sounds, which were intoxicatingly beautiful.¹⁷³

The seven-movement work was initially conceived and performed as a companion to Bach's *Magnificat*. When I asked Grant Gershon what inspired him to program *TLBU* for the Los Angeles Master Chorale, he responded, "I absolutely flipped over the piece...As soon as I had the chance to check out *This Love Between Us* it was a top priority to program it. Knowing that it was a companion piece to the Bach just made it really easy."¹⁷⁴ It is indeed smart for Esmail to create a piece that easily pairs with a canonical work, as it ensures programmability. While the two works are stylistically different, the texts have thematic connections. Gershon said he was excited to program two pieces "separated by time or tradition...finding ways that they illuminate each other."¹⁷⁵ Gershon added that the subject matter of Esmail's oratorio allowed for a reconsideration of the *Magnificat* text—a liturgical text containing progressive social ideas, which Esmail's oratorio highlights as well.¹⁷⁶ This "thematic resonance," and its particular tie to

¹⁷² Adam Wasserman, review of concert performance, "*This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (Esmail); *Magnificat* (Bach)," *Opera News*, Vol. 81, No. 12 (June 2017), accessed October 19, 2018, https://www.operanews.com/Opera_News_Magazine/2017/6/Reviews/NEW_YORK_CITY__Juilliard415.html

¹⁷³ Truman C. Wang, review of concert performance, "East meets West: A Magnificent Chorus of Prayers for Unity," *Classical Voice*, November 20, 2018, accessed November 28, 2018, <http://www.classicalvoice.org/review/losangeles/2018/11/18/magnificent-chorus-of-prayers-for-unity>.

¹⁷⁴ Grant Gershon, interview with the author, Los Angeles, November 19, 2018.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ "He hath filled the hungry with good things; and the rich he hath sent empty away." Luke 1: 53 (King James Version).

social justice, makes *TLBU* a compelling work.¹⁷⁷

Bach's *Magnificat* and Esmail's *TLBU* share the same orchestration: SATB soloists, choir, and baroque orchestra. For *TLBU*, the sitar and tabla players replace the continuo group. Each movement features a sacred text on unity from one of India's seven major religions. In concert order, the featured religions are Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Islam. Each movement sets the text in two languages—the language of the original scripture/poem and its English translation—often weaving these texts together simultaneously.¹⁷⁸ Esmail's microcosmic conception was heavily influenced by her own religious upbringing, as well as her music study:

I came from a religious family, Catholic and Muslim. Because I've always been surrounded by different religious traditions, I was able to express my broad conception of religion through the piece. Also, music and religion are so related in both Western and Indian sacred traditions: Hindustani music is to Hinduism what Western classical music is to Christianity.¹⁷⁹

Esmail's bi-religious upbringing, in tandem with her studies of Hindustani and Western classical traditions, culminated in a choral-orchestral masterwork that exemplifies her hybrid musical style.

While Esmail employs certain self-imposed guidelines in her setting of Western and Hindustani classical styles, her approach is by no means formulaic. Her program notes read,

Each movement contains a unique combination of Indian and Western classical styles, running the continuum from the Christian movement, which is rooted firmly in the

¹⁷⁷ Gershon, interview, 11-19-18.

¹⁷⁸ The one exception is the Christian movement, which sets Biblical text in English and Malayalam. Malayalam is a Dravidian language spoken in Kerala, a coastal region in Southwestern India that has the highest number of Christians per capita. Esmail, interview, 11-4-18.

¹⁷⁹ Esmail, interview with Paskvan, "A Musical Microcosm," *Classical Movements*, March 10, 2017, accessed October 15, 2018, <https://medium.com/@ClassicalMovements/a-musical-microcosm-850a9a9a18a3>.

baroque style, to the Zoroastrian movement, which is a Hindustani *vilambit bandish*. Each of the other movements live somewhere in between those two musical cultures in their techniques, styles and forms.”¹⁸⁰

TLBU embodies a conversation between two cultures, expressed through intermingling text, technique, and style. While the conversation ebbs and flows, the traditions primarily dance together between their disparate territories. The compositional choice to live in this in-between space further elucidates Esmail’s chosen title, which is excerpted from a Kabir poem: “This love between us cannot be annihilated.”¹⁸¹

This chapter is structured sequentially by movement. Each movement contains an analysis followed by a performance practice guide. The analysis uses the cultural contexts of gender and culture (discussed in previous chapters) to explore the relationship between text and music; the significance of form, harmony, and orchestration; and, the interweaving of Western and Hindustani musical features. The performance practice guide covers a broad range of practical considerations, including an overview of relevant Hindustani musical terms, explanation for Hindustani vocal/instrumental technique required for each movement, and instructions for effective communication from the conductor to the sitar and tabla players. The chapter concludes with general performance practice considerations. Much of the research for the performance practice guide derives from the Los Angeles Master Chorale’s West Coast premiere of *TLBU* in November 2018. This research includes rehearsal and performance observations as well as interviews with the musicians. I interviewed Grant Gershon (conductor, LA Master Chorale), Amy Fogerson (singer, LA Master Chorale), Robin Sukhadia (tabla player, Los Angeles performance), Rajib Karmakar (sitar player, Los Angeles performance), Saili Oak

¹⁸⁰ *Vilambit bandish* refers to a fixed composition at a slow tempo. Reena Esmail, “Program Notes,” *This Love Between Us*, self-published, 2016.

¹⁸¹ Esmail, interview by Paskvan, “A Musical Microcosm,” 3/10/17.

(intermediary between sitar and tabla), and Reena Esmail. Utilizing the diverse perspectives connected to the work, this experiential knowledge provides a strong foundation to facilitate successful future performances.

While the research contained here is specific to a single work, it evokes broader contemplations. What should a conductor know about Hindustani classical music if one is to teach and perform Esmail's music? How do Hindustani and Western elements interact, and how is this indicative of Esmail's signature style? How does one achieve authentic performance practice in the interplay of two historically distinct styles? How can one facilitate this work (and other hybrid musical styles) thoughtfully, respectfully, and lovingly? Esmail provides a poignant clue in her program note: "Each of the musicians is asked to keep one hand firmly rooted in their own tradition and training, while reaching the other hand outward to greet another musical culture."¹⁸² This tantric suggestion provides a rabbit hole through which to move from scholarly contemplation to practical application. Before diving into the work movement-by-movement, I outline some larger analysis points—movement order and translation origins.

Movement Order

Esmail ordered the movements based on the text. She considered how the sequencing conveyed her message and created the impact she desired.¹⁸³ She imagined how the texts would set musically, and assigned a general musical feeling for each movement. As with many multi-movement Western classical works, she wanted the order to create musical interest through varying tempi (alternating fast and slow movements) and emotional content. She knew that she

¹⁸² Esmail, "Program Notes," *This Love Between Us*, self-published, 2016.

¹⁸³ Esmail, interview with author, Los Angeles, November 19, 2018.

wanted to “open with a bang,” thus she chose a strong opening textual statement, which will be discussed as greater length in Movement 1’s analysis.¹⁸⁴ She initially conceived Movement 7 as another strong movement, however this idea evolved as she wrote *TLBU*. The work now ends softly with a repetitive layered ostinato.

After Esmail completed the work, she considered reversing Movements 3 and 6. Both movements are upbeat, dance-inspired, with catchy melodies accessible to diverse audiences. As the Christian movement, Movement 3 ends with a strong D major chord, one of the few moments in the work that really asserts a major modality. Much of the oratorio is written in D, but the closing cadences, mostly open fifths, sound unresolved to the Western ear. In *Emotional Meaning and Music*, Leonard Meyer explains unmet musical expectation through psychological theory. He writes, “Emotion or affect is aroused when a tendency to respond is arrested or inhibited.”¹⁸⁵ In other words, delayed gratification creates a strong emotional response. In *TLBU*, one could argue that the placement of Movement 3 later in the oratorio would create a greater emotional impact, because the D Major chord then becomes the resolution for all previous open fifth cadences.

However, Esmail had valid conscious and subconscious reasons for maintaining her initial conception of the movements’ order. The conscious consideration was of course text-based. She felt that given the current political climate, she wanted Movement 6’s text closer to the end. In our conversation, she called Movement 6 the “get your shit together” movement; it

¹⁸⁴ Esmail interview, November 19, 2018.

¹⁸⁵ Leonard B. Meyer, *Emotional Meaning and Music* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1956), 14. Meyer explains this theory through the relationship between a smoker and his cigarette. If a smoker has not had a cigarette in a while, the emotional impact of fulfilling the desire to smoke is greater. “...a tendency is inhibited not by another opposed tendency but simply by the fact that for some reason, whether physical or mental, it cannot reach completion.” Meyer, 15.

serves as a warning for what may happen if people continue to act from hatred and fear.¹⁸⁶ *TLBU* in part grew out of the divisive campaigning and consequent results of the 2016 Presidential Election. It was also inspired by her own experience being denied a visa to travel to India because her father had lived in Pakistan.¹⁸⁷

Esmail's choice to keep Movement 3 earlier in the work is also a subconscious subversion of Leonard Meyer's theory on musical meaning. Meyer describes musical equations and tropes that historically have occurred in Western classical music. Susan McClary has since called the delayed gratification formula—"the standard narrative of tonal striving, climax, and closure"—a tonal system that has marginalized women and minorities.¹⁸⁸ As discussed in Chapter 2, McClary argues that many contemporary composers, including Esmail, seek ways to work outside of this inherited system as a means to assert their own sense of identity separate from patriarchy. By placing the "major mode movement" early in the work, Esmail dismisses the Western-conceived formula of delayed gratification leading to powerful climax and release.¹⁸⁹ Because *TLBU* is just as much inspired by Hindustani as Western classical music, there is nothing "unresolved" about an open fifth. In Hindustani music, it is the bed of sound on which an entire Hindustani performance rests. To present an open fifth as unresolved because it lacks quality would dismiss Hindustani musical principles and instead affirm a more recent conception of Western classical tonality. This in turn creates a binary relationship, in which Western

¹⁸⁶ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹⁸⁷ I also heard a singer in the LA Master Chorale refer to this movement as a cathartic opportunity to express her frustrations with Donald Trump. I found this especially interesting, since Esmail in no way makes the political associations explicit; yet, this singer found her own point of connection similar to the composer's.

¹⁸⁸ Susan McClary, "Getting Down Off the Beanstalk," *Feminine Endings*, 114.

¹⁸⁹ During my observation of the LA Master Chorale, I spoke with a Western-trained conductor/composer who wondered why Movement 3 wasn't placed in Movement 6's position. I do not share this as a critique of Esmail or of this conductor, but as an example of how deeply embedded Western musicians are in Meyer's theory.

classical music is valued over its Hindustani counterpart—a polarity that Esmail is intentionally trying to challenge and ultimately dissolve. If the perceived East/West polarity is just another expression of the masculine/feminine polarity, then her dismissal of common practice harmonic tropes is, at its core, a rebellious, feminist act. This harmonic bedrock stems from Esmail’s intersectional identity, and the consequent musical possibilities that unfold from her core sense of self.

Translation Origins

Esmail sets the original scriptural texts in their vernacular unaltered, honoring the sanctity of the canonical writing and the purity of the initial idea. The translations, however, are a conglomeration of many different translations—found online or given to Esmail by scholars—that the composer then adjusted and ultimately transformed into completely new translations. Usually Esmail used one particular translation as a skeleton, and then changed words to best suit the musical flow and to reinforce her unique message. One of the challenges Esmail faced with setting canonical religious texts was that the translations were oftentimes prescriptive and sterile.¹⁹⁰ Esmail looked for translations that were more descriptive, poetic, and inviting in nature. From a practical standpoint, she also modified sentence structure so that the translations better aligned with the original text; this made the layering of the original with its translation easier to set and clearer for the listener. The settings of Rumi and Kabir (Movements 5 and 7) are an even larger conglomeration. Esmail did not set an entire poem but rather selected lines from many different poems, weaving them into her own poetic idea. The specifics of each movement will be discussed in the movement-by-movement analysis.

¹⁹⁰ “When you’re setting an instruction manual, it is so dry.” Esmail, interview 11-19-18.

The level of authority with which Esmail creates new translations of sacred texts and poetry is somewhat untraditional, yet stems from her own relationship to religion as well as her identity as a composer. Esmail does not identify with any particular religion, but rather incorporates prayers, meditations, and rituals from many religious traditions into her own spiritual practice.¹⁹¹ Similarly, *TLBU* mixes and matches ideas from seven different religions to create a common, cohesive story. Esmail portrays unity and brotherhood as universal ideals, not tied to any specific religious perspective. Sometimes Esmail modified translations to create an optic of universality, giving her own voice authority over religious dogma.

Esmail's alteration of religious translations stems from the 19th-century Romantic Era, during which composers such as Schubert and Beethoven altered Latin liturgical texts within their sacred choral-orchestral works (a compositional choice that would have been blasphemous in earlier eras). This shift in text treatment was due to larger cultural changes occurring in 19th-century Germany—the rise of humanism and nationalism, the church's decrease in power, and the growing middle class. This revolution resulted in composers writing sacred works as expressions of individual thought, conceived for the concert hall instead of the church. A poignant example is Franz Schubert's *Deutsche Messe* (1827), which choral musician Nick Strimple writes is a reflection of the composer's humanist ideals: "The text of *Deutsche Messe* is far beyond a paraphrase of the Latin. Rather, it neutralizes Roman Catholic dogma into a kind of pantheism appropriate to any religion, at any time, in any situation."¹⁹² One could easily take out *Deutsche Messe* and replace it with *This Love Between Us*. Esmail's treatment of text in *TLBU* is unarguably connected to 19th-century humanism—a belief in people's innate goodness and in the

¹⁹¹ Esmail, interview 11-19-18.

¹⁹² Nick Strimple, *Choral Music in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Amadeus Press, 2008), 33.

power of that belief. In *The Roots of Romanticism*, Isaac Berlin explains Romantic ideals as “wholeheartedness, sincerity, purity of soul, the ability and readiness to dedicate yourself to your ideal, no matter what it was.”¹⁹³ Esmail’s choice to create conglomerated translations may initially seem subversive, but in actuality this practice has deep roots in Western music history. The only reason this act could be perceived as subversive is because Esmail is a woman.

In *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter*, Sue Monk Kidd describes “the feminine wound” as a condition that all women carry from birth that marks them as inferior to men.¹⁹⁴ One of the many ways that this wound expresses itself in society is through the archetype of “the silent woman.” Kidd uses the Greek myth about Philomena as an example:

The myth is about the loss of women’s voices. It suggests that the source of female silence is the rape of the feminine—the devaluation and violation of femaleness. It suggests that when women protest this violation, their voices are frequently squelched through ridicule, sanction, and fear of reprisal. In the public arena, at church, work, and home, women’s tongues are often silenced when we dare to speak our anger, truths, and visions.¹⁹⁵

In stark contrast to this archetype, Esmail not only asserts her own creative voice through *TLBU*; she does so by asserting her own authority over the authority of religious texts. While composers have done this since the 19th-century, her identity as a woman makes this choice a subversive act. Esmail weaves and re-works sacred texts to create a new vision that is uniquely hers. Both Esmail’s ordering of the movements and her textual choices reveal an inner authority derived from self-reflection.

¹⁹³ Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, ed. Henry Hardy (1965; repr., Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9.

¹⁹⁴ “To be born female in this culture means that are you born ‘tainted,’ that there is something intrinsically wrong with you that you can never change, that your birthright is one of innate inferiority. I am not implying that this must remain so. I do believe that we must know this and understand it as a given before it can be worked through.” Anne Wilson Schaf, *Women’s Reality: An Emerging Female System in a White Male Society* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1981), 27, quoted in Sue Monk Kidd, *The Dance of the Dissident Daughter* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 2002), 37.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 71.

Movement 1: Buddhism

Analysis

The opening movement presents scripture from *The Dhammapada*. Translated as “The Path of Truth,” *The Dhammapada*’s teachings are central to Buddhist philosophy and practice. Esmail sets verses from the section on violence. Through the chosen text, she introduces subject matter that serves as the philosophical framework for the oratorio. The text also provides a strong introductory statement: “All beings tremble before violence. All fear death. All love life.” This poetic triptych incites urgency through universal values. Esmail pairs *The Dhammapada* text in its original Pali with a modified English translation. Esmail organizes the text into three main sections using rounded binary form. Table 4.1 shows a conductor’s analysis, which includes the overarching form, macro- and micro-phrasing, harmony, dynamics, and text.

Through form, Esmail creates contrasting textures and shifting harmony to evoke the text’s emotional fervor. In Section A, for example, Esmail creates a tripartite parallel structure that reinforces the parallel grammar of the text. Nearly identical musical material is repeated three times, declaiming the three complementary opening statements. Within each sub-section, Esmail sets the English translation next to the Pali, depicting prayer in its Western and Eastern counterparts. The Western declamation is vertically conceived, with homophonic block chords reminiscent of an opening “Kyrie” statement from a Haydn Mass. The Eastern declamation is horizontally conceived and rhythmically active, with a monophonic line featured in duet and canon. Sanskrit chanting inspires the motive, which includes a reciting tone with upper and lower neighbors. This motive appears in two-voiced parallel motion at the perfect fifth with imitative entrances separated by a half-measure (see Musical Example 4.1).

Table 4.1: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 1, Conductor’s Analysis

Section [A] m. 1-20				
Measure #:	1-7	8-13	14-20	
Form:	a	a	a	
Phrasing:	7 (3+4)	6 (2+4)	7 (2+4+1)	
Harmony:	C Dorian → Chant on C#	Chant on G	Chant on A	
Dynamics:	ff/f	mp – f	mp	
Text:	“All beings tremble before violence”	“All fear death”	“All love life”	
Section [B]. m. 20-53				
Measure #:	21-28	39-36	37-44	45-53
Form:	b	b	c	d
Phrasing:	8 (4+4)	8 (4+4)	8 (4+4)	7 (4+3)
Harmony:	D Kafi	D Kafi	DbM7- cm7 - Bbsus2/4 – f6sus2	fm – cm65
Dynamics:	mp	mf	mp – crescendo - mf	mf
Text:	Instrumental – Sitar solo	“See yourself in others. Then whom can you hurt? What harm can you do?”	“For those who seek happiness by hurting those who seek happiness shall never find happiness.”	“For your brother and your sister, they are like you. They too long to be happy.”
Section [A’], m. 54-end				
Measure #:	54-61	62-67	68-end	
Form:	a’	d’	a’	
Phrasing:	8 (2+2+2+2)	6 (3+3)	6 (2+2+2)	
Harmony:	D Dorian	D Dorian w/ B-flat pedal	Chant on D → D5	
Dynamics:	f - decrescendo	mf	mf – decrescendo - p	
Text:	“Never harm them”	“And when you leave this life then you will find happiness too.”	Instrumental - outro	

Musical Example 4.1: Reena Esamail, TLBU, Movement 1, m. 1-8.

commissioned by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music

This Love Between Us

Prayers for Unity

from the Dhammapada
Chapter 10 (Dandavagga) Verses 129-132

Reena Esamail

Powerful $\text{♩} = 68$ **I.**

Flute 1
Flute 2
Oboe d'Amore 1
Oboe d'Amore 2
Bassoon
Timpani
SOPRANO
ALTO
TENOR
BASS
Violin I
Violin II
Viola
Violoncello
Contrabass

All be - ings trem - ble be-fore vi - - o - lence.
 All be - ings trem - ble be-fore vi - - o - lence *sāb-bē tān-tā sī dān-dās-sā ah*
 All be - ings trem - ble be-fore vi - - o - lence *sāb-bē tān-tā sī*
 All be - ings trem - ble be-fore vi - - o - lence *sāb-bē tān-tā sī*

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6

Fl. 1 *p* *f*

Fl. 2 *p* *f*

Ob. 1 *f*

Ob. 2 *f*

Bsn. *f*

Timp. *mp* *f*

S. *mp* *f*
săb-bē tăn-tă sî dăn-dăs-să ah All fear death

A. *mp* *f*
săb-bē tăn-tă sî dăn-dăs-să ah All fear death

T. *mp* *f*
dăn-dăs-să ah săb-bē tăn-tă sî dăn-dăs-să ah All fear death

B. *mp* *f*
dăn-dăs-să ah săb-bē tăn-tă sî dăn-dăs-să ah All fear death

Vln. I *p* *fp* *f*
 crescendi of different lengths - do not align

Vln. II *p* *f*
 crescendi of different lengths - do not align

Vla. *f*

Vc. *fp* *f*

Cb. *fp* *f*

In addition to textural shifts, Esmail employs contrasting modes and shifting key areas. The introductory C5 drone in the lower strings alongside the septuplet scale in the flutes and upper strings establishes the opening statement in C Dorian. This harmonic underpinning is interrupted in m. 4 through chromatic movement in contrary motion, which results in B5 and C#5 sounding simultaneously. This dissonance incites the turmoil inherent in the word “violence,” and also functions as a pivot chord between C Dorian and the chant on C#. While the chant is not based on a particular mode, the flattened second and seventh scale degrees evoke Phrygian. As the musical material repeats, the tonic changes. The English translation becomes the vehicle for modulation, while the chant in Pali continues with different sustained tonics. This ever-shifting tonality dislodges the listener’s sense of harmonic stability, creating a harmonic journey that eventually settles in D Dorian.

Esmail avoids many of the standard classical modulation formulas of the common practice era. The one exception is modulation through the chromatic mediant, a technique associated with Schubert and Brahms. In Section A, Esmail uses a combination of chromatic voice leading, common-tone modulation, and modulation by whole step to move through “unexpected” harmonic terrain. In Table 4.2, I outline the various modulations employed in Section A.

Table 4.2: Comparison of Modulations in *TLBU*, Movement 1, m. 1-20

m. 3-4	m. 9-10	m. 15-16	m. 20-21
G → G# G → F# C → C# C → B	C# → D B → C \flat G# → G \flat F# → F \flat	G → A G → G F → F F → E	A → A E → D D → C C → B \flat
C5 → C#/B5	C#5/B5 → G5/F5	Fsus2 → A5sus2 \flat	a minor sus4 → B \flat sus2Maj7
Modulation technique: Perfect fifth splitting in chromatic contrary motion	Modulation technique: Chromatic voice leading	Modulation technique: Common tone modulation & chromatic/diatonic voice leading	Modulation technique: Common tone modulation/whole-step descent

Regarding modulations, Esmail asks herself, “How can I get to weird places easily?”¹⁹⁶ In her choral writing, she is influenced by Eric Whitacre’s harmonic language, which will often take a Major chord and add non-chord tones. These textured chords create the possibility to modulate into unfamiliar terrain. Esmail often starts with an open fifth, then moves up or down by step as she does in m. 3-4. Esmail conceives of these moments not as tetrachords (which would have similar weight given to each note), but rather as an overarching melody that is supplemented with dissonant textures. In this vein, Esmail belongs to neo-Romantic school.

Esmail interweaves a impressionist traits with Hindustani musical elements. Esmail has (jokingly) self-dubbed her genre “Ind-pressionism.”¹⁹⁷ Section B is a wonderful example of this characteristic style, in which Esmail interweaves spun-out melodies with chromatic harmonic progressions and atmospheric textures. The sitar introduces the melody in *Raga Kafi* while the tabla provides an eight-measure rhythmic cycle in *vilambit teentaal*. (For more information about these Hindustani terms, see Tables 4.3 and 4.4 in the performance practice guide.) *Raga Kafi* shares the same notes as Dorian, making the transition from Section A to B seamless. While Dorian is defined through the notes used, *Kafi raga* also includes characteristic motives, phrases, and relationships between notes (hence why Esmail defines *raga* as a “scale with personality”).¹⁹⁸ The sitar’s melody is characterized by increasing intervallic ascents resolved by stepwise motion in the opposite direction (see Musical Example 4.2). Particularly expressive is the melody’s ascent to the ninth and eleventh scale degrees, a musical expression of the yearning expressed in the text. To further reinforce this melody, Esmail employs canonic entrances in the

¹⁹⁶ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

¹⁹⁷ Chrysanthe Tan and Thomas Kotcheff, interview with Reena Esmail, “A Washing Machine in Dehli,” *Underscore*, Episode 8, USC Radio Group, August 29, 2018, <https://www.underscore.fm/>.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

violins that echo the sitar, creating a cascading effect.

Esmail references traditional Hindustani music through the viola and cello, which often function as the tanpura. The tanpura provides the foundation on which a Hindustani performance unfolds, sounding a drone on the tonic and perfect fourth or tonic and perfect fifth. In Section B, the viola and cello sustain a perfect fourth on A. Uncharacteristic of a tanpura's function is the cello's intermittent B-flat appearing every eight measures at the start of the tabla's new rhythmic cycle. While Section B is clearly *Raga Kafi* on D, the intermittent flattened sixth scale degree recontextualizes the harmony, creating a B-flat major 7. I hear the B-flat as a poignant interruption, a stinging reminder of the separation referenced in the text. As the choir sings, "See yourself into others/Then whom can you hurt," the B-flat symbolizes "the hurt."

In Section A', Esmail reprises musical material from the opening statement but in an intensified character. Instead of distinguishing sections to suit the declamations of English and Pali, Esmail weaves these statements together. While the chant continuously rumbles in the inner parts, the once vertically conceived English translation now appears linearly in the outer voices, issuing a foreboding decree. Esmail creates additional energy through the diminution of the tabla's rhythmic groove into a single measure. This thickened texture and heightened rhythmic intensity creates a powerful commingling of cultural expression.

This electrifying section culminates in a climactic moment at m. 60, when the bass reinstates the sustained B-flat pedal tone, the most emphatic reconceptualization of the harmony thus far, and in my opinion, a symbol for irresolution (see Musical Example 4.3). The B-flat pedal is held for eight measures, simmering underneath the soprano and bass parts that sing, "And when you leave this life, then you will find happiness too." Even within the promise of happiness, the B-flat exists as an ominous warning. As the music reprises the chant motive in D

for the final coda, the omission of a third sounds unresolved to the Western ear. Meanwhile, the ominous B-flat rings in the imagination.

Musical Example 4.2: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 1, m. 21-28.

20 **C** Vilambit Teentaal (♩=56) 5

Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Bsn.
Sitar
Tbn.
Timp.
S.
A.
T.
B.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

C Vilambit Teentaal (♩=56)
Raag Kafi

X = teentaal beat

mp
p

All love life
All love life
All love life
All love life

C Vilambit Teentaal (♩=56)
(concernmaster might need to double sitar)

mp
p

6

27

D

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn.

D
(improvise for one more avartan in Kafi)

Sit.

Tbl.

Timp.

S.

A.
mf
See_your-self in o-thers. Then whom_____can you

T.
mf
See_your-self in o-thers. Then whom can you hurt?

B.

Vln. I
div **D**

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

p

Musical Example 4.3: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 1, m. 59-61.

13

59

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn.

Sit.

Tbl.
X 2 0 3 X 2 0 3 X 2 0 3

Timp.

S.
Ne - ver harm them

A.
tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ Døn dẽ - nà nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm

T.
nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ Døn dẽ - nà nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà - tĩ nà hĩm - sà -

B.
harm them Ne - ver harm them

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Ve.

Cb.

Performance Practice Guide

Vocal Considerations

- Chant passages: Throughout the chant passages, sing with bright, forward placement. Esmail invites the singers to use a Hindustani ornament called *gamak*. Esmail describes this technique as a “swooping into each note.”¹⁹⁹ It is a traditional embellishment characterized by a fast, sometimes forceful glide between pitches. This glide can occur between sequential notes or between notes separated by larger intervals. The best place to use *gamak* in this movement is in the 16th-note runs that conclude each chant motive.
- m. 5-7 (and elsewhere): [ə] should be a clear schwa; it has a tendency to sound like [E]
- m. 11-14: strongly aspirate the [h] in *bhəyyəntī*
- m. 54 onward: dentalize and implode the t’s of *hīmsətī*; do not aspirate

Instrumental Considerations

- m. 1, flutes and violins: The septuplet should not be exactly in time. Treat the septuplet like a sweeping upbeat, with the arrival onto beat 2 as the downbeat.
- m. 5-7 (and like places): Have the choir sing the chant motive for the strings so that they hear the chant’s lilting quality. The tendency will be to over-accent the syncopation, which in turn will slow down the tempo.
- m. 7-9, violins: Esmail has noted “crescendo of different lengths – do not align.” Ask the violins to start their up bows at the time same, but to create bowings of different lengths, intentionally misaligning the bows. The resulting texture will evoke spontaneous swells.
- m. 54 onward: Listen for the alignment of the orchestra and the tabla player. The tabla will have a tendency to play slightly ahead or the strings slightly behind.

Communication with Sitar and Tabla

Make sure you are familiar with the Hindustani terms referenced within your score.

Hindustani Music Terms

- Teentaal

At Letter C (m. 21), *vilambit teental* instructs the tabla player to play the rhythmic groove

¹⁹⁹ Reena Esmail, “TLBU – mm1 – Buddhism – Audio Guide,” Soundcloud audio, December 3, 2016, 8:39, <https://soundcloud.com/reenaesmail/sets/this-love-between-us-audio>.

teental at a slow tempo. *Teental* sounds similar to common time in Western classical music. However, because *teental* is in a slow tempo, each macro-beat lasts two measures, bringing the length of a full cycle to eight measures. In Table 4.3, I have notated *teental* as a Hindustani classical musician would. The upper row, which displays “X-2-0-3,” represents the macrobeat. “X” is called *Sam* and marks the downbeat of an entire cycle. As a Hindustani musician embodies the *tal*, “X” and the numbers represent claps, while “0” represents a wave. In *teental*, a musician keeps track of the macro-beat through the embodied pattern, clap-clap-wave-clap.²⁰⁰ (The clap/wave pattern is a learning device, and would be internalized within a performance.) This pattern informs which larger beats have emphasis and which do not. The second line of the *teental* notation displays vocables called *bol*.²⁰¹ These syllables are a mnemonic device that corresponds to the drum strokes associated with *teental*. The syllables mark the micro-beat of the groove. At Letter G (m. 54), *teental*’s entire rhythmic cycle (called the *avartan*) diminishes. Esmail writes, “tabla in Drut Teental, ♩= beat.”²⁰² The cycle’s tempo has accelerated 8:1, meaning that the entire cycle now fills one measure.

Table 4.3: Overview of *Teental*

<i>Vilambit teental</i> (Letter C, m. 21)															
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>vilambit</i>: slow • <i>taal</i>: a rhythmic groove; the building block of rhythmic structure • <i>teental</i>: 16 beats divided into 4 equal sections (4+4+4+4) 															
X	2			0			3								
Dha dhin dhin dha	Dha dhin dhin dha			Dha tin tin ta			Ta dhin dhin dha								
1 2 3 4	5 6 7 8			9 10 11 12			13 14 15 16								
<i>Drut teental</i> (Letter G, m. 54)															
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>drut</i> = fast 															

²⁰⁰ The literal translation of *teental* is “three claps.” George E. Ruckert, *Music in North India: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 42.

²⁰¹ *Bol* is a mnemonic device used to teach rhythm in Hindustani classical music. Each syllable represents a different stroke. A tabla player learns how to speak this pattern before ever touching their instrument. Ruckert, *Music in North India*, 90.

²⁰² Reena Esmail, *TLBU* (Los Angeles, CA: self-published), Movement 1, m. 54.

- Raag Kafi:

At Letter C (m. 21), Esmail instructs the sitar player to perform within *Raag Kafi* (see Table 4.4). For the first *avartan* of *teental*, Esmail prescribes what to play. She writes the melody in both Western and Bhatkhande notation. At Letter D (m. 29), Esmail instructs the sitar player to “improvise for one more *avartan* in Kafi.”²⁰³ Esmail is inviting the sitar player to improvise for an additional eight measures (a complete cycle of *teental*).

Table 4.4: Overview of *Raga Kafi*

<i>Raga Kafi</i> (notated for sitar at Letter C, m. 21)															
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Raga</i>: a “scale with personality”; “a melodic representation of an emotional statement”²⁰⁴ • <i>Kafi</i>: 7-note scale on ascent and descent with flattened scale degrees 3 and 7; performed at midnight in any season; associated with the <i>rasa shringar</i> (erotic and romantic love) 															
<i>Kafi</i> scale in <i>sargam</i> , <i>solfeggio</i> , and scale degrees:															
<u>Ascent</u>								<u>Descent:</u>							
Sa	Re	<u>ga</u>	Ma	Pa	Dha	<u>ni</u>	Sa	Sa	<u>ni</u>	Dha	Pa	Ma	<u>ga</u>	Re	Sa
do	re	me	fa	sol	la	te	do	do	te	la	sol	fa	me	re	do
1	2	b3	4	5	6	b7	8	8	b7	6	5	4	b3	2	1

Movement 2: Sikhism

Analysis

Movement 2 is through composed, with the exception of the opening and closing parallel duets between the oboe and sitar. In my conversation with Esmail, she revealed that Movement 2 was the most difficult to write because of its horizontal conception and its improvisational nature:

I slaved over this movement. It sounds so flowy...Western notation of *alap* feels like putting three pairs of Spanx on under a sundress...That’s what writing this movement felt like to me. To get something to sound flowy is the hardest thing in Western classical music.²⁰⁴

²⁰³Reena Esmail, *TLBU* (Los Angeles, CA: self-published), Movement 1, m. 29.

²⁰⁴ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

The alto soloist's melody is reminiscent of a Hindustani *alap*. The *alap* is the opening movement of a *khyal* performance and introduces the *raga*. Deepak S. Raja writes, "The *alapa* is a free-flowing, rhythmically unstructured improvisation of low melodic density, in which the melodic lines attempt no correspondence with the beats of the *tala*."²⁰⁵ Like a slow sunrise, the *alap* begins in the lower octave. Over many phrases, it expands to include the middle and upper registers, reaching a climactic moment on high *Sa* (the upper tonic). Afterwards, the melody winds down, descending in phrase-by-phrase back to the tonic. In this movement, Esmail creates an arc that begins on tonic, ascends to the upper register, and then descends back to the tonic. The effect is certainly unmeasured like an *alap*. However, a traditional *alap* is not texted; it is sung on vocables and vowels. Also unlike an *alap*, many voices take part. Esmail defines this movement as an "*alap* in dialogue."²⁰⁶ She takes a Hindustani form and transforms it into something new.

The instrumental introduction introduces the imitative duet as the movement's defining feature while establishing the modality. The oboe and sitar converse in cross-cultural canon. They also introduce Esmail's mode, defined by a flattened seventh scale degree, expressive slides between intervals, and an emotive interplay between the flat and natural second scale degrees. This melody, and particularly the grace note introduced by the oboe in m. 6, is a quotation from a Sikh devotional song—a *shalok* by Baba Farid.²⁰⁷ Esmail calls this grace note her favorite within the entire oratorio.²⁰⁸ As this occurs, the second violin maintains a drone on

²⁰⁵ Deepak Raja, *Hindustani Music: A Tradition in Transition* (New Delhi: DK Printworld, 2005), 220.

²⁰⁶ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

²⁰⁷ Thomas May, program notes, "Theme and Variations: Praise and Unity," Los Angeles Master Chorale performance (Walt Disney Concert Hall, November 18, 2018), accessed November 15, 2018, http://lamasterchorale.org/bach-magnificat-program-notes?fbclid=IwAR2_1IRlvrg8oqMTFVazSp6FGQPhj4uTBxJjefXyaeXR43cZltUsI5TMpXA.

²⁰⁸ Esmail, interview 11-19-18.

the tonic and solo violins play *messa di voci* on upper harmonics. Against the sustained D, the flattened seventh and flat/natural second scale degrees sound as if they are aching to return to the tonic.

The chosen text is from the *Guru Granth Sahib*. The English translation is a conglomeration of many different translations that were combined to create a poetic setting. The alto soloist is the carrier of the Sikh text. She sings in an unmeasured, improvisational style that both echoes the free-flowing melody introduced by the oboe and sitar and defines the through-composed parameters for the movement. The soprano and alto choral parts accompany the alto soloist like modern-day “back-up singers.” The choir sings simple contrapuntal lines in English underneath the soloist’s declamation: “How can we call someone evil, when all are the creation of One?” Esmail spends the majority of the movement setting the first clause, expressing the pain of separation through chromatic dissonance in the choral parts and emotive ornamentation in the alto solo. Esmail enhances the vocal parts with experimental musical textures. This melody-driven piece presents solo material in imitation, performed by the first oboe, sitar, alto soloist, second violin, and viola. The strings function in two harmonic spheres—as the tanpura drone and as the vehicle for modulation. The strings also employ many contemporary techniques, such as natural harmonics, staggered entrances, aleatoric canons, and unmeasured ornamental flourishes.

Returning to the vocal parts at Letter B, the choir performs simple counterpoint while the soloist responds in ornamental flourishes sung in a *khyal* style. While both the choir and soloist begin the three phrases similarly, each phrasal depiction expands the musical idea to a longer phrase length and higher range. On the third phrase, the choral parts sing the full sentence. During this iteration, the soloist reaches the fifth scale degree, a significant structural moment within a traditional *alap*. Below the sustained A, the sopranos and altos continue their duet,

building energy through a lengthened 6/4 measure (m. 30), resolving in m. 31 with a surprising modulation on the word “evil” (see Musical Example 4.4). The alto soloist’s sustained A in m. 30 is replaced in m. 31 of the choral parts with chromatic dissonance between G and A \flat signaling the start of a new key area.

At Letter C, the previous G5 drone in the strings is replaced by a tetrachord. The cello enters a whole step below the viola’s G and the violin 1 enters a half step above the violin 2’s D, creating a chord cluster on C-D-G-A \flat . This moment in the strings creates the first vertically conceived texture within the movement, which draws our attention to the modulation. While the tonality is not initially clear, the alto soloist’s entrance on the Sikh word for “evil” suggests a modulation to C, which is then reinforced by the cello’s sustained tonic. Esmail employs one of her standard modulation techniques—an open fifth (G5) that moves by a descending whole step (D to C) and an ascending half step (G to A-flat) to create an entirely new harmonic context.

The strings tremolo and trill, remaining firm on the tetrachord. Every two bars, they erupt into a *sforzando* and then fade into the background. The result is a madrigalian pulsation that evinces the text’s angst-ridden question. Above the strings, the soloist cries on the word “evil,” echoed by the first oboe. In m. 37, the strings suddenly stop playing, while the soloist, echoed by the oboe, performs their most decorated phrase thus far.

Beginning at Letter D, this material is parallel in structure to Letter A. The soloist and choir repeat the same phrase three times, each time lengthening and heightening the idea that again leads to a climactic modulation. In this rendition, Esmail complicates the musical texture. The alto soloist and first oboe continue in canon, but the oboe leads and the singer follows. The distance between these canonic entrances has diminished to one beat apart, instilling a sense of urgency. The string texture is thicker throughout, with the bass providing a drone on F while the

cello, viola, and violins alternate asynchronously between sustained notes and ornamented triplets. The textural result is lugubrious and pulseless. Throughout this section, the strings and the choral parts largely reinforce a new tetrachord on B \flat -C- E \flat -F. As the three phrases unfold, the viola and cello move together into their upper tessitura. All parts increase in dynamic range, crescendo-ing to the movement's second modulation from C to F. This harmonic shift is ornamented by a G-flat pedal in the bass, sounding against the F5 in the upper strings and choral parts (see Musical Example 4.5).

At Letter G, Esmail features a bi-tonal sustained tetrachord in the strings, juxtaposing F5 against G-flat5. As mentioned previously, these tetrachords are not harmonically conceived, but rather provide texture through the use of non-chord tones. It is best to think of this section in F. The choir continues in its supportive role while the soloist sings her most virtuosic phrase. This is the only passage in which the soloist is not accompanied by an instrument in canon, which reinforces the text's commentary on "One-ness." In our discussion of the English translation, Esmail recalled that she changed the wording of the translation so that the word "One" would land on the downbeat of the final cadence.²⁰⁹ The soloist's heavily ornamented passage ascends through her range, finally resolving on the upper tonic of D, marking a return to the home key.

²⁰⁹ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

Musical Example 4.4: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 2, m. 25-36.

20

Ob. 1

Sit.

A Solo

S.

A.

Vln soli.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

25

B

mf

f

f

f

B

mf

mp

simile - staggered entrances

How _____ can we call _____ some-one

How _____ can we call _____ some-one

31 **C**

Ob. I *mf*

Sit. **C**

A Solo *mf*
mā - nā - dā

S. *e - vil*

A. *e - vil*

Vln soli. *f*

Vln. I **C**
fp sfz mp sfz mp

Vln. II *fp sfz mp sfz mp*

Vla. *fp sfz mp sfz mp*

Vc. *fp sfz mp sfz mp*

Cb.

Musical Example 4.5: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 2, m. 55-59.

25

Ob. I

Sit. fade out

A Solo *dā*

S. how _____ how _____ can you call _____ some - one e - vil

A. how _____ how _____ can you call _____ some - one e - vil

Vln. I *fp*

Vln. II *fp*

Vla. *f*

Vc. *f*

Cb. *mp* *fp*

Performance Practice Guide

Vocal Considerations (Alto Solo)

The following considerations are based on a coaching that I observed between Reena Esmail and the alto soloist for the LA Master Chorale Performance:²¹⁰

- This solo should be sung in a resonant, forward space.
- For the [a] vowel, open the mouth wide enough to place two fingers between the teeth and feeling the beginnings of a smile on the inhalation for each phrase.
- For sustained notes, begin straight tone and then allow vibrato to bloom (similar to musical theater technique). This allows the ornaments at the beginnings of notes to be rendered in a more Hindustani style, and the note to be sustained audibly through the use of vibrato.
- Emphasize the glides between notes, marked and unmarked. In Hindustani vocal technique, it is what happens between the notes that gives interest and style.
- The melody is *legatissimo* without any separation between pitches. Listen to the orchestra and bring out non-chord tones through careful timing and treatment. Esmail remarked that the melody should never feel comfortable in its temporal placement; there is an inevitable pushing and pulling that creates a feeling of unrest.
- In m. 64-65, take time at the beginning of the phrase and then accelerate to catch the downbeat. It should not feel metered at any point in the phrase, and the only arrival point should be at the end. This is good advice for any long coloratura-like passage.
- The “a” in the word *jān* is nasal, like a French “an.” There is no audible [n].

Instrumental Considerations

- m. 1: The two solo violins should be the first stand.
- m. 17-18 (and like places): These aleatoric string passages should be performed soloistically. Invite your violinists to “feel uncomfortably exposed.” They should not blend into the texture like a section player. In the LA Master Chorale performance, the strings coordinated these staggered entrances starting with the front stand and echoing back through the section.

²¹⁰ Lindsay Pope, Los Angeles Master Chorale rehearsal observations, November 13, 2018.

- m. 31-37: The *sforzandi* should be quick “textural bursts.”²¹¹
- Aleatoric passages in boxes: Staggered entrances should be frequent, about an eighth note apart.

Communication with Sitar

At the beginning and end of this piece, the sitar player has improvised material within a melodic contour. When the oboist finishes their line, look at the sitar player to let them know they can start. If you are using an intermediary, ask them to look at you when the sitar player has finished their improvisation. These interchanges can take time to coordinate at first, but in performance should be passed back and forth quite quickly.

Hindustani Music Terms

While there are not any Hindustani terms written into the piece, it may be helpful to familiarize yourself with common Hindustani ornamentation, as Esmail has written these gestures into the alto solo line:

- *meend*: glide/*glissando* (i.e. measure 14)
- *andolan*: slow, microtonal oscillation (i.e. measure 17)
- *kan-swar*: grace notes (i.e. measure 23)
- *murki*: *grupetto*; fast passage of upper and lower neighbor tones (i.e. measure 35)
- *gamak*: fast, forceful glide (i.e. measure 38)

Movement 3: Christianity

Analysis

Movement 3 is most inspired by the Western classical tradition. The compositional

²¹¹ Reena Esmail, Los Angeles Master Chorale dress rehearsal observations, November 16, 2018.

framework is determined by the movement's religious affiliation, as for many centuries Christianity was the backbone of Western classical music. The chosen text is from the Bible (Romans 13: 8-12). In our conversation, Esmail commented that she struggled to find a translation that did not imply that goodness was inextricably linked to Christian-ness.²¹² (Interestingly, this was the only religion for which she had this problem.) For the English translation, it appears that Esmail used the King James Bible as the skeleton, but she changed wording to ease the music setting. She also omitted phrases that were not in line with her humanist message. In Verse 9, she took out the commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," which she felt applied only to married couples.²¹³ She eliminated Verse 11 altogether, which reads, "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."²¹⁴ In our interview, Esmail explained that she took out this verse because it sounded too dogmatic. This unbound treatment of sacred text relates to her self-felt autonomy as the composer to convey her message. That being said, Esmail was explicit that she only felt comfortable altering the text because it was a translation. Never in the work does she edit scripture in its original language. There is a long history of poetic translations of scripture that are not literal, but provide a unique perspective into ancient texts.²¹⁵ Esmail's translations are an offshoot of this particular phenomenon.

Instead of featuring the original text alongside its English translation, Esmail sets translations in English and Malayalam. The Malayalam translation is in fact a "reverse translation" of the English. Esmail chose Malayalam because it is spoken in Kerala, a southern

²¹² Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

²¹³ Romans 13: 9. Reena Esmail, email correspondence to author, December 16, 2018.

²¹⁴ Romans 13: 11.

²¹⁵ Examples include *The Message* (Bible) by Eugene H. Peterson and *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz* by Daniel Ladinsky.

coastal state where Christianity first arrived in India. Known as “the Christian State,” Kerala currently has the highest percentage of Christians in India. For this translation, Esmail used a contact who spoke Malayalam, and together they created a translation that honored the English translation and considered poetic inflection and cadence. The choice to set two translations continues the cross-cultural conversation between Western and Indian music. To this end, including Biblical scripture in its original Latin would not make sense. The decision to set two translations also allows Esmail to alter *both* texts.

Esmail composes the movement with many Western musical techniques, expressed through orchestration, phrasing, and form. The orchestration is baroque, featuring trumpets and timpani alongside choir, strings, and bassoon. As this work was conceived as a companion to Bach’s *Magnificat*, the musical similarities are just as much practical as they are aesthetic. The three trumpets reference the fanfare of the *Magnificat*’s opening choral movement. Esmail initially composed Movement 3 without sitar and tabla, another way in which she initially created a “Western” aesthetic. After working with the Hindustani musicians for the premiere, she could tell that they wanted to be involved. She recalls, “They wanted the challenge—and this is a true credit to these amazing musicians (Ramu-ji and Rabindra-ji) who premiered the piece—who had never played with an orchestra before—that they were excited to be so flexible with their playing in a way I never anticipated.”²¹⁶ Considering the traditional roles of the sitar and tabla in Hindustani music, this movement is the most “outside the box” for these players, with frequent starts and stops and improvisation within unfamiliar tonalities and meters.

The form of Movement 3 is rounded binary (see Table 4.5). Section A contains two contrasting sub-sections, while Section B is developmental, moving through many textures and

²¹⁶ Reena Esmail, email correspondence to author, December 16, 2018. Esmail is referring to Rabindra Goswami and Ramu Pandit, the sitar and tabla players for the premiere.

tonalities. The result is a piece heavily rooted in the Western baroque tradition, but made unique through its interweaving of Hindustani techniques. Through phrasing and form, Esmail also evokes the “Gloria in excelsis Deo” from the *Mass in b minor*. Each measure is one beat, with a new phrase generally occurring every four measures. Esmail occasionally breaks the 4-bar pattern, but overall this phrase regularity determines the movement’s clear, periodic structure. When I asked Esmail why she chose to set this movement in 3/4 meter as opposed to 6/8, her answer was based upon tempo. As she marks at the beginning of the movement, Esmail wanted a “regal” tempo that felt settled and secure. As a practical consideration, she feared that if the strings had 16th notes it would impact the velocity of the fast passages, and thus change the musical feeling. The sitar and tabla players perform in *Dadra Tala*, for which an entire cycle last two 3/4 measures (six beats divided into two units of three), essentially creating the feeling of duple compound meter.

Esmail uses Western orchestration, form, and phrasing as a container for Hindustani-inspired modality. At the movement’s beginning, the tonic is clearly D, but the modality is unclear. The introductory melody features a major third alongside a flattened seventh (See Musical Example 4.6, m. 1-4). Even more unusual is the minor third in the tenor part, replaced one measure later by a major third in the first trumpet and violin (See Musical Example 4.7, m. 25-26).

Esmail was influenced by the Hindustani *raga Jog*. *Jog* is a contemporary *raga* that has become popular in the last generation. Its scalar pattern contains both natural and flattened third scale degrees, omits the second and sixth scale degrees, and uses both the natural and flattened seventh scale degrees. The reason this movement is *Jog*-inspired rather than *Jog*-determined is for practical reasons. While *Jog* in D uses both F-natural and F# (third scale degrees), there are

particular parameters for when each note is played. Because *TLBU* was initially conceived for period instruments, the baroque trumpets are only able to play F#, which breaks the pattern for traditional intervallic relationships associated with this *raga*. This instrumental constraint limited Esmail's opportunity to write strictly in *Jog*. However, she wrote in *Jog* whenever possible, hence the F-natural in the tenor part (m. 25). Although this movement is not in a *raga*, the modal freedom present in *Jog* allows Esmail greater tonal possibility, while still working within the preexisting parameters of Hindustani expression. The result is an interweaving of Hindustani modality with Western classical form.

Table 4.5: Reena Esmail, TLBU, Movement 3, Conductor's Analysis

[A] m. 1-90						
Measure #:	1-16	17-34	35-52	53-64	65-82	83-90
Form:	a (INTRO)	a	b	a	b	a
Phrasing:	16 (4+4+4+4)	18 (7+7+4)	18 (4+4+4+6)	12 (4+4+4)	18 (4+4+4+6)	8 (4+4)
Harmony:	D "Jog"	D "Jog"	c7→bb7 → ab7 → Gsus4	D "Jog"	c7→bb7 → ab7 → Gsus4	E "Jog"
Function:	D: I	I	bvii7→bvi7→bv7→IVsus4	I	bvii7→bvi7→bv7→IVsus4	II F: VII of bIII
Dynamics:	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>mf/mp</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>mf/mp</i>	<i>f</i>
Text:	[Instrumental]	Owe no man anything	But to love one another (3x)/For he who loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law	[Instrumental]	But to love one another (3x)/For he who loveth his neighbor hath fulfilled the law	[Instrumental]

[B] m. 91-180				
Measure #:	91-120	121-134	135-156	157-180
Form:	b'	b''	c	d
Phrasing:	30 (6+6+6+4+8)	14 (4+4+6)	6+6+6+4	24 (12+12)
Harmony:	FM7→Eb5/F→DbM7→Gsus4→ Bb7	bbm pentatonic w/ Cb pedal	ebm pentatonic → EM7	E(#4)→D#→D→C#→C
Function:	F: I→bVII→bVI→II→ IV	F: iv eb: v	eb: i→ bII7 D: bii→II7	D: II→#I→I→VII→bVII
Dynamics:	<i>mf/f</i>	<i>poco a poco crescendo</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>mp →mf crescendo</i>
Text:	For thou shalt not kill/Thou shalt not steal/Thou shalt not bear false witness/Thou shalt not covet	And if there be any other commandment/It is comprised in this word	Thou shalt love they neighbor as thyself (3x)	The love of our neighbor hath no evil/Love, therefore, is the fulfilling of the law

[A'] m. 181- 223				
Measure #:	181-188	189-204	205-216	217-223
Form:	a	a' [?]	a	a (CODA)
Phrasing:	8 (4+4)	14 (4+8+4)	12 (4+4+4)	7 (4+2+1)
Harmony:	D Jog	EbM7sus4	D Jog	Gsus42→DM
Function:	I	bII	I	IV→I
Dynamics:	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>f</i>
Text:	The night is passed and the day is at hand	Let us cast off the works of darkness and put on the armour...	of light (3x)	and put on the armour of light

Musical Example 4.6: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 3, m. 1-8.

Romans 13:8-12
The Bible

III.

Reena Esmail

Regal (♩=152)

Regal (♩=152)

improvise in D (SGMPNS)
Dadra X 0 X 0

Dadra X 0 X 0

Regal (♩=152)

Musical Example 4.7: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 3, m. 18-26.

31

18

Bsn.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

Sit.

Tbl.

Timp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Ve.

Cb.

f

f

f

mf

a - ny-thing

Owe no man a - ny-thing

a - ny-thing

Owe no man a - ny-thing

f

f

f

f

The 16-bar instrumental introduction provides a wonderful example of Esmail’s interplay of modality and form. The first violin introduces a recurring musical motive, which is imitated one measure apart by the second violin and first trumpet (See Musical Example 4.6, m. 1-4). It is a decorated ascending-descending scale that unfolds *Jog*-inspired characteristics. The viola and cello support the arc-shaped melody with a rhythmic D5 drone. The bassoon, lower trumpets, and bass interject every four measures with a dotted rhythm on the tonic, affirming phrase regularity indicative of baroque dance music. The melody unfolds over 16 measures composed of 4 micro-phrases — “a-a” is the antecedent phrase and “b-c” is the consequent phrase (see Musical Example 4.8). Even at the smallest levels of structure, Esmail contains *Jog* within Western periodic phrasing.

Musical Example 4.8: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 3, Violin 1 melody, m. 1-17.

Esmail also uses this musical motive to explore contiguous Western-Hindustani rhythmic devices. In the melody, the “d” phrase features a traditional Hindustani rhythmic formula called the *tihai*. The *tihai* (translated as “one third,”) is a rhythmic pattern repeated three times with the third repetition ending on the downbeat.²¹⁷ In m. 13-16, the *tihai* becomes the rhythmic device that propels the phrase toward the cadence. Layered underneath, Esmail places a hemiola in the

²¹⁷ Ruckert, *Music in North India*, 46.

viola, cello, and bass (m. 15-17). As the *tihai* and hemiola are essentially different expressions with the same function, the layering of these two devices is brilliant. Through subtle musical commentary, Esmail emphasizes what these two traditions share (see Musical Example 4.9, m. 13-17).

Throughout the movement, the motive introduced in m. 1-16 serves as both a structural pillar and a vehicle for harmonic transformation. These contrasting functions are best explored through an analysis of Section A. Sub-section [a] contains the same musical material as the introduction, but with phrases made irregular through the choir's interjections. These interjections, sung by the tenor and bass voices, are short and angular. They declaim, "Owe no man anything" (See Musical Example 4.7). The musical setting depicts the text's conviction. All instrumental material is drawn from the instrumental introduction, with the motive signaling phrase lengths and shapes.

The motive's function shifts in sub-section [b] (m. 35-52). In contrast to the transparent, angular writing of sub-section [a], sub-section [b] introduces new musical material that is lush and harmonically driven. Sub-section [b] breaks away from *Jog*'s influence, employing seventh chords descending in sequence by whole step. Within this thickened texture, the motive continues in canon in the violins, but its function evolves. Esmail uses the motive to support the descending harmonic progression. Alongside this descending motive, the tenors and basses lead a duet on the English text, and the sopranos and altos respond in Malayalam. At m. 47, the choir, strings, and timpani break the sequence, descending by half step to settle on Gsus4, signaling the return of sub-section [a] in D "*Jog*."

Musical Example 4.9: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 3, m. 9-17.

30

A **B**

Bsn.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

D Tpt.

A **B**

Sit. tihai

Tbl. tihai

Timp.

S.

A.

T. *f*

Owe no man

B. *f*

Owe no man

A **B**

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

Esmail establishes a textural polarity between sub-sections [a] and [b] that may represent a theological polarity between law and love, yet Esmail connects these contrasting sections through the recurring musical motive. The scalar passage weaves its way throughout, providing familiarity across divergent terrain. In sub-section [a], the motive is a rondo-like structural pillar. In sub-section [b], its melodic transformation becomes a vehicle for the harmonic progression. The motive is the glue that binds these two sections together, symbolizing the co-existence of law and love in Christian thought and practice.

Section B functions as the Development, unfolding the text in four through-composed sub-sections. In my analysis, I have named the first sub-section [b'], as this musical material seems to be an expansion of what Esmail introduces in the previous section. Esmail presents four Commandments in a descending harmonic sequence. Similar to sub-section [b], this sequence is supported by the primary musical motive (still played in the violins) as a vehicle for harmonic transformation. Also similar to sub-section [b], the harmonic progression matches the phrase structure. In contrast to sub-section [b], the entire choir states the English text in homophony, as the counter-melody, sung in Malayalam, is passed through the choral parts.

Sub-section [b''] serves as a transition to sub-section [c]. The choir sings mostly in imitative duets. Underneath the choir, the primary musical motive stirs in the strings. It begins in the cello, and is imitated in canon one measure apart by the second violin, first violin, and viola in B-flat minor pentatonic (m. 121-124). Underneath this canon Esmail writes a dissonant bass pedal on B-natural, which harmonically functions as C-flat. The chromatic tension between B-flat minor pentatonic with a C-flat pedal increases as all parts crescendo. This dissonance ceases with the start of sub-section [c], which introduces new material in E-flat minor pentatonic.

In sub-section [c], the meter changes to 7/8 (2+2+3), providing a rhythmic groove underneath the choir's exclamation of the English and Malayalam translations: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself." This shift to 7/8 does not correspond to a Hindustani *tala*, but rather is inspired by Béla Bartók's use of mixed meter. Esmail's decision to stray from a traditional *tala* was in an effort to best set the text. Similarly to Esmail's flexible use of *rag* in movement 2, here Esmail creates a *tal*-inspired conception of rhythm rather than one that is strictly conceived within a Hindustani context. The choir repeats the text three times accompanied by the strings and the oboes. The melody is catchy. This sub-section is the only moment in the piece that lacks the recurring musical motive. Instead, the violins support the choral parts and provide occasional ornamental flourishes, propelling the music into each new phrase. Esmail exits sub-section [c] similarly to how she enters—a dissonant E pedal against a recurring descending motive in E-flat minor pentatonic (m. 153-156). This chromatic juxtaposition resolves in m. 157 with the start of sub-section [d].

Sub-section [d] has a transitional function. As the choir sings explanatory text—"The love of our neighbor hath no evil/Love, therefore, is the fulfilling of the law"—the musical setting is reminiscent of sub-section [b]. It is melodically driven and harmonically progressive. While the string bass provides a pedal point, the cellos and violas pulse repeatedly on the quarter. The first and second violins revive the primary motive in a canon four measures apart. Here, Esmail highlights the searching quality of the motive through the frequent changing of keys. After the first eight measures in E Lydian, the choir and strings descend sequentially by half step through D#, D, C#, and a bi-tonal declamation of C5 against D5. Esmail uses a four-bar crescendo to increase the tension within the dissonance, ultimately resolving back to D "Jog" for Section A'.

Section A' reprises the opening musical material with new text. The revelatory nature of this text brings new meaning to Esmail's use of *Jog*. Just as *Jog* is played during the transition from night to early morning, this setting is a metaphor for spiritual transformation.²¹⁸ At the final cadence, the choir and orchestra sustain a D Major chord for three measures plus a fermata. Because the work has shifted through diverse modalities, this chord feels final. While the choice to resolve to D Major is clearly fitting to a baroque style, the brightness of the major third also beautifully evinces the word "light."

Performance Practice Guide

Vocal Considerations

- m. 111-112: Push tongue more forward for d's of *pārāyadādā*.
- m. 135-156: More pull on l's (retroflex) for *nīnnēpolě*. Move to the [l] quickly.
- m. 135-156: Dentalize and implode t's for *nīntě*.
- m. 135-156: Close to [j] sound faster for *ṛyālkārānēyūm*.

Instrumental Considerations

- m. 1-16 (and like places), violins/trumpets: Crescendo on the rising lines and decrescendo on falling lines. While shaping the line, don't slow down in the lower register. Stay in tempo. Listen for the alignment of the trumpet and violin. The trumpet will tend to be slightly ahead.
- m. 65-82: This works better balance-wise if the strings play slightly softer than *mezzo piano*.

Communication with Sitar and Tabla

Movement 3 is the most difficult to coordinate with the sitar and tabla players, as the movement was not initially conceived to accommodate the sitar and tabla. In my rehearsal

²¹⁸ Bor, *The Raga Guide*, 90.

observation for the Los Angeles Master Chorale performance, I noticed that it was easier for both players to rehearse this movement with the choir and an accompanist rather than in their individual rehearsal. If budget and time permits, consider inviting your sitar and tabla players to rehearsal early in the process.

A specific place that will need to be rehearsed is the *rallantando* in m. 134-135. Hindustani performances accelerate, but rarely slow down. This concept may be difficult to coordinate and will require extra attention.

Hindustani Music Terms

- Dadra Tal

Dadra tal informs the sitar and tabla players that this movement has six beats divided into two sets of three. The feeling of *dadra tal* is equivalent to 6/8 compound time (see Table 4.6). For additional information about the tabla vocables and clap-wave pattern, see the explanation of *teental* in Movement 1.

Table 4.6: Overview of *Dadra Tal*

Dadra tal: 6 beats divided 3+3

X 0
Dhi dhi na | dha tun na

- Tihai

In m. 13-16 (and like places), Esmail writes “*tihai*” into the sitar and tabla parts. As explained in the analysis, a *tihai* is a rhythmic motive repeated three times that leads to a cadential downbeat. It is often used in Hindustani music to denote structural seams.

- Reverse Rupak:

At Letter J (m. 135), Esmail describes the 7/8 meter (2+2+3) as “Reverse Rupak.” *Rupak* is a popular *tala* in Hindustani music that typically divides 7 beats as 3+2+2. To describe this as “reverse,” indicates that the division of time is opposite. The “X” and “O” above the parts indicates the clap-wave gesture; that is, the feeling of weight, both stressed and unstressed. See the Movement 6 performance practice guide for more information on *Rupak Tal*.

Movement 4: Zoroastrianism

Analysis

Movement 4 sets Zoroastrian scripture from the *Pahlavi Rivayat*. The *Rivayat* texts document correspondence between India and early modern Persia on Zoroastrian theology and practice. Founded by the prophet Zarathustra, Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest practiced religions, and has influenced the religious thought of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. It seems fitting that this text sits at the center of the oratorio as the seed through which the other theological texts were born. Esmail consulted with the Zoroastrian scholar Yishai Kiel for a text on brotherhood. Together, Esmail and Kiel adjusted the translation to make it more descriptive and inclusive.²¹⁹

The movement is set as a *vilambit bandish*, the most traditional Hindustani form that Esmail employs. Esmail remarked that she wanted this *bandish* to be “the centerpiece of the arc.”²²⁰ *Vilambit* means slow, meaning that this movement is performed at a slow tempo. A *bandish* is a component of *khyal*, the primary genre of Hindustani classical music. A traditional *khyal* performance features 2-4 *bandishes* at varying tempi, beginning with a slow *bandish* and

²¹⁹ In the translation, “humankind” was initially “mankind.” Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

²²⁰ Ibid.

increasing tempo with each composition. The *vilambit bandish* is the first bandish performed after the introductory *alap*. A *bandish* is a fixed, melodic composition set in a specific *raga* and accompanied by a tabla, *tanpura* drone, and an accompanimental instrument, such as a *sarangi*, violin, or harmonium.²²¹ Although the *bandish* is pre-composed, artistry is achieved through the vocalist's ability to improvise. Compositions in Hindustani classical music are vehicles for improvisation, while compositions in Western classical music are pre-determined, fixed ideas. In this movement, Esmail notates the *bandish*, sung by the bass-baritone soloist. Given that the soloist is likely trained as a Western classical singer, these parameters exist to ensure an authentic Hindustani performance.

Esmail's *bandish* includes both traditional and untraditional Hindustani elements. Esmail writes Movement 4 in *Raga Bhimpalasi* (see Table 4.8 in performance practice guide). While Esmail studied *Bhimpalasi* extensively in her Hindustani voice lessons, she still altered some phrases after the Yale/Julliard premiere based upon feedback from her Hindustani voice teacher, Saili Oak. I share this anecdote to explain the subtle intricacies of a *raga*, for which it takes years of immersion to truly master. Other traditional elements include a bass-baritone singing the *bandish* poetry and the tabla accompaniment in *jhaptal* (see Table 4.9 in performance practice guide). Atypical to a traditional Hindustani performance, Esmail sets a tenor-bass chorus alongside the soloist and tabla player. The choral parts fulfill the function of both the *tanpura* drone and the instrumental accompaniment. The choir's role as a *tanpura* drone is constant throughout, with the bass sustaining the tonic and the tenor sustaining the dominant. Esmail transforms the choir's role as melodic accompaniment into four-part harmony. Table 4.7 displays my analysis of Movement 4, outlining this movement through Hindustani *bandish* elements.

²²¹ Deepak S. Raja, "An Introduction to Khayala," in *Hindustani Music: A Tradition in Transition* (New Delhi, DK Printworld, 2005), 213.

Table 4.7: Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 4, Conductor's Analysis

Form: Intro		
Phrasing: 4 (2+2)		
<u>m. 1-2</u> Tabla intro: <i>Vilambit jhaptal</i>	<u>m. 3-4</u> Choir intro: C5 hum <i>pp</i>	
Form: <i>Mukhda</i> refrain 3x		
Phrasing: 6 (2+2+2)		
<u>m. 5-6</u> "All humankind" C5 <i>mp</i>	<u>m. 7-8</u> "All humankind" C4 → C5 <i>mp</i>	<u>m. 9-10</u> "All humankind" Csus4 → C5 <i>mp</i>
Form: <i>Sthayi</i> (Line 1)		
Phrasing: 8 (4+4)		
<u>m. 11-14</u> "would know its own lineage" C-F-G-A → C-G-A-Bb <i>mf</i>	<u>m. 15-18</u> "and stock" C-A-Bb-C → G4 <i>diminuendo to p</i>	
Form: <i>Mukhda</i> refrain 1x		
Phrasing: 4 (2+2)		
<u>m. 19-20</u> "All humankind" C5 → Csus4 <i>mp</i>	<u>m. 21-22</u> (Choir repeats) C5 → G4 <i>Crescendo</i>	
Form: <i>Antara</i> (Line 2)		
Phrasing: 10 (4+4+2)		
<u>m. 23-26</u> "Never would a brother be abandoned in love by his brother" C-G-Bb-D-(Eb) → G <i>mf</i>	<u>m. 27-30</u> "nor a sister by her sister" Fsus2 → Eb → cm <i>diminuendo</i>	<u>m. 31-32</u> "All humankind" G4 + suspensions <i>p</i>
Form: <i>Mukhda</i> refrain 3x		
Phrasing: 5 (2+2+1)		
<u>m. 33-34</u> "All humankind" C5 <i>mp</i>	<u>m. 35-36</u> "All humankind" C4 → C5 <i>p</i>	<u>m. 37</u> (Tabla out/fermata) C4 → C5 <i>pp</i>

Esmail adheres strictly to *bandish* form, which is similar to *rondo* in Western classical music. Deepak Raja explains the structure of a *bandish* in the following passage (he refers to *bandish* as "composition"):

Bada and *chota khayala* [big or small *khyal*] compositions, and also *tarana* compositions, have two stanzas, represented by two melodic sections: the *sthayi*, and the *antara*. The *sthayi* is, as a rule, centered in the lower half of the melodic canvas, except when the melodic centre of gravity of the *raga* falls in the *uttaranga* [the upper tetrachord]. The *antara* is identifiable by a deliberate ascent to the upper tonic, with its follow-through centered in the upper half of the melodic canvas. The *antara*, however, ends with a descent to base-*sa*. The two parts together represent a comprehensive map of the *raga*'s melodic personality. The *sthayi* also functions as the nucleus of the *khayala* presentation — the basic theme or refrain to which the rendition returns, repeatedly, after each round of improv-izations.²²²

In keeping with this description, Esmail's *bandish* contains two main sections, the *sthayi* and the *antara*. The *sthayi* sets the first line of poetry in the *raga*'s lower register (m. 4-18) and the *antara* sets the second line in the upper register (m. 22-33), reaching its climax on the upper tonic (m. 22) and gradually travelling back to the lower tonic (m. 33). A portion of the *sthayi* text also functions as the refrain. The soloist sings "All humankind" three times at the beginning and end of the movement. Each iteration increases in ornamentation and melodic expression (m. 5-9 and m. 32-27). The refrain also occurs between the two verses, signaling the end of the *sthayi* and the beginning of the *antara* (m. 18-19). In Hindustani music, this motivic refrain is called the *mukhda* (see Musical Example 4.10).

Musical Example 4.10: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 4, Bass-Baritone *mukhda*, m. 4-5.

The musical notation is a single staff in bass clef, marked 'in khayal bandish style' and 'mf'. The melody consists of a series of eighth and quarter notes. Below the staff, the lyrics are written: 'Hə - mā - gə mā-rə - dō - mə'.

Esmail's use of harmony through the choir is the most unconventional in a Hindustani context. Through this atypical "instrument," Esmail explores functional and non-functional harmony while remaining heavily rooted in the Hindustani tradition. The C5 is the foundational harmony, for which the choir functions as the tanpura drone. The bass voices alternate sustaining

²²² Deepak Raja, *Hindustani Music*, 220.

C3 throughout. When the bass moves away from C, it is only briefly, and is typically to reinforce the tonic through melodically conceived cadential movement: b7-1 or b3-2-1 (see Bass 2 m. 5, m. 7, and m. 9). The same is true for the tenors, who revolve around G3.

Esmail also sets the choir in pan-diatonic tetrachords, which, in keeping with the function of a secondary melodic instrument, reinforce the subtle unfolding of the soloist's central melodic statement. In the *sthayi*, these tetrachords move upward by step as the soloist expands into the upper register of *Bhimpalasi*. Because these chords are not functional, I have spelled them from the bottom up in my analysis. The third iteration of the *mukhda* contains a Csus 4 (C-F-G) in the choir (m. 8). This harmony expands underneath the soloist to include C-F-G-A (m. 11), then C-G-A-Bb (m. 13), and finally C-A-Bb-C at the phrase's peak (m. 15) (see Musical Example 4.10).

Following the expansion of these chords, the Bass 2 (who has largely sustained a C3 drone) moves to G2 for one measure, then resolves back to C through the flattened seventh scale degree (m. 16-19). This melodic movement in the bass (5-b7-1) functions as a perfect authentic cadence, but one that is distinctly linear. Above, the Bass 1 sustains the C drone, while the tenors move in a descending chain of suspensions, a clear Monteverdi reference.

These Western features—the homophonic tetrachord, the re-voicing of the drone, the Bass 2's cadential movement, and the chain of suspensions—work in service of the Hindustani components. The choir's tetrachords reinforce the soloist as they move through climactic moments in the unfolding *raga*. The drone re-voicing reinforces structural seams, informing when the music is nearing the end of the section. The cadential movement in the Bass 2 reinforces the soloist's cadential movement back to the tonic. The chain of suspensions moves the upper male voices linearly from the high tetrachord back to the drone. Esmail uses these

Western techniques not to defuse the characteristic Hindustani components, but rather to enhance them.

Musical Example 4.11: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 4, m. 10-16.

57

10 0 3 X 2 0 3 X 2

Tbl.

B. *pāī - vā - - - ndā ū - dā tō - mā*

T. *hu-man-kind hu - man-kind would know its own li - ne - age li - ne - age*

T. *hu-man - kind would know its own li - ne - age li - ne -*

B. *hu-man - kind would know its own li - ne - age*

B. *hu-man - kind would know its own li - ne - age*



14 0 3 X 2 0 3

Tbl.

B. *(ā) - - - gə ī hī vē - - - shə - - - dā -*

T. *and stock li - ne - age and stock*

T. *age and stock li - ne - age and stock*

B. *li - ne - age li - ne - age and stock*

B. *and stock li - ne - age and stock*

Performance Practice Guide

Vocal Considerations (Choral)

- Tuning: Invite the tenors and basses to tune to the tabla player, who is playing a C throughout.
- Tempo: Lean back in the tempo; there should be a lot of space between the beats.
- Diction: Articulate all h's of "humankind"

Vocal Considerations (Bass-Baritone Solo)

- m. 11-13: Lean into grace note slides (*meend*).
- m. 16 (and like places): Sing septuplets in a light head space (*murki*).
- m. 31: Sing this passage free flow, not in a steady time; use *gamak* to connect the passage.
- General: Observe schwa, even in the upper register. The tendency is to sing [E] instead.

Communication with Sitar and Tabla

For this movement, the tabla player switches one of their drums and has to tune. Remember to create space for this to happen. As this is a tabla solo, allow the tabla player to start the movement without a conductor's cue. Allow the tabla player to take charge of the tempo throughout. Ask the tabla player to play a "sparse beat" without much "filling in," per Esmail's preference. If "filling in" happens, it should be around the upbeat, very close to each of the main beats.

Hindustani Music Terms

- Bhimpalasi Raga

Table 4.8: Overview of *Raga Bhimpalasi*

Raga Bhimpalasi (notated for sitar at m. 19)

- *Raga*: a “scale with personality”; “a melodic representation of an emotional statement”²²⁴
- *Bhimpalasi*: Representative of an older scale called *Dhanashri*, which is personified as a weeping lady yearning for her lover. It has a 5-note ascent (that starts on the flattened seventh) and 7-note descent (the same as *Kafi*). This *raga* is characterized by slow slides and frequent oscillations, and is typically set in a slow, “solemn” style.²²⁵

Bhimpalasi scale in *sargam*, *solfeggio*, and scale degrees:

Ascent							Descent							
<u>ni</u>	Sa	<u>ga</u>	Ma	Pa	<u>ni</u>	Sa	Sa	<u>ni</u>	Dha	Pa	Ma	<u>ga</u>	Re	Sa
te	do	me	fa	sol	te	do	do	te	la	sol	fa	me	re	do
b7	1	b3	4	5	b7	8	8	b7	6	5	4	b3	2	1

- Jhaptaal:

Table 4.9: Overview of *Jhaptaal*

Vilambit Jhaptaal (m.1)

- *vilambit*: slow
- *taal*: a rhythmic groove; the building block of rhythmic structure
- *jhaptaal*: 10 beats divided into 4 unequal sections (2+3+2+3)

X	2	0	3
Dhi Na	Dhi dhi na	Ti na	Dhi dhi na
1 2	3 4 5	6 7	8 9 20

Movement 5: Hinduism

Analysis

This movement sets two Hindu perspectives: poetry by the 15th century poet Kabir and scripture from the *Isa Upanishad* (written in the first half of the 1st millennium BCE). Esmail uses the texts to create a ternary song structure evocative of Bach’s sacred arias. In the A sections, the soprano and tenor sing Kabir’s devotional poetry. The tenor begins with the English translation and the soprano responds in Hindi. The formula is reversed for the A section’s reprise. This inter-cultural duet asks the soloists to use vocal technique from both the Western

classical and Hindustani *khyal* traditions. The duet frames Section B, for which the choir sings the *Isa Upanishad* text in an English translation.

The inclusion of scripture and sacred poetry is reminiscent of Bach's Passion settings. In the Passions, the events leading to Christ's crucifixion unfold through the scriptural setting of the recitative and choruses. The arias, however, serve a different purpose. They use sacred poetry to offer a personal perspective to the congregation, a threshold through which the congregation can identify with the unfolding scene. Similarly, the Kabir poetry serves as commentary on the *Isa Upanishad* scripture. While the scripture is instructive, the poetry is descriptive. It is a personal reflection on an ancient text.

The choice to set Kabir is also poignant, as the poet did not associate himself with Hinduism. Kabir was raised by a Muslim family and his primary spiritual teacher was Hindu. After Kabir's death, Hindus and Muslims affiliated themselves with his work. When I asked Esmail why she chose Kabir, she explained that while Kabir was not explicitly Hindu, Hindus had adopted his devotional poetry. His writing has become inseparable from Hindustani music. The translation of Kabir that Esmail chose is not a single poem, but is a collection of lines from many different poems. Through the juxtaposition of many texts, Esmail crafts her own message.

Kabir's poetry often uses romantic love as a metaphor for the relationship between the soul and the Divine. Esmail's setting as a duet certainly illuminates this purpose. Similar to other texts used throughout the work, this movement depicts a separation that seeks resolution. Esmail instructs the soprano and tenor soloists to stand on either side of the conductor, as far away from each other as possible. This distance is meant to symbolize the distance between these two cultures, and their ability to communicate against all odds.

In addition to the use of duet and choir, Esmail also employs the orchestra in an

unmeasured, free-flowing style, utilizing imitation, extended string techniques, and modal harmonic language. Esmail reinforces the soprano-tenor duet with frequent instrumental imitation. The tenor sings their first motive with the first violins, after which two solo violins respond two octaves higher in augmentation (See Musical Example 4.12, m. 2-3). This pattern continues in varied instrumental combinations. The soprano enters in m. 3 with the sitar imitating two beats apart. The flutes enter as well, first in tandem with the soprano (m. 7-9) and then in imitation (m. 11-16). This pattern continues in both A sections, with high-voiced instruments supporting the soprano. Esmail's use of imitation creates an otherworldly atmosphere, a spinning out of luscious melodies.

This atmosphere is also created through extended string techniques. In m. 1, the lower strings sustain a D6/4sus2 chord, adding texture through aleatoric gesture—a sustained note followed by a quick tremolo. Esmail instructs the players, “do not align with others in section—each instrument enters at a different time and tremolo should emerge from texture in a non-metric way.”²²³ In a rehearsal with the orchestra in Los Angeles, Esmail explained that this gesture emulates sparkling stars.²²⁴ Esmail uses this technique throughout the A sections, a textural choice that evokes the composer's “*Ind-expressionistic*” aims. One other example in which Esmail uses extended techniques to depict the natural world is in m. 20-25 with the first violins' ornamentation. Their intermittent trill symbolizes a flowing river, painting the text of the soprano-tenor duet. While harmonically non-functional, these gestures contribute to the movement's mood, elucidating two lovers meeting by a river on a beautiful clear night.

²²³ Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 5, m. 1.

²²⁴ Esmail, Los Angeles Master Chorale rehearsal observations, November 14, 2018.

Musical Example 4.12: Reena Esmail, TLBU, Movement 5, m. 1-4.

selections from poetry of Kabir
 (tr. Robert Bly)
 and Isa Upanishad (vs. 6-7)

V.

Reena Esmail

Serene (♩=58) **A**

Flute 1

Flute 2

Bassoon

Serene (♩=58) Raag Yaman **A**
 SOLO: about 30" (3 aalapi) approximate: sitar will follow voice

Sitar

Soprano Solo

Tenor Solo

Serene (♩=58) **A**
 2 soli gli altri

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

mf Mō - - - - - hī_

mf This love be-tween us, this love be-tween us,.

p

mf *mf*

mp *mp*

mp *mp*

mp *mp*

pizz.

do not align with others in section - each instrument enters at a different time and tremoli should emerge from texture in a non-metric way

start new note at any time after downbeat previous note can bleed over from last measure

Esmail uses many of her characteristic harmonic devices in this movement: use of *raga*, modulation-by-step, and added-tone sonorities. The outer sections are in *Raga Yaman* (see Tabale 4.10 in performance practice guide). *Yaman* is typically performed between 9 pm and midnight, which fits well with a night-time lover's rendezvous. The opening section remains in *Yaman* throughout, but modulates by descending half step from D to D-flat to C (m. 1-19). Beginning at m. 30, Esmail ascends by half step to E5 with a D pedal and then to g minor for the central choral section (m. 30-34).

Section B features the choir in four-part texture. The chord progressions have a distinct musical theatre feel because of the frequent seventh chords and sequences by half step. At m. 46, the choir sings in canon in upper and lower voiced duets. The upper voices sing in a-flat minor, while the lower voices sustain a drone on A5 (see Musical Example 4.13). Similar to other places in the work, Esmail uses a chromatic pedal point to increase harmonic tension. This tension climaxes in m. 53 with a *forte* E-flat sus9/4 chord followed by cascading descending lines that lead to Section A's reprise.

When the duet returns, the tenor sings in Hindi in a *khyal* style and the soprano responds in English in a Western classical style. This exchange of languages and styles is a metaphor for the text's meaning:

Are you looking for me?
I am in the next seat
My shoulder is against yours.
The Lord is inside you, and also inside me;
Just as the sprout is hidden in the seed.

Esmail creates a musical space in which both soloists have the capacity to speak the other's language in the other's style. This capacity for each to embody the other completely eliminates the existence of the Other.

Musical Example 4.13: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 5, m. 43-56.

70

43

F

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Tbl.

Timp.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

f *mp* *p* *poco a poco cresc*

To the se - er, all things be-come the Self What de-lu - sion, what sor-row, what de-lu - sion, what sor-row,

To the se - er, all things be-come the Self What de-lu - sion, what sor-row, what de-lu - sion, what sor-row,

To the se - er, all things be-come the Self, the Self, What de - lu - sion, what sor - row, What de - lu - sion, what

To the se - er, all things be-come the Self the Self, What de - lu - sion, what sor - row, What de - lu - sion, what

f *mp* *p* *poco a poco cresc*

f *mp* *p* *poco a poco cresc*

f *mp* *p* *poco a poco cresc*

f *mp* *p* *poco a poco cresc*

f *mp* *p* *poco a poco cresc*

f *mp* *p* *poco a poco cresc*

50

Fl. 1
Fl. 2
Ob. 1
Ob. 2
Tbn. X 2 0 3 OUT
Timp.
S.
A.
T.
B.
Vln. I
Vln. II
Vla.
Vc.
Cb.

f *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *mp* *f* *p* *p* *f*

what de - lu - sion, what sor - row, can there be for the one who be-holds such one - ness
what de - lu - sion, what sor - row, can there be for the one such one - ness such one -
sor - row, What de - lu - sion, what sor - row, for the one
sor - row, What de - lu - sion, what sor - row, for the one

Similar to the opening section, Section A' modulates through many key areas. Esmail sets up the expectation of a descending sequence so the modulation from E-flat to D in m. 64 is expected. The unexpected moment is the final cadence, which resolves an ascending major third to F#. The orchestra continues with a coda, quoting material from the opening section. While this material remains in D *Yaman*, the sustained strings reinforce the shift to F#. When I asked Esmail about this moment, she called the modulation through the chromatic mediant a transformative gesture that recontextualizes the sitar's solo melody. The desired effect is a magnifying glass held up to a seed to behold the blossoming sprout. The sitar in D *Yaman* keeps the movement rooted in the home key, but the shift to F# represents the transformation that has occurred.

Performance Practice Guide

Vocal Considerations (Soprano and Tenor Solos)

- General: Begin all sustained notes straight tone and then blossom with vibrato. The soloists are also welcome to sing sustained notes without any vibrato if it feels manageable, which would be more in line with Hindustani vocal technique.
- General: Grace note with tenuto means that the grace note is on the beat.
- For Soprano: In *khyal* passages in a lower register, sing with as much resonance/forward projection as possible.
- m. 3 and m. 5: Use *gamak* on the ascending passages. Begin slowly and then accelerate to the sustained note. Esmail calls this technique “feather beaming.”²²⁵
- m. 4 and 6: Slide to [hi] of *mōhī* and *tōhī* after arriving on the final note.
- m. 15: Vowel for *kāsē* is halfway between [a] and [ae].
- m. 17: Glottal attack on grace note on G.
- m. 20: Vowel for *jāsē* is halfway between [a] and [ae].

²²⁵ Reena Esmail, “TLBU – mm5 – Hinduism – Audio Guide,” Soundcloud audio, December 27, 2016, 24:24, <https://soundcloud.com/reenaesmail/sets/this-love-between-us-audio>.

- m. 57-60: Use a retroflex, aspirated [d] for *ḍhūṇḍhě*.
- m. 69: Create a small space before *həm mē*.

Instrumental Considerations

- m. 1 (and like places), strings: This extended technique requires a long down bow *flautando*. Then, without reversing the bow (hence the tie), finish with a quick, erratic tremolo. On modern instruments, this tremolo is best achieved *sul ponticello*. The effect should sound like twinkling stars.
- General, flutes: Rehearse the flutes and soloists together. The flautists will easily pick up on the subtleties of emphasis and phrasing, since their parts mirror the soloists' melody.

Communication with Sitar

- m. 1: The sitar player performs “3 alaapi,” three improvised phrases with a melodic arc that establishes *Raga Yaman*. Ask the sitar player (or the intermediary) to look at the conductor when the mini *alap* is finished.
- m. 3-6 (and like places): Have the intermediary cue the sitar entrances after the soloist. If the conductor does not have an intermediary, they will need to do this.
- m. 10-17: Depending upon the skill level of the sitar player, the modulation to D-flat might be difficult. Talk to the sitar player in advance. If it doesn't seem feasible, don't have the sitar player perform in this section.
- Letter H (m. 64): The sitar player's improvisation follows the same format as m. 3-6.
- m. 84: For the LA Master Chorale performance, Esmail asked the sitar player to finish their improvised phrase on “high sa” i.e. the upper tonic. Remind the sitar player that they are still in D *Yaman*, even though the high *sa* will feel like *dha* (6th scale degree) because the bass has changed.

Hindustani Music Terms

- Raag Yaman (see Table 4.10):

The solo, flute, and sitar melodies are in *Raga Yaman*.

Table 4.10: Overview of *Raga Yaman*

<i>Raga Yaman</i> (notated for sitar at m. 1)														
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Raga</i>: a “scale with personality”; “a melodic representation of an emotional statement”²²⁹ • <i>Yaman</i>: 5-note scale on ascent and 7-note scale on descent with sharpened fourth scale degree; performed 9-12 am; fundamental <i>raga</i> of Hindustani classical music (like the C Major scale in the Western world); descent of Kalyan, a <i>raga</i> associated with Persia²³⁰ 														
<i>Yaman</i> scale in <i>sargam</i> , <i>solfeggio</i> , and scale degrees:														
<u>Ascent</u>							<u>Descent:</u>							
Ni	Re	Ga	Ma ^ˆ	Dha	Ni	Sa	Sa	Ni	Dha	Pa	Ma ^ˆ	Ga	Re	Sa
ti	re	mi	fi	la	ti	do	do	ti	la	sol	fi	mi	re	do
7	2	3	#4	6	7	8	8	7	6	5	#4	3	2	1

- Teental

Teental returns at m. 34. For an explanation of *teental*, see Table 4.3 in Movement 1 performance practice guide. This version of *teental* is in *madhya* (medium) tempo. One full cycle of the rhythmic groove lasts four measures.

Movement 6: Jainism

Analysis

Esmail calls this movement the “hit single” of her oratorio.²²⁶ The music is rhythmically conceived with a memorable hook reminiscent of the *raga rock* movement—the fusion of Hindustani music with Western pop that began in the 1960s.²²⁷ The chosen text is from the *Acharanga Sutra* (5th–1st century BCE), a code of conduct based on the teachings of Jain teacher Mahavira who lived around 500 BCE. Jainism’s central principles are non-violence, non-absolutism, non-attachment, and asceticism. This text focuses on non-violence, exploring the Golden Rule from the flipped perspective. Esmail explains, “I wanted to include a counterpoint

²²⁶ Lindsay Pope, sitar and tabla rehearsal observation, November 13, 2018.

²²⁷ See Jonathan Bellman, “Indian Resonances in the British Invasion, 1965-1968,” in *The Exotic in Western Music*, ed. Jonathan Bellman (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 292-306.

to the other parts of the oratorio that are often so warm and soft, with a text setting out things that are forbidden.”²²⁸ This subverted invocation is set within a direct, biting musical language.

Table 4.11: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 6, Conductor’s Analysis

<u>Introduction, m. 1-22</u> A 4 + 18 (4+4+4+6) 4-bar intro – string drone Sitar <i>bandish</i> (a) + string drone	<u>Verse 1, m. 23-45</u> B 21 (1+ 8+5+5+2) English Chorus: “If the mind is sinful...” Rising chromatic line in sitar & v1	<u>Chorus 1, m. 46-57</u> A 14 (2+4+4+4) Ardhamaghadi Chorus: “Then one should not employ such a mind in action” v1 <i>bandish</i> (a) + alto melody (b) + sitar improv
<u>Interlude 1, m. 58-75</u> A 18 (4+4+4+4+2) Sitar <i>bandish</i> (a) + v1 counter-melody (c)	<u>Verse 2, m. 76-98</u> B 14 (1+8+5+5+2) English Chorus: “If the speech is sinful” Rising chromatic line in sitar & v1	<u>Chorus 2, m. 99-110</u> A 14 (2+4+4+4) Ardhamaghadi Chorus: “Then one should not utter that sinful speech” v1 <i>bandish</i> (a) + alto melody (b) + sitar improv
<u>Interlude 2, m. 111-126</u> A 16 (4+4+4+4) Sitar <i>bandish</i> (a) + v1 counter-melody (c)	<u>Bridge, m. 127-158</u> C 32 (8+8+8+8) Ardhamaghadi Chorus: “If the mind is sinful...” Rising diatonic line in D Dorian	<u>Chorus 3 “Reprise”, m. 159-end</u> A 8 (4+4) Ardhamaghadi Chorus: “Then one should not employ such a mind in action” Sitar/viola <i>bandish</i> (a) + alto/tenor melody (b)

The text appears in Ardhamaghadi and English. This is the only movement for which Esmail separates the original language and its translation, a decision determined by the form. The movement has a verse-chorus structure commonly used in pop and rock music (see Table 4.11). The verses set the two stanzas of the English translation, which are parallel in structure. While the language in almost identical, the first verse refers to thought, an inward expression of sin, while the second verse refers to speech, an outward expression of sin. The translation is by Hermann Jacobi (1850-1937), a German scholar who specialized in Jain studies. The Chorus

²²⁸ Thomas May, program notes, Los Angeles Master Chorale, November 18, 2018.

uses the final line of each verse in Ardhmaghadi. The Bridge sets the entire first verse in Adhamaghadi.

The primary building block of the movement is the sitar *bandish*. Esmail explained, “Because the sitar has to be so careful in all the other movements, I wanted just one movement when the sitar player could really go wild, and it’s really about him and the tabla player.”²²⁹ This *bandish* appears in the instrumental interludes as well as the choruses. The structure of the *bandish* is aaba, with “a-a” functioning as the *sthayi* and “b-a” functioning as the *antara*.²³⁰ In my analysis, I call the *bandish* melody (a) (see Musical Example 4.14).

Musical Example 4.14: Reena Esmail, TLBU, Movement 6, sitar *bandish*, m. 5-20.

The *bandish* appears in both instrumental introductions/interludes and within the choruses. As the movement progresses, Esmail layers melodies and counter-melodies with the *bandish* to increase textural interest. The altos sing melody (b) in the choruses, which sounds alongside the reprise of the *bandish* (a) in the first violins. While the violins play the *bandish* with ornamental flourishes, the sitar improvises. For the instrumental interludes, the sitar player takes back the *bandish* while the first violins play counter-melody (c). In the final “reprise” of

²²⁹ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

²³⁰ See Movement 5 analysis for an explanation of *bandish*, *sthayi*, and *antara*.

the chorus, all instruments play together. The altos and tenors sing melody (b) in unison, while the sitar performs the *bandish*. In addition to providing textural variety, the clarity of form creates structural clarity that allows the sitar player to effectively navigate the movement.

Movement 6 is rooted firmly in D Dorian. Esmail creates tension within harmonic stability movement through her use of ascending chromatic and diatonic lines, expressed both horizontally as direction to the upper tonic and vertically as four-part choral texture. In the verses, Esmail increases tension through a rising chromatic line, which sounds against the lower strings' persistent D5 drone. In Verse 1, the chorus introduces the rising line, beginning on the tonic and ascending every two measures. The sopranos and tenors sing in parallel octaves. Their syllabic speech oscillates between the tonic and the ascending note, while the altos and basses, also in parallel octaves, pulse on the tonic. Meanwhile, the sitar and first violin reinforce the rising chromatic line (m. 23-36). In m. 32, the ascent continues in diminution, increasing excitement as the line moves toward upper tonic.

Esmail also elevates tension through the alto/bass tritone ascent from D to A-flat, followed by ascending chromatic movement that creates dissonant chord clusters with the sopranos and tenors. Esmail sets up an expectation that is then broken. Instead of resolving to upper tonic, the choir and orchestra skip over D and “resolve” on E-flat, the flattened second scale degree (see Musical Example 4.15, m. 36). This pivotal moment is reinforced in the chorus by a chromatic chord cluster. The soprano and tenor maintain the E-flat while the alto and bass employ the same antagonistic chromatic movement with a chord cluster of stacked fourths plus a perfect fifth (Bb-Eb-Ab-Eb).²³¹

²³¹ See Movement 1, m. 4, “violence.”

Musical Example 4.15: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 6, m. 31-45.

82

31

Sit. D

Sit. ६ ६ श्री श्री रे ष

Tbl.

S. *f* *mp*
 pro-du-cing cut-ting and split-ting, quar-rels, faults and pains, — if it in-jures li-ving be - ings,

A. *f* *mp*
 pro-du-cing cut-ting and split-ting, quar-rels, faults and pains, — if it in-jures li-ving be - ings,

T. *f* *mp*
 pro-du-cing cut-ting and split-ting, quar-rels, faults and pains, — if it in-jures li-ving be - ings,

B. *f* *mp*
 pro-du-cing cut-ting and split-ting, quar-rels, faults and pains, — if it in-jures li-ving be - ings,

Vln. I D

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

39

Sit. OUT E

Tbl.

S. *p* *f*
if it kills crea-tures, then one should not em - ploy such a mind in ac-tion.

A. *p* *f* *f*
if it kills crea-tures, then one should not em - ploy such a mind in ac-tion. *to -*

T. *p* *f*
if it kills crea-tures, then one should not em - ploy such a mind in ac-tion.

B. *p* *f*
if it kills crea-tures, then one should not em - ploy such a mind in ac-tion.

Vln. I *f* *f* E

Vln. II *f* *f*

Vla. *f*

Vc.

Cb.

Esmail then brings a new micro-phrase, leading five bars later to the same chord from m. 36 (see Musical Example 4.15). This climactic moment reinforces the text's consequent clause, evoking a commandment-like conviction (m. 42-43). Esmail hikes up the pressure again as this stacked cluster cadences to an A5 with a suspended second on the word "action" (m. 44). She achieves this through chromatic movement in contrary motion. The sopranos, altos, and basses ascend by half step while the bass descends by half step. This tension releases with the Chorus as the strings play a *tihai* that resolves to D Dorian.

The ascending scale returns as a central feature of the Bridge. Esmail outlines a rising scale in D Dorian. In m. 127, the tenors begin the rising sequence on A and ascend every two measures. This sequence is then taken over by the altos in m. 135, the sopranos in m. 143, and the basses in m. 152. Whoever has the rising line sings alone, while the other voices respond on either a drone or a complementary rising line. As each new voice enters, the texture thickens and the dynamic increases, building momentum to the final return of the chorus in m. 163. The Bridge also provides a platform for a virtuosic sitar solo, which rages like an electric guitar over the choir and strings' pulsing conversation.

Performance Practice Guide

Vocal Considerations

- General: For the choruses in Ardhamaghadi (such as m. 45-67), sing with timbre that is "biting and forward,"²³² Hindustani technique and timbre.
- m. 23 (and like places): Place a glottal before "is" in the phrase "If the speech is sinful."
- m. 32-33 (and like places): Aspirate the t's of "cutting" and "splitting."
- m. 46 (and like places), altos: Close to [p] quickly for *tahapagāram*.

²³² Reena Esmail, Los Angeles Master Chorale rehearsal observations, November 13, 2018.

- m. 46 (and like places), altos: slide up to written note on both quarter note A's on *tāhāpāgārām*.
- m. 47 (and like places): Close to the final [m] of *mānām* sooner.
- m. 53-57, altos: Use *gamak* on eighth note scalar passages.
- m. 101 (and like places), altos: Breath on tied eighth note on downbeat.
- 106-111, altos: Use *gamak* on eighth note scalar passages.
- m. 126-162, choir: Sing passage in Ardhamaghadi with Western vocal technique.
- m. 135-142: Close to [j] quickly for *ānhāyākārē*, *chāyākārē*, *bhāyākārē*. Completely pass over the schwa.
- m. 135-142: Gershon added sopranos to the alto line here to help address balance issues.

Instrumental Considerations

For 7/8 meter, create a space between the dotted quarter and the two quarter notes. Follow the tabla's lead here. This will correct the tendency to slow down. Because *Rupaktal* has a "wave" on the downbeat, consider having a weightless quality on the downbeat of each measure.

Communication with Sitar and Tabla

Allow the tabla to drive the tempo through this entire movement. In m. 24 and m. 77, make sure the sitar player and concertmaster can make eye contact. Ideally, the concertmaster cues the sitar player into these passages. From m. 126-158, the sitar player improvises a cadenza. They will need an indication from the conductor eight measures in advance of the *bandish* in m. 159 that the improvisation is near its end.

Hindustani Music Terms

- Rupak, ati drut (m. 1)

This movement is in *Rupaktaal* at a fast tempo.

Table 4.12: Overview of *Rupaktaal*

<i>Rupak, ati drut</i> (m. 1)		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <i>drut</i>: fast• <i>taal</i>: a rhythmic groove; the building block of rhythmic structure• <i>rupak</i>: 7 beats divided 3+2+2		
0	1	2
tin na na	dhin na	dhin na

- Bandish (m. 5)

A *bandish* is a Hindustani composition. See Movement 4 for a detailed explanation of *bandish*. See the analysis for this movement for information about this particular *bandish*.

- Jhala style (m. 20 and m. 99)

A *jhala* is the final section of a Hindustani *alap*. An *alap* traditionally contains three sections. The first section (*alap*) is slow and unmetered, the second section (*jor*) is at a medium tempo and contains a pulse, and the final section (*jhala*) is fast and features successive 16th notes. When Esmail asks the sitar player to perform in “jhala style,” she is invoking the fast and furious portion of an *alap* performance.

- Kafi (m. 99 and m. 127)

Esmail asks the sitar player to perform in *Raga Kafi*. See Table 4.4 in Movement 1 for an explanation of this *raga*.

Movement 7: Islam

Analysis

For the final movement, Esmail sets poetry by the Persian poet Rumi (1207–1273). Rumi is associated with Sufism, a mystic branch of Islam. There were many complications that Esmail faced in setting a Muslim text. In the Muslim tradition, setting the Koran to music is considered

blasphemous. Esmail had to find poetry representative of the religion that would not offend observers and would also correspond to her message. Given Rumi's universal popularity, she felt setting his poetry was a safe choice. In performances of *TLBU* on tour to India in 2017, she was encouraged to write "Sufi Islam" for Movement 7 instead of just "Islam" so as not to upset anyone in the audience.²³³ Similar to her setting of Kabir in Movement 5, Esmail creates new poetry through the amalgamation of verses from different writings.

The form of the movement is through composed and contains three main sections (m. 1-27, m. 28-66, m. 67-end). The beginning is new a cappella choral writing with oboe interjections. This compositional choice was part practical and part aesthetic. Practically, Movement 7 was one of the last movements Esmail wrote, so she was running short on time. Aesthetically, she preferred the a cappella setting as an homage to Renaissance sacred a cappella music. This passage also contains some of the most striking modulations within the music, which the a cappella setting effectively highlights. In my own research, I learned that a cappella devotional singing is part of Muslim practice, and thus this a cappella section could also be considered an honoring of this musical tradition.

In deference to composers like Palestrina and Victoria, Esmail uses alternating polyphony and homophony to emphasize the text's meaning. In m. 1-21, Esmail sets the same poetry three times: "The lamps may be different, but the Light is the same." For each passage, she arranges "the lamps may be different" in staggered imitation, highlighting each choral part's entrance (see Musical Example 4.16). Once all parts have entered, she continues in staggered homophony, juxtaposing the same text on the beat and syncopated. On the word "Light," all parts join together to complete the phrase.

²³³ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

Musical Example 4.16: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 7, m. 1-6.

Selections from *Divan-i Shams-i Tabrizi*
Rumi

VII.

Reena Esmail

Placid (♩=69) A

Oboe 1

Oboe 2

SOPRANO

ALTO

TENOR

BASS

dif - ferent the Light is the same, the same.

The lamps may be di - ferent but the Light is the same, the same.

The lamps may be dif - ferent di - ferent but the Light is the same, the Light is the

but the Light is the same, the same.

Musical Example 4.17: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 7, m. 22-34.

22

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn.

S.

A.

T.

B.

All re - li - gions All this sin - ging sin - ging, one.

Hum Hum Hum one.

re - li - gions all this sin - ging all - this sin - ging one.

Hum Hum Hum one.

*pronounce the word, then close to m quickly

D

28

Fl. 1 *f* 3

Fl. 2 *mp*

Ob. 1 *mp*

Ob. 2

D
Vachaspati (slow melodious phrases)

Sit.

Madhya Laya Teentaal
X 2 O 3 X 2 O

Tbl.

S.
song.

A.
song.

T.
song.

B.
song. *mf* 3 I have bestowed on each one a u-nique form of _

D

Vln. I *pp* div

Vln. II *pp* div

Vla. *p*

Vc. *p*

Cb. *p*

In addition to this textural interplay, Esmail also takes the listener on a harmonic journey.

She begins in D Lydian (m.1) and modulates on each iteration of “Light” through varied keys with tonics on C# (m.6), G (m. 13), and G-flat (m. 20). She follows with a six-bar passage in a

mode on G-flat with a #4 and a flat-7. The bass and the alto hum on a sustained perfect fifth while the soprano and tenor converse in sweeping scalar passages, singing, “All religions, all this singing, one song,” another beautiful depiction of the text. On the word “song,” the music unexpectedly modulates from G-flat to D (see Musical Example 4.17, m. 27-28). Again, Esmail employs a modulation through the chromatic mediant, descending by major third to D *Vachaspati*.

At Letter D, the orchestra returns with the sitar and tabla leading the transition into D *Vachaspati* in *Madhya Laya Teental* (see Table 4.14). The regular four-bar phrases create an opportunity for each choral part to deliver a portion of the poetry as a solo, beginning with the bass and ending with the soprano. Esmail connects the passages through her frequent use of the triplet, which gives the passage a forward momentum. The choral parts are supported by static, pulsing harmony in the strings and cascading lines in the winds, which both comment upon and reinforce the choral texture. This moment reminds me of the final number in a musical theatre production when, during a musical reprise, each character sings their last line. When I asked Esmail about the influence of musical theatre throughout the oratorio, she explained that it is something that very present in her music because it was her first love.²³⁴ This passage is one of those moments in which her love for musical theatre subconsciously works its way into her compositional rendering.

At Letter F, the sitar and tabla exit and the choir and orchestra modulate by ascending whole step to E *Vachaspati*. The choir sings, “Religions are many.” To depict the diversity of faith, Esmail sets this passage in imitation. The soprano introduces a motive that is then passed through the first and second violins (see Musical Example 4.18). First the tenors and then the

²³⁴ Esmail, interview, 11-19-18.

basses respond, “But God is One.” This leads to a single reprise of the introductory statement, “The lamps may be different...,” after which Esmail modulates from E *Vachaspati* to D *Kafi*, returning to musical material from Movement 1 (m. 21-37).

In Esmail’s reprise, she sets a new text and introduces a new form. After an eight-measure instrumental interlude, the sopranos sing the melody on the final line by Rumi: “Concentrate on the essence, concentrate on the Light.” This final thought by Rumi is followed by affirming phrases in each of the represented religions (see Table 4.13). (The one religion not represented is Buddhism because Esmail could not find a commonly used affirming phrase.) The sequence renews every eight measures with new *ostinati* entering, at first gradually then closer together (m. 98-100). These motives are reinforced by instruments *colla parte*, a reference to baroque performance practice. The walking bass line is also a nod to Monteverdi, one of the first to employ this technique for “*Lamento della Ninfa*” from his eighth book of madrigals.

Table 4.13: Movement 7, “Affirming Phrases”

<p style="text-align: center;"> Alto, m. 83: <i>Ōm shāntī shāntī shāntī</i> (Hinduism) Soprano, m. 91: <i>Sādḥū Sādḥū</i> (Jainism) Bass, m. 93: <i>Wāhēgūrū</i> (Sikhism) Tenor 1, m. 98: <i>Āmīn</i> (Islam) Soprano, m. 98: <i>Āmēn</i> (Christianity) Tenor 2, m. 100: <i>Wāj Bāj</i> (Zoroastrianism) (No Buddhist affirming phrase) </p>
--

When I asked Esmail about the significance of the ostinato, her response was based on her message of universality. She knew that she wanted to end with Amen-like phrases from each represented religion. If she set these phrases sequentially, the final affirmative phrase would have the most important placement, creating an unintentional hierarchy. The layered ostinato creates equality across the varied religious traditions and also allows the audience to hear these phrases in relationship.

Musical Example 4.18: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 7, m. 49-56.

107

49

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Sit.

Tbl.

S.

A.

T.

B.

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

Cb.

F

F OUT

2 O 3 X OUT

- ling. Re_ li - gions are ma - ny

Re_ li - gions are ma - ny

Re-li-gions are ma - ny But God__ is__ One_

But God is

F tutti

f *mf*

f *mf*

f *mf*

f *mf*

f *mf*

Musical Example 4.19: Reena Esmail, *TLBU*, Movement 7, m. 109-end.

115

109

Fl. 1

Fl. 2

Ob. 1

Ob. 2

Bsn.

Sit. closing phrase in Kafi

Tbl. X

Soli

S. shān - tǐ shān - tǐ shān - tǐ shān - tǐ Ōm Con - cen - trate on the Light.

A. Ō - (m) shān - tǐ Ō - (m)

T.

B.

Vln. I *pp* 3 3 3 3

Vln. II *pp* 3 3 3 3

Vla. *mf* *pp*

Vc. *pp*

Cb. *mp* pizz.

Although Esmail states that she wanted to keep all phrases equal, she does extend the “Om shanti” phrase slightly longer than the others (See Musical Example 4.19). The sopranos and altos carry this phrase into the final cadence, which concludes with a high-voiced open fifth on D. As the final word is “Light,” this perfect fifth in the upper register creates acoustic overtones that are often associated with awakening the seventh *chakra*. This was not intentional on Esmail’s part, but she liked my interpretation. In respect for the Hindustani tradition that inspired this work, the tabla and sitar conclude the work. The sitar performs with an improvised phrase in D *Kafi* and the tabla gives a final downbeat.

Performance Practice Guide

Vocal Considerations

- m. 93 and m. 99: The w’s of *wāhġġūrū* and *wāj bāj* are halfway between [w] and [v].

Instrumental Considerations

- m. 1: Tell orchestra that m. 1 is an upbeat.
- m. 14, oboe: Spend more time on first note of the septuplet (tenuto) and then accelerate through the rest to beat 4.
- m. 28-51, winds: The descending lines are soloistic.
- m. 114 (final measure), strings: Play fermata on one long down bow.

Communication with Sitar and Tabla

- m. 28 (Letter D): The sitar entrance here can be soft, meaning that they do not have to enter immediately.
- m. 75-106: Ask the sitar player to improvise in relation to the soprano part. The two melodies do not need to line up exactly, but the soprano part should serve as a guide for the sitar player.
- m. 113-114: The final sitar improvisation should be simple, a “Hindustani version” of the soprano’s final phrase.

Hindustani Musical Terms

- Madhya Laya Teental (m. 28)

Perform *teental* at a medium tempo. One rhythmic cycle lasts four measures (see Table 4.3.)

- Raga Vachaspati (m. 28)

Table 4.14: Overview of Raga Vachaspati

<i>Raga Vachaspati</i> (notated for sitar at m. 28)															
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Raga</i>: a “scale with personality”; “a melodic representation of an emotional statement”²⁴⁰ • <i>Vachaspati</i>: 7-note scale on ascent and descent with sharpened fourth scale and flattened seventh scale degrees; performed 3-6 pm; typically a Carnatic (South Indian) <i>raga</i> closely related to <i>Yaman</i>.²⁴¹ 															
<i>Yaman</i> scale in <i>sargam</i> , <i>solfeccio</i> , and scale degrees:															
<u>Ascent</u>							<u>Descent:</u>								
Ni	Re	Ga	Ma'	Pa	Dha	Ni	Sa	Sa	Ni	Dha	Pa	Ma'	Ga	Re	Sa
ti	re	mi	fi	sol	la	te	do	do	te	la	sol	fi	mi	re	do
7	2	3	#4	5	6	b7	8	8	b7	6	5	#4	3	2	1

General Performance Practice Considerations

Vocal Preparation

The primary challenge in preparing *TLBU* is the incorporation of Hindustani vocal technique and the pronunciation of unfamiliar languages. Grant Gershon commented, “The last thing you want to do is have it be false or a caricature or lacking in integrity.”²³⁵ Esmail created detailed sound recordings that address both tone and diction throughout the work. I strongly encourage the conductor and singers to use these guides throughout the rehearsal process. In the Hindustani tradition, there is no substitute to learning through listening and imitation. The following writing on diction and vocal tone is primarily drawn from Esmail’s guides as well as my own observations.

²³⁵ Grant Gershon, interview, 11-19-18.

Vocal Tone

The main vocal challenge throughout *TLBU* is moving between varying degrees of space and resonance. While the Western-inspired sections contain familiar vocal technique, the sections that are Hindustani-inspired need more forward, speech-like resonance. Some voice pedagogues might describe this as “in the mask.” The placement is similar to Bulgarian music, but without the forced air compression. When I asked Saili Oak about the vocal parameters of Hindustani technique, she responded, “Everything is chest voice, and probably just 5% that we sing we would use a little bit of the blend. I have rarely heard any Hindustani classical singers sing in their head voice.”²³⁶ That being said, sometimes Esmail writes in a range that is higher than a Hindustani vocalist would sing. In these cases, incorporate as much head voice as is necessary.

It is interesting to consider that within the Hindustani tradition, vocal technique is not explicitly taught:

Our voice training is just about repeating phrases in a *rag*. It’s not about the sound or the voice production. But I am not too proud of that fact, in fact it would help if even Hindustani musicians do take some voice lessons...just to know the process of how your body produces the sound, and how you could build the stamina, how you could use it more wisely, especially with the amplification.²³⁷

Regarding amplification, all Hindustani singers are amplified today due to the size of concert halls. This may be something to consider with your soloists for Movements 2, 4, and 5. Based on my observation of rehearsals at Walt Disney Hall, the soloists struggled to balance over the orchestra when singing with Hindustani timbre in their mid and low range.

²³⁶ Saili Oak, interview with author, Los Angeles, November 18, 2018.

²³⁷ Ibid.

In teaching Hindustani vocal technique, there is nothing more helpful than a live example. Invite a professional Hindustani singer into a rehearsal for a group lesson. Ask them to perform so that the singers can hear the appropriate style. If it is not possible to invite someone to rehearsal, there are many video and audio recordings of *khyal* performances available online. Ask a friend well versed in Hindustani music to recommend recordings in the appropriate *ragas*, and share them with the choir. Rather than focus solely on tone, listen to what is happening *between* the notes. As Oak remarked, “The distance between the notes, and not the notes themselves, is where all the difference is” between Hindustani and Western technique.²³⁸ When I asked Oak how she would teach a Western classical singer, she commented on theory rather than production:

I would not mess with the way they are trained to produce voice. I would rather focus on the movement in a *rag*, or just the pedagogy there...how a *rag* is formed, what is a particular phrase that gives that *rag* its character...Even Carnatic [South Indian classical] singers when they try to learn Hindustani music, I don't try to mess with their style, because that style is something that's like a mold, and it's very difficult to change what you have been molded into already. So, if I had to train a Western singer, I would try to incorporate phrases of Hindustani music in a way that they sound good with Western voice production.²³⁹

I personally feel that a shift in timbre can be effective for both choral singers and soloists, but I do find Oak's comment to be indicative of a larger preference in Indian classical music for the deep knowledge and understanding of a *rag* over vocal technique.

Pronunciation Guide for Indian Languages

- Consonants

²³⁸ Oak interview, 11-18-18.

²³⁹ Ibid.

There are four possibilities for pronouncing consonants: dentalized, retroflex, aspirated, and unaspirated.²⁴⁰ Most consonants are either dentalized or retroflex. Dentalization will be familiar to most Western singers from study of Romance languages. Retroflex consonants will be less familiar. To create a retroflex consonant, curl your tongue back toward your alveolar ridge and then allow the tongue to flip forward as you pronounce the consonant. For an aspirated consonant, blow extra air through the consonant. For an unaspirated consonant, allow the air to implode. In Esmail's transliteration, she distinguishes between these consonant treatments. A plain consonant is unaspirated. If it is a [t] or [d] alone it is dentalized. If there is a dot under a consonant, it is retroflex. If there is an [h] after the consonant, it is aspirated.

- Vowels:

There are no diphthongs unless specifically notated. The vowels are pure and reflect what a Western trained conductor/singer will already know through their study of Romance languages. Esmail describes vowels as short and long, which corresponds to open and closed. Below are the primary vowels used throughout the piece explained through the International Phonetic

Alphabet:

Short [ə] / Long [a]

Short [ɛ] / Long [e]

Short [ɪ] / Long I [i]

Short [ɔ] / Long [o]

Short [ʊ] / Long [u]

²⁴⁰ This information is excerpted from Esmail's self-made pronunciation guides for *TLBU*, which are distributed along with score purchase. While my writing is meant to be another source of information, it in no way replaces Esmail's audio guides. Reena Esmail, Soundcloud audio, <https://soundcloud.com/reenaesmail/sets/this-love-between-us-audio>.

Sitar and Tabla Considerations

Intermediary

An optional (but strongly encouraged) component of a successful performance of *TLBU* is an intermediary. The intermediary sits between the sitar and tabla players with a full score and cues entrances and exits. This person should have knowledge of both Western and Hindustani classical traditions so they can serve as a translator between the conductor and the Hindustani musicians in the concert as well as in the rehearsal process. This person should not excuse the conductor from also giving cues, but rather provide a safety net so that the sitar and tabla players feel supported.

The intermediary for the Los Angeles Master Chorale performance was Hindustani singer Saili Oak.²⁴¹ Oak described her experience as intermediary as “very exciting.” She commented, “I’m trying to be the liaison for the sitar and tabla that I can cue them in and out...in a way they understand it. Sometimes I literally have to whisper in their ears...I can talk to them in Hindi in a terminology that they get. And I can take their cues and converse with Grant about their entrances and their exits.”²⁴² The intermediary is the musical interpreter.

Whether the intermediary is necessary depends upon your hired sitar and tabla players. If both players are rooted in the Hindustani tradition without much exposure to Western classical music, an intermediary is extremely helpful. Even in the case of the LA Master Chorale performance, in which Robin Sukhadia and Rajib Karmakar had ample experience with

²⁴¹ Oak met Esmail in 2016, when Esmail was searching for a Hindustani music teacher. In turn, Esmail gave Oak Western music lessons. Oak now serves as Programs Director for Shastra, and leads workshops with Esmail for composers and musicians from both the Western and Hindustani traditions. Oak is a Hindustani singer who grew up outside Mumbai. While her parents were not musicians, they noticed her musical aptitude as a child and bought her a harmonium. At age 8, she began studying voice. For the past 15 years, she has been a student of Dr. Ashwini Bhide Deshpande of the Jaipur *gharana*. Oak, interview, 11-18-18.

²⁴² Oak interview, 11-18-18.

crossover, fusion, and Western notation, having Oak present was helpful. An intermediary would not be necessary if both the sitar and tabla players were dual-trained in Hindustani and Western classical music. In this case, the players would be able to serve as their own intermediaries. To determine whether an intermediary is helpful, consider your sitar and tabla players' musical backgrounds and have a conversation with them about what they need.

Rehearsal Strategies

Since Hindustani music is an aural tradition, the sitar and tabla players will need ample time to prepare the music. Robin Sukhadia provided commentary on this process:

I...think that there should be emphasis on helping the Western Classical music side in knowing how much memorization the [Indian classical] musicians may be doing in their preparation, because we typically don't read music or have formal notation. The preparation process is different and perhaps more extensive...For us, thankfully, we had 2 phenomenal rehearsals with Grant and Reena, which gave us the space to work through memorization and flow, without having to only look at the sheet music. But other choirs/orchestras may not have that luxury. The musicians involved should be aware of this, especially on the Western side, because we don't operate like sight-reading western musicians who are just coming in for a straight gig.²⁴³

Give your players the music and a recording at least six months in advance. Schedule a few meetings during which you can answer questions, explain structure, and sing through melodies. In these rehearsals, it is wonderful if you as the conductor sit cross-legged on the floor with the players. (Cross-legged is important, as culturally it is a sign of disrespect to show the musicians the soles of your feet.) Grant Gershon did this during the sitar and tabla players' private rehearsal and later both Sukhadia and Karmakar remarked that they appreciated the gesture. As the concert nears, schedule one or two sessions in which the sitar and tabla players rehearse alongside an accompanist playing the orchestral reduction and a quartet of choral singers. Because both

²⁴³ Robin Sukhadia, November 30, 2018, e-mail message to author.

players will be listening for their cues from the choral and orchestral parts, the inclusion of a choral quartet and an orchestral reduction ensures a productive rehearsal.

To ease the rehearsal and performance process, Esmail created “cheat sheets” for the sitar and tabla players. These guides are not only helpful for the players, but for the conductor’s understanding of how a Hindustani musician might conceive of their part. These parts are available in Appendix A and can be purchased alongside the instrumental parts. If you are performing *TLBU* without an intermediary, create time in the rehearsal process to plan how you will communicate starts and stops with the players.

Bhatkhande Notation

Bhatkhande notation is a pedagogic device for Hindustani musicians equivalent to *solfeggio* in the West (see Figure 4.1). Called *sargam*, V.N. Bhatkhande developed this system so he could notate compositions traditionally transmitted by ear.²⁴⁴ This figure shows *sargam* symbols in Sanskrit and transliterated. Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni correspond to Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La Ti. *Komal* means flat and *tivra* means sharp. Throughout *TLBU*, Esmail uses *sargam* in the sitar part to outline pre-composed melodic phrases. For the conductor, it is helpful to use this graph so that you are aware of what the sitar is playing.



Figure 4.1: Bhatkhande Notation.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ For more about Bhatkhande, see Chapter 3.

²⁴⁵ Figure found on David Courtney, “North Indian Musical Notation – an Overview,” Chandra and David Courtney’s Homepage, accessed December 19, 2018, https://chandrakantha.com/articles/indian_music/lippi.html.

Staging

The orchestra can assume its traditional position with extra space on stage left in front of the cello and bass for the sitar and tabla players. The sitar and tabla players should be seated as close to the front of the stage as possible. From the audience's perspective, the tabla player is left (next to the conductor), the intermediary is center, and the sitar player is right (see Figure 4.2). One consideration is whether the intermediary sits facing out toward the audience or with their back toward the audience. Since the intermediary is essentially a second conductor, the second option makes practical sense, although it is not as aesthetically pleasing. The performances of *TLBU* thus far have had the intermediary facing out and this set-up has worked well. The performance space should be angled slightly toward the podium so that all players have contact with the conductor and the concertmaster. Depending on the size of the hall, the conductor may want to seat the sitar and tabla players on a platform. This elevation will aid in balance with the orchestra and increase visibility.



Figure 4.2: Sitar, Tabla, and Intermediary Positions.²⁴⁶

²⁴⁶ Lindsay Pope, "Robin Sukhadia, Saily Oak, Rajib Karmakar in Dress Rehearsal with LA Master Chorale," November 16, 2018.

In the following quotation, Esmail voices the complications of sightlines and the importance of thoughtful staging to a successful performance:

For example, just think about the sightlines: some people are sitting on the floor, some are sitting in chairs and the conductor is standing above them all. How can you make someone feel like they are part of an ensemble if they can't even make eye contact with the other musicians? So the piece accommodates people who have very different ways of communicating. In many ways, it is a musical microcosm of what we're facing in our world right now. The musicians are trying to express themselves, but that can't happen if there isn't a process in place that allows cross-cultural communication. As the person who is engineering this environment, I love being the catalyst for really great collaboration between musicians so everyone is coming from their own place of strength.²⁴⁷

Amplification

Another consideration for the sitar and tabla players is amplification, which aids balance with the orchestra. Because of the size of modern halls, Hindustani musicians are accustomed to amplification in their performances. The necessity of amplification for your performance will depend upon the size of the performing forces and the concert hall. What you certainly do *not* want is an acoustic performance in which the sitar and tabla players become visual spectacles and cannot be heard.

Another argument for amplification is due to the roles of the sitar and tabla players. The sitar and tabla are not simply accompaniment. Esmail's oratorio is a concerto *for them*. Considering their central role in the work, it is essential that their parts are heard across the orchestra and choir and throughout the hall. As mentioned under "Vocal Technique," one might also consider amplifying the soloists.

Contracting

An additional consideration is how to navigate contracting with Hindustani classical

²⁴⁷ Esmail, interview by Paskvan, "A Musical Microcosm," 3/10/17.

musicians. In an academic environment, contracting can be more informal than in a professional union (such as for the performance of the Los Angeles Master Chorale at Disney Hall). In both environments, one must remember that the professional Hindustani classical performance world works differently than the Western classical world. Below are comments from Robin Sukhadia that address these issues:

The interaction between the Western Classical music world, with all of its personnel, unions, rehearsal protocols, etc. was something I wasn't quite prepared for, and not used to. Asking questions like how many rehearsals are required? What is a *tutti* rehearsal? How much time will be required to be fully prepared? How fair compensation for my time and performance? Are fees negotiable? [These] were all questions that I had through the process and wasn't quite sure who to ask without feeling inexperienced. I think it is something to consider in assisting [Indian classical] musicians, who don't normally work with Western musicians to prepare for when working on the piece.²⁴⁸

In the conductor's hiring of Hindustani classical musicians, do not assume that the players are familiar with Western rehearsal and performance protocol, just as you (the conductor) are not familiar with Hindustani classical protocol. Consider the level of preparation that is being asked of these players, and make sure the fee acknowledges this. In order for a successful cross-cultural conversation, these practical issues must also be addressed with respect and humility.

Demonstration

If time permits, create an opportunity for the sitar and tabla players to give a demonstration during rehearsal. In Los Angeles, Robin Sukhadia and Rajib Karmakar graciously offered to lead a workshop, which included explanations of their instruments, an outline of a Hindustani improvisation, and a short performance. This workshop was extremely well attended and received. Both Sukhadia and Karmakar expressed an interest in learning more about the

²⁴⁸ Sukhadia, e-mail, 11-30-18.

Western choral and orchestral traditions. If *TLBU* is meant as an opportunity for cross-cultural conversation, it is a wonderful idea to create space for conversation outside music rehearsals.

Other Considerations

Baroque versus Modern Instruments

While *TLBU* was initially conceived for a baroque orchestra, Esmail wrote the work intending it to be performed on modern instruments as well. Esmail wrote *TLBU* so that both modern and period instruments can be successful at A=415 or A=440. The main consideration is the sitar, for which there are aesthetic and practical concerns. Esmail feels that the timbre of the sitar is better suited alongside period instruments. If the main concerns are aesthetic, a period performance is a better choice, especially if *TLBU* is performed alongside Bach's *Magnificat*. If *TLBU* is performed at A=415, the conductor must communicate with the sitar player as if they are in A=440. All parts that are listed in D for the sitar player will actually sound in C#, which can become very confusing for both the conductor and the sitar player during rehearsals.

Conducting Gesture

In my interview with Gershon, I asked him whether he altered his gesture to conduct *TLBU*. The places where he noticed the biggest difference were in the more florid passages in Movements 2 and 5, which required him to use his fingers and wrist to mimic the curves within the melodic passages. This adjustment speaks to the importance of what happens *between* the notes in Hindustani music. The best way for a conductor to learn how to embody these Hindustani passages is to watch performances of Hindustani singers and notice the way that their hand moves while they sing. Matthew Rahaim is an ethnomusicologist who studies the connection between Hindustani voice and gesture. In his book, *Musicking Bodies*, he writes, "Unlike the elaborate systems of postures and handshapes mastered by Indian dancers,

movement in Hindustani music is not explicitly taught, deliberately rehearsed, or linked to specific meanings. Melodic gesture embodies a special kind of musical knowledge, transmitted silently from body to body alongside the voice: a knowledge of melody in motion.”²⁴⁹ It is this “knowledge of melody in motion” that Gershon attempted to embody, with each gesture evoking a subtle curve of a *raga*’s personality.

In the rhythmically defined movements—particularly those in which the tabla plays a central role—Gershon felt that the conductor’s role as timekeeper is inconsequential:

I was really aware that whenever the tabla is playing that the tabla is the time. In your role as a conductor, you are simply helping to transmit the time that the tabla player is laying down visually to everybody else. But you are not controlling the time. He [Robin Sukhadia] is controlling the time. That’s the way the music is structured.²⁵⁰

If time is no longer a conductor’s primary responsibility, then they can portray other musical aspects of the work. For example, in Movement 6, the *tal* that the tabla plays (*Rupak*) has a weightless quality on each downbeat. The conductor’s responsibility might be to emulate the rhythmic groove’s play between weight and weightlessness. In addition, Gershon felt that atypical to most compositions in 7/8 in the Western tradition, Movement 6 had horizontal direction and curve that he embodied in his gesture. This attention to curve honors the Hindustani contributions within the work and also aids in the ensemble’s ability to express some of the subtleties within Esmail’s music.

²⁴⁹ Matthew Rahaim, *Musicking Bodies: Gesture and Voice in Hindustani Music* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2012), 17.

²⁵⁰ Gershon, interview, 11-19-18.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

*if we
wanted
to.
people of color
could
burn the world down.
for what
we
have experienced
are experiencing.
but
we don't.*

*—how stunningly beautiful that our sacred
respect for the earth. for life. is deeper than
our rage.*

—nayyirah waheed, *salt*.

Through her musical language, Esmail does more than break down perceived barriers between Western and Hindustani classical traditions. She challenges the binary itself—male/female, East/West, rich/poor. She removes the us/them mentality and creates musical and social spaces for people to share. She accomplishes this in a way that is unique to her; it is an outpouring of her individual experience and perspective. In spite of, or perhaps because of its specificity, her music expounds universal human values. Her outlook is eternally optimistic and quintessentially American. She achieves this end by creating music that is both intellectual and accessible. Her compositions are performed in Carnegie Hall and on Skid Row in Los Angeles. Her music's ability to transcend boundaries unfurls from her intent:

In new music it often seems that our goal is to challenge the audience, to push them a little outside of their comfort zone. That's fine, but I can't help but think that there are so many people in this world who already feel very uncomfortable. The way to create a safe space where they can engage their emotions is to do the opposite: to invite them in and make them feel comfortable. Of course that's something that you can do on a human

level, but you can also do it in the context of a piece of music. That's how I see myself as a composer: as someone who creates musical environments that will allow people to feel supported, to feel encouraged, and to feel that they can express themselves freely in the language that is most natural for them.²⁵¹

Esmail does not seek to alienate through intellectual superiority, but to include everyone through the assumption that all human beings, and thus their musical languages, are valuable.

Through her own entry into the sphere of classical music, Esmail seeks to open doors for others whose paths are more restricted. Esmail speaks about her experience as a person of color:

I'm still a brown person, so I'm still a minority, but I'm also strangely what is problematically referred to as a model minority, because of my Indian-ness. Stereotypically speaking, I'm the kind of brown person who's going to throw the curve on your test score. I'm the kid who's going to prevent your kid from getting into college. I'm smart, but not creative. I'm the person you want working for you, the efficient one, but not the one you want calling the shots. I'm the taxi driver's kid, but I'm also the doctor's kid. And yet, the stereotypes of my brown-ness don't include being dangerous. So in that way, I often get let into spaces that other people of color don't. The hope is that maybe I can serve as a conduit—that I can bring people of color who face tougher stereotypes than I do into the conversation, and that once they're in the room, once people get to know them (and I'm speaking here especially about people from the Skid Row community), once a relationship is formed, the stereotypes will start to fall away and people will be seen for who they are. I don't know if this is just blind idealism on my part. But that's my hope.²⁵²

Esmail's utilization of music as soft power is reminiscent of Born and Hesmondhalgh's definition of music as a force that both reflects upon and impacts cultural context: "It is precisely music's extraordinary powers of imaginary evocation of identity and of cross-cultural and intersubjective empathy that render it as a primary means of both marking and transforming individual and collective identities."²⁵³ This statement eloquently depicts Esmail's primary musical intent, and honors the soft power she wields as an Indian-American composer to both

²⁵¹ Reena Esmail, interview by Danika Paskvan, "A Musical Microcosm," *The Juilliard Journal*, March 2017, accessed October 19, 2018, <http://journal.juilliard.edu/journal/109501/musical-microcosm>.

²⁵² Esmail, interview with author, 11-19-18.

²⁵³ Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh. "Introduction: On Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music," in *Western Music and its others: difference, representation, and appropriation in music*, 32.

mark and transform recognition of “individual and collective identities.” To this end, Esmail’s music integrates the multi-faceted aspects of her identity so that she can use her privilege as a “model minority” to impact and change people’s misinformed social conceptions—of gender, ethnicity, and race—resulting in truer representation.

Esmail first became involved in Street Symphony when a string quartet, led by Street Symphony founder Vijay Gupta, performed her music for 200 incarcerated women at the Twin Towers Correctional Facility. Gupta reflected that this was the first time Street Symphony had performed a classical work by a living composer in their concert series. Esmail attended the performance and demonstrated the *ragas* in her String Quartet so that the women could better connect with her music. Gupta remembers a shift of energy in the room when he introduced Esmail. He recalled, “Her presence was very powerful.”²⁵⁴

Gupta then commissioned Esmail to write a piece for Street Symphony. The result was *Take What You Need*, which Gupta describes as the anthem of the organization. Not only does it feature affirming phrases of self-care; its sing-along structure allows professional musicians, amateur musicians, and audience members to perform together. Gupta says that the call-and-response model is representative of how professional Street Symphony musicians feel about the organization—any amount that they give to the community, the community gives back much more. *Take What You Need* features interludes in which community members can express gratitude or tell a story of healing or struggle. Esmail included a vamp in these interludes so that the speaker never feels cut off. Gupta remarked, “When we represent somebody in that context and give them the agency to craft their own relationships in that space, something different

²⁵⁴ Vijay Gupta, interview with the author, phone, December 11, 2018.

emerges that is not expected by the hegemonic, mostly white male structures that define our field.”²⁵⁵

Take What You Need is symbolic of Esmail’s larger goal: to create spaces in which *all* people feel comfortable, heard, seen, understood. Gupta commented that Esmail’s presence in Urban Voices Project made a huge impact on the members. I spoke with two members of Urban Voices Project, Christina Collier and Brian Palmer. These singers also participated in Street Symphony as vocal fellows.²⁵⁶ Collier expressed her gratitude for the experience. She studied music at Cleveland State but left because she couldn’t afford it. While staying at the Union Rescue Mission in 2015, she joined the Urban Voices Project. Her experience as a vocal fellow fulfilled a “lifelong dream to sing classical music.”²⁵⁷

During Street Symphony’s annual event, The Messiah Project, Brian Palmer performed “The people that walked in darkness” from Handel’s *Messiah* with an orchestra of LA Philharmonic members. Palmer reflected on his experience:

It’s really refreshing to know that people from Street Symphony are such high caliber artists, and to know that they care enough to come down and sing with people who are disenfranchised and befriend them...it’s just something you wouldn’t think would ever happen. A lot of us that have experienced homelessness have never even seen a symphony or an orchestra, so it’s really refreshing to know that there’s no line between us. They’re not better than us, we’re not less than. We’re human, we’re people, and I love how music brings us together, as human beings.²⁵⁸

Both Collier and Palmer called Esmail an honorary member of Urban Voices Project.

Through Street Symphony, Esmail also mentored a composition fellow. Ben Shirley was a resident of The Midnight Mission (a rehabilitation facility) for 26 months. During this time he

²⁵⁵ Gupta interview, 12-11-18.

²⁵⁶ Collier and Palmer studied voice with a mentor (a professional singer from the LA Master Chorale) and performed solos during concerts.

²⁵⁷ Christina Collier, interview with the author, phone, December 5, 2018.

²⁵⁸ Brian Palmer, interview with the author, phone, December 5, 2018.

met Vijay Gupta and joined Street Symphony as a composition fellow in 2017. While he was enrolled as a composition student at the San Francisco Conservatory, he left his junior year to pursue the composition fellow program with Street Symphony because he felt that the support that he gained was far greater. Reflecting on his experience in conservatory, Shirley said, “They never want to hear, ‘I feel it.’” In his work with Esmail, he learned that there is no right and wrong, just ideas to be explored.²⁵⁹ When I asked Shirley what he felt Esmail’s music was trying to say, he gave an honest response:

There’s more that can be done in the classical world than old white dudes (What’s Frank Zappa say? All the good music has been written by dudes in wigs and stuff.) for a white dude audience. There’s more to be done than that and it’s time to hopefully put a foot in someone’s ass and shake it around a bit. It can be all-inclusive and let’s fucking rock.²⁶⁰

I asked each person I interviewed about Esmail’s legacy. Here are some of the responses:

She is willing to go for the connection and not worry about the intellectual prestige. She really believes that music means connection; it’s not a way to impress us with how quirky she can be. To me, that seems like a feminine characteristic. – Amy Fogerson²⁶¹

Hopefully more and more composers...are given permission to channel their own cultural experiences but also their own emotional response to our times. There are a lot of composers who you could say do that, but for me, what sets Reena apart is to have those aspects but also that combination of head and heart, mind and body, that you have both going so that there’s that clear emotional response and thematic point to what she wants to express. But it’s also wedded to some really strong compositional technique. It’s beautifully crafted material. – Grant Gershon²⁶²

Her music is global, so it’s beyond any single tradition. It’s not Western and it’s not Indian. It’s the crossover space that she intends to create and the dialogue that she intends to initiate between these two traditions. That’s where I think she is taking us. And music being a global language, then any one person will understand it. – Sails Oak²⁶³

²⁵⁹ Benjamin Shirley, interview with the author, Los Angeles, November 20, 2018.

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Amy Fogerson, interview with the author, Los Angeles, November 14, 2018.

²⁶² Grant Gershon, interview with the author, Los Angeles, November 19, 2018.

²⁶³ Sails Oak, interview with the author, Los Angeles, November 18, 2018.

Reena's music already plays and will continue to play a critical role in 21st century music because she redefines what it means to be a composer. She redefines how composition cannot happen in a vacuum based on old models of what were frankly commodification of composers... That model doesn't work anymore, because Reena has understood that the composer's role is actually to open conversations and to create by being present to those conversations. To that end, those conversations may happen between cultures, between socioeconomic strata, and between places where elements of structural violence emerge. – Vijay Gupta²⁶⁴

Music theorist Somanghu Mukherji gave a more pragmatic response. He remarked that it is impossible to determine what impact Esmail's music has, as her success is wedded to cultural values: "Who knows where the points of cultural synthesis will be facilitated because of broader sociopolitical and economic factors that underlie all this?"²⁶⁵ Right now, Esmail's work is only relevant to those whose cultural identities intersect with her work:

It's a paradigm, at least for the time being that will be restricted to the people who genuinely care about non-Western and Indian music in particular. Whether it will become a part of broader discussion of music and music scholarship in contemporary Western circles, that's yet to be seen.²⁶⁶

Mukherji is quick to acknowledge that Esmail's compositions certainly mean something to the Indian-American community. Millennial composers Nina Shekhar and Akshaya Tucker have certainly found inspiration in Esmail's music. These women represent the next generation.

There are other identities present within Esmail's music that, if I had more time, I would explore further. One of these aspects is the musical theater influence within her compositions, and how this may connect with queer studies and additional feminist perspectives.²⁶⁷ I also wish

²⁶⁴ Vijay Gupta, interview, 12/11/18.

²⁶⁵ Somangshu Mukherji, interview with the author, phone, December 5, 2018.

²⁶⁶ Ibid.

²⁶⁷ See Nadine Hubbs, *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004); Stacy Wolf, *A Problem Like Maria: Gender and Sexuality in the American Musical* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002); Stacy Wolf, *Changed for Good: A Feminist History of the Broadway Musical* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

to interview people within “contemporary Western circles” that approach Esmail’s music from a different lived experience. For example, Esmail told me about a musicologist who posted on the AMS website after hearing the premiere of *This Love Between Us*. He was a Trump supporter, and yet he was still able to connect with and appreciate her oratorio at its premiere in March 2017.²⁶⁸ Given the divisive display of political agendas in our contemporary American culture, and the fact that Esmail wrote *This Love* in part to protest the current presidency, what did he find appealing about the work? His voice would be meaningful within this conversation.

Clearly, my advocacy for Esmail’s music and its aims is deeply personal. As a conductor, I know what it is like to be a woman within a male-dominated profession. I relate to much of Esmail’s story as she studied in posh schools that both granted her access to success but did not always give her permission to succeed on her own terms. I may not know what it is like to be a woman of color, but I can listen to Esmail’s story and I can share her voice with a wider academic community. Like Esmail, I wish to use my privilege to champion the voices of others. I watch Esmail highlight her differences and use them to effect musical and social change. Perhaps I can do the same. Perhaps music scholarship was always deeply personal, but we are just coming to a point where we can claim it.

Esmail’s appeal and influence is inextricably linked to her gender and cultural identities. It is *because* she is a woman that knows what it feels like to be a second-class citizen. It is *because* she is an Indian-American that she knows what it feels like to be an outsider. And yet, it is also *because* of her woman-ness that she seeks to elevate the words, works, and innate value of women. And it is *because* of her Indian-ness that she is able to identify with parts of the population that historically have been marginalized and/or forgotten. It is *because* of the other

²⁶⁸ Reena Esmail, interview with Robin Sukhadia and Rajib Karmakar, Los Angeles, November 16, 2018.

parts of her identity that she has sought a musical language that removes the stigma of the Other entirely, disposing of this myth and revealing the connectedness between all living beings. She does not dismiss the differences between people. She honors them. She asks us to remain rooted in our individuality and unique cultural identity, and yet to reach out to another. “The lamps may be different, but the Light is the same.” Esmail has done something extraordinary. She has created a musical utopia, a space in which her woman-ness and Indian-American-ness are honored, celebrated, revered. She has flipped the paradigm and put the voice of the Other at the center.

APPENDIX

TLBU SITAR AND TABLA “CHEAT SHEETS” WITH ROBIN SUKHADIA’S NOTES

THIS LOVE BETWEEN US

APRIL 2018
 TABLA PERFORMANCE NOTES
 PREPARED BY ROBIN SUKHADIA

Movement 1 (Buddhist) All beings tremble before violence; See your self in others, what harm can you do? For your brother and your sister are like you, they too long to be happy; Never harm them.

Tabla play 2X 1) ATI
 2) VILAMBIT

SITAR (S=D)	TABLA (D)
Wait (about 2 minutes)	Wait (there are 3 waves; start on 4th "All Love Life (sum is "Life")
P S S N S M P S D N P P R D N P and P M G R S	C: <u>Ati</u> Vilambit Teentaal (all love <u>LIFE</u>) 3 avartans (listen for X 2 0 3, clear)
OUT	OUT After "Shall never find happiness", and right before "For your brother..."
Wait (about 2 minutes)	Wait (until "They too long to be happy" and then swell to Never Harm) <u>sum</u>
S-S-S- <u>NS</u> -RS- <u>NS</u> -RS- <u>NS</u> -RS- <u>NS</u> - <u>RMGRS</u> (Repeat 4x)	G: Drut Teentaal (14 cycles + sum) starts on "Harm" sum <u>A</u>
	OUT - "...find happiness TOO (sum)"

I
 II

Movement 2 (Sikh) - NO TABLA - "How Can We Call Someone Evil When All are the Creation of One"

SITAR (S = P (G#)) NO CHIKARI	TABLA (NO TABLA)
oboe plays three phrases, sitar follows after each phrase	☺
WAIT (about 1 minute)	
Improvise in Bhairav S = <u>G</u>	
CUE OUT on "Evil"	
WAIT (about 1 minute)	
oboe plays three phrases, sitar follows after each phrase	

Movement 3 (Christian) "Owe no man anything but to love one another" 5 times

SITAR	TABLA (D)
GPGPNPNDN D...	Dadra - Enter on Measure 5, and follow form, with ti-hai. BREAK for 2 measure at "Owe No Man Anything" two times and on third, DO NOT play for 22 measures
	D: Come back on "fulfilled the LAW (sum)" for just 12 measures; 3 sections
	OUT at E: "But to Love (sum) one Another" for 18 measures
	F: Dadra come back on "fulfilled the LAW (sum)" for 50 measures) - LONG -
	OUT: In this word (begin fading out)
	J Reverse Rupak: "Thou shalt love thy neighbor" for 20 measures, with ti hai with 24 measures break
	Enter back at N in dadra at "of the law" THRU O onwards (no breaks!) to end
	P Final 12 measures "Armour of LIGHT (sum); watch form and t- hai" 3 PART → and when KEEP GOING

I
(22) out
II
(18) out
III
fade
IV
(24) out
V
X3

then to T-hai: at PUT

N

Movement 4 (Zoroastrian) – All humankind would know its own lineage; Never would a brother be abandoned in love by his brother nor sister

SITAR (S = <u>N</u> (C))	TABLA (C)
Wait (about 2 minutes)	Vilambit Jhaptaal C
	get beat from David. Start on Sam, and give Reena a clear Khali.
	Play throughout. [no triplets, and go steady, sparse until the end]
Enter after sthaayi (reena will cue)	
Bhimpalas (S = <u>N</u>) - improvise melody.	
CUE OUT (after Hamag Mārdom tihai)	CUE OUT (after Hamag Mardom tihai)

Movement 5 (Hindu) - This Love Between Us Cannot be Annihilated

VILAMBIT
5 cycles

SITAR (S = C#)	TABLA (B)
Improvise in Yaman (30 seconds)	WAIT (about 2 minutes)
OUT (for a few seconds)	
Follow "mohi" and "tohi"	
one more phrase.	
CUE OUT.	
WAIT (about 4 minutes)	
	CUE IN at E: What Moves Inside Me, Moves Inside You and 1 measure: Vilambit Teentaal
	After 5 cycles, and end on beat 13 of 5th cycle; CUE OUT at "One"

[D]

[I]

SUM

Movement 6 (Jain)

5 sections

SITAR (S = C#)	TABLA (C#)
	enter after 2 avertans (Rupak)
Enter 2 avertans AFTER Tabla	(watch cues in and out)
BANDISH	- First t-hai: TKTERKIT dha ti dra
tihai	- you can do 8 + 6 - dha ge na tun - tun -
G M M' P...	- 6 + 6 + 2
OUT (2 avertans)	- 6 + 6 + 6 + 6 + 4
P	

~~SINFUL~~ short I till t-hai (1 measure) out at ^{KANAVE SINFUL}
 ACTION short II OUT at ^{SUM} ACTION (2 measures) IF the end
 IMPULSES LONG III till t-hai ^{IMPULSES} (1 measure)
 *SPEECH short IV OUT at SPEECH (2 measures)
 LONG V to END (LONG)

Movement 7 - Sufi Islam (Rumi): The lamps may be different, but the light is the same; Om Shanti Shanti – Concentrate on the Light

2 sections → 1. Vilambit
2. Ati

SITAR (S = C#)	TABLA (C#) D
WAIT (about 3 minutes)	WAIT (about 3 minutes); The lamps may be different, but the light is the same; Then comes all religions
Improvisation in Vachaspati	<u>Vilambit</u> Teentaal – enter on “singing one SONG (sum)” – 6 full cycles
CUE OUT	CUE OUT – on Re LI (sum) gions for 14 measures (short)
CUE IN: PSS SNSM...	CUE IN: Ati Vilambit Teentaal at be-YOND (sum) PLAY STARK, with minimal ornaments in subdivision, and more at the end of the beat # 5 CYCLES?
CUE OUT Last short phrase (Kafi?)	CUE OUT – on “Om SHANTI (sum)”

I

II

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