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# Sounds of Power: An Overview of Musical Instruments and Gender

Veronica Doubleday

*This article introduces the four case studies in the volume by outlining salient issues relating to musical instruments and gender. The basis of argument is that gendered meanings are constructed within relationships between humans and musical instruments. The article first examines various ways in which gendered meanings are invested in instruments. Consideration is then given to the general question of male dominance over instrumental musicianship, highlighting issues such as male exclusivity, gendered divisions of labour, gendered space, and male control over technology. Some typical female relationships with instruments are outlined, whereby certain instruments are deemed to be suitable or acceptable for women. Finally, the construction of gender by instrumentalists is related to issues of sexuality, gender role-reversals, and enactments that transcend gender.*

*Keywords: Musical Instruments; Gendered Meaning; Gendered Identities; Relationships; Male Dominance; Male-Female Pairing; Exclusivity; Sexuality; Androgyny*

Musical instruments are significant cultural artefacts invested with a wide range of meanings and powers. Through their presence and through the sounds they produce, they have a special ability to transform consciousness. To possess or play a musical instrument is to wield power—hence the title of this themed issue, ‘Sounds of Power’. Around the world instrumental sounds are indispensable to many religious and secular rituals, and in some situations instruments achieve iconic status.

Ellen Koskoff points out that ‘although all performance may be regarded as a locus of power, performance on musical instruments is often bound up with cultural

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Veronica Doubleday is a visiting lecturer in the School of Historical and Critical Studies at the University of Brighton. Following her fieldwork in Afghanistan during the 1970s, she published a narrative ethnography on Afghan women, *Three Women of Herat* (1988), with a particular focus on performance and expressive culture. Her analytical work on gender and musical instruments dates from 1999, with an article on Middle Eastern frame drums that explores broader theoretical issues. Her current research interests are Afghan music, musical instruments and meaning, women’s music, and issues of gendered representation. E-mail: vdoubleday@ukonline.co.uk



is its owner or player—but many others could be implicated: a sculptor who is inspired by its form, say, or an Afghan Taliban official who intends to destroy it. Both the instrument and human may be gendered. Furthermore, other parameters (e.g. age, class, social status, ethnicity, etc.) may intersect with gender in important ways. See, for example, Svanibor Pettan's comments on the intersection of gender with ethnicity, religion, and urban–rural and regional–local divides in Kosovo (2003, 288).

When any class of people wishes to maintain control over a particular musical instrument, an exclusive instrument-human relationship is developed, forbidding outsiders access. On a general level, this pattern has been common among male professional instrumentalists, as discussed in more detail below. Some professional monopolies are hereditary, and even caste-related, with specialised knowledge being handed down from father or uncle to son or nephew. Ideally at least, these musicians work within closed systems in which masculine power and prestige can be maintained and guarded (see, for instance, Baily 1988; Charry 2000; Euba 1990; and Neuman 1980). The parameters of professionalism, heredity and class or caste typically intersect with gender.

Exclusivity depends upon a relationship in which contact is ideally obstructed and forbidden. I will call this a 'negative instrument–human relationship'; see Figure 2. In many different parts of the world there are numerous instruments that girls and women are expected not to touch or play, and female experience of these 'negative relationships' is a logical outcome of instrumental monopolies. When exclusivity is firmly established, it is common for women and other 'outsiders' to accept the negative relationship to an instrument as almost 'natural'.

When musical instruments are heavily invested with power, the exclusive relationship may take on an almost 'fetishistic' intensity. The term 'fetish' was originally applied to 'magic figures' in Central Africa (see Mack 1995), and by 'fetishistic' I wish to convey the idea of a strong attachment to a magically charged object.<sup>3</sup> In some men's cults musical instruments are treated in this way, being carefully tended and surrounded by protective taboos. The bullroarers and paired flutes of the secret cults of manhood of Papua New Guinea present a good example. Initiated men enforce strong taboos around them, believing that they must be insulated from the power and danger of women's bodies and menstrual blood (Thomas 1995, 54).<sup>4</sup> Through their ritual enactments, cult members create a style of hegemonic masculinity, setting a dominant standard against which other masculinities are defined, so uninitiated men are also rigorously excluded.<sup>5</sup>

Beyond these 'basic', 'exclusive', 'negative' and even 'fetishistic' human–instrument relationships, I will explore some other relationships in the course of this article: those that include spirits, and those that are socially 'suitable', 'acceptable' or



**Figure 2** The negative human–instrument relationship.

'strained'. I will also examine the implications of 'same-gender' and 'cross-gender' relationships between player and instrument. Another line of enquiry concerns how instruments are used in the construction of human gendered identities; this includes variations in sexual orientation, gender role-reversal, and 'androgynous' phenomena. But, before that, I need to highlight some important features of gendered meaning in instruments themselves.

### Gendered Meaning in Instruments

Gendered meanings may be applied to any artefact, and therefore to any musical instrument.<sup>6</sup> Dawe points out that musical instruments 'are richly symbolic of our potential to externalise physically and socially our needs, aspirations, allegiances and creative energies' (2005, 59). Some instruments are more acutely and obviously gendered than others, and in some cases gendered meanings are not immediately obvious, being covert and esoteric. For instance, the image of a human hand painted on a Moroccan frame drum is a religious symbol, the 'hand of Fatima', daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, imprinting the instrument with female associations not evident to a cultural outsider; see Figure 3a.

Gender is a relational phenomenon, so meanings are constantly subject to change, even if they may appear as stable and fixed. In his analysis of metaphorical meaning in material objects, Christopher Tilley stresses that it is the activity between 'producers and their products' that creates meanings—which supports my general focus on instrument–human relationships. Tilley also states that the activity between producers and products may serve to gender the persons and artefacts (2002, 27). If

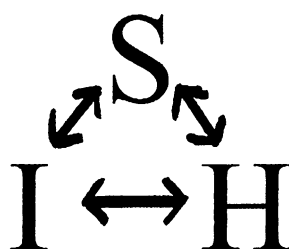


**Figure 3** Gendered meanings inscribed on drum-skins; (a): The 'hand of Fatima', painted in henna on *bendir* frame drum, after a photograph by Jean Jenkins, Middle Atlas, Morocco; (b): Typical four-fold symbolism on a Mapuche *kultrún* kettledrum, as reproduced by Ake Hultkranz (drawings by V. Doubleday).

we apply Tilley's model to musical instruments, we may ask who 'the producers' are. Instrumental performers activate instruments and bring their sounds to life, but many other people are involved in creating meaning in instruments: instrument makers, ritualists, visual artists, people in the music industry, journalists, advertisers, novelists and poets, politicians, religious leaders, moralists and campaigners.

In many traditions spiritual beings are also significant agents in the construction of meaning. Figure 4 shows a simple triangular relationship between a spiritual being, instrumentalist and instrument; all three entities may be gendered. Theoretically, within this schematic triangle various relationships may exist, each with potential to express gendered meaning.

To take an example, Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of wisdom, learning and the arts, has the Karnatic *vina* lute as her attribute and symbol. The image of this goddess as an instrumentalist is explicitly mentioned in religious texts and depicted in the visual arts (e.g. see Chaturvedi 1996; Ghosh 1984). In contemporary Hindu iconography Saraswati is instantly recognisable because she holds and plays her *sarasvati vina* (so named to distinguish it from other *vina* types; see Dick, Geekie, and Widdess 1984); see Figure 5. This costly and prestigious instrument is pre-eminent in Karnatic classical instrumental music, requires many years of training, and symbolises 'acoustic knowledge at the highest level' (Flora 2000, 325). Saraswati's image supports the *vina* as a suitable instrument for girls and women, lending them the aura of her particular feminine spiritual identity. In South India, wealthy families, especially those of the Brahmin priestly caste, promote the *vina* as a graceful adornment for girls to study (Lord 2003, 2). Female associations also apply to the instrument's physical form, through a creation legend that Lord Shiva modelled it on the body of his wife, the goddess Parvati. The *vina*'s long neck represents her slender figure, its two gourd resonators imitate her breasts, and the metal frets resemble her bracelets (Buchner 1971, 54).<sup>7</sup>



I = instrument  
 H = human  
 S = spiritual being

**Figure 4** Triangular relationship between a spiritual being, human instrumentalist and instrument (each of which may be gendered).



**Figure 5** Saraswati, the Hindu goddess of wisdom, learning and the arts, depicted in a popular printed poster. Following her standard iconography, two of her four hands hold and play the Karnatic *veena*, while the other two respectively hold prayer beads and palm leaf manuscript.

Other kinds of relationship come into play when instruments are used in the rituals of a deity or spirit. Lois Wilcken documents how during Haitian *vodou* ceremonies instrumentalists call on Outo, the god of drumming and guardian of the sacred ceremonial drums (1992, 45). He may be described as a ‘tutelary deity’, protecting his ritual instruments. Tutelary deities are usually addressed and depicted as instrumentalists themselves; a classic example from Ancient Greece is the lyre-playing god Apollo.<sup>8</sup>

The linked presence of spiritual beings and empowered musical instruments is integral to many varieties of shamanism (e.g. see Bacigalupo 2007; Emsheimer 1988; Li 1992; Oppitz 1990) and in traditions of spirit mediumship or ‘spirit possession’

(e.g. see Berliner 1978; Hagedorn 2001; Jankowsky 2006; Rouget 1985). In Tunisian *stambeli* possession ceremonies, the ‘voice’ of the three-stringed plucked lute *gumbri* is an active agent between human and spirit worlds; its ‘words’ speak directly to the spirits (Jankowsky 2006, 389, 391). Generally, in these traditions, it is common for many spiritual beings to be involved—not just one—and their gender status is usually known. Also, more than one instrument may be used. In *stambeli*, the *gumbri* is accompanied by loud *shqashiq* clappers; these have masculine associations through legendary links with the male saint Bilal, Islam’s first muezzin (ibid., 390). Figure 4’s simple triangular configuration is intended as a theoretical starting point for relational maps that could be considerably more complex.

Clearly, the agency of spiritual beings may be quite complicated. In his work on Australian Aboriginal ritual in Northeast Arnhem Land, P. G. Toner describes how instrumentalists may employ different techniques to access spiritual power. Male ritualists use the didjeridu (*yidaki*) to evoke the presence of male ancestral beings simultaneously in two ways: through song texts that refer to the instrument, and through the *yidaki*’s sounds which act as auditory symbols of the ancestral beings. Meanings are therefore constructed on two levels, which Toner calls textual metaphor and enacted metaphor (2005, 19).

On another symbolic level, issues of ethnicity and nationalism may affect meanings of an instrument, and here again the didjeridu is relevant. From approximately the mid-1980s this instrument became ‘the primary aural signifier’ of Aboriginality, both in Australian public culture and New Age discourse (Neuenfeldt, personal communication 2001). Proponents of these two camps have had conflicting ideas about gender, fuelling considerable debate. Recently Aboriginal activists have asserted that only male Indigenous people have the right to play this instrument, but in international New Age circles gender codes are freer (see Neuenfeldt 1997). When instruments attain iconic status, their significance often becomes highly charged.

In general, the commodification of any musical instrument is likely to affect its meaning, especially on an international scale, when an instrument enters totally new contexts (see Neuenfeldt 1998 and Polak 2006). This may have implications relating to gender. With regard to the didjeridu, Fiona Magowan notes that it is ‘subject to ambiguities of meaning that arise in varying modes of transaction and exchange within Indigenous communities and between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous purchasers’ (2005, 89).

Social practice and, especially, social context are important indicators of gender in an instrument. In her essay on the Indian bowed lute *sarangi*, Regula Qureshi highlights an instrument’s physical body and sound—its ‘embodied acoustic identity’—as key factors in articulating cultural meaning (1997, 4). She argues that since the *sarangi* was used to accompany the singing of courtesans, its sound has certain feminine associations. Thus, the very sound of an instrument may acquire gendered meaning.

Through social practices, a cluster of clear associations with either masculinity or femininity may emerge: for instance, see Dawe 1996 on masculinity and the Cretan

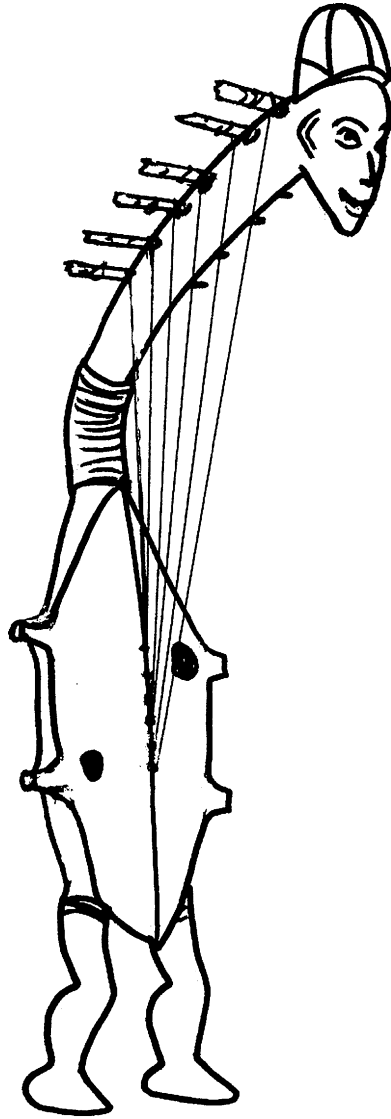


*lyra*, or, for feminine associations, Cohen's article on Iberian frame drums in this volume. In another culture area, Margaret Kartomi's work on differently sized *rapa'i* drums in Aceh, Indonesia, illustrates consistently virile associations with frame drums. These drums are always played by men and, as mystically potent objects, may be bequeathed from father to son. Performers are members of devotional brotherhoods, or male religious or secular ensembles, and the drumming accompanies texts praising the Prophet Muhammad, a male prophet. Historically, men used the drums to prepare themselves spiritually for battle, and nowadays they play them in all-male contests that emphasise acrobatic display. The *rapa'i Pasè*, a giant drum with a diameter of a metre or more, requires great strength and energy in the player, and it is said that only a man who can kill a buffalo with one sharp blow is capable of playing it (Kartomi 2004, 40, 48, 58, 70–71, 74).

Sexual symbolism in musical instruments is another powerful form of gendering. In Europe instruments have been treated as sexual symbols in folklore and traditional songs. This occurs in some genres of traditional song in Britain (Gammon 2008, chapter 2), and in Russian folklore and erotic folk texts (Velichkina, personal communication 2004). In art, European painters such as Titian exploited the phallic associations of wind instruments in depicting Bacchanalian scenes, and the art historian Emanuel Winternitz has stated that the 'orgiastic connotations' of wind instruments are firmly embedded in the 'undercurrents' of European culture (1967, 153).

Instrument makers may intentionally incorporate gendered meanings into their creations. Most obviously they do this visually, through anthropomorphism or zoomorphism, and through the use of symbolic designs, figurative depictions, or inscriptions on the surface of an instrument. Anthropomorphic instruments usually represent powerful spiritualised beings such as deities, saints, deified rulers and ancestors (see Laurenty 1989), whereas zoomorphism typically represents totemic animals or mythical 'monsters' and demons. Their gender is explicit when sexual characteristics such as breasts or genitals appear. In anthropomorphic instruments cultural features such as ornament or dress indicate gender, but insider knowledge may be necessary to decode their meaning. Figure 6 depicts an anthropomorphic harp from northeastern Zaire identified as 'probably male' because of its rounded cap and coiffure (Brinard 1989, 86).

Makers may introduce gendered characteristics into an instrument through specific choices of material, taking the wood or skin from a male or female tree or animal. In Tibesti, Chad, the double-headed *kwelli* drum is usually made from the wood of a male acacia (Brandily 1990, 152). Restricted to use by male aristocrats, this drum was previously used in warlike expeditions, so perhaps a male tree was considered to boost warlike energies. In eastern Iran, makers of the long-necked *dutar* lute prefer the wood of a female mulberry tree to that of a male; it is thought to retain less moisture and therefore sound better (Youssefzadeh 2002, 81–2). Reasons for choices of gendered material obviously vary, and are open to interpretation. This phenomenon is not unique to instrument making: anthropologists of material



**Figure 6** Anthropomorphic harp (*kundi*) from northeastern Zaire (Mangbetu people) (wood, 87cm), reproduced from Brincard 1989 (drawing by V. Doubleday).

culture have produced detailed evidence on the cultural gendering of natural substances and objects, and on artefacts made from gendered materials (see Gregor and Tuzin 2001; Mackenzie 1991).

Some instruments carry gendered personal names. For instance, the most famous and heaviest English bells have masculine names: London's Great Paul of St Paul's Cathedral, Big Ben of Westminster, and Oxford's Great Tom of Christchurch College (Camp 1997, 45). As prestigious time-keepers, their masculine identity supports

concepts of male authority and order. Gendered personal names can be female too: a well known example is the U.S. blues musician B.B. King's guitar, Lucille.

Another issue is the nomenclature of an instrument's component 'body parts': 'head', 'neck', 'belly', etc. This may include sexual parts that indicate a female or male identity. In Yemen, the point where the strings of *qanbus* lute are attached at the base of the instrument is called the 'little penis' (*zubbayba*), indicating a male identity for the instrument (Lambert 2001). Jean Lambert notes that this conforms to a legend about the origin of the Arab lute as derived from the body of a dead boy (*ibid.*; also see Poché 1984).

Myths of origin and legends help us to unlock gendered metaphorical meaning, as demonstrated in Richard Nunns and Alan Thomas's work on a Maori aerophone, the *putorino* (2005). Legend explains its unusual shape, which imitates the form of a commonly seen moth cocoon. In legend the goddess Raukatauri inhabits this cocoon-shaped instrument, following the natural behaviour of the adult female moth who continues to live in the cocoon to lay eggs there (Nunns and Thomas 2005, 72–3).<sup>9</sup> The legend identifies a significant female association with the instrument, as well as its high status through links with a goddess.

So far I have mainly discussed instruments with fairly clear masculine or feminine associations, but male–female paired symbolism is another important phenomenon. This involves the interplay between male and female forces, and it is often linked to local spiritual or philosophical belief systems. It occurs in various forms. Most commonly, two similar instruments are respectively designated as male and female, always being played together, as with the Papua New Guinea ritual flutes discussed earlier. Men play these with a hocketing technique, and the performance is said to resemble sexual intercourse (Lutkehaus 1998, 245–6). As in this case, sexual metaphor is sometimes a feature of male–female paired traditions, with the 'couple' as sexual partners—sometimes explicitly a husband and wife. Alternatively, the cross-generational model of mother and (male or ungendered) child appears in various cultures (e.g. West Java; see van Zanten in this volume).

Male–female pairing is also applied to component parts of one instrument (e.g. two strings, or two sides of a drum). Naming (as male and female) is the most common method for assigning paired gender. Another phenomenon is the combined use of male and female materials. The Tibetan *damaru* drum, for instance, was ideally made from the human skulls of a man and a woman (Helffer 1984).<sup>10</sup>

Male–female pairing also occurs when two instruments enjoy a gendered complementary relationship. Two varieties of Acehnese shawm demonstrate this. Made from different materials, they have distinct gendered symbolism and sounds. The *seurunè kalèè* is mainly made from matured hardwood, and has a 'masculine' sound symbolising 'a heroic male voice and a dynamic spirit' (Kartomi 2005, 42–3), whereas the *buloh meurindu* is made of bamboo with a buffalo horn resonator. This instrument is said physically to resemble a standing heroine; its feminine tone symbolises a woman's voice and expresses female heroism and longing (*ibid.*, 44). Another example, from Uzbekistan, is the combination of two long-necked lutes, the

*tanbur* and *dutar*. Musicians and poets see their musical roles as respectively masculine and feminine, with the *tanbur* leading and *dutar* following (Sultanova 2003).<sup>11</sup>

Doubled pairing creates four-fold gendered symbolism. In her work with Mapuche shamans in Chile, Ana Mariella Bacigalupo found that ‘pairs and groups of four of objects considered to be male and female’ were placed inside their *kultrún* kettledrum (2007, 51–2). The drum’s symbolism embraces the four principles of the Mapuche deity Ngüenechen, a family consisting of Old Man and Old Woman and their son and daughter, Young Man and Young Woman. By extension, the drum has its skin painted with symbols denoting the ‘four directions, four lines of ancestors, the sun, moon, spirals, planets, and other forces of nature’ in a four-fold microcosm (Grebe 1973; Robertson 1998, 234); see Figure 3b. Bacigalupo also states that the Mapuche often conceive of the *kultrún* as a womb (ibid., 52, 47). Thus, the drum may simultaneously embody a female symbol par excellence—the womb—and the deified polarities of gender and age.

Family-based gendered symbolism occurs in various parts of the world (Kartomi 1990, 154), typically comprising large, middle-sized and small versions of similar instruments. In European instrument families the implied symbolism has the largest instrument as father, next largest as mother, and smallest as children. This concept has a long history: in his treatise *Syntagma Musicum* Michael Praetorius wrote in 1619 that ‘everyone knows about the violin family’ (quoted in Boyden 1984, 767). *The New Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments* illustrates ‘the violin family’ with instruments made by Antonio Stradivari: a cello, a viola, and two violins (ibid., 765).

Instrument families are common in West Africa. The largest and principal instrument is normally the mother, with her children; the father may be absent. In the Yoruba *bàtá* drums the biggest is *iyá ilù*, ‘mother’; next comes *omele*, ‘the child that follows’; and the smallest is *kúdí*, ‘little one’. These terms reflect two ideas: the concept of the drums as a family group with a single female progenitor, and the musical roles of the rhythmic drum parts as they fit together.<sup>12</sup> Amanda Vincent’s research on these terms in Nigeria demonstrates some variability in interpretation, but consistent designation of the largest drum as female (2006, 174–6). She notes that the mother is ultimately ‘the authority within the home, and we see an analogous structure within the *bàtá* family’ (ibid., 175). Working on the taxonomy of instruments of the Igbo of Mbaise, Nigeria, Chinyere Nwachukwu found that in ‘nearly all ensembles of instruments’ the largest was usually called the mother (1981, 66).

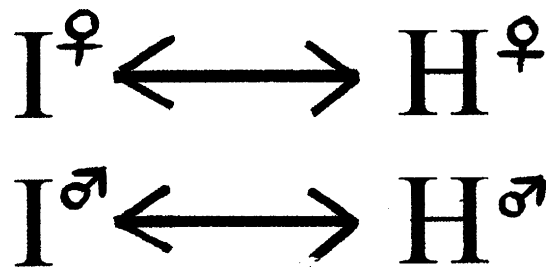
It is important to realise that gendered meanings may operate simultaneously on different levels, as already noted with the Mapuche *kultrún*. The Maori *pūtōrino* also illustrates this point: it is a feminine entity, identified with a goddess, and yet it combines two voices. The ‘male trumpeting voice’ was an urgent call for people to gather, whereas its ‘flute’ sound, or ‘female lamenting voice’, was used when a tragedy was announced (Nunns and Thomas 2005, 71; also see Flintoff 2005, 60–65, 74–7).

The saxophone is another instrument with complex levels of gendered meaning, and Stephen Cottrell has identified several pertinent issues. One concerns the

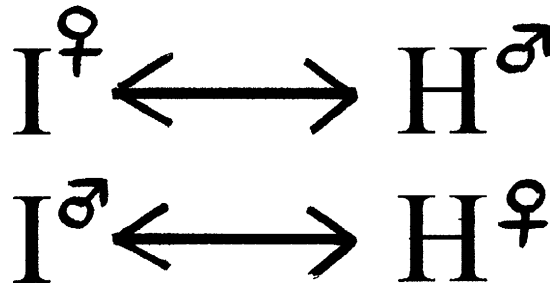
instrument's various physical forms, which may be interpreted as masculine (especially the phallic-looking soprano saxophone) or feminine (especially in the S-shaped models). Another issue relates to the saxophone's hybrid status straddling the categories of woodwind and brass, which Adorno called '*zwischen-geschlechtlicher*', literally 'between genders' (as discussed in Bell 2004 and Jay 1973). In this formulation, Adorno saw woodwind as acceptable for female performers, whereas brass was closely identified with men. With regard to performance practice, the saxophone has historically been played by both women and men. Cottrell notes its strong sonic and iconographic connections with sexuality, concluding that it can be seen 'both as a symbol of predatory phallic behaviour, and female sexual allure' (Cottrell 2006). Another point is that its range of sizes resonates with 'family' gendering, and their names imitate the choral part designations of soprano, alto, tenor, bass and baritone.

Finally, let us return to the original notion of a 'basic' relationship between instrument and player (Figure 1). How does the gendering of an instrument affect performers? It is common for an instrument to be gendered by association with its performers. In an all-male performance tradition, an instrument may take on a masculine ethos, and the same argument applies to female performance traditions. Furthermore, if an instrument has its own gendered identity—by virtue of links with gendered spirits, say—this may support the claim of people of that gender to play it. Circular arguments may be used, along the lines of: 'This instrument is played by men, it is therefore masculine, and therefore men have the right to play it, and to exclude women from access'. Whatever the underlying construction of meaning, it is common for a performer to play a 'same-gendered' instrument; Figure 7 illustrates these 'same-gender' relationships.

Alternatively, players may establish a cross-gender, quasi-'heterosexual' relationship with their instrument, as with B.B. King and his guitar Lucille. This is the principal theme of van Zanten's article in this volume. Figure 8 depicts these cross-gender relationships. Significantly, cross-gender relationships normally exist between male players and female instruments (Figure 8a), but not vice versa (8b). In terms of



**Figure 7** Same-gender relationships between player and instrument: above (a): female-identified instrument with female player; below (b): male-identified instrument with male player.



**Figure 8** Cross-gender relationships between player and instrument: above (a): female-identified instrument with male player; below (b): male-identified instrument with female player.

traditions and conventions, it is uncommon for a woman to play an instrument that has a clearly established masculine identity.

There could be various explanations for this cross-cultural disparity. In general, it is most likely a product of male dominance over instruments, as discussed below. Another point is that heterosexual relationships, especially marriages, carry different expectations for women and men. In patriarchal societies (i.e. most societies) men are often conditioned into patterns of ownership and control over their wives.<sup>13</sup> In constructing a 'marriage relationship' with their instrument, male musicians might incorporate culturally prevalent concepts of male dominance. Conversely, for women, the wifely role is frequently bound up with conventional notions of submission and subordination. In line with this, women would be unlikely to create such a relationship, giving an instrument power over themselves.

The male tendency to create cross-gender instrument–human relationships could also be linked to masculine objectification of women as sex objects. This seems to be borne out by some available ethnography, e.g. a Spanish guitar-maker's statements about the types of wood he uses, affectionately likening them to two beautiful sisters, one blonde, one brunette 'although I have to confess that I have a soft spot for the brunette, and by this I do not mean to scorn the blonde' (Ramirez III 1993, 17, quoted in Dawe and Dawe 2001, 76).

### Male Dominance over Instrumental Musicianship

Gendered relationships are rarely egalitarian, and in today's world the realm of musical instruments remains clearly male-dominated. From instrument makers to commercial producers, from sound engineers to orchestral conductors, from patrons to theorists, and right across the span of instrumental performers, women are starkly in the minority. With regard to music theory, as Kartomi points out (1990, xvi), the conceptualisation and classification of instruments normally abstracts ideas and beliefs from a wider intellectual complex—and these discourses have generally been a male preserve. As for the sound mix engineer, this person assumes an important degree of creative control and is almost always male. The female mix engineer and

ethnomusicologist Boden Sandstrom notes that ‘issues of power and control are inherent in access to this technology’ (2000, 290).

Specifically focusing on instrumental performance, male dominance is still a powerful phenomenon, even if women are currently ‘breaking taboos’ and playing instruments that were previously male cultural property. The relatively relaxed situation of Europe, where ‘older gender codes’ about musical activity have partially broken down (Koskoff 2000b, 200–01), masks a strong history of institutionalised male professionalism.

Focusing solely on Europe, we know that from the Renaissance period organists became a distinct class of male professional musician, and players of other instruments formed exclusive male guilds serving permanent church and court ensembles (Schulenberg 2000, 75). Until the late nineteenth century, orchestras were strictly all-male, and women were generally constrained from entering public professional artistic arenas, since it was socially unacceptable for ‘respectable’ women both to earn money in the public workplace and to perform in public.<sup>14</sup> Negative protectionist attitudes persist, and it was not until 1997 that the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra grudgingly admitted its first female member—a harpist.<sup>15</sup> The field of commercial popular music in Europe presents a similar picture: until the advent of female punk bands in the 1970s, in rock and pop music, women were normally restricted to being vocalists.<sup>16</sup>

Another important general point is that in some contexts ritual music-making has been a male pastime, or even passion. Revisiting Bali in the 1960s, Colin McPhee saw that men and boys met four or five times a week in village clubs to play gamelan (1966, 3–19). In north rural China male ritual ensembles have maintained respected village music associations on a strictly amateur basis (Jones 2004). Numerous other examples could be cited. The possession of valuable instruments and other ritual artefacts and the acquisition of technical knowledge and social prestige were among the many benefits these amateur musicians enjoyed—quite apart from the satisfaction and pleasure derived from making music.

Social strictures about gendered divisions of space have frequently supported male instrumental musicianship, keeping women away. Some religious ideologies actually prescribed the exclusion of women from public life. In China, Confucianism was adopted as a state orthodoxy, and the policy of excluding women from all public places was rigorously enforced during the long Qing dynasty (1644–1911) (Zheng 2002, 407). In Islamic societies, the seclusion of women from public view on religious grounds similarly precluded the development of respectable public female instrumental traditions. In Iran today, female musicians are generally not allowed to perform in public, except in strictly all-women gatherings.

The desire to control female sexuality is frequently at the root of religious or political decrees about ‘the position’ of women, and this is true of a seventeenth-century Japanese government decree banning public performances by women because female troupes were said to be corrupting public morals. Oshio Satomi points out

that this prohibition 'has continued to affect gender roles in music to the present day' (2002, 764). Female instrumentalists were driven into the private domain.

On a general level, male players have been anxious to guard their territory, and the economic benefits that accrue from them. They are also normally keen to maintain gendered divisions of labour that keep women in domestic roles. Male musicianship is intimately connected with masculinity, and when men maintain musical instruments as their exclusive cultural property, they make assertions about masculine identities and roles. Miriam Roving Olsen notes that in the Arab-Islamic world wind instruments are associated with virility, and that these instruments are absent from women's groups (2002, 306).

There is also a political dimension to male public instrumental performance, and prestigious male instrumental ensembles have frequently sustained and enhanced images of male authority and leadership. To borrow Carol Robertson's insightful phrase, the public use of musical instruments may become 'a ritual enactment of male supremacy' (1989, 227). This occurs at large- or small-scale political or military displays and rallies, and in public religious ceremonies. In Ghana, the performance of the 'drum histories' of the Dagbamba people involves massed male drumming by as many as 50–100 drummers. They accompany epic recitations of violence (including stories about cruelly punished wayward wives) that support male authority on many levels (Chernoff 1997).

Some important cross-cultural phenomena arise from the male dominance over musical instruments in so many performance arenas. One effect is that male instrumental musicianship may emerge as the cultural norm, with the female instrumentalist being seen as 'unthinkable' or deviant. The very image of a woman playing an instrument may be seen as 'weird', awkward or laughable.

Another outcome is that women have often been cast into the role of vocalists or dancers. Sometimes they complement male instrumentalists in shared performances, as is common in European and African popular entertainment genres. These arrangements are sometimes seen as a gendered 'division of labour': men play instruments, and women sing and/or dance. However, this model is often misleading, since the arrangements may not strictly fit this model: male instrumentalists may also sing or dance, and female vocalists sometimes play a supporting instrument.

Another type of arrangement also sometimes described as a 'division of labour' entails a cultural division of instruments between male and female players. The phenomenon has been noted in many parts of the world. Writing on jazz history in the United States, Jane Hassinger states: 'Commonly, brass, reeds, and percussion instruments are located in the male domain, while strings and flute are supposedly female in essence' (1989, 197). In practice such divisions are often asymmetrical, favouring male instrumental musicianship over female. Summarising the situation in Afghanistan of the 1970s, Mark Slobin noted 'a clear distinction of musical roles by sex'. He observed that women did not normally play or even handle musical instruments other than the frame drum and jew's harp. 'Men, on the other hand, master a great variety of lutes and fiddles, and generally shun the women's



instruments' (Slobin 1980, 137). According to Maria Lord, in South India the reinforcement of gender stereotypes has effectively created a Karnatic truism: 'Girls play the *vina*, boys the *mrđangam* [barrel drum]' (2003, 7).<sup>17</sup> Commenting on the difference between male and female domains in Kosovo, Pettan states that men performed mainly on aerophones and chordophones, whereas women were traditionally limited to percussion: frame drums or an ordinary household copper pan (*tepsi*, *tepsija*) (2003, 289–90).

Looking generally at the phenomenon of male dominance over musical instruments, two particular issues stand out: the manipulation of space as a male domain (especially public space), and the long-entrenched pattern of male control over technology. Scholars in gender studies have highlighted both these issues.

Treated with care, and avoiding essentialist male–female dichotomies, spatial segregation remains an important interpretative model with regard to gender. In her study of spatial segregation by gender in dwellings, Daphne Spain concludes that it is an important mechanism for exerting power: 'By controlling access to knowledge and resources through the control of space, the dominant group's ability to retain and reinforce its position is enhanced' (1992, 15–16; also see Low and Laurence-Zuniga 2003). The control of public space, or ritual or sacred space for the performance of instrumental music has important implications, perhaps most notably the assignment of prestige and honour to those occupying it. Moreover, musical instruments may be stored in male-only space, and this is one of several possible techniques whereby males maintain gender-exclusive control over instruments (Doubleday 2006b, 127–8).

With regard to gender studies about technology, scholarly lines of enquiry range from male monopolies over weapons and mechanical tools to consideration of new information technology (Wajcman 1991). In general these studies show the tendency of existing gender roles to perpetuate unequal power relations. Economic motives, involving the control of commodities, are surely also important. Sandstrom argues that the field of sound and recording has been 'most definitely controlled by men, reflecting the dynamics of the whole industry' (2000, 293). This is symptomatic of long-established traditions whereby women are not expected to acquire the necessary technological skills for making, maintaining, tuning and playing complex musical instruments.

A final point is worth mentioning: ideas and conventions about the female body have often been brought into male debates about female instrumental musicianship. A common idea has been that women lack the physiological strength to play a particular instrument; this is often confounded by fact once women gain access to it. Another consideration is that certain instruments have been seen as unsightly for women to play, either because their presence interferes with men's enjoyment of the female face or body, or because a playing position is judged to be indecorous. In Victorian Britain female cellists were expected to adopt awkward 'side-saddle' positions so as to avoid holding their instrument between opened legs (Cowling 1983, 179–80).

### Typical Female Relationships with Musical Instruments

I have already made the point that women frequently experience 'negative' relationships with instruments, being deterred from contact with them. It may be hard for girls even to imagine playing an instrument that is culturally assigned to males. Writing on music in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ankica Petrović notes 'a taboo against direct contact with traditional instruments' for girls, enforced 'from the earliest age' and based on unspoken shameful associations of musical instruments with sexuality or sexual symbolism (1990, 73). Cast into such 'negative' relationships with instruments, girls and women may experience warnings, threats and taboos, lest they transgress. As an extreme example, in Central Brazil Kalapalo women are warned that they may be gang-raped if they watch men playing certain ritual flutes (Basso 1989, 172).<sup>18</sup>

Another outcome of male dominance is that women rarely enjoy a gender-exclusive relationship with a musical instrument. A number of instruments are closely associated with female performance, but in most cases men also play them if they wish. As a general rule, therefore, women mostly play instruments that men also play.

Rather few instruments are the sole cultural property of women. One example is the one-stringed fiddle called *imzad*, made and played by Tuareg women in the Sahara and Sahel regions of North Africa (Brandes 1990, 1998). Here caste intersects with gender as only noblewomen usually play the *imzad* (Brandes 1990, 119).<sup>19</sup> Significantly, Tuareg social organisation is matrilineal, and women have an important position in their communities. Their instrument is also greatly esteemed. In at least one lineage it is customary for girls to make their first instrument at around 15 years of age, as an initiation into the musical tradition (Borel 1988).

Brandes has documented other instruments reserved for West African women: the *jidunun* water-drum and *gita* rattle, both made from calabashes and played by Bamanan women in southern Mali. The sounds of these instruments support singing and dancing during women's life-cycle ceremonies, notably (and, in the past, mainly) those of female initiation with genital excision (Brandes 2003).

Another interesting instrument reserved for women is the set of panpipes found in certain rural areas of the Russian Federation: in southern Russia (Kaluga, Kursk and Briansk) and in Komi territory immediately west of the Ural Mountains. Women make and tune the instruments themselves, using local plants and reeds. Playing the panpipes is a group activity, for recreation, always occurring outdoors, in nature (see Velichkina 1998; Velichkina and Zhulanova 2003). The ability of women to make their own instruments is significant for maintaining exclusive rights.

Counterbalancing the relative paucity of exclusive female traditions, in recent times (and in a variety of contexts) quite a few individual women have claimed the right to play 'men's' instruments. Judith Vander (1996) has documented the story of Helene Furlong (born 1938), who took up the Shoshone Native American drum; Timothy Rice (1994) and (2004) has written about the Bulgarian bagpipe player, Maria Stoyanova (born 1953), and Amanda Vincent (2004) has described the career of the



**Figure 9** Strained relationship between instrument and human player.

Cuban priestess and *bata* drummer, Amelia Pedroso (c. 1940–2000). When monopolies are challenged, individuals like these enter into what I would describe as a ‘strained’ relationship with the hitherto ‘forbidden’ instrument. Depicted in Figure 9, a wavy line between the instrument and human denotes the strain of working against established convention. Family or parental support or disapproval are significant factors in easing or exacerbating strain.

In general, and on an international scale, attitudes are changing about the cultural assignment of instruments by gender. Two factors help to explain why women around the world have been breaking conventions in this regard. The first is political. From the 1920s onwards, revolutionary communist ideologies supported the idea of female emancipation, and communist-influenced governments sought to display female instrumentalists as symbols of progressiveness and change. Later, from the 1970s, Western feminist activism and homosexual liberation had quite an impact, fostering a desire for change with regard to gender roles.<sup>20</sup>

The second, more recent, factor is the effect of global mass communications. Based on economic and liberal interests, the mass media and ‘world music’ industry give welcome publicity to controversial female ‘pioneers’. Their interest in the shock value of crumbling male monopolies has encouraged women to defy convention. The very image of a woman playing a ‘men’s instrument’ is an oxymoron; it has an arresting power and attracts public interest.<sup>21</sup> In Figure 10, a Nepali female shawm player (who is not a world music star) challenges familiar images of male-exclusive shawm traditions stretching from Morocco to China.<sup>22</sup>

Connected to this is the emergence of all-women bands. From the 1990s, in North America, Europe, and elsewhere, women have formed new instrumental bands, playing genres of music that were previously the preserve of men. They sometimes use instruments that women do not normally play.<sup>23</sup> Entering into competitive public arenas, they often experience difficulties, and band formations are sometimes short-lived (e.g. see Torshizi 2003 on female musicians’ experiences in Iran).

Promotion of innovative female bands sometimes occurs at government level, as discussed by Michael Bakan with regard to music-making in Bali. In the 1990s Indonesian nationalist interests provided the political motivation for the creation of a female version of a ‘quintessentially male’ martial instrumental tradition called *gamelan beleganjur* (Bakan 1999, chapter 6). Young Balinese women have embraced the opportunity with enthusiasm but, not surprisingly, this bold initiative provoked considerable controversy in Bali.<sup>24</sup>

Thankfully, however, it is possible for women to experience comfort, appreciation and social approval in their role as instrumentalists. In such circumstances, their ‘instrument-human relationships’ typically fall into one of two loose categories,



**Figure 10** Deomaya Pariyar, a female *sāhanāī* player from the Damāi tailor-musician caste, a professional instrumentalist contravening gender codes, Nepal c. 1990. (Photo courtesy of Carol Tingey).

which I call 'suitable' and 'acceptable'. The first, 'suitable' relationship enjoys the support of dominant male interests; it is promoted, and girls and women are urged to play particular instruments. Unsurprisingly, we see no evidence for any such reverse process, whereby women tell men what instruments they should or should not play.

Around the world girls and women have negotiated gendered stereotypes about 'suitable' instruments that are enshrined in past 'tradition'. Writing on nineteenth-century North America, Judith Tick states that 'tradition decreed' the piano, harp, and guitar to be appropriate feminine instruments. She points out that they 'required no facial exertions or body movements that interfered with the portrait of grace the lady musician was to emanate' (Tick 1987, 327). Female allure has certainly been a

consideration with regard to the 'suitability' of instruments for women.<sup>25</sup> 'Suitable' instruments are also often ones used to accompany the performer's own singing.

Social prestige is another important factor. As well as looking graceful, the piano, harp and guitar were promoted as signifiers of class, wealth, taste and respectability. As a possession for girls and women in nineteenth-century Europe and North America, the piano was an important symbol of upward mobility (Ehrlich 1976, 17). Today in South India, the Karnatic *vina* is another example. It is common for wealthy families to hold expensive 'coming-out' parties to advertise the availability of their girls for marriage, and the girls display themselves in a debut concert of classical music or dance, often playing the *vina* (Lord 2003). Similar expectations about prestige and feminine allure apply to certain other instruments (e.g. see Cadar 1996 for the *kulintang* in the Philippines).

A significant amount of female instrumental music-making falls into the other 'acceptable' category, entailing a weaker degree of social approval that shades into tolerance. In some parts of the world, life-cycle rituals provide the main context for women to use musical instruments, as with the Afghan *daireh* frame drum, an essential instrument at traditional female marriage celebrations (Doubleday 2000, 2006a [1988]). In contrast with prestigious 'suitable' instruments discussed above, the *daireh* is inexpensive, has a low status, and requires no special training. Although this drum's forerunner, the Arab *duff*, is mentioned in religious texts (*hadiths*) attesting the Prophet Muhammad's approval of its use at weddings, in Afghanistan these facts are not common knowledge, and the *daireh* has little spiritual cachet (see Doubleday 2006b [1999]). 'Suitable' instruments for women tend to be prestigious, whereas 'acceptable' ones are likely to be more 'ordinary'.

In professional contexts, conventions about the cultural assignment of instruments to women may be relaxed in entertainment genres that please and amuse men, rendering them temporarily 'acceptable'. Koskoff points out that in societies where males have been the main patrons of musical performances, it has been the norm for musical behaviour to heighten female sexuality (1989a, 6). The shock value of sexually attractive women uniformly dressed in eye-catching novelty costumes playing 'men's instruments' draws attention, and has made for commercial success (see Myers 2000; Placksin 1982). Here, the quality of strangeness (or 'oxymoron') is used to titillating effect.

### The Construction of Gender by Instrumentalists

So far I have concentrated on broad issues concerning relationships between the basic categories of 'men', 'women', and musical instruments. On a finer level of analysis, gender formulations embrace considerable variation, and it is now time to examine people's use of musical instruments in the construction of human gendered identities.

On a very general level, instrumental music facilitates social transformations as people pass through the human life cycle. The construction of new gendered identities is intrinsic to ceremonies of puberty, adulthood, and marriage. At

weddings, circumcision ceremonies, and other types of initiation into adulthood, the sounds of musical instruments are often considered as essential, advertising and validating the rite of passage.

Although now obsolete in many areas, musical courtship is an interesting phenomenon with regard to gender roles. Working within their local conventions of musical courtship, young men or women use instrumental (and often vocal) music to express their sexual desire or readiness for marriage. They are their own musical protagonists, acting within socially acceptable guidelines. This self-expressive situation contrasts with puberty or adulthood ceremonies, where other musicians express communal values and idealised notions of womanhood or manhood.

Musical courtship seems to take two main forms: the active expression of desire for a targeted loved one, or the assertion of availability for romance or marriage. My research into the available literature on musical courtship suggests that it is more common for boys to be expected to target girls, and for girls to advertise their availability. The 'suitable' instrument for girls is often part of this latter project, as with the Karnatic *vina* (discussed above). But sometimes girls are encouraged to adopt fairly assertive roles. In South Africa, with the support and approval of their age-mates, Zulu girls may choose their own husbands; as an integral part of the process, they compose and sing love songs accompanied by their musical bow (Joseph 1987).<sup>26</sup>

Movement through the human life cycle may bring new expectations relating to instrumental performance. Linked to this, Koskoff and others have noted that older women may attain a different musical status (1989a, 6). After marriage, women (and sometimes men) may be expected to leave off playing instruments. In Zulu society, a strict code of behaviour specifies that married women should cease to play the musical bow, since it is associated with courtship (Joseph 1987, 91–2, 96). Playing the bow would send out a message that a woman was interested in men other than her husband.<sup>27</sup>

Sexuality and sexual orientation are obvious parameters affecting gender roles and behaviour. These may have a political dimension: in the United States, radical lesbians implicitly resist the typecasting of women into conventional heterosexual feminine roles, and lesbian women have spearheaded social change at their annual musical festivals. The form of their festivals tackles precisely the two issues that I highlighted earlier: control over space and over technology. The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival rigorously excludes men, creating a predominantly lesbian interactive space. Significantly, this has allowed female sound engineers to break male monopolies over sound technology (see Morris 1999; Sandstrom 2000). In such an environment female performers are also free to defy male-exclusive taboos over instruments if they wish.

Issues about sexual orientation may affect a musician's choice of instrument. In his youth the famous New Orleans jazz pianist Jelly Roll Morton (1890–1941) originally shied away from playing the piano, for fear of being considered effeminate or possibly homosexual. By the age of 7 he had tried his hand at many instruments and become

one of the best guitarists around. Hearing the piano played at the New Orleans French opera house, he wanted to play it 'very, very much'. But the gentleman playing 'had long bushy hair, and, because the piano was known in our circle as an instrument for a lady, this confirmed me in my idea that if I played the piano I would be misunderstood'. As he put it: 'I didn't want to be called a sissy. I wanted to marry and raise a family and be known as a man among men when I became of age' (Lomax 1991 [1950], 6). Children tend to be rather sensitive to gender codes, and they may be subject to homophobic teasing if they play an instrument that is 'out of role'. Significantly, in her research on music in British schools Lucy Green notes that young boys involved in classical music are sometimes ridiculed as sissies (1997, 224).

The negotiation of gender identity takes another form when individuals enact role reversals. This may occur on a temporary or permanent basis, and musical instruments are sometimes crucially implicated. In the examples that follow, transgendered individuals play musical instruments that belong to their adoptive gender; the instruments serve as gender signifiers.

Temporary gender role reversal is a feature of rituals whose typical character is carnivalesque or devotional. In such rituals men dress as women and hold or play women's instruments, or, vice versa, women dress as men and take on masculine roles. In West Africa, among the Baga people living on islands off Guinea, men perform a role-reversal ritual in honour of a female spirit. They dress as women, play women's drums and sistrums, and dance in a homoerotic way (Lamp 1996, 76 and chapter 6). Carnivalesque gender role reversal has ritual and humorous overtones; three articles in this volume touch on these issues in different parts of the world—in West Java (van Zanten), Bolivia (Stobart), and Portugal (Cohen).

In similar rituals women may take on masculine identities, but it seems rare for women actually to play men's musical instruments in such contexts. It is, however, interesting to look at a ritual that directly relates to the strongly tabooed Kalapalo ritual flutes mentioned in connection with threats of gang-rape. In the Amazon rain forests of Central Brazil, Kalapalo women participate in a long annual ritual process which focuses precisely on 'how people of one gender might acquire the physical and mental attributes of the other' (Basso 1989, 166). Within this ritual, women dress as men and enter men's ritual space, the central plaza, and they sing songs that mimic the music of the men's flutes that are strongly prohibited to them. In this example, women do not actually play men's instruments, but their performance allows them a 'virtual' experience of playing them. Mimicking the flute music gives them a temporary expression of power normally reserved for men.<sup>28</sup>

Gender role reversals also occur on a permanent basis. In parts of eastern Europe we find the phenomenon of 'sworn virgins': biological females who adopt masculine gender roles and are accepted as social men. They live like men, except that they forswear sex (Pettan 2003, 293; Young 2000). Some have specialised as musical entertainers, playing instruments normally reserved for men (Pettan 2003, plate 18). In particular, certain sworn virgins have played the Serbian *gusle*, a culturally important fiddle used to accompany heroic epics (see Petrović 1990, 73–4).

This instrument is archetypally masculine, symbolising the 'tribal' and patriarchal world of the Balkan warrior-hero (Ceribašić 2000, 226). In the above examples of gender role reversal, transgendered individuals play instruments that are gender-exclusive and highly valued.

Androgyny is another alternative gender mode. On one level it concerns the expression of both male and female characteristics, but on a deeper level psychologists see androgyny as an archetype of primordial unity, transcending the polarities of gender (Singer 2000, 5). Unlike male-to-female or female-to-male transgendering, androgynous enactments maintain a simultaneous consciousness of masculine and feminine identities.

Androgyny was 'integral' to the stage personas of male 'glam' rock performers in Western popular music of the 1970s and 1980s. On stage, musicians achieved their androgynous image by 'donning women's clothing along with heavily applied makeup' (Nicholson 2001, 357). In this way instrumentalists (and singers) subverted the hard masculinity of mainstream rock music. As musical performers, Algerian female *rai* singers also exhibit androgyny, deliberately blurring gender distinctions by superimposing masculine and feminine signs. Marie Virolle suggests that the 'bigendered catharsis' that they create has a healing function in a 'divided' gender-segregated Islamic society (2003, 225–7).

The shamanologist Joan Halifax argues that androgyny is a notable feature of some shamanic traditions, allowing oppositional forces to be transcended. She cites the Siberian Chuckchi 'soft men' as an example of androgynous shamanism (Halifax 1979, 22–8). Androgyny embraces and transcends gender, and the Arctic shamanic frame drum is appropriately free of gender exclusivities.

Referring to Mapuche shamans' ritual performances, in which they move between masculine and feminine polarities to express notions of kinship, marriage, and mastery, Bacigalupo uses the term 'co-genderism' (2007, 117 and elsewhere; especially see chapter 4). This, along with Virolle's term 'bigendered catharsis', suggests a desire among contemporary analysts to go beyond the comprehensive concept of 'androgyny'. Taking up Judith Butler's influential 1990 work, *Gender Trouble*, Bacigalupo argues that Mapuche shamans 'subvert various gender ideologies' in everyday, ritual, and political contexts (2007, 9 and *passim*). In these enactments, the *kultrún* kettledrum, with its four-fold inclusive symbolism, is an essential tool.

Sometimes cult instrumentalists transform their gendered identities in ways that are radical and permanent. In Imperial Rome the transvestite eunuch priests of Cybele used several cult instruments: a round frame drum, cymbals and certain types of pipe (McKinnon and Anderson 1984, 686). They totally denied their male physicality by performing self-castration (*eviratio*) under the influence of frenzied music. Their gender status as eunuchs was central to their identity, being linked to Attis, Cybele's castrated lover (Vermaseren 1977). Today, in India, eunuchs, hermaphrodites, transvestites and transsexuals known as *hijra* are ritual specialists who have played 'a variety of important roles in Indian society for several thousand years' (Navatar 2003, 283). They dance, sing and play *dholak* drums during life-cycle



rituals such as weddings or when a child is born. They also wear bells on their ankles as they dance. In India the *dholak* and ankle-bells are instruments used by men and women alike. Like the Arctic shaman's drum, the ambiguous *hijra's* instruments are not bound by gender exclusivities.

Clearly, eunuchs and transvestites are a world away from the ritualised conventions of heterosexual courtship, but in all these examples I have tried to show how musical instruments may enter into processes where individuals work with gender identity—their own or others'. Specifically, people may use musical instruments as indicators of gender.

Finally, it is worth pointing out that people may have many different reasons for choosing to play an instrument that 'belongs' to the opposite sex. These include spiritual or artistic promptings, the impulse to experiment or to effect change, a desire to attract attention or shock, or simply an interest in economic gain. Whatever the reason, such an act has a social impact, since it sets an example that others may follow.

One particular reason for breaking gender codes concerns ethnomusicologists: the pursuit of scholarly research. Several female ethnomusicologists have found themselves in anomalous situations when they set about learning to play a 'men's instrument'.<sup>29</sup> Their position as cultural outsiders and their respectable status as academics usually afford some protection from censure, but the crossing of gender boundaries is always potentially disruptive. Two essays in this volume touch on these issues as experienced in Zimbabwe and West Java (Jones and van Zanten, respectively). The negotiation of gender roles in the field is potentially quite tricky if clearly visible performance codes are broken.

### The Essays in this Volume

The following four essays in this volume are deliberately drawn from widely varying contexts. All the authors examine questions about gendered performance, and value and meaning in musical instruments. They tackle many of the issues that I have raised: the gendering of instrument–human relationships and of performance space, gendered divisions of labour, and the implications of spiritual agency for gendered performance.

The question of gendered relationships between instruments and humans is central to Wim van Zanten's essay, and he writes on a cross-gender relationship that is explicitly described as a marriage. In the Sundanese culture of West Java, social ideals dictate that 'most musical instruments are traditionally played by men'. Van Zanten's particular concern is with a zither (*kacapi*) that has 'many female associations', including links with the local rice goddess and various female spirits. The conceptualisation of the zither as female is further supported by the nomenclature applied to its different parts, which maps onto the female body.

Drawing on pre-Islamic myths, van Zanten shows that in the Tembang Sunda Cianjuran music tradition the correct relationship between instrument and player is

cross-gendered. Musicians describe their instrument 'as a woman, their wife . . . , who is precious and should be handled with care'. In the past musical disciples underwent an initiatory ritual that was somewhat similar to a wedding ceremony.

Van Zanten points out that in Sundanese culture gender issues 'cannot be reduced to fixed male-female dichotomies', as is clear from the common phenomenon of gender role reversals in Indonesia as a whole. The female voice is highly valued, and women are considered as the best mediators of the emotional and aesthetic realm of Sundanese music. He argues that the Sundanese arts represent 'female aspects of human communication' and that, as instrumentalists, it is the work of men to elicit the female voice of the zither. The act of playing may even be seen as a 'musical-sexual climax for the player and instrument'.

Henry Stobart's essay is also based on a situation where male instrumental musicianship is the norm—where, indeed, 'playing instruments is key to the construction and expression of manhood'. He analyses several different instruments: *pinkillu* duct flutes, here played in pairs; the *charango* plucked lute, and double-unit *jula-jula* panpipes. He argues that in this particular region 'binary interaction' is 'crucial to many forms of musical performance', although it is not always necessarily related to male-female dichotomies. It is found in the hocketing of paired panpipes and *pinkillu* duct flutes, as well as in the shared performance of female singers and male instrumentalists, and he links gendered divisions of labour in musical performance with other productive activities.

As with van Zanten's work, Stobart notes many important spiritual aspects of the music culture. This Andean community exists in a conceptual environment where gendered attributes are projected onto the landscape and cosmos. Much musical performance is seasonal, entailing spiritual interactions with the weather and agricultural cycle through instrumental sounds, in order to promote fertility. In pursuit of sexual courtship, young men also believe that water spirits may positively affect their *charango*, making its sounds irresistible to the girls that they target and pursue.

Reviewing current Andean scholarship on gender, Stobart highlights complementary aspects of men's and women's roles, including the concept of a 'man-woman' at the heart of the idealised household unit. He also discusses degrees of genderedness, as opposed to male-female polarities. In paired *pinkillu* duct flutes, one partner is *q'iwa*, denoting mediated gender—'half-man, half-woman'—and its role is linked with the mediation of polarities or opposing concepts. This balances against the stronger, clearer sound of its partner.

Judith Cohen's essay is mainly concerned with female performance. Her work is based on years of fieldwork gathering information in numerous villages and small towns in Portugal and Spain, documenting their different repertoires, styles and drumming techniques. The instrument under discussion—the Iberian square frame drum—has a long history of belonging to women, and she traces its female associations in religious practice and ritual, its links with human fertility, and its sexual symbolism. In Iberian drumming traditions some of the women's song lyrics

express 'ideas, feelings and even practical information about the drum itself'. To illustrate this, Cohen has placed traditional verses at the beginning of each thematic section of her essay. Many song lyrics attest to the 'time-honoured association' of the drum skin with sexuality, so that playing the drum is likened to sexual intercourse and the drum skin symbolises the unbroken hymen.

In some parts of Portugal the drum still plays a pivotal role in local pilgrimages and their religious processions, yet women were banned from playing their drums inside the church, highlighting an exclusive taboo imposed by a (male) priest in the seventeenth century. Cohen notes the persistent male ambivalence towards women's singing and drumming in this region, connecting it with the physical and psychological strength of the women with whom she has worked.

This is a tradition in decline, and Cohen records how the transmission of performance skills has changed over past decades. She also discusses recent instances of appropriation of the instrument by men. Male professional musicians have taken a commercial interest in the drum, using it on the concert stage, and Cohen describes the tradition-bearers' reactions to this. Some are open to innovation, and some feel irritated and exploited, but there is a general sense that quite dramatic changes are inevitable, and that the drum is slipping out of women's control.

Issues of contestation are the central focus of Claire Jones's essay on the *mbira dzavadzimu* in Zimbabwe. This instrument does not have a gendered identity as such. It is predominantly played by men, but in the late 1960s women began to assert the right to play it on a public and professional basis. One of these, Stella Chiweshe, is a world music star. Female *mbira* players find themselves in an anomalous position when they occupy the male domain of the concert stage. In playing *mbira*, they support Zimbabwe's tradition, yet people 'regularly invoke tradition in ways that marginalise and devalue' these women. Jones notes that conflicting discourses of gender and tradition simultaneously affirm and deny women's connection to the instrument.

She argues that Zimbabwean nationalist and modernising endeavours have tended to place men in the forefront of society. Furthermore, an institutionalised gendered division of space has served to keep women out of cities. When they work in beerhalls and nightclubs, female *mbira* players are subject to sexual harassment.

Another important strand of Jones's essay relates to the agency of spirits. In traditional spirit mediumship ceremonies, the sounds of the *mbira* call down ancestor spirits. Furthermore, musical talent is attributed to the agency of a spirit. Jones points out that spirits 'do not discriminate between men and women in choosing mediums, or in bestowing *mbira* playing or other talents', but it is 'the social pressures to conform to conventional gender roles' that perpetuate the disparity in numbers between male and female players.

So, in these fieldwork-based case studies, many common thematic threads intertwine. With these, and my own overview, I hope to have encouraged future debate on many issues relating to musical instruments and gender.

## Conclusions

The gendering of musical instruments operates on many levels. An instrument's look or sound may come to embody gendered meaning. Instruments may be imaged or named as male or female entities, as paired entities combining male-female characteristics, or as gendered members of a family. Instruments may carry cultural associations with gendered deities or spirits, transmitted in beliefs, legends, myths, songs or rituals. Gendered materials may be physically incorporated into an instrument. Same-gender or cross-gender relationships with performers may be implicated in the gendering of an instrument. Changes of performance context or the commodification of an instrument normally bring about fresh constructions of meaning, and gendered meanings may be complicated by ambiguity when there are contradictory associations or when interpretations are contested.

Musical instruments are important symbolic tools used within the construction of human gendered identities. They play a key role in conventional rites of passage, and they may also be used to help establish transgendered identities. The power of instrumental sound attracts attention and may express sexual aspirations. Instruments may be treated as sexual symbols, and beliefs in the sexual power of instrumental music help to explain why instrumental music is a strongly male preserve.

The realm of musical instruments is characterised by gender inequalities, with men dominating instrumental musicianship and technology. There has been a common cultural tendency to deny women access to instruments, or to coerce female instrumentalists into 'suitable' and 'acceptable' musical roles. In so-called divisions of musical labour, men have often maintained the right to play instruments, expecting women to be vocalists. Customary tradition, religious law and the institutionalisation of male professionalism have all served to perpetuate inequalities, and women have generally been excluded from theorising about musical instruments. However, we live in an age of feminist and 'genderist' awareness,<sup>30</sup> and the situation is changing. Male exclusive rights are being eroded as women determinedly challenge existing gender codes.

Gender inequalities are still reflected in our discipline. Although our intellectual understanding and consciousness of gender have improved immeasurably, scholars still strongly favour male, public performance genres as opposed to domestic music by women, children and families, as Anthony Seeger has noted (2006, 218). Connected with this, female instrumental traditions have typically been seen as 'lesser', trivial or unimportant. Susan Cook and Andra McCartney point out that what is identified as masculine typically carries more cultural prestige and power (2001, 87).<sup>31</sup> Despite the valuable work of woman-centred scholarship and feminist perspectives, we still lack adequate information about many aspects of female music-making, past and present.

Given the biased nature of historical sources, popular memory, and musicological scholarship, women's contributions to the culture of musical instruments have often

been ignored or suppressed (e.g. see Myers 2000 on early twentieth-century European 'women's orchestras'). Significantly, this has occurred in relation to prestigious instruments, such as 'the most prized musical symbol of Confucian virtue and elitist aesthetics', the Chinese seven-stringed *qin* zither. In China, women actively developed the art of playing this instrument, but music historians have treated it as an exclusively male tradition (Zheng 2002, 406). Similarly, the early history of the Arab *'ud* lute is rooted in performance by highly trained courtesan entertainers (Sawa 2002), but their contribution was eclipsed by the later work of male performers and theorists. Also, see Labajo (2003) for women's forgotten contribution to the guitar in Spain.

Koskoff has recently noted that feminist and genderist work in ethnomusicology has slowed down (cited in Frisbie 2006, 212). Gender affects many aspects of the culture of musical instruments, and for many traditions we need basic data about gender codes and ideologies, and gendered relationships between instruments and players. We need more detailed documentation of gendered roles in rituals and ceremonies with instrumental music. We need to look more closely at questions of meaning and power in musical instruments, using gender as an interpretative tool. Little work has been done on anthropomorphism. Instrument makers and performers have much to tell us, and from their life histories we can learn about the gendered transmission of knowledge. We need to stop taking male instrumental musicianship at face value, and to analyse how it is implicated in the construction of different forms of masculinity. New research will allow us to develop gender theory in the fields of organology and material culture, and in areas such as performativity, androgyny, mediated gender, and embodiment.<sup>32</sup>

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## Notes

- [1] Studies of gender and music and women's music include Bernstein 2004; Bowers and Tick 1987; Brett, Wood, and Thomas 1994; Citron 1993; Cook and Tsou 1994; Doubleday 2006b [1999]; Drinker 1995 [1948]; Green 1997; Herndon and Ziegler 1990; Keeling 1989; Koskoff 1989b; Magrini 2003; Marshall 1993; McClary 1991; Moisola and Diamond 2000; Neuls-Bates 1982; Pendle 1991; Solie 1993; Sultanova 2005; and Whiteley 1997.
- [2] Sue DeVale's 1989 article was an early inspiration for my work in this field. I would also like to thank the scholars cited in this present article for their valuable work.
- [3] Thanks to Sue Steward for bringing up the idea of a fetishistic relationship in a conversation about my work (2006).
- [4] For references to the extensive anthropological literature on cults of manhood in Papua New Guinea, see Gregor and Tuzin 2001.
- [5] I take this point about hegemonic masculinity from Cornwall and Lindisfarne (1994, 20).
- [6] For gendered artefacts (but not musical instruments) see Kirkham's 1996 collection, which mostly focuses on dress.
- [7] Alternatively, some say the instrument symbolises the body of Saraswati (Reck 2000, 353).
- [8] The tradition of addressing tutelary deities has a long history. For instance, a victory ode from Ancient Greece (fifth century BCE) bestows on Apollo the epithet *chrosophorminx* 'god of the golden lyre' (Anderson 1994, 84–5).
- [9] Nunns and Thomas point out that the legend could encode esoteric associations because the cocoon is a liminal state between caterpillar and moth, perhaps representing the interface between human and spirit worlds (2005, 72 n. 5).
- [10] For more detail on paired symbolism in the *damaru*, see Helffer 1989. She points out that there are numerous 'skull-drums' in museums of the Western world, but that their usage is now rare, if not forbidden, in monasteries (*ibid.*, 42).
- [11] Jean During mentions this instrumental pairing in his discussion of 'the ideal couple', but he makes no specific reference to gender (2005, 157).
- [12] The *bàtá* practitioner Ade Williams agreed with this formulation of mine (personal communication, 2000).
- [13] A classic cross-cultural enquiry into male dominance was Sanday 1981; also see Sanday and Goodenough 1990. More recent scholarship has shifted away from this topic.
- [14] There are always interesting exceptions, e.g. the notable women musicians of Venice trained in *ospedali grandi* (charitable foundations) over a period of three centuries (1525–1855), as documented in Baldauf-Berdes 1996. In Europe in general, after the 1870s women began entering established professional ensembles (Reich 1991, 117–19). Around this time all-women peripatetic entertainment ensembles sprang up in German-speaking areas of Central Europe (Myers 2000).
- [15] Thanks to Stephen Jones for this information. The stereotyping of the concert harp as feminine was a feature of this decision. For further details on women in European orchestras, see Cottrell (2004, 189–90).
- [16] For the impact of female punk and female rock in Britain and the US, see Raphael 1995.
- [17] Also see Johnson's work relating to the Swedish motto 'Women don't play the fiddle, they play the horn' (1990, 37).
- [18] Basso argues that the threatened gang-rape may not be a punishment so much as a logical outcome of sexual feeling resulting from female contact with the flutes (1989, 172–3).
- [19] Brandes also notes a few players from the esteemed blacksmith caste (1990, 119).
- [20] For details on these changes in Europe, the United States and Canada, see Koskoff (2000b, 200–01) and Cook and McCartney (2001, 94–8).

- [21] When women defy tradition in this way, they typically excite strong emotions of admiration or anger. Leslie Gourse documents an incident in the 1940s when an outraged man from the audience at a jazz venue assaulted a woman playing a flugelhorn (1995, 8).
- [22] Deomaya Pariyar is an economically independent female *śahanār* player from a tailor-musician caste (see Tingey 1994, 8).
- [23] In 1991, the Lale Turkish Classical Music Ensemble of Istanbul visited London. The group highlighted music of the Ottoman palace harem, especially featuring its female composers. In 1999, Neiriz, 'the first ever all-female Persian classical orchestra' from Iran, performed in several European countries. Since then Iranian female instrumental groups have been on the increase, and they have their own women's music festival in Iran. There has also been an upsurge of women *son* and *salsa* groups in Cuba (Barbara Bradby, personal communication 1999). Also see Bayton 1998 on British female rock musicians.
- [24] The experiment seems to have been better engineered and more successful than the liberalising Soviet policies that brought barely trained female instrumentalists onto the concert stage in Uzbekistan of the 1930s (see Sultanova 1993).
- [25] Lack of allure may become an argument for unsuitability. In 1930 the director of New York's Casino Theater said 'women cannot possibly play brass instruments and look pretty, and why should they spoil their good looks?' (cited in Morgan 1989, 164). Also see Kimberlin 1990 on expectations about female allure.
- [26] In the late 1970s girls were playing a mouth-resonated bow in connection with courtship, but Joseph concentrated her research on recently obsolete traditions concerning two types of single-stringed gourd-resonated bows (*ugubhu* and *umakhweyana*) which older women still remembered how to make and play.
- [27] Kubik makes a similar point with regard to the musical bow in Malawi and Tanzania (1998, 321).
- [28] This act of vocal substitution compares interestingly with situations in the Arab world, as noted by Roving Olsen, where women 'replace' wind instruments with their singing (2002, 306).
- [29] Among British ethnomusicologists examples include Carol Tingey playing the *śahanār* in Nepal, and Lucy Duran playing the *kora* in Gambia. It is not common for male ethnomusicologists to learn women's instruments. For a discussion of learning to perform as a research technique, see Baily 2001.
- [30] Genderism is a useful term proposed by Pirkko Moisala for gender studies (Diamond and Moisala 2000, 7).
- [31] Anthropologists note similar tendencies. Bowie comments that women have been considered less important than men as informants (2000, 93), and Jolly points out that in Melanesian anthropology varieties of femaleness are typically ignored or treated as derivative (2001, 191).
- [32] I am grateful to Ellen Koskoff for pointing to embodiment as a theoretical avenue. Roman-Velazquez takes this approach (2006).

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