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doi:10.1017/ytm.2022.6

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Mae Mai. Produced by Jon Silpayamanant. In English. URL: https://silpayamanant.wordpress.com/

Jon Silpayamanant has been writing on his blog *Mae Mai* since 2005, with the goal of decentering "Eurocentric and white musics" by bringing the musics of minorities and underrepresented groups to the forefront. The premise of *Mae Mai* is that we can only deprioritise Eurocentric and white music ecosystems by viewing (Western) classical music as simply one of many ethnic music traditions.

Silpayamanant is a Thai American composer, researcher, educator, and multi-instrumentalist. The blog's subtitle reads "Boldly going where no cellist has gone before…." I assume this subtitle has partly to do with his testimony that he quit playing the cello right after he graduated from a music school and now refrains from performing most Western music. Moreover, as his biography explains, his bi-musical background has informed his understanding of different musical ecosystems. This certainly shows in his scholarly writings, which account for much of the blog's content.

Tabs on the homepage of *Mae Mai* are largely devoted to Silpayamanant's ongoing research. Among these projects are bibliographies and a database on several themes: Slave Orchestras, Choirs, Bands, and Ensembles; Early Black Musicians, Composers, and Music Scholars (505–1505 CE); DAW (digital audio workstation), Music Production, and Colonialism; and Islam, Blues, and Black Fiddling. For me, as a researcher of the histories of Western classical music and colonialism in Indonesia, my attention went straight to the topic of slave orchestras because I knew they existed in Indonesia (then the Dutch East Indies) around the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries. Silpayamanant's bibliography on this topic is comprehensive. The listed sources are divided into general sources and countries/regions: Brazil, the Caribbean, Chile,

https://doi.org/10.1017/ytm.2022.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, South Africa, Sri Lanka, and the United States. Admirably, the bibliography foregrounds scholars and researchers from the Asian and South American countries in question, who have done extensive research on the topic.

The history of orchestras of the enslaved people in these places is embedded in the history of colonialism. As Silpayamanant points out, classical music was one of the "tools" of colonialism and was used to assimilate indigenous peoples. He reminds readers that this practice did not end when colonialism ended—its legacy manifests, among other ways, in how the field of classical music has "systemically excluded BIPOC (and Women)."[1] The main takeaway, according to Silpayamanant, is that we cannot deny that classical music has historically benefitted from and is closely related to imperialism and colonialism.

Another ongoing project at *Mae Mai* is a series of posts on the topic of diversity, inclusive programming, and music education. There are twelve parts planned for this series in total; four have been completed so far. In the series, Silpayamanant explores various music ecosystems of ethnic minorities in the United States. Consistent with the blog's central premise, Silpayamanant aims to present evidence and demonstrate that the dominant music ecosystem (i.e., Western classical music) is simply one among many others.

As commonly found on blogs, on the right-hand side of the page are links to Silpayamanant's social media accounts, including Twitter. Silpayamanant occasionally posts Twitter threads (a series of tweets on a defined topic) which he later posts on or embeds in *Mae Mai.* Twitter has increasingly become a primary media of choice for academics to disseminate news of publications and share more informal ideas. The linking of Silpayamanant's Twitter account to the blog (and linking to other Twitter users in some posts) is helpful in this regard because it enables readers to follow the discussions on Twitter via *Mae Mai.*

Personally, what I most enjoyed from *Mae Mai* was how it often took me to a new aural world. For instance, in Part 2 of his Diversity, Inclusive Programming, and Music Education series, Silpayamanant highlights Arabic orchestras of communities in Michigan and Texas. In that post, he embeds the link to a YouTube video of a 2019 performance by The Houston Arab Youth Chorus and the National Arab Orchestra in Dearborn, Michigan. I was enthralled by the ensemble's rendition of *Zuruni*, a composition by Egyptian composer Sayed Darwish—all three, the ensemble, composer, and composition, I had not known before. At least from the experience of this reader alone, Silpayamanant has achieved his goal of broadening perspectives on music ecosystems beyond the hegemony of Western classical music.

We can interpret *Mae Mai* as a form of "public musicology," which some argue aims to democratise musicology through dissemination by alternative media (Levitz 2018:10). There are problems with such a venture—Tamara Levitz warns that scholars

1. The exclusion of and discrimination against people of colour in classical music, including in music studies, is widely acknowledged. See, for example, Thurman (2019:825–865) and Brown (2020).

https://doi.org/10.1017/ytm.2022.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press

producing public musicology often fall short in actually decolonising the discipline, because "they have tended to neglect systemic racialized power relations and the capitalist distribution of labor" (ibid.). In *Mae Mai*, Silpayamanant argues that one way to decolonise how we understand music is by changing how classical music is taught at schools. He seeks to do this by "teaching the history of classical music that hasn't whitewashed out slavery and colonialism" (Silpayamanant 2020). Silpayamanant claims that there are currently twenty-seven university courses that refer to various pieces on *Mae Mai.* To this end, it seems like Silpayamanant's blog is achieving its goals.

Over almost two decades, the posts on *Mae Mai* have covered a wide variety of topics. Examples include: the exaggeration of classical music's demise and overestimation of popular music's sustainability; the evolution of orchestras; and Silpayamanant's ensemble *Sulh*, whose aim is to advocate for underprivileged, marginal, and minority musics and bridge understanding between peoples with different musical communication systems. *Mae Mai* certainly merits our regular visits, as we know the increasing urgency of changing the way we think about, discuss, and practise music, including and perhaps especially Western classical music.

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doi:10.1017/ytm.2022.7

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https://doi.org/10.1017/ytm.2022.7 Published online by Cambridge University Press