

Singing across Cultures: an Auto-ethnographic Study

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Introduction

Delving deep into a phenomenon, asking the why, how and what of it, and analysing the results it generates for the benefit of those that may be directly or indirectly influenced by it would be the basic series of actions that research of any kind necessitates.

Art educator J. H. Rolling Jr. (2010, 2011) posits that any research practice that is arts based is an agency; one that has the capacity to contribute significantly to the academy and validate human experience in the real world.

While scientific ways of knowing involve the gathering of empirical data, testing hypotheses through specified methods, and validated representations of the human experience in the natural world, arts based ways of knowing are no less empirical, no less dependent on methodologies, no less valid, no less representative of the human experience in the worlds we live in. The arts and sciences are twin peaks in human cognition and neither should be privileged in research practices. (Rolling 2010, 105)

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Abstract - Résumé

This exposition is directed towards understanding an artistic experience in relation to the 'self' and the 'other' in a complex socio-cultural framework. The author is a traditional Carnatic singer from South India, who seeks to respond to the undercurrent of intercultural tensions that she is faced with in new sociological environs, by unpacking them candidly. In performing her own music in intercultural scenarios, the author reflects upon her supplanted practice, juxtaposes these reflections against relevant literature, and interrogates the emerging phenomena. The author uses evocative auto-ethnography to underscore the emotional challenges that emerge as the aesthetics of Carnatic music collide against a foreign backdrop; the exercise is combative yet fulfilling. The paper unfolds in three sections: the first section outlines the nature of inquiry and methods, the second section is a narrative of musical experiences that inform the reflections, and the third section conflates the ideas that emanate from the first two sections, positing that sociology and aesthetics are factors that constantly redefine themselves in the firmament of contemporary musical cultures.

Keywords: artistic research • auto-ethnography • sociology • performance • place • culture • aesthetics

As a singer/performer from South India, who has recently migrated to Australia, I wish to research my seemingly spontaneous 'artistic actions in performance' by observing them in relation to my new socio-cultural surroundings. The findings that I come upon would inform me of the extended impact my musical performances may have, not only on myself, but also on cultural 'others'. My role as an artist who is researching on a manifestation of her art form, namely the performance, makes me an artistic researcher. The kind of research that I engage in is 'artistic research' and the fact that I engage in it from within the paradigm makes my positioning 'reflexive' – an insider-outsider, the observer/observed. The way I engage with it is by 'practice', and the analysis of it. The 'act of performance' is my professional practice, which when questioned gives rise to a valid research practice. The two tools that I employ to shape my artistic research are: reflexivity in my positioning as the researcher/artiste, and auto-ethnography. The following sections briefly summarise the salient features of artistic research, reflexive positioning and auto-ethnography as presented in this exposition. The candid narrative of the performance experiences is foregrounded in Section 2, while the research premise is a scaffolding (Section 1) that supports, and nurtures the expressivity that follows.

1. The Nature of Artistic Research

1.1 *Artistic Research as Practice*

Borgdorff (2010) introduces artistic research to academics and artistes thus:

...to denote that domain of research and development in which the practice of art – that is, the making and the playing, the creation and the performance, and the works of art that result – play a constitutive role in a methodological sense. (Borgdorf 2010, 21)

When a traditional form of music such as Carnatic music from the South of India, is performed in an unconventional cross-cultural setting, factors including the nature of the place and the people inhabiting the place influence the feelings experienced by the performer, and therefore the performance itself. Each of these factors in turn hybridise the 'methodology' that is associated with the research in such a situation.

In a multicultural context, music is an epicentre of hybridisation, a distillation of varied cultural elements merging into newness; a locus referred to by hybridity scholars such as Bhabha (1993) as the 'third space'. Leavy (2009) perceives that the hybridity seen in musical creations extends, by the same argument, across to music-based research methods. These are indeed emergent methods, they draw upon the prevalent methods in social science and humanities research,

engaging with them additively, improvising within and outside, hybridising the research space in the quest for a native 'artistic research' model (Crispin 2016; Crispin & Gilmore 2014). Such a model draws 'snap-shots' from within its string of occurrences, dove-tailing them into a methodological sequence.

The act of 'practice' leads and moulds this kind of research. As the research practice intersects and conflates with the artistic practice, a spacious canvas emerges. In artistic research, the 'process' and the creative 'product' that is generated through the process are intertwined in a way that cyclically inform each other, often in real-time. An example of a creation that is generated in real-time would be a live musical performance, the performer being the creator who queries aspects of the performance in relation to its surroundings in his or her capacity as a researcher. This metaphorical artefact, 'performance', witnesses the research and is the ever-mutable work of art that informs and interacts with the research. In doing so, it elicits intuitive and logical actions from the researcher, even as he or she orchestrates it. In artistic research, hence, the artefact is as much in control of the research as is the researcher/creator of the artefact. The art work speaks to the researcher as well the environment, and in doing so opens emotional responses from them both that then serve as observed empirical knowledge. This knowledge would inform the research associated with it.

The Question of 'Knowledge'

As for the epistemological question in artistic research, the nature of the 'theory of knowledge' that it generates assumes the form of new knowledge that is sought through the research enterprise. This knowledge is both intuitive as well as empirical (Kelly 2016). The artiste/researcher's intuition forms the basis of the artistic creation that then becomes the pivotal point in the research. The empirical data that is generated from the creation is recorded using the perceptivity of the researcher, who then writes a journal on the objective nature of the performance, as well as the subjective feelings that stemmed from them, and how they informed the artefact in its ongoing creation. Photographs of the artefact at various stages of its creation do inform the research, but the most significant contribution to the epistemology comes from the artiste/researcher whose role within the research is invaluable. In scientific research, objective analysis and quantitative data are considered absolute, which is understandable, since science is about exactitude: things exist in binarisms in that world. On the contrary, art is all about several shades of grey. Every outcome is allowed, studied and accepted. Even if the artefact is a poorly created one, it is worthy of study, mainly because it is an informant of the artiste's creative process. Much advocacy for the acceptance of artistic research that is practice led by the academy has been ongoing over the last decade or so. Arnold (2010) posits this

research method as one that offers fresh knowledge. Knowledge that answers to academic rigour without stifling the creative flow in art.

The artefact and exegesis model ... offers an opportunity to bring creative activity together with academic debate and intellectual rigour ... the latter does not justify the former nor interpret it in an academic and theoretical way ... acting together, the artefact and exegesis bridge the Cartesian binary, offer new models of knowledge to the academy, and enrich the artistic practices of the practitioners themselves. (Arnold 2012, 10)

Reaching beyond Disciplines

It would be parsimonious to assume that artistic research deals merely with the creative output and the creator's interpretation of the same. It takes a direction wherein it often transcends disciplines. In the case of a musical performance for instance, the research touches upon the place and setting, the cultural influences of the performance on the people that view it and vice versa, and the embodied nature of performance practice: the act of music-making itself. Sociology, cultural studies, and musicology can all be at interplay in developing a multi-stranded model.

[artistic research] does not limit itself to an investigation into material aspects of art or an exploration of the creative process, but pretends to reach further in the transdisciplinary context. Experimental and interpretative research strategies thus transect one another here in an undertaking whose purpose is to articulate the connectedness of art to who we are and where we stand. (Borgdorff 2012, 57).

Another aspect that is interesting in artistic research is the fact that a life-time's worth of pre-existing knowledge that the practitioner possesses will feed into the research almost naturally, imbuing it with genuine experience. It offers a broad base of empiricism that may be further built up in an experimental setting to generate supplementary data that may then be looked at objective as well as subjectively.

The fact that most [artists] worked creatively and many systematically, is mostly undisputed. The motivation for knowledge enhancement was on the other hand not comparably obvious overall, even as they surely need to perform and reflect on their work by the use of knowledge they must have somehow acquired and therefore researched for – and this not only recently, but from the very beginning. (Klein 2012, 1)

1.2 The Tools: Reflexive Positioning and Auto-ethnography

The researcher's 'feelings' are considered when making observations on the researched, making subjectivity the cornerstone of the research practice. 'Feelings' themselves are considered subjective while sensory perceptions that are

governed by immediacy are believed to be objective, according to Kant's philosophy, as Schaper (1979; 1983) construes. Feelings that arise in the artist's mind lend themselves to scrutiny. This leads to the reflexive positioning that an artistic researcher assumes: the power to reflect upon action, the power to reflect while in action, as well as the ability to reflect for further action, as Schön (1995) postulated in his seminal work on reflection as a tool in research, but doing so by immersing oneself in it. Ellis (2011; 2009) and Peshkin (1985; 1988; 2001) in their works on auto-ethnography and subjectivity write that acknowledging and asserting subjectivity in the manifestation of feelings enables connections between life itself and research that informs aspects of it. Processing and exploring the self-narrative that emerges from the connectedness between the researcher and the researched gives an outsider-insider view of the artistic experiment, and this is commonly acknowledged as 'reflexive research' and 'auto-ethnography'. (Denzin & Lincoln 2008; Creswell 2009; Bartleet & Ellis 2009)

The distinction between 'reflexive' and 'reflective' research hinges on the 'positioning' of the self within the inquiry model. In creating academically viable models for practice-led research, Nimkulrat (2007; 2009) and Mäkelä (2007) favour the artefact-exegesis combination model. The 'role of an artist as a researcher investigating a research question' and 'thorough documentation of the creative production and the overall research process' (Dash, Nimkulrat, Nsenga & Mäkelä 2011, 7) are posited as significant methods in practice-led research. In many ways, these methods themselves advocate reflexivity: the artiste/researcher at the locus. A prismatic personal perspective in the narrative can be achieved using reflexivity, as opposed to mere reflective thinking. Etherington (2004) and Robson (2002) among others have acknowledged the positioning of the 'self' as the focal point of the research. The 'self' in the mode of reflexivity looks at everything around it panoramically, observing the processes and the outcomes, while super-imposing these findings against the subjective feelings that it experiences. The reflexivity when used as a tool in research, gives rise to ideas and thoughts that not only throw light on the actions performed during the process but also on the emotional highs and lows that are experienced as the artistic actions were performed and how they informed the researcher's understanding of the scenario. Reflexivity is essentially reflective, but reflecting without reflexivity leads to a loss of authorial voice. This is where narrating as an auto-ethnography chimes in as a life-line in realising 'authorial voice' within the research: becoming the critic, being the critiqued, juxtaposing subjectivity of feelings and experiences against objectivity of sensory perception.

Auto-ethnography relates the research process to both the social world and the self, draws on personal stories and narratives, and consolidates intertextuality between ethnography and autobiography. (Coffey 2002, 324)

Ellingson & Ellis (2008) write »whether we call a work an *auto-ethnography* or an *ethnography* depends as much on the claims made by authors as anything else« (449). In my personal narrative that forms the core of this article in Section 2, the cultural phenomena that emerge at the intersection of performance practice, place and people, is the ethnographic component of the research. My expressions find wings and transition to transcend the boundaries of rigour through auto-ethnography.

The data collection phase during research may seem overwrought with complex layers when using auto-ethnography as a method. Maydell (2010) suggests 'thematic analysis' of the emerging patterns as seen within the narrative and 'positioning theory' as a critical tool in auto-ethnographic research. I have tried to put this in practice while journaling as you might witness in Sections 2.3 and 2.4.

Auto-ethnographic research may yield very rich but seemingly unmanageable data, in their unstructured richness and multiplicity of perspectives....the positions accepted, rejected, and negotiated by the author that are identified during analysis will serve to illustrate an issue or phenomenon of the auto-ethnographic research. (Maydell 2010, 10)

Connecting a slice of life with research (Ngunjiri, Hernandez, & Chang 2010) is a dream come true for researchers who are interested in real-world issues that they are faced with, and is made possible using auto-ethnography – holistic accounts that look at the 'self' critically in relation to others, and conversely look at others critically in relation to the 'self'.

2. Analysis and Critique of the Experience of a Reflexive Artistic Researcher

The narrative that forms the core of this article recounts my experiences in performing traditional South Indian Classical music (henceforth referred to as Carnatic music) at three different unconventional venues, as part of an experimental 'pop-up' concert series at the village of Tyalgum, Australia.

2.1 Methods: Tailored to Suit

The methods that I have used to make sure my personal experiences had the transferability they needed in order to reach fellow researchers from various disciplines, involved a staged process:

- (a) The act acknowledging the realisations that arose in my perception as I constructed my own musical idiom at an unfamiliar place.
- (b) Allowing those realisations to come forth unfettered, using 'reflexivity' in reconciling with them *in-situ* and afterwards mentally.

- (c) Writing an honest, interrogative narrative that verbalises these embodied experiences.
- (d) Comparing and collating them with existing literature.
- (e) Finding the 'understanding' that I seek of the socio-cultural overtones (Bresler 2005; Holman Jones 2002) that influence my music (and thereby the feelings of those listening to it, albeit through my personal lens).
- (f) Transferring the personalised experience to a common platform wherein fellow researchers can engage, query and empathise from an aesthetic as well as socio-cultural point of view.

In this research, the first step was to identify the pivotal variables that would underpin my study. These variables were identified as 'place' and 'performance'. 'Place' in this context includes the cultural and sociological features associated with it that cumulatively impact the performance. I draw inspiration from myself, the 'person', the 'place', the sociological formation that serves as a backdrop for the staged music, the 'process', which is the act of music-making, and the 'product', the emergent intercultural phenomenon.

2.2 The Significance of Place in Performance

The variable of 'place' shapes the artistic impulse around it. The artistic work that happens at a certain place would later define its stature, as Cohen (1995) and Stokes (1994) point out in their works. The Wagner festival at Bayreuth is an example of the solid interrelationship between a place and a powerful persona. The Salzburg-Mozart connection is yet another obvious one that comes to mind.

Space to Place Transformation: Culture as Catalyst

Culture and place are intertwined. A stylised society is participative in the activities that transpire in a literal space. The space transforms into a place, and the activities into meaningful cultural events. A place in a social context is a practical environment which supports activity of any kind, and this activity may be consequentially viewed as an extension or a parallel manifestation of its identity. Johansson (2016) discusses genre and style in music in relation to present day transcultural societies in which the dissemination occurs. The identity of the music and the musician and consequently the idiom in which the music is represented is largely driven by the socio-cultural formations in the place of performance. Giddens' (1990) prescriptive definitions of place and space have come to define place in relation to a social activity. His use of the term 're-embedding' as a process when an individual adjusts to a new place is relatable to music performance. Evocations of places, identities and ethnicities through music look beyond just the transec-

tions of music, culture and place in the act of 're-embedding'. They delve into a new stratum that this interaction generates. A space succeeds in informing and absorbing the artistic output thus created and becomes something of greater significance: a place that is transformed by the sonority emanating from it.

Music does not simply provide a marker in a pre-structured social space but the means by which the space can be transformed....music is socially meaningful not entirely but largely because it provides by which people recognise identities and place, and the boundaries which separate them. (Stokes 1994, 4-5)

Markers of 'place' and 'setting' that the performer picks up, consciously or subconsciously, through the nature of sound or the visuals, before or during the progress of a performance, all fall under the category of the intangible, no doubt. But, they answer a question that a performer is often asked, »are you comfortable on stage?«. The answer is often just a simple 'yes' or a 'no', but its ramifications could be quite complex to fathom.

Being the 'Other'

When uprooted from its native premise and placed in a new, hitherto unexplored firmament, a performance becomes directly influenced by change, and the artiste is put in a state of uncertainty. The situation of not knowing what to expect from an audience in a new place can be both thrilling and daunting at the same time. The unpredictability and the indeterminacy in the event increase when intercultural encounters are at the heart of the performance. The performances that are interrogated here were cultivated in these experimental conditions at three different venues. The fact that I belong to a culture that is considered the 'other' at the place in question brought to the fore divisive variables such as exoticism in Indian music as perceived by the Westerner. Blum (1994, 255) refers to 'every culture as a site of encounters' that cannot be reproduced 'as an unchanging essence with fixed locations and boundaries'. When cultures come in contact there is friction, but the same friction can give rise to warmth. The scholarly writings that underpin research in such intercultural encounters include those of Campbell, Drummond & Dunbar-Hall (2005) and Schippers (2009) who examine to such meetings in Australian contexts.

For the benefit of the readers the Indian terms used here have been explained briefly in **Appendix A**.

2.3 Excerpts from my Personal Journal – Auto-ethnographically Speaking

Being an artiste used to having audience that know or can anticipate the nature of my performance, it was nothing short of a 'musical shock' when I was given the task of materialising at three venues, each and every one of them totally unrelated to music of any kind, leave alone Carnatic, and present Carnatic vocal music for around 15 minutes at each one of them, twice a day. My performances were supposed to be part of a 'pop-up' concert series, at three interesting venues that were embedded in the characteristic quaintness of Tyalgum: The General Store that sold all kinds of useful things, a Café Bar that was the 'hang-out' for the locals and visitors, and an Artefact Store cum café that was the simplest of these. These 'pop-up' concerts were a spontaneous fringe attraction at the annual Tyalgum Music Festival held in September, 2016. Tyalgum is a picturesque, quaint village that nestles in New South Wales, very close to the Queensland border in Australia. I enjoyed the new environs and the lack of control that this adventure entailed. I did not have accompanying artistes, and was to perform with a customary drone, the *tanpura*, that I had on my phone as an app. I found the sound of the *tanpura* suddenly as comforting as the call of an old friend in a room full of strangers. This would be my companion, the only 'known' trigger in a new place that would bring me alive as a singer. The audience is They usually look for pointers that enable them to make up their minds, beforehand, on what they could be expecting to hear. I would be judged firstly on physical appearance. I decided to dress in bright Indian formal attire. I put some make-up on, as I would if I were performing under the arc-lights, not only to suggest to my own conscious self that I was about to perform, but also to others that I was a performer in their midst. I am not sure now how well that worked. As I set out to 'take-in' the first venue, I drew a sharp breath. I was quite excited and a little nervous.

Venue 1 – The General Store

I arrived at the General Store a few minutes prior to the concert. It was a large, airy space that sold provisions, food, coffee, newspapers and magazines. I was pointed to a large magazine rack and a little space near it that was neatly carpeted. This was the place where I would be seated to sing. It was almost comical. I found myself comparing it to the ornate stages where Carnatic music is traditionally performed. Intermittently the coffee machine made a rather loud noise. 'It is on a different tonic (pitch) to mine, it would certainly clash', I thought to myself. I was accustomed to perceiving the tones of machinery that made sounds, like vacuum cleaners, cars, or fridges. This idiosyncrasy of mine was playing up here. I requested the kindly lady at the counter if she could stop making coffee while I was singing. She was initially flummoxed. I explained the nature of Carnatic singing, and that I

was performing alone, without amplification, with only a drone, and that it was difficult to hear myself over a noisy background. She hesitatingly acquiesced. I felt relieved. To my right were a few little tables where some pleasant looking people were seated sipping their coffee as they looked at the mountains outside. Before me was a cosy couch that could seat around three people.

People present at the venue were in varied states of activity, some browsing shelves, others just ruminating. It was 9 am in the morning. The sun was streaming in and I felt strangely liberated. I turned the *tanpura* on, and closed my eyes. I was free to express my idiom to a group of people who had no expectations of me. There was no pressure. I turned around and took a long look at the mountains and the swaying trees. I felt happy, engulfed in a sense of calm, and was going to respond to these emotions through song. I projected my voice loud and clear in an attempt to get everyone's attention, while tuning my voice to the drone. I felt like singing a piece in *Raga Shankarabharana* that evokes peace and joy. As I moved through the first stanza, I saw heads turn, activities come to a stand-still, and the coffee drinkers gently nod. As I continued with complex melismas and rhetorical interpretations, they swayed.

There was the occasional sound of the till; children chatted as they were walked past and there was the delicate clang of an odd tea cup. I closed my eyes again and went into the music to rid myself of these extraneous distractions that interrupted my flow. Another whiff of gentle breeze brought me back to the room. I noticed that some young children had made their way into the store. They were old enough to understand that a music performance was in progress, and had stopped chattering. They stood looking at me, listening. I thought it might be interesting to sing solfa passages (*svaras*) at a higher tempo to entice these children. Perhaps they would be reminded of tongue twisters! I cheerfully embarked on a fast embellishment that took me through hills and valleys, cruising within the raga, with syncopated syllables in interesting metrical combinations dancing their way into the room. The children tapped their feet, looking engrossed and excited. I felt a sense of triumph, almost childish. The piece was coming to a close. The children were called away by their parents and as they left, I felt disappointed – I had lost a few important members of my audience. I closed my eyes and internalised again, finishing the piece. Some members of the audience came up to me and said that I had a lovely voice. They asked me where I was from and what this music was. A few of them said that they had been to Delhi and asked me if I was from there too, while admiring the delicate embroidery on my *kurta*. I replied that I was from Chennai, in the South of India. The discussion then moved on to geography, tourism, food, and clothes. I realised that music was a part of a broader cultural fabric, and can never be isolated from it. I felt at that moment that I was a representative of my country, not just my own music. The question of the artist versus the art rose and fell as I walked away from the venue. I felt insignificant in

comparison to the art form that I represented. It weighed heavily on me. The performance was about me, but the perceptions belonged to the art form.

I found myself wondering, »Was I a representation of something exotic in that little store?« I fervently hoped that there would have been at least a few moments wherein transcendence may have caused the audience to forget that they were listening to an 'exotic' form of music, in realising that it was just music that didn't need to be classified, categorised or understood in any way other than the way than it naturally ought to be: aurally. I struggled to come to terms at that moment with being the 'other', though. I was noticed, not only for my music, but also for what I represented: my home culture. I wanted to be thought of as a musician before all else. Why did my identity and ethnicity have to overshadow my music?

Venue 2 – The Café Bar

This was a noisy, loud atmosphere. I could not come to terms with the fact that I had to sing in such a surrounding. I was almost certain that I would hurt my voice if I sang unsupported. The acoustic was poor, and I felt it was unkind on my part to expect people who were lunching as a family to drop their agenda and start listening to my singing. I was imposing on the culture and comfort of a random group of people. I suddenly wished I were a pop singer or a jazz artiste. I could sing love songs that were lighter, in a language that they would understand. They could sip their drinks and move to the music; that way I wouldn't let them down. It occurred to me that Carnatic music in itself was incompatible to such a setting. The bar was open and a few young people who were having drinks were getting louder.

The questions in my head were getting louder as well: How do I get Carnatic music across to these people? Don't I have a duty to delight them when I perform? If I am true to my traditional idiom would I fail in my duty as an entertainer?

»Was I being judgemental?« I asked myself. »Am I using my culture as a relativistic marker? Am I assuming that those young people at the bar will appreciate Carnatic music in a way that is any less than people wearing traditional *dhotis* and sipping filter *kaapi*?«

»Why am I afraid to put myself out there as an object that invites judgement, when I think it is ok for me to be judging others?«

»Am I stereotyping or was I afraid of being stereotyped? In being so afraid, I am engaging in reverse stereotyping?«

»Why does it matter to me that I may be judged?«

The volley of questions hit me like an avalanche. I was reeling in the intensity of the emotions that surfaced.

I reminded myself that I had ventured into this experiment to feel these complex emotions, I struggled to process them. When they took over I felt powerless.

In retrospect, I was struggling to separate religion, spirituality and the associated rigour and discipline that Carnatic music training entails, from the music itself. I had to decide at that moment to separate, in my mind, the art from its associated social stigmas. I clutched at my *tanpura* device, my knuckles white, my breath uneven. I felt myself tearing up. I dragged my feet towards the exit in an attempt to collect my thoughts. My ambivalence shocked me.

Mercifully, my colleagues, an Oboe trio were finishing their pop-up concert at a different venue and walked past. I called out to them and asked if we could collaborate with me and support my performance at the café. I felt that showing up with a group would give me the emotional strength that I needed. They were doing Beethoven. I suggested that I could come in with *svara* passages in between the sections. It was time for me to start, and I felt myself relax. I made my entrance with the Oboe trio. I realised that I was now collaborating and seeking comfort from a group of 'others' who were now my friends, and the thread that connected us and made us comfortable with one another was music. The fact that our music was so different did not seem to matter then. We were comfortable on stage, and a feeling of security enveloped my being. I felt like hugging the three of them in gratitude. I had never in the past improvised over Beethoven. I was excited, and felt adventurous. We started, smiled at each other reassuringly, unsure of what we were going to improvise on, but very sure that we had one another to depend on. It was a feeling of unity in diversity that I will remember for a long time. A very old gentleman came up to us after we finished and said, »Did you know that you have created something intercultural?«. We nodded joyfully.

Venue 3 – The Artefact Store cum Café

I decided to go in for another collaboration at the third and final venue. A talented artiste who was also a dear friend, played a wooden instrument from Central Asia, called the *erhu*. She was as excited about a spontaneous collaboration as I was. We were seated at a pretty courtyard outside the artefact store and café. Plenty of flowers were in full bloom before us, the onlookers were seated quietly looking straight at us, as if in anticipation. The birds were chirping intermittently. The leaves rustled. She had started to play a pentatonic scale, it was beautiful. I listened, and responded. I realised that I did so mechanically. Why wasn't I as excited to perform here as I was in the first venue? I felt annoyed with myself. A few old ladies across the courtyard cheered for us.

It dawned on me at this very moment that the novelty of performing in new places had worn off for me. I had gotten used to the experience, so much so that I was not deriving pleasure out of the unexpectedness anymore. Rather, the unex-

pectedness had become expected. The 'intrinsic value' of enjoyment in the performance process that had had me 'wired' ceased to exist that moment on. This meant that my experiment had ended. I suddenly felt spent.

2.4 The Outcomes

Upon unpacking the roller-coaster ride of emotions that I had experienced in putting myself through that day of uncertainty, I learnt the following things about my own art and artistry:

In Venue 1, I was intrigued and inflated by the novelty of 'place', so much so that I felt more powerful than the art form that I represented. The performance showed me later that the audience had responded to my culture and personality as much as to my music. I realised that music, identity, and culture were inseparable in performance practice. I felt humbled.

In venue 2, I battled with my value systems, and eventually reconciled to the fact that place and the people that inhabit it judge the artiste and artefact as much or as little as the artiste in turn judges them. In intercultural music-making scenarios judgements become inevitable; collaborations are useful: they transcend sociological constraints.

In venue 3, I realised that unusual circumstances in performance become usual once the performer gets used to it. The artistic creation in venue 3 failed to come alive to the fullest since it was not created with as much pleasure. I realised the importance of being in awe and wonder of the practice itself to appreciate and enjoy the research that is led by practice.

Though the artistic creations (performances) in each instance were engineered by me, they spoke to me of different tangibles and intangibles. In doing so, they silently steered me on. I wrote of my experiences; the performances emoted on my behalf.

When I queried my own narrative pragmatically, I surprised myself: I had originally set out to experiment with my conventional singing in an off-beat cross-cultural scenario and examine how my performance was influenced by those extra-musical markers, but the journaling reflected deeper issues as well: those surrounding intercultural hybridisation, and syncretic acculturation, that had surfaced concomitantly from within me. I was grappling with having to reconcile with my existence as an 'other'. When I had felt confronted and vulnerable, I had relentlessly engaged with my music, using it as a safety shield, a façade. I was finding my 'voice', but I had to lose my inhibitions and preconceived notions that had held me back to do so. This wasn't just about place, performance and people. This was about the complex chemistry between art and artistry, between cultures and belief systems that we now embrace, and now eschew, almost whimsically at

times, in response to external stimuli. This was about being human, being vulnerable, feeling complexities, allowing for them, openly acknowledging them, voicing them verbally, sharing them, and addressing them with the respect that they deserve. It was then that I felt the responsibility to look past myself and transfer this experience to a larger section of people who in their own way enhance the macrocosm of 'research' that is populated by millions of 'microcosms' that each speak for themselves. I needed to debrief with like-minded others on my personal tryst with intercultural performances, to share.

Through music researchers can ask timely questions regarding hybrid identities in a shifting global context. In addition, questions that would otherwise remain unasked such as those that are advancing studies of embodiment can be explored via music. (Leavy 2009, 117)

2.5 Challenges

The narrative did run the risk of becoming tendentious at times. I had to restrain myself from being overtly judgemental on a few occasions, reminding myself that as I was observing, so was I observed. As I journaled at the end of the day, I unpacked my emotions and laid bare my observations. I was tired and felt drained. I found it hard to stay focussed after such a long day. But I did whip myself into recording the memories when they were fresh. Seemingly insignificant details seemed important in retrospect. I had taken pictures at each of the places in question to refresh the visual frames. To make meaning of the reflections and emotions that have been acknowledged, they would have to be validated against the backdrop of relevant literature. I knew that if I neglected the grounded theories, I ran the risk of jeopardising the research, rendering it questionable. I had to be mindful of the variables and their innate characteristics as expounded in scholarly writings. I had to remind myself that research is undertaken to contribute, and addressing the gaps in literature is a step that cannot be overstated. The fact that subjectivity was the bedrock of the narratives was yet another issue that was real. I had to check myself at times during the journaling if I was being completely honest with what I had 'seen' and 'felt'. As I feverishly wrote, I did find that impassioned expressions got in the way of observed fact, so much so that some facts may have gone unmentioned in a few instances. As an example, in the Café Bar wherein I found myself caught up in wrestling with my own 'identity', I have neglected to acknowledge the kind compliments from the service staff, and the fact that I was plied with steaming hot cups of well-made cappuccino before and after the performance. It may have seemed unimportant to me at that time, when I was pouring out my prejudices and issues onto paper, but in retrospect it tells me something: I was cared for with hospitality, a token of love. Engaging and disengaging from latent emotions

periodically as I recapitulated the day, was a challenge I had to negotiate time and time again. Whether I could mindfully do this is something that I have addressed candidly in Section 2.3. I am in the process of developing self-awareness as opposed to 'textual self-consciousness' (Coffey 2002, 337), an ongoing effort in refining my craft as an auto-ethnographer.

3. Finding my 'Voice'

'Finding my voice' in that hybrid space was at the epi-centre of this experiment. The voice I sought there was not merely my biological instrument, but one that is embodied within my personality, one that responded willingly to the external social stimuli (Chang 2008). It is a 'musical voice' as well as an 'authorial' voice that grew in real-time, at the scene of the music-making (Stubley 1995), as explained in Sections 2.3 and 2.4.

My experiences are a manifestation of the collective energies of the environment in which this research was undertaken, and the actions and reactions of the other participants/observers. I had started the day looking at stimuli, recording them mentally, but as the day progressed, I was consumed by the energy that the environment reflected in response to my own actions. I found my narratives gaining character, verve, multiplicity in perception and variegated overtones. In a natural development of events, the research tries to address these extra-musical overtones that arise in real-time in addition to serving me, well.

The experiences of every researcher who is engaged in any form of inquiry is singular to him or her. The uniqueness that is claimed in the context of this project is simply due to the non-replicability of the day. I can never replicate the way I felt on that particular day, even if I went to Tyalgum again and repeated my actions, if I could, that is. Every iteration is different from the last in some imperceptible way. No two days are ever the same.

Music can be thought of as an event or a happening, and one that is necessarily singular because no two performances are alike, nor is a particular song performed quite the same by different musicians, each with his or her own »musical voice«. (Leavy 2009, 114)

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Appendix A: Glossary of Indian Musical and Cultural Terms Used

Term	Meaning
<i>Tanpura</i>	A drone that runs parallel to a Carnatic presentation that suggests the tonic and helps the singer stay in pitch.
<i>Raga Shankarabharana</i>	A melody in Carnatic music that is equivalent of the Western Major scale.
<i>Svaras</i>	Notes of music, usually sung as phrases with syllables such as sa, ri, ga, ma, pa.
<i>Kurta</i>	A long shirt usually with adornments and embroidery in colourful material.
<i>Dhoti</i>	A wrap around long piece of clothing that men wear in South India, in formal and informal occasions.
<i>Kaapi</i>	A delicious South Indian version of coffee, similar to a cappuccino, perhaps a bit stronger, made using a 'filter' that drips the decoction through.

*Sažetak***Pjevanje kroz kulture: jedna autoetnografska studija**

Ovo je izlaganje namijenjeno razumijevanju umjetničkog iskustva u odnosu 'sebe' i 'drugoga' u složenom društveno-kulturnom okviru. Autorica je tradicionalna karnatska pjevačica iz južne Indije koja istražuje kako odgovoriti na skrivene tendencije međukulturnih napetosti s kojima je suočena u novim društvenom okolnostima, a očitujući ih otvoreno. Izvedeći vlastitu glazbu u međukulturnim kontekstima, autorica razmatra vlastitu potisnutu praksu, supostavlja ova razmatranja relevantnoj literaturi i ispituje nastajuće pojave. Autorica upotrebljava evokativnu autoetnografiju kako bi podcrtala emotivne izazove koji se javljaju kada se estetika karnatske glazbe sudara sa stranom pozadinom; vježba je ratoborna ali i ispunjavajuća.

Članak se razvija u tri odjeljka: prvi ocrta prirodu ispitivanja i metodu, drugi je naracija o glazbenim doživljajima koji daju informacije razmatranjima, a treći odjeljak združuje ideje koje proizlaze iz prvih dvaju odjeljaka, postulirajući da su sociologija i estetika čimbenici koji se stalno redefinišu u univerzumu suvremenih glazbenih kultura.