



International Listener Perceptions of Kazakh Music as Interpreted by Contemporary Foreign Composers

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The concept of ‘cultural diplomacy’ is becoming a source of power in the bid to align with the UNESCO’s ideal of ‘Education for International Understanding’ as promoted by ‘global citizens’. Kazakhstan offers an interesting example of this phenomenon. This research highlights the geo-cultural image of Kazakhstan, as perceived within an intercultural “world,” specifically in music communication. Using methods of ‘listener research,’ this study has assessed the perceptions of international listeners using keywords related to both Kazakh and European cultures. This study is a qualitative case study of Kazakh music composers and concerts that has explored how Kazakh composers have attracted both national and international audiences with both contemporary and traditional music. Preliminary findings suggest that there is difference between the perceptions of Kazakh and non-Kazakh audiences when recognising and responding to Kazakh traditions used in non-Kazakh music arrangements, such as Tlep. A better understanding of how this happens could help to promote an accurate image of Kazakhstan and Central Asia, enhance ‘international understanding,’ and also create a bridge between cultures without losing the unique aspects of Kazakh musical and cultural identity. The results also suggest that, although the composers acknowledge the importance of Kazakh music, a much stronger emphasis is placed on the impact it makes on the international audience.

Key words: *Kazakhstan, Kazakh music, contemporary foreign composers.*



Introduction

The culture of Kazakh music has changed significantly over the last two centuries. One of the most challenging changes was the switch from an oral (non-written) to a literate (written) tradition. Another change was the involvement of the European musical system - its instruments, technology, musical styles and thinking. Kazakh music is historical and fundamentally connected with traditional folklore (Sipos, et al,2001; Fuki Yagi, 2019). It comprises of legends, fairy tales, and folklore, and improvises on the rules and rhythms of traditional Kazakh music. Russian, Mongolian, Turkish, and American cultural traditions have also had a clear influence on contemporary Kazakh music. In the 19th century, for instance, when the Russian colonial troops arrived, they caused Kazakh music to integrate with music globally (Rietbergen, 1998). There was a kind of mutual enrichment whereby Russian and European musicologists experimented with Kazakh musical traditions, and Kazakh musicians were acquainted with different styles of music from around the world. New artists like Abai Kunanbayev, Kurmangazy Sagyrbayuly and Ykylas Dukenov created a fusion with non-Kazakh music. Despite these fusions, however, Kazakh traditional music still has unique features that distinguish it, and is clearly recognizable among the related Central-Asian and Mongolian musical cultures (Kazakh SSR,1991; Mariyam, 2006)

An example of cultural harmony or cultural diplomacy (UNESCO, 2013) with alien cultures through music is the Kazakh jazz, which, despite its alleged Western cultural influence, developed as an avant-garde cultural movement in the face of great resistance. "Boomerang" was the first Kazakh jazz band that started in underground concerts in Almaty through its cafes and restaurants. Eventually Jazz festivals were organized all over the country, including the famous Jazzystan that brought together musicians from the UK, Israel, Europe and more (Sipos, et al,2001; Fuki Yagi, 2019). More recently, in the beginning of the 20th century, several other initiatives were taken. A classical music school was opened in Kazakhstan, for instance, folk orchestras were formed, composers wrote symphonies, and the opera and ballet became social events. This was the result of a synthesis of classical and Kazakh folk music (Fuki Yagi, 2019).

Looking at the cultural exchange and the sharing of traditional music with other nations, there are a number of non-Kazakh composers who have been using a synthesis of Kazakh traditional music and other musical styles and genres. In doing so, they are able to express the feelings and emotions of Kazakh culture. Some of these musical works reflect the Kazakh national identity. Others do not. However, even if they were not successful, these attempts at least tried to create something new.

The Kazakh Museum of Folk Musical Instruments in Almaty is the only one in the world. Such repositories have few parallels even in Europe, where music has long been an integral element



of culture and a sign of civility. There are instances of refined Europeans who have come to listen to concerts with the music scores of compositions, or nomadic Asians, who have travelled to listen to a song contest between their favourite music composers. In the museum itself, a wooden mansion has been designed for the careful preservation of its musical heritage. Indeed, it is difficult to find something more harmonious and integral than this carved casket and its contents.

The museum also has collected everything that would delight the inhabitants of this Great Steppe.

Problem Statement

One of the goals of Kazakhstan cultural diplomacy is to create a positive and recognizable image of the country all over the world. Smykova (2014) asserts that “the tourist brand can be constructed on such advantages as ... cultural traditions and customs”, and one of the target audience groups are “the tourists interested in alternative culture.” However, a greater role is played by Kazakh music culture which significantly affects the cultural heritage of Kazakhtan. A problem often raised is how to estimate the extent to which the European musical system, with its instruments, technology and musical styles, has impacted the legacy of Kazakh music and its traditional folklore (Fuki Yagi,2019).

There is thus a need to analyse and examine the influence of Russian, Mongolian, Turkish, and American cultures on Kazakh music, which has undergone so much experimentation by European musicologists that fusions have radically expanded the Kazakh’s cultural horizon. It is also necessary to assess the difference between the perceptions of Kazakh and non-Kazakh audiences when recognising and responding to Kazakh traditions, especially in music arrangements. This study will also attempt to find out how music, as a cultural bridge, could improve the international understanding of Kazakhstan as distinct from other nations of Central Asia.

Literature Review

The Kazakh Musical instruments

In May 2018, an international conference on “Current Problems of Musical Turkology,” in Almaty opened new avenues for Kazakh musical instruments and poetry. Special attention was paid to the problems of dombra and qobuz performance with presentations in Kazakh language. During the conference, the repositories in the Kazakh Museum of Folk Musical Instruments in Almaty were highlighted. Such repositories are unmatched in the whole of Europe. This speaks to how music become an integral element of Kazakh culture and a sign of civility. The Kazakh museum was attended by both the Kazakhs and non-Kazakhs. There was no attempt to distinguish, or to ascertain, who was more musical or musically influenced by either the refined



Europeans, who listened to the Kazakh music with great zeal, or the Asians, who showed a similar interest in musical compositions. In fact, the fame and popularity of musical instruments like kiuishes, akyns, and zhyraus is as large in Europe as it is in Kazakhstan. These traditional musical instruments have undoubtedly played an important role in the musical heritage of modern Kazakhstan. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has excelled in both polyphony and the genre repertoire of classical European music, such as opera, symphony, orchestral and choral performance, and has created a new school of professional composers. This is clear evidence of the versatility and the adaptability of the Kazakh musicians and composers to European music schools (Bartók, 1976)

The Kazakh musician and composers

Historically, in the 18th and 19th centuries, travellers and explorers visited and studied this Great Steppe and described the musicality of the Kazakhs. These were the non-Kazakhs audiences who were subtle connoisseurs of the Kazakh music. One of the travellers, the orientalist Peter Pashino, described the professional musicians of Kazakh's local community as "a special kind of singers." Similarly, Adolf Yanushkevich, a member of the audience who attended the performance of a Kazakh singer, describes it as having "...unprecedented lightness and skill," and that the singer was a master with a "brave and charismatic voice." Even today there are many Kazakhs who are world-class performers and winners of international music and song concerts. More recently, in March 2019, on the 10th anniversary of bilateral relations between the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Principality of Monaco, the Embassy of Kazakhstan in France organized a concert showcasing the traditional cultural and music of the Central Asian countries. The show was organized to help non-Kazakh audiences discover the culture of Kazakhstan, its traditional and cultural milieu. Even the Government of Kazakhstan compiled Kazakh traditional music and folk songs as a part of the 'Madeni Mura' cultural heritage program.

Kazakhstan has been the home of a great number of talented and internationally- renowned classical musicians, including Kulyash Baiseitova, Bibigul Tulegenova, Yermek Serkebayev, Roza Baglanova, Alibek Dnishev, Aiman Musakhodzhayeva, Marat Bisengaliev, Mayra Muhammad-kyzy, and Alan Buribayev. These Kazakh artists have performed in front of non-Kazakh audiences and earned recognition in concerts such as the Cliburn International Junior Piano Competition, the New Wave international Contest of Young Performers of Popular Music, the Grand Prix of Slavic Bazaar, the Moscow Conservatory's International Competition of Wind & Percussion Performers, and the International Festival of World Music held in Israel.

Empirical findings

Fuki Yagi (2019) assesses the systematization of Kazakh music in Mongolia during the Soviet era and highlights the musical and cultural heritage popularized by theatres. The study sampled three-year participation observation and attempted to examine activities in promoting the systematization of Kazakh music in Mongolia. It determined how musical knowledge and technology were imported from the Soviet Kazakh Republic. Historically, it identified such landmark events like the establishment of a radio station (1950s), audio archives and the difficulty of Kazakh music in Mongolia (1960s–1980s). The study is significant because it shows how the Kazakhs claimed their identity in the post-socialist period in Mongolia. The study also identifies the drivers that systematized Kazakh music in Mongolia. A special mention has been made of Gangan baigaali, a multi-instrumentalist and composer who carried forward the traditional Mongolian folk music, from Beijing to New York City, and thus tapped into an international audience. This has drawn western attention to the blend of Mongolian and Kazakh folklore and musical notations.

Another artist, Layla Tazhibayeva, well known for playing rock music using the traditional Kazakh string instrument, the *kobyz* (or *qobyz*), admitted that her mission was to promote Kazakh music and the *kobyz* (Layla, 2018). She is popular among the non-Kazakh audience for her cover songs on the *kobyz* and rock songs. The *kobyz*'s sound adds mystery to contemporary music. While the mysterious sound and ethnic element of Kazakh traditional music is difficult for a wide audience to understand, her rock songs made it attractive and easy to remember. Her songs have received positive feedback from both Kazakh and non-Kazakh audiences.

Research Methodology

Instrument

A questionnaire was designed to identify the key words and concepts about Kazakh musical culture that have been presented globally by a number of non-Kazakh composers (Karl Jenkins, Carlo Siliotto, Erran Baron Cohen, Anne LeBaron, Peter Child, Werner Linden, Yuval Avital, etc.). This questionnaire was presented to two groups of listeners: local and foreign. Here two different musical fragments were used: one was original/ traditional, and the other was arranged by a European composer. The questionnaire aimed at ascertaining the opinions of both the local and foreign listeners in order to determine the degree to which the music adapted the values of the Kazakh culture (Kazakh SSR.1991).

Objectives of the study

The purpose of this study was to identify keywords related to the perceptions of Kazakhstan and Kazakh identity through listening to Kazakh music. The other objective was to identify listener perceptions of the use of Kazakh traditional music by non-Kazakh composers. The participants were 45 national (20-75 years old) and 15 international (20-57 years old) listeners of both genders studying in Almaty in 2015. The geographical range of the study included both European and Asian respondents from the UK, Germany, Brunei, South Korea, and Kazakhstan. Thirty percent of the national respondents, and 10% of the international, were professional musicians. Fifteen percent of the international listeners have been in Kazakhstan.

Research procedure

In this study, two music excerpts were used to examine how music can help present an interesting and accurate image of Kazakhstan abroad. One song used in this study was by a Russian female, Mariya Egorovna Rykina, who has been living in Kazakhstan and has a good knowledge of the local music culture. Mariya Rykina (in Kazakh - Mariyam Zhagor-kyzy - Mariya, daughter of Yegor) (1887-1950) – is an author and performer of Kazakh folk songs, an Honoured Art Worker of Kazakh SSR, and composer. As the daughter of immigrants Yegor Rykin, Mariya knew the Kazakh language perfectly. She understood Kazakh folk songs well and learned the national style of their execution. She was widely known for her song "Dudarai", which tells of the love between a Russian girl and the Kazakh dzhighit Duisen. It describes a non-national's strength of feeling and religious prejudices. The name of the song comes from the gentle attitude of Mariya towards the zhightit ("dudar" - curly or kinky person) (Mariya, 1989).

The second composition used in this study was by famous collector of Kazakh musical folklore, musician-ethnographer Alexander Zatayevich, who recorded more than 10 variants of the song "Dudarai". It became the basis for the Opera by G. Brusilovsky, "Dudarai," which was first broadcast in 1953 from the Abay Kazakh State Academic Opera and Ballet Theatre in Alma-Ata (*Encyclopedia, 2-e Edition, enlarged, Almaty*). Another famous Kazakh poet Kh. N. Bekhozhin dedicated the poem "Mariyam Zhagor-kyzy» (1950) in honour of the love stories of Mariya and Duisen. In 2013, a Chinese music teacher, Kazakh Taskyn, performed the song "Dudarai" in a Chinese contest, "The Voice", which went viral on the Internet (Bartók, 1976). The research was based an analysis of the audience's perception of these musical compositions (Gluck, 2007; Hannan, 2008; Nedlina, 2011; Sipos, 2000;SOAS, 2007).

Results and Findings

Sixty percent of the international respondents agree with these keywords regarding Kazakhstan in western mass media (according to M. Smykova). Kazakhstan: a state between Russia and China, an autocracy, the new capital in the steppe, human rights violations, environmental problems, corruption, and has a raw economy. They also agree that Kazakhstan is a country with rich tourist potential, which is not ready to be realised. Three percent of these respondents said it is “as if the ‘Iron Curtain’ had survived: Qaz did not really make it to the attention of the West”; 2% said “Vibrant and colourful where modern and traditional cultures co-exist side by side”; 48% of them only stress the geographical location of Kazakhstan – “the state between Russia and China”, “the center of Eurasia”. All of the international respondents said that the keywords and concepts that characterized Kazakhstan are Steppe and Silk Road, almost 30% of them also added - Horses, Yurtas and Shanyrak. Thus, it can be concluded that modern Kazakhstan is still an unknown country for these foreigners.

Ninety percent of the respondents believe that music is a universal language: “music is about forms, and emotions. Words may fail, music never”. 80% of the local respondents stressed that adapted ethnic music could lose its originality and appeal as a result of adaptation. By contrast, only 20% of the international respondents agreed with this statement, for example, one said - “This is the risk when it comes to adaptations” (Boyes, 1993). Interestingly, 100% of the locals agreed that everyone (composers, musicians or public) can synthesis any ethnic music with other music styles and genres to express feeling and emotion. 20% of the foreigners worried about it – “It... is possible. But it is inevitable for the musician not only to copy the style, but understand the background of the song / kuy”. 80% of the locals think that it is better to listen to the simply arranged version (which can save the original) rather than skillfully adapted (which could destroy) ethnic music in order to develop an understanding of the country it represents. Approximately 15% of the foreigners prefer both. One of them said: “I think everyone curious about Qazaq culture should hear the music in all possible forms: traditional, adapted, and find out what touches him”. (Brocken, 2003).

Approximately 95% of the locals think adapted ethnic music should reflect and express Kazakh values and ethnos. 100% of the foreigners agree with this statement: for example, one said: “Absolutely. Otherwise it will be total “ethno-kitsch”, meaningless, coldhearted, worthless. But this is valid for every intercultural experiment of this kind”. Only 53% of the locals and 36% of the foreigners preferred *“Tlep”’s version of “Dudarai”*. Half of the locals and near two thirds of the foreigners liked the simply arranged version of “Dudarai”. However, although all of the respondents could only choose one version, almost 76% of the locals underlined the great benefits of the *Tlep’s version* by Karl Jenkins, stressing its “uniqueness” and “high professionalism” (Deemer, 2012).



All respondents (100%) agree that it is necessary to keep and promote traditional music to present an attractive image of the country abroad. Most of the respondents said that it is also necessary to adapt traditional music for foreign listeners who are unfamiliar with Kazakh music. Almost all respondents think that the empathy, talent, versatility, and skill of Kazakh and non-Kazakh arrangers is necessary to maintain the value and originality of traditional music when adapted.

Discussion

When we analyse the results of the findings, significant differences are revealed between the keywords, regarding both the image of Kazakhstan and the representation through the Kazakh music. The perceptions foreign listeners helped identify the degree and nature of Kazakh music recognition abroad. Comparing the foreigners' expectations and the local listeners' perceptions helped clarify features of Kazakhstan in relation to the Kazakh geo-cultural image. In addition, it would create both recognition of Kazakh music abroad preserve its uniqueness in the globalizing world. The identification of the key words and concepts of the foreign listeners helped identify the preferences /expectations of Kazakh music for both original and adapted forms.

Based on the combination of national and European music, a number of classics of Kazakh opera have been created, including 'Kyz Zhibek' by Yevgeny Brusilovsky, 'Abai' by Ahmet Zhubanov, and 'Birzhan and Sara' by Mukan Tulebaev. Nowadays Kazakhstan is home to the following classical music institutions: The Astana Opera, The Kazakh State Philharmonic Orchestra, The Kazakh National Opera, The Kazakh State Chamber Orchestra, The Abai Kazakh State Academic Theatre of Opera and Ballet and the Kurmangazy Kazakh State Orchestra of Folk Instruments (Gillies, 1993). It is the ongoing preservation of Kazakh traditional music, coupled with the thriving Western classical music, which makes Kazakhstan so unique. Table 1 exhibits the listener's perception of Kazakh's music.

Table 1: The listeners’ perception of Dudarai by Karl Jenkins

<i>Factors</i>	<i>Listeners’ comments</i>
Geography of the excerpt	European music, mixed Asian-European
Used music style	musical, “beautiful music fusion”, Kazakh country’s representation, Kazakh traditional, mix of many different styles including Kazakh, Kazakh music style by using European musical instruments
“Nationality” of the listened excerpt	“universal”, in Ireland style, in Tatarian style
Used music technology	“interesting music arrangement” “colourful by sound”, beautiful melody, clearly rhythmic
Feelings	“soul”, “fun”, “deeply emotional”, holiday, playful, relaxed

Further analysis of the data showed that the geo-cultural image of Kazakhstan, as perceived within intercultural “world” music communication, is still not known enough. There is a difference between the keywords associated with Kazakhstan from national respondents, which are “Steppe”, “Horses”, “Yurta”, and Shanyrak” and Silk Road, and internationals, who picked up “Steppe” and “Silk Road” only. The study also illustrated that there is difference between the perceptions of Kazakh and non-Kazakh audiences when recognising and responding to Kazakh traditions used in non-Kazakh music arrangements (using jazz, for example), such as *Tlep*. Although the national listeners generally preferred the familiar and simply arranged version of “Dudarai,” they also valued the new version by Karl Jenkins. It can be suggested that the second one has great potential to be popular (Finkelstein,1989; Mariya, 1989).

Conclusion

The research makes the point obvious that respondents believe that it is better to listen to the original, rather than the adapted version of ethnic music in order to develop an understanding of the country it represents. However they would like to have both the original traditional version and adapted version of traditional music in order to make a free choice. The study revealed how music can revolve around societal issues as well as cultural politics in general, and the development of the field of music and music education in particular. With their heritage, Kazakh composers appear to have a strong social conscience that manifests as a sense



of responsibility for the safeguarding, and the development of, the field of contemporary art music, as well as ensuring its cultural vitality. It is believed that this study will help gain a better understanding of the strategies of composers in attracting international audiences.



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