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Victorian bands and their dissemination in the colonies

TREVOR HERBERT and MARGARET SARKISSIAN

Introduction

This morning I unintentionally stumbled across the annual Cherry Blossom Parade in Washington, DC. It was probably little different than any other American public parade, full of decorated floats and oversized balloons interspersed between uniformed marching bands from high schools all over the country. What caught my attention was the 'foreign' element in the parade – three groups that represented Japan, land of the cherry blossom. Two of these groups were local martial arts associations: one representing the Ryuku Islands, the other, Okinawa. The men and women of both contingents, obviously multiethnic, were dressed alike in stereotypical Japanese martial arts costumes (complete with coloured headbands). Participants paused every few steps to demonstrate kicks and poses, then proceeded on to the sound of traditional Japanese music played through loudspeakers. The third group was the official Japanese delegation, flown over especially for the parade. I'm not sure what I expected – perhaps a float of graceful kimono-clad Japanese women waving cherry blossom branches to the ethereal sound of the *shakuhachi*. Instead, to my surprise our ears were assailed by a familiar John Philip Sousa march played with gusto by a Japanese high school band. The only difference between this band and its American counterparts was that the musicians did not wear unisex military uniforms: all wore fuchsia pink school blazers, with long white pants for the boys and short white skirts for the girls (Sarkissian 1994).

This vignette is salutary because it is simultaneously a confirmation and a negation of commonly held cultural stereotypes: a confirmation in the sense that local residents chose to represent Japan stereotypically through martial arts and 'traditional' music; a negation in the sense that the Japanese chose not to represent themselves through a feminised culture we might imagine 'traditionally Japanese'. Instead, by presenting a marching band without the military markers, they chose to subvert a medium we consider stereotypically Euro-American. The fact of the matter is, however, that brass and military bands – like the piano and the guitar – have transcended their cultural origins. They have had (and continue to have) a tremendous impact upon musical practices of the non-Western world. While they may range from more or less nostalgically remembered relics of former colonial times to audible symbols of present-day repressive regimes, in some parts of the world they have become a dynamic part of the modern soundscape. In Japan, for example, by 1985 – only 90 years after the Salvation Army first landed at Yokohama – there were 'well over 7000 elementary, middle and high school concert bands' (Satoh 1985, p. 30), and the nation had become a leading manufacturer of brass instruments, exporting them worldwide.

Whether it is because brass bands were associated primarily with colonial regimes and missionaries (two agencies from which anthropologists have, until recently, tried to distance themselves) or because anthropologists and ethnomusicologists working in the first half of this century were too committed in the attempt to document native cultures before they 'died out' to pay any attention to hybrid genres, little scholarly attention has been paid to brass bands and vernacular music culture in the colonial period. Preliminary examination of a limited body of published material raises a number of social, cultural and musical issues that suggest this is a fruitful avenue for further exploration for it is clear that brass instruments and brass bands have a special place in the musical soundscape of colonised countries. It is also possible that the processes of adoption and/or absorption were facilitated by a certain compatibility between the ideas shared by the coloniser and the colonised concerning the function and symbolism of brass instruments.

Brass instruments and the European art music tradition

Brass bands are a product of the nineteenth century, but brass instruments have a much longer tradition in European art music. Since the fifteenth century there have been groups of brass players who played music that was either learned by rote (trumpet ensembles and *alta cappella*¹ groups before the late sixteenth century or played from notated music that was composed for one of the secular or ecclesiastical functions that art music served. Brass instruments always had a special status both socially and symbolically. In the sixteenth century performers on *trombon* and *cornetti*² were skilled ensemble players whose principal function was to support and imitate voices in liturgical music. The players were always highly paid and almost always professionals. They were among the first wind players in the Renaissance to acquire international celebrity as performers (rather than as composer-performers). Trumpeters were particularly privileged. In most countries their art was either licensed directly by an officer appointed and paid by the monarch (for example, in England this responsibility was exercised by the King's Sergeant Trumpeter), or through an official agency, for example, in the Habsburg empire The Imperial Guild of Trumpeters was the sole privileged guild for trumpeter and kettle drum players (Tarr 1988, p. 94). Trumpets were ceremonial and military instruments, and were almost always associated with authority and declamation. This characteristic still prevailed when, in the seventeenth century, the instrument became integrated into art music. Similarly, horns were not used in art music until well into the seventeenth century, and even when their use in various forms of concert music was common, the symbolism of their vernacular origin – the sounding of hunt calls – persisted. These symbolisms – trombones (with the church death and terror), trumpets (with the military and heroism) and horns (with the hunt and the pastoral) – continue to the present time in, for example, film music and were particularly prevalent as programmatic devices in Romantic art music.

Victorian brass bands

At the start of the nineteenth century almost all British brass players were skilled professionals. An extremely limited number of brass instruments were used in military bands (which until the middle of the nineteenth century were primarily the private bands of commanding officers who funded them) and in church bands

These bands provided a widely dispersed infrastructure for text-based music-making, mainly in rural areas, but brass instruments were not prominent. The instrumentation of British military bands closely resembled the *Harmoniemusik* format that was popular in Germany in the late classical period.³

It was changes to the design, manufacture and marketing of instruments that stimulated change to the function, idiom and sociology of brass instruments (Herbert 1991). From the latter part of the eighteenth century several technological devices were applied to brass instruments so that players would be able to obtain a fully chromatic range. Up to that time, on brass instruments other than trombones it was only possible to obtain notes outside any given harmonic series by using highly skilled techniques such as handstopping and *clarino* playing.⁴ The most important technical advance came with the application of the valve to brass instruments, but, even though perfectly workable valve instruments were available in the 1820s, it was not until the 1840s that they became widely available and favoured. The acquisition shortly after 1844 of the agency for Adolphe Sax's piston valve instruments by the virtuoso brass-playing family the Distins was one important reason why the popularity of brass instruments accelerated in the middle of the century, but there were also other factors. The newly designed instruments were relatively easy to produce; the raw materials were commonplace metals, and since no especially complicated shaping processes were needed they could be manufactured by skilled production-line workers, whereas many other types of instrument were made by indentured craftsmen, each of whom made one instrument in its entirety before starting another.

The mid-Victorian period also produced other factors that were conducive to amateur instrumental music-making and brass bands in particular. Favourable economic circumstances and the economies that resulted from mass production resulted in a dramatic fall in the real cost of instruments between 1840 and the 1870s. Deferred payment schemes were easily available to those working-class men who could find guarantors for what were, in effect, loans. Instrument retailers in the middle of the century recognised that the prevailing combination of social and economic circumstances made for a salesman's utopia. Working people had more leisure time, and employers were concerned that this would lead to social unrest, so they readily acquiesced to requests from their workers that they act as guarantors for loans to buy instruments in order to form a brass band carrying the company name. The greatest number of brass bands that carried the name of a colliery, mill or forge were formed in this way. Very few had direct financial patronage from company owners.⁵

There were several practical as well as musical reasons why brass band instruments became instantly and particularly popular with amateurs. Brass instruments are easy to play in the early stages. Simple harmonic-series tunes of the type that army buglers play can be learned in a matter of hours. The chromatic notes that lie between those basic harmonic tones are made available by the manipulation of the valves. The valves are operated by the three most dexterous fingers of the right hand which press and release the valve buttons in a manner which is entirely natural and relaxed. So easy were these instruments to play that it is almost certain that most of those who taught people to play brass instruments in the early days could not play themselves, but taught from printed elementary primers. The newly invented instruments that were to be the most popular staple for brass bands were based on the series of instruments that became generally and generically known

as Saxhorns. The primary feature of these instruments is that the tubing from which they are made is, to a large extent, conical, as opposed to the tubing on instruments like trumpets and trombones, which is primarily cylindrical. Thus, the new technology made it easier for the players to blend with each other, for even though trombones (but never trumpets) were always included in the standard instrumentation, the easily identifiable sonority of a brass band is based on an appealing homogeneity that comes from the combined sounds of conical-bore instruments.

Contests, which started in earnest as professionally organised, leisure industry activities in the 1850s, soon became the central feature of British brass band orthodoxy. They made brass bands widely popular, and they also raised standards and provided the forum from which all the uniform features of the brass band idiom emerged. Almost all of the main ingredients of that idiom – the standard instrumentation and the characteristic performance techniques and values – that exist today were in place by the 1880s.

It is hard to estimate the number of bands that existed in Victorian Britain or to gain a reliable sense of their popular appeal. Towards the end of the century *The Brass Band Journal* claimed that there were 40,000 brass bands, a figure which has been shown to be spurious by Dave Russell (Russell 1991, p. 58). Audience sizes at contests are also impossible to verify. The estimated figure of 105,000 that are supposed to have attended the 1900 Crystal Palace contest seems inflated, but consistent reports that the larger provincial competitions drew audiences of between 10,000 and 25,000 are more credible. These contests were held in the open air, with affordable entry prices, and they appear to have been family occasions. Firmer (but not entirely reliable) figures are available for the production of musical instruments. Between 1853 and 1900 the London Patent Office registered patents for eighty-six different designs of valve instruments. The instruments manufactured in Britain appear to have been aimed at the home market and the colonies, but early in the period foreign imports were also sold in the UK. Almost all of these instruments were 'badged'; they were imported bearing no manufacturer's name but sold with an engraving of the importer's name and emblem on the bell of the instrument. Several manufacturers were making instruments in the UK in the last forty years of the century. Among the biggest were the Manchester firm of Highams and the London-based firms Boosey, Besson and Hawkes. Besson produced 52,000 instruments between 1862 and 1895, and Highams sold 60,000 in the same period. The Salvation Army Music Department, set up in 1883 to ensure that the supply of all musical and other accoutrements for the Salvation Army was self-regulated, produced all brass instruments played in Salvationist bands (Scott 1970, pp. 424–30; Herbert 1991, pp. 20, 46).

Brass instruments were not, of course, only played in brass bands. Professional brass players were employed in orchestras, military bands, and musical hall and other theatre bands. By the end of the century the military was a major employer of professional brass musicians and it was the amateur brass band movement that was the breeding ground for players. The Military School of Music (later to be called The Royal Military School of Music) was set up at Kneller Hall in 1858 with the express intention of promoting the cause of native-born musicians. The British military band tradition was built largely under the influence of foreign band-masters in the first half of the nineteenth century. These foreigners were civilians who, understandably, refused to follow their bands to any conflict. They

were London based and worked hand-in-hand with instrument manufacturers in what was a profitable and highly corrupt cartel that saw leading firms – particularly Boosey’s – selling to army bands, at inflated prices, instruments which they did not particularly need. From the middle of the century a new wave of British-born military bandmasters emerged, including J.R. Tutton of the Royal Horse Guards, J.G. Jones of the 16th Lancers, James Smyth of the Royal Marine Artillery and Charles Godfrey of the Royal Horse Guards. These bandmasters too had powerful associations with music- and instrument-producers. Much of the ‘journal music’⁶ which was sold to brass bands was edited by one of the army bandmasters, and they were also in receipt of respectable fees for adjudicating at band contests. Charles Godfrey, for example, arranged the test pieces for every British Open Contest between 1871 and 1900.

Brass and military bands in the Empire

Throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, particularly from about 1860, a number of factors contributed to make brass and military bands and their players influential in colonised countries. The market for instruments and music was massive – the sonority of the brass band, and its repertory, was deeply ingrained into the Victorian popular music psyche. The market for military music was probably falsely inflated by the vicissitudes of the bizarre relationship between the War Office, the regiments, their civilian bandmasters and the instrument manufacturers. The constant boast of manufacturing companies was that they were ‘suppliers to the military’. This imprimatur was both impressive and effective, for sales of brass instruments almost certainly led to a surplus of instruments in the military. The main reason why military bands continued to buy new instruments was that bandmasters and manufacturers capitalised upon the absence of a common pitch standard in brass and military bands. Thus, if a band wished to have any new instruments, there was a strong incentive to buy a complete set in order to ensure consistency of pitch (in any case, it was financially advantageous to buy the set). It was a scandal of massive proportions. Many of the redundant instruments must have ended up overseas (Binns 1959, pp. 26–9).

The symbolism attached to bands and the brass instruments in them was important in the construction of an image of empire. Bands have always helped authenticate ideas of authority through military power. The pre-eminence of trumpets in Western and non-Western ceremonial music is indicative of this. Bands were present at the most conspicuous exhibitions of colonial power in the nineteenth century. They had an important role to play in colonial social life and it is virtually certain that the establishment of most British-imposed music cultures in the colonies was initiated by some form or other of brass or military band. But it was in official ceremony that they had their most visible exposure, where their sound and image became woven into the broad tapestry of symbols of leadership. Interestingly, the symbolic features of brass instruments were also the motivating reason for their use by the Salvation Army – one of the most effective and broadly dispersed missionary organisations of the late nineteenth century. The military metaphor pervaded all aspects of the Salvationist image and structure. Bands were the obvious musical medium for Salvationists.

Salvationists were not the only missionaries to use brass bands or brass instruments because there were pragmatic factors which gave these types of instru-

ment a special utility. Indeed, these practical considerations made brass instruments important to the musical infrastructure of all colonisers, whether they were religious or secular. Some of these factors had also been significant in the setting up of amateur brass bands in the UK. The instruments were cheap and plentiful (as has already been pointed out, there may have been a market surplus of second-hand army instruments), they were durable and largely unaffected by extremities of humidity or temperature, and furthermore there are no parts of a brass instrument that need to be routinely renewed, because the vibrating membrane that excites the air to produce sound is not a string or a reed but the player's lips. The instruments could be played indoors and outdoors. They could play virtually any sort of music in transcription. There must have been an abundant supply of army and civilian players. Brass and military bands men were the principal music-makers of the colonial empire.

Most of the military bands in British colonies in the nineteenth century were staff or line bands of the British army that were stationed with regiments on a tour of duty. Some regiments formed separate bands dedicated to a colonial posting. For example, the Royal Artillery had permanent bands in Malta from 1885, and Gibraltar from 1899. Some regiments that were formed locally often had bands that were made up entirely of indigenous soldiers who were taught by a Kneller Hall trained bandmaster. This seems to have been the case with the Band of the British West Indies Regiment. The police in British colonies had bands too. Bands formed by British police in Australian territories in the nineteenth century still exist and permanent police bands were set up in Canada (1876), Sri Lanka (1873), South Africa (1897), Barbados (1889) and Zimbabwe (1897) as well as many other countries in Africa and Asia.⁷ The Salvation Army were in South America and the Caribbean by 1890, and in Africa, Australia, New Zealand and Asia by 1892. By the turn of the century there were bands of one sort or another in every colonised country.

Colonial bands, bandmasters and bandmen

Such data – describing where and when bands were formed in the colonial world – are relatively easy to find; however, it gives us little insight into the ways people of different cultures interacted at a vernacular level. In most cases, these interactions were based on an inherent power imbalance. A small number of European colonising people exerted disproportionate power over large numbers of indigenous peoples either through force (superior weaponry), consent/indoctrination (persuading them that traditional customs were 'primitive' in the face of 'civilised' European culture), or most often some combination of the two. For the majority of indigenous people, practical experience of this new culture rested on contact with two types of foreigners: officials (soldiers, police, etc.) and/or missionaries. Both groups used music as a means of demonstrating and disseminating their values, particularly European notions of order and discipline. Ranger's assessment of the usefulness of music in achieving this goal in Zanzibar could apply equally to many other parts of the colonial world:

the rhythm of hymns and European band music was thought to be an excellent way of introducing the freed slave children to the necessities of industrial time. For the missionaries European music represented a world of order and contrast to the inexplicable monotonies

and sudden passions of African drumming; musical ability was taken as a sign, a promise of potential for civilization. (Ranger 1975, p. 13)

Brass bands – loud, exciting and masculine – were particularly successful ‘as a musical weapon, and a thunderous proof of western military and religious superiority’ (Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, p. 2). Needless to say, the initial impact was made by military bands; references abound to the development of local brass bands inspired by military prototypes. In West Africa, for example, bands began to develop out of native military-fort bands as early as 1750 (Coplan 1978, p. 98). In South Africa, too, British military marching bands ‘made a strong impression, and Coloured bands paraded in the streets during the traditional New Year’s festivities as early as 1823’ (Coplan 1985, p. 11). Two years later, half a world away, the Dutch recruited men from Sulawesi and the Moluccas to put down a rebellion in Java; there too, military bandsmen were ‘locals who performed under a European bandmaster’ (Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, p. 11).

Local rulers quickly adopted both the military band and the notion of it as a symbol of royal status. When Jang Bahadur, the ruler of Nepal, visited London in 1850, for example, he was so ‘impressed with the British military bands playing in his honour’ that he not only ‘ordered a complete set of Highland bagpipes’ but also took a British military musician home with him to form a band of his own (Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, p. 3). Moving further east to Siam, American travel writer Frank Vincent provides an eyewitness account of a royal court brass band:

After the parade His Majesty’s own brass band played for us. There were sixteen instrumentalists, led by a sergeant-major, a mere youngster seven or eight years old and three feet in height; indeed, none of the members of the band were more than twenty years of age; their uniform was the same as that worn by the guards. They played in remarkably good time and tune, first the ‘Siamese National Hymn’, a rather pretty composition; and, second, a very familiar western waltz’. (Vincent 1874, pp. 152–3, quoted in Miller and Chonpairot 1994, p. 50)

The effect was felt even in Central Java, according to late nineteenth-century court chronicles. Although the brass band was not adopted *per se*, hybrid *prajuritan* ensembles mixed European drums, trumpets and flutes (possibly fifes) with Javanese drums and gongs. At the Yogyakarta court, *prajuritan* soldier-musicians wore uniforms modelled on contemporaneous European military dress (Sumarsam 1995, p. 70).⁸ In addition, a genre of *gamelan* compositions called *gendhing mares* (from the Dutch, *mars*, ‘march’) were performed by a *gamelan* ensemble augmented with European instruments ‘in order to reinforce the feeling of a military march’ (*ibid.*, p. 76). Significantly *gendhing mares* were used to accompany the entrance of *serimpi* and *bedhaya* dancers, the most refined and dignified of all the female court dances.

In the hands of the missionaries, music became a tool for fundamentally restructuring traditional societies around the world. Brass bands, in particular, were frequently organised, either as a replacement/antidote for ‘uncivilised’ native practices or as a means of attracting new converts. That military and religious superiority went hand-in-glove is amply reinforced by the mission’s appropriation of military themes – the band itself, the act of marching, and the wearing of uniforms. Mission bands often provided an opportunity for education, albeit an education that further inculcated a European world view. In the Cape and Transkei, for example, mission band ‘members acquired musical literacy and a European repertoire’ (Coplan 1985, p. 37).

Similar phenomena occurred throughout the colonial world, but how different was this from what was happening in Britain at the time? Just as in Britain, brass bands were popular in the colonies because of the durability of the instruments, the ease of playing, and the association with upper-class Victorian ideals of rational recreation. In Britain from 1859, bands were attached to the domestic volunteer force in an attempt to authenticate the military image, though – as in East Africa – in peacetime, there was little financial provision for the bands' maintenance.⁹ In times of war, of course, the situation in Britain and the colonies was quite different: the Third Battalion of the King's African Rifles, for example, was given permission (and a British bandmaster) to form a 'full band for use on recruiting tours, as well as to play at concerts for war charities and similar objects' (Moyse-Bartlett 1956, p. 695). Finally, bands were an equally successful part of the missionising process in Britain as in the colonies, also capitalising on the same concatenation of military and missionary metaphors. Significantly they also constituted a common link between the working-class domestic and foreign missionised:

Missionaries in the 1880s had few doubts of the civilizing and disciplining value of music. In Europe itself at this time the youth of the slums were being organized into Christian 'armies' and 'brigades', and marching to the sound of the fife and drum band. The Universities' Mission of Central Africa, which ran large freed slave villages and schools on Zanzibar, was supported in one 'large manufacturing town of the North of England' by a 'Children's Mission Army', with a boy Colonel and boy Majors presiding over it, and with Captains to collect contributions for the missions overseas. The U.M.C.A. journal, *Central Africa*, commented appreciatively on the singing of the Mission Army – 'whether it is the perpetual rhythm of the cotton mills, or what, these Lancashire people do know how to sing hymns and they do it well'. (Ranger 1975, pp. 12–13)¹⁰

Moving from social interaction at the institutional to the personal level, a different set of questions arise. Most pertinently: who played in the bands and how did they learn? It seems that the brass band was a small-scale metaphor for the colonial process itself – a single foreign bandmaster exerting authority over numerous native bandsmen who were expected to abandon their traditional ways of making music in favour of more 'civilised' European ways. References to this abound. Ideally the bandmasters were European: in Minahassa, Sulawesi, '[a]s with other European colonial armies, most military musicians were locals who performed under a European bandmaster' (Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, p. 11); in East Africa, during World War I, 'local East African troops, or Askaris, [were] employed by the Germans in Tanzania . . . and trained by them to play military music' (Collins 1989, p. 224); in Ghana, 'the company slaves, the mulattos, and the African traders [were] trained as artisans, clerks, soldiers and as military musicians. Thus, local musicians learned to play in so-called castle bands under European conductors' (Boonzajer Flaes 1993b, p. 3); in Paramaribo, Surinam, from 1825 the 'majority of players were locally recruited. Only the band master and his deputy were normally Europeans' (ibid., p. 9). In Nepal, Kale Nepali, a local musician who studied for two years at Kneller Hall, trained and conducted 'the brass and woodwind sections in the various army bands [but] always under a foreign bandmaster, of course' (Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, p. 3).

Although they stood out from their bandsmen by dint of race, the question remains, who were the European bandmasters? Were they part of a colonial elite, or were they just as much outsiders on the basis of class if not of race? In most accounts, they are just as faceless as the local rank-and-file musicians they trained.

An exception is found in the following sketch of M.C.A. Harvey. Although this vignette gives us little information about his regional origin, class, musical training, or military rank (other than that he served with a Lancashire regiment), it does give us a rare glimpse of day-to-day interaction between the bandmaster and his men:

The appointment of a European bandmaster for 3 K.A.R. was sanctioned in March 1913. When the 2nd Loyal [*sic*] North Lancashires reached East Africa after the outbreak of war in 1914, they were accompanied by their bandmaster, M.C.A. Harvey. In 1916 he was seconded to 3 K.A.R. . . . Harvey is said to have taught his Sudanese and Swahili recruits musical notation by showing them a rupee and its divisions into halves and quarters to represent the semi-breve, minim, and crochet, and the copper coins (ten, five, and one cent pieces) to represent the quaver, semi-quaver, and the demi-semi-quaver. The men proved apt pupils and the band was much in demand. (Moyses-Bartlett 1956, p. 695)

If a European bandmaster was not available, a foreign colonial substitute would suffice: the first Central African Rifles fife and drum band (which later became a full military brass band) was formed 'in 1900 under a Goanese bandmaster named De Souza' (Martin 1991, p. 73), while the East African Rifles band was 'founded in 1901 under a Goanese bandmaster, F.C. Pinto' (*ibid.*). In 1919 the Sixth Battalion of the King's African Rifles lobbied hard for permission to form their own band, pointing out that 'the sole cost involved would be the services of an Indian Bandmaster (thus alleviating the expense of importing a British bandmaster)' (*ibid.*). Even in modern times, the prestige of outsiders as bandmasters often remains: in Minahassa today, for example, to ensure victory in intervillage competitions, amateur bands collect money to hire famous bandmasters (Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, p. 14).

Although it may be impossible to determine the individual identity of the faceless bandmen, it seems clear that many colonial brass bands provided musicians with (perhaps their first) experience of interacting in a multi-ethnic environment. Harvey's East African band, as we have seen above, was a mixture of Sudanese and Swahili musicians. In West Africa from the 1870s interaction was international:

regimental bands of the English army, especially of the West India regiments were in high profile. The soldiers were West Indian or Africans who had received a military training in the West Indies. Their African headquarters were in Sierra Leone, but they would frequently tour the coast on military expeditions. The regiments served alternately for three year periods in the Caribbean and in West Africa, providing a continuous stream of cross-cultural information. (Boonzajer Flaes 1993b, p. 3)

Perhaps, predictably, the cross-cultural information exchanged between West Indian and Ghanaian regimental bands had immediate musical results, transforming 'European march time into a syncopated African beat' (Collins 1989, p. 223).

Of course, multi-ethnic situations were not unique to regimental bands. Leading European households in colonial Dutch Batavia (now Jakarta) maintained civilian and military wind ensembles staffed by house-slaves. These slaves, who originated from all over the Dutch East Indies '(but mainly from Bali, Sulawesi, Ambon and Java itself), were the principal carriers of musical life among the European colonists' (Heins 1975, p. 28). A similar multi-ethnic character is found in India today, despite the fact that so many other occupations are still defined by caste. It is estimated that 500,000 to 800,000 musicians earn a living in brass bands

(Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, p. 15), yet '[t]here is no single cultural or ethnic group from which all bandsmen come; Hindu, Muslim, Sikh, Brahmin, Scheduled Caste, Christian, all have their representatives in the band world' (Booth 1990, p. 248).¹¹ Finally, in turn-of-the-century East Africa, *beni ngoma* (a complex dance association in which military drill-like dance steps were accompanied by brass bands) began as an urban organisation that 'transcended tribalism' (Ranger 1975, p. 65). Not only did it provide migrant workers in new cities like Dar es Salaam with an opportunity for multi-ethnic contact, but it was also a vehicle for the consolidation and spread of Kiswahili as both a *lingua franca* and the language of urban music (Martin 1991, p. 79).

Brass bands and processes of acculturation

Having examined a variety of contexts in which social interaction occurred at a vernacular level, it is also necessary to consider the ways in which cultures and musics interacted in colonial contexts. At the broadest level, such an examination quickly proves that there was no single unified colonial experience. As Ranger has observed:

it was by no means the intention of the colonists to produce homogeneous colonial societies: 'traditional' unevenness was valued because it allowed for divide and rule or produced a localized focus for protest which was easy to deal with. Above all the working out of colonial policies produced an even greater unevenness. (Ranger 1975, p. 1)

This unevenness is just as apparent if we focus on a single cultural phenomenon, such as the brass band. The variety is endless: brass bands were readily accepted in some parts of the colonial world, but not in others; in some places they had a major impact upon vernacular culture, in other places their effect was peripheral; sometimes their instrumentation, repertoire and/or performing contexts were transformed in the process of adoption, other times they were not; even within a single culture, superficially identical manifestations of the same phenomenon could hold different meanings in urban or rural locations. Ranger has described this variety as 'a series of brass-band responses by people in a transitional period from pre-industrial to industrial society' (*ibid.*, p. 6).

The East African *beni ngoma* provides a particularly rich example of the complexity inherent in cultural interaction. Although there was considerable regional variety, certain features characterised *beni ngoma* throughout East Africa. Basically a dance association accompanied by brass band,¹² the *beni* had an elaborate hierarchy of officers identified by European military titles. Dances, based on the model of military drills, could range from a parade or march past to a repeated circling drill step or platoon formation. Dancers often wore European-style uniforms. On the surface, *beni* appears to be what Ranger has termed an 'adjustment to absolute power':

Beni dancers copied European military and ceremonial uniforms; took pride in their skill at drill; and often put on lavish displays of loyalty to the British Crown . . . both the missionaries and the freed slaves regarded European-style drill and uniforms and above all European-style military music as important symbols of progress towards the desired new life. (*ibid.*, p. 10)

He argues, however, that the adjustment to power was superficial, that the *beni* phenomenon was so widespread and successful because of its compatibility with

existing cultural preferences. Viewed in this light, European elements were contemporaneous topical (and fashionable) elaborations of traditional East African competitive dance associations.¹³ In other words, *beni* associations took what they wanted from European culture and adapted it to their own purposes, all the while presenting the veneer of adopting the musical forms of their colonial masters. Even the division into rival groups (for example, *Kingi* and *Scotchi* – the King's, or English, and Scots bands) can be seen as part of a continuing tradition of communal competition that characterised the natural sequence of Swahili festive life (*ibid.*, pp. 14–15).¹⁴ A similar compatibility accounts for the tremendous success of brass bands in north and central India, a success which has significantly outlasted the demise of colonial occupation. The substitution of brass bands for traditional *shelmai* and drum ensembles in urban wedding processions is simultaneously a marker of modernisation, an index of affluence, and an appropriation of the prestige derived from the former association of such bands with aristocrats. While the origin of the instruments may be Western, the performing contexts, social organisation of performers, and repertoire are distinctly Indian.

Equally complex are the interactions that occurred in areas of heavy missionary activity. On the surface it appears that hymn singing and brass bands were intended as a wholesale (and wholesome) replacement for 'native' musical practices, just as in Britain, these same musical activities were seen as a gentle palliative for working-class people immersed in an equally 'primitive' culture. For the missionaries, whose cultural values were shaped before they left British shores, there may have been little difference between foreign and domestic 'natives'. Yet even the missionaries discovered that ultimately success depended on a certain accommodation to local musical preferences. For example, when Lutheran missionaries began to work in Papua New Guinea in 1886, they set local translations of German hymns to German melodies; yet by 1915 they were promoting hymns based on traditional melodies. Over a decade later, Heinrich Zahn, the main missionary with a musical background, established a brass band, but not before he had successfully experimented with a band of local instruments (in this case, conch shells) for the harmonic performance of German hymn tunes:

[Zahn] had the idea of using the traditional conch shell to help his students in learning German melodies. Hand-in-hand with this, he taught them cipher notation. One shell produced one pitch, although the pitch could be lowered by a semitone by inserting the hand or finger in the open end of the shell. . . . By the end of 1925, students were playing two-part hymns. By 1927, they were playing in four parts. All of this apparently also helped their singing of these hymns. In 1928–29, Zahn received a donation of eleven brass instruments: six oval valve flugelhornes, two tenor flugelhornes with valves, two slide trombones, [and] one tuba with four valves. . . . Apparently the students learned to play the brass instruments (and to read Western notation) very quickly and certainly by 1929, they were performing together: ensembles in alternation with singing and all together. (Niles 1996)

Zahn's conch shell bands made a lasting impression in Papua New Guinea. Not only did they continue after his departure in 1932, but also two conch shell Hymnals were published in 1934 and 1959, and Niles reports that despite a hiatus after World War II, three bands presently exist. They also, significantly, made an impression back in Germany, where a couple of conch bands were started at the mission's headquarters (*ibid.*).

Conclusion

On the basis of the published material discussed so far, clear-cut conclusions about the purely musical impact of brass bands on local traditions in the colonial world is premature. One of the few systematic attempts to explore brass band traditions in the postcolonial world is Rob Boonzajer Flaes's *Frozen Brass* project at the Department of Visual Anthropology, University of Amsterdam (Boonzajer Flaes 1992, 1993a, 1993b, 1993c). Covering brass band traditions in Ghana, Minahassa, India, Nepal and Surinam, it provides us with invaluable descriptions, photographs and – most importantly – sound recordings (some made by himself, others acquired from ethnomusicologists' field tapes or from historical archives). However, even such an important contribution only scratches the surface of this subject.

The extent to which aspects of the symbolism attached to Western brass instruments was recognised in native communities is also difficult to assess. Certainly the traditional declamatory and ceremonial associations with trumpets in the West have parallels in other cultural contexts and it could be speculated that all brass instruments may have been surrogates for this type of symbolism in colonised countries in the period of Empire. A more interesting comparison, however, can be made between the colonised communities that encountered brass bands and the working-class communities in Britain where the brass band movement originated. Much of the impetus that promoted brass bands in Britain came from members of the upper classes who sought to engage working-class people in an activity which was improving and morally untainted. While other factors (such as instrument inventions, the economic climate, urbanisation, increased leisure time and commercial expansion) explain the growth of brass bands, it is important to stress that the phenomenon was originally perceived as being compatible with a number of widely shared dominant values that were in accord with the social, spiritual and moral order of the day. It did not take Victorian bandmen long to usurp musical and organisational control of their movement. The result of this was a new and distinctive musical and social identity – quite different in its social, musical and idiomatic structure than the art music values brass bands had previously imitated.

In the colonies, the situation was similar – the process was mediated by an ideology that was formulated on the other side of the world, but here, too, the hijacking by local practitioners did not take long. Local responses to the brass band vary widely, ranging from traditions in which musical interaction was minimal, to traditions in which interaction led to musical and cultural synthesis, in turn resulting in completely new – yet distinctively local – traditions. It may be that the point at which a particular local response lies along this continuum depends ultimately upon the compatibility of musical and/or cultural elements. In the case of Central Java, for instance, brass band music had little effect on court *gamelan* (with the exception in Yogyakarta of the *gendhing mares* repertoire discussed above). Sumarsam has suggested that 'incompatibility of the musical elements of the two musical systems (the tuning system, modal classification, and formal rhythmic structure), may be the reason for their continuing independence from each other' (1995, p. 75). More commonly, however, some degree of interaction occurred. In some cases, this took the form of juxtaposition. West Javanese *tanjidor* ensembles, for example, have preserved a European repertoire largely intact, but

play these pieces alongside a much larger body of locally composed pieces (see Yampolsky 1994). A similar juxtaposition of European and local pieces may be found in the repertoire of *musik bambu* ensembles from Minahassa, but in this case, other kinds of assimilation have also occurred. First, bands were readily incorporated into village life because they provided a new means for expressing a traditional value, community solidarity. Second, local musicians kept the form of the band and its repertoire but restructured the medium: lacking the raw materials to make new brass instruments, they substituted home-made bamboo imitations of European brass instruments (see Boonzajer Flaes 1992). At the most acculturated end of the continuum are traditions in which both the brass band and its music have been absorbed and transformed into distinctly new genres, such as the *beni ngoma* or the Indian wedding party. Whatever the degree of assimilation, however, it is clear that colonial brass bands subverted the dominant ideology just as thoroughly as did the brass bands of working-class Britain.

Endnotes

1. *Alta Capella* groups were, in effect, late-fifteenth century dance bands. Other similar groups were employed by civic authorities and had a wider range of functions; these included the Italian *Pfiffaro*, German *Stadpfeifer*, and British *waites*.
2. *Cornetti* were not brass instruments. They were made of wood and had side holes. They are classed with brass instruments because they are made to sound by vibration of the lips. They are quite different to the nineteenth-century brass cornets which, technically, are valved post-horns.
3. Most British military bands had eight players. Often one or two horns were used but clarinets, oboes and bassoons formed the core of such bands. There is evidence of serpents being used in church choir bands but it is rare for brass instruments to be found in them. See the analysis of instrumentation given in *Music in the English Parish Church* (Temperley 1979, p. 197).
4. Handstopping was used mainly by horn players. The hand is placed in the bell of the instrument to bring chromatic notes into play. *Clarino* playing was used mainly by trumpeters. It is a technique where the player performs in the high register where the upper partials of the harmonic series lie close together.
5. Retailers and manufacturers published a number of 'model letters' that provided workers with a form of words that enabled them to gain a guarantee from their employers (see Rose 1895, pp. 303–4).
6. Journal music consisted of serial, subscription publications containing arrangements of arias, dances and marches. It was the main form of printed music available to brass bands in the nineteenth century.
7. We are grateful for having access to information contained in the Jerome Gatehouse archive of military band history.
8. Sumarsam also notes that the *Serat Babad Nitik*, a chronicle of the neighbouring Mangkunegaran court, mentions a military marching band comprising female soldier-musicians (Sumarsam 1995, p. 70).
9. For example, in January 1912, due to financial constraints, the King's African Rifles' Nyasaland band 'was officially dismantled, despite exhaustive efforts on the parts of both Sir William Manning of the K.A.R. and the European residents of Zomba and Blantyre' (Martin 1991, p. 74).
10. The quotation comes from 'Home Work', *Central Africa*, 52, pp. 60–1.
11. Multi-ethnic brass bands are not a feature in neighbouring Nepal, however. Although a civilian brass band tradition has flourished there since the mid-1940s and there are now around sixty brass bands in Kathmandu alone, the vast majority of musicians still belong to the untouchable *damai* (tailor) caste. The few musicians who are not *damai* belong to the even lower *kasai* (butcher) caste (Boonzajer Flaes 1993a, pp. 3–4).
12. Martin suggests that the term "beni ngoma" itself, is an interesting example of the adaptability and flexibility of Swahili language and culture. "Beni" is an adaptation of the English word "band" and "ngoma" means drum and, by extension, any kind of dance music in general. . . . Thus, "beningoma" is the

absorption of the European military band into the framework of traditional East African music' (Martin 1991, p. 80).

13. He goes even further, stating that '[c]ompetitive dance associations were, in fact, a long-established feature of the Kenyan coast – and dance associations, moreover, which possessed an elaborate hierarchy of ranks, which specialized in dances displaying military skills, and which were vehicles for musical and other innovations. Thus many features of Beni which struck outside observers as most obviously new and foreign were really inherited directly from coastal dance traditions' (Ranger 1975, p. 18).

14. Focusing more narrowly on the *beni* tradition of Tanganyika, Martin takes a different view. He suggests that 'the *beni*, which was made possible by and grew out of aspects of European colonialism in Tanganyika, can be seen, then, as the musical metaphor for that colonialism. *Beni's* death [in the 1960s] symbolized the end of formal colonialism in Tanganyika' (Martin 1991, p. 78). The replacement of upcountry *beni* with similar but more Africanised genres such as *mganda* (in which gourd trumpets or kazoos have replaced the brass band), however, suggests that the process of adapting to the moment continues (Mtonga 1984).

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