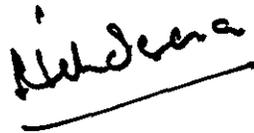


The Asian Traveler: A Journey Through Music and Culture of Asia

HONRS 499

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M.C. Nihal Perera", written over a horizontal line.

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Abstract

“The Asian Traveler”, is a collection of Asian music representing the CAPAsia III trip, Spring 2003. It is meant to take listeners and readers to a greater understanding of Asia through the music and text. The project is focused on investigation and presentation of the larger ‘Asian’ cultural, historical, spatial, social, and personal context to each song through the text. Information included in the booklet came from 11 weeks of personal experience in India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Malaysia. The experience included travel, observation, and reading articles and books dealing with history and theory of architecture and urban planning while in Asia. In addition to collecting information in Asia, additional research on Asian music and analysis was conducted. Conversations with college professors specializing in Asian music were conducted to verify work and seek additional advice. The largest component of the project was the processing of all the information, culminating in self-realization.

Acknowledgements

- I am very grateful to Dr. Nihal Perera for serving as my project advisor in addition to director of the CAPAsia program. Your dedication in educating students to acquire the qualities of analysis and critical thinking in Asia is displayed through this project. Thank you for your advice and comments and working with me to complete this project.
- As a novice to the discipline of music, Dr. George Wolfe of Ball State University and Dr. Harsha Abeyaratne of Marshall University aided my endeavors by offering expert advice in musical knowledge of India and Sri Lanka.
- Dr. Harold Cowherd, advised me in the early stages of the project, which made the project more feasible to complete.
- Justin Darrow, compiled the music selections from a variety of sources into one CD. Thank you Justin for assisting me in an area of the project I was unable to complete without assistance.
- Sarah Bensinger, provided feedback and support.
- All CAPAsia participants aided in providing the rich experience the music of this project represents.
- My Dad, exposed me to music from other cultures all over the globe prompting my own appreciation of music from different cultures. Connecting an interest of music with the educational trip resulted in a greater understanding of the learning and experiences I gained in Asia.

Project Information and Explanation

Completing “The Asian Traveler” has allowed me to better understand the meaning of the experiences and knowledge gained on my trip to Asia. I would have been unable to reap the benefits of both the trip and project if one was absent. The experience adds richness to project and the project provides an outlet for understanding of the trip. This fact came as a surprise to me.

The process of assembling the project began in the fall of my senior year. In the spring of 2003, I would be participating in a field study program to South Asia, CAPAsia III, and I desired to combine some aspect of this trip with my honors creative project. Since I was a child, my father introduced me to different music from all over the world. Today, I have a similar interest in world music, prompting me to be very interested in music from Asia. The idea for my creative project, in my proposal to the Honors College, was to combine my personal interest in world music and the experience in Asia through a compilation of music on CD with accompanying text that outlined the context of the song in its culture. I also had the opportunity to include information about several of the CAPAsia areas of study.

Collection of music CDs in Asia was informal—I would hear something on the radio or television and inquire to my Asian friends as to where I might be able to purchase a copy. I spent several hours in music stores looking for titles and artists I knew, along with listening to unfamiliar artists. Experiencing each of the cultures I lived in, I also became aware of what types of music were important and/or popular and sought out those CDs. In purchasing

the CDs, I attempted to get a wide variety that gave representation to the many colors of the culture.

Once I returned to the USA, I began putting the pieces of the project together. As I listened to each CD I had acquired in Asia, a strong memory of an experience or particular moment on the trip came to my mind. I quickly associated particular music selections with specific experiences, which became an additional dimension of the project. The text in the booklet accompanying the CD developed into two parts, the context of each song in the culture and a description of the picture in my mind the music evoked when I heard it playing. I wrote the context for each song using my historical and cultural knowledge acquired on the trip through articles I read and places I saw. I researched details of the musical aspects of some of my selections and reviewed this with college professors in the field of music. Small paragraphs, almost poetic, were written to describe the pictures evoked in my mind by each music selection.

Arrangement of the order of tracks on the CD represents a journey from traditional to modern, beginning to end. The CAPAsia III trip began in Thailand, and so does the music on the CD. In my description that accompanies the text for track 1, I highlight my thoughts and feelings as I began the trip. This sets the stage for the reader and listener to journey through the music on the rest of the CD. Tracks 2-5 are also more traditional; each is a slight progression in time from the track before. Tracks 6-9 are also represented on the spectrum of time that advances toward the present, but they would be considered modern. Track 9 is the most modern selection of music and that is why it appears last on the CD. In the description

— that accompanies track 9, I come to a realization about my trip and the experience that has changed my life. This brings closure to the journey that the listener and reader embarks on through CD and text. Although India, the country of track 9, was not the last stop on the CAPAsia III trip, it was the country that affected me most powerfully. For this reason, I have placed the song last on the CD.

— The result of the project is not what I envisioned at the start. It is much deeper than I envisioned it would be. This is due to a moving experience in Asia that led to deeper thinking and an insightful project advisor who pushed me to achieve greater things by displaying all that I know and learned in Asia through this project. In writing the text for the booklet, I was challenged to communicate 11 weeks worth of learning by seeing, doing, and reflecting into 12 pages of text. This required me to think critically about what I wanted to state, and then be very precise in what I wrote. I was able to draw conclusions about what I had learned, and put pieces together that never made sense before. Completing the project gave me the opportunity to thoroughly comprehend the CAPAsia III experience. The greatest period of learning in this project was the process, exactly how I learned in Asia.

— There are several places in the CD and accompanying text booklet where I have not followed selected unstated, but expected rules in an academic setting. These are not mistakes, but intentional ways of showing another aspect of Asia that was learned. The world has a high level of activity going on at all times. In academic work, we attempt to make sense of the world through order and science. In Asia, many rules as we know them are broken; order as we know it is disrupted. There is still an order and rules, they are just different than we know

them. To a person educated in the West, Asia could appear chaotic and dirty. After living in the culture of four countries in South Asia, I have observed that maybe meticulous order is not always necessary. In India, I saw a tree in the middle of a sidewalk. At first, I thought it was ridiculous that the tree wasn't removed when the sidewalk was laid, but then I began to see that the tree was of value and was kept for that simple reason. For similar reasons, some of the songs in "The Asian Traveler" lack information about the source. Selection of the songs was based on value to the project and the project goals, not the ability to classify the song precisely. The rules that I have broken in this project were broken because I felt there was value in not conforming to selected rules when it came to certain aspects of the project. This has made the CD and booklet something with great value and representative of a region of the world where everything is bold.

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