Topics to Consider in Unit V

- *How can we differentiate between healthy categorization (for communication) and biased categorization (stereotyping)?*

- *What are possible "habits" we can develop to more fully recognize and eliminate harmful biases and stereotypes?*

- *What role does media and education play in our generalizations of others? What roles can they play in our "re-education"?*

- *What is "religion"? And – how can we better understand religion in the context of both our past and present?*

- *What is the role of music in religion? And – what is the impact of religion on our world's music (secular and sacred)?*

- *What is "counter-culture" music? And – how can we better read the evolution of counter-culture movements and their impact on us/our music?*

- *What is "chant" or "intonement"? And – why is chant so important to all of the world's major religions and musical genre?*

- *What are some of the important aspects of Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and the Bahá'í Faith? And – in what way are each connected – or related both to our beliefs and cultural/ musical practices?*

- *What are some of the main principles or beliefs of Islam? And – how do these principles vary with many of the stereotypes current in other cultures?*

- *How – or in what manner do these ancient cultures offer a balancing alternative to modern Western cultures today?*

- *What are some classifications of instruments that serve our entire Musical World? Which Middle Eastern instruments and musical practices serve as the basis for many of the most famous Western instruments or practices (i.e. guitar, piano, or violin)?*

- *What is the connection between Persian poetry, music, and art?*

- *What can we learn from an Iraqi/Islamic rap group in Toronto, Canada?*

UNIT V

The Middle East (and Southern Asia): Religion and Music

"In the human kingdom itself there are points of contact, properties common to all mankind; likewise, there are points of distinction which separate race from race, individual from individual. If the points of contact, which are the common properties of humanity, overcome the peculiar points of distinction, unity is assured. On the other hand, if the points of differentiation overcome the points of agreement, disunion and weakness result." `Abdu'l-Bahá, The Promulgation of Universal Peace, pp. 67-68.

"It is unwise to be too sure of one's own wisdom. It is healthy to be reminded that the strongest might weaken and the wisest might err." Mahatma Gandhi

Communication and Miscommunication of Human Experience

How do human beings communicate their thoughts about other human beings? That is, how do we take something so complex as human thought and experience and encapsulate it into neat, understandable word packages for the sake of communicating to others? How do the communication norms and standards set by the collective ancestry of the societies through which we pass determine how we think, perceive, and live? More importantly, how many of the labels that we use are based upon biased information, misconceptions, or over-generalizations, which inaccurately describe others and stunt our own growth as flexible and potentially balanced individuals?

If it were possible to be in the minds of all the people with whom we communicate, to know their history, and to read their symbolism, we'd have no problem deciding upon labels and phrases to respectfully communicate our thoughts. But given the impossibility of this, while we continually grow in our experiences, we must also learn to better scrutinize our system of labeling, categorizing, and generalizations in order to find those which lead to the very source of human conflicts and are the "arch-enemy" of appreciation … **stereotypes.**

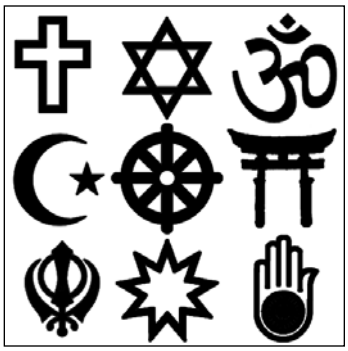
Summarily, to label or categorize[5.1] music, people, or cultural features is both a natural and essential element of human communication. As soon, however, as the areas of our biases are communicated to

Things to Consider

- **Many of the patterns of human categorization that separate people and music** are inaccurate to their reality and are the results of human strategies with ancient roots in bias, ignorance, and fears passed from generation to generation.
- **Undoing stereotypes and increasing our appreciation of other cultures and music** will require a patient and sustained commitment to re-educating ourselves, and we may sometimes feel alone in our efforts. [That is, many of our friends and family may not wish to move from their engrained perceptions of human categorization].
- **All culture groups which have been categorized as being "inferior" or "less than"** will have scars which will test the resolve of members of other culture groups and force them to demonstrate their sincerity in action over time. In like fashion, all culture groups, and especially those that appear privileged or elite in their culture hierarchy, will have blind spots and areas of ignorance that will test the patience and irritate the sensibilities of the historically repressed groups. Regardless of the position one occupies in one's culture system, remaining culturally blind or indifferent to imbalances, or perpetuating stereotypes, is counter-intuitive or unintelligent.
- **Musical genres are just as prone to mis-categorization** by virtue of labeling and attachment to racial, national, or religious stereotypes. When we begin to look for the inclusion (the manner by which a music incorporates influences outside its apparent genre or ethnic origin) and fusion (the unique combination of two or more influences within a specific piece), we begin to respect the music on its terms. We are not bound to perception of the work solely from the *stereotypes* or over-generalizations that may otherwise dominate our perceptions.

Music and Religion: Reconciling Belief Systems

"My religion consists of a humble admiration of the illimitable superior Spirit who reveals Himself in the slight details we are able to perceive with our frail and feeble mind… before God we are all equally wise - and equally foolish." Albert Einstein (1879-1955)



Perhaps no single phenomenon has had more impact on music than the evolution and practice of religion. Although it may seem strange to think of rock 'n' roll or hip-hop in the context of religion, not a single note, instrument, or manner of performance did not have—at some point in time—extensive ties to the evolution of our world's religions. Yet, nowhere in the annals of human history are there more generalizations and stereotypes than about this topic. More wars have been fought in the name of religion than for probably any other reason (except possibly greed). Religion has been used to justify enormous injustices and to subordinate and enslave masses of humanity; yet, despite its overwhelming importance to our understanding of history, it is arguably the single most avoided and misunderstood topic cross-culturally. To a large extent, humanity's difficulty engaging in passionate and thorough discussions of religion is not due to the principles or teachings of the religions themselves, for, as we shall see, *every* world religion advocates acceptance (love) for others; rather, it is due to the rigid or at times inflexible interpretations of the basic tenets of each religion by the religious practitioners themselves—that is, humans!

In many cases, what amounts to "dualistic thinking" [this *or* that] restricts the possibilities of *inclusiveness,* an essential ingredient in the acceptance of the validity of all religious (and non-religious) beliefs that do not advocate harm or disrespect to others. We can get a helpful picture of the sort of perceptions that have blocked religious discussion both historically and in the present by examining a few of the more predominant religious dualisms [Note: these perspectives are not made by inference that their ac-

ceptance is necessary for the reader but rather that their consideration may be essential to the appreciation of the thoughts and music that differ from one's own beliefs]:

> *Only those that accept "my religion" or "prophet" (revealer or Divine Manifestation) will be acceptable before God and/or all others will be condemned or rejected by God.*

Alternative: Perhaps the fact that each religion speaks of its teachings as "the way" or "the path," while also advocating (generally) the religions that preceded it, and most frequently, predicting other "comings" or "returns" as possible, is confusing and central to the dualism above. Essential to avoiding such a dualism which clearly cannot accommodate the respectful acknowledgement of other religions are the other core teachings of each religion:[5.5]

- That our actions (not words or expressions of belief) in this world determine our ultimate destiny in a/the "next world."
- That our acceptance (love) of others, undefined as to who those others are, is one of the central "actions" essential to acceptance of our lives by a Creator.
- That a Divine Creator (God), not man, is the essential judge. Therefore, to judge others by our perception of Faith (others believing as we do) is not only the basis for centuries of religious war and persecution, but tantamount to a rejection of the essential law of all religions: God is God and cannot be "asked" of his doings (or judgment), AND a human is a human, and it is not his/her place to judge the Faith of others.

How much of the world's music has been created in direct or indirect reference to the world's religions? How many songs and symphonies have been expressions of the composer's religious beliefs? Can we appreciate much of the world's music without respecting the musicians' religious beliefs? And, oh yes, what are the dualisms that relate to the practice of religion through music historically?

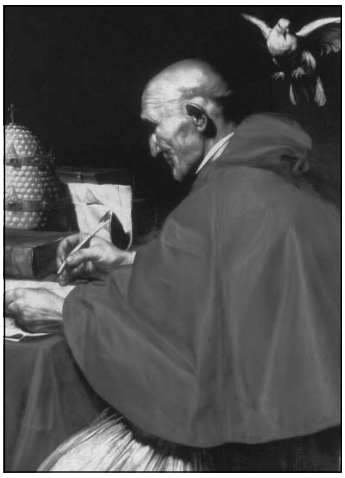
Whether we take the original Latin definition of **religion** (re- *again* / ligiare – *to connect*) as any endeavor which helps *re-connect* the human being to a purpose for life or "Higher Power" [thus implying that essentially *all music* may be "religious"] or the more pervasive definition of religion (specific belief systems based upon the teachings of a prophet or manifestation of an Unknowable Creator), there is no possibility of respecting much of the world's music without respecting the beliefs from which much of the music extends and all is connected. In short, whatever our religious beliefs, there comes a juncture where appreciating others' music requires the appreciation or respecting of their religious beliefs.

Pic. 5.2C *A embodiment of both the inter-connection and conflicts between our world's great religions, the Dome of the Rock lies in the heart of Jerusalem. The Jews and Christians believe this place to be Mount Moriah, the location where Abraham almost sacrificed his son Isaac at the command of God, where Jacob saw the ladder to heaven, where the innermost chamber of the Jewish Temple stood. The rock in the center of the dome is believed by Muslims to be the spot from which Muhammad ascended through the heavens to God accompanied by the angel Gabriel.* Courtesy, wikipedia.org.

If you are reading this text, there is a strong likelihood that you have the capacity to respect other religions and listen to what they have to say or possibly to see the connections or similarities of other religions to your own beliefs. If not, if you truly believe that only your religious orientation is correct or that only if people come through the belief systems of your orientation will they be acceptable to you or your vision of the Creator, then we offer the following "Golden Rules" taken from many of the world's great religions:

Intoning the Verses: Chant—The Melody of the Spirit

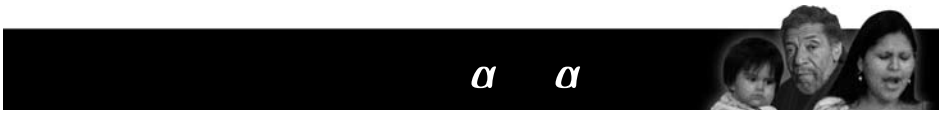
Among the methods for worship or "re-connecting" to a Higher Power (God) or passing along the teachings of all religions is the practice of **chanting** or **intonement** (putting pitches or tones to religious verses). In simplest terms, chanting slows down the text or thoughts, places them into pitched or defined frequencies, which resonate through the human voice and create the capacity through melody to attach a deeper emotional or spiritual connection of the words or thoughts to influence *the spirit, or the soul*.



Pic. 5.3C *Saraceni painting of Pope Gregory I, also known as Pope Gregory the Great [after whom Gregorian chant is named]. He is frequently given credit for the codification of chant and general formatting of liturgy which was passed from generation to generation orally to become the Roman Catholic mass. Later (circa 9th century), these chants (plainchants) would be documented and recorded by monks in the Roman Catholic church, through a notation system that would evolve into the musical system of notation used in documenting (notating) Western music until today.* Photo: Courtesy, wikipedia.org.

Since most of us may not likely chant or listen to chanting on a regular basis, if the practice of *melodic chanting* (cantillation or intonement) were restricted to the synagogue, temple, church, or mosque, we would not need to address this in the context of music *appreciation*. However, so pervasive is the influence of chant and the melodic singing-styles of the world's religious musical systems on both the instrumental and the vocal melodies of each culture that it becomes essential to investigate *chanting* regardless of one's religious beliefs or musical tastes. Since we are entering difficult waters for some, we may wish to remember the following:

- The "boundaries" between **sacred** music (that which pertains to religious practice) and **secular** (that which is *seemingly* not religious) are seldom as pronounced as historical perspectives of either religion or music tend to indicate. In nearly all cultures, the influence of religious music on popular music and vice versa is considerable;
- Nearly *all music* has some connection to the broader definition of religion as a means of "re-connecting" humanity (or the artist) to a purpose, whether directly tied to a religion or not. In this sense, the most "non-religious" piece may, to the musician, be a question or reflection about life, its purpose and the primary means for conveying their thoughts is through lyrics tied to melody. Most melodies (arguably all) have a strong connection to religious chant.



Note: Our passions and tastes are so directly tied to our history and experiences. Professor James Borders, a friend and colleague, tells the story of how he developed the passion for chant that would become a large part of his career and personal life. He also gives insight into the general nature and distinguishing features of *religious chant*.

> *"I grew up as a child in Chicago. I started singing in the Boys Choir when I was six years old. We had a great music teacher; her name was Sister John-Anthony. As the boys' choir got better, it would eventually blend into the larger choir, which included men and boys (the boys would sing the "soprano" or higher parts).*
>
> *"We learned not just the basics of music, but especially Gregorian chant. We learned how to sing on pitch, and also how to sing in the* **modes** (the pitch menus derived from Greek and Arab scales). *She would sometimes criticize us if we were singing G Ionian when we should be singing G mixolydian* (two different modes or scales based on a common "tonic" or foundation pitch).