

BEYOND THE BINARY: GENDER AND CROSS-CULTURAL IDENTITY
IN THE LIFE AND CHORAL WORKS OF REENA ESMAIL

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DOCTOR OF MUSICAL ARTS

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APPROVED:

Major Professor
Related Field Professor
Committee Member

PURPOSE

Reena Esmail (b. 1983) is becoming a powerful and prolific compositional voice. A graduate of Julliard (B.M.) and the Yale School of Music (M.M., D.M.A.), Esmail is best known for her compound musical style, which explores the resonant spaces between Western and Indian classical music. In her 2013 TedTalk at Skid Row, Esmail spoke about this “hybrid language” as a means to giving “the fullest range of expression.”¹ Esmail blends the melodies and rhythmic complexity available within Indian classical music with the counterpoint and orchestration of the West, weaving melodies together and explore diverse timbres.² This New American style creates a space in which Esmail can honor both her American and Indian identities:

While I might not ever be able to live in a physical world that contained everything that I loved and allowed me to be the fullest possible version of myself, I could at least try my best to create that world in the music that I wrote. And maybe it could go further than that. Maybe I could use my music as a vehicle to draw together some of the best Western and Indian musicians that I knew, and then create a space that allowed them to communicate using their own musical language and yet still be able to understand one another. And maybe the things they would see in one another, the mirrors they would hold up to one another, would be able to draw out new facets of their musicianship in the same way that looking at these two types of music through the lens of one another had done for me. And maybe if I could facilitate that, this universe that I had created in music, once it was realized by musicians and then shared with an audience, could begin to find its way into the real, material world.³

Esmail seeks to create an equitable musical space in which both aspects of her cultural identity work together, informing one another. To this end, her compositional process manifests as productive conversations between musicians and audiences from two distinct cultural backgrounds.

It is through the intersectionality of her American and Indian identities that Esmail also reconciles her identity as a woman composer. Since the 1990s, musicology

¹ Reena Esmail, “Reena Esmail at Tedx SkidRow,” YouTube video, 12:38, posted December 12, 2013,

² Reena Esmail, interview by author, November 4, 2017.

³ Reena Esmail, “Reena Esmail at Tedx SkidRow.”

has made great strides to include women's forgotten voices. In her keynote speech at the 2012 ⁴⁷ Feminist Theory and Music Conference, Susan McClary lists the factors that contribute to successful feminist frameworks — the legitimization of popular music studies; the growing fields of queer studies, music sociology, and performance studies; the recognition of patrons, teachers, *salonnières*, and scholars as equal players in music history; most importantly, the interdisciplinary connections between music and other academic disciplines.⁴ The cultivation of interdisciplinary approaches has most directly advanced women's inclusion in historical and professional music spheres by validating the cultural significance of their past and present work. Interdisciplinary research creates a non-binary framework in which to explore music as a product of culture, a fact that has always been true, but has only recently been claimed. Contemporary musicologists such as Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Emily Wilbourne are utilizing the concept of intersectionality to explore the “mutually formative relation among identity structures,” that is, the multifarious aspects of an identity, and how these threads weave together to create a whole person.⁵ This framework is helpful in understanding any composer, but is particularly relevant to living composer Reena Esmail, who identifies as an Indian-American woman, and whose music is influenced by her gender and cross-cultural identities.

McClary also argues that the exclusion of past female composers stems from a lack of musicological study during the composers' lives. Had women such as Fanny

⁴ Susan McClary, “Making Waves: Opening Keynote for the Twentieth Anniversary of the Feminist Theory and Music Conference,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 16, no. 1 (2012): 89-95

⁵ Olivia Bloechl, with Melanie Lowe, “Introduction: rethinking difference,” in *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship*, eds. Olivia Bloechl, Melanie Lowe, and Jeffrey Kall ²⁷; (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 48; Emily Wilbourne, “Letter from the Editor,” *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 21 (2017): vii-ix.

Hensel and Clara Schumann been the objects of scholarly attention while they were living, perhaps this would have elevated their achievements and consequently justified their inclusion in the canon.⁶ So as not to repeat this dark side of music history, it is imperative that living musicologists study the works of living female composers.

The aim of my dissertation is to explore the role of identity within Esmail's professional life and her choral compositions. I argue that it is through the intersection of Esmail's gender identity with her cross-cultural identity that her compositions challenge gender norms and break down barriers between East and West, inviting her listeners into a nuanced, "third wave" space. This study will serve as a guide for choral musicians and scholars who wish to ask difficult questions: How is cultural difference portrayed and interpreted in music? What does it mean to sound like a woman? How do gender and cross-cultural identity intersect in music, and what other aspects of identity are worth considering? How can we talk about music in a way that includes and honors difference?

As a feminist scholar, it is my mission to elevate and include those voices that historically have been demoted and/or excluded.⁷ Esmail's life and music provide an ideal case study for feminist scholars' frameworks—interdisciplinary approaches, assimilation of cultural identity, and researching a living subject—to elucidate how the questions above have taken shape in the choral profession. I will empower Esmail's voice as a significant contributor to a timely conversation.

⁶ Rebecca Geoffroy-Schwinden, email message to author, April 6, 2018; Susan McClary, "Da Capo: Women Representing Women in Music" (AMS Women and Music endowed lecture, Riverside Convention Center, Rochester, November 11, 2017).

⁷ Suzanne Cusick, "Gender, Musicology, and Feminism," in *Rethinking Music*, eds. Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

SIGNIFICANCE and STATE OF RESEARCH

In addition to highlighting Esmail's unique contribution to choral music, I will use second- and third-wave feminist scholarship to elucidate Esmail's place between Western and Indian classical music traditions. Second-wave feminism emerged in the 1960s to address gender inequality within professional and domestic life. Musicology's response to second-wave feminism was a "search and rescue" mission that inserted gifted female composers of the past into history textbooks.⁸ While these efforts were well intended, the result was a tokenistic approach that did not always consider the complex facets of a woman's identity, and how these facets contributed to her compositional output.⁹ Third-wave feminism seeks to address this schism through intersectional avenues, namely the intersection of race, sexuality, and class with women's issues. In *Feminine Endings*, Susan McClary argues that critical musicology should not divorce musical work from culture, but rather recognize the ways in which gender, sexuality, race, and socioeconomic status affect musical conception:

The deconstructive methods of postmodernism – the practice of questioning the claims to universality by the 'master narratives' of Western culture, revealing the agendas behind traditional 'value-free' procedures – are also beginning to clear a space in which a woman's voice can at last be heard as a woman's voice.¹⁰

Esmail's music is significant not only because of its innovative commingling of styles, but because these styles are born from her unique expression of gender, culture, and class.

³³ Rebecca Geoffroy-Schwinden, conversation with the author, April 6, 2018.

⁹ Pauline Oliveros, "And Don't Call Them 'Lady' Composers," *The New York Times*, September 13, 1970, accessed August 24, 2017, <http://www.nytimes.com/1970/09/13/archives/and-dont-call-them-lady-composers-and-dont-call-them-lady-composers.html>.

¹⁰ Susan McClary, *Feminine Endings: Music, Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991 [2002]), 123.

While Esmail has received media attention in the form of promotional articles, reviews of her music, and personal interviews, there is no scholarly work as of yet that contextualizes her music within contemporary academic discourse. There are numerous scholars in musicology, theory, and ethnomusicology who study the intersection of identity with music, whose work will guide my research. I have already referenced second- and third-wave musicologists who have and are grappling with these concepts.¹¹ These scholars often include embodied analyses of musical works, a methodology introduced by McClary and Cusick and put into practice by Hester Bell-Jordan and Elisabeth LeGuin.¹² Using these scholars' work as a basis, I will conduct a combined musical and embodied analysis. The embodied component will explore how inherited embodied language within Western and Indian classical performance interacts in performances of Esmail's choral music.

Within Indian Classical music, I will use existing research on the role of identity of fusion and gender to inform my interpretation of Esmail's cross-cultural style. Gerry Farrell will frame my understanding of the relationship between Indian and Western music.¹³ Regarding gender studies, Chloë Alaghband-Zadeh studies "how South Asian cultural practices (especially music) reproduce structures of power and inequality, such as

¹¹ McClary, Cusick, Bloechl, Wilbourne.

¹² Susan McClary, "Getting Down Off the Beanstalk: The Presence of a Woman's Voice in Janika Vandervelde's *Genesis II*," in *Feminine Endings: Music Gender, and Sexuality* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 112-131; Suzanne G. Cusick, "Feminist Theory, Music Theory, and the Mind/Body Problem," *Perspectives on New Music* 32, no. 1 (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), 471-498; Hester Bell-Jordan, "Chapter 3: Gender and Gesture in Late Eighteenth Century Women's Violin Performance: Regina Strinasacchi's Violin Concerto in B flat major," in "Transgressive Gestures: Women and Violin Performance in Eighteenth-Century Europe," (M.M. Thesis, New Zealand School of Music, 2016), 43-86; Elisabeth LeGuin, *Boccherini's Body: an essay in carnal musicology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006).

¹³ Gerry Farrell, *Indian Music and the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

gender and class.”¹⁴ Amanda Weidman’s research is also relevant; she explores gendered meaning in music within the context of South Indian postcolonial politics.¹⁵ I will use Alaghband-Zadeh’s and Weidman’s writings to guide my understanding of gender within the Indian classical performance tradition. This research will culminate in an exploration of fused Eastern and Western perceptions of gender, and how these emerge specifically in Esmail’s compositions.

Regarding the emergence of Indian classical music within Western classical repertoire, there are dissertations that explore the performance practice issues that arise from a Western classical instrument playing Indian classical or Indian classical-inspired music. The dissertations I found dealt with this topic within the context of solo flute and violin.¹⁶ However, there are no dissertations that explore the pedagogical, stylistic, and practical issues embedded within choral works and larger-scale choral-orchestral compositions that unite musicians trained in Western and Indian classical music. Esmail’s music provides a unique platform in which to explore these challenges.

¹⁴ Staff,” Social Sciences at Loughborough University, accessed March 31, 2018, <http://www.lboro.ac.uk/departments/socialsciences/staff/chloe-alaghband-zadeh/>. Relevant articles include “Listening to North Indian Classical Music: How Embodied Ways of Listening Perform Imagined Histories and Social Class,” *Ethnomusicology* 61, No. 2 (Summer 2017), pp. 207-233 and “Sonic Performativity: Analysing Gender in North Indian Classical Vocal Music,” *Ethnomusicology Forum* 24, No. 3 (2015), pp. 346-379

¹⁵ Amanda J. Weidman, *Singing the classical, voicing the modern: the postcolonial politics of music in South India* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

¹⁶ Caroline Frances Rohm, “Ragas for the Western Flute: A Discussion of Compositions and Performance Practice of Repertoire Inspired by Indian Classical Music” (DMA diss., University of Maryland, College Park, 2017), accessed March 31, 2018, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses; Lori Ann Kesner, “Krishna Meets Pan: Indian-Western Fusion in Two Works for Flute and Harp” (DMA diss., University of Cincinnati, 2006), accessed March 31, 2018, Proquest Dissertations & Theses; Gordon Nichols Swift, “The violin as cross-cultural vehicle: Ormentation in South Indian violin and its influence on a style of Western violin improvisation” (PhD diss., Wesleyan University, 1989), accessed March 31, 2018, Proquest Dissertations & Theses.

METHOD

Rather than make sweeping generalizations about musical conception for *all* women or *all* people of color in the United States, I wish to amplify Esmail's individual story, and to contextualize her experience within larger socio-musical themes. What will begin as a contextualization of her work within a larger cultural framework will culminate in a practical musical analysis and performance guide to aid conductors in preparation of Esmail's compositions. This project synthesizes musicological, theoretical, and ethnographic methods in order to explore:

- How is cultural difference in choral music portrayed by the composer and interpreted by the performer?
- What does it mean to sound like a woman?
- How can we talk about choral music in a way that includes and honors difference?
- How do gender and cross-cultural identity intersect in choral music? What other aspects of identity are worth considering?

The doctoral coursework I have pursued at UNT has provided appropriate methodologies with which to answer these questions.

How is cultural difference in choral music portrayed and interpreted?

I am currently taking a graduate course with Dr. Virani (Ethnomusicology) on North Indian classical music. This course is laying the groundwork not only for my understanding of Hindustani music theory and practice, but also of India's music history, its transition into modernity, and the ongoing commingling of Eastern and Western performance traditions. I will relate these themes to Esmail in a chapter that focuses on

the role of cross-cultural identity in her professional life and choral works. My methods will synthesize analytical, historical, and ethnographic research to explore how cross-cultural identity manifests in Esmail's choral music.

I will begin this chapter with a summary of Indian classical music's history and transition into modernity as it relates to Esmail. Particularly relevant will be the Westernization of Indian classical music pedagogy through V.D. Paluskar and V.N. Bhatkande, as Esmail uses their notation systems to aid Western and Indian musicians alike. I will also use Esmail's accounts of her experience in India as well as articles she wrote that explore the differences and similarities she found between Indian and Western classical music. These accounts will provide a framework with which to conduct a musical analysis of Indian classical techniques within her choral compositions — *TaReKiTa* for SATB chorus (2016), *Tuttarana* for SSAA or SATB chorus (2016), and *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (2016).¹⁷

What does it mean to sound like a woman?

I have already completed extensive research on this particular question. This research evolved from a doctoral seminar I took in Fall 2017 with Dr. Geoffroy-Schwinden (Musicology) entitled "Women and Gender in the Long 18th Century." This course not only looked at gender's role in 18th century music, but also considered the

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¹⁷ Wim Van Der Meer, *Hindustani Music in the 20th Century* (Boston, MA: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1980); Daniel Neuman, *The Life of Music in North India* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1990); Janaki Bakhle, *Two Men and Music: Nationalism in the Making of an Indian Classical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); Esmail's Fulbright year is documented in her blog (<https://reenainindia.wordpress.com/>), articles at New Music USA (<https://www.newmusicusa.org/author/reenaesmail/>), and her TedTalk at SkidRow (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KnQudZQGjWw>).

evolution of historiography, musicology, and music theory, and how these fields have evolved to include more nuanced representations of women and difference.

My final paper for this class explored gender-related issues within Esmail's professional life and a musical analysis of gendered meaning in her choral-orchestral compositions. Research methods I used included: familiarizing myself with women and gender studies within musicology and music theory; reading contemporary thought on gender in music education and composition; personal interviews with the composer, for which I received informed consent and will submit my IRB expedited review in April 2018; musical analysis of three of Esmail's choral-orchestral works — *I Rise: Women in Song* for women's chorus and string orchestra (2016), *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* for baroque orchestra, choir, sitar, and tabla (2016), and *Take What You Need* for double choir and string orchestra (2016) — suggesting how gender appears through subject matter, style, and tonality.¹⁸ This paper will become the chapter on gender within my dissertation. In order to expand upon the themes present in this chapter, I plan to conduct interviews with those who commissioned the analyzed works — Sun Min Lee (LeHigh University), David Hill (Yale School of Music), and Vijay Gupta (Street Symphony).¹⁹

How can we talk about music in a way that includes and honors difference?

Esmail defines her mission as a composer to create equitable musical spaces: “I want to use my voice to bring other important voices into the conversation – other

¹⁸ See McClary, Cusick, Bloechl; Lucy Green, *Music, Gender Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Sally Macarthur, *Towards a Twenty-First-Century Feminist Politics of Music* (Basingstoke: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2010); see Appendix A for informed consent form.

¹⁹ See Appendix B for sample interview questions for Reena Esmail and the conductors.

⁴ women, other people of color, and people who are on the margins for one reason or another. That is what drives me: the ability to be in a position to truly facilitate the success of others.”²⁰ Esmail considers herself a representative of the forgotten; she uses the privilege she has gained through her education and professional success to elevate and affirm the Other within classical music. In this way, Esmail’s gender and cultural identities are not only present in her compositions, but in her pedagogical approaches and performance spaces.

Two outreach organizations that fulfill Esmail’s mission are Shastra and Street Symphony. Shastra is an educational organization founded by Reena Esmail and Payton McDonald in which musicians are invited to create connections between Indian and Western music. ¹¹ “At Shastra, we aim to set the stage for this new order of musicians, to create a community of artists who contextualize one another’s work, and to share this beautiful, cross-cultural music with audiences around the world.”²¹ This organization provides summer intensives, workshops, festivals, and commissioning projects for musicians from the Indian and Western classical traditions. Street Symphony is a non-profit organization founded by Vijay Gupta, whose mission is “the restorative and regenerative power of music at the heart of communities experiencing poverty, homelessness and incarceration in Los Angeles County, with the vision that all people have the right to a creative and expressive voice.”²² Esmail serves as composer-in-residence.

⁴ ²⁰ “Composer Reena Esmail on Creating Music that Empowers Women,” *Chicago Woman*, accessed March 31, 2018, <http://chicago-woman.com/profiles/composer-reena-esmail-chicago-sinfonietta/>

²¹ “About,” Shastra, accessed April 1, 2018, <http://www.shastramusic.com/about/#>.

²² Street Symphony, introductory note for *Take What You Need*, 2015.

Through rehearsal and performance observation as well as interviews with Esmail, McDonald, Gupta, and participants of the Shastra and Street Symphony communities, I will examine the ways in which Esmail is creating an accessible musical environment for a diverse scope of peoples.

How do gender and cross-cultural identity intersect in music? What other aspects of identity are worth considering?

This section will explore the question of intersectionality in music through a musical analysis and performance guide to Esmail's *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity*, an oratorio in seven movements, with texts on unity drawn from seven major Indian religions: Buddhism, Sikhism, Christianity, Zoroastrianism, Hinduism, Jainism, and Islam.²³ Musical analysis methods will draw from both Western and Indian classical traditions for the purpose of performance (not theoretical academic discourse). This analysis will include exploration of performance practice issues of Esmail's cross-cultural style. These issues will be determined through personal interviews with Esmail, David Hill (conductor for the premiere), Rabindra Goswami (sitar player for premiere), and Ramu Pandit (tabla player for the premiere).²⁴ Performance issues will likely include treatment of Indian classical vocal timbre and ornamentation, the limitations of Western notation to depict Hindustani modes and rhythmic grooves, and how to best rehearse

²³ Commissioned by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, Esmail received the commission invitation in early November 2016 between two political events. Shortly beforehand, India denied her a visa because of her grandfather's move to Pakistan in the 1950s. Shortly after, the US presidential election results.²³ Yale Schola Cantorum in collaboration with Julliard 415 premiered the work in New Haven on March 3, 2017, with David Hall conducting. The two ensembles then toured India with Esmail, March 12-19, performing *This Love* in Delhi, Mumbai, and Chennai. See "Yale Schola Cantorum Tour to India," Yale Institute of Sacred Music News, February 23, 2017, accessed December 6, 2017, <https://ism.yale.edu/news/yale-schola-cantorum-tour-india>.

²⁴ See Appendix B for a list of sample questions for Goswami and Pandit.

musicians from different practices, one notation-based and the other aural. This analysis may also discuss the role of musical theater within Esmail's work, particularly in its harmonic conception, and explore how this aspect of Esmail's identity intersects with the main topics of gender and culture.

TENTATIVE CHAPTER HEADINGS

Chapter 1. Introduction

- Aim of dissertation
- Summary of gender-related and cross-cultural themes
- Brief overview of Esmail's biography
- How this dissertation will be organized

Chapter 2. Esmail's Cross-Cultural Identity

- Summary of Indian classical music's history and transition into modernity as it relates to Esmail
- Cross-cultural themes in Esmail's musical upbringing and professional life
 - Exposure to ICM as a child
 - Documentation of Fulbright year abroad
 - Common ground found between Indian and Western classical music
- Cross-cultural themes in Esmail's music: *TaReKiTa*, *Tuttarana*, *This Love Between Us: Take What You Need*
 - Analysis of rag, tal, and genre
 - How do these Indian classical components interact with Western composition?
- Connect Esmail's cross-cultural identity to gender

Chapter 3. Esmail's Gender Identity

- Summary of feminist musicology/music theory as it relates to Esmail
- Gendered themes in Esmail's musical upbringing and professional life
- Gendered meaning in Esmail's music: *I Rise: Women in Song*, *Take What You Need*, *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity*
 - Subject matter
 - Style
 - Tonality
- Connect gender and cross-cultural identity to social justice i.e. creating equitable spaces

Chapter 4. "Equitable music spaces"

- Shastra Music
 - Role of organization and Esmail's involvement
 - Rehearsal/performance observations
 - How is Esmail creating an accessible teaching environment?
 - When learning another tradition, what are the distinct challenges for Western and Indian classical musicians?
- Street Symphony
 - Role of organization and Esmail's involvement
 - Rehearsal/performance observations
 - How is Esmail creating music that is accessible to those from marginalized communities?

- What are the distinct challenges for creating music for combined professional and amateur musicians?

Chapter 5. *This Love Between Us: Prayers for Unity* (Performance Practice Guide)

- Overview of work, its significance, reception history
- Analysis and guide:
 - Movement 1 - Buddhism
 - Movement 2 - Sikhism
 - Movement 3 - Christianity
 - Movement 4 - Zoroastrianism
 - Movement 5 - Hinduism
 - Movement 6 - Jainism
 - Movement 7 - Islam
- Summary of findings

Chapter 6. Conclusion

- Summary of research and restatement of key themes
- Esmail's Legacy

APPENDIX A

University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Gender and Cross-Cultural Identity in the Life and Works of Reena Esmail

Student Investigator: Lindsay Pope
Choral Studies

University of North Texas (UNT) Department of
Supervising Investigator: Vivek Virani

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study that involves the exploration of gender, cross-cultural identity, and other important aspects of identity in Reena Esmail's life and choral music.

Study Procedures: You will be interviewed in a total of 3-4 sessions that will take about 6-8 hours of your time.

Foreseeable Risks: No foreseeable risks are involved in this study.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: We expect the project to benefit you by bringing scholarly attention to your compositional output.

Compensation for Participants: None

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study. No identifying information will be released without your consent.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Lindsay Pope at lpope@my.unt.edu or Vivek Virani at vivek.virani@unt.edu.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-4643 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Office of Research Integrity & Compliance
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

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Research Participants' Rights:

Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Lindsay Pope has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

REENA ESMAIL
Printed Name of Participant


Signature of Participant

3/29/2018
Date

For the Student Investigator or Designee:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.


Signature of Student Investigator

3/24/18
Date

APPENDIX B

Sample Questions for Esmail:

- Describe your musical upbringing
- How did you become interested in composition?
- How did your studies at Julliard and Yale affect your compositional approach?
- What inspired you to study Indian classical music?
- During your Fulbright year, what were some of your most eye-opening musical experiences?
- How, if at all, do you perceive musical priorities to differ between Western and Indian classical music?
- How have these differences shaped your composition language?
- In your experience, what is the body's role in Indian versus Western musical traditions?
- What has been the response to your unique composition language? How does the response differ between American and Indian audiences?
- How do you view your gender in relation to your music and career?
- Do you have any response to feminist musicologists who historically claim the realm of mind (academic musical discourse) as a masculine pursuit versus the realm of the body (performance) as a feminine pursuit?
- How do you view your cross-cultural identity in relation to your music and career?
- How did you come to write *I Rise: Women in Song*?
- As a female composer, how do you feel about being asked to write for women's voices on a subject matter specifically about women?
- For this work, you set texts from influential American women. Did you intentionally differ your style movement-to-movement based upon the cultural identity of the women whose texts you set? What was your process for doing this?
- Does your Indian classical training influence any of the music in *I Rise*?
- For *I Rise*, did you determine the instrumentation, or did Sun Min have input as well? What was your reasoning for this make-up of ensemble?
- *This Love Between Us* intentionally blends Western and Indian styles. What were the composition challenges in doing this?
- Did you write *This Love Between Us* specifically to accommodate period instruments? If so, how did you write differently?
- What were the performing challenges faced by Julliard415 and Yale Schola Cantorum when performing your work?
- When you compose, do you consider the space in which your works will be performed?
- *Take What You Need* seems to have significant influence from musical theater. What was your reasoning for this?

Sample Questions for Conductors (Lee, Hill, Gupta):

- How did you come to know Esmail's music?
- Tell me the story behind commissioning this particular project. Why did you choose Esmail?
- I know that Esmail was also part of the rehearsal process for the piece's premiere. What was this process like? How does it differ to have the composer present?
- What were the musical or practical challenges presented by this music? Did it demand different rehearsal strategies or technical knowledge from you as the conductor?
- When preparing this work, did you consider the roles that gender and/or cross-cultural identity play in Esmail's music? If so, how did you make these considerations a part of the rehearsal process?
- What place does Esmail's music have in the 21st century? Where is it leading us?

Sample Questions for Indian classical musicians (Goswami and Pandit):

- Tell me about your musical background.
- How did you get hired for this project?
- What was the experience like performing your instrument within a combined Western and Indian classical work?
- What were some of the challenges you either observed or personally experienced?
- What significance does Esmail's work have in the 21st century?

Sample Questions for Shastra and Street Symphony participants:

- Why did you join this community? What does it provide for you?
- How does Esmail's teaching and/or music contribute to this community?
- Shastra: What are some key concepts you have learned from studying cross-cultural performance or compositional techniques? What have been the challenges?
- Street Symphony: How do you feel when you sing Esmail's music? What do you think Esmail is trying to say?

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