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## Last Rites: Self-Representation and Counter-Canon Practices in Classical Music through *Radhe Radhe*

Sharanya, Theatre, Arts and Humanities, Brunel University London, UK, [sharanya.murali@brunel.ac.uk](mailto:sharanya.murali@brunel.ac.uk)

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To commemorate the centenary of the 1913 Paris premiere of *The Rite of Spring*, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill organised *The Rite of Spring at 100*. As part of this, the Carolina Performing Arts (CPA) commissioned new pieces interpreting and responding to *The Rite*. Among these was *Radhe Radhe: Rites of Holi*, created by the Indian-American composer-scholar and pianist Vijay Iyer, performed by the International Contemporary Ensemble and accompanied by a film about Holi (the annual Hindu harvest festival) assembled by filmmaker Prashant Bhargava. *Radhe Radhe* eventually took the form of a performance document mediated between live music and film, as well as culturally divergent notions of ‘ritual’.

This article will consider Bhargava’s film and Iyer’s score, along with documentation of live chamber performances of the piece and ask: how does ‘western’ classical music represent itself in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? In what ways is self-representation performed in an intercultural collaboration such as *Radhe Radhe* that destabilises the dominant whiteness of the classical music canon by reimagining its soundscape in reference to a canonical work such as *The Rite*? I propose that *Radhe Radhe* – and Iyer’s score in particular – echoes as a sonic postcolonial ur-text through its engagement with Holi. As an instance of the Deleuzian simulacrum, it represents a radical departure from the cultural politics of ‘everyday colonial racism’ (Levitz, 2017: 163) surrounding the 1913 *Rite* by employing a collaborative vocabulary that resists the hegemonic performance traditions of western classical music.

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‘Sound has an image, and this image has a sound, which slowly gathers momentum like waves, more far-reaching than a literary metaphor.’ —Mahmoud Darwish, ‘Visible Music’ (2009)

In 2018, the historian Kira Thurman positions the death of young double-bassist Draylen Mason, who was murdered as part of a series of bombs targeting one of Austin’s ‘oldest black neighbourhoods’, alongside the making, and breaking, of canonicity in classical music. ‘The tradition that Mason could have joined had been stolen from him, just as he had been taken from it,’ she writes. Elaborating on the tension between mourning Black life, because it upholds the virtue of respectability that haloes classical music, and the aesthetic pleasure of the music itself in layering Black experience, she adds: ‘Two things that appear contradictory must sing in harmony: blackness and abstraction. At our best, black classical musicians insist on holding these dualities in our hands’ (2018).

The duality Thurman so eloquently articulates has a volatile relationship with the performance of canon in western classical music.<sup>1</sup> Significant scholarship has now established that the canonicity of western classical music has been constructed over centuries, through violent discursive acts of erasure of Black and Global Majority composers and repertoires, to appear white, and is not in itself naturally representative of whiteness. This has even been acknowledged in more popular considerations of scholarship on classical music (see Ross 2020 citing Morrison, 2019; André, 2018; Ewell, 2020). One of the key ways in which white canonicity is continually re-inscribed is through the politics of anniversary programming, which establishes the hegemony of white European composers, creating and participating in a cycle of demand for the same.<sup>2</sup>

On the Southbank Centre website for the Beethoven 250 project *Beyond Beethoven 9*, which brings together professional and amateur musicians, the conductor and Associate Artist Marin Alsop is quoted as saying, ‘Beethoven was all about love and joy and celebrating the essence of what it is to be human, and what it is to be connected. That’s what we’re trying to do in this project — throw the doors wide open and say

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<sup>1</sup> It is worthwhile to dwell here with the words of composer-musicologist Guthrie P. Ramsey, Jr., who writes in a different context that ‘[African-American music] would always perform specific kinds of functional, cultural work for its performers, transcribers and audiences, though not always the same kind’, arguing that it ‘would always be tied inextricably to a specific social function’ (2007: 34).

<sup>2</sup> A version of this introduction appeared on the AHRC Research Network blog ‘Representing “Classical Music” in the Twenty-First Century’: <http://blogs.exeter.ac.uk/representingclassicalmusic/2021/05/04/the-problem-of-the-composer-anniversary/>.

“Come on, everybody owns this piece. Everybody owns this idea. And together we’re much stronger” (2020). As scholar Mina Yang argues:

Classical music adherents often characterize the music of Bach and Beethoven as a universal language that transcends historical and geographical boundaries and stands apart from the complex realities of politics. Scholarship strongly challenges this assertion, divulging classical music’s complicity in nationalist and racist projects of the last two hundred years, and argues that Western music’s ‘universal’ qualities have been invoked in the past to avow the superiority of European culture. (2007: 2)

The emphasis on ‘the diverse backgrounds’ of the musicians in the press release (2020) and on collective ‘ownership’, scaffolded by universality as an accepted, uncontested premise (a tacit acknowledgement of the fact that the ‘doors’ to framing Beethoven as property can be opened and closed at will as decided by whiteness) signals the now commonplace appropriation of racial justice as a ‘diversity’ issue in service of neoliberal projects of canonicity. Such projects, supported by cultural-economic strategies such as anniversary commemorations, as detailed above, present representation in western classical and art music as an issue of optics that needs redress rather than as acoustic and structural foundations determining the practice of performing canon.

Thinking with Thurman’s provocation on how classical music straddles the apparent contradictions of abstraction and blackness, this article will consider an adjacent but intertwined struggle for representation in western classical music: that of diasporic South Asian creative practices in America.<sup>3</sup> The emphasis in this article will be on the paradigm of self-representation, noting that Black American and South Asian American communities have distinct histories and genealogies of struggle in the United States that cannot be conflated; Indian-Americans in particular face discrimination on the basis of caste-oppressed identities.<sup>4</sup> This article takes the aforementioned context of South Asian-American identities as its starting point and addresses self-representation and counter-canonical practices in western classical music. It does so by considering in detail *Radhe Radhe*, a compositional performance-work by the Indian-American

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<sup>3</sup> See Stanger (2013) on the relationship between choreographic aesthetics of abstraction and racial nationhood.

<sup>4</sup> Much work remains to be done on the representation of caste within western classical music, particularly since the tradition of who is ‘allowed’ access to music traditions and knowledge-production in Indian contexts is caste-inflected above all else; this dynamic continues to be reflected in the Indian diaspora in other industries such as, for instance, technology. See Weidman (2003) and Subramanian (2006) on caste and modernity in Indian classical music.

composer-scholar and pianist Vijay Iyer, and a film accompanying the music directed and edited by the late Indian-American filmmaker Prashant Bhargava.

2013 marked the centenary of the Paris premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, or *The Rite of Spring*. To commemorate this, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill organised *The Rite of Spring at 100*. Programmed as part of the 2012-13 season, the Carolina Performing Arts (CPA) commissioned new pieces interpreting and responding to *The Rite*. In the programme notes, the then-Executive Director for the Arts and Director of Carolina Performing Arts, Emil J. Kang writes, '*The Rite of Spring* and its riotous history embed nothing less than a core belief of the modern world – our faith in innovation as an ideal of the arts and society – coupled with a troubling intuition that the price of innovation might be violence' (2013: 3). The glittering line-up included the Silk Road Ensemble with Yo-Yo Ma, puppeteer Basil Twist and the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company with the SITI Company and theatre practitioner Anne Bogart. Among these was *Radhe Radhe: Rites of Holi*, created by Iyer, performed by the International Contemporary Ensemble (ICE) and accompanied by a film about Holi (the Hindu harvest festival, celebrated annually in spring) shot in Mathura and its surrounding regions in North India, directed and edited by Bhargava. *Radhe Radhe* eventually took the form of a performance document mediated between live music and film, as well as culturally divergent notions of 'ritual'.

This article will ask, with a focus on Iyer's score and Bhargava's film, along with documentation and media coverage of live performances of the piece: how do representational practices, particularly those of self-representation, function in classical music responses to canonical western classical music works? In what ways is self-representation performed in a collaboration such as *Radhe Radhe* that destabilises the dominant whiteness of the classical music canon by reimagining its soundscape in reference to a canonical work such as *The Rite*? Considering collaboration as a relational, counter-canonical practice of representation, I propose that *Radhe Radhe*, and Iyer's score in particular, resounds as a sonic postcolonial ur-text. As an ur-text, *Radhe Radhe* is not a 'reflection' of *The Rite* but a deviation from it. Through its engagement with Holi, it represents a radical departure from the cultural politics of 'everyday colonial racism' (Levitz, 2017: 163) surrounding the original *Rite*. It enacts this break by 'simulating', in the Deleuzian sense, a collaborative vocabulary that resists the hegemonic performance traditions of western classical music. This article argues that Iyer's *Radhe Radhe* could be read as an example of counter-canonical self-representation in classical music.

Methodologically, my argument locates itself between critical investigations of performance, visual culture and sound studies rather than musicology. This is considered against a critical summary of the cultural politics of the original *Rite*. The

methodologies are enhanced by extracts from an interview I conducted with Iyer, from which I quote extensively, as the focus of this piece is on self-representational structures.<sup>5</sup> Alongside this, I read video, audio and photo documentation of both *Radhe Radhe* the film and performances. I focus on the performance at the 2017 edition of the Ojai festival, an annual classical music festival held in Ojai, California in the United States. Programmed on the evening of June 10th at the Libbey Bowl venue, Steven Schick conducted an arrangement of *The Rite* by Cliff Colnot, for ICE. The envelope fold of this, in the second half of the concert, involved *Radhe Radhe*, also played by ICE (with Iyer on the piano and composer Tyshawn Sorey on drums) in time to Bhargava's film, which was screened simultaneously to a large audience.

### **Rite and Radhe**

*The Rite of Spring* was presented as a ballet by Serge Diaghilev's Ballets Russes, to Igor Stravinsky's score, Vaslav Nijinsky's choreography and Nicholas Roerich's costume and stage design, at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées on 29th May 1913.<sup>6</sup> In 2013, Vijay Iyer premiered *Radhe Radhe* with ICE, a score accompanied by Prashant Bhargava's film on Holi. In an interview before a performance at the Cleveland Museum of Art along with the premiere of Cliff Colnot's arrangement of *The Rite*, Iyer expands on the impulse behind the score. 'Given that *Le Sacre* is a fantasy of the folkloric springtime ritual from some mythic ancient past in Russia, I thought it was an opportunity for us to deal in a reality-based way with that transformative period of springtime as it is expressed, celebrated, and experienced in Indian culture,' he says (2016). Holi is indexed by a multitude of Hindu myths, all centring on devotion to the Hindu lord Krishna.<sup>7</sup> A central theme is the divine union between Krishna and his companion Radha: a relationship that is portrayed through the perspective of Radha (a role played by the Anna George) in Bhargava's film set partly in Mathura, the mythic birthplace of Krishna.

Iyer's navigation of his own racial position as South Asian in relation to Blackness and how it is entangled in the compositional performance of *Radhe Radhe* will be explored in more detail in the next section of this article. It is notable, however, that Iyer's articulation reflects, in part, a divergence from the enactment of a 'myth' to a

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<sup>5</sup> The interview was conducted with Iyer over Zoom on 2nd October 2020 at 2:30pm BST. It lasted 80 minutes.

<sup>6</sup> The 1913 *Rite of Spring* has been considered in order to provide context for the legacy of orientalism in *The Rite* that Iyer's *Radhe Radhe* productively challenges. The 'ownership' of *The Rite of Spring* could be said to belong to all the practitioners mentioned (Stravinsky, Nijinsky, Diaghilev, the Ballet Russes) but for the purposes of clarity in the article, *The Rite* will be referred to as the 1913 *Rite* unless an allusion is made specifically to Stravinsky's score.

<sup>7</sup> In some caste-privileged Hindu myths, the lord Vishnu, of whom Krishna may be understood as an incarnation or avatar. Krishna is a central figure in caste-Hinduism but occupies a more divergent and complex position in devotional movement practices, such as Bhakti.

performance of a celebration and event that is based in ‘reality’. His statement also expresses a resistance to the colonial ideals of racial supremacy dominant in historical enactments of myths, frequently taking on and reproducing anxieties of nationalist projects. Musical historiography reminds us that *The Rite* is no exception to this. Both Annegret Fauser and Tamara Levitz show, in their respective contributions to a scholarly anthology titled *The Rite of Spring at 100*, that the myths realised in the 1913 production and read in audience responses to the work elide local specificities unique to the context of Paris.<sup>8</sup> For Fauser, the ‘mythologizing interpretation’ (2017: 83) of Russian sources in the 1913 *Rite* ignores the local context that resulted in, she argues, *The Rite* being designed especially for a Parisian audience, to appeal to its specific taste for oriental logics. This was not exempt from the creation and reception of sound. She clarifies that:

... the horizon of expectation was shaped through a cultural practice that distinguished between the long-standing appropriation of exotic materials by French composers on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the musical accent—in the sense of Edward Said—that French audiences enjoyed as a distinctive quality in the music of foreigners ... (2017: 89)

Tamara Levitz analyses the soundscape of the 1913 production and persuasively argues that:

the ballet did not incite an angry riot because of its newness ... but rather provoked a xenophobic response from critics who associated the ballet with cultural practices of colonized people of colour they considered racially inferior to themselves, and who reproduced everyday racist discourse about these peoples in their reviews. (2017: 147)

She breaks down the racial and colonial operations behind the construction of the term ‘riot’, positing that the term was first used to describe the 1913 performance by Olin Downes after hearing a performance of the piece by the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 1924.<sup>9</sup> She reads this against how the term ‘riot’ was used by the US Press to refer

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<sup>8</sup> The authors make complex, layered arguments which I have attempted to summarise as best I can here in order to comment on how oriental and colonial logics function in the original *Rite*. I acknowledge, however, that as a consequence of this there may be some unintended flattening of the nuances of their respective arguments.

<sup>9</sup> The use of this term ‘riot’ in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement, to vilify Black resistance as deviant, impulsive and destructive, is particularly resonant in how it reproduces white supremacist and settler colonial discourse, and effaces the historical genealogies of longstanding subversive protest tactics, such as looting. See Rakia (2013), for instance.

to 'violent social clashes, race and prison riots, and sports matches' (162). The key incident on the night of 29 May 1913, she suggests, is an auditory over-reading of the verbal responses of the audience on the basis of their seating and class backgrounds, which became a 'noisy dispute' because the 'stamping' of the dancers on stage broke with 'the racially exclusionary aesthetics of Western art' that maintained national and racial borders in French listening culture, or more specifically, the concert hall (152).

For both Fauser and Levitz, the Paris *Rite* was disruptive because it broke the orientalist expectations of audiences: it did not fit neatly with the exotic tropes that Fauser discerns the Parisian audiences were used to with their viewing habits centred around ethnological exhibits and expositions. *Rite* was read, sonically and visually, as too 'primitive', too indicative of Otherness, even as it was tailor-made for the exoticising cultural palettes of the Parisian concert-goers. Davinia Caddy's work on the Ballets Russes offers an important consideration here. In looking closely at the press articles and reviews of the Ballets Russes, Caddy details the 'ideological and aesthetic premises upon which articles and reviews were constructed' (2012: 118), revealing how the Ballets Russes 'became a metaphor for invasion' (2012: 122).

*Radhe Radhe* responds visually and acoustically to the original *Rite*, and in doing so, offers a new text that is available to view and hear both as a reinvention of *The Rite* but also more radically on its own terms. The music of *Radhe Radhe*, threaded with complex dissonance and rhythms, simulates the original *Rite*. Part one, titled 'Adoration' (*Aaradhana*), is an accumulation, consisting of the movements 'Dawn', 'Promise', 'Summoning', 'Spring Fever', 'Procession' and 'Colours'. Part two, 'Transcendence' (*Utkarsh*), drives towards catharsis: 'Thirst', 'Intoxication', 'Exaltation', 'Spirits', 'Rituals' and 'Purging Rites'. The film by Bhargava is divided along the same lines.

The tone of the film hovers between meditative and exalting. It presents footage documenting the North Indian celebration of Holi in a non-chronological manner, edited to include a fictitious sequence with the character of Radha awaiting her lover (the lord) Krishna. The film flits between these two arcs with moments where they synchronise in tone. The instrumentation in Iyer's score includes a flute, clarinet, bassoon, trumpet, pianos, strings (violins, violas, cello and double bass) and two sets of percussion (one: wood block, bass drum, snare drum, tom-toms, ride, stacked rides, thin crash and vibraphone; two: a drum set, wood blocks, tambourine, Glockenspiel and Timpani). A transposed film score is also assimilated into the music.

In order to clarify the connections between practices of self-presentation and *Radhe Radhe*, what follows is a brief description of the visual and musical composition of the piece. Movement one, 'Dawn', opens with a 'slowly evolving open improvisation' across two pianos (mm. 1; see **Figure 1**), set to a serene scene with boats bobbing on a river,

This work was written for and commissioned by Carolina Performing Arts at The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

## RADHE RADHE: RITES OF HOLI

### PART I: ADORATION

#### 1. Dawn

Vijay Iyer

Slowly evolving open improvisation for 2 pianos, about 3:15

Slowly evolving open improvisation for 2 pianos, about 3:15

Film Track  $\sharp$  chimes cue approx. 30 sec before Part 2

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#### 2. Promise

Elegant, with a bustling undercurrent  
♩ = 124 (in 5; each pulse is [3+4] 16<sup>th</sup> notes; ♩. = 71)

Elegant, with a bustling undercurrent  
♩ = 124 (in 5; each pulse is [3+4] 16<sup>th</sup> notes; ♩. = 71)

shaker  
low & high bells  
chimes

6 (8)

Pno. I *p*

Pno. II *pp* clear, limpid

Vln. *ppp* smoothly

Vla. *ppp* smoothly

F. T.  $\times$

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**Figure 1: The first movement and the opening to the second movement in Part One of *Radhe Radhe*.** Photo: An extract from the score of Vijay Iyer's *RADHE RADHE: Rites of Holi*. Multimedia work for chamber ensemble and electronics. Copyright © 2013 Schott Music Corporation, New York NY. Reproduced with permission.



151

749 Handclaps when possible

Tpt.

Pno. I *dim.*

Pno. II

Perc. II

Vln. *dim.*

Vla. *dim.*

Vc. *dim.*

Cb. *f dim.*

F.T.

751

Pno. I

Pno. II

Vln.

Vla.

Vc.

Cb. *mf dim.*

F.T.

**Figure 2:** An extract from the last movement of *Radhe Radhe*, nearing the end of the piece. Note the use of handclaps and the film track (F.T.). An extract from the score of Vijay Iyer's, *RADHE RADHE: Rites of Holi*. Multimedia work for chamber ensemble and electronics. Copyright © 2013 Schott Music Corporation, New York NY. Reproduced with permission.

followed by similarly charmed images of a tall bundle of hay and a heron standing alone in a field. In 'Promise', a violin pattern is distinctive (mm. 3), annotated as 'elegant with a bustling undercurrent' (Iyer 2013-14: 1), along with the pianos. One can see this pattern mimicked in the fresh daytime tempos of Mathura and its neighbouring areas, and people working in the fields. More precisely, labouring hands can be seen preparing food and flower garlands, pumping air into cycles and sifting powdered colour into plastic bags. Strings, bassoon/bass clarinet and the trumpet join, creating layers of sound and invoking a joyful but melancholic bustle of sound, a familiar feeling at the outset of festival celebrations. In a sequence that particularly aligns music and image, a close-up of Devanagari and English script-writing is seen on a train passing by, accompanied by percussion (bass drum and wood blocks) representing transport rhythm with a hoof-like beat. This gestures to postcolonial modernity's divergent sounds: in contemporary urban Indian life, the mundane beats of traffic and transport are always ensnared with the sounds of more seasonal celebrations, such as music and songs specific to Holi. 'Summoning' leads into an anxious, anticipatory rhythm created by the second piano and vibraphone, led by the drum set as the strings play smoothly. The pace of the film builds to the steady thrum of people praying, with their hands raised, readying themselves for and throwing themselves into the festivities. Women spin, caught in the fervour of prayer. A flute solo captures the melancholic, apprehensive nature of the celebrations, foreshadowing the violence that emerges in part two. Chaos cuts to yellow and pale green bushes, very still, with musical notes holding long and steady.

The most striking image in movement four, 'Spring Fever', is that of long-necked heron-like birds thrashing around in a field, a hint of darkness under their wings. This darkness is mirrored in the music through the flute and viola (annotated as 'lush, mysterious' in the score (Iyer 2013-14: 20), they express apprehension in their tone) and the frenetic dancing. Our first glimpse of Radha's face is halved in the mirror she holds. Bhargava's camera captures the dizzying pace of the celebrations through medium-long shots and close-ups of people jostling, coloured in saffron, pinks and reds. The flute and violin, 'slightly agitated' (Iyer 2013-14: 24), create a sense of foreboding. The crowding and pushing in 'Procession' pulses, enhancing the atmosphere of volatility: an indication of the caste and communal violence of Hindu saffron terror. The piano and strings begin to crescendo. The beats are heavy and urgent on the flute and violin, and the piano repeats a pattern of four notes, played at a lower scale. In 'Colours', the closing movement to part one, the violin is played in a flurry. Faces are increasingly captured in close-up, which intensifies the claustrophobic celebrations of the festival. A Hindi folk melody is replicated instrumentally in movement six, played by the ensemble, with

the trumpet and mridangam-like rhythms (played by Tyshawn Sorey) on percussion: bongos with sticks. The cuts get sharper, faster, with the music assuming a faster pace.

The pace of the film is slowed at the beginning of part two ('Transcendence'), steadied by those playing Holi outdoors as they gaze into the camera. In 'Exaltation', the visuals are saturated, jarring against the music which speeds up, and then becomes languid. A tight, dizzying circle of dancers occupies the screen, montaged by Radha playing. A pair of blue coloured arms rest on her, intimated to be Krishna. She is still filmed as a woman who performs the act of desiring, rather than being an object of desire: throughout the film, Krishna is not seen except for a glimpse of his arms. Movement 10, 'Spirits', settles into an excess of liquid colours, with the violence and the threat of sexualised violence looming. The camera focuses on a largely male brawl with colours functioning as weapons of violence. The trumpet synchronises with this mood, sounding 'sultry' (Iyer 2013-14: 106). The drums set the pulse. Movement 11, 'Rituals', continues in this vein. The strings and flute are sharp, 'becoming brutal' (115). In the coda to the music and film, 'Purging Rites', the wet colours take on a darker hue, mimicking the darkness of the day and the ominous mood, running in parallel to the dramaturgy of Radha's sexual encounter. Tyshawn Sorey creates a drum solo around a rhythm, which intensifies. The orchestral ensemble maintains the rhythm by hand-clapping on the downbeat as night falls (mm. 749; see **Figure 2**). The bonfire (a Holi-eve tradition) is set up as the clapping continues, and women raise sticks to ready themselves to beat a man. A mobile phone creeps into the frame, its screen a blip of blue filming the burning bonfire. In this final movement, the faint chants of those celebrating on the streets are worked into Iyer's music. The mood of the music is foreboding, and highlights the disturbing communal and patriarchal undertones of the festival: the clapping is not merely representative of cultural practices specific to the festival but replicates the rhythms of the street.

*Radhe Radhe* presents Holi not as a performance ritual, as witnessed by colonial and neo-colonial anthropology, but as an intimate, affective and material celebration marking seasonal time. 'Ritual', in this instance, refers to Holi as a cultural event, as an expression of personal heritage experienced and responded to by Iyer and Bhargava rather than an anthropological framing of a performance through a Eurocentric gaze. Bhargava's film, in this regard, resists Orientalist expectations visually (as evidenced by the aforementioned descriptions of key scenes) by witnessing the celebrations from the perspective of someone who participates in and is familiar with them. Iyer's music also responds to Holi as a festival that is not alien to his context, despite cultural differences such as it being a North Indian festival when he is of South Indian heritage. These differences embed themselves in how Iyer interprets the festival musically, as the

compositions for *Radhe Radhe* demonstrate deep familiarity with rhythmic variations and note patterns of (North and South) Indian Classical music, representing the ‘self’ (the diasporic self) within the music. Thus, what one sees *and* hears in *Radhe Radhe* resists framing Holi as an ‘exotic’ Indian ritual by centring compositional practices in sound and music that emerge from knowledge of the ‘self’ rather than situating Holi as a visual and acoustic performance of the Other, and as an imitation of the *Rite*.

According to Lynn Garafola, ‘Since 1913, choreographers have approached *The Rite* from numerous vantage points. Some have emphasised its violence; others its sexuality, primitivism, and terror’ (2017: 18). As Garafola writes, the lost quality of Nijinsky’s ballet choreography for the 1913 *Rite* leads to the envisioning of it as ‘a body of ideas rather than a detailed choreographic script and that this conceptual freedom allows both for the ballet’s continual reinvention and for the persistence of ideas associated with the original’ (2017: 18). She offers examples, such as the ‘original scenario’ and score being changed (citing Akram Khan, for instance) and the ‘ethnographic trimmings’ being cast off, arguing that choreographers of modern dance aim to enliven ‘the ballet’s original transgressive moment, its modernist persona’ that seeks continual reinvention (18). Iyer explains the compositional process he and Bhargava undertook, passing cuts of video footage and audio samples back and forth:

We started with [Prashant] insistently adhering to the structure of that recording in particular—so in fact, if you wanted to, you could take the NAXOS recording of LSO [London Symphony Orchestra] playing *Rite of Spring*, and play it with this film, and it would line up! It’s twelve movements divided into two halves, by six and six. There’s a first arc, and then a second arc. Each one you could see as a sort of thematic variation on the original. I imagined it like what *Ulysses* is to the *Odyssey*. (Iyer 2020)

In this regard, it is valuable to highlight the multimedia nature of *Radhe Radhe*: a formal transgression that takes technological root in both sonic and visual media, locating itself alongside contemporary performances that have also reimagined *The Rite*’s score. Garafola notes instances such as Akram Khan’s 2013 dance production *iTMOi (In the Mind of Igor)*, which uses original music compositions by Nitin Sawhney, Jocelyn Pook and Ben Frost. *Radhe Radhe* highlights these corporeal concerns by shifting the portrayal of *Rite* in media from stage to screen, from ballet to film, and in doing so ‘corrupts’ and reinvents the shape of the original *Rite*. The film is a visual equivalent of the ballet and the score is an adaptive iteration of the original score by Stravinsky in its structure and energy.

The similarities, however, stop there. I read *Radhe Radhe* as a simulacrum in the Deleuzian tradition. Deleuze, framing the simulacrum as defining modernity, posits that ‘the copy is an image endowed with resemblance, the simulacrum is an image without resemblance’ (1983: 48). Bhargava’s footage appears as a simulacrum in its disparateness from *The Rite*: there is little holding the ballet and the scenes from Holi celebrations together as a comparable unit other than the commissioning of it, and with knowledge of that, the structural layout of *Radhe Radhe* and the themes of sexuality, chaos and violence. But *Radhe Radhe* is also an independent multimedia consideration of Holi, with its volatile, rhythmic, claustrophobic celebrations in Mathura, and with the caste, class and gender politics of the communal festival. Iyer’s comparison of *Radhe Radhe* being to *The Rite* what *Ulysses* is to *The Odyssey* is useful to consider here in terms of the emphasis of difference and repetition.

The soundscape, too, inhabits a Deleuzian simulacrum, as it is ‘built on a dissimilitude, implying a perversion, an essential turning away’ (1983: 47) from *The Rite*. The two halves, with six movements each create the illusion of likeness (the piano improvisations at the start of the first movement ‘Dawn’ could be said to follow the introduction to *Rite*, particularly the bassoon, and so on) but the 1913 *Rite*, located at the nexus of Russian modernism and French colonial aesthetics, turns inward towards a mythic past, acoustically energising ritual as savagery. Iyer’s piece, simulating *Rite*, looks outward towards the physical, corporeal celebration of Holi, creating diasporic sound as a response to, and including, the sonic affects of the festival. Radha is not a mythological figure in the cinematography and that fictive aspect also cuts through the ethnography: ethnography’s long tradition of framing the formerly colonised as Other is undercut here. Iyer’s analogy of *Radhe Radhe* being to *The Rite* what *Ulysses* is to *The Odyssey* reveals the precise texture of these distinctions, and thus the epistemic value of framing the work as a simulacrum.

According to Bhargava’s note in the booklet accompanying the DVD, ‘Incorporating sounds of the actual event, Vijay’s composition propels us to the state of renewal’. He details his process of editing: ‘Letting go of when or where the footage was shot, I started sculpting the edit around the arc of Stravinsky’s chapters’ (2014). The decision to reorder footage in time to *The Rite* and to present the musical composition as responding to and reinterpreting the thematic variations of *The Rite* destabilises any notion of authenticity to ritual: *Radhe Radhe* the film (and the music composed by Iyer in response to the footage being sent to him by Bhargava) becomes a musical story about the psychic space of heritage, a part-fictitious view towards the ‘real’, on-site experience of Holi which, consequently, refuses the ethnographic gaze that politically

underpins the 1913 *Rite*. *Radhe Radhe* is best seen as documentary-fiction, the score and film constituting the hyphen in this genre. The visual and musical scoring of the narrative of Radha allows for this movement away from colonial ethnography.

Several factors reveal the compositional and visual text of *Radhe Radhe* to be one that resists a canonical hearing of the 1913 *Rite*. These factors include the historical theatrical context for the 1913 *Rite*, the emphasis on the circumstances in which *Radhe Radhe* was commissioned to mark the centenary of the 1913 production and Iyer's response to distance his musical articulation from the colonising forces that governed the original, such as mythmaking in the original *Rite* production and reception emerging from and directed towards a national taste for xenophobic stereotypes. I do not suggest that there is historical continuity in cultures of reception from the Paris audience to Iyer's. Rather, I invite an attunement to the varying political manifestations of acoustic cultures to canonical texts, of which one response, *Radhe Radhe* to *The Rite of Spring*, is what I read as an act of self-representation in terms of composing away from *The Rite*, and towards the festival of Holi. In this case, Iyer's work points towards how we can *listen* to Stravinsky's score in more than one way. His work also sets up the creation of a new, relational assemblage of sounds as a form of acoustic resistance to hegemonic whiteness by drawing on methods of sound-making from Black and South Asian musical practices.

*Radhe Radhe* thus represents a way to transform contemporary practices of listening in western classical music. It does so by becoming a sonic postcolonial ur-text, a simulacrum that creates new conceptions of colonial myth and new forms of resistance to the performance repertoire of *The Rite*. It also accomplishes this through the collaborative practices of both Bhargava and the Ensemble that performs *Radhe Radhe*, notably Iyer's collaboration with Tyshawn Sorey. Iyer's work centres on the idea of 'spring' as embodied in the cultural specificity of North India rather than through mythical representations of 'Other' cultures.

### **'Performing Misfitness' and 'Enjoying Whiteness': Structures of Representation**

Listening to the 2013 orchestral recording of *Radhe Radhe* at Chapel Hill, at the beginning of movement 2, 'Promise', I detect a violin opening that resonates as an *alapana* [introductory elaboration] arrangement from Indian classical music, which I read sonically as the opening expressions of a Carnatic raga (an improvisational framework in Indian classical music, such as Kalyani).<sup>10</sup> In his response, Iyer gestures to the hybridity of musical traditions:

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<sup>10</sup> Adrian McNeil defines a raga as 'simultaneously an inventory of melodic elements, a performative process, and an aesthetic outcome' (2015: 4). Each raga could be said to have a specific set of notes where 'improvisation' is the

A lot of the musical choices I made, were influenced by the rhythms of the film: either the rhythms of the people or the rhythms of the edits. Those were the two dimensions of moment-to-moment; there's a pulsing of human action, and there's also pulsation in the cutting ... My entire rhythmic vocabulary is some amalgam of Black music and South Asian music. In particular that cyclical thing that's happening there is—by spending a lot of time with Mridangam players, and trying to get myself to do that, to do things like that on the piano, or embody similar kinds of speeds, or *nadai* [rhythmic subdivisions], and just sit with them and let them become a framework to move in. (Iyer 2020)

The (self-)representational work performed here, within the sonic, visual and structural spaces of western classical music (as both art form and industry) is multifaceted. Not only are global musical traditions and histories brought into visible acoustic conversation by Iyer on the level of compositional practice of a piece like *Radhe Radhe*, but in doing so there is no ideal (white) audience or listener being cast as dominant in relation to other audiences. Following Grace Wang:

Within the field of classical music, racialised beliefs are embedded in the discursive frameworks used to discuss, interpret and evaluate musical texts and performances. How individuals hear and make musical judgements are shaped by grids of ideology that exist within and beyond the realm of classical music. (2014: 67)

In playing for and towards an ear that is intimate with listening traditions beyond the ideological models offered by western classical music, a wider audience is represented too. This is done in part through Iyer self-representing cultural origins and influences, both diasporic and otherwise, via technical compositional skill and the genre of multimedia collaboration. This destabilises the hegemonic notion of a white audience as the default and assumed audience in western classical music, as Iyer's Carnatic influences translate into his composition in ways that reach out to audiences familiar with musical traditions other than western classical music. The example of hearing the strains of a raga through the use of violin, to which Iyer responded with the influence of Black and South Asian music, is one of these ways. Another is the influence of the mridangam and tabla on the rhythmic elements of his compositions.

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expression of those notes, articulable in a multitude of distinctive styles across Hindustani and Carnatic music traditions. However, improvisation is not manifest here as in the western classical tradition: see McNeil (2017) for more on the dangers of a hegemonic imposition of a western understanding of improvisation on to Indian practices.

If audiences are more culturally diverse than is evident, then the roles essayed by Black and Global Majority musicians and composers within the operations of whiteness in western classical music are also obscured by structures of representation that begin at the level of training. In her book chapter ‘This is no Monkey Show’, in reference to an Asian violinist’s words that she parses as locating ‘music making as the antithesis of imitation and technical wizardry’, Wang astutely reads the self-representation of the violinist resisting a ‘monkey show’, in his words, as a double-bind. ‘While the performance is amusing and entertaining, lurking beneath the appearance of domestication is the threat of danger—a wild and unpredictable nature that can potentially veer out of control,’ she argues (2014: 65).

Iyer’s words resonate directly here, as he articulates his relationship with the western classical music canon as a composer:

For me as a marginal figure in that [western classical] world, I often get asked to comment on the past, or to articulate some existing relationships to canon. This has been a recurring theme in my life as a composer of concert-works. I get asked to justify my presence in relation to what is considered classical music by doing this, by—it’s sometimes seen like a stunt almost, like let’s get that weird jazz guy. Almost like I’m set up to fail—or set up to spice things up. It often feels that way. Feels like being cast as a novelty. Except it’s now been going for 10 or more years. More broadly, this is the challenge that contemporary composers have in relation to the canon, period. (2020)

Iyer’s articulation of being perceived as ‘that weird jazz guy’ who is ‘cast as a novelty’ speaks to the ‘threat of danger’ that Wang suggests because musical practice is an extension of corporeality and, therefore, one’s cultural identity. Canonicity operates as a scale of control, against which alterity is scripted as misbehaving, disorderly dissonance. In western classical music, that scale of control is the presumption of whiteness as the norm. Iyer details the maintenance of the ‘imperviously white’ nature of many contemporary music ensembles and western art music more broadly, even in the 21st century. (2020). He expands on ‘the whiteness that is expressed and enjoyed in the classical music space’, adding:

Enjoying whiteness, getting together as white people to feel white, [to] enjoy being white together, that’s a phrase I’ve used elsewhere—I actually think that’s a key part of it. Basically, it has an affective register to it: the pleasure in being white together, the sociality of it. I’ve talked about me in relation to that, being this weird misfit and



performing that misfitness. But what I didn't talk about and I think is actually the core of my work always, is my relation to blackness. Which is as a non-Black person, as essentially a privileged non-Black person, someone whose entire career and language is informed by innovations of Black musicians of the 20th century. (Iyer 2020)

Commissioning structures such as, for instance, anniversaries, can spatialise this social affect of whiteness in concert halls and efface the intersectional nuances of musical composition. *Radhe Radhe* marketed as a response to the 1913 *Rite* signals a different audience in its relationship to whiteness than if it were marketed as a work engaged in and made from an intersectional ethics and aesthetics as symbolised by the influence of Black avant-garde music, or as a work that reflects inter-cultural musical traditions. The latter, not exempt from operations of orientalism, reflects the varied ways in which whiteness exercises control in western classical music spaces. Iyer notes the 'invariable' exoticism that was reflected in the promotion of the film and how 'that was confounding what [they] were trying to do'. He observes:

I felt like we had to keep pushing, keep fighting against that both in the accompanying material, the programme notes, the post-concert talks—but also Prashant resist[ed]. It was funny. He'd come along to these performances, even though his work was done. He was just there to spread joy. He'd actually bring Holi powder with him. Like this big bag of magenta, or bright blue. He'd try to get us with it ... He did break the stiffness of that culture, in a way that was really crucial. (2020)

In one of the behind-the-scenes episodes from the 2013 premiere of *Radhe Radhe*, Bhargava and Iyer can be seen in front of the stage, doused in spots of Holi colour, talking with other musicians in what resembles a post-show talk. In the 2017 Ojai festival recording, the year that Iyer was its Music Director, it appears that Sorey is dappled with pink Holi colour. The presence of the colour serves as a reminder that representation is not a disembodied, abstract notion: the colour enunciates a relationship that is central to the work, and exists beyond nation-state borders. In the spatial context of the concert hall, Iyer, Bhargava and Sorey (none of whom are white) are engaged in a performative resistance to the horizon of expectations of whiteness. The colour destabilises notions of professionalism as racialised in appearance, which extends to dress code, demeanour, skin tone, gender, and more deep-rooted ways of moving through, or playing to, the world as a Black or South Asian musician.

These can be better understood as theatrical movements because representation is a theatrical process. Adrian Curtin articulates an emerging hybrid art form he

astutely deems to be orchestral theatre, for theatres and orchestral concerts, ‘in which music is an important, but not necessarily all-determining, part of the performance experience’ (2019: 291–92). *Radhe Radhe* is not orchestral theatre but it is theatrically orchestrated. The inversion of this construction emphasises the identities, in this context, of the people in the film (North Indian, across varying castes and classes), Bhargava as filmmaker and Iyer as composer (caste-privileged Indian-Americans) and of the musicians performing to (largely white) American audiences.

In the performance at the Ojai festival in 2017, the arrangement was slightly different to the usual arrangement for the piece, such as at the Brooklyn Academy of Music (Pareles 2014). While the ensemble did occupy the stage at Ojai, the film was screened on a giant sheet draped around them (Ojai Music Festival). The quality of this theatricality heightens the layered performativity of these identities: Iyer’s Indian-American ‘brownness’ in relation to whiteness (or Blackness) does not mimic or overlap beyond diasporic resonances with the Indians presented as celebrating in Mathura.<sup>11</sup> Viewing the ICE performance as theatrically orchestrated lends visibility to this acoustic assemblage of identities. It also spotlights the hybrid form of the composition-film: the film is activated by the music that is played live but the cultural scripting of the ICE (the orchestrating body of the film) is visible as a result of the focus on this hybridity of form. ‘We were the live orchestra. But we were on stage, we weren’t in a pit. Our presence was important,’ reflects Iyer. ‘I made sure that this is actually a live performance. This isn’t just a film that conceals us’ (2020).

Once again, the relationship between Bhargava’s film and Iyer’s music simulates, in the Deleuzian sense, the relationship between the 1913 ballet and music: the intermediality of *Radhe Radhe* accentuates the availability of multiple modes of cultural representation. How does one read the performances of the music ensemble against the edited filming of the people celebrating Holi in the film, and against the performance of the actor [Radha]? The players of ICE are largely white, for instance, with Iyer and Sorey being notable and constant exceptions. This mirrors the broader issue of white dominance in the western classical music industry. Self-representation, emergent in a work like *Radhe Radhe*, challenges this dominance by locating musical voices and influences in composition as rooted within the musical traditions of America, such as Black American avant-garde music, and diasporically, as within Indian classical music. An ‘authentic Indian’ music that is Other is not within the

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<sup>11</sup> While caste and caste privilege in terms of Iyer’s own identity was discussed explicitly with regards to the locus of Iyer’s music-making during a later conversation, in this instance it was noted that the film cut across caste-contexts in Mathura, including locations that were accessible to the caste-privileged, such as certain temples, and to the caste-oppressed, such as specific urban areas and ecological spaces.

score, nor is there a delineation of what differentiates scored sections from unscored sections. Rather, the acoustic fabric of the work is immanent in how it structures or, indeed, draws from the repertoire of Iyer's musical influences. Or, as Born and Hesmondhalgh ask on the subject of difference: 'What is implied by attending to the boundaries of musical-aesthetic discourses inherent ... in the notion that a music's construction of its own identity may involve the exclusion or repudiation of another music?' (2000: 1). The last major section of this article will examine the potential and radical possibilities of collaboration in formulating counter-canonical performances of self-representation.

### **Collaboration in Western Classical Music as Counter-Canonical Practice**

Laudan Nooshin argues powerfully that the insistence on binaries, such as composition and improvisation (and notation/oral scores) in musical discourse, serves only to consolidate orientalist thought and colonial exploitation. Binaries of this type exercise power in the representation of otherwise complex practices (2003). As Caines and Heble remind us, improvisation is 'a social activity that cannot readily be scripted, predicted, or compelled into orthodoxy' (2015: 2). *Radhe Radhe* is a composed multimedia work, created in part to respond to *Rite of Spring*. So what is the value of emphasising the role of improvisation in this work? As the score indicates, technical improvisation is limited in the music of *Radhe Radhe*. Any value of considering improvisation may be retrieved by finessing what is meant by improvisation here, which might illuminate how alternative conceptions of performance can be useful, such as an emphasis on radical collaboration.

In his scholarship, Iyer frames diaspora as 'a form of improvisation'. He attests:

Diaspora is not only a state of displacement, but also an ongoing navigation of social difference. It is a condition of having to perceive, decide, and act under the watchful gaze of a suspicious and distrustful host culture, particularly intensified by the hypervisibility associated with racial difference. Diaspora is, we might unremarkably observe, improvisation within constraints. (2019)

Iyer's framing of diaspora as 'an ongoing navigation of social difference' is reflected in musical collaborations, too: *Radhe Radhe* involves, as Iyer has repeatedly argued and as evidenced by my reading of the score and film, multiple cultural registers of acousticity from South Asian and Indian classical music, to western classical music and the Black Radical tradition. This is clarified through Iyer's compositional influences (as named), as well as through his collaborators, such as MacArthur Fellow and composer-

drummer Tyshawn Sorey. As Amanda L. Scherbenske notes on Sorey's performance of 'jazz, new music and klezmer' and the influence western classical music on his work:

Although [Sorey] crosses genres and traverses new music and jazz art worlds, he was quite literally rejected by one of America's preeminent institutions of higher education for not meeting racially essentialist expectations ... A discussion of boundary erosion and multiplicity is not about artistic and cultural flows for Sorey; it is, rather, about artistic and cultural networks disjointed by personal prejudice at the micro level, and, disciplined structures of inequality at the macro level. (2013: 4)

Adam Shatz, in a 2021 profile of Sorey, writes:

When [Sorey] first met with the International Contemporary Ensemble, a group of new-music players that has performed many of his scores, to discuss a possible collaboration, he told them: 'I'm not interested in fusing or dissolving or creating a hybrid. I want to start from a place where the lines between notated and improvised music have disappeared completely'. (2021)

It is notable that as collaborators, too, Sorey and Iyer articulate, in their own vocabularies and from their own experiences as Black American and Indian American respectively in spaces of western classical music, there is a suspicion of the notion that improvisatory practices are inherently radical. Drawing on Glissant, Iyer makes the case in his scholarly writing for an improvisation that is a practice of materially-situated doing (acts, relations, neglects, flows) and that is, in his words, 'movement in relation to power', or following Glissant, as a movement 'in relation' (2018: 771). He outlines traumatic instances of 'the removal of Black life in an ordinary encounter gone wrong' as 'clearly improvisative moments that are contiguous with everyday life—events of extremely minor import, the innocuous actions of innocents' that 'are systemically suspected, abhorred, criminalized, punished' (764).

This framing productively complicates the dominant cultural understanding of improvisation as a movement of 'freedom', when freedom is, after all, in relation too. Iyer's 'movement in relation' is a framing that also allows for challenging canonical acoustic practices (or repertoires, or both) through collaboration as a counter-canonical practice when it functions as a mode of forging solidarity through acoustic and cultural differences, without needing to cohere in a uniform, legible manner. As Fumi Okiji argues, 'jazz cannot be adequately understood through a reading that sees the individual soloist fully liberated within the confines of predetermined rules and expectations nor through one that portrays a group of "isolated" individuals who

merely inhabit the same space and miraculously turn out “coherent” work’ (2018: 18). *Radhe Radhe* is not a work of jazz but Okiji’s reminder that improvisation (and improvisers) bears an uneasy relationship to the structuration principles governing the music and sociality of an ensemble is a sobering and important one here. Collaboration as practiced by Iyer and Sorey is another aspect of the Deleuzian simulacrum: it is so dissimilar from the context of the collaborative models of the 1913 *Rite* that in the practices of self-representation employed here, the piece veers away from the binary of original/copy and also finds itself removed from composed/improvised, native/foreign and canon/adaptation.

*Radhe Radhe* is, I argue, a counter-canonical acoustic text. Its employment of collaboration is counter-canonical in this case because it resists the dominant mode of audition demanded by canonical works like *The Rite*, but also because it makes visible the construction of minoritised subjectivities in composition. ‘Allowing the body to feel,’ says Iyer, ‘That in and of itself is, I would like to think that destabilises the authority of the great composer’ (2020). If subjectivity can be said to consolidate at the nexus of dialogic acts and our socio-cultural location, then collaboration is, above all else, a practice of history too. It is embodied in live performance, past and present, as much as it is discursive.

In one of the bonus behind-the-scenes episodes included on the DVD of *Radhe Radhe*, we see Iyer teaching the musicians in a practice session how to capture a folk melody that appears in the work. He demonstrates the melody verbally, asking, ‘You know what I mean?’ before showing them a physical demonstration of the rhythm. I read this demonstration of the rhythm as a counter-canonical moment brought about by a diasporic movement, of learned memory, transference, exchange, and of difference. Moreover, the pedagogy of the moment itself is collaborative in form: Iyer’s translation of a mode of playing across inter-cultural vocabularies constitutes that, and the exchange of that knowledge becomes a type of collaboration too.

Of the broader process of creating the work, Iyer explains, ‘It wasn’t just me, it was me and Tyshawn Sorey who is a key force in this piece.’ He elaborates on the importance of the collaboration, noting:

That final episode with the bonfire and beating the man with sticks and the erotic encounter. The drum solo, that’s [Tyshawn]. The reason that it goes there, to that extreme, is because of him. I wrote it with that in mind. Because I knew we could do that together. I couldn’t really do that with anyone else. So that is a key part of it. That tradition of exceeding all frames. That to me is the Black radical tradition. (2020)

He adds that it is also true of *Radhe Radhe*, that even though it is not a jazz piece, it is ‘informed by Black avant-garde operations, or Black experimental, Black radical operations ... I think it’s easy to tell the story about me as a brown person in a white space but the reason any of this is possible is because of my relationship to Black music’ (Iyer 2020). The navigation of the caste-racial location is a collaborative practice that indexes the multiple loci of power: in scoring, scripting, performing, orchestrating, teaching, moving, and narrating. These aspects of creating western classical music are enhanced through the clarifying framework of collaboration: that Iyer and Sorey could ‘do that together’, and from ‘a place where the lines between notated and improvised music have disappeared completely’, as Sorey’s words above remind us. Highlighting self-representation attests to these axes of solidarity forged between Black American and Indian American composers. Iyer added that the improvisational elements are also owed to Cory Smythe (‘piano 1’, especially in movements one and seven) and, on the recording, to Amir ElSaffar.<sup>12</sup> The construction of the single ‘composer’ voice serves ideological traditions that are aligned with whiteness.

Emphasising collaboration in practice (and in dialogue, which allows for these influences to be rightfully named, as Tyshawn Sorey has) challenges this and further highlights relationships between the specific experiences of communities in western classical music spaces: Iyer’s articulation of his indebtedness to the Black avant-garde tradition, for instance, and Sorey’s influences of Ethiopian and Ukrainian Jewish musicians. The multicultural influences on Iyer’s compositional voice as well as his intersectional, collaborative performance practice collapse the notion of a single auteurial composer voice, dispersing the notion of countering canon with the edification of another. Collaboration in itself is no more radical than improvisation, but the multi-layered confrontation of inter-racial musical influences and histories in collaborations such as Sorey, Iyer and the ICE offers a powerful rebuttal to the notion of a sole composer in performance practice. This also, as a result, challenges the dominance of improvisation as the primary mode through which to engage with classical music pieces such as *Radhe Radhe* that are compositionally influenced by Black avant-garde music traditions.

In listing her pedagogical goals, Lise C. Vaugeois suggests ‘deconstructing the notion of the Western musical canon as a unitary entity’ (2018). For Vaugeois, deconstructing the relationship between this canon and White bourgeois supremacy can lead to the recognition of ‘the roles that public music-making can have in normalizing or challenging the logics of inequality’. She frames it as a ‘luxury of Whiteness—an

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<sup>12</sup> This was clarified in a subsequent conversation conducted over email in late 2021.

indicator of dominance—to be able to perform music under the guise of “great art” without the need to consider the appropriateness of textual (or other) significations or their relevance to a wide range of people’ (2018). I read this as an extended invitation to rethink how material structures of white supremacy distort representational values in classical music institutions. Viewing collaboration as a subjective, relational movement within and beyond the score–performance dynamic also leads to a reshaping of the expectations of representational practices. In the score and the film of *Radhe Radhe*, self-representation resists the ethnographic, orientalising impulses of canonicity through radical collaborations, channelling musical and multimedia vocabularies from the Black American and Indian classical music contexts.

### Postlude

George E. Lewis and Joy H. Calico assert, ‘While genre markers are often framed by scholars as promoting community and intelligibility, one might ask a race-aware genre scholarship to confront the gatekeeping, border-policing, and kinship-enforcing functions of genre’ (2019: 609). This is applicable to the demands of authenticity in western classical music and raises the question of whether liberation can only be found in identifying genre-markers as gatekeeping practices intended to preserve white canonicity. Iyer makes the illuminating case that it is ‘hard to imagine reforming something that’s constructed around that central need to preserve—white dominance.’ (2020). This challenge is also refracted in scholarship. Historian Kira Thurman situates herself and her work in a body of existing scholarship, arguing ‘that classical music, like whiteness itself, is frequently racially unmarked and presented as universal—until people of color start performing it’ (2019: 832). What Thurman and Iyer identify is the value of self-representation, as Black and Global Majority musicians and scholars who trouble notions of western classical music as an institution worth reforming, preserving and defending in ways legible to whiteness, and who demonstrate other ways to be *in relation* to it.

This article has considered Iyer’s work *Radhe Radhe*, along with the eponymous film by Bhargava, as a multimedial text that challenges hegemonic structures of whiteness within and beyond western classical music. Iyer’s positioning of his work with regards to canonicity, both in tonal texture and in broader representational structures of programming, commissioning and performance, poses an important challenge to universalism. The argument may well be enhanced by a finer and more textured analysis, making use of the technical methodologies of notation and music from musicology, particularly Iyer’s use of syncopation in classical music and the legacy of

syncopation in Black avant-garde music. The argument would also be well-served by extending the registers of representation to a more detailed, broad analysis of the role of caste and diaspora in relation to Indian-American musicians. Additionally, Sorey's work as a composer urgently requires scholarly attention. 'Sharpening musicology's engagement with race and ethnicity can also produce new understandings of the relations among formations of canon, race, and genre,' argue Lewis and Calico (2019: 609). This article contends that *Radhe Radhe* exceeds the dialectic of original-copy. By viewing it as a postcolonial Deleuzian simulacrum that transforms and 'perverts' *The Rite of Spring* through its use of collaboration as a counter-canonical practice, one is presented with a sundering of canon that casts self-representation of minoritised identities within western classical music as a radically collaborative act.

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The author has no competing interests to declare.

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