

## EXPLORING A MUSICAL CULTURE

**Purport:** This will be a two-part research project. The first essay asks you to define a chosen musical culture in terms of geography, history, and ethnic boundaries. *What, where, and who plays what kind of a musical repertoire?* In ethnomusicological terminology, this is a *normative* description. The second essay will be about your excursion "into the field" and will concentrate on the *particular* description of the music and its context. There must be a *living* component to these papers—researching just recordings and books will not be sufficient.

For these two projects, it would be best to choose a culture which is not reflective of your own immediate background—that is, if you are from Bavaria, do not choose German alpine music; but whereas this mandates, or at least suggests, objectivity, it is not an immutable rule—if you wish to more deeply explore into your personal musical heritage, you can, as long as you maintain a scholarly distance from your topic. Hence, are no immediate restrictions in terms of musical fields, but choosing one which is researchable may have a lot to do with your options: some are too big ("Japanese classical music" or "Indian pop music" for example), and some are too difficult (i.e., "Tuvan throat music," for which you would have trouble finding people who practice it). The first step, then, is to identify the musical culture in terms of its availability.

### **STEP 1: Identify the musical culture according to its availability in live performance this semester!**

It would be best, and easiest, if you found a culture represented at MIT, or next best, in the MIT-Boston environs. There are hundreds of choices available: i.e., Irish pipe music, bhangra, belly dancing, New England contra dance music, or some particular genres of the following: fiddle music, banjo music, Caribbean music (including rumba, mambo, ska, reggae, calypso, soca, merengue, salsa, etc.), bagpipes, accordion music, Balkan music and dance, Scottish music, Portuguese music, Klezmer music, Turkish music, Armenian music, Israeli Music, Arab music, Vietnamese music, Japanese pop music, Indian pop music, to name a few. There are the contemporary pop genres: rap, hip-hop, jungle, etc., but these are harder to maintain scholarly distance from, and have not in the past been easy to write about. Whatever topic you choose, make sure you will have BOTH adequate *written and recorded materials* and *personal informants* on which to research.

**Procedure:** Start writing the first paper by circumscribing your musical culture. Your opening paragraph should lead your reader into the field with generalities and specifics stated in a lively, summary manner. Remember to give your reader enough information about the paper to excite his/her interest.

Then write the paper, composing all paragraphs with coherent organization (using topic sentences), and using the formatting that you have already mastered. Think HASS-D and Phase One writing requirements. Write a concluding paragraph that summarizes the paper and draws conclusions about the music you examined. *Then, review the opening paragraph—it should lure the reader in and bring the subject to life.* It is often the case that the overall quality of paper can be deduced from the opening statements. Go over your draft, if you wish, with Kim.