

BEYOND KITSCH: A. R. RAHMAN
AND THE GLOBAL ROUTES OF INDIAN POPULAR MUSIC

Stephanie Lou Jackson

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green
State University in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

August 2010

Committee:

David Harnish, Advisor

Esther Clinton

Jeremy Wallach

© 2010

Stephanie Jackson

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

David Harnish, Advisor

At the 2009 Academy Awards, A. R. Rahman became the first Indian composer to win Best Score and Best Song (“Jai Ho”) for his music in the film, *Slumdog Millionaire* (2008). This event not only granted Rahman another prestigious accolade for his accomplishments as a popular film music composer (i.e., he has been awarded many times over in India for his music), but it gave Rahman new star-status recognition among a Western audience. Although enormously famous in India and well-known among the South Asian diaspora located throughout many parts of the world, Rahman remained, up until that time, virtually unknown among mainstream U.S. audiences. U.S. audiences today are perhaps more likely than a decade ago to recognize the sounds and images of Indian cinema known as Bollywood, a cultural artifact, once considered “kitsch,” that increasingly traverses international popular cultures. Consequently, the appeal of Rahman’s Bollywood music among a wider global audience (as presented in *Slumdog Millionaire*) coincides with the global circulation and consumption of Bollywood films and music in recent years. I suggest that the appeal for Rahman’s music outside of India cannot be explained by the Western fascination with the exotic “Other,” but instead involves a cultural affinity for a type of style and sound set forth in Rahman’s music. I argue that Rahman’s music exhibits high production quality and a synthesis of Indian film music and global pop sounds created through his use of digital technology. In this thesis, I explore the cultural implications of Rahman’s use of digital technology within the context of the Bollywood film music industry and

the historical presence and adoption of new music technologies. I also examine Rahman's musical career and background which reveals the effect and ramification of multidirectional processes of globalization in the consumption and production of global pop. While some might argue that mass-mediated efforts due to globalization risk homogenizing music, I believe we must confront the creative potential of local artists who choose to ride the wave of transnational trends in music making. I analyze Rahman's compositions in *Slumdog Millionaire* and explore globalist discourses surrounding the production and consumption of his music. The commercial success and public praise for Rahman's music in the U.S. present a convergence of topics related to musical authenticity, ownership, cultural representation, as well as the transformative properties and qualities of sound (on its listeners) as mediated through popular music recordings.

I dedicate my thesis to my mother, Ok Hui, who has sacrificed so much to make it possible for me to pursue my academic passions and interests. I thank her for teaching me to never doubt myself and to pursue every endeavor with integrity, especially in terms of education. Lastly, I look back and thank her for always demanding that, as a child, I practice more piano and read more books.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The research for my thesis is a culmination of observed behaviors and shared thoughts, formal and informal, surrounding A. R. Rahman's music throughout the past year and a half. I am grateful for the feedback and comments shared during all interviews that took place during this time including with members of the India Student Association, students from Dr. Jeremy Wallach's Asian Popular Music seminar, disc-jockeys of the Indian Music radio program at Bowling Green State University, as well as Dr. Srinivas Melkote, an A. R. Rahman enthusiast.

While I take full responsibility for the contents of this thesis, I wish to acknowledge several scholars who, with their contribution, have helped me gain valuable insight into this project. First, I would like to thank Dr. Harnish, my thesis advisor, for his continual support and guidance throughout the thesis writing process. I also thank my thesis committee members, Dr. Esther Clinton and Dr. Jeremy Wallach for their patience, guidance and expertise.

I also wish to thank other professors, including the professors I just mentioned, who have provided detailed information, revisions and remarks towards earlier versions and portions of this thesis (presented at the 2009 and 2010 Mid-West regional conference for the Society of Ethnomusicology), including Dr. Joshua Duchan and Dr. Katherine Meizel. In addition, I thank Dr. Robert Fallon for encouraging me to write about A. R. Rahman while taking his graduate writing seminar course in the spring of 2009.

As their graduate assistant, I thank Dr. Katherine Meizel and Dr. Jesse Johnston for asking and encouraging me to present my research on Bollywood and A. R. Rahman during Music of World Cultures class lectures.

I wish to thank Dr. Christopher Williams for his careful attention and shared knowledge of Hindi commercial film music for an earlier article length manuscript of my thesis topic. I also wish to thank Dr. Peter Kvetko who read an earlier manuscript and whose article on Indipop prompted and challenged me to contribute to the larger body of research on Indian popular music. In addition, I would like to thank Dr. Nilanjana Bhattacharyja and Dr. Paul Greene for their words of encouragement and for sharing their knowledge and theories about South Asian popular music (presented during the Asian Popular Culture Symposium hosted by Bowling Green State University in spring 2010).

Finally, I am especially grateful to Dr. Jeremy Wallach for all the opportunities he has granted me to seriously pursue the study of Indian popular music. Dr. Wallach helped me to see that undertaking this project was more than completing a thesis requirement, but a worthwhile scholarly attempt to explore a fascinating topic as well as understand important musical, social and cultural dimensions of Asian popular music. Dr. Wallach's keen insights and ardent attitude that characterize his approach as a professor and scholar of popular music provide me with a credible model and knowledge of the tools needed today within the discipline of ethnomusicology. As a person and a scholar, he has inspired me personally to remain a student in this field.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
INTRODUCTION	1
Kitsch as Ideology.....	3
The Global Presence of Bollywood	5
Bollywood in the U.S. Revisited.....	7
The Study of Indian Popular Music	9
Giving Greater Visibility to Bollywood	11
Methodology.....	16
CHAPTER I. THE BOLLYWOOD FILM MUSIC INDUSTRY: A CULTURE AND AN INDUSTRY.....	18
The Early Years: The Formation of a National Cinema and Glimpses of a Global Outlook.....	20
Early Technologies and Musical Practices	23
The 1980s and New Music Technologies and Practices.....	27
Shifting Realities and New Musical Possibilities	29
Maintaining the “Big Sound”	30
The Blurring of Film and Nonfilm Music.....	32
Global Aspirations	33
CHAPTER II. A. R. RAHMAN, HUMAN AGENCY AND CULTURAL CHANGE.....	35
Continuity and Change	37
“The Mozart of Madras”	38
Rahman’s Musical Heritage and Hybrid Sensibilities	41

Other Musical Influences	43
Rahman's Inspiration with Sufism.....	44
Rahman's Compositional Practices	46
Living in a Globalized World	52
CHAPTER III. THE MUSIC OF <i>SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE</i> : A SYNTHESIS OF	
SOUNDS.....	55
The Bollywood Sound of Music	56
“Jai Ho”: The Song and Dance	59
“O...Saya”	63
Discourse on Indian Vocal Timbre	65
The Blurring of Genres	66
Mediated Meanings.....	68
Further Beyond the Diaspora	74
CHAPTER IV. TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES WITH SONGS THAT TRAVEL THE	
GLOBE.....	78
The Commodification of the World's Music.....	80
The Many Guises of World Music	82
CHAPTER V. CONCLUSION.....	90
REFERENCES	92

PREFACE

Beyond Kitsch: A. R. Rahman and the Global Routes of Indian Popular Music is a thesis inspired by two events: my decision to live in India for two years, and the 2009 Academy Awards in Hollywood. I mention these two seemingly disparate events for several reasons. First, I want to highlight the timeframe in which I first traveled to India, in 2005. The sentiments I experienced as an undergraduate prior to the fall of 2005 involved a strong skepticism towards the long-standing supposed superiority of American culture combined with critical attitudes toward the U.S. government's handling of international affairs. For the first time in our young adult lives, many of my peers and I felt that our own government was deceiving us. We adopted an attitude that the world's issues were not so simple, but instead were rooted and situated in global-historical, political and social structures of power. We noticed an apparent mistrust of the U.S. intensifying throughout the world. Based on this, we formed a global consciousness founded on the perception that international dealings, whether political, economic or social, had repercussions around the world. Therefore, whatever agenda the U.S. government acted upon abroad not only resulted in growing global cynicism towards the "American way," but found expression among U.S. citizens like ourselves whose disillusionment with the U.S. government cast doubt on our own cultural dominance and Eurocentric ideals. Being biracial (I am half-Korean) and growing up in America, I have struggled with the notion of what it means to be a true American, often finding myself, in my most cynical moments, resting on the notion that there is perhaps little room for negotiating racialized differences within mainstream contexts. Real or imagined, my peers and I felt more strongly linked to citizens who shared similar outlooks and were situated in other parts of the world than to ideologues within our own nation (i.e., individuals who sought a unified U.S. in support of the Iraqi invasion). We were in search

of and ready to hear alternatives to our global situation, suspicious of Eurocentric narratives in American culture that suppress or overlook differences. As a consequence, we have since noticed that a global consciousness has emerged in the U.S. and elsewhere that not only celebrates cultural difference but seeks to understand race and ethnicity within global cultural relations in the contemporary world.

Within the U.S., I believe this global consciousness now informs and directs daily activities, including the consumption of non-western music. It is now easier to find popular Bollywood films in the U.S., not only in urban centers but in small towns as well. The increasing presence of Indian popular music has allowed it to intersect with American popular culture in new, although not entirely surprising, ways. With greater access to Indian popular musics, via globally-circulated films and the Internet, consumers can choose from and experience a more diverse selection of styles and songs from India, beyond simply the 1970s Bollywood “classics.” In addition, increased interaction with Indian popular films and music has the potential to lead towards a gradual demystification of an omnipresent (yet very foreign) Bollywood.

This brings me back to my statement at the beginning of this preface. Going to India was a new experience, and yet, I felt more comfortable living in the city of Chennai than I did when I lived in Seoul or even in the U.S. In South Korea, I am a Korean who speaks very good English and in places like Bowling Green, Ohio, I am seen as Asian, most often Chinese. At least in India I was a foreigner, learning how to speak Tamil, and understood by others as someone spending two years of her young adult life volunteering for tsunami disaster relief.

Although I spent a significant amount of time in India, various aspects of India and its culture remain very foreign to me. I have discovered, however, that although I have physically left the country, its music, in the form of popular film music, has traveled and has been present

here at “home.” Oscar buzz surrounding the achievements of Indian film music composer A. R. Rahman at the 2009 Academy Awards may have dissipated somewhat in the mainstream media since the height of the excitement (when Rahman became the first Indian composer to win Oscar awards for his music in *Slumdog Millionaire*), but I find it still a worthy endeavor to explore what this music means to people and why it matters. For me, it was a remarkable moment to see on national television an Asian/Indian musician being recognized in Hollywood. More significant, it was surreal to see a Tamil (who even spoke some Tamil in his acceptance speech) receiving this type of positive mainstream attention, realizing that the Tamil minority is rarely celebrated in India, with its dominant North Indian, Hindi-speaking culture, much less in the West.

In this thesis, I examine the historical relevance and musical practices surrounding the production and consumption of Indian popular music. I explore the impact of new music technologies on these processes and the ways in which Rahman’s music exemplifies the emergence of globalized processes in music making. I suggest that his music is a model for contemporary music-making trends within the Bollywood commercial film industry as well as the global pop scene in the new millennium. In addition, I discuss how Rahman’s music confronts fears of misappropriation, cultural misrepresentation and inauthenticity. Rahman and his music force us to rethink analytical issues dealing with cultural imperialism and a postcolonial world. Furthermore, I argue that the wide circulation of Rahman’s music across the globe presents the potential for increased intercultural interaction and communication through music, opening the door for different socio-musical interpretations of Indian popular music and new meanings for its listeners.

INTRODUCTION

Throughout my research on Indian popular music, I have noticed a profuse use of the term “kitsch” in describing Bollywood film music, whether in scholarly material or in the western mass media.¹ *The Rough Guide to Bollywood* (2002) is described by one western listener on Amazon.com as “enduring quirky tracks...loaded with kitsch classics, and some especially weird cuts from the 70’s featuring the golden voice of Asha Bhosle singing over a rhythm section composed, it seems, entirely of a panting male chorus. Literally. Crazy and offbeat but will certainly get you moving and laughing” (Savka, Vancouver, Canada, August 1, 2003).² In 2006, U.K.’s *Telegraph* featured a review of a public cultural event called the “London Mela,” showcasing food, music and dance associated with the Indian festival Mela. The columnist for this article described how the “grand finale was an over-the-top Bollywood dance show, with fireworks, a flower-strewn wedding scene, and fountains ensuring the essential wet-sari effect much used in films. Deplorably kitsch, of course, but enormous fun.”³ These descriptions project an image of Bollywood music as odd, somewhat bizarre but also fun and entertaining. Many Bollywood music reviews (mainly about Bollywood music compilation albums) include notions that Bollywood is fun, danceable, pleasant, hilarious, relaxing, or, in the case of Putomayo’s

¹ See Edward K. Chan, “Food and Cassettes: Encounters with Indian Filmsong,” in *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, eds., Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 264-287.

² http://www.amazon.com/Rough-Guide-Bollywood-Kishore-Kumar/dp/B00005OW5M/ref=pd_rhf_shvl_3 “shake your chapattis” (accessed June 7, 2010).

³ Peter Cushaw, “Bhangra, Bollywood and wet-sari kitsch,” *Telegraph.com*, August 15, 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/music3654552/Bhangra-Bollywood-and-wet-sari-kitsch.htm> (accessed June 7, 2010).

World Music release: *India* (2009), “guaranteed to make you feel good.”⁴ Do these descriptions reveal the final outcome of mass culture in western society, a notion described earlier by American cultural critic Dwight Macdonald about the majority of Americans in the 1940s and 50s becoming “uncritical, herd-minded [and] pleasure-loving?” (Wreszin 2003: xvi) It would certainly appear to be the case concerning some examples of western experiences with Bollywood music. But, does this predicament present the same cultural values and assumptions attached to earlier meanings of kitsch and mass culture as described in the first half of the twentieth century by cultural critics?

Music scholars and critics usually present the term “kitsch” in order to convey how the term is used in public discourse within a given western context. In his 1932 essay, Theodor Adorno⁵ discusses kitsch and the general understanding of kitschy music during the early twentieth century, which he believes is a cultural phenomenon providing false hopes and impressions to the listener of what is supposed to be “good” music within the contemporary musical landscape. What concerns Adorno is the process by which kitschy music becomes enormously popular among an otherwise undiscerning mass public audience. Adorno expresses contempt for kitschy music because it resists high musical standards and instead is strictly bound by musical conventions that serve to appease the masses with expected musical codes and language. Kitsch music defends “moderate culture” and seeks to find a “happy medium” or *juste*

⁴ Amazon.com, http://www.amazon.com/s/ref=nb_sb_ss_sc_1_4?url=search-alias%3Dpopular&field-keywords=putomayo+presents+india&srefix=puto (accessed June 7, 2010).

⁵ Theodor W. Adorno, *Essays on Music*, edited by Richard D. Leppert and translated by Susan H. Gillespie (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1932/2002), 501-505.

milieu (a condition that Macdonald called “mid-cult” or middle-brow culture).⁶ While it is beyond my intention to describe Adorno’s disdain for “low music,” I do wish to point out aspects of his analysis that are insightful towards my argument.

Kitsch As Ideology

From an ideological standpoint, kitsch exists to maintain the status quo or “happy medium.” In the context of my research, the status quo for Westerners is that Bollywood is kitsch. Although Adorno would have hoped that kitsch and the household use of the term would become obsolete, I think the function of kitsch in the West in recent years has changed in order to deal with and describe the presence of Bollywood within the American contemporary musical landscape. In the past, kitsch was used in the context of western cultural commodities primarily consumed by Westerners. Kitsch takes on a new layer of meaning when used in the context of Bollywood consumed by Westerners; at worst, it is a somewhat frivolous and essentially xenophobic view of Indian culture.

Therefore, the western use of kitsch is a way of defining and negotiating cultural difference. Kitsch has been used in the West to define Bollywood as Indian melodrama combined with musical peculiarities and low-fidelity production value. (In actuality, such complaints are really about Bollywood films produced during a somewhat specific time period between the 1960s and 1980s when sound production quality in the Mumbai film industry was poor due to other political and economic factors in India, which I explain in Chapter 1). This

⁶ “Conservative Anarchism: An Interview with Dwight Macdonald,” in *Interviews with Dwight Macdonald*, edited by Michael Wreszin (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2003), 84-85.

Bollywood sound is kitsch because Westerners seem to view it as a lesser model that only hints at the “true” or “better” sound of Hollywood productions in America.

Kitsch is commonly used by Westerners to somehow grapple with a bit of frustration and cultural difference when watching Bollywood films. Bollywood films are often perceived as “unrealistic” (Morcom 2007: 2). Unlike films in the West, Bollywood films (and this would apply to other Indian commercial film productions) are most characteristically known for so-called “interrupted” moments in the narrative when characters break into song and dance. Bollywood songs are often a hybrid of western and Indian elements that audiences may either find novel and compelling, or inauthentic and quirky. To complicate matters for western audiences, characters in films almost never actually sing the songs, but rather act like they do and lip-synch to prerecorded playback singers. In addition, song and dance sequences often visually shift to an extra-narrative, remote location, which may confuse viewers. At the same time, I suggest that while these elements of song and dance sequences in Bollywood films might appear to distinguish western and Indian audiences, ironically, song and dance sequences are precisely what seem to popularize Bollywood films and music globally.

Lastly, Bollywood is kitsch because, until more recently, it has been a rare commodity to be found among American consumers. Without the penetration of other and newer kinds of Bollywood music into the American market, western consumers can remain loyal to their allegation that Bollywood music is kitsch. As the presence of Asian media, including Bollywood, become increasingly apart of American popular culture, however, individuals’ experiences with Bollywood films and music have the potential to become more sophisticated, just as the

consumers have the potential to become more discerning.⁷ Therefore, to maintain that Bollywood is kitsch is an ideological ploy to hold onto the musical past and disavow any progress in production: doing so permanently positions India and Bollywood as “backward.”

The Global Presence of Bollywood

Recent publications, including *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance* (2008), edited by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, and *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music* (2008) edited by Mark Slobin discuss the continued presence and popularity of Bollywood in locations throughout the world such as Latin America, the Caribbean, Southeast Asia, North Africa and the U.K. In an article published in an edited volume with a similar title (*Global Bollywood*), Aswin Punathambekar highlights film composer A. R. Rahman’s popularity outside of India, particularly within diasporic communities among Tamil-Malaysians and second-generation Indians in Gulf cities such as Dubai (2008: 86). Rather than re-inscribing neo-Orientalist notions of the West versus the rest, these scholars aim to distinguish Bollywood’s “alternative resonance in the global South”⁸ as belonging to parallel processes of globalization: what Gopal and Moorti call an “alternative globalism” (Gopal and Moorti 2008: 7). In shifting

⁷ See David Novak’s article “Cosmopolitanism, Remediation, and the Ghost World of Bollywood,” *Cultural Anthropology* 25/1 (2010): 40-72.

⁸ In using the phrase “global South,” Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti refer to a socio-economic divide rather than a geographical distinction. Also see Arif Dirlik, *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism* (Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers, 2007), 134-5. According to Dirlik, the term “South” was popularized in the 1980s by the Brandt Commission reports published in 1980 and 1983 which used “North-South” in their titles. In the 1970s, the term was widely equated with “third world,” but unlike the latter term which emphasized the need for developing nations to modernize through capitalist or socialist economic and political systems, the context for “South” advocated a global economic and political imperative to enable the flow of capital from the North to the South. Although it is unclear when “global” was attached to “South,” according to Dirlik, the United Nations helped popularize this term releasing the Development Program initiative of 2003, “Forging a Global South,” which called for developing nations to take initiative to adopt developmental economic agendas.

the gaze away from the West, Bollywood's influence in the global South is described as the result of complex social and economic processes and it "has historically served to negotiate questions of tradition and modernity and continues to inform identity formation even as these societies are being transformed by current geopolitical conjunctures" (ibid.: 9). Such geopolitical movements include, for instance, cultural exchanges that help form political alliances, such as the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which helped bring Bollywood songs to certain countries (ibid.: 8). In Kano, northern Nigeria, popular Hindi film songs have become part of Hausa youth culture and have been incorporated into Hausa popular music repertoire to form a new genre of sacred music called *bandiri* (Larkin 2003: 406-440; see also Larkin 2008). In Indonesia, the popular reception of the Bollywood film *Kuch Kuch Hota Hai* ("Something or Other is Happening," [1999]) not only reveals the continued popularity of Indian cinema and music throughout Indonesia historically, but also highlights the role of music with shifting views of modernity, class and culture as constructed within the larger Indonesian society in the present. As Bettina David argues, the film's popularity in the global North, especially among NRIs or Non-Resident-Indians, impacted the cultural mindset of many within Indonesia's rising middle-class who viewed the film's transnational popularity to be a symbol of their own modernity in the consumption of Bollywood film and music. Furthermore, David argues that this phenomenon helped to spark a renewed interest among Indonesia's middle class for *dangdut* music, a genre that incorporates elements of Indian film music (David 2008: 179-199). Although Bollywood's presence and influence within the global North may have been facilitated by different geopolitical circumstances, exploring the cultural practices of Bollywood music here in the United States helps to further understand processes of globalization.

Bollywood in the U.S. Revisited

How does theorizing about Bollywood music, however, apply to Rahman's music for a non-Bollywood film? Although *Slumdog Millionaire* is not a Bollywood film (and might even be considered a British film with the British director Danny Boyle),⁹ I argue in this thesis that the music is still Bollywood music, but it is used in a different filmic context. The music is "Bollywood" in the sense that it sonically resembles some of Rahman's latest Bollywood songs, and in the case of one of the songs on the soundtrack "Aaj Ki Raat," the music is precisely the same as one presented in an earlier Bollywood film. On the other hand, labeling Rahman's music for this film as "Bollywood" is fraught with controversy because the term itself is dependent upon cultural interpretations and aesthetic musical markers of the Hindi commercial film industry and seems to exclude the other regional cinemas. Therefore, although I use the term "Bollywood" in my thesis, I do not do intend to valorize the Hindi commercial industry over the other regional industries.¹⁰ The term has gained some footing in recent years in the American mass media and its use most often implies the simplistic view that "Bollywood" is any film music coming from Indian enterprises. Of course, this is far from the truth; however, it is still necessary to use the term in this thesis because the term provides some degree of meaning when

⁹ *Slumdog Millionaire* was released nationwide in the United States in January of 2009. The film was nominated for ten Academy Awards in 2009 and won eight, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Song and Best Original Film Score. It also won seven BAFTA Awards, including Best Film, five Critics' Choice Awards, and four Golden Globes, including Best Motion Picture. The film was distributed by Fox Searchlight Pictures in collaboration with Warner Independent Pictures. The domestic gross reached over \$141 million. The screenplay was based on the 2005 novel *Q & A* by Vikas Swarup. Loveleen Tandan co-directed the film with Danny Boyle in India.

¹⁰ I do not want to complicate my argument at this point, but I should mention that Rahman does not like the term "Bollywood" (he states this opinion in an online interview). He thinks that a blanket term such as "Bollywood" neglects the musical productions of other regional film industries throughout India, including in Chennai in Tamil Nadu, where he came from and still works. TIME Magazine, "TIME Ten Questions/TIME Magazine Interviews: A. R. Rahman," April 21, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqUbiOgEb0w> (accessed March 19, 2010).

discussing popular forms of music from India, especially for audiences in the West. Numerous crossover films, such as Gurinder Chadha's *Bride and Prejudice* (2004) and Mira Nair's *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), gave western audiences an idea of Indian cinema. These films include enormously popular Bollywood actors and, Hindi language with English subtitles and incorporate Bollywood performance idioms into a western narrative. Aamir Khan's *Lagaan* (2001) is a Bollywood film, featuring Rahman's score, that gained western audiences and continues to inform western audiences of Indian popular films and music. Rahman's music for the film *Slumdog Millionaire* (hereafter SM) has also been superficially described as "Bollywood" by the western mass media, especially because of the song "Jai Ho" and its choreographed dancing at the end of the film which forms a context separate from the film's narrative. In my interviews, individuals used the term "Bollywood" to signify a monolithic popular music formation from India that has gained appeal in the West, and SM has contributed to this understanding. Some individuals are familiar with India's other regional cinemas (especially younger individuals) and realize that many Bollywood films today feature Rahman's music. Therefore, although Rahman established his career as a popular film music composer in the Tamil film industry (and continues to produce music for this industry), he has also crossed over to make music for Hindi commercial films. As a result, he has gained recognition as a Bollywood composer in India. (Rahman has composed music for several Telugu films,¹¹ most recently in 2009). Due to the increased availability of technology and Rahman's expertise with this technology to create music, I assert that the production and musical/compositional practices involved in creating Indian popular film music for either the Tamil or Hindi film industry is the same. I argue that Rahman uses these same musical practices and methodologies in creating the

¹¹ The Telugu film industry, popularly known as Tollywood, is based in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh.

music for SM. All in all, I am most interested in “Bollywood” as a popular music commodity that circulates around the globe and gains increasing attention in the United States. Throughout my thesis, I explore both the historical relevance and current musical practices in the production and consumption of Rahman’s Bollywood music in light of transnational cultural flow.

The Study of Indian Popular Music

Only in relatively recent years have ethnomusicologists focused on the study of popular, hybrid forms of music, including Indian popular film music. Hindi film music scholar Anna Morcom points out that “despite the extent of the suffusion of film songs through Indian society and non-Indian societies, and their deep roots in Indian culture, film songs are only beginning to be taken seriously at a scholarly level” (2007: 7). In general, I attribute this scholarly reluctance to the history of ethnomusicology as a discipline, which in the past has been wary of studying popular music (see Lysloff and Gay [2003]). The discipline was founded on the study of non-western music and has in subsequent decades focused primarily on the valorization of “traditional,” “folk,” or “high art” musics from various cultures and subcultures around the world (Myers 1992). Furthermore, some of the reluctance in ethnomusicology to study “popular music” or mass-mediated forms of recorded popular music in the past (even if within non-western cultures) was compounded by the presence of technology in music making processes. Therefore, theories surrounding the study of popular music recordings stood in direct opposition to the prescribed linkage between live (“unmediated”) musical performance and the notion of authenticity. This theory is based on the dialectical premise that technology in relation to popular music is, as Lysloff and Gay (2003: 6) point out in conjunction to Simon Frith’s earlier ideas, “somehow false or falsifying, that is ‘unnatural’ (creating an artificial presence in performance),

‘alienating’ (coming between performers and their audiences), and somehow ‘opposed to art’ (emptying musical performance of creativity and expressiveness).” Indeed, ethnomusicologists are often motivated in their work to find valid arguments for authenticity found in music production and human experience, striving towards “the truth in music.” Walter Benjamin’s landmark essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1936/1968) asserts that the mechanical reproduction of art work destroys the original “aura” of a unique original. In terms of music, Benjamin’s argument implies that the consumption of music recordings, through a process of “distracted” listening or reception, can actually empower the individual and enables the formation of new and meaningful musical experiences. One major aspect of Benjamin’s argument is that the process of listening to music recordings empowers the listener to make critical judgments about musical experience and performance.

Today in industrialized societies, individuals can interact with and experience music via technology in new ways through the use of iTunes, Internet and digital file sharing, and YouTube. Technology enables new possibilities in expressive music making, distribution, and consumption that both meet and generate new desires. Some scholars argue that new technologies give greater control to the individual in selecting music and help “determine the power that the popular music industry has over its consumers” (Lysloff and Gay 2003: 9). Our very affinities and aesthetic preferences for sounds and musics may reveal the potentialities of popular music to inform what is popular, enabling commercial recordings to become a means of expression through consumption. Therefore, technologies in popular music can create new meanings in new spaces and contexts as they are indigenized in societies through human agency (Lysloff and Gay 2003: 8). As Paul Greene points out, “it is quite likely that today there are more people working in studios to engineer sounds in Asia, Africa, and Latin America than in the

West, and there are certainly more people listening to engineered musics in the non-western world” (2005: 2). Accordingly, the ownership of technologies in musical consumption and production has become more culturally widespread in the non-western world—an interesting condition considering the supposedly western origin of technological innovation (*ibid.*). So, although it might be argued that mass-mediated efforts risk homogenizing music, I assert the need to confront the creative potential of artists who choose to make popular music via technologies.

Where once “the field” in ethnomusicology was far from home and relatively unexplored due to geographical distance or limited means of transportation and communication, the “field” today is no longer necessarily remote from our academic lives, geographically or socially (Lysloff and Gay 2003: 4). The world’s music scene is increasingly affected by increased flows of information and technology much “closer to home” in a world that continues to globalize (Appadurai 1996). As the gap narrows between the researcher (and our ideas about “the field”) and the researched, ethnomusicologists and other scholars must meet new demands situated within complex cross-cultural currents. Just one of these currents involves studying the role of technology, the cultural implications for the popularity and the commercial success of popular music made by non-western artists such as A. R. Rahman.

Giving Greater Visibility to Bollywood

In the first chapter of this thesis, I explore the historical development of what has become known today as Bollywood, the Hindi commercial film industry located in Mumbai, India. Several works have been published in recent years that help conceptualize and contextualize the early establishment of the Hindi commercial film industry, its cosmopolitan outlook and hybrid

musical productions. In her book *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema* (2007), Anna Morcom presents an analytical account of the historical and cultural formation of the Hindi commercial film industry. Morcom provides thorough musical analyses of a wide variety of popular Hindi film songs. This book on commercial Hindi films and music covers nearly sixty years, starting with the dawn of audio recording technology and India's first "talkie" film in 1931. The bulk of her musical analysis includes films from the 1950s-80s, although she also discusses numerous Hindi commercial film songs produced in the 1990s. Since my research focuses on Rahman's compositions from more recent film productions within the last five years, her musical analyses do not directly relate to my thesis; her research does help, however, quantify and qualify Hindi film songs as historically hybrid and provides a comprehensive evaluation of Hindi film songs that combines musicological and cinematic aspects of film songs as a unified whole.

In his seminal work, *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India* (1993), Peter Manuel focuses on the revolutionary impact of audio-cassette recording technology in the democratization of local music-making throughout regional contexts. At the time of this publication, the crucial role of broadcast television in the dissemination of popular film song (as stand-alone music videos) had yet to be fully realized. In my own research, I show how more recent Internet-based technologies such as YouTube and blogging websites help to disseminate Rahman's songs as free music videos to a wider audience, including to those who may not have seen the original films.

For a more detailed analysis of the history and the musical practices within the Bollywood music industry, I draw information from Gregory D. Booth's book, *Behind the Curtain: Making Music in Mumbai's Film Studios* (2008a). Booth's analysis of the social, economic and political climate throughout the "golden era" of Bollywood during the late 1940s,

50s and 60s (the post-colonial nationalistic period) and into the early 1980s is especially helpful to my research. Booth makes a distinction between sound quality production and musical styles from pre-1980s and post-1980s. Booth writes about the “old Bollywood sound” that has characterized Hindi commercial films for nearly fifty years (2008b). But, as he points out, this “old Bollywood sound” transforms into the latest brand of Bollywood’s “new” sound, characterized by higher production quality and digital technology. These music production practices are later adopted in the Tamil film industry, especially by Rahman.¹²

In recent years in India, high production quality and the incorporation of digital technology have revamped Indian popular musical aesthetics. This has resulted in growing audience demand for high quality film music productions. Joseph Getter and B. Balasubrahmaniyan provide a more in-depth account of the Tamil film industry in the production of Indian popular music (2008).¹³ The authors also provide an insider’s look into Rahman’s compositional approach and technological savvy that distinguishes his style of music from that of previous Tamil film music composers.

Because Rahman is a younger composer with much of his work coming in the 21st century, relatively less scholarly material is provided about Rahman’s career as an Indian pop music artist. Increasingly, however, Rahman’s background and career are being discussed in the mass media. In chapter two, I explore Rahman’s compositional style and techniques that demonstrate his mastery over new music technologies. In a new wave of digital technology in the production of Indian popular film music, Rahman leads popular music trends. I focus on the

¹² Gregory Booth, “That Bollywood Sound,” in *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, edited by Mark Slobin (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 85-113.

¹³ Joseph Getter and B. Balasubrahmaniyan, “Tamil Film Music: Sound and Significance,” in *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, edited by Mark Slobin (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), 114-151.

1990s as a pivotal time period in the production, dissemination and consumption of Indian popular music. I situate Rahman and his career within the context of India's economic liberalization policies during the early 1990s, characterized by increased transnational flows of cultural products from the West. Also, I describe Rahman's mixed musical background and influences as an Indipop artist and popular film music composer. Rahman enters the Indian popular music scene at the height of the world music movement, during the "commercial phase" of deregulation from the 1980s to the present (Théberge 2004: 767-73). With the rise of MIDI technology in the 1980s and the home studio, I explain how Rahman was influenced by the rise of MIDI and home studio technology in the 1980s. I later describe Rahman's embrace of digital technology and how his knowledge and ability to use these machines forever alter musical practices, genre conventions and audience expectations in India within transnational contexts. I draw information from Paul Théberge (1997), who provides much insight into contemporary music making and how the composer is both consumer and producer of music via technology. I argue that Rahman redefines Bollywood film music with his own musical perceptions and interests.

Chapter three primarily explores the music of SM. Songs analyzed include "Jai Ho" (which won the 2009 Academy Award for Best Original Song) and "O...Saya" (nominated in the same category). Deconstructing the musical elements and text that comprise these songs helps to reveal three important aspects: (1) these songs follow a Bollywood template in the sense that this is music created specifically for a film; (2) the sonic elements of these songs signify a disjuncture between Rahman's style and a more traditional Bollywood music-scape (and Rahman's songs are stylistically undifferentiated from the genre Indipop, understood as a nonfilm music of India); and (3) these songs sonically resemble Rahman's recent Bollywood songs. I use Peter Kvetko's

article (2004) describing the aesthetics of Indipop as a framework in my research to decipher Rahman's compositional style and sound. Also in this chapter, I examine audience reception of Rahman's songs for SM and analyze the global dimensions of individuals performing the "Jai Ho" dance. In addition to analyzing the musical recordings of Rahman's songs for SM, I discuss the socio-musical relevance of a remix version of his original "Jai Ho" as performed by the Pussycat Dolls.

Chapter four discusses Rahman's music within the context of globalist discourse. I explore the rise of "world music" within the global music industry. I examine theories of acculturation that have emerged (and been abandoned) within the field of ethnomusicology in response to the activities of the world music industry, the proliferation of popular music in non-western societies that has generated fears of global musical homogenization for many music scholars. In response to problematic issues involving indigenous music promoted by the world music industry, many ethnomusicologists, musicologists and popular music scholars including Thomas Turino (2000, 2003), Timothy Rice (2003), Timothy Taylor (1997, 2007), Martin Stokes (2004) and Simon Frith (2000) confront issues of musical ownership, authenticity, hybridity, representation and dominant market forces. I examine the arguments of these and other scholars in order to highlight the tension between the celebration of fusion musics and the anxiety of commodified, commercial musics. I explain how Rahman's music challenges traditional notions of "world music" productions due to the decentralization of the recording studio and the "increasingly dispersed nature of global music production" (Stokes 2004: 59).

Also in this chapter, I contextualize Rahman's approach to music making. I make use of Jeremy Wallach's "techno-hybridity" as a category defining "self-conscious musical mixing" (2008), a notion that I believe best describes situations in which popular musicians worldwide

make fusionist music both representative of their “hybridic socialized selves” (Turino 2003) and their desire to be internationally recognized as modern music artists.

In exploring the history of the Bollywood film music industry and explaining Rahman’s role in transforming it, I hope to contribute to the understanding of underlying economic, political and social forces that have helped culturally define and redefine Bollywood music today. Global capitalism and the emergence of transnational corporations have globalized music production and consumption processes, presenting conditions that threaten to blur national and cultural identities while enabling the exposure of different music cultures. Due to these processes, Rahman, who has been making popular music for nearly two decades in India, is recognized, heard and celebrated in the West. The point here is not that Rahman’s music should have been recognized in the West all this time, but that a confluence of various social and economic factors mobilizes the opportunity for his music to finally be heard in a world that appears more ready to accept it.

Methodology

My field research includes a triangulation of methodologies including ethnographic interviews, observations and participant-observation. I have interviewed students of Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, as well as members of the India Student Association. I have also interviewed a husband and wife team of Indian descent who has lived in Bowling Green for the past twenty-five years. They are radio disc jockeys for a community radio program featuring a variety of Indian musical genres. I also interviewed a student who is a freshman at The Ohio State University and his sister, a graduate student at Harvard University (who saw *Slumdog Millionaire* in Scotland). While I interviewed several second generation

Indians and international Indian students, I also interviewed individuals of European background who had no earlier experiences of Bollywood music. Of the students I interviewed, one of them is a local resident of Northwest Ohio and third year undergraduate student at Bowling Green State University. At the time of our meeting, he was enrolled in a Global Popular Culture course. Therefore, my research includes both long-time fans of Rahman's music and new listeners. Due to requests, I have kept the names and personal identities of my consultants anonymous. In addition, my research includes Internet-based ethnography in which I examine comments and responses to Rahman's songs posted on YouTube and Amazon.com, mass-mediated publications, blogging websites, and interviews with Rahman posted online.

Portions of this thesis were presented at the annual conferences of the Midwest Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 2009 in Minneapolis and 2010 in Chicago.

CHAPTER ONE. THE BOLLYWOOD FILM MUSIC INDUSTRY: A CULTURE AND AN INDUSTRY

In India, film music dominates all other popular music genres due to the strong connection between cinema and music in South Asian culture (Manuel 1988, 1993; Morcom 2007). Multiple major film industries coexist within India, each representative of distinct and varied linguistic cultural groups. Kollywood of Chennai (formerly Madras), Tamil Nadu in the southernmost state of India rivals production outputs of Bollywood in Mumbai (formerly Bombay), Maharastra, while the Telugu film industry in Andhra Pradesh (Tollywood) competes with the Bengali film industry of Kolkata (formerly Calcutta). Perhaps tying them together is the incorporation of elaborate and illustrative song-and-dance sequences, six or seven songs on average per film (Morcom 2007: 1).¹⁴

My thesis focuses on the musical production of the Bollywood film industry. One practical reason why I focus on the Bollywood film industry is because of the relatively substantial amount of research that is available describing this industry versus other regional cinema industries. Further, the motivation among Indian film historians to study Bollywood is to investigate the relevance of the Hindi commercial film industry's dominance and advantage over other regions in relation to the emergence of Hindi as the official "national language" in post-independence India (Gopal and Moorti 2008: 11). Bollywood film scholar Biswarup Sen provides a comprehensive account of the history of popular music in India "as it evolved within

¹⁴ Also see IANS, "Bollywood Composer Rediscover (sic) Sufi Music," November 16, 2009, http://www.thaindian.com/newsportal/entertainment/bollywood-composers-rediscover-sufi-music_100275298.html (February 23, 2010).

the context of Bollywood film” (2008: 85).¹⁵ Sen discusses the role of *filmmigit* (i.e., popular Hindi film song) in the formation of colonial and postcolonial modernity as a “constitutive site of the popular and brings to light its capacity for constantly reinventing itself in response to the demands of the contemporary” (ibid.). His description of Bollywood film music as “radically heterogeneous” in terms of style and sound follows a generally accepted view among Hindi film music scholars.

Although it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine all the implications of Hindi commercial cinema’s cultural dominance and how it relates to Indian society, I subscribe to this notion of Bollywood’s cultural hegemony because of the greater significance of what Bollywood and its music represents to the rest of the world’s audiences as well as to global corporate music industries. Mere usage of the term “Bollywood” within the United States not only reveals its increasing popularity and accessibility overseas but also its growing ubiquity as an imagined monolithic symbol of “Indian popular culture.” “Bollywood” is thus a gloss for both Indian popular culture and Indian film music. As Hindi film music scholars Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti state, scholars also increasingly use the term Bollywood to describe a culture industry that exists contemporaneously with Hindi film products and the rest of Hindi cinema—Bollywood being “that small slice of the industry that has gained international currency” (ibid.; See also Novak 2010).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the major historical developments of the Bollywood film music industry, from its inception to the present. By doing so, I hope to locate and contextualize A. R. Rahman as an Indian popular film music composer within this Indian

¹⁵ Biswarp Sen, “The Sounds of Modernity: The Evolution of Bollywood Film Song,” in *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, eds., Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 85.

music culture. While I recognize that Rahman's musical career began (and continues to flourish) in the Tamil popular film music industry of Tamil Nadu, I concentrate my research on his active involvement within the Bollywood popular film industry for reasons mentioned above and because I want to highlight the formation of Bollywood popular film music as a cultural product.

Any attempt to outline the history of the Bollywood film music industry chronologically is problematic because of the inaccuracy of actual dates given by scholars and the media. A generalized chronological account, however, is useful to my research in understanding how the Bollywood film music industry as a culture changes over time and space. In order to highlight these changes, I explore the impact of technology on musical production within the Bollywood film music industry. I divide historical information into two main periods: from the 1930s to the 1980s, and from the 1980s to the present. In each of these time periods, I examine important musical practices and technological innovations in the shaping of a musical culture. I focus on the technological innovations (and the adoption of new technologies) during the 1980s and the years following this important decade, a period marked by new practices and shifting attitudes among musicians within Bollywood's film music industry as it entered into a digital era in music making.

The Early Years: The Formation of a National Cinema and Glimpses of a Global Outlook

Of course, Indian film narratives have earlier precedents. As Hindi commercial film music scholar Anna Morcom points out, "the format of Hindi films can be historically traced to dramatic forms that predated the cinema" (2007: 3). Hindi cinema's musical format is linked to urban theatrical traditions that developed in the nineteenth century. Folk drama forms that included song and dance were part of Bengali, Marathi and Parsi theaters. The staging of live

folk drama performances stretches back to two thousand year old Sanskrit traditions of dramatic expression. Before the coming of sound recording technology, staged song and dance performances were added to the screening of silent films in theaters through a live band and singers (ibid.).

Biswarup Sen, in his article “The Sounds of Modernity: The Evolution of Bollywood Film Song,” includes an excerpt dating back to 1902 written by a colonial entrepreneur who traveled throughout India on a quest for recordings to send to his colleagues at the Gramophone and Typewriter Company in England (2008). In one particular encounter, the colonial entrepreneur recalls his experience with Indian music during a popular theater show called the “Classic Theatre” that featured a live performance (before the era of recorded film music in India) of “‘And Her Golden Hair Was Hanging Down Her Back’ accompanied by fourteen brass instruments all playing in unison” (ibid.: 86). This rendition of an English vaudeville tune combined the use of western instrumentation (i.e., brass) with a heterophonic musical texture that characterizes various traditional and classical Asian and Middle Eastern musics. The British colonial entrepreneur’s response to this performance was somewhat dismissive, but I allude to this passage not for its musical content but to show a clear example of globalization at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although the intention of the South Asian performers is unknown exactly (i.e., whether to please a western audience, etc.), this type of performance presents an early example of cultural integration as expressed through South Asian popular music in the early twentieth century.

Many of the same musicians from staged theater shows would later become part of early music ensembles for the Hindi commercial film industry. According to Alison Arnold, the musical style of Hindi film songs derived from urban theater traditions, and was a mixture of

classical, light classical and local folk traditions (quoted in Morcom 2008: 4). By the mid 1930s, however, film songs incorporated western instruments, harmony and orchestration. As Morcom states, “since the mid-1930s, film songs have been characterized by musical hybridity and a thirst for the new and the modern” (ibid.).¹⁶ Morcom discusses several factors that correspond to this phenomenon, including the availability of western classical music recordings (that were broadcast on the British controlled radio airwaves) and the familiarity of western classical music among Parsi and Christian communities living in Calcutta and Bombay (ibid.). While India was still part of the British Empire in the 1930s and 1940s, new film and music technology flowed into the country due to political and corporate colonialism (Booth 2008a: 59). By the mid-1940s, film songs included styles from an array of genres including jazz, waltzes and other western and Latin American popular musics. Morcom argues that the incorporation of diverse genres reflects “global musical fashions” that continue to characterize popular Bollywood film music today. As Barnouw and Krishnaswamy write, “This new and modern song style soon became a national craze as ‘audiences responded with ecstasy to the eclectic styles and the large ensembles full of western instruments’” (1980: 157). Early on, Hindi cinema became an avenue for cultural transformation and experimentation with popular music formats.

Meanwhile, not all members of Indian society welcomed the hybrid sounds of Hindi commercial cinema. Especially after 1947 when India gained independence from British colonial

¹⁶ Anna Morcom devotes an entire chapter in her recent book to the analysis of Hindi popular film music. In trying to define what is Bollywood film song (somewhat difficult to do considering its eclectic hybridity), she compares a number of film *qawwalis* with traditional *qawwali* (Sufi devotional song) styles in order to isolate stylistic components that would essentially characterize Bollywood music. A typical description for Bollywood film music is the use of ornamented Indian vocal style, western orchestration, refrain-verse structure, high emphasis on catchy melodic tunes, incorporating foreign styles, and Hindi-Urdu texts. Morcom, *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 61-136.

rule, cultural purists and members of the Indian government attacked Hindi commercial film music as a form of cultural depravity. Hindi film songs stood in opposition to “socialist-inspired Nehruvian development of 1950s and 1960s India, which sought to raise the standards of the masses and stick conservatively to pure, Indian traditions” (Morcom 2007: 5). In 1952, B.K. Keskar was made the new Minister of Information and Broadcasting and he tried to ban and enforce restrictions against radio broadcasting of film songs on India’s airwaves via All India Radio (AIR). Only five years later, Keskar would be forced to repeal these same restrictive measures due to mass demand and consensus among Indian fans; during the five year ban, Indian audiences had been tuning into Radio Ceylon which continued to broadcast Hindi film songs (Morcom 2007: 5, Bhattacharyja and Mehta 2008: 109).

Early Technologies and Musical Practices

A musical template for hybrid models of music-making, along with the incorporation of song and dance performances, carried over from live staged performances into the production of popular film music within Mumbai film studios. In the first years of Mumbai’s film and film music production during the early 1930s, actors were chosen and hired based on their three-fold talents which included singing, dancing and acting (not to mention they also had to be physically attractive). A singer-actor like Nurjehan was hard to come by and therefore highly valued within the industry for her multiple-talents. Singer-actors were still required to perform live song and dance sequences. In the recording process, these song and dance sequences or film songs (*filmigit*) were recorded first, and the scenes were added later (Booth 2008a: 58). Daman Sood (who shared his experiences as a film-music recordist in an interview with anthropologist and Hindi film music historian Gregory D. Booth), was one of the first graduates in sound

engineering from the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII) in Pune, Maharashtra (ibid.). Sood recalls a recording process that was established in 1935 involving “mono” recording, or “mixing” all audible sounds and visual actions onto a single track that was recorded directly on optical film (ibid.: 59). Mono recording on optical film involved several drawbacks including poor sound quality due to a limited recording range and not being able to hear sound until a film was developed. Also, during the editing process, strips of film were often physically cut and spliced to make changes and this resulted in musical interruptions and patchwork songs. With the practice of mono recording during this time, it was imperative to record songs correctly on the first or second attempt because it was economically infeasible to prolong studio recording time. Due to technological limitations, songs had to be recorded in one continuous shot. Singer-actors were required to stand close to an orchestra with microphones hidden from view (Sundar 2008: 146). As Gregory Booth points out, this also put enormous pressure on musicians to impress film producers (2008a: 59).

Throughout the 1940s and early 1950s, the number of microphones increased as Mumbai film studio western-style orchestras expanded but recording technology and procedures involving the use of optical film remained the same. As I mentioned above, the newly established government of post-independence India was reluctant to support the production and dissemination of Hindi commercial film music. As Booth explains, “in the private sector and especially in the film industry, technological change actually slowed somewhat after 1947” (ibid.). In an attempt to define India’s national heritage, Indian governmental policies during the 1950s and 1960s limited foreign investment and made it difficult for filmmakers, musicians and recording engineers to obtain filmmaking materials and other technologies (ibid.).

The Hindi commercial film industry continued to produce films and music regardless of governmental fears and setbacks and limited technological resources. Due to a variety of economic, social and political factors, the practice of using actor-singers gradually transformed into a standardized system of playback singing.¹⁷ Playback singing is an institutional musical practice in the Mumbai film industry in which singers' voices are recorded separately from the visual content (the singers are never seen on screen) and actors lip-synch to an audio recording. Initially, playback singers were "voice casted," chosen according to whether or not their voices matched the actors' voices (Sundar 2008: 147). In the late 1940s and early 1950s, however, "voice casting" faded away and the singing voices of a few select individuals would eventually dominate the industry (for the next four decades, two of these individuals were Lata Mangeshkar and her sister, Asha Bhosle).

In the same attempt to define a desirable India, political powers linked to the film industry controlled and fashioned the very musical sounds the film industry could produce. One way to control musical style and production was through a specific female style of playback singing voice. While male vocal singing did not undergo any changes during this time (maintaining a "crooner" vocal style),¹⁸ female vocal styles significantly shifted towards a "lighter, thinner vocal timbre" (Morcom 2007: 66). Lata Mangeshkar's high-pitched, "shrill, adolescent-girl falsetto" was supported, promoted and eventually widely accepted among Indian audiences (Sundar 2008: 147). The popularity of Mangeshkar's voice highlights gender and

¹⁷ With the falling value of the Indian rupee, escalating prices for Mumbai land and real estate and imposed governmental taxes on the film industry, stars demanded more money for what they could offer their producers, and some salaried musicians, arrangers and directors apparently abandoned their positions. Sen (2008): 86.

¹⁸ This was a "softer style" of singing with the microphone, developed by American singers such as Whispering Jack Smith and Bing Crosby and made popular in India by the Bengali singer K. L. Saigal. Sen (2008): 93.

religious politics of post-independence India and ensuing cultural practices within the Mumbai film music industry. As Hindi film music scholar Pavitra Sundar argues, “Lata Mangeshkar’s rise to fame coincided with Indian independence (1947) and the ‘golden years’ of Hindi cinema (1950s and 1960s). During this period, film served as a key site for the consolidation of national identity” (2008: 149). For the next four decades, Mangeshkar’s high-pitched singing voice came to symbolize spirituality and tradition as well as women’s chastity, purity, “respectability and goodness” within Indian society (ibid.). As Sundar Pavitra argues, a female singing voice with a “nasal heaviness” was negatively associated with Muslim courtesans. Although Asha Bhosle’s vocal timbre lacked “nasal heaviness,” her voice (different from her sister’s), still upheld negative connotations such as “sexiness,” excessive modernization or “Westernness” (ibid.). Morcom suggests that this change in vocal pitch and timbre (what Morcom calls “sweet and girlish” in describing Mangeshkar’s voice) may be related to India’s need for change after the gloomy years of misery during war and partition (2007: 66). Meanwhile, Alison Arnold suggests that the purpose and popularity of this change in female vocal style was to distinguish it from the old style of female singing as depicted in professional, courtesan classes. As a result, new female singing styles did not “evoke the world of the *tawaifs* [South Asian courtesans under the patronage of nobility during the Mughal empire of the 15th century], which was so frowned upon from the beginning of the twentieth century and was chiefly responsible for the stigma surrounding cinema” (Arnold 1991: 112).

Although it is beyond the scope of my thesis to discuss cultural perceptions of the singing voice in any more depth, I do want to point out two outcomes of the practice of playback singing that affected the musical practices of the Mumbai film music industry for approximately thirty years, from the 1950s to the 1980s. First, playback singing ensured box-office success. As

audiences became more familiar with the voices of notable playback singers, the recognizability of “star singers” attracted audiences. The wealthy individuals that helped finance many Hindi commercial films after World War II participated in a “risk free” production practice by hiring well-known recognizable playback singers (Majumdar 2001: 170). Secondly, playback singing practices affected musical composition and social organization within the industry. Music directors could compose longer, more elaborate pieces using a larger orchestra. This also created a demand for more orchestral musicians to produce a “big sound” characterizing the signature sound of Hindi commercial music during the “golden era” of the Mumbai film industry (Sundar 2008: 147; Booth 2008b).¹⁹ Also, since songs could be recorded separately from the film, playback singers were free to sign on for multiple films at once, allowing film music directors to create more songs and profit from the increased production of popular songs. For nearly thirty years, from the 1950s to the late 1980s, these musical practices were standardized and mechanized to attract audiences *and* fulfill audience demand.

The 1980s and New Musical Technologies and Practices

In the attempt to create a “home-grown” national product from the 1950s to the 1980s, Bollywood film music production flourished. With a firmly established “star system” and a standardized system of film music production, the Mumbai film industry came to dominate the production of popular music in India in general (Manuel 1993). The mid-1980s was marked by a dramatic increase in the number of production studios (Booth 2008a: 76). Up until the 1980s,

¹⁹ Gregory D. Booth describes the institutionalization of a “Bollywood sound” characterized by sweeping orchestral sounds pioneered during the 1940s (and would dominate for the next fifty years) in the city of Mumbai (2008b: 85-113).

film music producers continued to use 35 mm, single-track machines made by RCA and Westrex (ibid.).

As mentioned above, isolationist Nehruvian politics had a direct impact on the production and consumption of Bollywood film music and popular music for nearly thirty years. In the early 1980s, however, a series of events took place that would gradually transform the Mumbai film music industry. In 1984, India's prime minister Indira Gandhi was assassinated and replaced by her son, Rajiv Gandhi (until he was also assassinated in 1991). Apparently during his years in power, Rajiv Gandhi managed to eradicate the "license Raj" (established by his grandfather Jawaharlal Nehru and maintained by his mother Indira Gandhi) that for years had enforced restrictions on foreign imports and technology (Booth 2008a: 76). As a result, musicians and music producers could gain access to more musical materials outside of India, unlike in previous decades.

New musical technologies affected production and composition. For instance, programmable synthesizers changed the recording process. Prakash Varma, a Bollywood film music arranger since the late 1980s, explains that before the use of programmable synthesizers, certain elements of a song (including melody, harmony and rhythm) were programmed on a keyboard, "dubbed" onto 35 mm tape and then played back to the orchestra who would record their parts along with what was heard in a pair of headphones (Booth 2008a: 77). New multi-track recording and editing machines (i.e., systems that were based on western models) replaced single-track machines, changed musical recording practices and split orchestral musicians from other instrumentalists who were no longer required to record live performances together (ibid.). Eventually, stereo recording (which would replace track recording) recorded separate sections of the orchestra itself (i.e., violin section, cello section, etc.) (ibid.: 78). Other technologies also

impacted studio practices. The Studer machine, for example, had crystal motors that changed the recording process once again. With crystal motor machines songs could be “punched.”

“Punching” is a practice that involves re-recording a phrase or small portion of a performance (as opposed to having to perform an entire song again) (ibid.: 81). Reportedly by 1989, Mumbai film music producers installed the first digital recording system, a Mitsubishi two-track machine (ibid.: 78). With access to and knowledge of new music technologies, Mumbai film musicians could not only experiment with new sounds, but they could also imagine achieving these sounds beyond the limitations that previously existed.

Shifting Realities and New Musical Possibilities

Throughout the 1980s, Mumbai musicians and producers gradually adapted to new music technologies. While some musicians initially resisted technological changes, many younger musicians were eager to experience them (Booth 2008a: 78). Booth claims that “much of the change was driven by a younger generation of technicians who had excellent educations and expectations heightened by a global perspective” (ibid.: 76). For example, younger musicians like Bishwadeep Chatterjee came to Mumbai in the late 1980s to continue their careers with the film music industry. Chatterjee, like many other younger musicians, had a strong technical education and a “broad perspective on the workings of the film music industry and its place in Indian culture” (ibid.). As Booth states, “He and others who realized that the limits of the possible had shifted began to agitate for change” (ibid.). For these younger musicians, much of the motivation behind making new changes stemmed from their exposure to and initial impressions of musical productions in the West. Joe Monsorate, a trumpet player, expressed notions about a perceived difference between Mumbai’s lesser quality musical productions and

western sounds. Upon returning from overseas travel, Monsorate made the following comment:

““We were very much behind the time. I was in London in 1980, and I saw some recording at BBC, and there, if somebody cracked a note or something, they could punch it, but here, because our machines were not so modern, if there was any mistake, we had to stop and start all over””

(ibid.). Expressing a similar view, Bishwadeep Chatterjee stated in an interview:

When our whole generation landed up here (Mumbai), we kind of realized that the whole thing was like that [technologically old fashioned]. The stuff from the West was always the thing, you know but there was no explanation really as to why we couldn't have that stuff. So finally common sense came in, and we started having our way. And things started changing (ibid.).

These comments reveal how the tentative years of economic liberalization during the late 1980s had a profound impact on the ways musicians viewed their own musical productions.

Furthermore, these comments reveal the desire among these musicians to produce music that might one day be globally recognized. Evidence of neocolonist attitudes, these musicians looked to the West for validation. New music technologies provided younger Mumbai film musicians with new compositional and recording capabilities and new musical opportunities.

Maintaining the “Big Sound”

One major aspect of sound recording technology that the younger generation of Mumbai film musicians came to realize was that a “big sound” (i.e. western style orchestra) could still be produced within small spaces (i.e. smaller facilities with advanced electronic equipment). By the late 1980s and early 1990s, only three major film music recording studios remained in Mumbai (Tardeo, Film Centre and Mehboob), and within these old studios, old musical practices continued to operate. These old studios continued to record using 35 mm non-crystal equipment

and optical film (Booth 2008a: 82). Eventually new studios such as Sudeep and Sunny would replace older studios with digital recording systems.

Film musician Chatterjee describes what he called the myth “that you need a big, big studio because you had to have the huge film sound” (Booth 2008a: 83). In the construction of a new studio, Chatterjee explains that with the potential of technological innovation, a “big space” is unnecessary in order to produce a “big sound.” With the conversion of sound to digital in the early 1990s, recordings, edits, and mixing projects could be stored on hard drives. (In the late 1990s, the studio Spectral Harmony installed a twenty-four-track Dolby system that carried out these operations). This practice was quickly followed by computers that were capable of operating software recording systems (which would eventually facilitate home computer recording practices) (*ibid.*). The computer software recording system ProTools was first introduced during this time for home computer recording practices and continues to be used today by film music composers, including A. R. Rahman.

All in all, music directors’ and producers’ access to new music technologies (such as crystal motor tape and digital hard disc recorders) proved to be more durable and efficient, and enabled audiences to experience high quality film music through Dolby Sound’s digital 5.1 surround sound systems in theaters (Booth 2008b: 107). Booth insists that film music of the late 1990s (to the present) should be considered a “New Bollywood” sound, characterized by digital technology and computer-based sound recording. These shifts in music production starting in the early 1990s resulted in, as Booth explains, “the surge in transnational influences [that] altered audience expectations with regard to musical content and production quality” (*ibid.*).

The Blurring of Film and Nonfilm Music

By the late 1990s, composition and recording practices using computer based technologies had become the norm. Keyboards were now attached to computers that could record musical sounds and easily transfer them to other computers. Some sound engineers found it efficient to simply transfer sounds from home computers to studio systems. The practice of using computer software programs has come to dominate Mumbai's music culture and, as Booth suggests, has blurred the distinctions among composing, arranging and recording (2008b: 84). I argue that Rahman is a prime example of this musical phenomenon. Although he officially assumes the title as "Film Music Director" in India, he more realistically functions as all three: composer, arranger and recording engineer.

This blurring of methods in the compositional and recording process coincides with the blurring of a structural division between film and nonfilm recording facilities (Booth 2008b: 76). Prior to the mid-1980s, Mumbai film studios (and its music production facilities) were separate from all other popular music recording facilities. In fact, when Gulshan Kumar purchased the recording studio that he renamed Sudeep Studio (one of Mumbai's newer film studios), his initial intention was to use the new music facility to record nonfilm music and carry out a cassette-production business. Sudeep Studio was one of India's first twenty-four track recording studios that were capable of vast musical production. Gulshan mentions how film producers in the 1980s were reluctant to use his facility because this would require using methods and devices that were compatible with the latest technologies installed in this facility. Despite this challenge, Gulshan benefited from using the latest technologies at Sudeep Studio, a successful Mumbai film music studio.

The Bollywood film music industry adopted new music production practices and technologies that many nonfilm music industries also capitalized on during the 1990s. The use of new music technologies, along with the promotion of new music through the film industry, enabled Bollywood music to remain the most dominant form of popular music in India. In chapter three, I will discuss in more detail how Rahman's compositions share the same musical aesthetics as Indipop, a nonfilm popular music genre in India. I argue that this blurring of musical aesthetics has greater implications in terms of how audiences might perceive Indian film music composers who, like Rahman, are "stars" in their own right. In essence, Rahman's music blurs the lines between genre-bound stylistics of Indipop and Bollywood film music and enables him to become a "star" in two capacities: a famous film music director for Indian audiences, and, an Indian pop music artist for international audiences.

Global Aspirations

Today's "global market" is not entirely new; however, I argue that major technological developments and changes in musical practices helped crystallize the potential for worldwide recognition in the minds of Mumbai's film musicians. Especially after the 1980s and during the tentative years of economic liberalization in India, Mumbai's film musicians gained access to new music technologies that many musicians perceived as key to creating new popular forms of music. As Bishwadeep Chatterjee states, "'Today it's different; we're like everywhere else. People started realizing that you had to have quality and that quality translated very well'" (Booth 2008a: 84). Booth concludes that younger sound engineers like Chatterjee "take considerable pride in the now accurate claim that Mumbai studios are 'like everywhere else'"(ibid.). Whether or not this is true is beside the point; what matters is that Mumbai

musicians express this claim as they negotiate their place and purpose within a “globalized” world. I do not wish to convey a deterministic view of Mumbai’s film music industry that comes down to the adoption of technological innovations. Instead, I want to highlight the shift in cultural attitudes facilitated by technological innovation toward “India’s (and, most importantly, Mumbai’s) new conceptualization of film culture’s identity and value—in a new global market where Indian producers can finally compete with their Hollywood counterparts” (ibid.: 116).

In the history of Mumbai’s film music industry, musical practices as well as social structures were forever altered by ever-changing technological innovations. The “big sound” of western style orchestras shifted to smaller facilities and personal computers. From mono recording on optical film to analogue multi-track recording to “punching” and digital conversions, the Mumbai film industry exemplifies the workings of a dynamic culture that helped to produce an industry. In describing the hybridic nature of Bollywood’s music and the sociomusical culture to which past and present Indian film composers and musicians belong, I have described historically ongoing processes of globalization (along with the incorporation of new music technologies and styles) that have produced Bollywood’s national and global image.

Although traditional musical practices have become practically obsolete, these same changes enabled Indian film music composers, including Rahman, to flourish in this generation. In the next chapter, I will describe Rahman’s musical background and the changes he brought to the Indian film music industry.

CHAPTER TWO. A. R. RAHMAN, HUMAN AGENCY AND CULTURAL CHANGE

Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, technology has altered the musical practices and social organization of the Bollywood film music industry. I argue that these transformations as enabled by technology could only be made possible through individual musicians' interest to own, learn and adapt to new musical practices. Meanwhile, ownership of and the decision to use new technologies mainly resided with a small handful of music directors and recording engineers whose powerful positions in the industry enacted changes from the top down. As I continue to show in this chapter, many studio session musicians in the film music industry express disgruntled feelings about technological changes in music production processes, such changes that enable music directors like A. R. Rahman to digitally record performances and manipulate sounds.

The growing discrepancies between studio session players, playback singers and orchestral members, and music directors after the introduction of new music technologies starting in the 1980s point to delineating social and cultural differences within the Bollywood film music industry. As a film music director younger in age than the majority of musicians and performers already well established within the industry, A. R. Rahman does not seem to share all the same musical experiences and expectations as those expressed by individuals from older generations. For instance, musicians from older generations are nostalgic for playing live in large orchestras and performing simultaneously with solo instrumentalists. While recollections for these types of collective experiences continue to be expressed (as seen among musicians in Gregory Booth's ethnography), I explain how these experiences have become displaced and replaced by new social relations that have emerged within the last decade in the Bollywood film music industry.

As Rahman remains a film music director with musicians whose careers carry over into contemporary times, essentially two music cultures cooperate in creating new popular film music. Due to the cultural dynamics of the Indian film music industry characterized by a hierarchical chain of command in which the music director presides with the most power, musicians have little input of their own in terms of what to perform besides what the music director asks. In turn, musicians are demanded to play and sing precomposed film songs. Peter Manuel attributes the mechanized efforts of the Indian popular film music industry—in reproducing hit song after song to an Indian mass audience—to the intended goal of a capitalist profiteering system. Manuel states that Indian popular music “does not emerge from an extensive base of amateur and professional live performance. The ability of a musician to make any sort of oppositional statement is thus practically nil, since his or her own contribution is deeply imbedded in a capital production network” (1993: 49). In this chapter, I suggest that Rahman’s improvisational approach and on-the-spot compositional techniques may promote creativity as musicians are encouraged to perform more freely during the recording process.

Differing cultural expectations within the Bollywood film music industry run parallel to divergent cultural sensibilities among Indian audiences as well. Rahman’s compositional approach and his global outlook as a popular music artist conform to cosmopolitan sensibilities while they diverge from other Indian cultural expectations. I draw my conclusions based on interviews with Indian international students as well as from observations I made during my time in India. I also rely on interviews with Rahman posted online. Since my understanding of Tamil and Hindi languages is limited, I must rely on interviews with Rahman in English. Although this restricts my ability to understand more deeply how local segments of Indian society view Rahman and his music, I have access to the same information and media disseminated to

educated, urban youth in India, thus revealing the cultural significance of these interviews in shaping global identities and attitudes as they relate to Rahman and his music. I analyze discourses primarily from three online international media sources: TIME, CNN-IBN (a CNN syndicate broadcast in India) and the commercially owned Apple.com. Thus, my aim in providing biographical data about Rahman and his musical career is to characterize the type of culture to which he belongs, and, in turn, highlight how the style and reception of his music signifies different cultural sensibilities in a globalized world.

Continuity and Change

A hybrid musical template has been adopted and adapted within the popular Bollywood film music industry over the course of nearly seventy years, beginning with the start of sound film production and India's first "talkie" (*Alam Ara*) in 1931. Throughout major shifts in musical style and sound, commonly referred to today as the "revolutions" of Indian popular music, a distinctive *filmi* style (starting around the 1940s in Mumbai)²⁰ set the standard for future popular Bollywood film song composers (Morcom 2007: 7).

It is nothing new for Indian film composers to incorporate non-Indian elements with established *ragas* (South Asian modes and system of scales) from Indian repertoire (including Hindustani and Carnatic classical and regional folk genres). In general, non-Indian elements include Western orchestral accompaniment like that used by film music directors Shankar and Jaikishan in the 1970s and early 1980s. They, like most Indian film composers, incorporated classical *rags* and folk song melodies as compositional bases for film songs. This compositional

²⁰ Gregory D. Booth describes the institutionalization of a "Bollywood sound" characterized by sweeping orchestral sounds pioneered during the 1940s (and would dominate for the next fifty years) in the city of Mumbai.

approach references the historical foundation of Mumbai's film music industry in which film music was still heavily influenced by existing light-classical genres and was basically impossible to differentiate from nonfilm, light music from the 1930s to 50s (Arnold 1992: 124).

In the “second revolution” in Bollywood music, composers of the 1960s and 1970s initiated a paradigm of music making with an emphasis on rhythm rather than traditional melodies. Music composers during this time incorporated traditional folk and classical melodies with danceable, upbeat rhythms in the context of changing perceptions in Indian society towards sensuality in celebration of the body. The famous film music composer R. D. Burman and playback singer Kishore Kumar were untrained and uneducated in classical music, and therefore drew inspiration from their exposure to other musics from around the world including disco from the United States and Jamaican reggae. They worked with musical material that was globally recognized and yet managed to create a synthesis of sounds for local audiences in India (Bhattacharyja and Mehta 2008: 110). Therefore, in India, Kishore Kumar and R. D. Burman became synonymous with popular Bollywood music that crossed musical boundaries and tapped into the so-called “multicultural global music scene” (Sen 2008: 85) of the 1960s, 70s, and 80s, thereby setting a precedent for later popular film music composers, including A. R. Rahman.

“The Mozart of Madras”

In Tamil Nadu, India, A. R. Rahman is a household name when discussing popular film music. Rahman first established his popular film music career composing music for Tamil-speaking audiences. He is popularly known in India as the “Mozart of Madras,” a name referring to both his prestige and local popularity, having grown up and lived in the city of Chennai—the

center of activity for the Tamil film industry. In the mass media, he is described a national hero.²¹

While living in Chennai, India during the years of 2005-2007, I discovered that Rahman was often a topic of great interest when discussing films or popular music tastes, especially among young, English-speaking urbanites. I could relate more easily with Indian friends that listened not only to Rahman's music but also to many western rock bands that were popular in India at the time, such as Metallica, Iron Maiden and 3-11 to name a few. Meanwhile, among lower working class Indians, Rahman was given honorable mention to Ilayaraja, the famous South Indian film music composer also hailing from Tamil Nadu. My drivers Kannan and Pandi, who both were very limited in the English language and grew up in much smaller towns many hours south of the capital, were avid Ilayaraja fans who viewed Ilayaraja and his music as more representative of their musical tastes and lifestyle. After we purchased a new vehicle, a vehicle equipped with a CD player and high quality speakers (which everyone, including the drivers, were excited about), one of the drivers, Kannan, was eager to test out the new speakers and went out to buy several compilation albums featuring various Tamil popular film songs. As he showed me his new CDs, I learned that Ilayaraja was his favorite composer, while his next favorite songs were those by K. J. Yesudas (another South Indian composer made most famous as a playback singer). He mentioned that A. R. Rahman was his least favorite. He explained to me how Rahman was "too modern, too different." Even while we listened to music from the car stereo and heard songs from the blockbuster Tamil film, *Sivaji* (2007), a film that was highly anticipated for its high-tech stunts, flashiness and contemporary look and sound, the drivers

²¹ Ben Sisario, "'Slumdog' Fusionist in Oscar Spotlight," *The New York Times.com*, February 21, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/21/arts/music/21rahm.html> (accessed March 3, 2009).

expressed excitement for the star hero actor, Rajini Kanth, rather than A. R. Rahman who composed the songs.

Here in the U.S., the Indian population as a whole valorizes Rahman and his music as an icon of Indian culture. Among members of Bowling Green, Ohio's Indian diaspora, Rahman is one of the most recognizable and well-respected names of Indian cinema and referred to as a "musical genius" (interview March 5, 2009). Rahman is most highly regarded among Indians with ties to South India. I interviewed a couple in their fifties who came to the U.S. in their late twenties and have been living in Bowling Green, Ohio ever since. They characterized Rahman as possessing gifted musical sensibilities and abilities to consistently create catchy songs time after time that invariably combine both traditional and modern styles. Younger members of the Indian diaspora describe Rahman as a symbol of Indian modernity and express their enthusiasm in witnessing the rise of Rahman's global status after winning Oscars at the 2009 Academy Awards. For international students from South India, it came as a surprise that Americans including myself would know anything about Rahman's music. When discussion arose about Rahman's music for SM and his success in the United States and in Hollywood, most Indian international students quickly retaliated that Rahman has composed so many other better songs in the past. Second-generation Indians I interviewed also mentioned Rahman's previous compositions but more so wanted to convey and celebrate Rahman's works in Bollywood that have crossed over into the western international market, especially *Lagaan* (2001).

Perhaps unusual for film music composers from Tamil Nadu, Rahman, especially in recent years, has increasingly been widely identified as a Bollywood music composer, including his work for *Bombay* (1995); *Lagaan* (2001); *Yuva* (2004); *Rang De Basanti* (2006); *Guru* (2007); and *Delhi-6* (2009). In his analysis of Bollywood songs throughout Indian cinematic

history, Biswarup Sen asserts that since the mid-1990s, Rahman has played the lead role in defining Bollywood music as it exists today. Bollywood director and lyricist Gulzar once said that “[A. R. Rahman] is a milestone in Hindi film music. He has single-handedly changed the sound of music in the movies” (quoted in Sen 2008: 100). I suggest that Rahman possesses the cultural capital, including a diverse musical background, exposure to western and Indian lifestyles, and knowledge of new music technologies, that enables him to act and maneuver more freely as a musician within the various cultural institutions of Bollywood, Kollywood²² and now, Hollywood.

Rahman’s Musical Heritage and Hybrid Sensibilities

A. R. Rahman (b. 1966)²³ came from a musical family and began playing the piano by the age of four.²⁴ His father, R. K. Shekar, was a film music director for Malayalam films (from the southern Indian regional film industry of Kerala state) who regrettably passed away before he was able to release his first film as music director. Two years later, Rahman, who was nine years

²² Kollywood, a name given to the Tamil film industry located in Chennai, India, refers to the first letter of the name of the neighborhood where the industry headquarters is located: Kodambakkam.

²³ Rahman was born in 1966, one year after what some scholars presume to be the glory days of Indian film music production: pre-1965. Alison Arnold argues that film songs before 1965 are unlike film music of later years because they lack the same kind of “genuine artistic endeavor of a body of musically-trained, creative composers to develop a modern, native music of national appeal at once popular, eclectic, and yet fundamentally Indian.” Musicologist Christopher Williams has argued for this idea, which he presented during the Popular Culture Department Colloquium Series in the spring of 2010 at Bowling Green State University. I do not agree with this analysis. Instead, I view music productions that involve digital sampling, the organization of sounds, and other electronic elements (e.g., rhythms) to be simply another creative form of music making that is increasingly prevalent in 21st century Indian popular film music. In addition, music directors like Rahman and Ilaiyaraaja have formal music-training backgrounds yet produce electro-acoustic music. See Arnold (1993: 122).

²⁴ Gopal Srinivasan, “The Complete Biography of A. R. Rahman,” <http://gopalhome.tripod.com/arrbio.html> (accessed March 14, 2010).

old at the time of his father's death, joined the Tamil film music orchestra as a keyboardist under Ilayaraja. Like Ilayaraja, Rahman first learned western music from Master Dhanraj (Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan 2008: 125). From an early age, he was also trained in classical Indian (Carnatic) music and as a teenager, Rahman was playing keyboards with superstar musicians such as *tabla* master Zakir Hussain and Indian classical violinist Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan. Rahman's professional career in visual media began with composing Indian television commercial jingles (of which he composed over 300). Rahman's "big break" came in 1992 when Tamil film director Mani Ratnam commissioned him to compose music for the film *Roja* (Sen 2008: 99-100). It is important to point out that *Roja* was a crossover film first popular with Tamil audiences, which quickly became popular with Bollywood filmgoers. Like most other south Indian film directors, Mani Ratnam made deliberate choices to have his films in multi-lingual translatable text (other than Tamil) in order to reach audiences of other Indian states and languages. In order for *Roja* to be a crossover film, it had to be remade, crafted and embedded with the dominant Hindi language. Within Kollywood (Tamil) film culture, directors like Mani Ratnam allow their films to be dubbed or remade into the dominant regional language after the release of films originally in Tamil. Therefore, *Roja* has both a Tamil and Hindi version, a phenomenon seen in other films including *Dil Se* (1998), *Yuva* (2004) and *Sivaji* (2006). This enables the double exposure of Rahman's music among regional consumers as well as national and diasporic audiences as Rahman's film music crosses over from Tamil to the majority Hindi consumer base. Rahman's film music also reaches a transnational audience through globally distributed films including *Lagaan* (2001) (Gopal and Moorti 2008: 1-62).

Other Musical Influences

In addition to his involvement within the Tamil and Hindi popular film music industries, Rahman has also been involved with several independent music projects as an Indipop artist. Indipop is generally defined as “non-film” popular music heavily influenced by western rock, a subcultural genre in India that grew within the context of increased private consumption (such as satellite broadcast) and influences of Western media corporations, such as CNN, HBO and MTV in India that developed alongside India’s economic policy for liberalization in 1991 (Kvetko 2004: 183). In his thirties, by the time Indipop became popular within the mainstream middle to upper-class Indian market, Rahman was exposed to the genre and had even played the keyboard for several Indipop bands including Roots and Nemesis.²⁵ Soon after, he began to establish himself as a popular film music producer with an eclectic musical background.

Rahman has an affinity with Western popular music having played in a rock band in his youth and listening to American country singer Jim Reeves and Walter (now Wendy) Carlos’s landmark electronic album *Switched-On Bach*.²⁶ He also studied traditional Western classical music through his formal education at Trinity College of Music at the University of Oxford (Sen 2008: 99). Rahman notes that some of his favorite traditional Western classical music composers include Verdi and Janacek. Rahman is also influenced by Indian musicians such as Hindustani vocalist Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan 2008: 123).

Rahman’s experiences as an Indipop artist in India and his exposure to individual musical artists, whether western or Indian, helped to influence Rahman’s attitudes as a stand-alone pop

²⁵ On the BBC Asian Network, South Asian DJ Gagan Grewal asks radio listeners, “Who is the best of former band members, former soloists now in the Bollywood industry?” A radio listener called in during the program to give his vote for A. R. Rahman. *BBC Asian Network*, March 9, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/console/asiannetwork/> (accessed March 9, 2010).

²⁶ Sisario, “‘Slumdog’ Fusionist in Oscar Spotlight,” *The New York Times.com*, February 21, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/02/21/arts/music/21rahm.html> (accessed March 3, 2009).

artist. Rahman's personal views and perceptions are linked with genre expectations of pop stars as seen and formulated in the West. Early on, even though Rahman was involved and committed to traditional production processes in the Kollywood film music industry, he began to seek out more individualistic experiences as facilitated through new technology to explore his own musical passions and interests. In an interview, Rahman states,

“When I was working in the studios as a session player, I would do other people's music, or play other people's music during the day, and the night, used to be my, or, whatever I used to compose, little commercials and stuff. So maybe that practice of five or six years made me start, my thinking mode would only come to me in the nights, I guess.”²⁷

Rahman expresses how he had to adjust his daily routine in order to be able to find time and space away from others to create his own music. Rahman is determined to forge his musical career as a contemporary artist yet he remains loyal to the culture of social relationships and practices belonging to more traditional activities of the popular Indian film music industry.

Rahman's Inspirations with Sufism

Throughout the 1990s and at the start of his career as a film music director and as an Indipop artist, Rahman composed songs that he claims are inspired by Sufi Islam. He collaborated with Pakistani *qawwal* Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan, singer of Sufi devotional songs, in a duet, to create the song “Gurus of Peace” (1997) (a song that is often labeled as “Indipop” in the Indian media). Rahman is a self-proclaimed Sufi convert. To become more successful, music directors will often change their Muslim names to Hindu ones. Rahman, however, did the opposite; he changed his name from Dileep Kumar to Allah Rakha Rahman. He projects an image of Sufism to worldwide audiences through online interviews where he openly describes

²⁷ Anuradha Sen Gupta, IBNlive.com, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TBooET_5d4 (accessed March 19, 2010).

his Sufi faith as connected to his compositional approach. He also records his own vocals for songs that are considered Sufi (e.g., “Khwaja Mere Khwaja” of *Jodhaa Akbar* [2004] and “Tere Bina” from *Guru* [2007]) and this also helps to legitimize his work as authentic Sufi music. Rahman’s Sufi music, while still maintaining some *qawwali* elements, is a unique blend of Bollywood and global pop music that sonically signifies modernity and progressive notions of Islam, both within the Indian context and among transnational consumers of Sufi music.

If the use of *qawwali* in Hindi commercial films reached a sort of zenith in the 1950s, I would argue that a resurgence of Sufi music in Bollywood is taking place today. It may be worth noting that the establishment of Rahman’s musical career and Sufi conversion coincide with political upheaval and increased sectarian violence linked with a resurgence of Hindutva ideology during the 1990s. His music for the film *Roja* (1992) (and later *Bombay* in 1994), described as a nationalistic film which dealt with Hindu-Muslim divisions, was produced the same year as the Babri Masjid incident and ensuing riots in Mumbai and Delhi. And, although he converted to Islam in the late 1980s, it is interesting how discussion about his religious affiliation has become widespread in the mass media in recent years. Several websites and publications about Rahman and his music are intended to reach a diverse Muslim community including ProgressiveIslam.com²⁸ and IslamAwareness.net. An article from *Arab News*, “A. R. Rehman: Leaving Celebrity Status Behind” (January 13, 2006),²⁹ describes when Rahman and his family converted to Islam in 1989 and his experience during a second hajj pilgrimage in 2008. Rahman’s views on Islam (“as a religion of peace, love, coexistence, tolerance and modernity”)

²⁸ Gustavo Mustafa, “AR Rahman: Well-adjusted Muslim Convert Wins 2 Oscars-Jai Ho,” ProgressiveIslam.org, entry posted February 27, 2009, http://www.progressiveislam.org/ar_rahman_welladjusted_muslim_convert_wins_2_oscars_jai_ho (accessed January 12, 2010).

²⁹ Syed Faisal Ali “Leaving Celebrity Status Behind,” *Arab News*, January 13, 2006, <http://www.islamawareness.net/Converts/arrehman.html> (accessed February 22, 2010).

are presented on the blogging website rahmaniac.com.³⁰ Individuals from Macedonia, Bosnia and Canada among other locations post their responses, including “Khalid” who expressed his thoughts after Rahman won two Academy Awards, “What a proud moment for all Muslims of the world. A. R. Rahman is not only an Icon but he represents the real Islam, conveying the true message of Islam to the world.” While some individuals express their dislike for Rahman’s conversion, others explain how Rahman inspired them to convert from Hinduism to Islam.

Rahman’s Sufi musical identity helps convey to the public his image as a 21st century follower of Islam. In interviews, Rahman is open and frank about his Sufi background. He seemingly affiliates himself with a long lineage of traditional South Asian Sufi musicians. Rahman even dedicates his composition, “Khwaja Mere Khwaja,” to the Sufi Saint Khwaja Moinuddin Chishti, thereby reinforcing his loyalties to South Asian religious leaders.

By identifying himself as Sufi, however, he places himself outside of the mainstream Hindu culture of India as well as outside mainstream Islamic culture. Rather, Rahman takes on a universal religiosity that enables him to transcend particular religions. Thus, Rahman’s Sufi musical identity may be easily welcomed by diverse audiences with different religious backgrounds from around the world.

Rahman’s Compositional Practices

A. R. Rahman’s decision to utilize technology is not only a musical decision but a socio-cultural one. With the ability to store and sample sounds using digital software systems, it appears that Rahman controls nearly all aspects of musical arrangements and sound production.

³⁰ Farzad Khaleel, “Islam Gives Me Peace-A R Rahman,” rahmaniac.wordpress.com, entry posted May 27, 2008, <http://rahmaniac.wordpress.com/2008/05/27/islam-gives-me-peace-a-r-rahman/> (accessed February 22, 2010).

In an interview with Apple Inc., Rahman shares how Apple's program, Logic, enables him to become a "programmer" who can manipulate certain sounds in order to produce a song:

Normally what happens is I have a rhythm, and it's probably a loop. Then I do my vocals, and once I have a structure in place, I record with the singers and write lyrics. When I have the vocal recording, I then work in reverse for the music. We record live rhythms sometimes, and then start programming, and everything is complete. Then of course all the editing is done, and we go through the mastering. That's pretty much it.³¹

Here, Rahman discusses how Apple's Logic allows him to produce music more efficiently. His decision to use Logic, which he has been doing for the past 12 years, is based on a practical and important matter in which he can utilize a "whole workstation" rather than a separate MIDI workstation and audio workstation (*ibid.*).

Although Rahman may have knowledge of how to use Apple's Logic, it is clear from the above statement that he also works collectively with other participants in the studio. In this interview, however, emphasis is placed on Rahman and his use of Apple's merchandise (and marketing this merchandise through his celebrity status) rather than on other aspects of a collective music making process. The webpage layout for this interview on Apple.com includes a photo of Rahman by himself. The overall impression of this interview, including its visual appearance adheres to western codes and assumptions that value individualism, technology and musical creativity. As Jeremy Wallach states, there is "the tendency in the West to treat the recording studio as a sterile musical laboratory off-limits to nonparticipants...[and] the potential of multitrack recording and electronic music technology to isolate performers, mechanize music production, and attenuate musical interactions" (Wallach 2008: 120; for an analysis on collective music making processes in Asian society, see Wallach 2008). An ethnographic account of how

³¹ Joe Cellini, "Scoring 'Slumdog Millionaire' With Logic: An Interview With A. R. Rahman," Apple.com, March 21, 2009, <http://www.apple.com/logicstudio/in-action/arrahman/> (accessed March 14, 2010).

Rahman composes music would provide much needed insight into the processes and practices that take place in Rahman's home studio. Rahman first constructed Panchathan Record Inn in Chennai, which became very famous throughout the nation. In 2005, this studio expanded into a new 3,000 square-foot digital facility and was renamed A. M. Studios.³² Paul Théberge describes the rise of the "home studio" in the 1980s coinciding with the affordability and accessibility of MIDI technology during this time (1997: 218-241). The home studio, perceived in the West as an isolated domestic domain away from the outside world, becomes like a laboratory where the music composer carries out new experiments in order to obtain the "right sounds." Rahman certainly projects this image of the "creative mad" music producer. Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan describe Rahman as someone who "composes and records in his own space. He is known to work alone, very late at night" (2008: 125). In my own experience, the entire city of Chennai seemingly shuts down for the night and streets become quiet around 10 p.m. Even dance clubs at local hotels require guests to leave by 11:30 pm. The only places still thriving are five-star hotels that accommodate westerners and wealthy Indians.

For Rahman, however, composing at night is also a practical concern regarding his daily routines. As a Muslim, Rahman mentions how composing music late at night help maintain discipline. Rahman states, "Also I think, uh, if I am awake till 2 or 3 and when I sleep I can't get up for my morning prayers which is probably around 5:30, 6. So I prefer to be awake till then, finish, then sleep" (ibid.). By mentioning these issues in an interview, Rahman conveys to the public his commitment to work and religion and notions of being Muslim in a modern world.

³² The acoustic and architectural designs were devised by Studio 440. Studio 440 oversees the maintenance of the facility in collaboration with "acoustic architects" from California (DAXCO DIGITAL) who also designed studios for Sony Music and Warner Brothers. A local architectural and construction company in Chennai built the facility. "A.M. Studio: AR Rahman's New Studio," July 29, 2007, <http://www.rahmanism.com/2009/03/rahman-interview-studio-making-music.html> (accessed May 14, 2010).

While it would certainly appear that Rahman is often alone, it is unclear whether this is entirely true. After winning two Grammy awards in 2010 for his music in SM, including Best Compilation Soundtrack and Best Song Written for a Visual Media, Rahman delivered an acceptance speech that acknowledged numerous individuals. Rahman stated:

"Insane, eh? I never even dreamt about winning all these awards. I once again want to thank the Almighty, my spiritual Sufi teachers, Ameen Peerullah Malik Sahib, and all my music teachers...MIA...My whole team, Gulzarji, Sukhvinder Singh, Tanvi Shah, Vijay Prakash...My friend and sound engineer the late H Sridhar...My mentor Maniratnam...mentors in Mumbai Shekhar Kapur and Subhash Ghai and mentor in the west, Andrew Lloyd Webber...My extraordinary musicians from Chennai and Mumbai...Jaiho, India!"³³

This speech reflects a diverse network of social groups, national and international, that are interconnected within Rahman's sphere of musical influence. In addition, Rahman gives credit to some of the individual vocalists and musicians he records.

Rather than recording the sound of an entire orchestral ensemble at once, Rahman prefers to record a single performer. After Rahman performs various parts of a song and records the basic rhythm and harmonic progressions on his keyboard, he calls in a soloist (Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan 2008: 125). In this process, some traditions are carried over within the Mumbai film music industry, such as orchestral musicians playing anything a music director asks (Booth 2008a: 291-2). For instance, Shankar Indorkar, a veteran musician in the Mumbai film orchestra, recalls his experience working with Rahman:

He [Rahman] says, 'Just play something. Play anything. Just open the cor anglais and play something.' I didn't understand. I say, 'What key? At least tell me something!' But he says, 'Play anything, whatever you want.' So I played something, nothing, just something. Maybe half an hour. From low to high on both instruments (oboe and English horn). Whatever I could think. And he just recorded everything. So it got to be about two o'clock in the morning, and then he says, 'Okay, pack up.' I didn't understand what was going on. He paid me, and I went back [to Mumbai]. After that he never called me. Because he had all my sounds. So you could say he has me (quoted in Booth 2008: 290).

³³ Arrahman.com, www.arahman.com/v2/journey-media.html (accessed March 25, 2010).

Older film musicians like Indorkar express their frustration when collaborating with Rahman and are unable to fully reconcile the changes that are ushered in by new musical practices and technologies. Statements like these reveal the tension between valuing acoustic instruments over electronic instruments in the composition process. Fears like these that arise concerning new technology “and the perceived loss of human input” in creating music may be attributed to differences in personal preference for certain genre expectations and conventions (Théberge 1997: 188; Negus 1999: 4).

Meanwhile, in other situations, musicians find that the compositional process is about discovery and improvisation. Guitarist R. Visweswaran describes how Rahman encourages him to play freely and improvise musical material while he records sounds that would later be “cut and pasted” on his Apple computer digital recording workstation (Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan 2008: 125). For Rahman, it seems that composing and improvisation are one conceptual practice, rather than separate approaches in the compositional process. He describes:

When I’m doing a song or any improvisation, most of the time I have a live input on it, with headphones on, and the performers in the booth. And I have a MIDI keyboard running simultaneously. So if I’m doing something that is partly Indian classical, I keep prompting the singer or the performer on the mike, and then keep playing it. After twenty minutes of that we sit down and edit the portion I like but sometimes I do like the standard thing. You know, you have an idea and then you start playing more instruments, more Logic instruments (Apple.com March 2009).

Once again, rather than making distinctions and placing value on one type of instrumentation (acoustic versus electronic, or “Logic” instruments), Rahman appears to transcend these boundaries. Also, this statement reveals not only that Rahman values individual musicianship but that he values the input from individual musicians about their particular performances.

Rahman’s promotion of musical creativity is closely linked to ideas of social empowerment at the individual level. For Rahman, having one’s own home studio and

possessing technological equipment (and having the knowledge to use these electronic musical devices) empowers the individual musician. In a seemingly democratic tone, Rahman states, “I think the world is what we create...I think the more we are doing that, we are creating that world. And the more possibility we take, the more we can change it, I guess. I think as individuals, we have the power to do that.”³⁴ Rahman conveys how technology is a “tool” that can enable musical ingenuity to enact change. These attitudes reflect Rahman’s view on modern society. Rahman states,

What is modern is, um, rediscovering yourself, rediscovering the way music is done is modern. I do love to embrace new technology and new ideas...Like some other people are very close-minded and say ‘oh, what are they doing, it’s just noise...rap is noise and heavy metal is noise...so when you go into that framework just try to like for what, like something for what it is, not go and take a lens and, uh, disrupt it and try and analyze it. So with this philosophy, I think I kept moving on for 18 years, rediscovering myself.³⁵

For Rahman, “rediscovering yourself” and the use of technology are not mutually exclusive. As Théberge points out, even though digital and electronic systems can reproduce basically any sound imaginable with the touch of a button, individual musicians operating these devices still perceive themselves as creating new music, synthesizing sounds that they “discover” (1997: 199). Nonetheless, Rahman’s statement reveals how the ability to use various technological devices can have a major impact on perceptions about music. Rahman discusses two genres, first developed in the West and that rely on the heavy use of technology: rap and metal. His mentioning of these genres not only reveals his affinity for these styles of music, but also reinforces the cultural validity that these genres, developed in the West, continue to have among English speaking, urban youth populations in India’s rapidly expanding middle class. By

³⁴ Gupta, IBNlive.com, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TBooET_5d4 (accessed March 19, 2010).

³⁵ TIME Magazine, “TIME Ten Questions/TIME Magazine Interviews: A. R. Rahman,” April 21, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqUbiOgEb0w> (accessed March 19, 2010).

affiliating himself and his music with rap and metal, Rahman views himself as an international globalized musician. Rap and metal, and what their sounds symbolize for urban cosmopolitan youth, are culturally foreign to the musical sensibilities of lower working class Indians.

Therefore, Rahman, in this statement, speaks of a music culture that translates to international audiences including young Indian audiences who strive to make sense of their positions and identities in a globalized world.

Living in a Globalized World

In recent years, Rahman's workplace has shifted from the home studio and state-of-the-art facility to an international mobile world. High-tech computer software enables Rahman to compose even while he is traveling. Rahman states, "I use the mobile system when I travel, because I do a lot of my writing in hotel rooms; it happens all the time. Right now I'm huddled up here (in Los Angeles) with my MacBook Pro, which I also use to work on flights" (Apple.com March 2009).³⁶ Similar to how the home studio changed modern lifestyles and how musicians consumed and produced music, the virtual world is now space for musicians to create new music (and with musicians in other parts of the world). As Rahman states, "Logic becomes part of your life. I have three or four programming rooms, and I exchange files across the Internet with London; it has become a whole philosophy of using the Logic tools" (ibid.).

Throughout this thesis, I argue that the Mumbai film music industry is more than an industry that institutionalizes the mass production of popular music; it is a culture made up of individual lives and collective practices of musicians and their activities in the production of popular music. Rahman's use of samplers to record musicians and store sounds enables him to

³⁶ Rahman uses Apple's program "Apogee Symphony Mobile" while he is traveling and composing music on his laptop.

“free himself and anyone else with whom he shares his digital files from the necessity of writing out parts” for other instruments, “from having to schedule rehearsals and recordings, and from the expense of hiring orchestral musicians” (Booth 2008a: 289-290). It is these aspects of Rahman’s composition process that characterize his style, alacrity and efficiency in making music. (He completed the score for SM within two weeks.) It also appears that Rahman has a powerful influence on the compositional process, not just as a film music composer but also as a sound engineer and producer. Therefore, I assert that Rahman helped spur the changes that also took place with film music in the 1990s, an important period in the history of India’s film industry characterized by a shift in sound production quality and style. With the use of his laptop and other mobile equipment, Rahman has material and artistic maneuverability to independently direct, choose sounds, and select methods in creating music. At the same time, it appears that while new technologies may enhance the overall sound quality of commercial film music and have changed the way in which music is recorded and produced, the overall hierarchical structure of the Indian film music industry remains intact.

Gregory Booth’s description of competition as a “driver of change” (2008a: 291) may have powerful implications in the years to come for the popular Indian film music industry. As a leader in his use of digital technology, Rahman is a model for future film music composers in India. Only as high-tech musical equipment and computer software becomes more accessible and affordable, however, can aspiring music composers partake in these types of musical activities to become the next generation of popular music makers. Rahman’s idealistic sentiment that “the

world is what we create” could be enough impetus for many middle-class Indian musicians to seek such a goal, given that they have the cultural capital that enables them to do so.³⁷

Nonetheless, Rahman represents for many Indians notions of modernity as he is characterized as a technologically savvy musical genius. Like all music, Rahman and his music are embedded in a “constitutive context” in which “sounds, words and images of popular music [are] made and given meaning” (Negus 1999: 20). Due to a diverse musical background, Rahman appropriates numerous western and Indian styles and genres into his own musical compositions that, in turn, appeals to Indian cosmopolitans, urban youth populations throughout the world and a wider global audience. In the next chapter, I analyze Rahman’s compositions from the film *Slumdog Millionaire* in order to show how technological innovations influence and affect Rahman’s compositional approach and style.

³⁷ It appears that Rahman has plans to provide Indians with a way to acquire new musical skills through education. He hopes to establish the KM Music Conservatory and Audio Media Education located in Chennai that will include courses in western and Indian classical music, theory, appreciation, ear training, audio engineering and an Apple certified course in Logic Pro. Arrahman.com, www.arahman.com/v2/kmconservatory.html (accessed January 16, 2010).

CHAPTER THREE. THE MUSIC OF *SLUMDOG MILLIONAIRE*: A SYNTHESIS OF SOUNDS

Peter Manuel states, “film music is by far the single largest category of popular music in South Asia, and it provides the model for much of the popular music that exists outside the cinematic world” (1988: 158). It is true that film music is the dominant form of popular music and most certainly relevant to the production, distribution and consumption of all Indian film music from around the 1950s until the 1980s. At the same time, I suggest that the musical sounds and genres produced today in the Bollywood film music industry and nonfilm music industries (i.e., Indipop) are difficult to differentiate from one another due to reasons other than the hegemony of Indian film music. In this chapter I analyze two of Rahman’s compositions for the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, “Jai Ho” and “O...Saya.” I suggest that Rahman’s music for this British film sonically resembles his latest Bollywood film music compositions. (For instance, the song “Aaj Ki Raat” featured on the SM soundtrack is literally the same song for the Bollywood film *Don* [2006]. Both songs in these films occur during similar action scenes and evoke similar emotions.) I do not compare notational transcriptions between songs Rahman has composed for recent Bollywood films and those composed for SM. I do, however, explain how the high level of sound production quality and use of various musical elements and effects in the songs of SM (such as electronic drum kits, guitars and layering) sonically resemble Rahman’s recent Bollywood film songs. I believe that this approach is fruitful in analyzing his music, especially when dealing with forms of popular music created and consumed through digital technology.

By examining various unifying musical structures, I describe an overall “sound” that characterizes these songs. I believe that the total “sound” of a song, rather than dissected musical elements, informs pop music listeners. And, as in the case of Rahman, I show how this “sound”

also in turn affects composers, who are also listeners. Especially when discussing popular music, any distinction between “sound” and “song” in the production and consumption of popular music has become increasingly blurred (Théberge 1997: 191). In my analysis of Rahman’s music for SM, I explore the socio-musical implications of terms and concepts related to these songs within the context of popular music discourse and contemporary digitized music-making. Furthermore, I analyze these songs within the context of Indian film musical aesthetics as well as electronic dance music remixes and Indipop. In doing so, I argue that Rahman’s music for SM blurs the line between these genre-bound stylistics, thereby reaching a wider global popular music audience. First, I discuss how Rahman’s identity, as a popular music artist has become so closely linked with a certain “sound” and how this phenomenon fits into the larger discourse of Bollywood film music.

The Bollywood Sound of Music

Throughout my research on popular Bollywood film music, I have noticed that music scholars, composers and consumers alike generally describe a unique “sound” rather than details that might pertain to a musical score or precise compositional techniques. For example, the “sound” that one pop musician was seeking in 2002 when recording a song in India was ““that incredible string sound that you hear in Bollywood movies”” (quoted in Booth 2008b: 85). Gregory Booth distinguishes between an “Old Bollywood sound” and a “New Bollywood sound” to demarcate a distinct sound fashioned during the “Golden Era” of the Bollywood film music industry from that of digitized musics characterizing post-liberal India of the early 1990s into the new millennium. Booth nostalgically describes the “Old Bollywood sound” as one in which “individual instrumental sounds did not stand out discretely but instead formed part of a huge

wash of sound, in which the strings ‘bled’ through on the horn parts and where the drums and guitars sounded as if they had been recorded on a single microphone” (ibid.). As a way of extending the aural limits of music into other sensory realms, listeners often discuss Indian popular film music as being characterized by the use of certain instruments from the north or south of the country that thereby lend music a certain regional “flavor.”

Furthermore, discussions of Indian popular film music often involve genre-specific meanings, or the “sounds” associated with certain genres (as well as the *blending* of these genres). For instance, Tamil popular film music scholars Joseph Getter and B. Balasubrahmaniyan discuss Tamil film music composer Illyaraja and his particular “sound”: “Illyaraja introduced the instruments, melodies, and feelings of Tamil folk music to film songs... Illyaraja’s music is distinctive for its complex instrumental arrangements and unique blend of Tamil folk, Indian classical, and western classical and pop music genres” (2008: 124). As Théberge points out, “The particular ‘sound’ produced in such instances is as intimately tied to personal style and technique as it is to the characteristics of the instrument’s sound-producing mechanism” (1997: 187). For this reason, certain “sounds” which are intended to be specific to individual composers and personal styles also seem generic and somewhat abstract. For instance, while Illyaraja is described as “innovative” and “authentically folk,” so is Rahman often described this way. Since Illyaraja and Rahman both hail from Tamil Nadu and have become enormously popular among Tamils, scholars and fans often compare and contrast their styles and sounds. I think that Rahman, who studied under Illyaraja and was exposed to his musical style, is perceived among listeners as more influenced by digital technology and western rock and pop musical aesthetics (as facilitated through the consumption of western media and musical recordings throughout the 1990s) rather than Carnatic musical traditions. For the most part,

Rahman has developed a particular “sound” defined by his use of the latest technology involving digital sampling, computer software, keyboard synthesizers and a fully-equipped home studio. Rahman’s music is hybridic—Indian film music that essentially adheres to global popular music trends. Hosts of the Bowling Green, Ohio radio show “The Music of India and Its Diaspora” (WBGU FM 88.1)³⁸ describe his music as a synthesis of “folk” or “traditional” musical characteristics and “modern” sounds. One of the radio show hosts, a middle-aged woman of Indian descent who has lived in the United States for over twenty-five years, articulates that Rahman “uses the sound and music of very...tribal drums...South Indian classical...Sufi sounds...he takes the unadulterated versions of these forms...taking original sounds and creating something new, so that it stands out” (interview March 5, 2009). So in this sense, Rahman’s music is perceived as generic because it conforms to the much earlier template for Bollywood music as a hybrid of Indian and western sounds and instrumentation. At the same time, Rahman also embraces and adroitly handles new music technologies when composing, unlike many Bollywood film music directors from older generations. Thus, the songs “Jai Ho” and “O...Saya” transcend conventional approaches of Bollywood. Vocal layering, mixing and looping of Indian and electronic drums, delays, a heavy bass, minimalist ambient qualities and other digital effects comprise a considerable amount of the overall sound quality of the recordings of “Jai Ho” and “O...Saya.”

³⁸ After A. R. Rahman won his Academy awards, one of the radio show hosts showcased two hours of Rahman’s music in a single program that included songs from *Slumdog Millionaire*. In addition to winning an Academy Award for this song, Rahman also received a 2009 Golden Globe for Best Original Music Score and two Grammy Awards in 2010 for Best Compilation Soundtrack and Best Song Written for a Motion Picture, Television or Other Visual Media. “Jai Ho” was also on the *Billboard* charts in the summer of 2009, reaching the 8th position on the “Top Digital Tracks” chart. “Jai Ho” has also reached international music charts as a top single in Ireland, Turkey, Australia, Greece, and Finland (all within the spring of 2009), http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jai_ho (accessed May 30, 2010).

“Jai Ho”: The Song and Dance

Within the first opening moments of “Jai Ho” (“Be Victorious!”), listeners can get a sense that this song is not a typical western pop song. We first hear keyboard-triggered samples of a nylon-stringed guitar, perhaps a Spanish guitar or even perhaps a Middle-Eastern *‘oud*, playing a simple riff twice, accompanied by rapid hand-clapping rhythms. A second instrument, a similar keyboard-triggered sample, plays the same riff an octave higher. Through this heterophonic playing of the riff, which extends into a full-length melody, Rahman introduces the main melody that the vocalists sing in verses to follow throughout the rest of the song. The exclamatory shout of “Jai Ho” (consisting of two pitches a half-step apart) is introduced early on in the song by a chorus of male vocalists, or at least multiple male voices in reverb. After the downbeat of “ho,” along with the beat of a drum, the male voices fade until we hear a female vocalist singing open vowels in the western *bel canto* style (producing a somewhat haunting effect). For four beats, while this female vocal line is unaccompanied, heavy drum rhythms and a deep bass sound can be prominently heard. Perhaps this singing voice is another representation of female embodiment of spirituality. All of these different elements comprise only the opening seconds of the song.

This recording includes a mix of sounds, rhythms and timbres. The basis of this recording consists of electronic drum kits, including Japanese *taiko* drums, which, according to Rahman in an interview with the company Apple, can be reproduced with a certain setting on the software Pro Tools. (Meanwhile, in live performances of “Jai Ho,” both at the Oscars and at a staged performance in India, *taiko* drummers are shown playing.) Throughout this recording, bass *ostinati* on electric bass guitar as well as a trance-like arpeggiated melodic line with synthesizers

creates a “full sound” in which syncopated bass rhythms and melodies (both at high volume) fill in gaps produced by steady down beats (carried out by the *taiko* and electronic drums). Although most of the drums sound acoustic, they are in fact electronic.³⁹ A blend of acoustic-sounding drums, catchy rhythms and electronic drums interweave to create a thick layer of rhythmic patterns.

Meshed within pounding bass-drum rhythms and driving beats is a mix of harmony instrumentation, including keyboard synthesizer and acoustic guitar. A marker of the “Old Bollywood sound” in which a full string orchestra is continually heard throughout a song and serves as the main accompanimental feature, “Jai Ho” incorporates a string orchestra (comprised of an entire string section with basses, cellos, violas and violins) at sporadic moments in the song to emphasize certain melodic lines (i.e., performing simultaneously with the lute instruments) or to fill in space with a short sweeping passage. Sometimes the strings can be hard to hear and are often mixed well within the overall texture of various instruments and drums. Near the end of the recording, sampled string pads are prominently heard (probably played by a computer or by Rahman on a keyboard), serving as the “outro” for the song. Rather than using an actual string orchestra, Rahman records individual musicians playing instruments or singing (or records himself) and mixes the separate tracks together (ibid.).⁴⁰ Rahman even includes a pedal steel guitar in a later verse of “Jai Ho” to produce a sonic texture reminiscent of American country music.

³⁹ According to Rahman in an interview with Apple, he used ES2 presets on Apple’s Pro Logic software to construct this heavy bass line and trance rhythms. Joe Cellini, “Scoring ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ With Logic: An Interview With A. R. Rahman,” Apple.com, March 21, 2009, <http://www.apple.com/logicstudio/in-action/arahman/> (accessed March 14, 2010).

⁴⁰ According to Rahman in an interview with Apple, he used Apogee Symphony Mobile (AD-16 and DA-16X) while he was “on the road” creating this soundtrack.

This recording includes various styles of singing and vocal timbres. Rahman is thus able to feature a wide variety of vocals that might appeal to a wider audience. He includes two male singers, the Bollywood playback singers Sukhvinder Singh and Mahalaxmi Iyer, and the female Indian pop vocalist Tanvi Shah. Rahman also records his own vocals during the singing of the chorus, “Jai Ho.”⁴¹ In addition, for nearly twenty seconds, Rahman includes a chorus of Spanish-speaking youth “Baila! Baila/ Ahora conmigo, tu baila para hoy/ Por nuestro dia de movidas/ los problemas los que sean” (“Dance! Dance!/ Come with me now, you dance for today)/ (For our day of movements)/ (whatever problems may be).”

Although the chorus “hook” (“Jai Ho”) is sung in Hindi, the words “Jai” and “Ho” are relatively easy to pronounce for non-Hindi speakers (although there are still different pronunciations for “Jai”). There are debates about whether or not Rahman incorporates Arabic phrases in the recording (I do not hear any).⁴² In addition, there are discussions about whether or not Tanvi Shah, whose vocals for “Jai Ho” sound similar to Shakira’s and is known for singing in various languages, sings in Arabic on this recording in between shouts of “Jai Ho” (1:35-1:41; 4:01-4:06). All in all, Rahman utilizes a simple yet uplifting proclamation of “Jai Ho” (“Be Victorious!”) as well as multiple languages and eclectic instrumentation to reach a diverse global audience.

Throughout my research, I have encountered various vernacular forms and performances of “Jai Ho.” At a local concert that took place at a Hindu festival in the Toledo, Ohio area, musicians of the local band Gayaki (general term for Indian vocal music) Grooves (a group comprised of diasporic and second-generation South Asians of various ages) performed an

⁴¹ On the chorus vocals in “Jai Ho,” Rahman creates “the robotic, stair-stepping pitch-bend effect with Logic’s Pitch Correction plug-in to achieve the exaggerated tuning effect.”

⁴² Manish Vij, “Jai Ho Rahman,” Ultrabrown Blog, entry posted January 24, 2009, <http://ultrabrown.com/posts/jai-ho-rahman> (accessed May 19, 2010).

instrumental version of “Jai Ho.” The youngest member of the ensemble (a teenage boy) performed his rendition of “Jai Ho”’s melody on a synthesizer keyboard (opting for the “strings” sound) while two other members of the band accompanied him on *tabla* and an electronic drum pad. “Jai Ho” was one song among a dozen popular Bollywood songs in the band’s live performance. On another occasion, several members of the India Student Association at Bowling Green State University chose to use “Jai Ho” when performing a fashion show segment during their Diwali-Mela event.

Meanwhile, on YouTube, videos of “Jai Ho” include performances involving different cultural groups learning the tune and the dance steps of the original choreography of the so-called Bollywood song-and-dance sequence portrayed at the end of SM. This past year, Filipino prisoners were showcased emulating the dance sequence to “Jai Ho.”⁴³ (Filipino prisoners from the same penitentiary first caught worldwide media attention in 2007 with video footage of hundreds of prisoners clad in bright orange jumpsuits reenacting the dance steps and moves of Michael Jackson’s “Thriller” video.) Back in the United States,⁴⁴ the “Jai Ho” dance is performed among a group of girls passing the time and dancing to the song in the middle of the Philadelphia city airport⁴⁵ as well as a group of men and women creating an amateur music video

⁴³ This example of CPDRC Inmates dancing to the choreography of Rahman’s “Jai Ho” was posted on June 1, 2009 ,” <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uTMUZ39UHgo&feature=related> (accessed August 20, 2009).

⁴⁴ A recent article posted on On NPR.org featured several amateur videos of toddler’s throughout the U.S. dancing to “Jai Ho” and recognizing the song by name. In addition, the “Jai Ho” dance was featured on several daytime entertainment programs, including *The Ellen Degeneres Show*. “The Cast of Slumdog Does a Bollywood Dance,” YouTube.com, entry posted Jan 19, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NTzA5h81kQQ> (accessed January 25, 2009).

⁴⁵ “Jai Ho in the Philly Airport,” YouTube.com, entry posted July 17, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d2A60gP40-g> (accessed August 20, 2009).

shot in a downtown Chicago parking garage.⁴⁶ In Argentina, pop singers and musicians gather for a televised concert event in which performers sing and dance to the song.⁴⁷ Although the verses are in a foreign Indian language, the singers still manage to sing in Hindi. The rest of the group joins in to sing “Jai Ho” during the choruses. During the section of the song that includes Spanish lyrics (repeated twice for this particular performance), performers seem especially enthusiastic and passionate (suggesting that A. R. Rahman succeeded in appealing to a Spanish-speaking audience.) Also on YouTube, there are numerous home-made recordings of individuals performing acoustic versions of “Jai Ho.” One particular YouTube video labeled “Jai Ho, Hard Rock Version,” includes three young males, a drummer, a bassist and an electric guitar player, at a private academy located in India.⁴⁸ These musicians include one drummer, a bassist and electric guitar player. The electric guitarist plays the melodic riff from the original recording producing a gritty, “dirty” overdriven guitar sound. These examples reveal that rather than alienating people from their musicality, this popular form of music represented by “Jai Ho” appears to promote listeners’ musicality. The following examples show how film song in the contemporary context can encourage people to become performers rather than passive listeners (Morcom 2007: 207).

“O... Saya”

In the recording of “O...Saya,” Rahman constructs an intense electronic musical soundscape. Rahman’s stated compositional goal to create music for this film with “a very edgy

⁴⁶ “‘Jai Ho’ in Chicago (the Slumdog Millionaire Dance),” YouTube.com, entry posted June 24, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HxofohmohJY> (accessed August 20, 2009).

⁴⁷ “Jai Ho Is Goin’ Places Like In Argentina Amazing Video,” YouTube.com, entry posted July 17, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhRcpw4LmxA> (accessed August 20, 2009).

⁴⁸ “Jai Ho!!! (Hard Rock Version),” YouTube.com, entry posted September 17, 2009, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmp0nI_4DwY (accessed October 15, 2009).

kind of feel”⁴⁹ is certainly realized in this recording, which starts with a flurry of oscillating synthesizers and other ambient digital effects. Rahman, who is the only singer in this recording, introduces the first portion of the refrain. Apparently, there is no literal translation for “O...Saya” and the other vocables Rahman sings. Instead, it appears Rahman only wishes to express universal emotions, rather than communicate a clearly defined text.

Following this vocal introduction is a mixture of electronic beats that steadily increase in tempo until the song swells with pulsating rhythms. Rhythmic heavy down beats, highly distorted electric guitars, along with Rahman’s wails, evoke intense emotions of surprise and distress. Sound clips from the film intermittently juxtapose the young boy protagonists’ voices with the fast-paced, powerful song. (In the film during the song, the boys are running away from the police in complete terror.) Rahman splices one of the boy’s screaming the word “Go” and layers this sound repeatedly on top of the distorted electric guitar riff (and other digital effects) in order to match the sounds rhythmically. At other moments, Rahman reproduces the boys’ voices in order to create new rhythms. An unchanging bass line comprises the deep sound of this recording.

This three-minute song is devoid of any major harmonic changes until the last thirty seconds when Rahman sings the main chorus of “O...Saya.” During this section, Rahman’s voice is interwoven with spliced portions of M.I.A.’s rapping (M.I.A. is a British songwriter, record producer, rapper, visual artist and political activist of Tamil Sri Lankan origin). The lack of harmonic changes in this song is made seemingly even more static with M.I.A.’s rapping (rather than singing) which consists primarily of one pitch. As I will describe in more detail later,

⁴⁹ Joe Cellini. “Scoring ‘Slumdog Millionaire’ With Logic: An Interview With A. R. Rahman,” Apple.com, <http://www.apple.com/logicstudio/in-action/arahman/> (accessed March 14, 2010).

M.I.A. raps in English with lyrics that contain messages about poverty, independence struggles, and social revolution.

Discourse on Indian Vocal Timbre

In terms of timbre, the vocal aesthetics in Rahman's songs of SM starkly contrast with the singing styles of traditional Bollywood films. Overall, voices are not entirely "soft," as Kvetko defines Indipop singing style, nor do the vocals adhere to the same high-pitched vocal styles of typical Bollywood film music; instead, the vocal timbre is a mixture of Bollywood and Indipop aesthetics. In contrast to *filmi* aesthetics, the woman's voice in "Jai Ho" is primarily in the alto range with a smooth, less shrill sound quality. At the same time, while the female vocal line in "Jai Ho" is primarily unstrained, relaxed and mostly non-melismatic, she occasionally sings in the traditional Bollywood style. In contrast, in the first few moments at the start of the recording (0:15-0:23) and again in the middle of the song (2:55-3:08) a female vocal line is displayed reminiscent of female vocal styles in 1950s and 60s American country gospel, including those singers accompanying Jim Reeves on his recordings (one of Rahman's musical influences). Perhaps most unlike *filmigiti* is the lack of high-pitched melismatic female vocals in these songs, replaced by M.I.A.'s rapping in "O...Saya." Rahman also includes the use of the vocoder effect during the refrain passages of "Jai Ho" and throughout sung parts of "O...Saya"; a vocoder is an effect associated with the auto-tuning device (originally these were analog devices that predate digital music technology by several years) often employed in most current western pop genres that "fixes" the performer's pitch in an indiscreet manner, producing a robotic yet fluidly technologically engineered vocal quality.

The Blurring of Genres

Rahman's songs for SM challenge current notions of genre in India. I would like to compare its aesthetics with a popular music genre of India that first gained national popularity in the 1990s, Indipop. Generally described as a nonfilm-based music, Indipop as a subcultural genre "emerged as a significant challenge to the hegemony of popular film songs" (Kvetko 2004: 183-191). In 2004, ethnomusicologist Peter Kvetko raised the question, "Can the Indian Tune Go Global?" implying that Indian popular music could attract a western audience if it obtained a certain "sound" and a higher degree of sound production quality and aesthetics (2004: 185). In this article, he describes the sound and meanings associated with Indipop and the growth of the genre within the context of increased private consumption (e.g., satellite broadcast) and influences of western media corporations, such as CNN, HBO and MTV in India that developed alongside India's economic policy for liberalization in 1991.

As Kvetko points out, western rock music of the 1960s and 1970s heavily influenced Indian artists and producers who adopted its aesthetic qualities in the creation of Indipop. Indipop production aesthetics include a lack of heavy reverb, "clear" tones suitable for headphones and personal stereos, louder bass, less treble and softer vocals—qualities that distinguish Indipop from film music of the 1980s and early 90s (Kvetko 2004: 185). Meanwhile, film songs are generally reserved for "public consumption" as film music producers attempt to create a sonic space through film songs that resonates well in public spaces and transportation locations such as in movie theaters but also rickshaws and taxis, open-air markets with loud speakers, and truck stops. Two of Rahman's compositions discussed in this paper, "Jai Ho" and "O...Saya," seem to fit both classificatory modes of listening. The prominent shouts of "Jai Ho" and the melody of "O...Saya" are suitably heard when blasted through loud-speakers in an open-

air space, relating well to the film music aesthetic. At numerous social gatherings in a large auditorium and a gymnasium with the India Student Association at Bowling Green State University, I noticed that “Jai Ho” was played and heard quite prominently over any chatter, despite the use of poor-quality speakers. At the same time, these songs possess elements, including reverb and delay techniques and mid- to-low-range bass tones, that can be enjoyed and heard more clearly with high-quality speakers (in India, this would entail an air-conditioned vehicle) or headphones attached to a personal computer or MP3 player.

These songs, like Indipop songs, are shorter in length than *filmi* songs and involve taking a few notes from a *raga* that even audiences unfamiliar with Indian music can easily remember. Rahman employs an Indipop aesthetic with the conventional use of “the hook” in which the entire song is constructed around the buildup of a sequence of chords, a type of harmonic “tension and release” (Kvetko 2004: 185).

In addition, Indipop has a “preference for guitars and drums *over* the synthesizers and electronic drum machine of today’s film music” (Kvetko 2004: 185), and, in Rahman’s “Jai Ho,” an acoustic guitar is clearly heard in the recording (similar to his song “Tere Bina” from the 2007 Bollywood movie, *Guru*), relating more to the Indipop aesthetic. Further, Rahman adds simulated Japanese *taiko* drums along with the *dholak*, a large North Indian folk drum, to create an overall thunderous rhythmic quality in “Jai Ho” (ibid.). At Oscar performances of “Jai Ho,” including during the ceremony and at Oprah Winfrey’s “After Oscar Party,” Japanese *taiko* drums are prominently displayed (along with the *dholak*). This is also the lineup at a live performance of “Jai Ho” on the Jay Leno show in which Rahman is positioned in the center of the stage, shown playing his keyboard, while *taiko* drummers are shown playing simultaneously with Rahman.

Another production aesthetic that is generally characteristic of Indipop utilized by Rahman in his compositions for SM is diminished treble frequencies and a pounding boost of the bass. In “Jai Ho,” a rumbling and forceful bass drum is played on a downbeat at 0:14 and fully introduced at 0:18. When vocalists Sukhvinder Singh, Tanvi Shah and Mahalaxmi Iyer sing solo lines of the refrain passages, a less deep and voluminous bass drum is used but still present in a prominent techno and “house” beat underneath these passages. The same heavy bass drum appears during the singing of “Jai Ho” by an echoing amplified male voice juxtaposed simultaneously with the soloist lines.

Mediated Meanings

In Indian films, a specific *raga* can set a certain mood, a folk rhythm connotes a village or rural scene, and a techno beat “can evoke a modern character or milieu” (Getter and Balasubrahmaniyan 2008: 123). Beaster-Jones describes a type of Indian film music characterized by a “stylized electronic beat” that in recent years (in the 2000s) has become more prevalent in current “evergreen” films (classic Indian blockbuster films that often are remakes of older, classic films). Throughout the 1990s this electronic or “techno” beat was first associated specifically with Mumbai’s night club scenes: “Often meant to embody the negative influence of western materialism on urban India, the music composed for these venues consisted of stylized songs representing contemporary musics that were popular outside of India” (Beaster-Jones 2009: 428). Some scholars, however, attribute different reasons for the electronic beat’s recent attractiveness. For example, Paul Greene suggests that across South Asia during the 1990s, techno music, although first introduced in western societies, became increasingly popular among Indian youth (2005: 11). The affinity and cultural staying power of techno music is best

explained as a cultural preference for the “high tech” in south Asian countries, where, according to Greene, artists make music through the “conspicuous use of digital effects (for example, reverb, delay, flange), quantized (computer-perfected) rhythms, perfectly balanced frequency response, and the frequent use of obviously synthesized or electronically manipulated sounds” (ibid.). South Asians’ youth inclination to listen to digitized musics such as techno music is a desire to be connected to the “positive associations of the new, the cutting edge, the cosmopolitan, the sophisticated...highly prized prestige markers” (ibid.). Thus, the techno beat may be another example of audience desire for new, cosmopolitan sounds in the construction of one’s self-hood and identity in a complex, modern society. In addition, Rahman’s compositional approach, which utilizes digital technology, reflects his knowledge about these electronic sounds (via his consumption of this type of music) and his ability to make music that appeals to audiences. Rahman is not only a composer but also one of the producers whose authority is “based on the assumption that they will deliver hits because they listen with the ears of the consumer...The success of producers [is] thus dependent on their ability to completely identify with the public” (Théberge 1997: 218). Rahman’s use of synthesizers and other digital musical instruments enables him to produce the “right sound,” one that fits within the context of this film in order to draw his audience’s attention (ibid.: 186).

Beaster-Jones describes the ambivalence of some Bollywood evergreen film music directors towards the use of digital technology. He writes how some Hindi film song composers and arrangers “take some pains to conceal the use of synthesizers” in their songs. This preference in Bollywood to conceal the use of synthesizers contrasts with the “remix” genre of India which “tend[s] to heighten their use, applying sound effects that clearly reflect influences from transnational dance or electronica genres” (Beaster-Jones 2009: 437). In India, remix refers to a

mainstream genre that came to dominate nonfilm popular markets in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Vocally-centered and with limited song fragmentation, Indian remix differs from transnational remix-based genres like dub. Rather, Indian remix ensures the recognizability of the original film song; popular songs are transformed into contemporary dance music with musical emphasis on low bass frequencies.

I suggest that Rahman, unlike many other older film music directors, chooses to use musical aesthetics found in nonfilm based genres of India, often adopted and adapted styles from the West, such as techno and rock, to create a highly synthesized, electronically grounded style for his film music and to attract younger, urban middle-class Indian audiences who are the vast majority of the “remix” dance music genre (and Indipop) fans of India. His use of digital technology in composing film music sets him apart from older Bollywood composers whose use of electronic or “techno” beats were meant only to evoke negative feelings of seedy western club scenes and frivolous lifestyles of over-consumption. Instead, Rahman utilizes these sounds within the context of the film to shock listeners and subvert traditional notions and convey a heightened sense of emotion for a film that depicts serious, current-day problems such as unjust cruelty, oppression and systemic poverty in Mumbai’s overcrowded slums. As stated above, the song “O...Saya,” occurs non-diegetically during a scene in the film as the two young boys Salim and Jamal are running through Mumbai’s slums. Meanwhile, Rahman’s music manages to portray the boys running in pace to the beats of the rhythm, creating a human sense of urgency and immediacy that fully engages the viewer as if the images were in “real-time.”

Equally important in creating this overall volatile effect is Rahman’s inclusion of M.I.A.’s rapping in “O...Saya.” Her rapping, coupled with subversive lyrics, presents post-modern sarcasm that criticizes society’s attempts to reform dangerous misbehavior and curb

delinquency which only tackle surface-level problems: “They can’t touch me/ Run so fast they can’t even catch me/ When you live for the buck/ We get for the family/ One day I wanna be a star/ so I get to hang in a bar/ I’ll go to Vegas with the playas/ Just to forget my scars.”

In the West since the 1980s, technology has played a major role in the formation of rap and electronic dance music aesthetics. With the emergence of sampling and drum machines in the 1980s, dance music with a “heavy bass sound” came to express African-American cultural identity (Théberge 1997: 197). Rahman’s electronic dance music “sound” combined with M.I.A.’s rapping may present an expression of social criticism and collective subcultural priorities, even criticizing the West in its handling of global problems. Rahman’s use of these sounds reaffirms his position outside the mainstream in the U.S., yet, at the same time his style of music also attracts mainstream listeners within the United States. Nonetheless, Rahman, as a popular music-maker, participates in the creation of pop music formations, which according to Théberge “retain[s] the sense of identity that sounds carry with them—their ability to act as a kind of referent for the object that is the source of the sound—thus leading to an aesthetic fundamentally based in collage and ironic juxtaposition” (1997: 204). While this juxtaposition of sounds may not mean much for new listeners of Rahman’s music (including American and western audiences of SM who mostly have been exposed to Rahman’s music for the first time), for more seasoned listeners of Bollywood music and remixes, Rahman presents these songs with additional layers of meaning and contextual references. For one consultant, a second generation Indian-American studying at The Ohio State University and an avid listener of Rahman’s music, Rahman’s music for SM is “Bollywood music transcended to a whole new critical level” (Interview April 22, 2009). At the same time, western audiences, who may lack experience with

Bollywood music, are nevertheless enabled to create new meanings and associations attached to Rahman's hybridic compositions.

Based on my analysis of Rahman's songs for SM and using Jeremy Wallach's notion of "techno-hybridity" (2008b), I argue that Rahman mixes sounds that include Indipop, techno, melodic tunes from regional Indian traditions, as well as a diverse array of traditionally western and Indian instrumentation, thereby emulating styles he has been exposed to as a musician but creatively fusing them together in order to produce desired effects. Perhaps fundamental to this is the idea that consumption and musical production practices collide at faster rates for musicians in an age of digital audio recording technologies (Th  berge 1997: 243). Throughout Bollywood's history, film songs have been cosmopolitan, reflecting trends in global popular music (with the West usually leading these trends) and incorporating western and Indian instrumentation and musical idioms to create a hybrid of transnational and local music. With digital technology and satellite broadcast, global popular musics travel at much quicker speeds than in the past, influencing the consumption and production of popular film music. Therefore, as a film music director that has been recognized as an accomplished popular Tamil film music composer who has crossed over as a Hindi film music composer, Rahman is proving himself as a leader in global popular music in the United States.

Rather than composing film music to depict the "westoxication" (Gupta 2000: 21-26) of the Indian youth through dance club scenes in Mumbai or Chennai, Rahman uses heavy techno bass rhythms and loud sounds (that I argued earlier can be mediated in public spaces as well as through private consumption) in order to portray the story of SM and messages in the film about the struggles of slum life in India. I concur with Jeremy Wallach who writes about the effects of such mediated sounds upon the listener:

The politics of bass and treble are intimately tied in with recorded music's strategic deployment in social space. Loud sounds in public places inevitably have political effects, and musics with screaming high notes and pounding bass rhythms are more likely to produce a strong response, whether it is utter revulsion, fear, or powerful identification with these transgressive sonic presences (2003: 48).

While Rahman produces music for a film about Indian society in *SM*, the ability of the music to effectively transport an audience viewer in places like Bowling Green, Ohio, to the social scenes of Mumbai's urban sprawl is worth noting. Rahman's music for *SM* becomes the space through which "transgressive sonic presences" engage the listener to experience realms of Indian culture, including the unsettling realities of life for South Asian slum dwellers, and ultimately, the lives of marginalized citizens throughout the world.

Of course, for anyone who has seen *SM*, it is a film that also celebrates triumph over despair, finding your true destiny (and the love of your life), winning an exorbitant amount of money, and rising above your circumstances. But the point I would like to make here is that while Rahman's music sonically bridges a cultural gap between India and the West, it ultimately transcends national, linguistic and cultural boundaries through a fusion of sounds. It appears that Rahman's use of digital technology enables him to create timbres and styles that not only Indian youth might identify with but also American audiences who are familiar with genres or subgenres of electronic music. In the words of one consultant, a white male studying as an undergraduate student who characterizes himself as a heavy metal fan, "this music reminds me of Moby, if Moby were industrial" (Interview November 5, 2009). I concur with Paul Théberge who argues that "in the age of electronic reproduction, with recordings and radio disseminating and reinforcing 'sound' as an identifying mark of contemporary music-making, individual 'sounds' have come to carry the same commercial and aesthetic weight as the melody or the lyric in pop songs" (1997: 195). I will describe next how the song "Jai Ho" is refashioned into an

American “remix” pop song, fully relying on the “sound” of Rahman’s original composition yet incorporating other elements, as enabled through technology, to produce new rhythms and timbres.

Further Beyond the Diaspora

Rahman collaborates with the American pop group, The Pussycat Dolls, who incorporate the chorus of “Jai Ho” into the remix song “Jai Ho! (You Are My Destiny).” This production of this song extends the circulation of Rahman’s original music further within the arena of popular culture and outside any clearly defined “Indian space.”⁵⁰ The Pussycat Doll’s version is complete with English lyrics (except for the singing of “Jai ho”) and new melodies added to the chorus, similar to how John Legend sang with Rahman in a live duet performance during the Oscar ceremony. Nicole Scherzinger, lead singer of The Pussycat Dolls, sings a quasi-mellifluous rendition of “Indian” scales (1:40-1:46). A vocoder effect aids her singing by producing a seemingly fluid melisma (whether or not the producer of this song was striving to conceal her inability to sing with an “Indian” flare, the effect still manages to create a mysterious and exotic sound). Later in the recording, this exotic vocal timbre is harmonized with another female singing voice. This harmonized singing produces an eerie effect, especially for western listeners who may not be familiar with hearing pitches harmonized in seconds and fourths. Since Indian music does not contain parallel harmonies in seconds and fourths, there appears to be a conflation of exotic elements presented in this song.

Although these few seconds in the recording are somewhat strange, these foreign elements fit nicely within the context of a western pop music video production. The music video

⁵⁰ This song was first recorded in 2009 and released on February 23, 2009 on the U.S. iTunes Store.

depicts flashy images of attractive young females, a busy, carnival-esque marketplace and *taiko* drummers. These visual images are combined with pulsating rhythms along with female pop singing and intermittent female rapping about sexual attraction and romantic fantasies.

Therefore, any non-western elements of the recording and music video only add to the alluring appeal of an exotic and imagined otherness. The music video for “Jai Ho (You Are My Destiny)” portrays the female group dancing seductively in a busy foreign marketplace and wearing accessories including bangles, *bendis* and tight blouses (a midriff revealing garment worn underneath the fabric of a sari, a traditional Indian dress). Perhaps “this curious overlap is part of the supercultural blurring of the ‘Other’” (Slobin 2008: 16) in the American imagination of Indianness (i.e., commodity fetishization of Indianness in the 21st century). What this music video provides is a visual representation of what it might look like to dance to this remix song. Unlike the original version which has several intermittent seconds of silence or inaudible beats, the remix version has no moments of rhythmic interruption. The danceability of the remix version was clearly communicated during a Diwali After-Party at Bowling Green State University. The student in charge of playing music for the night switched playing “Jai Ho” in favor of the remix version after he noticed that guests were not enthusiastically dancing to the original.

Rahman’s decision to collaborate with The Pussycat Dolls and create a remix is one way to prolong the commercial life of his song “Jai Ho.” In an interview with Time Magazine in 2009, Rahman explains what motivated him to create a remix:

Well, what motivated it was, um, it’s a film soundtrack, *Slumdog* is a film soundtrack. I didn’t want that to die as a film soundtrack. I wanted that to extend and go to the young audience too. So The Pussycat Dolls, in my opinion, were one of those contenders. And even though all of us had a little bit of apprehensions, we made sure that we told that this is a song about destiny. It’s about love and all that stuff, and about victory, so don’t make

it obscene and make it as loveable and a respected thing...we were all very conscious of that.⁵¹

By collaborating with The Pussycat Dolls, Rahman is able to forge the perfect remix, a familiar musical format similar to the making of remix dance songs so widespread among South Asian youth. In addition, Rahman participates in cultural/musical practice in the production and dissemination of Indian popular music, making sure that his songs reside within two contexts, within the film itself and outside the film (Morcom 2007: 54-55). Rahman also extends the life of his music by performing live concerts in various large U.S. cities. This past summer in 2010, Rahman announced his U.S. tour: “Jai Ho, A. R. Rahman: The Journey Home World Tour 2010.”

The socio-cultural ramifications of this musical production with The Pussycat Dolls, however, point to a larger discussion of appropriation and cultural borrowing. As one American informant remarks about The Pussycat Dolls’s music video for “Jai Ho (You Are My Destiny),” “We are used to having our stuff copied by others around the world; not the other way around” (Interview November 5, 2009). In this statement, my consultant speaks from the perspective of his own American background that American films and music are usually emulated by non-western societies but that increasingly, non-western cultural productions are seen as viable entertainment in the West.

In the next chapter, I contextualize my research on Rahman within the discourses in the field of ethnomusicology on topics related to the study of technology and popular music. I explore the globalist discourses addressing these related topics and how Rahman’s music for SM challenges and confronts what is “world music.” I discuss how Rahman’s music for SM presents

⁵¹ TIME Magazine, “TIME Ten Questions/TIME Magazine Interviews: A. R. Rahman,” April 21, 2009, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TqUbiOgEb0w> (accessed March 19, 2010).

a divergence from other “world music” productions thereby challenging popular notions of hybridity and the role (and ownership) of technology. I also discuss Rahman’s music within the context of Bollywood’s growing appeal among new audiences in the West and how this informs larger musical trends within a transnational media landscape.

CHAPTER FOUR. TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES WITH SONGS THAT TRAVEL THE GLOBE

“In dismissing Bollywood songs as ‘just music,’ we not only risk ignoring and reinforcing the hegemonic values of this music, we also miss the potential for social change implicit in the musical exchanges that characterize Bollywood as a global phenomenon.”

Pavitra Sundar (2008: 172)

“Contemporary music-making demands that any musical sound be as available as any other; technological reproduction guarantees availability and, in so doing, contributes to the increasing commodification and industrialization of world musical culture.”

Paul Théberge (1997: 203)

As transnational listeners become increasingly familiar with Rahman’s music through *Slumdog Millionaire*, they join an expanding urban middle-class youth population in India (and an Indian diaspora) already familiar with the latest sounds of Bollywood and/or Rahman’s previous work. Rahman was, for the most part, an entirely unknown name in the American mainstream prior to the 2009 Academy Awards, though perhaps Rahman was slightly more familiar among niche British audiences after producer Andrew Lloyd Webber commissioned Rahman to compose music for the musical *Bombay Dreams* in 2006. After the Oscar success of SM, however, Rahman gained immediate musical stardom and commercial prestige in the United States. Shortly after the release of the SM soundtrack, Rahman’s music suddenly became more accessible to western audiences (Rahman’s music can be purchased on both iTunes and Amazon.com, two major sites in the global market). After winning at the Oscars, Rahman’s older compositions were immediately redistributed on separate compilation albums such as *The Best of A. R. Rahman*, which features songs originally from popular Bollywood and Kollywood films from the 1990s to the present. These “best of” albums are a way for new international audiences

of Rahman's music to catch up, in a sense, or learn about music perhaps they never knew existed.

I explain this situation not only to highlight Rahman's increasing popularity in the West, and the global commercial distribution of Rahman's music, but also to discuss the role of the global music industry in the promotion and marketing of musical genres in the West. I am interested in investigating genre classifications, their impact on the musical reception of western consumers of non-western musics, as well as how genres inform listeners about cultures and identities. Although this issue can be superficial, I believe genre classifications and the ways in which corporate entities describe music has a profound social impact by influencing individuals' perceptions about the world around them. The music entertainment industry mediates music for the consumer, creating genre codes and expectations that, in turn, shape what music people might listen to and wish to experience (Negus 1999: 4).

Rahman's musical appeal in the West demands a discussion beyond the blurring of Indian popular music genres and western-conceived genres as well. At a conference where I presented a paper on Rahman's music for SM, an individual asked me a question in a room full of ethnomusicologists, music scholars and folklorists, that I thought was somewhat alarming: "what is the difference between A. R. Rahman and Paul Simon's music?" This chapter addresses what I believe is a major difference between Rahman's music and that of Paul Simon. Thus, I now turn to a discussion about the ubiquitous genre of "world music," a label used in western societies that signifies music that is created or performed by non-western artists, and therefore "othered." The global music industry has made attempts to market Rahman and his music as world music on iTunes.com and Amazon.com, despite the fact that Rahman won Best Original Score and Best Song in the Academy Awards, not Best Foreign Music. Rahman also won a

Grammy for “Best Film song of the Year” in 2009, beating competition that included Bruce Springsteen. Nonetheless, the goal of this chapter is to understand the processes by which non-western artists are classified as “other” and explain how Rahman transcends conventional genre-bound categories. I also suggest that Rahman conforms to modernist ideals within the global music industry as a composer and producer.

The Commodification of the World’s Music

Starting in the 1980s, throughout the 1990s and into the new millennium, non-western artists have tapped into the western market via music projects/collaborations with famous musical artists from the West (i.e., Peter Gabriel, Paul Simon). Much of this music is commodified and classified under the industry genre label today as “world music.” At first glance, such practices seem progressive in the popular music industry, perhaps helping to promote the careers of lesser-known artists. However, these hybrid approaches also raise questions about artistic authenticity and the appropriation of sounds from unaccredited creative sources and towards reproducing “institutions of patronage,” positioning power with those that supply non-western musicians with their “attendant rights of validation” (Feld and Keil 1994: 270). With production control in the hands of western producers (and/or famous western musical artists), world music is produced and packaged in order to attract a western audience, cultures with the greatest buying power. Laurent Aubert claims that world music is “the last temptation of the West” (2007: 53). According to Aubert, world music as an industry adheres to an “ethics of integration” that comes with a price: “they imply a new North-South relation in which the North erects itself as a model and ideal market for the South” (2007: 55). To me, this statement implies a shift in balances in which more and more non-western artists and producers may seek potential

star-power success among audiences outside their native countries. At the same time, I think Aubert's statement (although indicative of a global market enterprise) over-generalizes the conditions of many non-western musicians who choose to consume, create, and produce popular music.

In his research with popular music in Indonesia, Jeremy Wallach describes “techno-hybridity” as a form of “self-conscious musical mixing” and how musical hybridities are “strategic,” the “conscious calculation[s]” and results from “a conscious effort to introduce ‘local’ elements into a global form—to add something new and thus to participate in the replication of culture characteristic of the metaculture of modernity” (Wallach 2008: 259). I think these conclusions about what motivates popular musicians in Indonesia can certainly apply to Rahman, as well as other popular music makers from non-western societies, who create new music in order to present to the rest of the world their musical takes on a particular genre, whether rap, rock, metal, electronic music or film music. This process not only locates artists within their own musical cultures, but also reveals shared global music sensibilities that sonically bridge new audiences to finding new sounds.

As Steven Feld points out, the promotion of “world beat” and “world music” has allowed for “greater exposure and market power [that] has improved the prospects for survival and development of local musics in unexpected ways” (Feld and Keil 1994: 273). I argue that A. R. Rahman's music for SM exposes to the world a stylized version of his established brand of film music, music also heard throughout his songs in today's popular Indian films and recordings. In SM, Rahman blurs the lines between genre-bound stylistics of western rock, electronica, Indipop and *filmi*, creating a hybrid of sounds suitable for a global popular music audience. Whether mediated through a movie theater sound system or listened to as a recording (e.g., with

headphones or loudspeakers) apart from the film, his sound transcends cultural space and place, and reaches a wider audience.

The Many Guises of World Music

Music created by musicians from anywhere outside the West is relegated a second class status as “hybrid” to the hegemony of western music productions. Timothy Taylor asserts that the notion of hybridity, when used within the corporate music industry, is a marketing term, a way of identifying and commodifying a “new form of difference” that simply reproduces old prejudices and hegemonies (2007: 142-143). Therefore, although non-western popular musics have in the past been successful in the West, usually these styles are adopted by western musicians and sold as Anglo-American musics. For instance, throughout the 1960s numerous British and American musicians such as the Beatles, the Kinks, and the Byrds incorporated Indian instrumentation and styles in their pop songs (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 25). Often music industries conceal non-western styles with western repackaging and/or genre classifications.

Beninoise musician Angelique Kidjo’s album *Oremi* (1998), which was not traditional Beninoise music but an electronic pop album, was described using terms from an older essentialist discourse and colonialist tropes such as “natural” and “Third World,” or both “electronic and organic,” which as Taylor points out are coded terms in which “electronic” presumably means “western” and “organic” means “African” (2007: 143). Although Kidjo’s music is technologically innovative and hard to define, reviewers at the time this album was released tried to reduce her music to some sort of “recognizable style.” Another reviewer for her music wrote that “through Kidjo employs many elements familiar to techno fans, she makes that

genre sound utterly sterile next to her funky, thoroughly organic hybrid” (quoted in Taylor 2007: 143). Her music, despite its sound, is still seen as African and therefore, according to the western music industry’s definition, qualifies as world music. As Taylor explains, hybrid musics are celebrated for their authenticity (e.g., in the use of indigenous sounds and instrumentation, “raw materials” or an exoticized “front man”) and in turn are cast as “Other” and labeled as world music.

It appears that some western listeners prefer Bollywood “kitsch classics” because, for them, it represents India as exotic and authentic. Reviewing *Beginner’s Guide to Bollywood Volume 1* (2003), featuring forty tracks divided into three themes, “Vintage Bollywood,” “Funky Bollywood” and “Modern Bollywood,” listener Keith Gillard writes: “The first disc is stellar, incredible, full of classics which you will love instantly. The second disc is very funky, with breakbeats, sound effects, and hot dirty grooves. The third disc is my least favourite...it has a decidedly '90's slant to it, sounding quite a bit like American soundtrack(sic) pieces from the same period” (San Jose, California, May 20, 2004).⁵² In reference to the “Vintage Bollywood” tracks, another reviewer for this album posts, “These singers (asha bohsle, mohommad rafi, lata...) offer a very wide spectrum of vocals and instrumentation not commonly found in today's digitally enhanced pop junk. the cd makes you dance and i find it quite hilarious too” (Allentown, Pennsylvania, November 30, 2003).⁵³ From these comments, it appears that some listeners equate Indian Bollywood music with a less than up-to-date style and sound, technologically less refined and therefore authentic and traditional.

⁵² Amazon.com,
http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B000095SLI/ref=s9_simh_gw_p15_i4?pf_rd_m=ATVPDKIKX0DER&pf_rd_s=center-2&pf_rd_r=0WEN9ZD2A4K08HHQ6KVE&pf_rd_t=101&pf_rd_p=470938631&pf_rd_i=507846 (accessed June 7, 2010).

⁵³ Ibid.

Kidjo's earlier album *Aye* (1994) serves as a good example of my next point about musical authenticity and modernist ideals in the music industry. On this album, music journalists criticized Kidjo's music as sounding "too Western," or for selling out to commercial western pop styles, or for working with western producers (Taylor 2007: 143). Kidjo's music was not deemed valuable or marketable because it did not *sound* like authentic African music for western listeners. What these two examples involving Kidjo reveal are conceptual shifts within the music industry from "authenticity-as-pure" to "authenticity-as-hybrid" (ibid.).

I think Rahman, however, further complicates matters. Not only did Rahman produce his own music for the SM soundtrack (as well as composing the songs, except for M.I.A.'s "Paper Planes"), but he also manages to create songs that *sound* Indian, like Bollywood. Rahman and his music present a divergence from these conceptual usages of loaded terms and superficial images commonly cast upon non-western popular music artists.

As a popular music artist with a diverse background of musical experience and exposure, Rahman and his music neither ideally support nor promote the goals of the world music industry, which in the 1980s and 1990s sought to present the "ethnic purity"⁵⁴ of indigenous music from the global South (i.e. traditional musics) to global consumers. I suggest that Rahman's fame in the United States is unlike what has often occurred in the past for non-western artists whose hybrid styles of music are marketed for a mainstream western audience by the music industry.

⁵⁴ Gopal and Moorti state that "the reinvention of the song and dance sequence in unlikely places in the global North demonstrates the aesthetics of sampling, pastiche, and creative appropriation that mark postmodern global cultural formations. These hybrid, sampled musics are in sharp contrast to world music that asserts its ethnic purity." Although Gopal and Moorti discuss a different socio-musical context involving the creation of new songs by sampling Bollywood sounds, I think the type of "hybrid" musics that they discuss applies to Rahman's pop music. I argue in this chapter that Rahman's music is not a form of "world music" but a form of Indian popular music. Gopal and Moorti, eds., *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 9.

Rahman utilizes state-of-the-art technology to create his own Indian popular music, a culturally complex hybrid music that presents a new music-culture paradigm, what ethnomusicologist and popular music scholar Jeremy Wallach theorizes as reflecting “pluralistic, polyvalent, hybridic realities with multiple ‘origins.’”⁵⁵ The global dissemination and circulation of Rahman’s music is capable of producing a wide variety of socio-cultural meanings for diverse cultural groups and listeners.

Wallach’s statement suggests a growing complexity of global musical-cultural flows that emerge from various social and cultural movements and encounters of North and South, East and West that result from global capitalism. This presents a new paradigm shift within academia, or in other words, “the abandonment of what was the dominant paradigm in ethnomusicology and anthropology during the 1970s and 1980s: acculturation” (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 25). This paradigm was an attempt to understand processes of musical change within otherwise presumably static and traditional cultures. This involved contact between two distinct cultures to create musical syncretism. Mass-mediated musics, according to theories of acculturation, were attempts to homogenize the world’s musical cultures that would lead to a form of cultural “grey-out” (Lomax 1968), an issue that some ethnomusicologists and folklorists feared. By the late 1990s, however, this sort of theory was no longer entirely supported by academics for its “unacceptable essentialism and lack of sufficient attention to global-historical structures of power” (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 25). My research on Rahman and the production and consumption of his music reveals that the export of western sounds and technologies has not led to a kind of cultural “grey-out.” As Laurent Aubert states, “Globalization of culture is not, as we

⁵⁵ Jeremy Wallach, “Analytical Approaches to Asian Popular Culture: Four Key Concepts” (presentation, POPC Colloquium, Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, OH, January 21, 2010).

believed for a long time, an exclusive synonym for the Westernization of the rest of the planet, because the sonic invasion has been reciprocal, even if we assume responsibility for its initial impulse” (2007: 51).

Rahman’s music is difficult to define, especially according to music industry standards. Since Rahman possesses the skills to manipulate digital technology and synthesize sounds in ways to produce music that appeals to a global pop music audience, his music is less recognizable as one distinct genre, at least in the West. One editorial review for MTV attempts to avoid Orientalist connotations and vaguely describes the music for SM as “hip-hop fusion of a *very up-to-date* kind.”⁵⁶ Rahman’s music is still described as a “fusion” (another code word for “hybrid” and a term often used to connote Asianness within American culture), but using this label does not blatantly reduce his music to any one recognizable sound. Furthermore, the term “kitschy” is not used to describe Rahman’s music, unlike how most earlier Bollywood film music was often labeled.

This system of categorization raises an important question: Is Rahman unique as a Bollywood film music composer or representative of other popular music artists from India? Rahman could be considered unique in that he possesses economic resources that perhaps are not within the grasp of the majority of Indian musicians today. At the same time, increased affordability and accessibility to electronic systems along with a growing Indian middle-class might enable many privileged Indian musicians to utilize these devices. It has taken nearly two decades for Rahman to gain wealth, recognition and achieve a highly-respected status in India. More importantly, however, is that Rahman possesses the cultural capital and musical skills that

⁵⁶ Amazon.com, http://www.amazon.com/Slumdog-Millionaire-R-Rahman/dp/B001LX0JK6/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&s=music&qid=1276624638&sr=8-1 (accessed Jan 25, 2010).

enable him to manipulate and compose technologically innovative music. Musicians around the world, including those in the West who may own the same technologies, may not carry out the same musical practices or have the knowledge or cultural capital that Rahman has gained. In addition, since his childhood, Rahman has been fortunate to be fully immersed in the musical practices and lifestyles of other well-known South Indian music directors; he further worked with North Indian musicians such as Zakir Hussain and Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan. Lastly, Rahman is unique in that his film music currently monopolizes the Indian film music industry (Bollywood and Kollywood).

Though he is unique, I think that Rahman represents the potential for future popular musicians throughout the non-western world to be internationally recognized as modern music-makers. Furthermore, as Rahman records and other non-western musicians and vocalists to create new music, he breaks traditional hierarchies of patronage. In this sense, Rahman breaks through as Indian Paul Simon or Peter Gabriel of the Bollywood industry. For Rahman, this possibility continues to motivate him as a musician from India. Rahman also expresses how he hopes more Indian musicians will choose futures in music and be granted recognition for their musical talents and abilities. He states “We really need that space for creativity in India right now...Most of all, I just want that to be recognized.”⁵⁷ Furthermore, Rahman views that this individual desire to be recognized in the West can be achieved by encouraging solidarity through common musical practices shared among other Indian and non-western musicians. As Keith Negus points out, this is a common inclination for many popular musicians:

Musicians are notoriously individualistic, continually questing for ‘autonomy’ and ‘independence’ and desiring the ‘freedom’ to pursue their own whims. Yet at the same

⁵⁷ Emily Wax, “‘Slumdog’ Composer’s Crescendo Of a Career” *Washingtonpost.com* February 19, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/story/2009/02/18/ST2009021803953.html> (accessed May 19, 2010).

time musicians are continually contributing to solidarities in a way that dissolves any simply individual/collective dichotomy or pattern of us/them musical discrimination. The practices of musicians and their fans are continually bringing about such possibilities within, between and across genres (1999: 183).

Rather than functioning as a music producer who has the power to control musical practices of other musicians, Rahman views himself as an independent artist-producer who has the technological capabilities to freely create and manipulate sounds. I also suggest that Rahman views technology as the vehicle for musicians to pursue various individualistic musical practices, unbound by top-down hegemonic structures and traditional production practices. These changes and musical practices are only possible through the decentralization of the recording studio and the “increasingly dispersed nature of global music production” (Stokes 2004: 59).

While I view these forms of transnational popular musics (and Rahman’s music) as musical embodiments of a “new and effective cultural politics from the margins” (Born and Hesmondhalgh 2000: 27), I do not want to overstate the cultural power of Rahman’s music. I realize that Rahman’s music still functions within the structures of a global music industry. Rahman’s music and the way in which the music industry and the Academy Awards promote and support his music all might contribute to “global myth-making.” Some might argue that Rahman simply belongs to an elite group of artists who are internationally promoted via major labels of the global music industry. Or, Rahman’s music, marked by digital music technologies, could simply be used by the music industry to sell and promote new artists with unique “sounds.”

On the contrary, I think that the decentralization of market forces and Rahman’s control over nearly all aspects of the music production process challenge these notions. I think the circulation of his music and international success follows a different logic in which Rahman is internationally successful “*despite* the music industry” (Negus 1999: 171). More research is

needed to learn about the circulation of Rahman's music: who contributes to global music formations and how Rahman's music is promoted in the future.

Furthermore, the dissemination of Rahman's music into the international market enables Westerners to become more familiar with new forms of Bollywood music and to compare this music with older Bollywood music styles. Rahman's music, characterized by digital technology, helps confront issues of inauthenticity, challenging essentialist assumptions that Indian music, whether folk, classical or pop, resists progress.

CONCLUSION

As this thesis shows, Rahman's music has attracted audiences from around the world to Bollywood film music. It appears that Rahman transcends India and has become, to at least some extent, a global citizen. His career provides good evidence: he has traveled around the world multiple times, composed while in flight, and made films for Hollywood blockbusters. His cultural background and story as a musician in India is a reminder of complex interactions, experiences and negotiations that mark the lives of contemporary popular music makers around the world. Although Rahman is Indian, he cannot be considered as coming from the "third world." Rahman belongs to the cultural elite of India, a constituency that lives a lifestyle similar to Rahman's. Despite cultural differences among populations of India, Rahman remains a national icon of Indian film music. He remains committed as a film music composer for Bollywood and Kollywood. So although Rahman is recognized in the West, he does not sellout to the West. Rahman does not conform to western sounds to create Hollywood music; instead, by holding onto his Indian culture, he chooses to express and create a new form of global popular music that appeals to a wider global audience.

Rahman's Oscar success, musical style, and worldwide attention reflect a shift in modes of music production and global audience reception as a consequence of globalization, making it, in Keith Negus's words, "difficult to identify any power that might be directing such movements" (1996: 177). Rahman, who once stood at the periphery of the Anglo-American mainstream global music scene, now moves into the center. Rahman's music for SM is a form of transnational music characterized by a sense of "converging nation-less culture." Rahman and his music for this film blurs neat distinctions that identify dominant and subordinate culture, mixing up things in a way that leads to new forms of "global culture" (Negus 1996: 197).

In light of Rahman's work and its recognition, I believe scholars must confront an analytical shift characterized by ever-increasing global flows and transnational processes in which musical practices are taken up and experienced in multiple locations simultaneously. In this thesis I show how these processes apply to the production and consumption of A. R. Rahman's "Jai Ho" and "O Saya" and suggest that the appeal for his music, especially among non-Indians, is an indication that Rahman's Bollywood music is no longer viewed as kitsch.

In this realization, Rahman's music for SM represents more than what Edward K. Chan describes as the "intersection between kitsch and cultural difference" for the American market, the "quaint echo of the American past reflected back with excess" in an "'ethnification' of kitsch" in his reference to Bollywood films (2008: 277). Instead, I believe Rahman's music represents what George Lipsitz calls a "contradictory manifestation...of the emergence of digital capitalism, an economic and social system that produces distinctly new kinds of people in order to meet the needs of new forms of production, distribution and consumption"(Lipsitz 2007: xvii). Since Rahman's music for SM blurs genre distinctions, it provides the space for intercultural interaction and experience through music. Furthermore, Rahman and his Bollywood sound represent a possible breakthrough and an avenue through which more non-western artists can tap into the global popular music scene.

REFERENCES

- Adorno, Theodor W. [1932] 2002. *Essays on Music*. Ed. Richard D. Leppert. Translated by Susan H. Gillespie. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Appadurai, Arjun. 1996. *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Arnold, Alison E. 1993. "Aspects of Production and Consumption in the Popular Hindi Film Song Industry." *Asian Music* 24(1): 124-136.
- . 1991. *Hindi filmi git: on the history of Indian popular music*. Unpublished PhD thesis completed at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign: 112. Quoted in Anna Morcom, *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007).
- Aubert, Laurent. 2007. *The Music of the Other: New Challenges for Ethnomusicology in a Global Age*. Translated by Carla Ribeiro. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Barnouw, Erik and S. Krishnaswamy. 1980. *Indian Film*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Beaster-Jones, Jayson. 2009. "Evergreens to Remixes: Hindi Film Songs and India's Popular Music Heritage." *Ethnomusicology* 53(3): 425-448.
- Benjamin, Walter. [1936] 1968. "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." In *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn, 219-53. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Bhattacharyya, Nilanjana and Monika Mehta. 2008. "From Bombay to Bollywood: Tracking Cinematic and Musical Tours." In *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, edited by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, 105-131. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Booth, Gregory D. 2008a. *Behind the Curtain: Making Music in Mumbai's Film Studio*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- . "That Bollywood Sound." 2008b. In *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, edited by Mark Slobin, 85-113. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Born, Georgina, and David Hesmondhalgh, Eds. 2000. *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Chan, Edward K. 2008. "Food and Cassettes: Encounters with Indian Filmsong." In *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, edited by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, 264-287. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

- David, Bettina. "Intimate Neighbors: Bollywood, *Dangdut* Music, and Globalizing Modernities in Indonesia." In *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, edited by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, 179-199. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Dirlik, Arif. 2007. *Global Modernity: Modernity in the Age of Global Capitalism*. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Feld, Steven. 1994. "From Schizophonia to Schismogenesis: On the Discourses and Commodification Practices of 'World Music' and 'World Beat.'" In *Music Grooves: Essays and Dialogues*. Charles Keil and Steven Feld, 257-289. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Frith, Simon. 2000. "The Discourse of World Music." In *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, edited by Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, 305-322. Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Getter, Joseph and B. Balasubrahmaniyan. 2008. "Tamil Film Music: Sound and Significance." In *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, edited by Mark Slobin, 114-151. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Gopal, Sangita and Sujata Moorti, Eds. 2008. *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Greene, Paul D. 2005. "Introduction: Wired Sound and Sonic Cultures." In *Wired For Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, 1-22. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Gupta, Dipankar. 2000. *Mistaken Modernity: India Between Worlds*. New Delhi: Harpers Collins Publishers.
- Kvetko, Peter. 2004. "Can the Indian Tune Go Global?" *The Drama Review* 48(4): 183-191.
- Larkin, Brian. 2008. "asdf." In *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*, edited by Mark Slobin, Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- _____. 2003. "Indian Films and Nigerian Lovers: Media and the Creation of Parallel Modernities," *Africa* 67(3): 406-40.
- Lipsitz, George. 2007. *Footsteps In The Dark: The Hidden Histories of Popular Music*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Lysloff, Rene T. A. and Leslie C. Gay, Jr. 2003. "Introduction: Ethnomusicology in the Twenty-first Century." In *Music and Technoculture*, edited by Rene T. A. Lysloff and Leslie C. Gay, 1-22. Jr. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

- Maira, Sunaina Marr. 2002. *Desis in the House: Indian American Youth Culture in New York City*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Majumdar, Neepa. 2001. "The Embodied Voice: Song Sequences and Stardom in Popular Hindi Cinema." In *Soundtrack Available: Essays on Film and Popular Music*, edited by Pamela Robertson Wojcik and Arthur Knight. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. 161–81.
- Manuel, Peter. 1993. *Cassette Culture: Popular Music and Technology in North India*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- _____. 1988. "Popular Music in India: 1901-1986." *Popular Music* 7(2): 157-176.
- Morcom, Anna. 2007. *Hindi Film Songs and the Cinema*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company.
- Myers, Helen. 1992. Ed. *Ethnomusicology: An Introduction*. New York: W.W. Norton.
- Negus, Keith. 1999. *Music Genres and Corporate Cultures*. New York: Routledge.
- _____. 1996. *Popular Music in Theory: An Introduction*. Hanover, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Novak, David. 2010. "Cosmopolitanism, Remediation, and the Ghost World of Bollywood." *Cultural Anthropology* 25(1): 40-72.
- Prasad, Madhava M. 1998. *Ideology of the Hindi film: A Historical Construction* (New York: Oxford University Press).
- Punathambekar, Aswin. 2008. "We're Online, Not on the Streets." In *Global Bollywood*, edited by Anandam P. Kavoori and Aswin Punathambekar, 282-299. New York: New York University Press.
- Rice, Timothy. 2003. "Time, Place, and Metaphor in Musical Experience and Ethnography." *Ethnomusicology* 47(2): 151-179.
- Sen, Biswarup. 2008. "The Sounds of Modernity: The Evolution of Bollywood Film Song." In *Global Bollywood: Travels of Hindi Song and Dance*, edited by Sangita Gopal and Sujata Moorti, 84-104. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Slobin, Mark. 2008. Ed. *Global Soundtracks: Worlds of Film Music*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Stokes, Martin. 2004. "Music and the Global Order." *Annual Review of Anthropology* (33): 47-72.

- Taylor, Timothy D. 2007. *Beyond Exoticism: Western Music and The World*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- _____. 1997. *Global Pop: World Music, World Markets*. New York: Routledge.
- Théberge, Paul. 2004. "The Network Studio: Historical and Technological Paths to a New Ideal in Music Making." *Social Studies of Science* 34(5): 759-781.
- _____. 1997. *Any Sound You Can Imagine: Making Music/ Consuming Technology*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- Sundar, Pavitra. 2008. "Meri Awaaz Suno: Women , Vocality, and Nation in Hindi Cinema." *Meridians: Feminism, Race, Transnationalism* 8(1): 144-179.
- Turino, Thomas. 2003. "Are We Global Yet? Globalist Discourse, Cultural Formations and the Study of Zimbabwean Popular Music Authors." *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 12(2): 51-79.
- _____. 2000. *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Wallach, Jeremy. 2010. "Analytical Approaches to Asian Popular Culture: Four Key Concepts." Paper presented at the Popular Culture Department Colloquium. January 21, 2010. Bowling Green State University. Bowling Green, Ohio.
- _____. 2008. *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997-2001*. Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press.
- _____. 2005. "Engineering Techno-Hybrid Grooves in Two Indonesian Sound Studios." In *Wired For Sound: Engineering and Technologies in Sonic Cultures*, edited by Paul D. Greene and Thomas Porcello, 138-155. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.
- _____. 2003. "The Poetics of Electrosonic Presence: Recorded Music and the Materiality of Sound." *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 15(1): 34-64.
- Wreszin, Michael. 2003. Ed. *Interviews with Dwight Macdonald*. Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi.