

# THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF INDEPENDENT WESTERN CLASSICAL CHAMBER MUSICIANS IN THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES: A NARRATIVE INQUIRY

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## Abstract

The research concerns the relationship between Western classical music and Arabian cultures in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) as experienced by independent classical chamber musicians. The main research question was: what stories do independent Western classical chamber musicians tell about their lived experiences of practicing and performing Western classical music in the UAE?

The real-life problem guiding this research has two parts:

- i. the problem that Western classical music is not a sustainable profession for performers in the UAE and
- ii. the gap in the literature on Western classical music in the UAE.

The real-life problem the first author experienced in the UAE as a Western musician had the following challenges: practical obstacles related to sourcing fellow musicians who uphold the same standards and music ideals, finding rehearsal venues and creating performance opportunities. These challenges lead to the formation of the research problem.

## Keywords

Migration and music, Musicianship, Sustainability, Life experiences, Western classical music

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to explore the stories that five independent Western classical chamber musicians tell about their lived experiences of practicing and performing Western classical music in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This first part of the problem concerns the sustainability of Western music in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The NSO of the UAE operates on a concert-to-concert basis. It does not employ full-time orchestra members, and all the participants need a permanent income in addition to the orchestra to sustain themselves (Anon, 2016). The Abu Dhabi Music and Arts Foundation (ADMAF) has an annual concert series that focuses on fostering growth among Emirate artists, and they import Western classical musicians for their concerts (ADMAF, 2018). However, they do not support resident Western musicians for a long term but only for the period of their concert performance. The Dubai Opera House is host to many different Western classical music groups as part of their vibrant program (Dubai Opera, 2018). However, the opera house does not have an in-house orchestra and imports Western classical instrumentalists for an opera performance.

The second part of the research problem refers to the gap in the scholarly literature. Although no articles could be uncovered on the experiences of Western musicians in the UAE, there are a few articles on the experiences of musicians upholding Western music ideals in other non-Western cultures. Chou (2003:1) wrote a PhD thesis titled “Performing for the people: A history of the Central Philharmonic Orchestra in the People’s Republic of China, 1956–1966.” In this thesis, he discusses

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the fact that the orchestra “symbolized China’s modernity and tolerance of Western (music) culture” and he discussed “an experimental institution trying out different styles of symphonic music with Chinese characteristics” (Chou, 2003:1). The thesis does not focus on the experiences of independent classical chamber musicians. Thorsén (2007) did a qualitative study on three independent Swedish musicians’ experiences and perspectives in postcolonial South Africa. This study points to the personal motives of each Swedish musician and found that “social and societal issues are intersected with personal attitudes” (Thorsén, 2007:1). This could be linked to the stories of independent classical musicians in the UAE, and parallels could be drawn between motivation, personal attitudes, experiences, perspectives, and societal issues.

## RESEARCH PROCEDURES

The research design used in this study is qualitative as it had a strong emphasis on thick layered descriptions and was focused on individual meaning as narrated by independent musicians. According to Creswell (2013:44), the structure has to remain flexible for such studies. Ahammed (2015:1) argues that “Qualitative methods present an epistemological framework that allows for the recognition of the cultural uniqueness of the UAE.” This study acknowledged the importance of detail of situational complexities and included the current dynamics of Western classical music in the UAE, the influence of local Arabian cultures, and the availability of resources for chamber music practices (Ahammed, 2015:1). These situational influences had to be recorded as the independent classical chamber musicians experienced them. A qualitative research design was therefore best suited for this study.

In this qualitative study, we followed a narrative research approach that constructs stories of the lived experiences of the participants. The five participants are all Western chamber instrumentalists: a pianist, two clarinetists, and two violinists.

Clandinin (2006:52) suggests that the researcher adopts an “ethical attitude” of “negotiation, respect, mutuality and openness to multiple voices.” Narrators often have a feeling of vulnerability because the nature of narrative research is to expose as much information as possible, with information that makes the participants feel uncomfortable (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013:61). The participants of this study were informed of how the research would be presented, published, or performed and gave informal consent during the interview process and formal consent via email. The participants were all adult professionals in their fields of Western classical music, and this research did not do any harm to their personal or professional well-being. The participants volunteered and were allowed to withdraw from the research at any stage. They would also stay anonymous, and pseudonyms are used when presenting their stories.

After conducting three rounds of semistructured interviews on their lived experiences of Western classical chamber music performances in the UAE, we constructed a story for each participant. These stories were centered on Clandinin’s (2006:46) three-dimensional criteria, namely, the criterion of the participant’s interaction with their UAE environment, the continuity criterion that focuses on comparison experiences with their Western home countries, and the situational criterion of lived experiences in the UAE.

Riesman states that “narrative studies are cross disciplinary, a many-layered expression of human thought and imagination” (Riesman, 2008:21). This research employed Riesman’s (2008:22) six elements for structural analysis, namely, abstract, orientation, complicated action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. This was the analysis process followed when analyzing the data from the interviews and constructing the stories of the participants.

## THEMES EMERGING FROM STORIES

After the interviews, a story was constructed for each participant. The five participants were Anna, Lika, Brenda, Milan, and Mia. In this section, we will just briefly give a short background of each participant, and then the overarching themes will be given and discussed by combining all the

participants' themes and creating a metanarrative of Western independent classical chamber musicians' lived experiences in the UAE.

## BACKGROUND OF FIVE PARTICIPANTS

Anna's story about Western classical chamber music is valuable; because of all the participants, she has been in the UAE for the longest period. At the time of this study, she had already been in the UAE for 9 years. She is from Wisconsin in the United States of America and studied Western classical music at Lawrence University in Wisconsin with voice and violin as major subjects. She completed a master's degree in music education at Boston University and is currently busy with her doctorate at the same university. Anna is currently working as the head of a music department in Abu Dhabi.

Lika is a Ukrainian musician who obtained a Bachelor's degree in piano at the Peter Tchaikovsky National Music Academy of Ukraine (Kyiv Conservatory). She is 24 years old and by her own admission shy and an introvert. English can be classified as her third language after Ukrainian and Russian. Lika has been in the UAE for almost a full year now working at a Music Institute.<sup>2</sup>

Brenda is an American clarinet, saxophone, and flute player who obtained a bachelor's degree in music education with a minor in chamber music from the University of Minnesota, De Luth. She also completed a master's degree in music education at St. Thomas University in St. Paul, Minnesota, in 2015 while being a full-time teacher and a part-time musician. Although her main focus is music education, Brenda enjoyed a variety of ensemble opportunities at St. Pauls that included community theater ("Pit band" playing<sup>3</sup>), symphonic orchestral work, and Western classical chamber music. She came to the UAE in search of the international school experience and the hope that she could expand her clarinet playing activities. She works as an elementary school music teacher.

Milan studied violin and viola at the University of Sofia in Bulgaria. Milan is married with one small child and has relocated to the UAE with his family. He has been in the UAE for 2 years and is sponsored by the Elite Music Institute in Abu Dhabi. He was an orchestral musician in Sofia and played in various ad hoc ensembles in his home community. His main reasons for moving to Abu Dhabi are tax-free salaries and financial gain. His work at Elite Music Institute generates a small part of his monthly salary. He is financially lucrative as a "music entertainer." He focused on background restaurant music, which he performs with his electric violin. However, Milan is still involved as an independent Western classical chamber musician in his capacity as an ad hoc performer for the NSO and New York University Arts Department, Abu Dhabi campus.

Mia is a South African clarinet and saxophone player who has been living in the UAE since August 2015. She has a bachelor's degree from Stellenbosch University, South Africa, a postgraduate certificate in education, and an honours degree in clarinet performance with a minor in music education. She is currently busy with a master's degree in clarinet performance, with a focus on chamber music. Mia was headhunted by a school in Abu Dhabi to be a music teacher and to start a music academy for the school. She came to the UAE for multiple reasons: financial security, a tax-free salary, traveling, and to be part of a global music scene. Before living and studying in Potchefstroom, Mia lived in Cape Town, South Africa, where she worked as the head of a music department at a performing arts school, and she had a varied performance career as a clarinetist and saxophonist. She played in a symphony orchestra, did orchestral pit work, and performed in smaller ensembles and various other ad hoc opportunities.

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<sup>2</sup> A music institute is an after-school music school or academy that focuses on primarily one to one instrumental or vocal tuition. Music institutes may include smaller ensembles, music theory classes and even ballet classes. Clientele pay per lesson and usually book lessons in advance.

<sup>3</sup> American colloquialism for musical theatre orchestral pit.

## METANARRATIVE

A metanarrative theme emerges when three or more of the themes from the participants correspond with a central idea. Table 1 provides an exposition of the six themes that emerged as metanarrative themes from the individual stories of the five participants.

Anna's themes	Lika's themes	Brenda's themes	Milan's themes	Mia's themes
<b>Theme 1: Indifferent Emirate Audience</b>				
Emirate audience does not value Western classical music	Superficial Abu Dhabi community	Indifferent Emirate community	Local audience is superficial	Emirates focussed on own music traditions
	Homogenous Western expatriate audience		UAE not fostering local Western classical music growth	School community focussed on Arabic and pop music
<b>Theme 2: Limited choice in Western classical chamber musicians</b>				
Restricted choice in instrumentalists	Small music community with limited variety in instrumentalists	Lack of vibrant music community	Mixed abilities of instrumentalists	The need for interaction between music societies
		Unpopular instrument		Piano players not interested/capable to do ensemble Higher fees for string players
<b>Theme 3: Transient Western expatriate community</b>				
Transient expat community	Mediocre work environment in the UAE	Limited time as UAE resident	Fluent music community	
<b>Theme 4: Inadequate Western classical chamber music performance opportunities</b>				
Inadequate performance opportunities	Limited opportunities for Western chamber musicians	Numbered corporate chamber music events	Violin music: popular and lucrative	
Chamber music group evolved into Jazz group				
<b>Theme 5: Complicated UAE concert bureaucracy</b>				
Development of NOC document		Concervative UAE bureaucracy in terms of marketing concerts	NOC documents allows extra gigs	Tedious concert bureaucracy
Tricky UAE bureaucracy regarding public performances				
<b>Theme 6: Restrictd choice in performance venues</b>				
Difficulty to find free performance space	Lack of performance space	Expensive performance space		Restricted choice in rehearsal times and concert venues

Figure 1: Metanarrative themes chosen.

### THEME 1: INDIFFERENT EMIRATE AUDIENCES

Anna: “Emirates are very happy for ex-pats to create and practice their own music culture, but it is not something they value or understand – they have their own music culture, very different from Western music.”

All the participants experienced the indifference of the Emirati audience to Western chamber music concerts as Anna stated. Both Lika and Milan referred to the Emirate community as “superficial”: Lika stated that “shopping” is their preferred activity, and Milan said the Emirates choose superficial popular music. This ties in with Lika and Milan’s need to “create art music” as they did in their home countries of Ukraine and Bulgaria. Mia describes the local community as “Emirates (who) focus on (their) own music traditions,” and this corresponds with Milan’s theme of the UAE citizens who “do not support growth in their local (Western classical) music community.” Anna is from a more educational background, and her lived experiences have taught her that “Emirate audiences do not

value Western classical music” out of ignorance and lack of education in this field. This coincides with Mia’s experiences at the school where she teaches where the greater school community prefers “Arabic and pop music.”

It is worth noting that none of the participants experienced any antagonism or negativity from the Emirate community. Brenda puts it succinctly when she states that the Emirate community is “indifferent.” Therefore, the best collective description for these themes is “Indifferent Emirate audiences.”

This indifference to and ignorance of Emirates about Western classical chamber concerts are linked with Theme 5, the “Complicated UAE bureaucracy,” and Theme 6, “Restricted choice in performance venues.” However, because the Emirate community does not “support growth in their local (Western classical) music community,” out of either ignorance or indifference, it is difficult to create a music community. This is a direct cause of the limited choices in Western classical chamber musicians, which leads to the next theme.

## THEME 2: LIMITED CHOICE IN WESTERN CLASSICAL CHAMBER MUSICIANS

Lika: “Everywhere I go there is the same people!”

The limited selection of chamber musicians is a theme that emerged from all five interviews. Anna mentioned that most of the instrumentalists in her chamber group are “mostly music teachers who play an orchestral instrument,” which, according to her, restricts the choice of quality instrumentalists. This links to Lika’s opinion that the collective of Western classical chamber musicians is limited to instrumentalists of the Music Institute where she works. Milan agrees with both Anna and Lika when he states that when playing corporate gigs, he has to deal with instrumentalists with a “mixed bag of abilities.” Both Mia and Brenda’s stories brought to light that specific instruments influenced their Western classical chamber music experiences. Mia needed piano players capable of playing the complicated Brahms clarinet and piano ensemble works. However, as soon as they heard it was (one of) the Brahms clarinet sonatas, they canceled. Brenda, who is used to Minnesota’s “vibrant” music scene, realized that she plays an unpopular wind instrument as corporate gigs “prefer string instruments and pianos.” This correlates with Mia’s follow-up theme when she had to pay “higher fees for string players.”

All these themes indicate that the participants experienced limited choices in choosing Western classical chamber musicians because of either the quality of musicianship or the perceived popularity of different instruments, which in turn is based on the availability of different instrumentalists. This is also the result of the transient nature of the Western expatriate community, which leads to the next theme.

## THEME 3: TRANSIENT WESTERN EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

Milan: “Maybe if there were regular (serious classical music) opportunities for instrumentalists, the music scene in Abu Dhabi would be more consistent and not change so easily.”

The third theme emerged from the interviews of three of the five participants. Brenda wanted to make a gradual change in the music scene of Abu Dhabi when she said, “Effect changes slowly,” but felt that her 2-year stay, like most music teachers and instrumentalists, was too short. Anna, a veteran in the UAE music scene, feels the transient music community contributed to the evolution of her classical chamber music group to a jazz group. More and more instrumentalists were departing and then being replaced by musicians interested in playing lighter music like jazz as opposed to Western classical chamber music. Milan sees the potential in the UAE music scene but sees a need for “regular opportunity for instrumentalists” to sustain a more consistent and less fluid music community.

This theme of the lack of stability in the ex-pat classical music community could be a result of the “Indifferent Emirate audiences” and links with the second theme of “Limited choice in Western

classical chamber musicians.” According to the participants, all these themes point to an inadequate Western classical performance experience, which is the fourth emerging theme.

## THEME 4: INADEQUATE WESTERN CLASSICAL CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCES

Brenda: “Pre-existing music structures are necessary if you want to be a chamber musician.”

This metatheme is supported by four of the five participants. In Anna’s story, she proposes two individual themes that link with the third metatheme when she states that she “struggled to get involved in chamber music in the UAE.” Only through her community musical theater group could she make music community connections that could support her performances. This theme correlates with Lika in that she only had two “art music”<sup>4</sup> concerts during her 2-year period in the UAE and in both cases, Lika and Anna experienced limited choices and opportunities in chamber music performances. Brenda, who “actively pursued” the NSO to get corporate gigs, found that she only had limited performing opportunities. As stated earlier, the limited choice in chamber musicians has an influence on the adequacy of chamber music performance opportunities.

In Anna’s second individual theme, she mentions that her Western chamber music group evolved into a jazz ensemble “partly because of the instruments who joined and partly because of our audience.” Anna points out that this evolution from Western classical music to jazz is because the specific musicians available for this group were more inclined toward jazz and that the audience preferred a lighter style of music. Milan enjoys “popular and lucrative” opportunities as a violin player in the corporate gig field but states the need for “regular (serious classical music) opportunities for instrumentalists” to foster a healthier performance environment.

Mia is the only participant who does not identify with this theme. This could be because her focus in terms of chamber music performances was aimed at her studies and this emphasis did not allow her to seek further opportunities.

According to the stories of the participants, there are some opportunities for Western classical chamber music performances, but the lived experiences bring into question not only the reliability of opportunities but also their quality. Therefore, because of the lack of consistency and the quality of performances, the individual themes are collectively best described as “inadequate” performance opportunities. The theme of “Inadequate Western classical chamber music performance opportunities” is directly linked to the previous theme, but it is also a direct cause of the fifth emerging theme of concert bureaucracy in the UAE.

## THEME 5: COMPLICATED UAE CONCERT BUREAUCRACY

Brenda: “The UAE bureaucracy was painful and took forever.”

The theme of performance bureaucracy in the UAE and the challenges it poses is supported by four of the five participants. One of Anna’s individual themes of the stumbling block, that is, concert bureaucracy, involves entrance fees for performances, performance licences, submission of music programs for approval, and extended time constraints. Anna describes it as “quite tricky to perform in the UAE when you want to charge for tickets.” Brenda experiences the same challenges and describes the process of organizing Western classical chamber concerts in the UAE as “painful and took (taking) forever.” Mia agrees with Brenda and Anna when she talks about her honours degree

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<sup>4</sup> Lika uses the term “art music” to refer to a serious and challenging Western classical chamber music.

concert that was free and not advertised because the bureaucracy was “tedious” and not worth the effort.

In all five cases, the stories provide contrasts in music experiences between the UAE and the participants’ home countries where they would engage in a range of performances and music activities and where none of them were limited to one course of action (being only a teacher or an orchestra player). However, according to Anna and Milan, UAE law dictates that people of residence are only allowed to do one “job,” which in effect prevents instrumentalists from teaching during the day and performing at night because it is described as two employment opportunities. Both Milan and Anna have found the development of the NOC signed by their primary employer to be a positive change that enables musicians to participate in ad hoc performance opportunities. Lika did not experience any of the bureaucracy regarding performances. This could be because she has never been in a position to organize a concert and was never confronted by laws and regulations regarding concerts in the UAE.

The challenges regarding UAE bureaucracy when organizing concerts and the specific need for the NOC for musicians contribute to this theme of the Complicated UAE concert bureaucracy. This fifth theme is linked with the first theme of Indifferent Emirate audiences and is directly responsible for the restricted choice in performance venues in the UAE, which is the following metatheme.

## THEME 6: RESTRICTED CHOICE IN PERFORMANCE VENUES

Brenda: “Just to hire a concert venue was ridiculously expensive!”

The sixth theme is mentioned by four of the five participants and is about performance spaces in the UAE. Western classical music ensembles often require large spaces for rehearsals to accommodate all the musicians and a space that provides some degree of sound proofing. In the case of Mia and Lika’s trio, they had to rehearse in the music institute’s ballet room, which is the only space large enough to accommodate their group of musicians. They also hosted their performance there because it was the only free space available to them. Brenda states that it is “ridiculously expensive” to hire any concert space and she ended up canceling her chamber music concert because of this. Anna’s chamber music group performed at “The Club,” the former British social club, because she struggled with challenging bureaucratic processes to compensate for expensive performance space in the greater Abu Dhabi area.

Milan does not have a specific link to this metatheme as he is mostly a corporate gig player who works for the in-house theater of New York University Abu Dhabi Campus on occasion. He is contracted as a player and does not have to produce any concerts.

This final theme regarding the restricted choice in performance venues is linked to the fifth theme of the Complicated UAE concert bureaucracy as well as the fourth theme of Inadequate Western classical chamber music performance opportunities. This final theme also linked with the first theme of the Indifferent Emirate audiences, which brings the metanarrative to a full circle as can be seen in Figure 2.

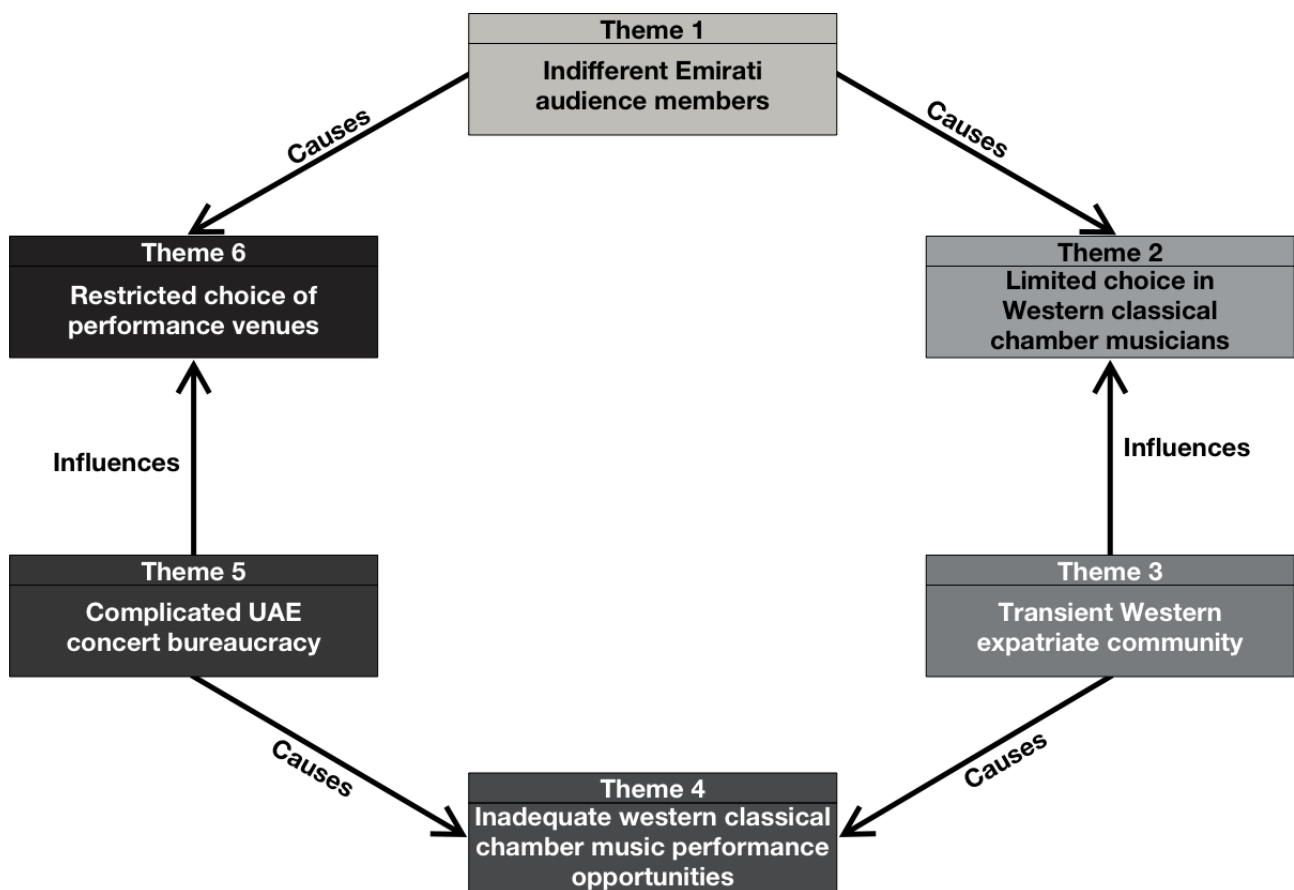


Figure 2: Themes that emerge from the metanarrative. Scheme by the authors.

## DISCUSSION

The original aim of the discussions was to show how the emerging themes identified from the lived experiences of Western classical chamber musicians link with scholarly literature. However, it soon became clear that the scholarly literature on Western music in the UAE is extremely limited. The lack of scholarly literature on Western classical chamber music in the UAE could be a result of the complicated relationship the Muslim faith has with both Arabic and Western music. Research indicates that the emerging themes can be related to a branch of cross-cultural psychology named acculturation theory (Berry, 2005:677). This provides a basis with which these themes can be evaluated.

## INTRODUCING ACCULTURATION THEORY

This section introduces Berry's (2005:677) acculturation theory and explores how it could offer new insights into the themes that emerge from the cross-case analysis. The first section explains why the theory is relevant to the research. It is followed by a definition of acculturation theory and a discussion of its strategies. This is followed by a look at how the theory can be used to interpret the emerging themes.

## BERRY'S ACCULTURATION THEORY

In terms of Berry's theory, the Western musician is engaged in "conflict, negotiation and mediation" (Berry, 2005:679) within a dominant Emirati culture. Acculturation theory essentially investigates "what happens to people when they move from the culture in which they have been born and raised to a new and unfamiliar culture" (Sam & Berry, 2010:472). Berry (2005:678) distinguishes between a minority group, which refers to the individuals moving away from the culture in which they were raised, and a dominant group, which is the larger, hosting cultural group. Our study strongly links



with this aspect of Berry's (2005:678) acculturation theory as the Western classical chamber musicians can be seen as the minority group and the local Emirati population can be seen as the dominant group. Furthermore, it became clear from the study that the minority group of Western classical chamber musicians is trying to establish and maintain a music practice that is typical of their own culture, and this is an attribute of acculturation theory (Sam & Berry, 2010:472). As noted, Arabic cultures are distinctive in their everyday practices and musical traditions. This contrasts in many respects with Western musical traditions.

The next section defines Berry's acculturation theory further and links it with the current trend of international assignment<sup>5</sup> that many global citizens experience. "During acculturation, groups of people and their individual members engage in intercultural contact producing a potential for conflict and the need for negotiation to achieve outcomes that are adaptive for both parties" (Berry, 2005:472).

The acculturation theory stems from a branch of cross-cultural psychological research. Acculturation is "a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation" between the cultural groups (Berry, 2005:700). This often entails "learning each other's language, sharing each other's food preferences, and adopting forms of dress and social interactions" (Berry, 2005:700). This study of Western classical chamber music in the UAE illuminates the dynamics of music traditions within two distinct cultural groups. It concurs that music-making is a social process particular to a specific cultural group and that it forms part of "various forms of accommodation" (Berry, 2005:700). The Western classical musicians endeavored to perpetuate their musical heritage in the UAE without adapting their Western music ideals.

## INTERNATIONAL ASSIGNMENT

Acculturation theory is applied in many different fields, especially given the growing trend of international assignment, which is a "key form of international migration in the global economy" (Collings et al., 2011:361). International assignment involves individuals who are employed internationally by a global company (Collings et al., 2011:361). This relates to the acculturation theory as it describes "what happens to people when they move from the culture in which they have been born and raised to a new and unfamiliar culture" (Sam & Berry, 2010:472).

Much like the participants of this study, individuals find international assignments financially advantageous. Furthermore, bureaucratic issues such as residency and visas are the responsibility of the hosting branch company. In the case of the five participants involved in this study, the hosting companies are the various music institutes and schools that sponsor them. Apart from its financial focus, Collings et al. (2011:361) use the acculturation theory as a criterion to "understand and support the career implications of international assignments." Much like the study by Collings et al. (2011:361), the strategies of the acculturation theory are used in this study as criteria to examine the emerging themes. In the next section, these strategies of acculturation theory are defined.

## ACCULTURATION THEORY: STRATEGIES AND METHODS

Acculturation theory is described as a bidimensional, fourfold model (Ward & Kus, 2010:472). The bidimensional concept comprises two issues:

Issue 1: Cultural maintenance – the "degree to which people wish to maintain their heritage culture and identities" (Sam & Berry, 2010:476). This is a key issue in this study.

Issue 2: Contact participation – The "degree to which people wish to have contact with those outside their cultural group and participate in the daily life of the larger society" (Sam & Berry, 2010:476). This second issue is concerned with the degree to which the musicians require the participation of the greater UAE society to practice and perform.

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<sup>5</sup> International Assignment is a financial term and refers to migration of professionals in the global economy (Collings et al., 2011:361). This will be formally discussed in the following section.

The fourfold model (Ward & Kus, 2010:472) refers to the following acculturation strategies:

**Assimilation:** This occurs when minority group members “shed their heritage culture, (and) become absorbed into dominant society” (Berry, 2005:705). This is when a smaller cultural group adopts observable change of new cultural patterns of the dominant cultural group.

**Separation:** In its moderate form, separation as an acculturation strategy is when the minority group places a high value on “holding on to their original culture” (Sam & Berry, 2010:476). In its extreme form, separation is when “individuals (minority group) turn their backs on involvement with other cultural groups” (Berry, 2005:705).

**Integration:** This is when the minority group wants to maintain their original culture while still have daily exchanges and interactions with the dominant group (Sam & Berry, 2010:476). Integration allows for some degree of cultural assimilation with members of the dominant culture (Berry, 2005:705).

**Marginalization:** This is when the dominant group forces the minority group to abandon its heritage culture (Sam & Berry, 2010:476). This is also known as deculturation (Berry, 2005:705) – the loss of the original culture – as a negative acculturation strategy. This is not only the consequence of bureaucracy but also the inevitable result of minority existence.

In our analysis, each metatheme derived from the lived experiences of the five Western classical chamber musicians are measured against all four acculturation strategies. It should be noted that each theme is not limited to just one strategy. There could be a combination of all four strategies as acculturation is concerned with the degree to which these strategies have occurred. Furthermore, acculturation in this study is viewed from the perspective of the minority cultural group, in this case the five Western classical chamber musicians. In the next section, the six emerging themes are discussed and linked to the acculturation theory (Figure 3).

Acculturation strategies	1. Indifferent Emirate audiences	2. Limited choice in Western classical chamber musicians	3. Transient Western expatriate community	4. Inadequate Western classical chamber music performances	5. Complicated UAE bureaucracy	6. Restricted choice in performance
Separation	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
Marginalisation	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present	Present
Assimilation	Not present	Not present	Not present	Not present	Not present	Not present
Integration	Not Present	Not present	Not present	Not present	Not present	Not present

**Figure 3: Evaluation of acculturation theory strategies. Scheme by the authors**

In the next section, the most prevalent acculturation strategies, namely, marginalization and separation, will be discussed in how the emerging themes measure against these two strategies. As the strategies of assimilation and integration are not present, they will not be discussed.

## MARGINALIZATION AND SEPARATION

### THEME 1: INDIFFERENT EMIRATE AUDIENCES

From table 1, it is clear that separation strategies are evident in all the themes. In the first theme of the indifference of Emirate audiences, the musicians experienced minimum support from the local Emirati community in terms of audience participation. The experience was not antagonistic or negative, but rather indifferent. Emirate audiences did not appreciate Western classical music,

preferred their own music traditions, or preferred a more popular style of music and were largely not interested in the Western classical chamber music style.

Marginalization is prevalent as an acculturation strategy in this theme and points to practical and psychological consequences for the musicians. Marginalization does not need to involve the law or enforcement. The musicians experienced marginalization because being the minority cultural group, the larger dominant group was indifferent toward them. This indifference limited their music practices and prevented their music environments to flourish.

Regarding separation, Western classical musicians in the UAE attached great value to performing their own specific music traditions. Western classical chamber music was the key motivator for their performances and an extension of their cultural heritage. However, the Emirate audience did not attend these Western music performances, yet the Western classical chamber musicians did not compensate by assimilating to UAE music traditions. In terms of music performances, the Western classical musicians placed a high premium on their own music traditions, and this influenced the Emirate audience participation.

## THEME 2: LIMITED CHOICE IN WESTERN CLASSICAL MUSICIANS

Some of the key frustrations that the participants experienced centered on limited choices of Western classical instrumentalists. The Western classical music community in the UAE lacks viability in terms of available musicians. One of the participants commented on the lack of vibrancy and the inconsistencies in the payment of musicians.

To a certain extent, an argument could be made that because the UAE community did not actively foster Western classical music growth, they restricted the choice of expert Western classical musicians and therefore marginalization as an acculturation strategy occurred. However, the UAE facilitates Western classical instrumental tuition in its schools and music institutes, and this indicates freedom of music choice. The UAE government is not forcing Westerners to abandon their music traditions as the marginalization acculturation theory suggests. This theme is not concerned with the prevention of Western classical music traditions, but rather the need for higher quality musicians.

Separation is evident because the theme indicates a specific requirement in Western music traditions. The Western classical chamber musicians were frustrated with having a limited choice in instrumentalists. They placed a high premium on their own music traditions by requiring a wider variety of experts in Western classical chamber music, and this is evident of separation. Furthermore, this theme does not indicate any level of expected Emirate instrumentalist participation to sustain a greater variety and quality of musicians.

## THEME 3: TRANSIENT WESTERN EXPATRIATE COMMUNITY

This emerging theme concerns the ever-changing Western expatriate community. The nature of the UAE resident music community is based around a 2-year fixed contract, and usually, they leave afterward.

Western classical musicians tend to leave the UAE on conclusion of their 2-year residency contract. In most cases, they have the option to extend their stay either for another 2 years or on a permanent basis. However, the transient nature proves that musicians prefer to leave after 2 years. This could be interpreted as a form of separation because the Western classical chamber musicians value their own music traditions. They could find a more accommodating music environment in their home countries. This indicates an eventual form of cross-cultural separation and that Western classical musicians seek out their own music traditions by leaving the UAE.

This theme further indicates an environment of short-term commitment. It could be interpreted that Western classical chamber musicians could not pursue their music traditions in the long run. This could be evidence of marginalization. However, the fact that Western classical musicians are given

opportunities on a limited contract basis indicates that they can practice and perform Western classical chamber music but only on a short-term basis.

## **THEME 4: INADEQUATE WESTERN CLASSICAL CHAMBER MUSIC PERFORMANCE OPPORTUNITIES**

As stated in the cross-case analyses that combined various themes to form this metatheme, this theme concerns the number and quality and nature of performance opportunities that Western classical chamber musicians experienced in the UAE and combines the lack of opportunities, the limitation of corporate paying events, the inconsistency of paying more for popular instruments like the violin, and moving away from Western classical music toward a lighter style. All these lead to participants experiencing the performance opportunities as inadequate.

The Western classical musicians placed a high premium on not only the number of performances but also the quality of the performances. This indicates a high degree of separation as the Western chamber musicians have specific expectations within the performances of their music traditions.

A further argument could be made that the UAE inadvertently do not stimulate Western classical chamber music performance opportunities and that the participants were responsible for creating their own performance opportunities. This lack of regular support can directly influence the quality and number of music performances. There is not an issue of forced abandonment, rather a consequence for the quality and the number of performances. This could be interpreted as marginalization.

## **THEME 5: COMPLICATED UAE BUREAUCRACY**

As indicated in participants' stories, the UAE concert bureaucracy is experienced as tedious, tricky, and complicated. Hosting concerts in the UAE requires application processes in terms of music programs and often requires long waiting periods. The strategies of separation and marginalization are present in this theme and are now discussed further.

The Western classical chamber musicians valued their own music traditions, which is a sign of separation to the extent that they are prepared to engage in this "tricky" UAE concert bureaucracy. The participants did not sacrifice their music traditions and employed a high degree of separation by negotiating the complicated Emirate concert bureaucracy to maintain their music traditions.

The Complicated UAE bureaucracy experienced by the participants is evidence of Western classical music marginalization. This tedious bureaucracy also impacts the emotional and intellectual stance of the participants. Although this form of marginalization starts out as a form of government control, it demoralizes the musicians as their performance bureaucracy is complicated and not effortless. This theme indicates difficulty in freely performing Western classical chamber music in the public domain in the UAE. This is linked with the earlier themes of inadequate Western classical performance opportunities and ultimately could result in Western classical musicians not committing to the UAE in the long term.

## **THEME 6: RESTRICTED CHOICE IN PERFORMANCE VENUES**

The participants of this study had trouble in obtaining performance venues because they were too expensive, not suited to Western classical chamber music, or simply not available. The participants of this study experienced the availability of performance venues in the UAE as restricted, mainly because they required performance spaces specific to Western classical instrumental ensemble playing. An argument could be made that other more accessible venues are available but that the participants were not prepared to integrate their Western music ideals and venues required for Western music with requirements of UAE music traditions. UAE performances are typically done in

outdoor venues,<sup>6</sup> which the participants deemed problematic for Western instrumental ensembles. Therefore, this theme does not support assimilation and integration as acculturation strategies. The strategies of separation and marginalization are present and are now discussed further.

Western classical chamber musicians did not alter their music ideals to obtain easier access or more choices in performance venues. This theme is again indicative of separation as an acculturation strategy. Musicians in this study focused on placing a high premium on their Western chamber music ideals and tried to find cost-effective concert venues suited to Western classical ensemble music. The importance of their own music traditions was kept separate from the Emirate music culture, and the venues had to suit their specific needs.

As the participants found it difficult to have access to a variety of performance venues suited to Western classical chamber music, marginalization occurred. Performance venues were available but were restricted in terms of expense, suitability, and availability. This in turn created a restricted chamber music environment, which indicates marginalization.

## CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In this section, the implications of this study are examined by addressing the problem driving this research. This body of research concerned the lived experiences of Western classical musicians in the UAE. The problems that drove this research were:

- i. The fact that Western classical music is not sustainable for performers in the UAE
- ii. A lack of scholarly literature on Western classical music in the UAE

The aim of this research was to examine what stories Western classical chamber musicians tell about their ensemble experiences in the UAE. The cross-case analyses identified six general themes. This provided unique insight from the perspective of Western classical musicians in the UAE that has not been addressed in the scholarly literature. In identifying these themes and the implications, this research contributes to the scholarly literature in this unique field.

In trying to link these themes of Western classical music to an Arabic environment, a significant gap in the scholarly literature was exposed. However, the cross-case analyses revealed the cross-cultural aspects that Western classical chamber musicians must negotiate within the local Emirate cultural environment. This study is significant for addressing not only a need in the scholarly literature but also the valuable link of the themes to acculturation theory (Sam & Berry, 2010:472). Acculturation theory, previously dominant in the financial world of international assignment (Collings et al., 2011:361), is also applicable to this study of Western classical chamber musicians' experiences in the UAE. Acculturation theory comprises four strategies that linked with the emerging themes.

Acculturation theory strategies (Berry, 2005:705) were used to evaluate and explain the emerging themes. The strategy of separation and marginalization was dominant in all the themes. This answers the second problem driving this research, namely, that Western classical music is not a sustainable profession in the UAE. The emerging themes brought to light that the Western classical chamber musicians experienced their performance environment as restricted, limited, inadequate, and transient in various aspects. These aspects were all linked to acculturation strategies and provided insight into why Western classical music is not a sustainable profession in the UAE.

## EVALUATION AND SOLUTIONS TO ACCULTURATION STRATEGIES

In this section, the acculturation strategies are evaluated and possible solutions are discussed to enable Western classical musicians to better adapt to the UAE cultural environment.

Assimilation as an acculturation strategy was not evident from the emerging themes. This could be because the aim of the participants of this study was to preserve their Western music ideals and to

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<sup>6</sup> Arabic instrumental music is usually accompanied by a tabla or dharbuka, suited to outdoor social gatherings.

find ways to improve chamber music performance ideals. Assimilation as an acculturation strategy is used to evaluate to which degree a cultural group abandons their heritage and assimilates the dominant group's (in this case the UAE's) traditions. In this study, this acculturation strategy was not evident.

In contrast with assimilation, separation as an acculturation strategy was evident from all the themes and to a high degree. This is because of the nature of this study, which concerns the performance, practice, and preservation of a specific foreign tradition, namely, that of Western classical chamber music within a dominant cultural group. The participants of this study used separation acculturation strategies to not only preserve their Western music traditions but also perform and practice music because it is what is natural to them and part of their being. Turino (1989:2) refers to this self-evident behavior of the musicians as enculturated patterns of behavior and states that:

“...individuals within a social group internalise ways of being and conceptions of the ‘natural’ order of the world based on the specific responses to common objectives and conditions. These internalised dispositions (definitions of reality, bases for action) are continually made manifest as concrete images in social behaviour and cultural forms.”

In other words, musicians' behavior is self-evident and 'natural' to them because this is how they have been trained and enculturated to do. So the preservation and maintenance of their Western music ideals as seen through the lens of separation could be viewed as a strategy incorporated to protect the familiar and reassuring music of their culture. Furthermore, separation strategies were used not to preserve Western music in general but rather to disregard UAE music traditions in favor of a specific branch of Western classical music, namely, instrumental chamber music. Separation as an acculturation strategy was successfully used to maintain a specific branch of Western classical music.

However, with the theme of the transient Western expatriate community, separation strategies had a negative impact. Although Western classical chamber music was preserved, it did not succeed in fostering long-term instrumental ensemble growth. Separation strategies could be the reason for the frustrations that the participants experienced. In maintaining their own music ideals, they restricted their music opportunities by excluding Arabic music opportunities and limited their own performance opportunities.

Marginalization is linked to all of the themes. The Western classical musicians are not so much compelled to give up their music ideals but rather feel that a range of obstacles like complicated bureaucracy, restricted venues, inadequate opportunities, and limited choice in instrumentalists impede their musical ambitions and practices. Marginalization occurs in the sense that Western musicians give up on their music ideals in the long run and contribute to a transient society that does not allow to foster more permanent growth among Western musicians.

## POSSIBLE FUTURE STRATEGIES FOR MUSICIANS.

Integration could be a pivotal acculturation strategy for Western classical chamber musicians in the UAE as it is a strategy that allows musicians to maintain the integrity of their own music traditions and incorporate the UAE cultural traditions. Falavarjani and Yeh (2018) argue that Berry's acculturation strategies (2005:677), with specific focus on cultural integration, create a highly creative environment where participants can show “creative achievements and creative problem solving.” Western classical musicians can use integration as an acculturation strategy to explore how “creativity and creative potential may be harnessed during cultural adaptation processes” (Falavarjani & Yeh, 2018:2221). In terms of indifferent Emirate audiences, Western musicians can use cultural integration and incorporate UAE Arabic music ensembles as part of the program to attract a wider audience. Western classical chamber music items could still be performed, and UAE music could be integrated as part of the program, allowing both cultural groups to practice their instrumental performing art. This will attract UAE audiences and expose the Emirate society to Western classical music. By integrating the music of the UAE as separate items on the program, Western classical musicians could maintain their music heritage while incorporating the dominant UAE music traditions and reach a greater audience.

This simple integration strategy could solve some of the other frustrations. In the long run, a more aware audience – as opposed to an indifferent audience – could simplify the complicated bureaucracy, help locate accommodating performance venues, and in turn positively influence the quality of performance opportunities. Therefore, by creating an enlightened audience and by implication of a supportive UAE society, an understanding of the nuances and needs of Western classical chamber music could be stimulated. If integration acculturation strategies are used effectively, Western classical chamber musicians could maintain their preferred music traditions while fostering a meaningful cultural understanding in the UAE.

Research into the success of integration acculturation strategies (Falavarjani & Yeh, 2018:2220) provided a viable solution not only for us but hopefully for all Western classical chamber musicians. Integration strategies could provide a creative environment where Western classical performers do not have to sacrifice their music traditions while incorporating Emirate music ensembles in their music programs – this could have far-reaching effects for not only Western music scenes but also UAE audiences and communities.

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