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**BREAKING THROUGH SOCIO - CULTURAL BARRIERS IN
POPULARIZING WESTERN MUSIC ACROSS SRI LANKA
1950 – 2010
THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION**

BY

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ABSTRACT

The introduction and growth of Western music took place as a result of contact with Colonial European powers, the Portuguese, Dutch and British. By the middle of the 20th century, Western music had been established within the English educated middle and upper class in Colombo and cities such as Galle and Kandy. The association of Western music with the English language and the upper classes has been one of the major socio-cultural barriers to the spread of Western music in Sri Lanka. The period 1950 – 2010 is one which saw vast changes in Sri Lankan society. This thesis examines the activities of the Ministry of Education during this period in the field of Western music and attempts to evaluate their effect in overcoming socio-cultural barriers in the popularizing of Western music in Sri Lanka.

Primary source of information used in this research, was the documentation available at the Ministry of Education (MoE), Department of Examinations and the National Institute of Education. The researcher having being associated personally with most of the programmes carried out in Western music during the period covered by this thesis had in her possession many documents pertaining to the research topic. Information from the Non-Governmental Organizations was obtained by gaining access to their records and requests made for specific items of data. In evaluating the impact of the various programmes of the MoE, a wide variety of information sources of different degrees of relevance and reliability were studied. These included discussions at workshops, responses to questionnaires, interviews and feedback from the school community and the public in addition to statistical data available on record.

This thesis is divided into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides the background for the study including the changes in the education system that took place during this period. Chapter 2 is a brief summary of Western music in other multicultural, multiethnic or advocating world musics in the region, in countries such as India, Singapore, Malaysia, Hong Kong and China.

Chapter 3 documents and analyzes changes that took place in the formal teaching of Western music during this period in the class room as reflected in the syllabi of the MoE.

Chapter 4 examines in detail the initiatives of the MoE outside the classroom to popularize and develop Western music and attempts to analyze their impact using both quantitative and qualitative data.

In Chapter 5, it is concluded that while the formal teaching of Western music in the school system has not had much impact on the popularizing of Western music, the non-formal programmes of the MoE in particular the 'National Youth Orchestra' and 'National Music Festival' have had a major impact. Other institutions such as the private examination boards and private music teachers have made a significant contribution. Finally, it is recognized that with the changes that have taken place in Sri Lankan society during the period 1950 – 2010, association with a particular class of society and a lack of knowledge of English are no longer significant socio-cultural barriers to the popularizing of Western music.