



DOI: 10.4312/mz.60.2.9-32
UDK: 784.66(548.7):929Bastiansz W.

Theorising on the Genesis of *Chorus Baila*

Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya

Universities of London and Cambridge

ABSTRACT

Chorus Baila is associated with the Portuguese colonisers of Sri Lanka. The originator of the genre, Mervin Ollington Bastiansz, was a member of a minority community, a *Burgher* with Dutch, Portuguese, and Sinhalese ancestry. I consider the life and musical experiences of Bastiansz in theorising on the genesis of *chorus baila*.

Keywords: *chorus baila*, hybridity, postcolonial identity, Wally Bastiansz

IZVLEČEK

Chorus baila je povezan s portugalskimi kolonizatorji Šrilanke. Utemeljitelj žanra, Mervin Ollington Bastiansz, je bil pripadnik manjšinske skupnosti, *burgher* z nizozemskimi, portugalskimi in singalskimi predniki. Pri opazovanju nastanka *chorus baila* razmišljam o vplivu Bastianszevih življenjskih in glasbenih izkušenj.

Ključne besede: *chorus baila*, hibridnost, postkolonialne identitete, Wally Bastiansz



Figure 1: Wally Bastiansz CD cover.¹

Samāgame Waslyan
Āgame Kristian
Mame Wally Bastian
*All Ceylon baila champion*²

(author's transliteration from Sinhala)

Only a single CD with fourteen *bailas* survives as a tribute to the *Baila King* Wally Bastiansz,³ the originator of *chorus baila* (Figure 1). Sumathipala Perera, a leading *vāda baila* singer (2004, 193) remembers a competition near Ananda College, Colombo, when Bastiansz sang the above in Sinhala. This paper takes into account the history of *chorus baila* which is entwined with two other genres *kaffrinha*⁴ and *vāda baila*.

Sri Lanka's strategic position in the Indian Ocean enabled trading during both the northeast and southwest monsoons enhancing its economic value and attraction to traders. In the early modern era, a small country on the Atlantic was driven to set sail in the high seas, taking high risks in expectation of high

1 Torana Records, Colombo, 2004.

2 "I Wally Bastiansz, the All-Ceylon *Baila* champion, am a Wesleyan Christian" (author's translation).

3 The variant spellings of the surname Bastiansz, pronounced with a final "s" in Dutch and Bastian in lyrics could be due to rhyme.

4 Spelt variously as *kaffrein* (Hugh Nevill manuscript) and *kāfriinha*, *kaffringha* (see White-Radhakrishnan 2023), *kaffringna* (Kalinga Dona 2019, 217).

returns. By reaching the source of spices and carving out a maritime trade route, the Portuguese undercut the middlemen and previously established markets in Venice and Antwerp (de Silva Jayasuriya 2008). Whilst trade was the main driving force, proselytising and political entanglements with the local royalty led to colonisation from 1597 onwards. Sri Lankan culture moulded by its Buddhist-Hindu base was disrupted by the encounter, which began four hundred and fifty years of European contact. Although the Portuguese period is considered to be from 1506 to 1658, actual domination lasted no more than sixty-one years. Nevertheless, the Portuguese paved the way for other Europeans to engage in Indian Ocean maritime trade. In Sri Lanka, the Portuguese were ousted by the Dutch in 1658, after a prolonged struggle over twenty years. The Dutch, in turn, were superseded by the British in 1796, who unlike the two previous colonisers were able to take over the central Kandyan kingdom and unify the administration. By the time of independence in 1948, almost half a millennium of European contact had made indelible imprints in the island's socioculture. The Portuguese legacy is strongly embedded in the island's intangible cultural heritage. A multiethnic pluricultural country with a range of ethnolinguistic groups is further stratified by socioeconomic class, bound to a western education through the English medium. Caste is less problematic as the majority are Buddhists, not bound by ideas of purity and pollution as in the Hindu caste system but by a person's actions or deeds. A person should not be marked by his birth according to Buddhist philosophy. Remnants of caste that existed as trades and endogamous groups were ruptured by colonial presence; Sri Lankans abandoned their caste obligations to perform military and other tasks for the colonial regime.

The birth of *baila* stems back to an important moment in Sri Lanka's history – regaining independence after four and a half centuries of colonial rule. The Portuguese have left strong impressions on the cultural landscape of Sri Lanka of which music is the most vibrant. *Baila* evolved when Sri Lanka was struggling to define a national cultural identity. Newly independent nations search for an identity, untarnished by the colonial presence and imagining the precolonial past. But the precolonial cannot be reinvented by the independent nation. During moments of economic and socio-political chaos, music can be a weapon to articulate the sentiments of the masses. Multiethnic nations struggle with the tension between diversity and homogeneity that nationalism imposes. “Nationalism is a political principle which maintains that similarity of culture is the basic social bond” (Gellner 1997, 3). As Kumar (2010, 393) points out, “[n]ationalism has a dialectical quality about it: it is both inclusionary and exclusionary at the same time. The very process of including people who share the same objective and subjective characteristics in the political community of nation inevitably excludes those who do not share these. [...] [N]ationalism as a sentiment could be used by powerful groups to marginalise

and subjugate the weaker ones.” Anne Sheeran says that “[a]lthough the *baila* is nowadays sung in the language of Sri Lanka’s dominant ethnic group, the Sinhalese, it is originally an African-Portuguese musical genre” (Sheeran 1997, 2). Despite the African and Portuguese inspirations in the melodic-rhythmic structure of *baila*, I argue that *baila* is a new musical identity which emerged in the “third space”. As cultural theorist Homi Bhabha asserts, hybridity is the “third space” where other positions emerge, setting up new structures of authority (Rutherford 1990, 209).

The Trajectory



PAGEANT OF LANKA

to celebrate
INDEPENDENCE OF CEYLON

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DONORS AND GUARANTORS :

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Figure 2: Pageant of Lanka to Celebrate Independence of Ceylon (1948).

The term *baila* is used without qualification in the literature. In a souvenir published to recognise the culture of the Island in 1948 called “Pageant of Lanka to Celebrate Independence of Ceylon” (Figure 2), musician Devar Surya Sena describes *vāde baila/hitivana baila/tharanga baila*, a form of impromptu sung poetry:

The lilting rhythm and tunes of the “Kaffrinha”, danced by Portuguese mercenaries, some of whom were Kaffirs [sic], fell on willing ears in the maritime provinces. Sinhalese words were immediately put to them and the Kaffrinha tunes are still sung and danced with gusto. Baila is another foreign importation which remains immensely popular at parties where Sinhalese words are composed extempore and sung to the Baila tune. That the Sinhalese have the gift of extempore composition is evident from the Viridu – a metrical pattern song sung to a rhythm on the Rabana. (Surya Sena 1948, 65)

Ananda Jayasekera (n.d., 23), nephew of Bastiansz writes of a *vāde baila* competition where the theme was the Buddha. Bastiansz was the only non-Buddhist competitor. Nevertheless, his knowledge of Buddhism, learnt through priests, helped in his poetic compositions as he sang:

Sandun rukak sē suvanda pathurai bō sē (author’s transliteration)
Budun kātade vandē budu vunāta passē?

Emitting a lot of sweet smells like a sandalwood tree (author’s translation)
Who did the Buddha worship after he reached Buddhahood?

His opponents were baffled and looked at each other for help but none could retort. Therefore, Bastiansz himself replied:

Edandak udin dinak danakate vadine Budun (author’s transliteration)
Thame, diyehi diṣwū chāyavete vendā doboth mudun

One day when going out for alms, the Buddha walked on a plank to cross a pool of water Placing his hands on his forehead, the Buddha worshipped his own reflection
(author’s translation)

Bastiansz won the competition, and he sang:

Āgamath Christian (Jayasekera, n.d.)
Palliye San Sebastijan
Mame Wally Bastians
Ceylon Baila champion

Religion is Christian
 Church is San Sebastian
 I am Wally Bastiansz
 Ceylon Baila Champion

Clearly, several genres of music inspired Wally Bastiansz in his compositions. The cross rhythms that he had been accustomed to through *kaffrinha* and the eighteen melodies, Portuguese legacies, which *vāda baila* singers draw upon, resurface in *chorus baila*. Bastiansz was known by various epithets such as “the person who brought *kaffrinha* to the fore” and “*baila chakravarthy*” [Baila Emperor], for example.

Wally Bastiansz was the leading *vāda baila* singer. His opponent Sumathipala Perera emphasised that the “real baila” was *vāda baila*, a form of impromptu sung poetry (de Silva Jayasuriya interview, 2008). More recently, Professor Nishara Fernando remembered *vāda baila* performed during his childhood in Dehiwela at *Poson* or *Esala* [June or July] full moon days in New Market, Station Road, opposite Perlin Hotel. The performance was on a stage constructed to act Buddhist dramas. After the *jāthaka kathā*⁵ dramas followed a musical session with *vāda baila*. Four or five singers sat on the stage and four or five musicians sat behind the competitors and played violins and bongo drums. The judge set the topic on which the singers had to compose lyrics and sing according to the given melody. Eighteen Portuguese melodies are drawn from, and the Sinhalese have widened the spectrum of melodies. Themes are marriage, dowry, drunkenness and gambling, for example. The poetry is comical and entertaining (de Silva Jayasuriya interview, 9 March 2023).

I also interviewed Percy Rajapakshe (19 May 2023, Colombo), *vāda baila* champion and Founder Chairman of the *Samasthalanka Shilpinge Sangamaya* (All-Ceylon Artists Association), founded in 2001, with the help of a former Minister of Culture, T. B. Ekanayake. The number of artists is now under one hundred. Sumathipala Perera was the Secretary and Esiri Fernando its Treasurer, both leading artists. During election campaigns, *vāda baila* singers are in much demand by politicians. Instruments played are violin, banjo, mandolin, triangle, congo drums, bongo drums, and tambourine. *Vāda baila* gave way to *chorus baila*. Both genres had space for creativity of the artist but *vāda baila* is demanding poetically as the singer must compose lyrics spontaneously and outwit the opponent. *Vāda Baila* is akin to Challenge Singing which in Brazil is called *Canto ao Desafio* [challenge songs] or *Repente* [improvised or impromptu songs] and in Portugal is called *desgarradas* [improvised or impromptu songs] or *Cantigas ao Desafio* [challenge songs].

5 Stories from the Buddha’s previous births.

In his book *Baila Kapirinna Vimarshanayak* [*An Enquiry into Baila Kapirinna*], Sunil Ariyaratne (1999, 80–81) lists the melodies which can be transliterated as *kapirinna*, *flon da bol*, *rosa*, *minho mai*, *java*, *alankara*, *banda*, *bathe bathe*, *manila*, *jamare*, *coranjaneetha*, *thirani*, *cha cha*, *kaviyan*, *ramtha neluma*, *josalin*, and *kafar*, named after the first word/s of the Portuguese or Sinhalese tunes and songs. According to Lal Jayasekera (de Silva Jayasuriya interview, 9 September 2018), Bastiansz was uncomfortable with the aggression that ensues in *vāda baila* competitions. Therefore, he composed *chorus baila* which involves a solo singer narrating through sung poetry. Bastiansz was familiar with the poetic form of chorus and verse through Wesleyan church hymns. The form of *chorus baila* is chorus-verse-chorus-verse-chorus-verse. The chorus is the most memorable part of the song, and the singer uses the lyrics, composed with simple and direct poetry, and repetition to ensure that the listeners can memorise and join in.

Kaffrinha songs in a manuscript recorded in 1888 by Hugh Nevill who worked for the British Civil Service in Ceylon, housed in the British Library (London), illustrate that *kaffrinha* did not include a chorus. Six *kaffrinhas* – “*Singellenona*” [“Sinhalese Lady”], “*Korra Jannethaie*” [“Blush Joanita”], “*Bastiahna*” [“Bastiana”], “*Chekoetie*” [“Whip”], “*Ama die none Frencena*” [“Love of Lady Francina”] and an untitled song are grouped under *Cantiga De Purtigese – Kaffrein – Neger Song Portigiese* [Songs of the Portuguese – *Kaffrinha* – Portuguese Negro Songs] (de Silva Jayasuriya 1995, 1996, 1997, 2001a, 2001b).

In order to contextualise *chorus baila*, I turned to the life of its composer, Gajanayake Mudiyansele Ollington Martalanus/Mervin Bastiansz (10 June 1914–16 January 1985), who became known as Wally Bastiansz. Bastiansz was a Burgher, a Sri Lankan of Portuguese/Dutch/Sinhalese descent. His father, Hinton Wilmot Bastiansz, was a Burgher and his mother Nalo Fernando was Sinhalese; the father’s ethnicity determines the child’s ethnic identity for official purposes. Bastiansz was born in Galle, a cosmopolitan port city, in the southern coast of Sri Lanka. I visited his home in the suburb of Piyadigama and his nephew Ananda Jayasekera, a son of his favourite sister – Felicia Florence, who inspired one of his best known *bailas* called *Nōna Mage Nurse Nōna* [*Lady, my Lady Nurse*] – showed me the site where Bastiansz’s house stood, behind a Buddhist temple. I recalled another of Bastiansz’s *bailas* called *Yaman Bando Vesak Balanna* [*Let’s go Banda to See the Vesak Decorations*]. Though a Christian, Wally learnt Sinhala from Buddhist monks such as Venerable Sumangala, head priest of the temple adjoining his home – *Piyadigama Purāna Vihāraya* – and also from the *Dadella Vālukārāmaya* priests (Jayasekera [n. d.]). Although ethnolinguistic and ethnoreligious divides are apparent within the diversity of Sri Lanka, the porosity of culture amongst the ethnic groups is illustrated through the performing arts.

From his childhood, Bastiansz had an affinity for music and played the mouth organ, button accordion and flute as a self-taught musician. Later on, he also played the piano, banjo, ukulele, Spanish guitar, violin and accordion. Bastiansz became known as the “God Father of *Baila*”, “*Baila Vishāradha*” [“Erudite in *Baila*”], and *Baila Chakravarthy* [“*Baila* Emperor”]; “The Exotic Ceylonese Performer” when he featured in Colombo’s night clubs (Sheeran 2002, 154), and “Ceylon’s Number One *Baila* Star” (anonymous 1962). Bastiansz joined the Police Department in 1932 and served for 27 years as Police Constable 2407. He was involved in the Road Traffic Demonstration programme which travelled throughout the island, educating children about road safety, when he became known as “*Polisiye Māmā*” [“Uncle in the Police”]. The simplicity of the narratives and the realities that he addressed through ballads, and the catchy rhythms are in these popularised *bailas*.

On hearing of Bastiansz’s problems, Sir John Kotelawela, Prime Minister of Sri Lanka (1953–1956), requested the police department to relieve Bastiansz from night duty and to retain him in Colombo. Bastiansz thereby was able to perform in Colombo’s night clubs. Lal Jayasekera informed me that Bastiansz had sung his composition *Dadikala Mage Mavuni* [*Mother Who Brought Me Up*], and tears had rolled down the cheeks of Sir John who remembered his own mother. This is just one example of the sentiments that Bastiansz evoked through his poetry. Moreover, *baila* dissolved class barriers and the Sri Lankan elite who were accustomed to western classical music also identified with *baila*, a space where they could express a new identity and embrace modernity. Sir John danced the *baila* in public such as at the annual police picnic when his sarong, singlet and *baila* merged as signifiers of the local, counterpoints to the supposedly unpatriotic embrace of colonisers’ tastes among the upper classes (Sheeran 2002, 157). However, *baila* is Sri Lankan, if the lyrics and poetry are taken into account. Bastiansz’s patriotism and unrecognised role as educator and social reformer is evident in his poetry. An example is the song *Nidabas Lankāve* [*In Freed Lanka*] where he brings to the fore values suppressed by colonialism.

Nidahas Lankāve

*Nidahas Lankāve... Api du puthu obagē...
Veera vikum pa dasa maha yōdayo kō ape lak mavagē?*

*Asanu lamayinē... mage dū puthunē
Ma dena bas medinē...
Numbala mal men suvanda hamannē
Sirilaka mal uyanē...*

*Saradam marekam nokaran sorakam
Hasirenu kusum vagē...
Numbela mal men suvanda hamannē
Sirilake mal uyanē...*

*Honda lamayin vāge... sitiyoṭṭ ratata agē...
Ametheke nokeran... me dena ovadan
Polisiye mamagē...*

*Ganja thailan... abing de mathpan
Lamayine ivatha lanū...
Horakam merakam vancha athahera
Sāmen rata rakimū...*

Asanu lamayinē... mage du puthunē...

*Sithe thaban doṭṭa naga vandinuva mavpiyatē
Bulath aran haniketa yan thama guruverayanetē*

*Nidahas Lankāve... api du puthu obage
Veera vikum pa dasa maha yōdayo ko ape lak mavge*

(author's transliteration)

In Freed Lanka

In freed Lanka... We are your daughters and sons...
Where are the ten giants who performed heroic acts for Mother Lanka?

Listen children... my daughters and sons
To the advice that I give
You all are like sweet smelling flowers
In the flower garden of Sri Lanka

Do not be fierce or treacherous and do not steal
Be like flowers
Your fragrance floats like flowers,
In the flower garden of Sri Lanka

If you are good children, the standing of the country will be enhanced
Do not forget... this advice I give
Your uncle from the police

Opium, drugs and alcohol
Children throw away
Give up stealing fierceness dishonesty
Let us peacefully protect our country

Listen children... my daughters and sons...

Keep your hands on your forehead and worship your parents
Take betel leaves and quickly go to your teachers

If you behave well, children, you will be an asset to the country
Don't forget the advice of your uncle in the police
Don't forget the advice of your uncle in the police

(author's translation)



Figure 3: Marshall Wambeck with Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya holding his tambourine.⁶

First point of contact for my research on *baila* was Gerald Wickremasooriya, the founder of Sooriya Records. At his suggestion, I contacted Marshall Wambeck (Figure 3) who was a member of the Bastiansz troupe. Wambeck lived in Mutwal, where Bastiansz was also stationed in 1962.

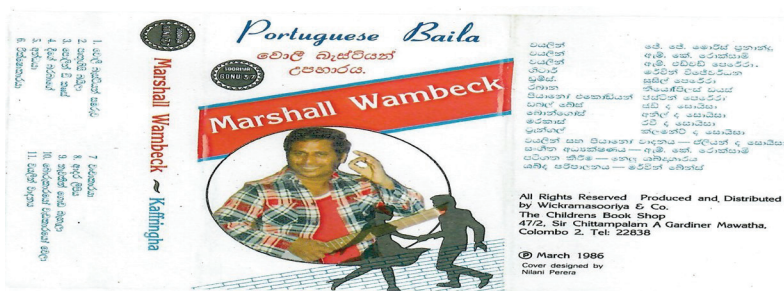


Figure 4: Cassette inlay of Marshall Wambeck's recordings of Portuguese *bailas*.

Surprisingly, at our first meeting, Wambeck presented me with the last copy of his Portuguese *baila* cassette (Figure 4). Wambeck substituted for Bastiansz on stage.

⁶ Photograph by Dr Hemal Jayasuriya.

To,
 Dr. Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya,
 This is to inform you that I went to see
 Mr. Rajiv Sebastian to Lamma Recording
 Studio. And I discuss with him about the
 recording of 16 Bailas for the Cassette and
 CD. now everything is been finalise and
 I have attach a letter to my letter about
 the Recording Charges.
 So I hope everything will be finalise
 and you will make arrangements about the
 recording process. Soon as possible from
 your Side.
 God Bless you and Amaal
 Thank you
 Yours Sincerely
 Bala Sings
 Marshall Wambeck

The titles of Wally Bastiansz Baila what I am
 going to record for you. In English, Sinhala,
 Portuguese, Malay, and Tamil. Include the
 Catholic Bailas also. and this are the
 names of all 16 Bailas.

(1) FATIMA MANE	(8) WATTE AMMA	(15) RAKET MEDILLA
(2) SAN SEBASTIAN	(9) PORTUGUESE BAILA	(16) ANBARA SHAMARA KULMA
(3) JESUS CHRIST	(10) SAKA KACHAL ANAK (MALAY)	
(4) BAILA UYATHA	(11) VERANICA DANCE THE BAILA	
(5) ROSE SUDUMA	(12) MY LOVING MARIK	
(6) ALE ALE	(13) NALLA NARUNI (TAMIL)	
(7) KALEENA	(14) KETTA JAINS BATHANAYA	

Figure 5: Marshall Wambeck's handwritten list of Wally Bastiansz *bailas*.

Wambeck compiled a list of *bailas* that Bastiansz sang in Sinhala, Tamil, Malay, Portuguese and English (Figure 5). Whilst the masses were receptive to a new genre given the political climate surrounding independence, the inclusivity of Bastiansz in reaching out to everyone through his multilingual lyrics is noteworthy. Unfortunately, Wambeck passed away before we could complete the project. The dialectics of language can be inclusive or exclusive. Bastiansz also sang bilingual (Sinhala/English) *bailas* such as *Kussi Amma Sēra* [*Kitchen Maid Sera*]. Listeners must understand the narration to appreciate *chorus baila*, which I argue is a ballad, a narrative poem set to music. Its value is primarily in the poetry. Ronald Walcott, an American musicologist, in his doctoral thesis submitted to the University of Sri Jayewardenapura (Sri Lanka) in 1978, highlights the poetic value of *baila* which surpasses all else in importance (Donaldson 2006). The etymology of *baila* is *ballare*, the Latin/Italian word which means “to dance”. A ballad is a short poem suitable for singing and was originally intended to accompany a dance. In Portuguese, the word *bailar* means “to dance” in the context of a ball in a dance hall; the standard European Portuguese word *dançar* means “to dance”. The intertwining of music,

song, and dance is reflected in its contemporary usage when *baila* is used to refer to the three art forms. *Baila* is a noun qualified by adjectives: *Paraguayan baila*, *kapirinna baila*, and *vāda baila*, for example. *Kapirinna baila* is described by Anne Sheeran (1997, 11) as “the rich continuum of Afro-Portuguese expressive traditions that eventually formed the basis of twentieth century *baila* music as a Sinhala popular cultural form”.

Traditionalists may be sceptical, but they cannot disagree that *baila* stirs Sri Lankans and as Aelian Soysa sings: “*Lankāvata Baila genā Wally Bastiansz, Baila valin rata hollapu Baila champion*” [“Wally Bastiansz, who gave *Baila* to Sri Lanka, was the *Baila* champion who moved the country with *Baila*”]. *Baila* reflects Bastiansz’s creativity as a poet and as a musician, composing both the lyrics and music for his songs and accompanying himself on the guitar. His favourite instrument was the *viyōle*, meaning “guitar” in Portuguese,⁷ a language that Bastiansz spoke. His Sinhala *baila* composition *Ayirin Josepin Rosalin Anjelin* exemplifies this. Bastiansz sings of Irene, Josephine, Rosaline, Angeline, and Catherine, and his grandson Lahiru (Angeline’s son),⁸ remarks that the names are of Bastiansz’s daughters. However, Bastiansz’s second wife was also named Josephine (née Stratts); his first wife was called Florie de Silva (Ananda Jayasekera interview by de Silva Jayasuriya, September 2017). Bastiansz had thirteen children (six from Florie and seven from Josephine). The lyrics reveal Bastiansz’s immense love for his *viyolē* with which he hopes to be re-united in heaven.

Ayirin Josepin Rosalin Anjelin
[Irene Josephine Rosaline Angeline]

Chorus

Ayirin Josepin Rosalin Anjelin
Atharin patharin natayida Katharin
Piyano banjo tamarin mandolin
Vayalin vayalin lōke nonasena vayalin

Irene Josephine Rosaline Angeline
Katherine also dances amidst
Piano, banjo, tambourine, mandoline
Violin, violin, violin that is indestructible in the world

7 Ruwin Rangeeth Dias (2015) writes of Malaysian Joget, a genre of Portuguese-inspired music in Melaka (Malacca) and refers to a *violão* as a guitar-like instrument which strummed fundamental chords.

8 Lahiru commented on the girls’ names in the song via YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eWYL6SO2JAo>.

Stanza 1

*Viyole mā sanasane viyōle
 Viyōle oba mage athē mevelē
 Obē mihiri nādeta nidallē
 Nalawē ladaruvō ran thotillē
 Viyole obave ne man hare giyē
 Sangīta sastarē kumāriyē
 Vinōde obe ne suraliyangē
 Viyōlē viyōle māgē, viyōle viyōle māgē*

Guitar, the guitar that comforts me
 Guitar you are in my hand now
 For your sweet sound in tranquillity
 Babies are rocking in their golden cradles
 Guitar, I did not abandon you
 Princess of the art of music
 You are the joy of the angels
 Guitar, my guitar, guitar, my guitar

Chorus

Stanza 2

*Devna nādeta dev suraliyan
 Natuvāne guththile panditha vatekaran
 Nirindūn bisōvarunde pandidanan
 Āvānē obe tharangeta dura sitan
 Mihiri geetha nāda liyangē
 Asilā sith randuna kumaradanangē
 Nādē mahalu vunath anargē
 Viyōlē viyōle māgē viyōlē viyōle māgē*

For your divine music the angels
 Danced surrounding sage Guttila
 Kings, queens, and sages
 Came to your competition from afar
 Writing sweet sounding songs
 Etched in the memories of princes
 Even though old, the music is great
 Guitar, my guitar, guitar, my guitar

Chorus

Stanza 3

Bāledi obata bande ādarē
Ēkālē sita sithen māge nomaharē
Hitē athivena duk karadarē
Obagē eka talayakata mage hare
Māgē avasāne mohothe velāvē
Nādē kumatade batanalāvē?
Hamuvemu api denna suvargē
Viyōlē viyōle māgē, viyōlē viyōle māgē

The love I took to you in my youth
Has not left my mind since
Sorrowful problems in my heart
Disappear when I hear one of your melodies
During my last moments
What is the point of the flute's sound?
Let's meet up in heaven
Guitar, my guitar, guitar, my guitar
(all transliterations and translations by the author)

Through playing chords on the guitar, Bastiansz included harmony in *baila*, a dimension introduced by the Portuguese. The typical chord progression in *baila* is I IV V and most, not all, *baila* are built on major scales. For example, a *baila* built on C major involves C major, F major and G major chords. The asymmetric rhythm and syncopations drive *baila*. *Baila* is not entirely a carryover of colonial music as I have illustrated. As Sri Lanka discovered and explored her new post-independent identity, *baila* music became more indigenised and identified with Sinhala popular music.

Wally Bastianz's Musical Journeys

His musical compositions, I argue, were shaped by his journeys through several genres of music. *Kaffrinha* was in vogue during the 1950s, and Alex Van Arkadie (personal communication, 2001) recalls Colombo's *kaffrinha* dancers, travelling entertainers, who performed annually with blackened faces in affluent Dutch Burgher houses. Van Arkadie's father was a close acquaintance of Bastiansz (de Silva Jayasuriya 2013, 2020, 2023). The etymon of *kaffrinha* is *Kaffir* meaning "African" from the Arabic word *qafir* which means non-believer and *nha* (or *na*) which is the Portuguese diminutive implying that the music consisted of a bit of African. Portuguese Burghers in the Eastern Province towns of Batticaloa and Trincomalee call their traditional performance *kaffrinha* and sing in Sri Lanka Portuguese, a creolised form of Portuguese, which

was the lingua franca of Sri Lanka for most of the colonial era. The language was called “Ceylon Portuguese” by its speakers at the end of the nineteenth century, “*Indo-Portuguese de Ceilão*” by the Goan Vicar General of Ceylon, Sebastião Rodolfo Dalgado (1900), and “*Indo-Portugiesisch von Ceylon*” by the “father of Creole languages” Hugo Schuchardt (de Silva Jayasuriya 1999). Mother-tongue speakers of Creole, simply call their language “Portuguese” though they are aware that it differs from the European dialect.

The pioneer researcher of Portuguese music in Sri Lanka – C. M. Fernando, an elite Sinhalese who graduated in Law from the University of Cambridge – presented his seminal paper on “The Music of Ceylon” to the Royal Asiatic Society (Colombo) in 1894, and accompanied Portuguese Burgher musicians on the piano. The “Ceylon Portuguese” orchestra consisted of a *banderinha* [mandolin], *viuale* [tenor violin], and *rabāna* [tambourine] (Fernando 1894). Whilst scores were published by Fernando (1894 and 1904),⁹ Nevill’s manuscript (1888) included songs with similar titles: *Singallenona* [*Sinhalese Lady*], *Bastiana* [*Bastiana*], *Chikothe* [*Whip*], and *Coran Janita* [*Blush Joanita*]. The African connection is also evident in the titles of songs: *Velinda*¹⁰ *Mazambicu* (Fernando 1894, 184), *Viltao*¹¹ *de Mazambicu* (Fernando 1904, 16), *Caffri* (African), and *Cafferina* (*Kaffrinha*). Culture contact and cultural exchange is brought out through *kaffrinha* (see de Silva Jayasuriya 2020 and White-Radhakrishnan 2023). Describing music of the Portuguese, Fernando contrasts the “peculiar jerky movements” of the fast *kaffrinha* in 6/8 time (six quavers to a bar) with the “slow and stately” *chikoti* in 3/8 time (three quavers to a bar) (Fernando 1894, 186). Scores of three twentieth century orchestral arrangements of *kaffrinha* for the piano such as “Ceylonese Dances” (Norbert Rodrigo), “Ceylonese Lancers on Kaffrinha Airs” (Vincent Rodrigo) (Ariyaratne 1999) and “Caffarina Quadrilles” (Professor Lord) consist of five movements: *siinku padāās* [five dance figures] (Radhakrishnan 2021, 3). *Kaffrinha* is sparked off by cross rhythms, that is, the interplay between 6/8 (six quavers to a bar) in the treble and 3/4 (three crotchets to a bar) in the bass, and syncopation, shifting accents to where they are not supposed to be in western music and accenting the parts in-between beats. Playing “off the beat” adds excitement to the performance. The scores of the first collector of *kaffrinha* Herr Somers, the Band Master of the Ceylon Rifle Regiments, have not been traced (Ariyaratne 2001, 32). Many of these “Kaffir airs” had been published by the Band Master of the Ceylon Rifle Regiments under the title *After Supper Kaffir Quadrila* (Brohier 1973, 27).

9 Fernando provides different titles for the same song in his publications of 1894 and 1904.

10 Fernando (1894) provides a title that is different in a later publication (1904). Both refer to Mozambique.

11 *Viltao* could be a misreading or typing error of *Villão/Vilão* meaning “villain”.



Figure 6: Portuguese Burgher Musicians Edward Outschoorn, Niroshan Ragel, Freddy Sellar, Stephen “Iva” Andrado, and Gladwin Speck playing *Kaffrinha* at the Batticaloa Burgher Union.¹²

During my visit to Batticaloa in 2009, I experienced the hospitality and warmth of the Portuguese Burgher community in their community centre, the Catholic Burgher Union. Edward Outschoorn played the *rabāna* (a hand-held circular drum played with the fingers and palm of the hands), *ra-vukinnas* (violins) were played by Freddy Sellar and Stephen “Iva” Andrado, Gladwin Speck played the guitar, and Niroshan Ragel played the tambourine. Four couples – Ludmila Outschoorn, Selorin, Sriyana, Omega, Edvin Outschoorn, Stephen, Repitus, and Lenor – danced the five figures of the *kaffrinha*. The girls wore pale blue knee length dresses of organza lined with silk, or made of pure silk, adorned with sequins and trimmed with lace. The boys wore black suits, white shirts and ties. For a description of *kaffrinha* performed at a Portuguese Burgher wedding see Mahesh Radhakrishnan (2021, 9–12).

Although *baila* is associated with the Portuguese colonisers and the performers were originally Christians in urban coastal areas of the southwestern parts of Sri Lanka, its popularity spread throughout the island through cinema and radio. The diaspora carries their musical identity overseas but *baila* has not become globalised. Globalisation remains in the hands of the *baila* singers who might introduce international languages in the lyrics such as Sunil Perera’s *baila* with an Italian chorus:

12 Photograph by Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya, 2009.

*Buongiorno Senhore,
Buona sera Senhora,
Como stai Senhorita?
Va bene?*

(author's transliteration)

Good morning, gentleman
Good evening, lady
How are you, young lady?
Alright?

(author's translation)

Baila was moved into the age of rock 'n' roll by including electric guitars, drum kits, and synthesisers by Gerald Wickremasooriya of Sooriya Records (Fernandez 2002, 10). The dynamism of *baila* through M. S. Fernando, C. T. Fernando, groups such as La Ceylanicas, Los Caballeros, Nihal Nelson, Bhatiya and Santosh inspired by several genres of world music has broadened its range. Although *baila* is popular with both men and women, boys and girls, performers are mostly male which reflects the established patriarchy. Vasana de Mel (2004) argues that "negotiating freedom and commanding respect within a rigidly debilitating framework burdens many Sri Lankan women in *chorus baila* and Sinhala *pop* music" (de Mel 2004, 121). Recently, however, the number of female *baila* singers has increased. During an event organised by Feizal Samath, Business Editor of the Sunday Times, on 15 July 2014 aboard a floating restaurant cruising along Colombo's Beira Lake, I stressed the importance of *baila*, which needed support through economic and marketing strategies.¹³ Ronnie Leitch confirmed the prejudices towards *baila* singers: parents were reluctant to give their daughters in marriage to *baila* singers. "A *baila* festival with an academic flavour" called for by Damith Kurunduhewa, Corporate Risk and BCP Specialist/Pragmatic Trainer (Sirimanna 2014) has not come to fruition yet. However, a new *baila* called *Prūtugisi Apita Kiyala Dunna Thāle* [*The Melody That the Portuguese Taught Us*], which Ronnie sang with Corinne Almeida, a leading singer, was released. Mariyaselle Goonetilleke, who sang her signature *baila* – *Kandy Lamissi* [*Girl from Kandy*] – with Ronnie on our cruise, identified *baila* with a 6/8 beat.

13 I am grateful to musicians Marshall Wambeck, Anton Jones, Walter Fernando, Stanley Oumar, Mariyaselle Goonetilleke, Harsha Makalanda, Sumathipala Perera, Percy Rajapakshe, Ranjith Fernando, and Dulcie Outschoon. I thank Dr Hemal Jayasuriya, Johan de Silva, Ajith Nanayakkara, João Paulo Cota, Margarida Oldland, Dr Samadi Galpayage, Dr Marilyn Herman, Shanta Gunasekera, Dr Mahendra Gonsalkorale, Dhammi and David Holbourne, and Srimani Ranasinghe for participating with me in my *baila* performances.

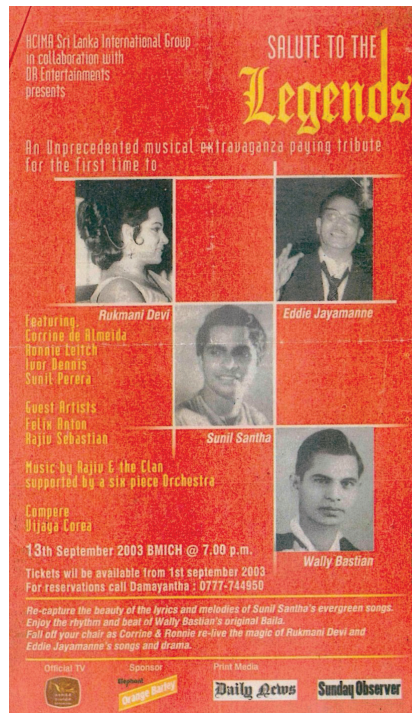


Figure 7: Advertisement for the concert “Salute to the Legends”
(Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall, Colombo, 13 September 2003).

As a member of the police band, Bastiansz was inspired by western music, and his composition *Hai hui Babi Achchige baisikel eka* [*The Bicycle Belonging to an Old Lady Called Babi*] can be mapped on to Charles Sweeley’s composition titled “Repasz Band” (1901) (Abeywickrama 2006). On my visit to the police station at Park Road, Colombo 5, I was shown Bastiansz’s photograph which hung in a room where the police band was rehearsing. He was honoured posthumously at the concert “Salute to the Legends” in Colombo on 13 September 2003, together with three other megastars in the field of entertainment (Figure 7).

Bastiansz’s ethnicity shaped *baila* as he ruptured cultural borders and negotiated a new identity. Finding a new musical identity which is not simply a colonial continuum is a celebration of freedom. Moreover, *baila* draws together diverse communities, dissolving hierarchies and has a role to play in the reconciliation process, in re-building social cleavages. I will conclude with a poem composed by Dr Hemal Jayasuriya:

Sounding Baila, Plucking Strings

by Hemal Jayasuriya

Fireflies light the night
 Hanging on a forest
 Of tropical green leaves nestling
 In the dark besides the beach
 Of the Galle¹⁴ bay. Sounds
 Emanating from plucked strings:
 Guitar, Violin and Tambourine
 Roped in, togethered, by the drumbeat
 On the taut skin of a *Rabāna*
 Lets loose *bailas*
 Into the salty winds soothing the Indian Ocean
 As the feet of the Dancers
 Rotating at the edge of the Water
 Kicking, sending plumes of sand skywards.

A silvery full moon alights
 On the face of the Lagoon
 And silently ruptures into a million pieces
 As the gentle oceanic ripples take apart
 The cosmic intruder making it into a non-entity.
 Bastiansz sings: *Nōna mage Nurse Nōna*.
 My arm becomes a sail
 My body becomes a boat
 To carry you, you my everlasting Love
 That is untouched by Time and Space
 On an ocean wave to the resplendent isle of Lanka
 For us to climb the Holy Mountain
 To see butterflies frolicking in the cool air
 In the surrounds of Adam's Peak

Acknowledgements

I thank Gerald Wickremasooriya and his son, Udena, for their advice and for introducing me to the *baila* singer Marshall Wambeck. I also thank Professor Sunil Ariyaratne who gifted me his book on *baila kaffrinha* and Dr Maya Abeyiwckrema for sharing personal experiences on the subject. I thank Dr

14 Galle is a heritage city which highlights Sri Lanka's colonial past.

Lalanath de Silva for his generosity in sending me copies of his *baila* compositions. I am obliged to the feedback from participants of my *baila* and *kaffrinha* seminars and lectures at the Universities of Aberdeen, Aveiro, Colombo, Hawaïi, Lisbon, Ljubljana, London, and Roehampton, and at the Sooriya Village (Colombo). I thank Dr Roland Silva for encouraging me to research *baila* due to its significance for Sri Lankan identity and heritage. Moreover, I am grateful to the British Library Sound Archives for supporting my research on *baila*. Lastly, I am grateful for the critical remarks by the anonymous reviewers and sincerely thank Dr Christian Poske for his editorial suggestions.

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POVZETEK

Razprava o nastanku *chorus baila*

Portugalska zapuščina na Šrilanki izhaja iz srečanja obeh kultur v šestnajstem in sedemnajstem stoletju. Od 150 let (1506–1658), ki veljajo za portugalsko dobo, je portugalska oblast trajala le enainšestdeset let. Kljub temu so Portugalci na Šrilanki pustili močno zapuščino. Najbolj živa je popularna glasba, kot je *chorus baila* (splošno znan kot *baila*). O njej bomo razpravljali skozi teoretsko opazovanje raznolikosti tega postkolonialnega žanra, ki presega etnične, verske, jezikovne, razredne, kastne, spolne in starostne delitve. Pri orisu evolucijske poti *baila* so upoštevani zgodovinski in etnografski pristopi. Ob upoštevanju življenjske poti začetnika *baila* – Wallyja Bastiansza – in žanrov, ki so ga navdihnili, razpravljam o njenem nastanku. Pomembni viri informacij so intervjuji z Bastianszovimi sorodniki in glasbeniki, arhivski viri in postkolonialne pripovedi. Kot trdi postkolonialni teoretik Homi Bhabha, je hibridnost »tretji prostor«, kjer se pojavljajo nove pozicije, ki vzpostavljajo nove strukture oblasti (Rutherford 1990, 209). *Baila* daje Šrilančanom možnost, da najdejo novo postkolonialno identiteto. Pri razumevanju *chorus baila* se ne omejujem le na melodično–ritmične strukture, ampak upoštevam tudi poezijo in besedila. S tem trdim, da ima *chorus baila* posebno vlogo pri obnavljanju šrilanške identitete na osnovi predkolonialnih vrednot. Poleg tega trdim, da *chorus baila* zaobjema a novo postkolonialno glasbeno identiteto Šrilančanov. Kot sta ugotovila Jim Sykes in Julia Byl (2023, 3), je »glavni cilj preučevanja glasbenih tradicij Indijskega oceana razumevanje, kako lahko glasba tvori in prečka meje skupnosti«.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

SHIHAN DE SILVA JAYASURIYA (shihan.desilva@sas.ac.uk), DipLCM, PhD, is a Senior Research Fellow (Institute of Commonwealth Studies), a Senior Associate and Research Associate (Lucy Cavendish College and Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics, University of Cambridge, a Discretionary Associate (Faculty of History, University of Oxford), Sarath Amunugama Visiting Professor (University of the Visual & Performing Arts, Colombo), and a Collaborative Researcher (University of Colombo). She was a Visiting Professor at Ritsumeikan University (Kyoto) and a Visiting Fellow at the International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam). She holds a Diploma in Piano Performance (London College of Music) and her doctorate concerned the “Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon: History, Linguistics and Literature” (University of Westminster, London). She won the distinguished Rama Watamull Collaborative Lecture Series award from the University of Hawaii and is an elected Fellow of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland and the National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka. She edited five books and seven special volumes of journals, and published six monographs, including *Sounds of Identity: Music of Afro-Asians* (*International Journal of Ethnomusicological Studies*). Her ethnographic films have been screened worldwide. She served as a Member and Rapporteur on the UNESCO Slave Route Project (Paris) and is currently an Expert on People of African Descent in Asia for the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (Geneva). She Chairs the National Scientific Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage, ICOMOS Sri Lanka and is an Expert on the ICOMOS Paris International Committee on Intangible Cultural Heritage.

O AVTORICI

SHIHAN DE SILVA JAYASURIYA (shihan.desilva@sas.ac.uk) DipLCM, PhD, je "Senior Research Fellow" (Institute of Commonwealth Studies), "Senior Associate" in "Research Associate" (Lucy Cavendish College in Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages and Linguistics, Univerza v Cambridgeu), "Discretionary Associate" (Faculty of History, Univerza v Oxfordu), "Sarath Amunugama Visiting Professor" (University of the Visual & Performing Arts, Colombo), in "Collaborative Researcher" (University of Colombo). Bila je gostujoča profesorica na Univerzi Ritsumeikan (Kyoto) in gostujoča raziskovalka na International Institute of Social History (Amsterdam). Diplomirala je iz klavirja na London College of Music. Njeno doktorsko delo nosi naslov "Indo-Portuguese of Ceylon: History, Linguistics and Literature" (University of Westminster, London). Prejela je prestižno nagrado "Rama Watamull Collaborative Lecture Series" univerze na Hawaii in je članica Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland in National Academy of Sciences of Sri Lanka. Uredila je pet knjig in sedem posebnih števil znanstvenih revij, izdala pet monografij, med katerimi je tudi *Sounds of Identity: Music of Afro-Asians (International Journal of Ethnomusicological Studies)*. Njeni etnografski filmi so imeli mednarodni odmev. Delovala je tudi kot član in poročevalec UNESCOvega "Slave Route Project" (Paris) in je trenutno strokovna svetovalka za področje prebivalstva z afriškim poreklom v Aziji pri Uradu visokega komisarja za človekove pravice Združenih narodov (Geneva). Predseduje Nacionalni znanstveni komisiji za nesnovno kulturno dediščino ICOMOS Sri Lanka in je strokovnjakinja mednarodne komisije za nesnovno kulturno dediščino pri ICOMOS Paris.