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Senri Ethnological Reports

47

Music: the Cultural Context

Robert Garfias

National Museum of Ethnology, Osaka 2004

CONTENTS

Part one The Cultural Context

A Beginning	1
How Did It All Start	5
The Cultural Context	7
How Culture Determines Structure	21
Choice, Preference and Cultural Perimeters	37
Cultural Contact and the Dissemination of Music	53
Music across Cultures	79
Diffusion and Mixing Politics and Music	85
The Pace of Change in Music	95

Part two The Structure of Music

Structure in Music	
The Perception of Pattern in Music	
Time and Perception in the Structure of Music	
How Music Organizes Time	
How Music Plays with Time	
Tone Systems and Formal Structures	
Theories of Music	
Musical Style	
How is Music Learned?	
Musical Instruments	
How an Ethnomusicologist Looks at Music	

Appendix I

Types of Instruments

Terms and Concepts

We sometimes hear it said that Nero fiddled while Rome burned. Actually, the fiddle or violin did not enter into Europe for several hundreds of years after Nero's time. If he played anything at all, Nero might have played the lyre. We naturally tend to name things we don't know with the names of objects with which we are familiar and that describe things that we regard as similar. Sometimes this creates difficulties. There are a number of instruments that we know by name and others not so well. Most of us know what a guitar is and what trumpets and violins are. What exactly is a banjo or an ukulele? Traditionally, lower sounding instruments are larger than higher pitched instruments however, in these days of electronically a amplified instruments, the bass guitar is not significantly larger than the lead guitar. When we get to other cultures it becomes more difficult. We encounter instruments for which we can think of no appropriate name or reference.

It is useful to be able to name things with some degree of exactness and while a global system of nomenclature is not directly connected to the ability to view the role of music in any given society, we may be aided by a somewhat higher level of specificity. There are some general terms for instrument type which it may be helpful to remember as we think of the different types of instruments that have been developed throughout the history of humans on this planet.

Chordophones

Chordophones are stringed instruments and of these there is a great variety. With the exception of the Americas before the time of the conquest, chordophones of a great variety are to be found throughout Asia, Africa and Europe. Here are just a few of the main types to remember.

Lutes: Lutes are stringed instruments with long necks and a body which serves as an sounding area. The strings are stretched along the length of the instrument and can be either plucked or bowed. Examples of plucked lutes, are the guitar and banjo, as well as the *sitar* and *sarode* of India. Violins and other fiddles are bowed lutes because the strings are activated by a bow.

Harp: It appears that the harp as it appears in many parts of the world has but one original source, perhaps two, from which it spread throughout the world. Harps are string instruments in which a number of strings are stretched between a bow or post and the body of the instrument that also serves as a resonating chamber. Most harps that survive to this day have the body and resonating chamber on the lower part with the bow or post at the top. The modern Western orchestral harp is of this type as are the Irish and Celtic harps and the many harps fond in Mexico and Latin America. In ancient Asia, however, there was a harp in which the resonating chamber was at the top of the instrument and at the bottom was a short post to which the strings were attached. This is the type that was used in ancient Persia and in the Arabic world and which was also known in ancient China, Korea and in Japan. The Asian version of the harp has disappeared everywhere except in Burma (Myanmar).

Zither: These are chordophones with a number of strings attached to them and stretched across a hollow sounding body. Zithers are usually plucked as with the Turkish *kanun*, the Japanese koto, the Korean *kayagum*, and the Chinese *ch'in* and *cheng*. Included in this category are the *chake* from Thailand, the *kechapi* from Indonesia and the *kudyapi* from the Southern Philippines. These is one bowed zither, the *ahjeng* from Korea.

Dulcimer: This is a type of chordophone often much like the zither except that its strings are struck with small mallets rather than being plucked. Included in this category are the Chinese yang ch'in, the Persian *santur*, the Romanian *tsambal* and Hungarian *cymbalom* as well as the American hammer dulcimer.

Membranophones

These are instruments in which the sound is produced by a vibrating membranes. Almost all of the instruments in this category are drums, however tambourines would also be placed in this category. There are hundreds of variants in the membranophone class, but here are a few of the main types.

Barrel drums: These drums are of two sub types; single headed and double headed, that is with heads at top and bottom or at the top alone with the bottom open. The heads are attached in various ways, most often the heads stretched over the top and then either held in place with small stakes driven into the sides, or nailed down at the sides. Barrel drums are played either with the bare hands or with sticks. The Cuban conga drum is an example of a barrel drum as are the drums used in a popular traps set.

Laced Drums: These are drums in which the heads are attached by means of a series of laces which hold the heads to the drum and which are tensioned to adjust the pitch. These drums can be played upright, as with the North Indian *tabla*, which sits on the ground in from of the player, or sideways so that the player can play both ends as with the Korean *changgo*. Sometimes the laces are tight against the body of the instrument as with the North Indian tabla. With other drums the laces are separated from the body of the instrument as with the Korean changgo, or the

Nigerian dun-dun where the laces are squeezed by the player as he strikes the drum producing a rising pitch on the drum which imitates human speech. The Nigerian dun-dun is called a pressure drum.

Aerophones

Aerophones are instruments in which the vibrating air column produces the sound. Throughout the world the most common aerophones are flutes and of these there are many types, however there are some other common aerophones also known in Western culture.

Flutes. Flutes produce sound by the air column striking an edge and being deflected into a tube. The pitch is changed by making the tube longer or shorter, that is, by opening and closing finger holes.

End blown Flutes. End blown or vertical flutes, as the name implies, are flutes in which the player blows into one end. Some end blown flutes are a simple tube in which the player blows at the edge to produce the sound. The Bulgarian and Middle Eastern *kaval* and the *ney* are examples of this type of flute, as well as the Japanese *shakuhachi* and Chinese *hsiao*.

Sometimes a small guide is attached which directs the are column at the edge correctly so that the player does not have to form the lips in order to make the sound, a difficult task. These flutes with the attached guide are found in the Indonesian *suling*, for example. The Western recorder, or block flute used extensively during the Baroque period is another common example of this type.

Transverse Flutes. These are flutes in which the instrument is held horizontally in front of he player and the player blows into a small hole cut into the side of the tube. The Western concert flute and piccolo are examples of this are the North Indian *bansuri* and South Indian *venu*, the Chinese *ti-dze*, Korean *taegum*, and Japanese *fue*. These are most commonly made of cane or bamboo, but in the West they were made of wood then later of metal.

Reeds. These are instruments in which a small thinly shaved cane or reed is attached to the tube and it is the reed which vibrates the air column and produces the sound.

Single reeds. This now familiar type of wind instrument may have originated in the Middle East. Here a thin reed is either cut from the side of the cane and left attached or a small red or cane is attached and placed over the blowing opening for the instrument. The reed vibrates and "beats" against the body of the instrument or mouthpiece constructed for it, thus giving rise to the description, single beating reed. The clarinet and saxophone are common instances of this type.

Double reed. This now common instrument type makes use of two thin reeds fasten back to back and attached to the tube of the instrument. The two reeds beat against each other. Sometimes, as in many Asian forms of this instrument, the reed is actually a single tube of reed, cut very short and pressed flat, so that the two sides vibrate against each other. There are two basic and very distinct types of double reed pipe, one has a conical bore and the other is cylindrical. Both seem to be Asian in origin, with the cylindrical type being older and used in the ancient ritual and court orchestras. The second, the conical type was part of the tower and watch music ensemble that eventually gave rise to the military band. The Western oboe and bassoon are examples of this type as are the Middle Eastern and Eastern European *zurna* and *zurle*, the Indian *shahnai* and Chinese *sona*. (See box)

Lip vibrating aerophones. These are instruments in which the player's lips buzz or vibrate the air column. The Western trumpet, trombone, French horn and tuba are common types as is the Australian *dijeridoo* and the numerous trumpet types used in the ancient wind bands of Asia, Muslim Africa and the Middle East.

Idiophones

These are instruments in which the body of the instrument itself is what vibrates. Here are some of the most common types.

Gongs and bells are instruments in which metal has been cast into prescribed shape and thickness in order to produce particular tones or qualities. Bells and gongs are found through out the ancient world and in particular associated with Asia. The invention of bronze casting by the *cire perdu*, or "lost wax" method having been invented in ancient China. Large bells can be either stuck from the outside as in Asian temple bells, or stuck by a clapper hanging inside the bell as with many Western bells. Jingle bells or sleigh bells are small enclosed metal chambers into which a small sounding stone or metal sphere has been inserted to make it sound when shaken.

Musical Stones are stones which have been selected for their sonorous qualities. Sometimes they are used just as they are found and in other cases, such as the jade slabs used in the ancient Chinese ritual orchestras and in the court music orchestras of Korea, the jade has been carefully cut and shaved to produce the correct tone.

Woodblocks and log drums are hallowed or partially hollowed pieces of wood which produce a sound when struck.

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P. 9, Fig. 1; P. 9, Fig. 2; P. 52, Fig. 12; P. 55, Fig. 15; P. 56, Fig. 17;
P. 76, Fig. 28; P. 111, Fig. 35; P. 157, Fig. 44; P. 158, Fig. 45; P. 172, Fig. 50;
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