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How Culture Determines Structure

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How Culture Defines the Elements of a Music

Finding Meaningful Segments

When we listen to music, we both seek to hear something familiar and at the same time something new in it. In order to do this we must find our way through it. We must “follow it”. If we find no recognizable guideposts, we must then try to make sense out of what we hear from scratch. Our culture, that is, our past experience and exposure has established these guideposts for us. These guideposts mark off areas or periods of the music into meaningful segments. One step towards understanding a new music is by trying to isolate what may be significant units or subsections. In a situation in which we are faced with a music style with which we have no familiarity, we naturally try to first make sense of it using our previous experience with music with which we are already familiar. Should this not yield a key, and should we decide to continue, we must then try to make sense of the music in its own terms. Until we can figure out something about how the music was put together, attempting to identify the meaningful segments of that music may be difficult. The key to finding these segments lies in the culture.

We might think that the major cultural differences in music would show themselves in a number of variations of the length or shape of perceivable units. What we find, however, are that the vast differences of cultural and historical context in combination with human imagination and creativity have resulted in an endless number of possible variants. The manner in which time is conceived in the general culture, the way human relationships are delineated, and the manner in which adjustments are made to the environment, in a culture have an effect on the way music is structured in that culture. The physical nature of the region determines what materials are naturally available for the construction of instruments. The economic system of the society and the ideas defining religion and mythology will also contribute to the manner in which music will be defined in any culture. It is the combination of all these elements which establishes the parameters within which the music can develop.

Lets us look at some ways in which culture creates contrasting structure and practices in music.

Repetition as a Cultural Value

The *mbira* music of the Shona of Zimbabwe, like much of the music of sub-Saharan Africa, is based on a principle of a steadily repeated basic or ground pattern on which variations are superimposed. Although the description of this system of organization may suggest similarity to the use of a repeated background or accompaniment as in some forms of Western Classical music, the African system is different. There is a technique in Western music called a ground in which a bass line repeated many times over which a series of variations are played. There is also the principle of variation in European music, but in fact the Shona ideal is quite something else.

For the sake of drawing a sharper distinction between the Western and this particular African approach, let us first say something about what the Shona music is not. For one, there is no sharp or clear distinction between what we would consider the ground or background and the “melody”. That which we might, from a Western vantage point, consider the melody, is a rather illusive suggestion of a melodic line which rises up from the ground but which, once again from the Western perspective, does not seem to stay there. The melody seems to be heard in Shona music and then it seems to blend into the background. Most of the time it is doing both of these things simultaneously.

The principle of variation as it is understood in Western music does not fit exactly either, since there is no theme on which the variations are based. In the Western concept of variation, there is a theme upon which variations are developed. In Shona music the distinction between a theme and its variations is not so clear cut. It is better to think of the variations in any composition as a great number of possibilities, some of which are simpler and can serve as teaching examples.

It is interesting that, for example, in Japanese, the words and concepts of “wrong” and “different” are close in meaning. In English, so strongly does the culture affect and color the meanings of words that it is difficult to describe the basic underlying principle of the Shona music of Zimbabwe without allowing an amount of pejorative coloring to enter into the description. Simply said, repetitiveness is a positive factor in this music. This is not to suggest that the music goes on endlessly without change, but rather that the repetition of a basic unit is and of itself a positive and unifying factor in the music. The principle of variation in this music serves to enhance the sense of repetition. Repetition is that element in the music which binds the musicians together and which creates the bond between listener and musician drawing the listener more and more closely in order to sense the minute and detailed variations. From a position of some aural distance, that is, from an untrained Westerner’s perception, or when not listening carefully, nothing seems to be happening in the music and it appears only to be repeating itself without any variation at all. In fact, repeating something again and again emphasizes the subtle

and minute differences between each occurrence. Listening carefully and in more detail, one finds that there are numerous minute variations going on all the time. It is something like focusing a lens more sharply on the small details.

Repetition and Variation in Shona Culture

In fact, the Shona musicians are creating the music on the basis of a principle which the African musicologist, Andrew Tracey, aptly referred to as “kaleidophonic”. As the musicians repeat the basic structure of a composition, they listen carefully, yet effortlessly and gradually some particular regrouping of the notes they have been playing leaps into the mind. That is to say that, as yet, nothing has changed in what is being played but only in the player’s perception of it. Since this music consists of several superimposed layers of sound, the musician may be hearing one or two of the notes he is playing suddenly combined with a note which someone else in the group is playing to form a new pattern in his mind. He might then add a note or two to better establish the pattern and by this means enable others to hear the new pattern also. At the same time, the principle of unity and repetition is too important in this music to allow constant variations to take over or to destroy the basic structure of the performance. So the principle of variation is exercised with great restraint. Gradually and over the years certain variations come to be associated with one musician, and then his group and eventually they can become the standard form used in one village or area.

The variation principle in the *mbira* music of the Shona is thus an outgrowth of the principle of unity and repetition. The basic form of each composition contains the seeds of several different possible variations and any one performance of the composition, even of the basic ground pattern is already one of the countless different possible variations. Therefore one can understand how in the world of this music with its minute and subtle variations uniquely occurring at each performance, no two performances can ever be exactly alike. In addition as the listener hears different patterns arising out of the music, he is encouraged to contribute to the performance by either singing out a short repeated pattern based on what he hears, or to get up and dance out the rhythmic pattern of what he has heard. The repetitive basic pattern of the music helps to cement the relationship between the listener and the players so that this type of participation is facilitated and is important. The distinction between player and listener in Shona performance is blurred. The repeated pattern of the music bonds the players and audience into one.

In order to perform and to listen to this music audience and players alike begin with a common basis of expectation. When the music begins performer and audience expect to recognize the pattern, or construct in their minds the range of possible common factors that would define the performance and composition. All expect that the beginning pattern will be repeated in recognizable form until the end of the

performance. Listener and performer both will expect to listen actively and creatively, not only to what they are actually hearing, but to what they might contribute with their own imaginations as well.

Variation in North India

The classical music of North India presents another very different type of mental imaging required when listening to music. In the tradition of North India today, improvisation plays a prominent role. As a consequence each performance is valued as a demonstration of the musician's skill and mastery of the principles underlying the music and not just in the interpretation of an existing repertoire. The main components of this system, *raga* and *tala* require a bit of explanation. The term *raga* is used to refer to the melodic system of India music. The *raga* is a group of notes, usually conceptualized in scale order, but with specific and fixed relationships between them. In this system certain pitches are always grouped with certain others, other notes might only be approached only after certain others, some notes might only be heard in ascending passages and would be replaced by others or perhaps omitted in descent. Thus the *raga* is a matrix or complex of tonal relationships and is much like a nuclear melody or an abstracted version of a melody. It is clearly much more than a scale in the Western European sense.

Tala refers to the underlying rhythmic structure of the music and is a system of complex rhythmic patterns or structures that are multiplied, divided, regrouped into new patterns, etc. An instrumental performance begins with an improvised exposition of the *raga* in an opening section in free rhythm called *alap*. The *alap* can be of varying length depending on the mood and preference of the soloist. After the *alap*, a fixed melody in a fixed rhythm known as a *gat* is introduced. This *gat* also establishes the particular *tala* for the performance. After the statement of the *gat* the improvisation in the *raga* continues now against the matrix of the *tala* and alternately weaving in and out of statements of the *gat*.

At performances of Indian music today it is not uncommon for the name of the *raga* and the *tala* to be printed in a program or to be announced and nothing else in the way of a title for the particular piece to be performed. However the performance of Indian classical music is structured in expectation that the audience be conversant with the requirements of the style and to therefore be in a position to appreciate the unique contribution which this particular performer is to make. The audience does not really need to be informed as to which *raga* is to be played because the performance itself begins by explaining, without words and entirely in sound, the structure of that *raga*. The musician has two responsibilities in performance: he or she must clearly etch out the contours of the *raga* in order that the audience will recognize its pattern, its accented pitches and characteristic melodic turns. Then in addition the musician must show in the performance a unique aspect of the *raga*

with skill and interpretation, and giving it new and heightened meaning while at the same time not destroying the expected norm of that *raga*. To recognize the *raga*, the audience need not necessarily know its name but by the careful manner in which the musician states the structure during the *alap* section, the audience should be able to grasp the general shape of the *raga* and the rules which govern movement within it. Then the player expands on this, without departing at all in the slightest from the structural pattern established by long tradition for that *raga*, but by delving deeply into the mood created by that structure and then attempting to surpass previous performances by expressing the *raga* with more grace and subtlety than ever before.

The main exposition of the *raga* occurs in the opening section of the *alap*. Instruments which provide a continuous drone on the fundamental pitch of the *raga* and, usually, also the fifth, are sounding before the soloist begins. The performance of the *alap* by the soloist almost invariably begins in the lower register and on the lower notes of the *raga*, that is, beginning on the low fundamental pitch of the *raga* and then gradually working up the scale. As each new note is touched upon the player carefully shows how it will be characterized in the *raga*, how it will be stressed or ornamented, how it will be related to those notes surrounding it, and thus he will gradually show the characteristic patterns which identify that *raga*.

This process of exposition of the opening *alap*, followed by the *gat* and then the improvisations can and frequently does last for as much as three quarters of an hour and longer is also common. Beginning from the lowest fundamental of the *raga*, the opening can with some musicians require as much as twenty minutes or more to gradually work up to completing the exposition of the first octave. As the listener perceives each note, he is to remember how the note is played, what sort of ornament or inflection it is given, how it is related to other notes. Then he adds to that his impression of other notes, one by one and to the characteristic phrases of the *raga*. Thus step by step the listener scans quickly back over what he has just heard and adds to it that which he is hearing at the moment. In this manner the listener is being prepared to recognize an entire musical structure of complex interrelationships, without which it would not be possible to appreciate the excellence of the that particular performance.

Variations Defining a performance: The music of the Tzeltal peoples of Chiapas, Mexico

To cite just one more example of the use of variation of another very different type let us consider the music of the indigenous peoples of the highlands of Chiapas in Mexico. Among the numerous groups of peoples living in this area, one large group are the speakers of the Tzeltal group of languages. The Tzeltal peoples, like their neighbors, the Tzotzil speakers were converted to Catholicism by early Jesuit missionaries. The Jesuits also introduced Spanish instruments current in the early

17th Century, the harp, violin and guitar. These the indigenous people learned to make themselves. While the outward structure of this music may sound like European music, it also appears to have many important characteristics that are indigenous and in fact may only be superficially European at all.

Here the principle of variation is applied to an entire performance in a very unusual manner. The performance consists of several repetitions of the composition. The repetitions do appear to be endless repetitions of the same thing. In the Tzeltal culture, the leader of the ensemble begins playing the already known composition, but in the initial statement, there may be a slight emphasis of one note over another, a slight delay at some point, or perhaps even an added new tone. In any case, once the leader has established this variant of the composition, this becomes the variant that all the group will play during that performance. Thus each performance in its entirety becomes a new and very subtle variant on the already know composition. Each performance would consist of a number of compositions and each would be a unique variation on the know composition.

Social Structure and Music

Parallels Between Social Structure and Music Structure

It is easy to see and also quite inescapable that music is an outcome of its cultural context, a reflection of the culture which produced it. Still, the ways in which this can happen may not be obvious to us, particularly if we consider only our own culture. However, the manner in which groups of people organize themselves socially is often reflected in the way they organize themselves in their music.

In some societies there is a cohesive communal structure in which all members are regarded as equal, having equal rights and responsibilities. In other societies there is a high degree of stratification, distinct social levels ranging from rulers, enforcers, artisans and craftsmen, to workers and peasants.

In communal societies, the interdependence of members of the community is often reflected in the structure of the music. Many communal societies share common musical characteristics. One such characteristic shared between some communal societies in Central and South West Africa and with the Hill Peoples of South East Asia and the Philippines is the use of interlocking melodic and rhythmic patterns. In such cases each player plays a note or set of notes while another player plays another note or set of notes which interlock with the first set. The notes of the second player fit in the spaces left by the first player's pattern. The combination of these two or more independent patterns fit together to create a whole pattern, much like the pieces of jigsaw puzzle. In this way the interdependence of the members of the community is reflected in its music. The role of each individual is important. The whole could not be created without each part. Furthermore, each part must be

executed with great precision in order to maintain the spaces in each part clearly so that they can indeed fit together. These performances require cooperation and precise rhythmic synchrony and reflect the existence of these values in the daily lives of people in these communities.

These are cultures in which the entire community consists of one unified group. All of the members of the group do essentially the same work as the others and many members of the community working together share most of the work. In such communal societies people are accustomed to close cooperation and sharing. The Bushmen of Southwest Africa, the Pygmies of Central Africa and many of the Hill peoples of South East Asia and the Philippines live in communities like this. Among the Tinguian people of Northern Luzon in the Philippines their music reflects this social structure. There are basically two kinds of music, singing, both solo or in groups, and dance music, which is provided by an ensemble of gongs. There are some other instrumental musics, such as the bamboo tube zither, *kolibit*, which also plays the dance music in imitation of the gongs. The technique for playing the gongs requires that each player hold a single gong. Each gong has a different pitch or tone and each plays a special pattern. There are five or six such gong players and each has his own pattern that he or she plays and on which slight variations can be imposed. The sound of the music when heard blends all of the individual gong patterns into one single pattern. In this way the communal structure of the society is reflected in the way the music is organized.

Further South in the Philippines, among the Muslims of the Sulu Islands, they also play the gongs, but here we have a more highly stratified society with special roles for Sultans, Imams, or holy men and soldiers. In these cultures the music is also more complex and stratified. Instead of a set of single gongs, here we have one set of gongs to play the melody, drums to play and ornament the rhythm, larger gongs to punctuate the phrase patterns and a smaller gong to keep the basic beat. The group is divided up into separate discrete but complimentary functions just as the society itself have different unique and interdependent strata. Most of the cultures with which we come into contact are stratified cultures and this social stratification is reflected in their music. Societies like those of Western Europe had music for the upper classes that was used at private functions like dances and concerts. They also had civic music, like the bands that announced the hours from the city towers. There was also the popular music of the city dwellers and the folk music of the countryside. In addition there was music especially dedicated to religious ceremonies and observations. Like the cultures of Europe, traditional Japan, Korea and China, for example had ceremonial and court music. These musics were rarely if ever heard or seen performed by the common people. There was also classical chamber music for the upper classes, theater music which had its own semi cultured following and then urban and rural folk music as well as the special music

for religious ceremonies and village festivals which could be enjoyed by everyone.

In more highly stratified societies in which there are specialized roles and professions, the music usually reflects this stratification. In complex and multilayered societies one finds multi layered music. Some examples are the symphony orchestra with its special instruments whose duty it usually is to provide bass lines, and others to provide harmonic accompaniment and still others to play the melodic lines. Similar specialized functions can be found in Rock bands as well as in the *gamelan* orchestras of Indonesia, Chinese, Japanese and Korean court orchestras, numerous drum ensembles of West Africa and Western and Eastern European folk dance ensembles to name just a few. Such manifestations of social order in music structure are merely the result of the way people in each culture see order and this same vision is reflected in music and in society. We organize our music in just the way we naturally organize other things in our culture.

Definitions Defined by Culture

Generic Classifications of Music

In today's contemporary popular music, one encounters many labels and ways of applying them that are new and innovative. Still, it is difficult to find agreement and consensus among several people about these descriptions. This may mean that the categories are still unclear and are slowly developing, that people are looking and perhaps willing to force similarities between different musical styles in order to make sense and organize them in their own minds. In the process of selling popular music, performers, producers CD manufacturers attempt to place other recordings that they have produced into a category similar to another in which they or a competitor has hits. By this means gradually a consensus of descriptive labels arises and comes into current usage. Categories are redefined to suit the needs and perspective of the times.

Most often we do not think much about labels and yet they are used freely and sometimes carelessly, which does create difficulties. Certain broad categories that are applied to music would seem to be self evident. Folk music, religious music, popular music, jazz and blues might at first seem to be such clear descriptive terms that we would not question their validity and their applicability. They are, in fact, our own cultural view of the matter and even there, we will find difficulties in applying these labels to our own music. There are, understandably ever greater difficulties when we attempt to apply these labels to the music of other cultures. Nevertheless, it is useful to have some broad labels and categories by which to measure man's musical activities that can then be changed, refined or amplified as we understand each particular cultural context better.

What fits into then category of Pop today, may soon be reclassified as nostalgia

which may cause some chagrin to those who are still engaged in listening to it. This is an example of the passing of time, dictating what is current and what is not. In Japan today we can see another variant of this, but one that tells as much about changes in the culture as about the simple passing of time. Japanese record stores even as recently as the 90s had classifications of popular, classical (meaning Western European Music) Jazz, World Music, etc. If we were to look for Japanese traditional music in our record stores we would likely find it filed under world music, Japan. This seems logical. However, in Japan, while Japanese traditional music is as much a part of the world of music as anything else, putting it under the heading of World Music, while European and American Pop, Jazz and Classical were not under world music did not make sense. So there was another category in Japanese called “*Hogaku*” which means local music. The understanding was that this category included all traditional Japanese music, folk, religious and classical, but not music by Japanese composers in the Western European idiom. In the beginning of the 21st Century the term *Hogaku* has been re-appropriated. Many of the big record stores in Japan carry virtually no more traditional Japanese music and if they do, it is likely to be classified under World Music. Few of the majority of CD record consumers in Japan ever listen to traditional Japanese music anymore and even the number who listen to Western Classical music, although much, much greater than the number who listen to traditional Japanese, are also far eclipsed by those who listen to and buy pop music and rock. In the new record store, a huge sea of pop and rock music is categorized as “*yogaku*”, Western Music, however meaning only pop and rock, and “*Hogaku*” which now instead of meaning traditional Japanese music, now means pop and rock by Japanese artists.

In general labels as classical, popular, folk and religious divide music into broad functional categories that are somewhat useful. Nevertheless, we can encounter difficulties if we attempt to classify other kinds of music, that is music from other cultures under this system. For example in the Islamic world, the musically intoned recitation of the sacred Koran is not regarded as music at all, but part of a religious observance and practice. To label this “religious music” would be offensive to the adherents of Islam, and to describe this musical practice in that culture by the label, ‘religious music’ for this practice is therefore inaccurate. Yet it remains true that such labels imposed from outside the definitions developed within the culture help us to see patterns across cultures and to better understand the larger pattern of music in human existence.

Let us look at the broadest and easiest categories used to describe different kinds of music.

Folk Music

Folk music as a term was first used to refer to the music of peasant societies and for the

basic traditional music in societies that had already other kinds of music like classical or professional (see below) music and perhaps religious music. The term is better used for Europe and The Americas, especially European America, where this specific kind of stratification exists. It can also be applied to the village or peasant music of India and the Far East.

By implication the term means that the music comes out of a broad social tradition and that the specific composers or creators of the music are anonymous or forgotten and that the music has been absorbed into the collective memory of the community. It is incorrect to think of the musics of sub Saharan Africa as folk music, nor the musics of the indigenous peoples of the Americas. There are several types of music in the many societies that comprise these areas. Also, particularly in Sub Saharan Africa, the composer and performer may very often be one and the same. Neither does the term primitive music, in the sense of it being rudimentary or preliminary to later developments, apply to these regions since those musics may possess aspects which are highly sophisticated and complex when viewed and understood in their own context and have had as much time to develop and change as any other music existing on the planet. As a broad and general category, the many musics of Asia should not be labeled collectively as folk music. Asia is comprised of many often highly stratified, societies and possesses many kinds of music. There are many musics in Asia which could more appropriately fall under the label of folk music, but that description does not apply to all. It is best to apply the label folk music to those musics that are collective and anonymous and are the shared tradition of a single group, like a village or region. It is also best applied to this type of music in stratified societies in which are also other types of music.

Popular Music

In complex and multilayered societies there often evolve forms of music, usually drawn from folk traditions that are then elaborated upon with an eye to making them more immediately accessible to large groups. Popular music is enjoyed by large segments of the society and very often, starts among the dwellers in dense urban environments and spreads from there. We refer to as popular music, that music which seems deliberately intended and created for the purpose of broadest dissemination and to achieve great popularity most often using mass media distribution systems to aid in that broad dissemination. In popular music, the particular composers are usually known and very often it is particular performers who come to be associated with it as well. It is not that creators and performers in other types of music do not wish to be popular or that they do not seek to please their audiences. It is that popular music as a genre has the immediate goal of seeking broad popularity and dissemination. It also follows that popular music is generally not expected to remain consistently so for a long period of time. The hope is that a new popular music will appear to take the place of the recently popular and now dated older stuff.

In the former socialist countries of Eastern Europe, the term "Popular" was used to mean that the music was something "of the people" and therefore had more the sense of the kind of music we have described as folk music here. It is also true that in the socialist republics of Eastern Europe, the state supported and encouraged the dissemination of this music to such a degree that this folk music did eventually become a kind of popular music in the sense that we use the term here, but it was a popular music that had to

maintain clear roots to its folk origins to be accepted and disseminated.

In large modern Urbanized societies in which there is a great variety of different popular music, there is another sense of the term popular music. It can come to refer to a style of music as well as its social function. This means that although we use the term popular to describe music that is intended for broad dissemination, a contextually defined use of the term popular, the musical elements, melody, form, harmony and rhythm might also identify a musical style that could then be called popular. In some sense the two uses of the term can be synonymous. It is possible, however, and this does happen, that music is created and performed using the style of the contemporary popular music but that the music is intended not to be enjoyed by the largest number of people in that society, but by a smaller segment of it. Thus in contemporary popular music there are some artists whose work would not ordinarily be considered popular music but because of the genre in which the music is set, they may find themselves classified there. Such contemporary artists as Laurie Anderson, John Zorn and Faust and many other such artists are examples of this. During the 1940s when the older form of American popular song was current, songs like *Lush Life* by the African American composer, Billy Strayhorn were clearly too difficult as well as too dark and serious in content to be considered popular in the functional sense. Nevertheless *Lush Life* and a few other songs like this at that time belonged to the popular music genre because of general stylistic characteristics. They sounded like popular music but seemed to be doing a poor job of going about trying to be popular.

Classical or Art Music

Like the two previous terms, the idea of a classical or art music fits better in some cultures than others. Classical music, is a term that is most appropriately applied to the Western European tradition of the late 18th Century. More broadly the term classical music has come to be applied to all of the musics of the European art music tradition and not only to the one specific period within it. Most often in our culture we use the term classical music to describe all that music handed down in the tradition from the Renaissance down to the music of contemporary composers in that same tradition. It is therefore, most often described in reference to a long tradition of music in Western society, rather than in the sense of a social or functional quality as we have been using terms above. In our culture we usually use the term classical music to broadly separate it from Jazz, Rock, or religious music.

We still need a term to describe this music as a type of music based on its function rather than as a stylistic tradition. Let us consider that certain kinds of contemporary rock are very challenging in their content and are appreciated only by a smaller subset of even the younger music listeners. We may not want to think of this as “classical” rock because it bears so little similarity to the music usually described by this term. However, it does bear certain similarities to it, in that it is intended to be challenging to listen to and not to be appreciated by the mass audience. In this more general sense of music categories, art music may be a better term to describe it. Usually these elitist forms require long years of training for the artists and composers to reach a level of proficiency adequate to achieve status. This is a condition that requires wealth, patronage or state or community support, certainly at least a sufficient audience to support it.

There are many music traditions in Asia that fit this description on all counts. There are also musics in Africa that fit these prerequisites. In the Western tradition the particular associations with terms such as classical music or art music imply refinement and a high cultural and social level, much like many use the word culture itself. In Asia and Africa where highly developed and complex music forms may also be found, the Western elitist connotation may not apply because the music is associated with a high state or civic function but accessible to the entire population. For example, ensembles playing complex music may provide such music for the entire community but the musicians and often the instruments themselves, may belong to a ruling noblemen, monarch or the state itself. It is the length of the training period and the technical mastery required for it performance that suggest for this music be described in terms similar to those use for classical music in the West.

Professional Music

Sometimes a distinction is made when music is played by professional musicians rather than by amateurs. The implication is that professional musicians would as a matter of course, spend more time learning the trade and practicing their music, thus being more proficient than those who took it up only now and again or when a community function required it. This would separate into a different class, musicians who were paid for their performances or were compensated in some other way, from those who were more or less randomly selected from the group and asked to perform. As we look closer at this distinction we would have to separate musicians who performances provided the means of their livelihood from those who, although they might be compensated for their playing, might do so only occasionally, and who would need others avenues to provide their livelihood. Sometimes musicians are born into families of musicians and are expected to continue in the family tradition. Sometimes long periods of apprenticeship, sometime even from childhood determine future professional status.

In some cultures, amateur musicians may more highly esteemed than professionals, that is those who are paid to perform. In cultures like Turkey and Iran and also in Okinawa and in the Chin music of China, the most highly acclaimed and valued musicians had other means of livelihood and devoted their free time to playing music as an avocation. Some, as many in Turkey, for example, may eventually have given up their professions almost entirely to devote themselves to music and thus cross over into professional status. Although this kind of amateur master is quickly disappearing in many cultures, being replaced by musicians who have been trained in conservatories they were in existence in many cultures until very recent times. They were musicians would preferred to have another means of earning a living in order to devote their spare time to music and did not wish to be seen as a person who accepted money for playing. This is an example in which the professional musician might not have had as high an artistic status as an amateur as defined within that culture.

Culturally Derived Classifications of Music

New forms of music are continually developing. Some are accepted, imitated by others and survive while others fall from popularity or acceptance and gradually fade from collective memory. The process of acceptance begins with a single piece

of music or with a single performer or innovator and is followed by imitations and repetitions. Very often the role of this innovator may be hidden in the slow and anonymous process of collective evolution. Gradually, as the distinctive form is recognized as such, its distinctiveness from other forms in the culture is noticed and a unique label may be applied in order to establish in that society's consciousness an awareness of the distinction. These labels are quite different from those that a scientist who studies many musics, an ethnomusicologist, might use. These terms described above such as folk music and popular are terms used to explain how music works in many different cultures. By contrast terms that have evolved from within the culture and that describe music as it is seen from within the culture are very valuable in helping us to understand the structure of that musical culture. We need both kinds of terms, those that are applied from outside the culture, "emic" terms, and those that have developed from within the culture, "etic" culture. These "etic" labels are derived and accepted by members of the culture itself in order to help them define and distinguish new forms. As a case in point, the recent evolution in American popular music of styles such as "Hip-hop" out of "Rap" is an example of this kind of creation of new terms. In this same way, not too many years ago the term "Jazz" came into use to distinguish that music from the earlier "Ragtime" style. Later "Rock" was accepted as a term to define the distinctively new popular music of the late 1960s.

In many other societies, particularly in highly stratified ones, the coining of terms to distinguish different musical forms and practices serves an important function in each culture. Even in less highly stratified societies, labels may be applied to distinguish different musical types in order to allow for more efficient function. In some cultures, new or distinct labels indicate different dance types. In the case of social dancing the labeling helps the dancers know which dance type and consequently which steps will be required. Labels are frequently used to distinguish distinct melodic and formal types of music, as well.

In flamenco, for example, the various labels, *Granaina*, *Malagueña*, *Sevillana*, or *Bulerias*, indicate specific formal musical patterns in particular rhythms. To those who know the repertoire, the labels also indicate something of the place that a performance of one of these pieces might have in the performance of a larger set as well as giving an indication of its origin.

The use of labels to define culturally important functions and distinctions can be found in numerous cultures, throughout Asia, Africa, Oceania, Europe and the Americas. Sometimes these labels are a recognition of an important musical function. What is common to all these "emic" terms is that they are useful labels for distinctions that are important in the culture. They may function to aid audiences in understanding the music that is being played, or to tell dancers how they should dance. They may also function to tell the musicians something about how the piece

should be played or about the social function in which it is to be used.

Among the Are-Are peoples of the Solomon Islands, there is a practice of playing a great number of fixed and remembered compositions on various ensembles of pan pipes. Each of the compositions represents sounds, natural or humanly produced and is labeled as such.¹⁾ Performances are set into groups of ten compositions each. Several such sets of ten different compositions may be played at important festivals more or less continuously. In order that the musicians be able to keep track of the number of compositions played at any festival, after every tenth piece played a special “marker” or “counter” piece is played. This eleventh piece is thus repeated after every ten pieces and it is much easier for the musicians to keep track of how many times they played the “counter” piece than to remember how many pieces they have played in total. Thus in this case the label, “Toto ‘au” in the ‘Au Tahana ensemble indicates the special 11th composition played after any sequence of ten other pieces. Although it is the sound of “Toto ‘au” that the musicians count during a festival, the label allows them to talk about it without having to refer to its function each time.

It is certainly possible to enjoy or to use music without attaching labels to it. It does happen most often, however, that as peoples recognize and make use of distinctions between musical types and forms, the application of specific labels aids in the efficient functioning of the music in fitting within the context of that culture.

Notes

- 1) Hugo Zemp, (avec Daniel de Coppet): 'Aré'aré, un peuple mélanésien et sa musique, 1978, Paris, Le Seuil.

A Note on the Terms *Etic* and *Emic*

Anthropologists use the terms *etic* and *emic* in a number of different ways. The concept is useful in the study of music in its cultural context because it enables us to view music in culture, both from within and from the outside.

Simply stated, *emic* is the internal, culturally defined use of the idea, while *etic*, think of synthetic, is a constructed view of that aspect of the culture from an objective point of view. Although it is easy to slip into thinking that *etic* is the true, or inside view of the culture and *emic* is the outsiders view, this is not quite correct. Actually, even some anthropologists have been known to avow that *etic* is the more pure and scientific view of the culture whereas, *emic* is “what the natives think.” Actually, neither *etic* nor *emic* is more right or wrong. They are just different ways of viewing.

To further clarify this let us consider a few examples. In the study of music we find it useful to consider the basic music types, folk, classical or art music and popular. Let's just say that folk music usually means a body of music that belongs to

an entire community and for which the composers are no longer known. It seems to exist as something that belongs to the entire community.

Classical or art music is a little more complicated to define. It is played by professionals, but so is popular music, and even many kinds of folk music. Sometimes the best classical music is played by amateurs, as in Turkey, old Iran and Okinawa. The best definition of art music or what we call in the West, “Classical” music is that it was intentionally composed to be challenging and perhaps, not even completely understood on the first hearing. It is supposed to get better, deeper, more profoundly understood, the more one hears it.

Let’s leave that for the moment and talk about popular music. In some sense, everything is supposed to be popular, that is you or someone is supposed to like it. Why else would the performer or composer bother? But popular music, unlike art or classical music is not usually intended to be popular forever. No one is really against the idea, but its real purpose is to make it big in the short run and hope that it lasts as long as possible, at least until the group or the composer can create another hit to take its place. Economics is behind it. It is a way of making a living. So do the adherents of the other two categories of music, but in the case of popular music, the objective is more short term. Popular music is designed to be broadly disseminated, to use mass media system of communication and distribution and to become popular right away. It is more important to make it big now than to make it big later, like Beethoven or Mozart.

This sort of works as an *etic* definition of pop music. It has to be popular, to be widely disseminated, to make it economically in order to support the performers and the delivery system, and, very important and because of all the above, the performers and composers associated with this music, have to be known and advertised. That works as an *etic* definition.

This works fine for *In Sync* and *Madonna*, however, what about Tori Amos, Bjork and ATB? Will ATB ever be nominated for a Grammy award? Do you think they expect it? Maybe they do and maybe they will get one someday, but it doesn’t look like they are headed in the right direction if that’s what they want to do, does it? What’s going on? Is this pop music? Probably not by the narrow *etic* definition we have created. But ask yourself, where would the young woman being paid minimum wage at Borders or Warehouse file it in the record bin? Alternative? Trance? Pop-Rock? In the sense of the way we use this music today it can all be filed under the broad category of pop rock or just pop. It certainly wouldn’t fit next to Beethoven or Mozart, not Nusrat Ali Khan or Compay Segundo. Now here we have an *emic* definition of pop music. Many groups and artists we consider pop because they “sound” like pop to us even though they may not fit our dictionary, or *etic* definition of popular music in the strictest sense.

Consider another kind of example. We have an idea about what we consider and

recognize as music. If we hear a group of musicians from the island of Bali banging away on bronze gongs and metallophones, we can recognize from the concentration and coordination of the performers that this is music. But they have no particular word for music in their culture. So “*etic*”ly it is music but “*emic*”ly, we may have to go a little deeper into the culture to get at the truth.

Take another example. A choir in a Christian church is singing hymns. We hear it as music and they probably think of it as such as well. However, if we go to a Muslim mosque and hear the *azan*, or call to prayer or a recitation from the Holy Koran, we would recognize this activity as music, but in Islamic culture it is not considered music at all and in fact music of any kind in connection with religious observance is frowned upon. This is another clear case of the usefulness of use *etic* and *emic* concepts in considering how music functions in a culture.

We sometimes can learn much about how cultures work by taking an *emic* concept and testing it across a number of different cultures, The famous *Encyclopedia Cinematographica* of Göttingen, Germany has thousands of ethnographic and scientific films and has been making them for many, many years. They began this enormous compendium of cinematography by filming the way bread was made in different cultures, primarily in Europe. From this they expanded to the filming of virtually all human activity.

Looking at a particular human activity, like eating, for example, across many cultures, can tell us much about the culture. In the same way, even considering music, for which not all cultures have their own term is in itself a kind of “*etic*” activity. More specifically however, we can take “*etic*” concepts such as the role of music in gender roles in a number of societies to see hat it tells us about the larger society.