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Cultural Contact and the Dissemination of Music

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Cultural Contact and the Dissemination of Music

The most of the first things we learn occur during infancy and are the result of contact with adults and the environment around us. Humans learn at an amazing rate during the earliest years of childhood without being aware of nor remembering the ways in which we learned nor the sources from which we learned. We learn from hearing, touching smelling and feeling. We are and have been since infancy bombarded by experiences from which we learn. We weave our way through this variety of stimuli by selecting and ignoring.

Our preferences change. Sometimes the first time we experience something we do not like it but familiarity and positive associations may gradually change this. We are constantly experiencing new things, evaluating them, selecting them and revising our selections. This happens to us as individuals and the same thing can be observed as we watch entire cultures come into contact with each other. Every time we come into contact with others we are exposed to different ideas and different ways of doing things. Some of these new things are agreeable to us and thus we change.

Learning and Borrowing

First Contacts with New Cultures

Our cultural contacts expand almost like our circles of friends. As children we begin within our families. Through our families or in our neighborhood we may begin to make friends outside the family. When we go to school we meet new people, learn new things and make new friends. Each level of school takes into circles of possible friendships which are further steps away from our families.

If you think about it, it is natural that much the same happens with whole cultures. The people living in one village are prone to knowing the people in the next village over better than they do those who live at a greater distance. Proximate villages may be bound by common culture and language. They understand each other because they are similar. What if one village is in the lowlands, near the river and the other in the hills within the forests? One village survives by fishing and farming, the other by a different kind of farming together with hunting. They are different but come together for exchange or barter of goods and thus also learn from each other.

Learning from the Familiar

This process of borrowing and adapting as the result of personal and cultural contact happens so often that we take it for granted and usually do not even think about it. We become so accustomed to practices and ideas around us that we do not think of their origins. What we do and what we are accustomed to seems very natural. What is at a distance we see as more unusual and we group those things together as more or less all the same in proportion to their distance from us.

For most Westerners, it is easy to think of the Far East as a place where most people eat with, what we call “chopsticks”. It is also easy to think of the cultures as all very similar culturally, beginning with the fact that they all eat with “chopsticks”. However, we do not think very often about the fact that all Europeans eat with knives and forks, nor that it was only at the time of the arrival of Catherine de Medici from Italy in the 16th Century that the use of the fork and fine cuisine was introduced into France. We most often associate the high art of European cuisine as something from France, but its Italian roots and the fact that it only really developed from the 16th century onward, very recent times in terms of the history of the Far East, are matters that we do not often think about.

The process by which music is diffused is simple. Someone likes what he or she hears and wants to make something like it. We quickly however, get into all kinds of subtle complications. The one who hears it can not quite hear it the same way as the one who created it. The context is now changed, either because the memory of the initial hearing left things out, or because at the time the listener was already filtering out that which did not make sense from his own cultural perspective.

Let us imagine a scenario like this. A person from a country town in the mid 18th Century makes a visit to a big city let us say Prague or Vienna. He is there invited to a ball where he hears exciting new dances and music. We will assume that he is predisposed to like this new music and dance because they are presented in the context of the glory and glitter of the modern urban setting. He later returns to his village and plays the tune for friends and tries to get the local musicians to play it. There are of course no phonograph recordings yet and none of the village musicians has ever been to the big city. They understand the tune and think that they understand the instructions for playing it, but it will naturally become transformed into something closer to the already extant repertoire of the local musicians. The original has been transmitted and transformed.

The most frequently exchanges between cultures occur when peoples borrow from their closest neighbors, often in a process that has gone on so long that both borrower and borrowee are not aware of who borrowed from whom. Another kind of cultural exchange occurs when the borrowers are conscious of the place and the people from which they have borrowed something. This happens very often in

Five different examples of harps, all of which are related. The harps of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia spread to the east and then back to Europe. The first two harps shown here are from Mexico and Venezuela both owe their origin to the old harps of Spain. The harp from the Philippines is the result of cultural and political contact between Mexico and the Philippines during the time that they were both colonies of Spain.



Fig.14 The harp was introduced to the indigenous populations of Mexico by Jesuit monks. Zinacantan, Chiapas, Mexico. 1963.



Fig.15 In the states of Aragua and Miranda in Northern Venezuela, another form of the Spanish harp survives.



Fig.16 An example of cultural diffusion. The old Spanish harp survives in the Northern Philippines, probably introduced through contact with Mexico. (Paoay City, Ilocos Norte, Philippines 1966)



Fig.17 The Turkish *cheng* was for long periods popular in the Ottoman Courts as it was in Persia but gradually disappeared probably as the result of changes in musical style.



Fig.18 The only surviving harp in the Far East is the elegant *saung gauk* of Burma (Myanmar). It was related to a number of such harps once popular in India, China, Korea and even Japan.

music. Among the Muslim cultures of Mindanao, both the Maranao and Maguindanao people have a rhythmic and melodic pattern which they call *sinulug*, which means that it is in the style of the Muslim people of the Sulu Islands. Although *sinulug*, *sinu'ug* as it is called in the Sulus, is a little different on Mindanao, the similarity is clear and the generic connection between the different versions is unmistakable.

The manner in which the ancient Chinese at first began collecting the songs from outlying provinces as symbols of their suzerainty and then from foreign neighbors is another example. There existed the belief that if a person's song, or a group's song was received that the receiver then had some control over the giver. What began as a system of collecting songs from all over China expanded to include the collection of songs and dances for all the countries surrounding China, also as a means of showing Chinese dominance over their neighbors. Gradually, the Chinese began to enjoy these foreign musics so much so that by the time of the T'ang dynasty (6th-9thC. AD), Chinese had become very fond of Indian and Persian art and music and these were particularly popular at court and had an influence on the development of music and the other arts at that time.

In the Ottoman Empire of Turkey there was a vast repertoire of compositions played at court and in the homes of the upper classes and this practice has survived long after the abolishment of the Ottoman Sultanates. Within the vast Turkish classical music repertoire of some 5,000 compositions, there are a great number of compositions by Armenian, Romanian, Greek, Jewish and Gypsy composers. These compositions by non Turks, however, are in the Turkish style and are appreciated as Turkish music. There are two forms, however, which are thought of and enjoyed as foreign. These are the *sirto*, which is Greek in origin and the *longa* which is thought to be Romanian in origin. The Ottoman repertoire is thus both eclectic and in the case of the *sirto* and *longa*, consciously so.

Change and the Process of Dissemination

Change is a natural and recurring process in all cultures. The pace of change and what causes it and effects it may vary. Some cultures may appear to us to be quite static and others appear to be changing at a rapid pace, but all are changing steadily and continually. Some of the broad patterns of cultural change we can observe are the results of innovation, by chance or deliberate creation, the diffusion of ideas from one individual to another or from one culture to another, cultural loss and forgetting, and forced change processes, such as acculturation and directed change.

The Guitar as a Metaphor for Change and Retention Diasporas

The Guitar in the US

We have become so familiar with the sound of the electric guitar in modern popular music that it is a surprise to recall that the idea of electrically amplifying the jazz or blues guitar did not occur to anyone until shortly before W.W.II. Black country blues singers had been using the guitar in a manner which combined both the picking out of melody, sometimes sliding a small piece of bottle neck attached to one finger for a more fluid melody, while interspersing it with harmonic ground accompaniment. Jazz musicians were not often expected to use the guitar to play melody and usually played only harmony.

The blues singer, T-Bone Walker, who came to be associated with the West coast style of blues, was one of the first to use electric amplification for his guitar. In essence he simply attached a pickup mike to the guitar and thus amplified the sound, making his instrument louder than it sounded before. The West Coast blues style, growing as it did out of Black country blues style, already had the melodic element there which now stood out much more clearly with amplification.

For Jazz, the possibilities of electric amplification brought a greater change to the style. Charlie Christian playing with the Benny Goodman band, was able to profoundly effect the development of the Jazz guitar style. The electrically amplified guitar allowed it to speak in a clearer and stronger voice than before, to contribute to the overall ensemble in a way that previously only the wind instruments could do. It also added a new sound quality to the group, one which heretofore had never been heard.

The first electric guitars were simply ordinary guitars to which a small “pickup” microphone was attached and then connected to an amplifier. It took a surprisingly long period of evolution, it seems, for the realization that the traditional acoustic body of the guitar served no viable purpose since the amplification system replaced all of the acoustic function of the guitar body. Eventually the flat guitar shell with electrical controls and connections built in became standard. Jazz guitarists, however, because they do not play at extremely high volume levels still prefer the electrically amplified guitar which retains some degree of hollow body. Meanwhile, the electric guitar used by rock bands seems to be constantly going through a process of regular modification and addition of new sound producing effects.

The development and availability of easily accessible electronic amplification systems had an important affect on the role which the guitar was to take in the unfolding of popular music in the West. While a similar series of events also affected the piano, it was the guitar which assumed primary importance as a definer of the sound of the new music and as its symbol. While not all rock musicians openly recognize their debt to the old country blues musicians, it is undeniable that the playing and singing of such as Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Lightning Hopkins and Howling Wolf are the ultimate source of this music, along with borrowing of stylistic elements from the later generation urban blues musicians.

Large movements of groups of people over time also entail great potential for cultural diffusion. The great waves of immigration into the United States are in great measure what have made the country unique. Underlying the popular culture, a

number of strong cultural traditions survive among the immigrants who in other respects share the common American culture. For example, there are some 500,000 Ukrainian Americans living in the New York metropolitan area alone, not to mention those in the mid-west and far west. Among them the study of the Ukrainian language and culture is considered very important even for third and fourth generation American Ukrainians. The performance of traditional Ukrainian music is very strong among them. Similar examples could be drawn for the Puerto Rican Americans, Chinese-Americans, Polish Americans, Polynesian Americans, Basque Americans, Korean Americans, etc. Under the surface of McDonalds, TV Soaps and MTV there flourishes a rich diversity of cultural traditions in the United States, that are the result of the years and years of open immigration policy and even in spite of official attempts to stem the tide of these migrations.

One of the strongest cultural influences in the United States has been the influence of Africa on America through the importation of slaves during its early history. Slaves and former slaves saw the performance of music as an opportunity for even limited mobility and along with it and in great measure because of it, were able to implant new African musical concepts into our music. Many Americans are now accustomed to thinking of these forms as All-American to such a degree that African roots are often overlooked. The development of Ragtime, then Jazz and later rhythm and blues which gave rise to Rock and Soul were all in origin and in aesthetic principle, basically African. Certainly non African Americans have made great contributions to all of these genres of music, often so much that they became separated from their Black originators. Nevertheless, the popular forms of music of the United States today, from Rhythm and Blues, to Rock, Rap and Hip-Hop all owe their existence to the persistence of African Americans in retaining and transmitting elements of African music to the new world, often under extremely adverse conditions.

Many diasporas have occurred and been historically documented. The travels of the Jews throughout Europe have continued to mean a diffusion of cultures and cultural influences, often stemming mostly from the last place of their residence. Likewise the movement of the Roma, or Gypsies since the 13th Century beginning in Eastern Europe and eventually reaching France, Germany, the British Isles and finally Spain have been a case in which they retained among themselves their own traditional culture, but for survival learned the local music, reinterpreted it and became so adept at it that they were often acknowledged as the favorite interpreters of the national music.

Diffusion and New Creation

When it comes to culture, nothing remains static, at least not for long. Just as

individuals are continually seeking and being exposed to new stimuli, the aggregate pattern that many individuals share together, their common culture, also changes. The process of this change and its rate, as well as what brings it about, all have important impacts on the delineation and development of music cultures.

Cultural attitudes develop like other aspects of the culture, by a long process of selecting certain elements, new ideas or borrowed concepts, while at the same time rejecting others. The pattern of this development may appear haphazard only because such a great number of seemingly separate factors come into play.

Looking only at the pattern of new creation and the adoption of elements from outside the culture, fails to consider the potential effect of extra-musical events, such as political developments and influences, and this may create the false illusion of isolated chance development. Without recognition of the Ottoman Turkish incursion into Vienna and of the Turkish military bands which came with them, a musicologist working hundreds of years later would have great difficulty in explaining the sudden bizarre appearance of Turkish military music in the works of Michael Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. By the same token, future musicologists would not be able to understand the appearance in America of a music of such distinctive African origins as Rock during the mid 20th century, if they do not take the history of slavery into account.

The period during which there was a fascination with Turkish military band music in Western European Art music was very short. It did have later an important and determining influence on the development of the Western military band, one which can be noted in the brass band ensembles of even today. What began as a isolated and seemingly unrelated historical event, became, after hundreds of years, a firm cultural bias forming the basis for acceptance and rejection of other concepts.

Individual Creativity in the Historical Process

In music, each new step is either taken up or rejected by the audience and by other musicians. But the path taken by music in its progress through history is not entirely predetermined by the changes in the culture. Each individual musician responds differently from every other musician in his own time to that which he is exposed and therefore what he does as a result of this stimulus must be unique. Yet, while it would be impossible except in abstract theory for an 18th century central European musician to independently hit upon a Chinese musical idea, there are such infinite possibilities for individual reactions, it is equally inconceivable that any two musicians could ever come up with the same solution either.

In some ways these differences may be accounted for if all possibilities are carefully examined and considered. However, most of what we regard as unique in music is the result of such complex chains of influences and reactions and conscious

and unconscious modifications that they are impossible to unravel. Let us consider the early 19th century Viennese composer, Franz Schubert. We know of Schubert's respect for the music of Mozart and Beethoven and thus, indirectly through them of the potential indirect influence of Haydn on Schubert. In Schubert's music it is not difficult to find those elements shared in common with the music of Beethoven and of Mozart. It is also possible to hear in Schubert the pattern of his own background, his trials, his ambitions, the tragedy of his frustrations and at the same time the reflection of his own particular corner of the world and of the times in which he lived. Yet all of these elements together do not reconstruct the uniqueness of what constitutes Schubert. Schubert was the result and product of all of those things which were the culture of his times, but at the same time, his own individual creativity took all of those elements and influences and made a unique and personal statement in his music. Thus Schubert is both a product of his times and a solitary and unique individual.

Just as a complex set of influences and events created the musical style we associate with the name of Schubert, so too does a complex set of factors, events and influences determine how we will react each time we hear Schubert. In this way the process of change in any culture takes place. Thus far, there is nothing new about this. However, something different is beginning to take place in the global process of change which suggests a new parameter to the seemingly never ending process which cultures have endured.

Cultural Adoption, Change and Diffusion

The way we remember things, unless our memory is refreshed by being reintroduced to the original stimulus, is the way it is going to stay. We have all had the experience of remembering something clearly and then being reminded by someone or something else that it was not quite that way. Sometimes we even resist the idea that we could have been wrong. In the process of cultural transmission, this sort of thing happens all the time.

In the process of trying to understand each other, we often get things wrong. Sometimes these changes in transmission stay that way and the cultural process moves in that direction. These are not mistakes, but just part of the long process of change. Let's look at a cross cultural example of how this happens. During the 1940s there was a film with Bing Crosby, called "Going My Way". The song in film, and indeed, the spirit of the film was, "this is where I'm going and would you like to come along with me?" During the 50s, the film "Going My Way" was somewhat popular in Japan. Following the post war Japanese custom of taking a phrase in English and using it as a kind of motto, it was popular for a while to use the English phrase, "Going My Way", in the course of a conversation in Japanese,

however, the phrase was now used as a statement instead of a question and so the meaning changed to become, and this was the general Japanese understanding of it, "I'm just going my own way, alone.", which is something very different from the original intent of both the song and the entire film as well. Rather than being simply a misunderstanding, this might be better thought of as another example in the process of cultural change.

Teachers often play a great role in cultural change. In an attempt to clarify and simplify things, the original is gradually replaced by a clear working and easily explainable model of it. This often happens in the tradition of music theory. It also happens in many cultures as part of the transmission of playing techniques. Ornamentation techniques or other aspects of performance, breathing and posture, for example, become codified to such a degree that the new simplified and clarified form becomes the norm and the original, perhaps, freely improvised or stylized form becomes lost.

Forgetting is another aspect, often of the same teaching process. In recent historical times, entire languages have been lost forever, because the only speakers of these languages have died without the opportunity of teaching any others to speak the language. In this same musical practices and entire traditions die away regularly. Family traditions of the performance of certain kinds of music disappear when the last members of the family die without passing on the tradition. Often in the process of passing on the tradition any number of slips can occur. In the course of teaching certain parts of the tradition are forgotten, or the student goes off before having learned all there was to learn, or as often happens, the teacher dies before getting teaching the remaining part of the tradition, sometimes a secret part that is saved for final transmission. In India, in the strict and careful process of transmission from master musician to pupil, as the student learned more and more, that student gradually came to be regarded as a disciple. Nevertheless, the teacher would retain certain "secrets" about the tradition until on his or her deathbed, at which time they would be transmitted to the disciple. Many such masters have died, however, either suddenly or far from the presence of the disciple and thus these secrets are lost forever. But such loss is part of the natural process of change.

Political and economic control and influence also play a great role in forcing the acculturation of all those cultures within its sway to the practices of the dominant culture. The forced imposition of Spanish on all of the native peoples of Latin America by the Spanish Conquerors also brought with it the forced assimilation of many forms of Spanish music creating the blend of Spanish, Indigenous and African elements which we know today as the many varied forms of Latin music.

In the Far East, China has for centuries been the dominant cultural force, both because of its political power and because of the prestige associated with its political dominance. In very recent times, however, the rapid economic development of Japan

since World War II, has made some forms of Japanese popular music function as a model for the new and modern in other Asian countries because of the attractiveness of the economic prestige of Japan.

Political forces can require change to take certain directions. The effect of slave policy in the United States on the transmission and retention of African music traditions is one clear example. Another is the strictly controlled and governmentally endorsed policy of national musical styles during the years of socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These are cases in which a policy was put into effect expressly for the purpose of controlling and influencing musical culture.

Asian and European Origins and the Lute

What happened to the guitar in America after it became electrified is something which is happening now and the changes can be noticed right in our own times. But let us think for a bit about how the guitar got to be a part of our popular culture. Although plucked lutes, like the guitar are, in various forms, very popular throughout the world, they seem to have had only one or two different origins and all variants have stemmed from those. The origins seem to go back to the ancient world of many hundreds of years ago.

The change in musical style which took place between the Renaissance which basically ends in the late 16th Century and the Baroque period which begins in the early 17th Century, is a parallel to the change in our times between the influence of Jazz and of Rock in the evolution of Western popular music. The Renaissance counterpart and predecessor of the guitar was the lute. The lute actually became established in Europe during the middle ages. The instrument originated in Persia and spread both eastwards to China and eventually to Japan, where in both countries it still survives, and to the West. The lute was taken by the Arabs and spread with Islam. By this means it reached Spain and eventually to the rest of Europe.

We have only the sketchiest idea of how the instrument might really have been played in those early times. Unlike the present-day Western tradition, notation was in those times, primarily as a simple memory aid. In fact, notation continues to be used in this way in many of the other cultures of the world which do possess a notation system. The notation is often only a mere sketch or outline with the player being expected to remember the details. The notation which survives from the Middle Ages basically gives only the melody line and yet descriptions from the time tell us of great speed and virtuosity among lute players of the middle ages. Clearly the notation which survives is not telling us much about how they might have played.

We can only piece together by conjecture and drawn from the parallel evidence of other surviving music traditions from the same period and from what we know of the playing method of other lute-like instruments in other parts of the world. On this basis we can make some assumptions about the probable playing technique of the

lute in the Middle Ages. It was essentially a melody playing instrument with the melody usually plucked out on the higher pitched strings. The lower strings were employed as rhythmic drones to alternate with and support the melodic line. The contemporary *ud* of the Arabic speaking world, the historical predecessor of the European lute, makes use of this same technique, albeit in a very distinct musical language. In essence, the style and fundamental technique used for playing the Chinese *p'i-p'a* and the Japanese *biwa*, the contemporary easternmost counterparts of the lute, is the same.

The basic lute-like instrument type, exemplified by the Renaissance lute, the Middle Eastern *ud*, the Chinese *pi-pa* and the Japanese *biwa*, has a short neck with a varying number of strings and is plucked either with the bare fingers or with some type of plectrum which varies by location. Such an instrument is ideally designed for strumming across several strings, for rhythmically alternating between high pitched melody playing strings and lower pitched strings drone or rhythmic strings. These are the basic techniques which most easily “fall under the hand” when playing the lute.

Music during the Renaissance period was marked by the rise and dominance of multipart vocal music, or polyphony, that is, music in which several voices perform distinct melodic lines simultaneously. Instrumental music followed the polyphonic vocal style which was soon established and very popular. Keyboard and instrumental ensemble music quickly adapted to these demands. In fact, instrumental ensembles came to function almost interchangeably with voices, since each part could be played by an instrument or sung in any combination and the basic polyphonic texture would be maintained.

For the lute, however, the new style created difficulties since the instrument was designed not to produce a simultaneous independent lines, but as noted above, more easily produced a form of drone or harmonized accompaniment to a single melodic line. Although it was possible to play a single melody line on the lute, the instrument was still thought of as a popular solo instrument or one which could accompany the voice. In order to retain its popularity the lute had to adapt its playing technique to that of the current polyphonic music. In fact, performing polyphonic or multipart music on the lute is almost as difficult and as unusual as it would be to attempt such a technique on a bowed string instrument like the violin. Still this is exactly what happened and the lute continued to serve as a solo instrument and to accompany the voice.

One might therefore have certainly expected that an instrument as difficult to adapt to polyphonic or multi part music as was the lute, would have faded away. But the lute appeared to have other factors in its favor. In a manner similar to that which occurred in the case of the guitar with modern rock musicians, there may have been a romantic or historical image associated with the lutanist that needed to be



Fig.19 The guitar has become a traditional instrument in the performance of Burmese music. The player uses a steel or glass rod to slide across the frets producing a sound that is well-suited to the Burmese style.



Fig.20 In Korea the glass rod to slide across the frets has also been adapted in this instrument, the *chulhyun gum*. It is used to play the improvisatory South Korean music, *Sanjo*.



Fig.21 *Kulintang* gong ensemble of the Bajau people from Zamboanga in the Sulu region of the Philippines where the Sulu version of Sinulug (Sinu'ug) is played.



Fig.22 Roma or Gypsies dancing in the caves of Granada. Here we find one of the only examples of handclapping used in a traditional context in Europe. This practice of marking out the *compas* or rhythmic pattern by hand clapping interlocking patterns is a shared tradition with Western North Africa.

preserved. He was seen as someone who had traveled widely, often a nobleman or someone vaguely associated with nobility, versed in poetry and speaking several languages who thus in many respects may have served as an important connection with the world outside the immediate locality in which he was playing.

In addition to this romantic view of the lutanist himself, the instrument is ideally suited in terms of delicacy and potential subtlety of sound for a single player and a small audience. Being cradled, as it is, close to the body, it is one of instruments with which it is comparatively easy for a player to feel a strong sense of unity, that particular and important sense of identity which occurs when the instrument and the player function almost like one indivisible unit. This is, of course, the ideal relationship between player and instrument in any combination of the two, but in the case of certain instruments, for example, the piano or the organ, the physical distance which exists between the player and his instrument requires that a considerable period of practice occur before the same sense of oneness between player and instrument takes place.

The most important factors contributing to the survival of the lute in the renaissance were, in addition to its easy portability, two: one was that the lute was ideally suited for the accompaniment of the solo song and the second was the continued need for instrumental accompaniment to the dance. Dance music, unlike the liturgically influenced vocal styles, required a clear and fixed rhythm as a guide to the dancers and in this task a light and easily portable instrument was of great value. Since the requirements of dance music for portability and full accompaniment were easily managed by the lute, it found a place for itself in the new music of the renaissance.

Dynamic Pace of Change

In our society we are accustomed to witnessing the dynamic effects which technological and scientific developments have on the way we live. We find it natural that music should also change. But dynamic technological development and change are so much a part of our lives that it is difficult to avoid the pitfall of thinking that as the arts reflect changes in technology and science and make use of these developments that they are improving as well. The methods for persevering and disseminating the arts may improve, but their content remains the arbitrary result of all the stimuli being processed within the culture.

Yet many of these changes have come about only very recently. Radio only came into general usage only during the lifetime of many people who are still alive today and television only much later. Yet we have now already relegated radio to something which many people only listen to when they drive and the rapid spread of car cassette systems and CD players appears ready to even further reduce the influence of radio. Meanwhile television has taken an importance in lives of all who

live in the technologically developed societies that seems to increase with each year and new development.

Not long after World War II a few people began to have television in their homes but by the mid-50s, it was almost universal in all modern homes. This was also largely the case in most of Western Europe and has already reached the same prominence in Japan. Thirty years later, aside from the fact that Japan has outstripped us in TV production and technology, as well as in the number of TV sets per home, the development and introduction of satellite transmission and cable television home followed by the general adoption of video cassette recorders and cameras has radically affected the way in which most of us live.

The rapidity and profound effect of these changes we tend to take for granted because we quickly become accustomed to their benefits. Nevertheless changes in technology, like other aspects in a society are also imprinted on the development of stylistic and formal changes in music.

New Technology and the Pace of Diffusion

In the late 19th century when Franz Liszt transcribed for the piano, music ordinarily heard in the concert hall he was attempting to provide this music for possible enjoyment of it away from the concert hall. People could play his piano versions of music which previously could only be heard in the concert hall. This was a practice parallel to that which had taken place centuries earlier in the Renaissance lute settings of polyphonic vocal music. The solo lute player could enjoy the music without a chorus of voices to sing it, or could play the group part to accompany a solo singer in a performance of the same music. In both these cases, the new settings made the music more widely accessible.

With the advent of recording techniques people were free to enjoy music out of its original context and at any time they might choose. At first there was reaction on the part of some traditional music lovers against this non-human means of sound reproduction. Eventually, however, and rather quickly, the convenience of the idea won out and reproduction of music through recordings became a distinctly new aspect to the enjoyment of music and one which has come to identify the 20th century. The reaction against mechanical recording techniques is a response to a new technological development which has many parallels, particularly in our own times. There was not very long ago a reaction, particularly by performing musicians, against the use of electronic and then later, computer generated music. Currently there is still considerable of discussion concerning the development of digital recording techniques and compact discs. Some traditional musicians insist that they can hear the difference between analog and digital sound and the digital recording process does something to destroy the beauty of the music for them. Yet these new

technological media are in a sense no different than what occurs in a radio transmission or even than the effect of the bias oscillator in the tape recording process. After all, when digital recordings are played back, they once again become analog in the sound waves that reach us.

But this is only to reiterate the consistency of the process of change. Within the process of change something else is changing. We seem to be getting better and better at finding effective, efficient and inexpensive means of communicating with each other. We have moved in the space of a few short years from radio to satellite TV communication systems and from the local printing and distribution of newspapers to a single national newspapers and from small special interest production of recordings of music to a vastly complex and far reaching distribution for records which spreads around the world.

Who could argue against the marvels which our industriousness and inventiveness has blessed upon us? Who could argue against the inevitability and necessity of change?

The Effects of Technology on the Pace of Communication

Our methods of communication have been improving so rapidly and so effectively that the rate of change itself has now become a matter of concern. What had until not long ago been allowed to develop at the local level and in response to local taste is now increasingly provided by major distributors of culture in the larger urban centers.

The increased effectiveness of communication systems is not only bringing us closer together but is helping to make us more alike. Local and regional differences in music as in speech are being compressed into common national styles and types. The performance of music is increasingly moving away from the forms it took during the last century when a large percentage of most populations created or performed their own music. After the middle of the 20th century with increasing regularity, the performance of music is being left to professionals and to records, tapes and radio performances of these professional instead of live performances by amateurs.

This phenomenon is taking place not only in the highly industrialized societies. Now that the benefits of radio, records and most recently, cassettes are reaching almost everywhere in the world, their accessibility is also having profound consequences. Some fifteen years I returned to my father's birthplace in Southern Oaxaca in Mexico. Since my childhood I had heard stories of the marvelous *marimba* music of the city of Tehuantepec. When I visited there already the music was not frequently played in the traditional manner by three or four men on one large *marimba*. I was able to find a group of musicians who still remembered how to play the traditional repertoire in the old style. Already the more international

“dance” band with saxophones and electric piano had taken over in much of the Isthmus. When I returned some ten years later most of the traditional repertoire of Tehuantepec, although still remembered, was hardly played even by the dance bands. When the older songs are played they are given a modern treatment with a touch of the bolero or *cumbia* as they are heard coming from the radio generated from Mexico City. This is sad, perhaps, but not really surprising. The gradual focusing on the major urban center for the determination of new styles is an inevitable result of better and cheaper distribution systems.

Central Java has been long renown for its rich musical traditions, for the sound of its numerous gong orchestras, the *gamelans*, so profuse that there were several in each village, each with its own unique tuning which gave a special character to the performance of the music and each with its own unique combination of instruments. In the past few years with increasing frequency a cassette recording of a *gamelan* is being used for village festivals rather than the local *gamelan*. It is more convenient, less expensive, usually well recorded and dependable. The Indonesian record companies ensure that the basic repertoire is always available on cassette tapes. The tradition is somehow kept alive, so perhaps one should not complain.

In the former Socialist countries, it was felt that regionalism and local folk music styles tended to keep peoples divided into small separate groups rather than unified as a more effective and functioning cohesive unit. The ministries of culture in these countries in the name of preserving the folk traditions of their culture helped to reduce the variant elements and to encourage the dissemination of new, pan-regional folk styles made up of bits from all regions.

Where Does All This Lead?

One of the lessons we learn from biology is that an indication of the health of many species lies in the diversity of its variants. While we are making more music available to more people by current methods of dissemination and distribution, the level of available diversity is being drastically reduced. An increasingly large percentage of the world’s population is moving from active participation in music to the passive mode —of allowing someone else to make the decisions about what we can hear, of having someone else perform it for us and of listening passively. The diversity of musical languages is being reduced in favor of those musical styles which will be appreciated and paid for by the largest number of consumers.

But this is not the result of some conspiracy. The process for deciding the directions and methods for the dissemination and distribution of music are being made on the basis of the efficiency of those channels and on the best potential for economic gain. Unless someone can show what harm might result from the dogged pursuit of these ends, it is certainly bound to continue until all the world options will

Diversity in the Arts in America

Numerous music and dance traditions flourish in the United States and many strong traditions are transmitted and practiced here. These are some examples of the numerous separate and distinct cultures which maintain their identity while remaining part of the larger general culture of the country.



Fig.23 Lydia Mendoza of Texas, known as la Alondra del Valle, has for many years been a respected singer of the Mexican American tradition which thrives Throughout the US in the large Mexican communities.



Fig.24 Ensemble of Cuban *comparsa* drummers like that of Francisco Aguabella, above, are examples of another kind of Latin music alive and active in the US.



Fig.25 Pow-wow drummers relaxing during between pieces at a big dance. The pow-wow has become a new form of Native American popular culture. Drawing largely on the traditions of the Plains Indians, the Pow-wow has become a cultural meeting place for Indians of all tribes and all regions of the United States.



Fig.26 Okinawan music and dance is one of the strongest Asian traditions practiced in the United States. Numerous performing groups of Okinawan Americans practice the tradition mainly in the Western US and in Hawaii.

be reduced to singing “The One Big Song”.

It is not likely that this grim picture will come true. Such a terrible reduction of choice could never come to pass. We may never ever be reduced to quite that level. Music is too closely related to the syntax, stress patterns and accents of spoken language to avoid being influenced and even molded by speech. Although the number and variety of local languages is being reduced and radio and television broadcasting are greatly reducing local regional accents in areas where one language is spoken, probably as long as there are different languages spoken, there will also be different musical languages and thus different songs to sing in them.

Today Rock has become an international musical style. There are US, British, French, Italian, German, Australian and Japanese counterparts and even bands in the Russia and the former East Block countries. There are all of the many new African popular musics also. While all these share much in common there is great variety among these vast modern musical languages. Even in the comparing the two most prominent types which use the same language, US and British Rock, it is noteworthy that most of the British tend to sing with an “American” accent which lends them indistinguishable from the singing of American Rock groups. Even so, most teenagers living in the US can distinguish between US and British groups on the basis of musical style. The surviving differences in the musical language of these two groups must be an outgrowth of the differences in the accent and stress patterns of the two spoken languages.

As long as we retain individual spoken languages our distinctive musical languages may also survive. If it is true that music provides an increased diversity in shadings of mood and feeling which in turn can have an effect on our process of thought and on the diversity and intensity of our emotional vocabulary then it must follow that the steady reduction of variety and subtlety in the music which generates these important aspects of our lives can only have increasingly debilitating consequences for our ability to cope with the future and to survive in it. If there is too great a loss in music cultural diversity, can the species itself become endangered?

The Marimba from Africa to America

Here is an example of the fortuitous and tenacious path of diffusion. The *marimba* is an instrument which traditionally was performed exclusively in the Southeastern region of Mexico, in the states of Oaxaca, Tabasco, and Chiapas and on into Guatemala, Eastern Belize, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. The instrument and its music have functioned as an important cultural link between peoples of all these countries in Central America and Mexico. The instrument is a xylophone with wooden keys which are struck by a pair of mallets in the player’s hands. Often and usually, a single large *marimba* covers the range of several octaves

and is played on by three or even four men. Sometimes two of these large *marimbas* are paired in an ensemble and played by a group of seven musicians. The deep resonating throbbing and buzzing sound of the *marimba* playing the local 'sones' has come to be associated as characteristic of the music the Southern region of Mexico and of Central America.

The *marimba*, however, is actually African in origin, having been brought by slaves from Africa who probably served as part of the labor force in the Pacific and Gulf Coastal regions of Central America. In the older simple *marimbas* still played by the indigenous peoples of the highlands of Guatemala and among the indigenous peoples of Nicaragua, the instrument has a strip of rattan around one side which serves both as a handle and a brace on which the player can sit while playing the instrument. Each key is suspended over an individual resonator, traditionally made of a dried hollow calabash shell in which a small hole has been cut out and this hole covered over with a thin membrane which vibrates when the key is struck. These two elements, the rattan strip and the vibrating membrane along with the name, *marimba*, all point to the African origin of the instrument. Although in the more popular instrument the rattan carrying strip is not longer used, the vibrating membrane and the name *marimba* remain to link it to its African origins.

The origins of the *marimba* in Africa are not clear. What is clear however, is that an instrument of this type, wooden keys, individual calabash resonators, and a curved rattan stick used for a handle or sitting on, is found broadly covering a range from coastal Mozambique in East Africa, stretching all along the central forests of Africa and on through the Western part of Africa extending all the way to Senegal on the farthest Western tip. This distribution roughly coincides with one of the important traditional trade routes through Africa in the days before colonialization. While anything is possible, it does seem more likely that the African *marimba* was introduced by African slaves from the West coast of Africa to the Americas.

The *marimba* was apparently an instrument which was taken up by the Indians who learned about it and its techniques from the African slaves with whom they were forced to serve as a common labor force. The instrument was quickly taken up by the Indians and used in connection with their religious rituals, practices which on the surface purported to be Christian but which also retained strong pre-Hispanic elements. From this ritual use of the *marimba*, the Indians began to use the *marimba* music for village fiestas and gradually from this came a new mestizo or lowland style of music in which the sound of *marimba* was perfectly suited to the regional style.

The sound of the *marimba* is considered in the traditional culture of Southern Mexico and Central America something of great importance and the sound of which forms a cultural link between these otherwise quite separate nations. The haunting sounding of the vibrating membranes of the *marimba* resonators and the frequently

used tremolo of the keys has inspired the phrase, '*maderas que cantan con voz de mujer*', "wood that sings with the voice of a woman". Although increasingly replaced by electronic instruments for local festivals, the *marimba* continues to serve as a symbol of the southern region. During the 1930s and 1940s a group of musicians from Guatemala, the Hurtado Brothers, carried the sound of the *marimba* to large audiences in the United States where they eventually took up permanent residence. Their performances became a rallying point for the Southern Mexicans and Central Americans living in the United States during that time. So well accepted is the *marimba* as a symbol of the culture of Central America and Mexico that few of the inhabitants would believe that the instrument is of African origin.

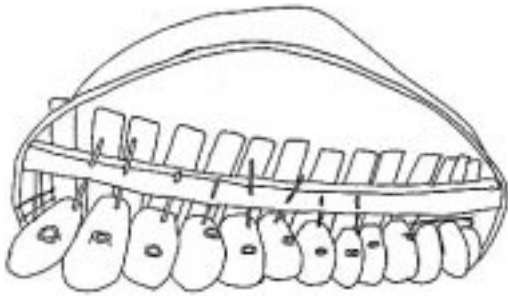


Fig.27 The basic elements of the African *marimba*, the rattan carrying strip, the calabash resonators under each key and the vibrating membrane on each resonator.



Fig.28 Chopi, Mozambique. The master musician, Chambini plays a representative African form of the marimba, in this case, the Chopi *Timbila*.



Fig.28 The *marimba* of the highlands of Guatemala shows all the characteristics of the classical instrument of African origins, the individual calabash resonators, the vibrating membrane on each resonator, the rattan strip for carrying or for balancing the instrument while sitting.

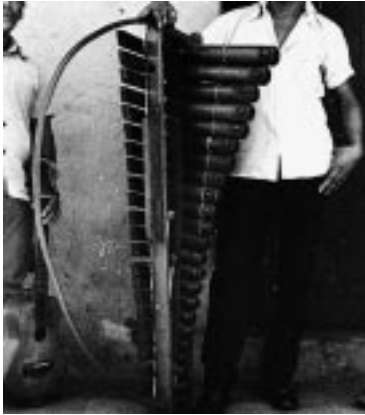


Fig.29 The indigenous people of the Masaya region of Nicaragua use a form of the *marimba* with clear African elements. In this case the resonators have been made of wood and shaped to resemble bamboo.



Fig.30 The *marimba* is a well known instrument in Central America. However, the roots and origin of this instrument lie in Africa. *Marimba Doble* from San Jose Soccotz, Belize.

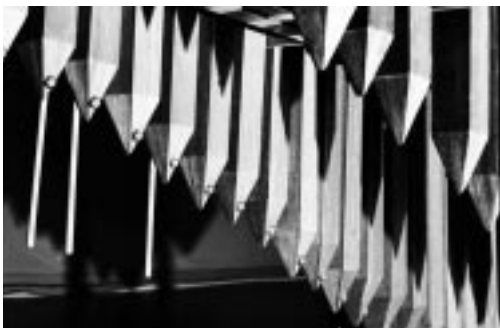


Fig.31 Detail of a modern Mexican *marimba* showing the wooden resonators made to replace those of calabash and the attached ring with the vibrating membrane.

