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## On the Diffusion of Musical Cultures

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The topic is vast, and can be approached in a variety of ways. What strikes me personally are those aspects which result from the natural limits of musical knowledge, among other things, from different temporal perspectives in which we perceive musical phenomena. They reveal the distinctive qualities and values attached to music<sup>1</sup>, and the ways in which music is present in the life of mankind and in the history of culture. These limits are clearly distinguishable, beginning with the area of musical language and compositions, through those situations in which music is performed and their place in the natural and cultural environment, to the position of music in human life and culture (regional, national, universal), and in the history of music, understood in the widest possible sense. These areas, in spite of their distinctiveness, are inter-related in a multitude of ways. So are the specific research problems embedded in this structure. They determine the manner and method of research, since the laws governing musical phenomena in each of the areas enumerated above will be different. Laws applying to the musical language and idiom are different from those applying to composition (genres, forms, styles); yet other laws reveal the truth about the role of music in the life of people, culture and history. Concentrating on a particular area of research (e.g. musical language and composition, or the biographical, cultural or historical context of a work) does not eliminate the influence of the other

areas. They remain important, providing general background and helping to define the main topic more closely.

Diffusion of musical cultures is not a topic relating to the level of musical language, although it can be revealed in it. Moreover, research tradition has tended to differentiate styles, traditions and cultures precisely on the basis of the morphology of music (e.g. the differentiation of rhythmic formulae, mainly dance ones, constituted for some scholars a method of defining the “ethnic” provenance of the music they analyzed). Examples from ethnomusicology and musicology are just too obvious to be worth quoting.

Neither does our topic belong to the subject of performance situations and musical composition, although perhaps a composition or, even more so, a number of compositions, can be a manifestation of it. Nor is the diffusion of musical culture a typical issue relating to musical environment. Studies of musical environments are more likely to emphasize the stable elements, whereas cultural diffusion brings out the elements of dynamics and change. However, it would be true to say that the environment may be the arena where cultural diffusion takes place.

It is better to position our topic at the level of individual and social life. Life is the universal model of change; it is the expression of personal history and socially experienced history, history as it is retained in the collective memory of living generations — the only truly universal history, present in every culture, even the most primitive one. This is the approach to cultural change favoured by the anthropological science of today. The social aspect of life needs to be particularly stressed here. This point was made strongly by Niklas Luhmann when he pronounced the judgement that the belief that a society consists of people is a “humanistic superstition”. In his own words, “Society is not made up of people but of interpersonal communication systems”<sup>2</sup>. Thus social systems are communication systems and are decidedly different from psychical systems, which belong to systems of perception.

Social systems are formed out of many subsystems, such as the economy, politics, science, art (including music), law, religion, love and family. Each of them has its own code which, in essence, is not translatable into the codes of the other subsystems. This means that communication takes place within the

given subsystems rather than between them. The relative independence of the economy, politics, science, law, religion is emphasized here on purpose, since it would be so easy to find evidence for their being mutually inter-related. For instance, music is clearly related to other arts, to religion, politics and economy.

Luhmann's sociologism is rapacious and tries to explain a great deal. Here, using the systematics of musical knowledge presented in the introduction, an attempt will be made to differentiate an area which will extend beyond the immediate experience of individual and social life. Its aim is to throw light on that which we have not lived through ourselves, which we have not experienced socially, but which still shapes our view of the world and of music. Above all, this is history — history which is full, deep and different from history as experienced by living generations. The term 'history' is used here in the wider sense, as a concept which illuminates the past and reaches into its deepest layers. History understood in this way constitutes the most important area for revealing fully the issue of diffusion of musical cultures.

What, however, is history? Many traditional, primitive cultures do not have an awareness of history as we understand it. Historical thinking is a relatively new phenomenon, with the Bible usually taken as its beginning. It brings with it a new understanding of time, replacing cyclical time with linear, directed time, starting in the most distant past and proceeding towards an indefinite, or definite, future. We cannot discuss this issue in depth here. What is important now is to point out that not all cultures have an awareness of history as conceptualized by us, and yet they are not powerless against the fact that time reaches back further than the experience of living generations. They mould that time into the form of myth, tradition, religious conviction, belief in the ideals of a traditional worldview, in the same way that others form a belief out of the ideals of the scientific worldview, where the contemporary understanding of history is a significant component. History is an attempt to fit out scientifically the area taken up by myth, an attempt which is not fully successful. The need for myth is a natural human need and cannot be easily eliminated. The struggle against myths usually ends up with one set of myths being replaced by another. History itself often participates in myth creation,

and research papers on the diffusion of cultures provides much evidence of this.

There is no such thing as pure history; pure history would be a fiction. History as a higher perspective of perceiving humanity's story must always link up with the aforementioned subject areas, i.e., with the individual and social life perspective, with the perspective of the cultural environment, with the perspective on participating in performance situations and with the perspective of musical language. Also, there is no such thing as history free from ideas dominant at the time. The European historicism of recent centuries, born of the idea of progress, feeds on its ideals. There are many levels of history, and each presents the problem of differentiation and mutual diffusion of cultures. The deepest layer takes us to anthropogenesis, to differentiating, from within the common synthetic system, of two separate systems, linguistic and musical. Presumably the absence of such a differentiation did not constitute an obstacle to the differentiation of cultures, since, for instance, bird song is not purely the result of genetic programming, but also of mutual learning and imitation, which leads to the differentiation of cultural communities of bird song.

Diffusion of musical cultures of ancient times is usually deduced from the effects of their differentiation, from the registered degree of distinctiveness and similarity. There are few areas where comparative research on the widest scale has been undertaken, but one such exception concerns knowledge about musical instruments. For a long while now it has been used to illustrate the diffusion of cultures through different continents. Among the best known music research programmes on the widest possible global scale, are the results of Alan Lomax's cantometry research programme from the nineteen sixties<sup>3</sup>. The study was based on recordings from different cultures, selected on the basis of the atlas of world cultures edited by George P. Murdock. This research led to the differentiation of the basic cultural sets, to defining their inter-relatedness, and to presenting the whole evolutionary schema as a genealogical tree of musical cultures of the world. Such a daring hypothesis was easy to criticize, but nobody verified it on a wider scale, nor produced counter-proposals. In Poland we also have our own experience of music research

conducted from a wider perspective: one could mention here the diffusion of the cultures of East and West in the studies of Anna Czekanowska<sup>4</sup> or the differentiation of old music traditions of Southern Europe in the work of Bożena Muszkalska<sup>5</sup>. Meanwhile, anthropological sciences have abandoned the fashion for grand syntheses; research concentrates on detailed studies of small ethnic groups, and on cultural change registered in the consciousness of living generations.

Lomax distinguished, among other things, the so-called old Europe, i.e., Central and Eastern Europe, without including the Western peripheries in the concept. This is exactly the reverse of the desired aim of some contemporary Western politicians, who divide Europe into old Europe — Western, mature, respectable, well-placed to instruct others, and young Europe, which should listen respectfully and not speak unless spoken to. This is another example of how strong the ideological function of history can be.

The development of historical research coincides with the period of growth of European nationalisms. In such circumstances history was expected to provide answers to the need for national myths, all the more important in the case of Poland because of loss of its independent statehood. The rebirth of the Polish state after the First World War intensified the need for recreating the foundations of national existence. The humanities were actively employed in this process. In Kraków, Józef Reiss was trying to cure national complexes by claiming in the title of his work that “Polish music is the most beautiful of all”<sup>6</sup>. In Poznań, Łucjan Kamieński, perceiving the hopeless position of Polish history of music when competing with the German one, decided that our only chance was to develop a new, dynamic science, ethno-musicology, independent of history<sup>7</sup>.

The title “Concerning the diffusion of musical cultures” sounds neutral, even friendly, and that is how we would like the problem to appear. Historically, however, such diffusion is often based on naked violence, a ruthless conflict of ideas. And when the ideas fight then the people die. Diffusion of musical cultures throughout history took different forms, including that of rapacious expansion and resistance to it in defence of one’s own identity.

Today, with the prospect of Europe uniting, we face new challenges —

or perhaps not so very new, as musicology and ethnomusicology have for some time now been participating in shaping the unity of European learning. Close contacts with others, free exchange of experiences have cured us of national complexes. Does the European Union bring with it a threat to national culture? No! On the contrary; the Union will make it easier for us to define our own distinctive characteristics and will exert pressure to have them preserved and developed. It is only through preserving our distinctiveness that we will be of interest to others, and will take our place among them as clearly identifiable and full members.

One can expect that future regional studies will be fuller, less dependent on historical divisions and the variety of languages in which sources have been preserved. The easiest accomplishment so far has been in the area of including the architectural monuments of Gdańsk, Wrocław, and even the Teutonic castle at Malbork, in our cultural heritage, which we guard with care. In time this will happen to foreign music, literature, philosophy and science which developed in the past in the area of today's Poland. We will probably participate to an even greater degree in working on questions of European music, beyond national divisions. And in time we will come to regard the whole European cultural heritage as our own, in spite of the often artificially enforced national divisions of recent centuries. We will share in the pride of Europe's achievements, and in the responsibility for causing its misfortunes.

### Notes

- 1 This point is stressed by Katarzyna Dadak-Kozicka ('Pionowy wymiar antropologii muzyki', *Muzyka* 44:2 (1999), pp. 115–132) when commenting on my concept of temporal spheres of music.
- 2 See Jerzy Szacki, *Historia myśli socjologicznej. Wydanie nowe*, Warszawa 2002, p. 937.
- 3 Alan Lomax, *Folk song style and culture*, Washington, D.C., American Association for the Advancement of Science 1968, 'The evolutionary taxonomy of culture', *Science* 171 (21 July) (1972), p. 228–239.
- 4 Anna Czekanowska, (ed.) *Dziedzictwo europejskie a polska kultura muzyczna w dobie przemian*, Kraków 1995; *Pathways of Ethnomusicology. 50th Anniversary of Research Work of Professor Anna Czekanowska*, eds. P. Dahlig, L. Bielawski, S. Żerańska-Kominek, Warszawa 1999.

- 5 Bożena Muszkalska, *Tradycyjna wielogłosowość wokalna w kulturach basenu Morza Śródziemnego*, Poznań 1999.
- 6 Józef Reiss, *Najpiękniejsza ze wszystkich jest muzyka polska*, Kraków 1946.
- 7 Łucjan Kamieński, 'Z badań nad śpiewem i muzyką ludu polskiego', in *Balticoslavica*, vol. 2, Vilnius 1934, pp. 129–149. See Ludwik Bielawski, *Strefowa teoria czasu i jej znaczenie dla antropologii muzycznej* Kraków 1973, p. 14.