

RELATING THE PRESENT TO THE PAST THOUGHTS ON THE STUDY OF MUSICAL CHANGE AND CULTURE CHANGE IN ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

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<http://www.muspe.unibo.it/period/MA/index/number1/nettl1/ne1.htm>

The relationship of past to present is one of the principal issues in all human cultures. It is also perhaps the most important task of many areas of scholarship, and in different ways, of musicology and anthropology.

In ethnomusicology and in anthropology, one of the principal ways of associating past to present has been through the concepts of culture change and musical change, the idea that something that a society maintains and shares can change in character or in detail and yet remain essentially the same. I would like to approach the relationship of past and present through this concept. It is an immense subject, and you will understand why I have had problems finding ways to grasp it. To deal with it properly might require that one define culture and music and then change, to say nothing of providing a bibliography. But instead, as a more modest goal, I would like to try to circumscribe the subject by mentioning and discussing a few of the issues that dominate this area of endeavor, phrasing each in terms of a widely accepted generalization and then illustrating each with something from my experience.

The ultimate concern of musicology has always been the nature of musical change. The majority of musicologists, who see themselves mainly as music historians, have tried to show that there is a systematic way in which music proceeds from past to present, using, for example, the concept of periods, the significance of biography, the belief that similarity or identity must usually be explained by contact and influence. Following the approaches of anthropology, ethnomusicologists have sometimes also looked at music in that way, but more frequently they have been concerned with the analysis of a present-day situation and what the present can tell us about its own past, and with the observation of change more or less as it occurs.

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1. There is a multitude of relationships between past and present

Let me begin with some remarks about the classifications of the concept of change. Most broadly, ethnomusicologists have studied change in three relatively distinct ways. First, and dominant in our literature, is statements based events recorded by observers, in traditional historical and ethnographic senses. Second, we are also concerned with the ways in which change, history, relationship of past and present are perceived and classified by the world's societies -- sometimes in ways that do not conform to the mentioned observations. And third, as a related issue, we study the world's interpretations of their perceptions, the ways in which societies shape their past to fit the needs of the present. These areas of study overlap, but it is sometimes helpful to separate them artificially for analysis.

But what do we mean by the concept of "musical change"? Let me start by simply listing a few quite unrelated examples of some of the things that have happened. In the 19th century, some Native American tribes felt forced to completely give up their traditions and take up those of Western vernacular music. In the 20th century, mainstream European composers of fine art music gave up functional harmony and adopted serialism, but they kept traditional forms and genres such as

symphony and string quartet. Already in the 18th century, African slaves in Jamaica created a new music that incorporated principal elements of their African heritage as well as of the Protestant hymns to which they had been introduced. After 1920, Iranian classical musicians added Western harmony to their melodies. In the late Middle Ages, German villagers sang a ballad over a period of a hundred years and created seventy-five variants. Today, an Indian musician plays the same raga in concerts year after year, but never the same way. When Mozart first played his D-minor concerto it had the same notes as it does more than 200 years later, but it sounds quite different today -- and different also on each 20th-century recording. I am sure you get my drift. We can group these examples somewhat along the lines of a continuum: replacement by a society of an entire musical system; radical change of a music; and changes within a system, permitted and perhaps even required for its maintenance.

And then, we can also distinguish change in the central system from peripheral change --the violin becomes the main accompanying instrument in South India, but the saxophone might be used only by two musicians. Musical style can remain while social context and the system of ideas about music change: Again, in India, the classical repertory of devotional songs sung at temples moved during this century to the middle-class concert milieu of cities. The meaning of music, may change while the structure remains. The symbolic role of folk songs changed greatly in American society between 1900 and 1990.

There have been attempts to classify types, and more accurately, degrees of change, and processes range from complete abandonment to cosmetic changes such as the addition of a chord here and there. There are lots of terms, including transculturation, westernization, modernization, syncretism, some of which I'll mention again. Classifications have been provided in publications by John Blacking (1978), Margaret Kartomi (1981) Amnon Shiloah and Erik Cohen (1983), and myself (Nettl 1978). In most cases, what impresses me is not so much change, but the techniques societies have devised to prevent, inhibit, and control change, and to maintain musical tradition, permitting it to flourish while other things in life are forced to change. In music, perhaps more than in other domains of culture, people wish to tie their present to the past. So, there are changes in the total musical culture that are brought about in order to maintain some aspects of a tradition intact -- for example, secularization of a sacred tribal repertory; or reduction of a repertory to make possible its retention when decreased musical energies are available for its maintenance; introduction of functional harmony; or replacement of improvisation with emphasis on precomposition. The first thing with which we may be struck in looking at the relationship of past and present is the bewildering variety of phenomena that must be taken into account. Indeed, in the history of one genre or style or even an instrument, a number of processes occur and converge. So, I come to my first excursion, to Australia.

The story of the aboriginal didjeridu is one in which several ways of relating past and present interact and conflict. It is a long trumpet, ordinarily made of eucalyptus. Looking at its ancient history from the viewpoint of Kulturkreis anthropologists of around 1920 (see Schneider 1978), it is similar to long trumpets in other societies -- Tibetan trumpets, the Alphorn, the molimo of the Mambuti pygmies, the Trutruka of the Araucanians, and this non-contiguous geographic distribution as well as the instrument's role in fundamental rituals suggests that it is particularly ancient. In Australia, however, it was at one time limited to tribes in the north. After settlement of the continent by whites, it began to have a much wider distribution, and eventually it became a kind of musical symbol of Australian aboriginal (Berndt and Phillips, ed. 1978:269-75).



Didjeridu. In Uomini & Suoni (Firenze: Usher): 48

[Editor's suggestion: you may visit a site on the [didjeridu](#)]

Australian didjeridu 

I suggest three reasons: the greater amount of contact among Australian peoples; the need for small and diverse aboriginal societies, all of them under the pressure provided by domination of white culture, to find artifacts and ideas which, via re-interpretation and with the concept of nativism, they

could share in a kind of pan-Australian culture; and the desire to find a way to syncretize with the emblematic role of instruments in Western culture, where music was regarded as quintessentially an instrumental art. So, changes in Australian culture brought about not so much a new musical sound but new conceptions and different distribution. New sounds came to the didjeridu later yet, when it had become a kind of symbol of Australian aboriginal culture to white Australians and began to be introduced as an instrument in rock music associated with aboriginal, or by aboriginal musicians.

Australian aboriginal rock music

Eventually, as indicated in Australian tourist shops and by films about white Australians, it has become something of an emblem of Australia generally (see M. Breen, ed 1989; Dunbar-Hall 1994). Then, as illustrated by its use by American musicians such as the trombone virtuoso Stuart Dempster experimenting with metal and plastic and with its tone in European cathedrals, it became a part of the international new music instrumentarium.

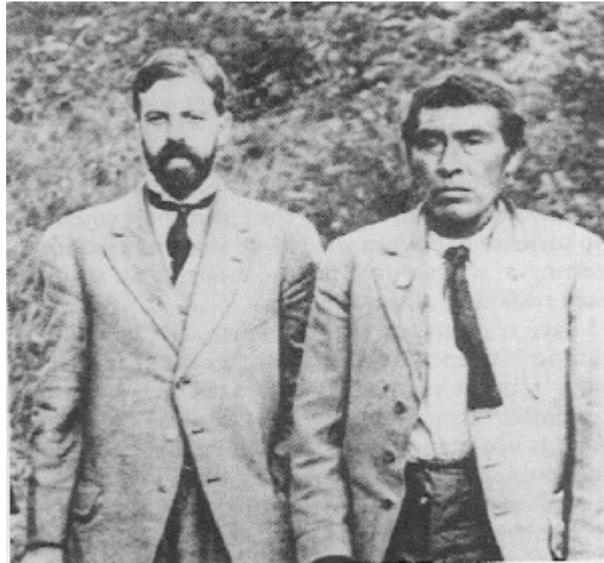
This instrument makes its way through history with a variety of processes: it seemed once to be part of a large Kulturkreis; it partakes of abandonment of traditional culture; it is the subject of acculturation, reinterpretation, syncretism, modernization, westernization. It successively becomes part of several cultures; its sound stays the same while its social and musical contexts change; its symbolic role changes from ceremonial to ethnic to national. It experienced interaction with social, political, technological forces. Changes in the use and sound and conception of the instrument accompanied culture changes largely resulting from contact among societies. Ironically -- and one sees this in the music of many small societies -- the didjeridu became increasingly known and used at the same time as Australian aboriginals and their culture became increasingly absorbed into the Australian mainstream. That it is a powerful tool for connecting past to present is clear.

2. The music of the present is a map to its past.

The ethnomusicological study of the relationship of past to present began largely with map-making, that is, with the study of geographic distributions. Thus, early comparative musicologists such as Hornbostel and Sachs participated in the development of Kulturkreis theory, in which the congruent distribution of clusters of traits would signify a historical period (Schneider 1978). Somewhat later, ethnomusicologists such as George Herzog (1930), Helen Roberts (1936), and Alan Merriam (1959) used the culture areas of American anthropologists as a model for their musical areas. Here a contiguous area with a common group of traits most concentrated in the center was thought to be a map of history; the center, or climax, was the culture's place of origin from where its characteristics moved to the fringes.

Related to these theories is research in which the distribution of a tune type or a ballad type or even a motif -- the English Child ballads or "Sul Castel che'l mira bel" studied by Marcello Sorce Keller (1984) come to mind -- are studied in the belief that the contemporary distribution is a guide to how it came about. Bela Bartók's studies of the Hungarian folk song and its division into styles (Bartók 1931) representing periods is an early example of the transfer of the concept of tune families and types to entire repertoires. Thus, taking the term "map" more metaphorically, a repertory in aural tradition and its internal structure, living in a sense only in the present, may also be a map to its past. Absence of conventional historical data in the form of written sources or physical artifacts has usually led to theories of development -- regarded as laws by some, and as statistically significant regularities by others -- based on history's arrow, the tendency to move from simple to numerically complex, or on history's circle, some kind of alternation from Apollonian/Dyonisian to classic/romantic and so on. But whatever the basic assumptions of what is likely to happen, musicologists have usually assumed that the present in some sense contains the past. The variants of "Lord Randall" provide clues to the nature of the original tune. The late Quartets tell us something about Opus 18.

Can an isolated tribal repertory provide this kind of map? Sometimes we really have nothing else. Let me briefly give an example of a kind of archeological style analysis from the culture of Ishi, the last member of the Yahi tribe, of California, sometimes called, in his day, "the last wild Indian" (Kroeber 1961).



Ishi, the last Yahi Indian, shown with the anthropologist A.L. Kroeber, 1911 (as reprinted in R. Heizer - T. Kroeber, eds., *Ishi, the last Yahi: A Documentary History*, Berkeley:University of California Press, 1979: 111).

Ishi was the last survivor of a tribe that went into seclusion as a way of escaping cultural and physical destruction by whites. It numbered about 200 at its largest, but there were no more than a dozen in 1900, only four in 1910, and Ishi, the last, joined western society in 1911 and lived for five years at the University of California in Berkeley working as an informant for the famous anthropologist Alfred L. Kroeber. As part of his work he recorded his entire song repertory, which included songs of many functions. Extremely simple in scale, form, and rhythm by our conventional standards, it nevertheless exhibited amazing variety. Most of the songs have three or four tones; and most have a two-part form in which the second part is in some sense a restatement of the first -- variation, extension, contraction, inversion. This is the style of the central repertory, stylistically speaking.

Flint song sung by Ishi, the last Yahi Indian

But there is also a much smaller, more varied, part of the repertory, which I will call peripheral. It consists of songs which remind of musical styles found elsewhere in traditional North American cultures. These have scales of four and five tones. There are two using the peculiar ascending form of the Yuman people in the southwestern U.S. Others remind us of the Apache, and yet others of the songs of the Plains Indians, with their sharp descent and incomplete-repetition form type. What are these strange-sounding peripheral songs doing in this otherwise rather homogeneous repertory? In earlier times, these peoples were distant from Ishi's tribe in central California. In the period after 1850, and maybe even before, the Yahi seem to have had little contact with the outside, and the culture deteriorated because of the people's need to move constantly, the ever-declining population, life as a constant emergency. The culture as a whole seems not to be divisible into "central" and "peripheral" components. (For a summary of Ishi's song styles and transcriptions, see Nettl 1965.) I suggest that Ishi's repertory is a map to its own history and an indicator of culture change or contact. First, the vast majority of the repertory suggests consistency, like the culture as a whole. The fact that a single kind of form dominated and was developed into numerous variants indicates a musical culture in which composers kept doing pretty much the same thing for a long period. But the few Plains, Yuman, and Athabascan-like forms leave us wondering. Do they tell us about the wandering of songs from tribe to tribe? Or about long-ago visits by travelers from these tribes who left songs but evidently little else? Should we regard these songs, outside the mainstream as they are, part of the Yahi musical culture, or aberration? There are numerous possible interpretations; but I

insist that the presence of these songs means something in a historical sense, and that the music history, if -- or when -- we discover it, will provide important clues to the history of a culture for whose there is virtually no data beyond what was learned from this last survivor.

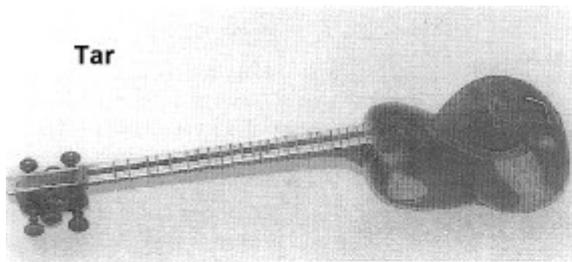
3. *Components of a musical system may change in different ways and at different rates*

What is it that determines what musical style a society will have, or prefer? When pushed to the wall, most ethnomusicologists, after some squirming, will maintain that it must have something to do with the character of the society's culture. A good many studies, beginning with work of Curt Sachs (1937 -- and earlier) and continuing in the cantometrics work of Alan Lomax (1968), and going on into the recent studies in the anthropology of music, suggest that there is at least something to this theory. And if culture determines music, then culture change must usually also determine musical change.

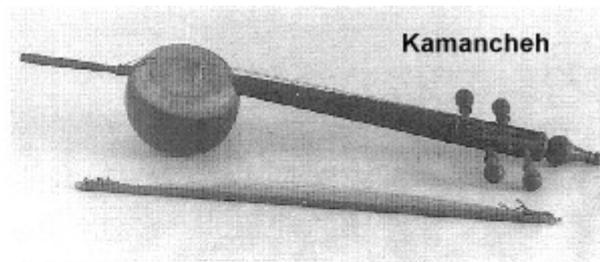
But what is it that may change? The conventional wisdom to the effect that culture is a unit and therefore its domains somehow change in tandem would suggest that music is also a unit. But we know that individual parameters of music may change -- affecting but not changing the rest. Obviously, adding harmony to a melody is a change in texture but does not necessarily alter the melody itself. It may be more interesting to contemplate the question in the light of the three-part model for the study of music proposed by Merriam (1964:32-33) sound, behavior, and concepts. The point is that these three sectors (one could probably divide music differently as well), integrated though they are, nevertheless often behave differently in given situations. Indeed, they may have complementary roles in culture and music change, the conceptual framework of music perhaps remaining essentially constant while sound, or style, changes; or, the behavior sector changing in order to permit the style to survive.

Approaches to musical and cultural change revolving around Merriam's model have parallels in anthropological theories of culture change. The musical system may be seen as practicing adaptive strategies, somewhat along the line of cultural evolution -- or as contributing to adaptive strategies. I particularly want to call to your attention two concepts characterizing older possibly conflicting approaches to these issues: innovation as a cultural phenomenon, and cultural evolution. Their musical ramifications are perhaps obvious. For literature, I'll mention only two major scholars. Julian Steward's (1955) model of multi-linear evolution, where regularities and patterns characteristic of different cultural and even physical environments were recognized but which relied on high cultures as sources for innovation and diffusion, has close parallels in the typical ethnomusicological approach to musical change. Along different lines, H. G. Barnett analyzed the concept of innovation, as a way of tying personal to societal insights and behavior. It is interesting that neither of them took advantage of the divisible nature of the musical domain to show the complexity of the phenomenon of culture change. An example from Iran, based largely on my own field observations (see Zonis 1973, Farhat 1990, and Nettl 1992 particularly for details and bibliography).

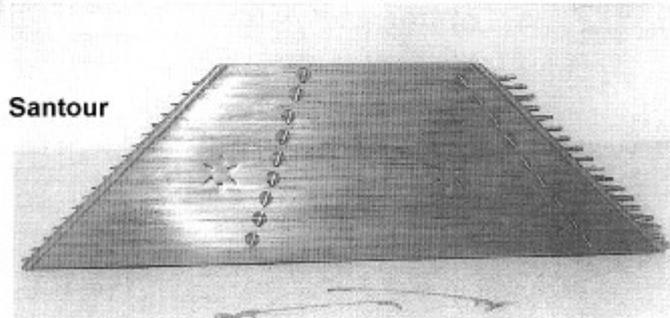
In twentieth-century Iran, we can observe the interaction of Persian and Western musics, and of their subdivisions of sound, behavior, and ideas, with this interesting result: The coming and the adoption of Western ideas about music and how it should function in a society permitted the musical sound -- the repertory -- to remain unchanged in its central features. At the same time, imitating the structure of the European repertory (structure of the *repertory*, not of the individual pieces), Iranian musicians built something analogous to the European classical system, its theory and its repertory, in the context of the Persian style. Also, European practices such as concerts permitted Persian music to survive and flourish, even at a time when much of the rest of Persian culture was changing fundamentally in a direction of western practices and values.



Tar



Kamancheh



Santour

 [Dastgah-e Shur. Persian music played on santour: traditional avaz](#)

In the older traditions of Iran, music had been something about which people were ambivalent. They wanted music in their lives, but music was dangerous, and they had coped with this problem in several ways: by creating a narrow definition of music, by seeing sounds as having varying degrees of musicness in them (but rarely being fully "music"), by giving musicians low social status or turning music over to non-Muslim minorities, by not permitting music to experience the development of the kinds of large formal structures found in Persian visual art and literature; and more.

Then, when Westernization came to play a major role in the late 19th century and later, and when life began to have a distinct Western flavor, traditional Persian music suddenly began to flourish. In part this was due to the Westernization of the music concept, as something one could respect. What happened was not so much the introduction of Western music -- which did take place -- but changes in musical life and musical style that approximated Western, musical culture, and this included allowing music to have the advantages of the other arts -- and the establishment of the magnificent radif as a basis for improvisation -- as well as introduction of Western-style teaching methods, notation, ensembles, emphasis on composed pieces, virtuosity, and much else; even Westernization of musical style such as harmony and emphasis on modes compatible with major and minor, but in a distinctly Persian musical milieu.

 [Dastgah-e Mahour. Persian music played on santour: modernized and Westernized](#)
[Chahar mezarab](#)

[Editor's suggestion: you may look for photos and information on [santour](#) in the Larnikam catalogue]

Much of this was inhibited, after 1978, along with Westernization at large. But what had been changing musically in the 1950s, 60s and 70s, in the context of culture change, is fundamentally the value of music among the domains of culture; this accomplished, we see Persian music develop, to a substantial extent in the direction of Western musical culture, but flourishing in Iran. And among the hundreds of thousands of immigrants and exiles in Europe and North America who in most respects began to act like mainstream Americans and Europeans, music ceased being a neglected domain of culture and became a major emblem of ethnicity. In all of this, we note the processes identified by anthropologists. We note Barnett's innovation and its adaptation to traditions (Barnett 1953); and there is evolution in which Persian music has adapted to Western intrusions in sophisticated and distinct ways, following Steward's model, different from the lines of evolution followed in India and Africa, unique ways of relating past to present.

While Steward and Barnett concentrated on cultures as self-contained units in which change was mainly determined by factors internal to the society, other approaches, such as that of Melville J. Herskovits (e.g. 1945) and some of his students such as R. Waterman (1948) and Merriam (1977), concentrated on change that resulted from the interaction of cultures. The picture of culture change studies has by now changed completely, from the contemplation of cultures as units in which outside contact would be an intrusion, to the belief that intercultural contact and the resulting culture change were the norm.

4. Societies may shape the past to fit the present.

Starting with the emphasis on emic and etic and the "new ethnography" in which the insider's interpretation was to play a major role, anthropologists began around 1950, to look at the relationship of past to present with the perspective of reflexivity. Going much further in the last two decades, works by many scholars -- anthropologists, mainly (e.g. Geertz 1973; Clifford and Marcus, ed. 1986; Clifford 1988; Turner and Bruner, ed. 1986, and others, often exhibiting the strength of their approaches by using the symposium as a venue) --, joining literary critics, philosophers, and scientists, have led the way in a movement which maintains that the position of the observer inevitably shapes the account, and that we can, as it were, really write only about ourselves. These approaches supported the view that we must study the ways in which societies see their own histories, however much they may contradict positivistic appraisals. A society's identity is substantially determined by its view of its own past. And so, in relating a society's present to its past, we also study the way societies imagine this relationship in their own cultural systems, interpret what happened and sometimes invent what did not. The way in which the musicians of a society see their own past plays a major role in their present.

It's a view which clearly helps to explain aspects of Western art music culture, and books by various musicologists (see e.g. Bergeron and Bohlman 1992) have provided insight into the way in which modern music historians invent music history. Western classical musicians who are not academics can serve as illustration. They may see music history as a tension between two forces: one is the belief in consistent progress according to which the music of today is better and more advanced than all that came before; the second, overshadowing this view, sees in music history a bell-shaped curve in which music worked up to the heights of Bach, Mozart, and Beethoven, a level which it could not maintain, and from which it has been descending. Today's composers often alternate between veneration and resentment of these great masters, their activity thus very much shaped by their view of the past. And outside the Western orbit, in the 20th century of many cultures, a way of dealing with the coming of Western music is to reshape the interpretation of the past to fit the present. My illustration comes from the Carnatic music culture of Madras (see Nettl 1985; L'Armand and L'Armand 1978, 1983). It is well known that there is hardly a place in the world in which a non-Western musical system has remained as much intact and flourishing as Madras, which has, however, undergone a vast amount of culture change. Madras is a city of modern India, and its economy, government, transportation system, educational structure, even aspects of the system of religion and values, and much else have changed enormously in the last 150 years. And still, there is a musical system whose practitioners resist change. Well, change in some aspects. They have, for example, adopted a Western-derived concert life, taken over some European instruments, established Western-style music conservatories, and modified the relationships among castes in the musical culture. And still they insist, some of them, that there is no room for innovation in Carnatic music. One of the ways they resist the hegemony of western music is by maintaining a kind of dualistic thinking, adopting Western music as a concept parallel to the Indian, but without giving it much of a chance to be heard. Western and Carnatic musics are the only worthwhile systems, and they complement each other: Indian music is melodic, Western harmonic; the Indian is substantially improvised, the Western not; Indian music is largely religious, Western largely secular.

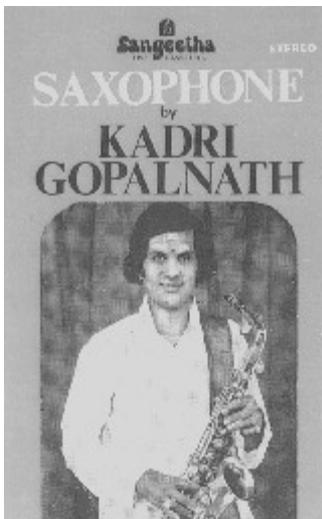


Group of South Indian musicians: T. Viswanathan (flute) and T. Ranganathan (mridangam) with American students

 *"Banturiti" from "Ramnad Krishnan Kaccheri"*

Western instruments have been introduced. The violin and the harmonium were introduced in the 19th century and play a role of enormous importance. Indian scholars know their origin, but the musical public and many musicians regard them as quintessentially Indian instruments and may refuse to believe that they came from elsewhere, relating them to ancient Indian developments and thus, also, reshaping the past to fit the needs of the present. Others, such as the saxophone, were seen as imported curiosities.

 *"Tillana", South Indian violin music*



Cover of a pre-recorded cassette produced in India, with Carnatic saxophone player Kadri Gopalnath

"We too have our trinity of composers," they say. "Like your Beethoven, Mozart, and Haydn, we have Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri, and Dikshitar, living about the same time as your classical composers." And so, by establishing the conception of complementarity as a kind of strategic device, the music-loving public of Madras sees its recent music history largely as a process of accommodating Western music, which must receive its due.

5. *Musical change may contradict or mitigate culture change.*

As I already suggested, during the last thirty of forty years, anthropologists have become interested principally in culture change that results from interaction among societies. (For detailed bibliography to 1984 see Nettl 1985:167-81). They developed concepts, some of them mentioned already, to explain the results of such interaction: acculturation -- the result of sustained contact between two cultures; syncretism -- an acculturative mechanism in which the degree of similarity or differences between analogous components of two cultures plays a major role in determining the direction of change; re-interpretation, a change in function without change in form; division of a culture into its central and peripheral components results in two mechanisms: Westernization (or the related concepts, Hinduization and Sinicization), in which central cultural features change to become part of the general Western (or Hindu, or Chinese) cultural system; and modernization, where a society changes the peripheral components of its culture in order to maintain the integrity of its central ones. (The concept was first brought forward by Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, and Singer 1972.) We have seen some of these mechanisms at work in my last example. In most cases, musical change is simply part of culture change, music is a participant, though, to be sure, sometimes with unexpected results. But also, there are situations in which the story of music contradicts what happens in the rest of culture. Music changes, perhaps, when the rest of culture does not, or it remains stable when everything else changes. This may suggest the conclusion that music is independent of culture, doesn't really matter, experiences arbitrary development; for example, that the maintenance of a singing style has no more to do with cultural continuity and change than vowel shifts in medieval English. Or, it may suggest to us that music, on the contrary, is *especially close* to fundamental identities such as ethnicity. Or we may guess that it is the particular cultural role of music to mitigate, as one may say in music what one does not dare say in speech, that it is the function of music to balance. Or that music is essentially outside culture, contemplating and commenting. My illustration from Iran showed that when Persian culture became modernized and westernized, its traditional, non-western music flourished, perhaps because music became particularly associated with Western musical conceptions. By contrast, in our next example, from Native North America, music contradicts the norms of experience.

It was about 1880 or 1890 that the Native American people of the Plains, including the Sioux, Crow, Blackfoot, Arapaho, and other well-known names, were finally defeated by the U.S. Army and by the bad management of the buffalo herds. Their culture virtually went out of existence, and in the course of the 20th century, they began to experience culture change of a most fundamental sort, and many of them became members of Western society, but of its most impoverished and deprived sector. After 1950, there were efforts to resurrect important components of Plains culture on the reservations while maintaining Western-style modes of subsistence, industry, transportation -- and even religion, as most Indians had become nominally Christian.

At the same time, in music, Plains Indians maintained and emphasized their traditional style and in effect increased or exaggerated it (see Nettl 1985:33-36). And further, as Native Americans from many culture areas came to work at establishing a pan-Indian culture in which elements were shared across cultural boundaries, they selected for their central sound the style of the style of the Plains peoples who had just been, it seemed, definitively beaten down.

 [Blackfoot Scalp Dance song, rec. 1910](#)

 [Blackfoot Grass Dance song, powwow song rec. 1966](#)



Scene from the large Blackfoot powwow, "North American Indian Days", 1982

How was it that at a time of heavy Westernization of Indian culture, the musical style of the very people undergoing the most heavily forced Westernization, a music most readily distinguished from Western music, became the generally accepted style of Indian peoples, became as it were "more Indian?" Some of the possible replies: Survival of a music through exaggeration of its distinctive characteristics; the use of music to express what may not be expressed verbally; music remaining an emblem of ethnicity when other domains cannot. Music does not always change in the same directions as the rest of culture. To be sure, in the realm of ideas about music, these styles have also been Westernized (see Powers 1990; Howard and Levine 1990).

Interestingly in the last two decades, as Indian traditions came to experience more encouragement and less pressure, more Western elements from musical style (such as harmony) and concept (such as human composition) have been accepted and syncretic forms established. Most obvious, in view of the centrality of instrumental music in Western culture and its relative absence in older Indian traditions, is the prominence of flute music as a major component of Indian music today.

6. Music may play a special role in culture change.

It is clear that music may have a particular, unique role in associating a society's present with its past. This observation may relate to Daniel Neuman's (1990:27-28) proposition that music can stand outside the rest of culture, its function being to comment and also to build bridges between a society and the outside world -- connecting insider and outsider, humans and spirits, culture and nature, present to past. The "outsider" position of musicians in many societies may be related to this phenomenon. Could this kind of observation lead to a general theory of musical change? This is not the place to try to provide one. But there are instances in which it would seem that it is music more than other domains which cements the past to the present. Some of my excursions could already provide illustration: In the Plains, music may remain while everything else changes; in Iran, it changed in some components and not in others, helping the transition; in the culture of Ishi, music may have provided the vanguard of change. But it seems to me that the special role of music can best be seen through the classic studies involving the history of musics originating in sub-Saharan Africa. African music, in its relationship to culture and culture change, seems to me to have been unique in its behavior.

The interaction between African and various other musics, mainly Western, the resulting array of musics in the various African-derived societies in the New World, and the reimportation of New World black musics to Africa with yet further musical results, has been one of the main issues in the history of ethnomusicological study of musical change. The concept of syncretism, involving the compatibility of cultures confronting each other, was, as it were, invented for this situation. The following examples represent an older, non-Westernized style of performance (Badouma Paddlers' song), and a style that combined older African traditional elements with style elements from Western popular music ("Agayanka Dabre").

 [Badouma Paddlers' song](#)

"Agayanka Dabre", a Nigerian highlife piece

Many major scholars contributed to the study of the African and African-derived situation, beginning with Hornbostel and the West African pioneer Ballanta-Taylor, and including particularly Melville Herskovits and later -- most importantly -- his students Richard Waterman and Alan P. Merriam . (For a tracing of the history of this strand of Africa-American musical studies, see C. Waterman 1991.) But let me speak of Herskovits for a moment: Among his many accomplishments, Herskovits in 1945 did something quite unprecedented: He rated the various domains of culture --religion, economy, political life, material culture, visual art -- comparatively in their relationship to their African counterparts, and he did this for a variety of African-derived New World societies, from Surinam and Haiti to Jamaica, Cuba, and the United States. Given the immense methodological difficulties, which I won't go into, one is still left with interesting conclusions that cannot easily be denied: The less contact an African-American society had with whites, the more like African it remained; that's perhaps to be expected. But also, music -- and secondarily religion -- maintained far more of an African character than did the other aspects of culture.

This might lead to the conclusion that in the course of culture change in the Americas, music was a conservative domain that resisted. But in the African world, Western music has played a substantial role even though there were fewer whites and more tribal and cultural cohesion and consistency than in the Americas. We should look at all this in an older African context, and so it may strike us that sub-Saharan Africa has a considerable degree of stylistic consistency. Of course each culture has its own specialties and particularities, but the African musics have a lot in common -- more perhaps than the musics of Europe, if you compare the folk music of the Sami with that of Greece, and all of this with church and court music of any period. If musical style derives in good measure from culture type and social organization, then in Africa, with its variety of societies, from major empires to middle-sized hierarchical tribal groups and on to the tiny, acephalous bands of pygmies and bushmen, one would expect a lot of musical variety. It is there, but also, certain principles -- short, iterative and variational forms, polyphony and the importance of having several things going on at once, the significance of rhythm and of percussive effects in all instruments and the voice, call-and-response, to name a few -- consistently characterize the music of sub-Saharan Africa and New World Africans. We can't say why African cultures are more like each other in music than in other domains (as suggested in Merriam 1959), but it's also true in the Americas (Herskovits 1945). In the New World, the various unrelated groups, forced to live together, may have used the similarity of musics to communicate, and conceivably it was this association of music with Africanness that caused music to be the last cultural domain to Westernize. Or possibly it was a case of humans discovering, as it were, a particularly successful way of making music, in a style that first spread throughout Africa and then became the hallmark of Africans forced to make the best of it when dragged from their homes into slavery. We are tempted to ask, can music, once created, have a life of its own, as it were, and develop independently and even in contradiction to other domains of culture? It continues to be an unanswered question.

Conclusion.

In this informal approach to the synthesis of some anthropological and ethnomusicological views of the relationship of past and present, we have seen that the world's societies survive by tying the present to their own past, and in this, music plays a significant and sometimes indispensable role. In devoting ourselves to the anthropological study of "past and present" in the musical cultures of the Mediterranean, we participate in discussing what has perhaps been the most fundamental question in music research.

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