

## Bruno Nettl – The Study of Ethnomusicology

### Cap. 13 – The Continuity of Change

1. WHAT HAPPENED AND WHAT HAPPENS
  - 1.1. A cliché about musical scholarship once divided scholars into historical musicologists, for whom music changes, and ethnomusicologists, whose emphasis is in what remain constant.
  - 1.2. A very great deal of ethnomusicological literature is concerned somehow with the fact that things to happen and that, in one way or another, happening implies change.
  - 1.3. But for the most part, the approaches of ethnomusicologists to history, largely because of the lack of data but also because of the nomothetic tendencies of the social sciences, concern the processes of change more than the content of change.
  - 1.4. Several activities
    - 1.4.1. Development of some kind of theoretical perspective regarding the nature of the search.
    - 1.4.2. Gathering of data and development of specific, particularistic, conclusions on individual cultures, periods, etc.
    - 1.4.3. Generalization of the conclusion to culture-wide and then universal processes.
    - 1.4.4. Prediction.
  - 1.5. Duckles gives seven generating forces that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries led in one way or another to the study of music history.
    - 1.5.1. Traditionally historical impetus
    - 1.5.2. Custodial rule of
      - 1.5.2.1. Collectors
      - 1.5.2.2. Librarians
      - 1.5.2.3. Biographers
    - 1.5.3. The discovery of world music
    - 1.5.4. The discovery of national song
  - 1.6. Theoretical thinking about history and change in ethnomusicology is found most frequently in the writings of those most aware of anthropological thought.
  - 1.7. Murdock generalizes about culture change, identifying innovation, social acceptance, selective elimination and, integration as a universal sequence.
  - 1.8. Historians of Western music usually engage in studies dealing with the particular, but the implications often direct the reader to wider generalization about the history of musical style.

- 1.9. In a certain sense the concept of culture (the particular way in which societies take care of their needs) is analogous to the concept of musical style (the particular way in which societies go about making music).
- 1.10. Ethnomusicologists have little hope of finding out comprehensively what happened in history and so have usually been content to present models of the kinds or types of things that happen in the course of musical change, in different situations.
2. FROM ABSOLUTE TO INCIDENTAL
  - 2.1. One must also be aware of changes in musical conceptualization, and behavior, in the uses and functions of music, which are usually but not necessary accompanied by changes in musical sound.
  - 2.2. Several types of change
    - 2.2.1. For the case of the most complete kind of change, a population that shares and maintains one musical system abandons it for another.
    - 2.2.2. Radical change in a system of music whose new form can definitely still be traced in some way to the old.
    - 2.2.3. Within a musical system a certain amount of change may be and probably is part of its essence. Most societies expects of their artists a minimum of innovation.
    - 2.2.4. In musical artifacts such as songs or in song types, groups, repertoires, a certain amount of allowable individual variation may not even been perceived as change.
3. THE PRESENCE AND ABSENCE OF CHANGE
  - 3.1. ...whether there are cultures or social conditions in which music does not change or in which change is greatly inhibited.
    - 3.1.1. Musical change is absent or exceedingly slow in societies with a minimum of technology.
    - 3.1.2. Musical change may be slow in societies in which the musical has, through previous change been adapted to the social system with a certain degree of perfection.
    - 3.1.3. Accepting a cyclic interpretation of history, we may find a music to be temporarily in a state of stability, waiting for the rather convulsive changes.
    - 3.1.4. Music may resist change if it is associated mainly or exclusively with a particular domain of culture that changes less readily than do most activities.
  - 3.2. Western culture have recently changed in many ways
    - 3.2.1. Shortly after 1900 a new language was added.
    - 3.2.2. New technology
    - 3.2.3. New type of sounds
    - 3.2.4. Social contexts, audiences, groups of participants have changed greatly.
  - 3.3. What are the conditions of culture that made this possible or necessary?
    - 3.3.1. Enormously complex technology
    - 3.3.2. The possibility of immediate contact between almost any two persons in the world.
    - 3.3.3. Widespread cultural and particularly religious relativism.
    - 3.3.4. Allegiance to nation states that usually supersede older culture units.
    - 3.3.5. Political and economic domination.
    - 3.3.6. Large-scale migration.

- 3.3.7. Establishment of a small number of widely used international languages.
- 3.4. Historians of Western music often seem to believe that musical change is first and foremost to be explained in terms of the behavior of music and its tendencies, because of its special character, to develop in certain directions.
- 3.5. Stated very simple, music may do for society what other domains of a culture fail to do – provide relief to everyday sameness, a way to communicating with the supernatural when other forms of communication are direct to humans, a kind of luxury among necessities.
- 3.6. A musical system may seek a kind of equilibrium in which the close interrelationship of the components plays a major role. Change in one parameter is likely to require or encourage changes in others.
4. PATTERNS, DIRECTIONS, REGULARITIES
  - 4.1. ...we are dealing with “decisions made by individuals about music-making and music on the basis of their experience on music and attitudes to it in different social contexts (Blacking; 1978:12).
  - 4.2. Ethnomusicologists are interested in regularities ... One way of seeing these regularities is to recognize the distinction between change brought about by a society from its own internal sources, and what which comes about as a result of intercultural contact.
  - 4.3. The most common belief is that music increases in complexity, adding tones to scales, sections to forms, notes to chords.
  - 4.4. Sachs (1946) proposed that change is frequently a function of the tendency of societies to react against the past...
  - 4.5. Determinants of change involving intercultural contact
    - 4.5.1. The quality of the relationship between the societies affected
    - 4.5.2. The degree of compatibility between the:
      - 4.5.2.1. Culture
      - 4.5.2.2. Musical system
    - 4.5.3. The degree in which a musical system is integrated
  - 4.6. Blacking (1978) has suggested an approach to a “comprehensive and definitive study of musical change”, including synchronic, diachronic and biological approaches.