

Bruno Nettl – The Study of Ethnomusicology

Cap. 16 – The Singing Map

1. AREAS, CIRCLES, CLUSTERS

- 1.1. What is the musical map of the world, that is, where are the significant musical phenomena found? And what can one do, from a mass of data limited to the contemporary, to reconstruct the history of world music?
- 1.2. We wish to establish maps whose spaces and borders outline the distribution of traits, clusters of traits, partial or comprehensive musical systems.
- 1.3. Culture area
 - 1.3.1. Developed by American anthropologists and said by Driver (1961: 12) to be "a convenient way of describing the ways of life of hundreds of peoples covering a whole continent or a larger part of the earth's surface."
 - 1.3.2. The use of the culture area concept developed among anthropologists who were concerned with American Indians and it worked best when applied to these peoples, who could be rather easily seen as a large number of small tribal groups.
- 1.4. Culture Circle (*Kulturhistorische Schule*)
 - 1.4.1. The concept developed in this school came to be known as "*Kulturkreis*", i.e. culture circle. Like the culture area concept, a culture circle is a statement that a number of peoples share a group of culture traits.
 - 1.4.2. At the root of the concept is the idea that humans are basically uninventive and thus extremely unlikely to develop the same thing more than once.
- 1.5. The culture area and *Kulturkreis* concepts involve the style of culture... by contrast, the so-called historical-geographic method in folklore involves content. (...) Applied mainly to tales but also occasionally to ballad stories (Kemppinen 1954), the method compares versions by assessing their degree of similarity as well as the intensity of their geographic distribution.

2. DRAWING THE MAP

- 2.1. Studying the geographic distribution of musical phenomena is generally more complex than the typical distributional study in cultural anthropology, where statements are often restricted to indicating that a given trait is present or absent in a culture unit.
- 2.2. There is, moreover, the problem of deciding on geographic units to be used as a basis for statement, whether they should be determined by political affiliation, by language, by physical geography, whether smaller units such as villages should be considered, or perhaps even families, units that can often be studied most realistically.

- 2.3. There are few characteristics of music not found in a vast number of cultures, but in many of these they play an insignificant role. Giving mere presence and absence only establishes a capability realized. Statements of proportion are needed.
- 2.4. Our first problem would be to determine the identity of such a unit of musical creativity. Assuming that we can come up with an acceptable concept and a working definition, we would have to distinguish similarities genetically determined from others.
3. MUSICAL AREAS
 - 3.1. Studies of the distribution of musical styles, of clusters of traits, or of the total configuration of elements have not been carried out as widely as one might expect, given the rather basic quality of this information for other kinds of study.
 - 3.2. Similarly, the music areas are sometimes distinguished primarily by non-coordinate traits in music. One may be based on a trait present in it and not found elsewhere, although its distribution within the area may be uneven.
 - 3.3. At one point it was thought that culture areas could be regarded as units with separable histories, but in the end they served mainly as ways of creating order out of the chaos of ethnographic data.
4. THE SINGING GLOBE
 - 4.1. The issues in the history of ethnomusicology intersect; here in the context of cartography we meet up with old friends, the measurement of similarity, comparative method, and universals.
 - 4.2. Attempts to divide the globe into musical areas are uncommon but interesting because of basic assumptions and method.
 - 4.2.1. My own attempt (the Far East, North Asia, and the Americas; sub-Saharan Africa and Europe; India and the Middle East with North Africa) is based on harmony and scalar intervals (Nettl 1956b: 141-42).
 - 4.2.2. Collaer (1960: pl.1) divides the world into several "zones musicales" based entirely on scalar structure, distinguishing "pre-pentatonic", "anhemitonic-pentatonic", "heptatonic," and others.
 - 4.2.3. In an earlier publication, however, Lomax (1959) divided the world into ten musical styles, largely on the basis of what is usually called performance practice. Separating styles that he labels American Indian, Pygmoid, African, Australian, Melanesian, Polynesian, Malayan, Eurasian, Old European, and Modern European, he grouped some styles in correlation with geographic or readily recognized culture areas
 - 4.2.4. Relating musical styles to geographic factors such as river valleys and access to the sea, he [Bence Szabolcsi; 1959] saw the musical map as a combination of areas with boundaries and of a patchwork resulting from musical differences of locales with varying degrees of isolation.
5. THEY SING THE SONGS OF HOME
 - 5.1. Since the 1950s the music of immigrant enclaves has become a major field of study.
 - 5.1.1. Was an entire musical repertory physically moved?
 - 5.1.2. Did the immigrants bring with them their musical specialists?
 - 5.1.3. Did they perhaps play a special, musically skilled role in the home country?

- 5.1.3.1. Were they motivated to change their musical behavior, or would the maintenance of a musical tradition reinforce the maintenance of the whole cultural tradition?
 - 5.1.4. Would musical change symbolize acceptance of the host culture?
 - 5.1.5. Or would music be used to remind the population of its heritage while other forms of behavior conformed to that of the host culture?
 - 5.2. It appears that the musical behavior of indigenous minorities (e.g. American Indians) may often parallel the behavior of immigrant minorities; perhaps the minority status rather than the fact of immigration is the main factor in determining subsequent musical behavior and musical style.
6. QUESTIONS OF SPACE AND TIME
 - 6.1. In his extremely detailed account of the relationship between the Kulturkreis school and musical studies, Albrecht Schneider points out that some of the significance of this school could not have been achieved without the help of comparative musicology (1976:66).
 - 6.2. Early in his career Curt Sachs proceeded to map the distribution of all musical instruments... he organized his findings in twenty-three areas, which he then placed in historical order on the basis of distributional criteria as well as technological level.
 - 6.3. Hornbostel (1933) used a similar approach to establish twelve instrument areas for Africa.
 - 6.4. In related studies A. M. Jones (1964) tried to show the tunings of Indonesian and African xylophones to be similar and, with other factors, to point to a common origin of aspects of music style of the two areas.
 - 6.5. Indeed, if one removes the quality of dogma from Sachs's basic axioms but regards them as statements that express likelihood, tendency, regularity, one can hardly disagree with him when he writes: "The object or idea found in scattered regions of a certain district is older than an object found everywhere in the same area. [And] objects preserved only in remote valleys or islands are older than those used in the open Plains" (1940:62).
 - 6.6. The coming of mass media to the world, increase in travel, publication, emigration have provided a basis for a completely new kind of music sharing among the peoples of the world.