

Bruno Nettl – The Study of Ethnomusicology

Cap. 17 – It Was Bound To Happen

1. The Central Question
 - 1.1. What determine the stylistic character of the main body of music of a particular society?
 - 1.1.1. Other ethnomusicological definitions
 - 1.1.1.1. Comparative study of musics.
 - 1.1.1.2. The music of the World's peoples.
 - 1.1.1.3. Oral way of transmitting music.
 - 1.1.2. Others questions concerning music.
 - 1.1.2.1. What is the function of music in human culture?
 - 1.1.2.2. What are the universals of music? Etc...
 - 1.2. Ethnomusicological literature... usually avoids making the leap from relationship and correlation to causality... The few statements dealing with causality can be grouped in two categories.
 - 1.2.1. Historical - Sees whatever music is to be examined mainly as a result of the past. Two strands:
 - 1.2.1.1. Music is determined by more or less fortuitous and in any case unique configurations of events.
 - 1.2.1.2. History follows a predetermined sequence, modified by the vagaries of fate.
 - 1.2.2. Synchronic – Extrapolates cause from relationships, seen at one time, to other domains of culture or nature.
 - 1.2.3. Even elementary texts are full of hypothetical statements involving relationship to what came before, musical and nonmusical.
 - 1.3. Multiple choice test answer: “The most important factor in determining musical style is the nature of people’s culture.”
2. Genes, Individuals, Speech, And The Weather.
 - 2.1. Are there in a population biological factors that determine its musical style?
 - 2.1.1. “All musical behavior and action must be seen in the relation to their adaptive function in a evolutionary context, whether this is limited to their function within adaptive mechanisms of different cultures, or extended to their function in biosocial evolution” (John Blacking, “Some Problems of Theory and Method in the Study of Musical Change,” *Yearbook of the IFMC*, nº 9, 1978: 1-26.)

- 2.1.2. Ethnomusicologists generally do not believe that the genetic apparatus determines a people's musical style.
- 2.1.3. During the Nazi period many books were written about music and race.
 - 2.1.3.1. ...Discerns musical differences among the remnants of German tribal groups (Hans Joachim Moser, *Die Musik der deutschen Stämme*, Vienna: E. Wancura, 1954)
 - 2.1.3.2. ...Attempts to show racial differences between black and white Americans by examining recordings of the same songs (Fritz Bose, "Messbare Rassenunterschiede in der Musik," in *Homo 2/4*, 1952, pp. 1-5)
 - 2.1.3.3. ...Racial characteristics in music are easily detected when one actually hears a singer, but they cannot be described in words. Race show itself by timbre, by the general rhythm of movement...(Marius Schneider, "Primitive Music", in Egon Wellesz, ed., *Ancient and Oriental Music*, London: Oxford University Press, 1957, pp. 1-82)
- 2.1.4. The criteria of musicianship differ among societies and cannot be used in a universal comparison...
- 2.2. The suggestion that topography or climate determine musical style may elicit a chuckle from humanists and social scientists (...) Indeed, geographic determinism as a fundamental theory of culture was known to the ancient Greeks and continues to be a credible explanation.
 - 2.2.1. Grame has suggested that in those parts of the world in which bamboo is found, there is a tendency to develop particular types of instruments (Theodore Grame, "Bamboo and Music: A New Approach to Organology", *Ethnomusicology*, n° 6, 1962, pp. 8-14)
 - 2.2.2. ...the tempo of Venda music is related to the steady walking pace of the people, "thrust upon them by the mountainous environment" (John Blacking, "The Role of Music in the Culture of the Venda of the Northern Transvaal", *Studies in Ethnomusicology* (New York), n° 2, 1965, pp. 20-53)
- 2.3. The content of language is clearly related to culture, but it is hard to make the same case for linguistic structure.
 - 2.3.1. Sociolinguists study and illustrate the relation of the way in which a language's structure is used and the culture or subculture that it symbolizes.
 - 2.3.2. The relationship (between structure of a language and music, despite its close association) are there but as minor contributing factors.
- 2.4. The idea that certain individuals influence and determine the main musical style of a society because of their personal character and what they do *not* share with their fellows somehow goes against the grain of ethnomusicological tradition.
 - 2.4.1. Berliner describes the special role of the great masters of the mbira among the Shona (Paul Berliner, *The Soul of Mbira*, Berkley, University of California Press, 1978)
 - 2.4.2. Merriam asserts that the greatest changes in Flathead Indian music in recent times were caused by the missionary zeal of a tribesman who returned after years of absence to revive aspects of supposedly traditional musical life (Allan P. Merriam, *Ethnomusicology of the Flathead Indians*, Chicago, Aldine Press, 1967)

- 2.5. The overriding determinant must be the special character of a culture. The way in which people live, relate to each other, see themselves in relation to their natural and human environment, control energy, and subsist, determine the kind of music they have.
3. Why Is Blackfoot Music...?
 - 3.1. Why is their singing so strange?
 - 3.2. The core of traditional Blackfoot culture
 - 3.2.1. Based on human and animal energy
 - 3.2.2. It had little social stratification, etc...
 - 3.2.3. ...we can easily find relationship to musical concepts, functions and behavior. But for considering musical style, one must look far and wide for correlation.
 - 3.3. Substantial differences in men's and woman's repertoires.
4. And How Come In Iran...?
 - 4.1. By comparing parallel situations we can again rule out race, language, and the character of land as direct determining factors, and turn to aspects of culture as possible determinants of musical style.
 - 4.2. Similarly in music, certain components prominently including singing style and the relationship among performers in a group, as suggested in the cantometrics projects, seem in the main related rather directly to the nature of culture. Others, including scales and forms... appear to be an arbitrarily designed code.
 - 4.3. At this point the most promising hypothesis is that the style of each music is determined by a unique configuration of historical, geographical, and linguistics factors.