

## From Culture to Culture

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Music's intent, as well as its features, vary from culture to culture. In oral traditions, music is still vital. Vernacular music along with vernacular speech binds a community together, and some activities and ceremonies cannot take place apart from the music associated with them. Rites of passage in many oral traditions are marked by special music, such as that associated with birth, the naming of children, puberty, initiation, courtship, marriage and death. There are, of course, other occasions for which there is an associative music. Some social events and religious practices are accompanied by music which signifies the particular occasion. A vernacular music system, including all of the musical styles within that system, designates both the function and identity within a community.

Western music, particularly in America, has lost most of its communal value. Stylistically, music in America might be relegated to three primary types. The first type consists of compositional icons, the music of high art preserved from the past. The second type includes dance forms. In these works, rhythm is dominant. The third type is more from the vantage point of performance than composition. It is based on "star" performance and may focus on an individual or group rather than the value of the composition performed. Star performances may include types one and three but, by and large, public appeal does not and can not weigh the value of a composition. The majority seem to hear through a selective funnel which narrows into what is familiar, and the marketing of music, geared to seduce the young, molds the young into a habit of remaining within one, familiar style. This is the prison which deprives them not only of the broad scope of their own heritage but of a sensitivity to the music barrier, that is, a sensitivity to foreign music systems in which chords and meters play no role.

Those who make music today are specialists, and where once many varied styles were recognized by association with particular events and activities, today's musical practices seem to have shrunk to the three types mentioned. The icons of art which embody many historic and personal idioms are known only to a trained minority. Social dances tend to embrace only what is current. And in the case of "star" performances, music is secondary to the personality of the "star/s"; the music itself is valued for its capacity to entertain, and this trait carries over into almost every human event. Even the birthday song and the national anthem are currently rendered in entertainment style which, in all too many cases, is the only musical style known.

Western musical heritage originated in Europe more than 800 years ago. Music-making in the Eastern hemisphere has even longer traditions. When discussing musical behavior three vantage points might well be considered:

1. That of music's structuring in treasured compositions of the past.
2. That of the dance, when music corresponds, to body movement.
3. That of the performer, singer or instrumentalist, who renders a composition according to a standard set by the culture. Whether that standard is voiced or not, a culture responds to music as acceptable or unacceptable. Among the three vantage points, overlap may be assumed.

Composers invent musical compositions which are satisfying to themselves. The composition's worth or "greatness" rests upon the degree to which listeners are gratified emotionally, aesthetically and intellectually through the test of historical persistence. Immediate popularity does not ensure the work a place in history. It is important to make music nonetheless, and it is important also to become acquainted with many musical styles and periods lest one miss out on the full range of musical expression with all its emotive and spiritual power kept for us over the centuries. The excitement, the serenity, the gamut of expressiveness affords enjoyment and well-being while the exercise of intelligent listening contributes to the wholeness of education.

Before a musician crosses the music barrier into a foreign culture's music system, he does well to understand the meaning of music's structure and performance standards within his own culture. The craft of symbolizing music on a linear graph sets Western culture apart from others. Formal training in music literacy is achieved only through years of study. One is musically literate when the brain makes connection between sound and symbol, when one can actually "hear" the pitches and rhythms symbolized on paper and has the added ability of being able to notate music as it is heard. Oral learning exists in Western musical practices though long and complex forms, for which Western music is famous, are written. Without music literacy not many fugues, sonatas or operas would have been retained.

The Western composer organizes melody around tonal center upon which is built one of two tonal inventories known as "scales"\*. The scale's form is fixed, consisting of 7 notes which take the form of either major or minor mode, both of which are exclusive to European music. The Western composer also selects a meter for the rhythmic plan of his composition. As in poetic meter, this plan continues throughout the work or movement, its measures all having the same number of beats.

Composers in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea or in Java proceed in a manner very different from the European. An Usarufa composer of the New Guinea Highlands, for example, has no written tradition. The songs are invented in his subconscious, when asleep. The dreamed song is then sung to his household, all of whom join in the singing of it until dawn, so that the song is not forgotten. He does not consciously manipulate a particular inventory of pitches although research of Usarufa music has shown the commonest pitches to be the third below tonal center, tonal center itself, and the pitches a major 2nd and minor 3rd above tonal center. If a pitch known to Western ears as F equals tonal center, the inventory would be: D F G Ab. Talk of a "scale" as such would be out of place. In regard to a rhythmic plan, the accents of the language become the rhythm of melody; melody is never forced into metrical units. The Javanese composer also invents within an oral tradition, superimposing variations upon an underlying theme, the sum of which is an elaborate heterophony based on one of two scales, pelog or slendro, neither which occurs in Western music theory. The rhythmic plan is cyclic.

Music for the dance arises out of a kinesthetic urge. Rhythm takes the foreground and humans, being rhythmic creatures, respond to it biologically. When body movement is choreographed, the result is dance. Examples of Western dance are myriad - ballet, tap, ballroom, stage show, folk, "modern", acrobatic, to name only a few. Each has its own standards of acceptability.

In Western art music the performer's task is to render the composer's intentions as faithfully as can be determined. In styles such as jazz, the performer uses extant thematic ideas for improvisation, which are generally not written. Vocal teachers encourage relaxation of the vocal apparatus. A tremolo is desirable, and song is rendered solo or in consort with other singers. Instrumentalists, like singers, may be male, female, or mixed, and perform either solo or in ensembles of immeasurable variety.

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\* The more exotic scales such as whole-tone 12-tone, borrowed ethnic scales and historical modes are regarded here as the exception rather than the rule

The Usarufa people of Papua New Guinea's Eastern Highlands also seek to follow the composer's intentions. Sons are designated to retain their fathers' songs, and improvisation is not acceptable since the singing is communal and in unison. Voice quality is noticeably different from Western standards. There is no tremolo, and the group strives to maintain a strong dynamic level. Contrast in dynamics does not occur. What is more, there are no solo performances, but all the community participates in dancing with singing, accompanied by a steady beat on the hand drums carried by men. The major differences in men's and women's parts are that vocally, the women sing the same melodic line only one octave above the men and, for the most part, the dance step is the same. However, men carry props such as bow and arrows whose activation contrasts their movements with those of the women. This involves a pivoting of the shoulder and occasionally plucking the bowstring, but movement of the feet remains the same for both sexes. Musical instruments are another story. Tradition has it that they (aerophones only) originated with the women but were stolen from them by the men who forbade women even to look upon them again. In no case is there ever a "star" performer in music of this area.

A brief look at Javanese music reveals their meticulous effort to adhere to the repertoire of their oral tradition. In orchestral (gamelan) playing, the leader-drummer is responsible for retaining and teaching the repertoire. Instrumental playing is typically in ensemble rather than solo; each part is discreet, and only at predictable intervals does a player add any embellishment of the theme. Ensembles routinely practice and are highly disciplined in their performance. Voice quality is strictured rather than relaxed, and dance is a specialized art in which training begins during childhood. Dance is both spiritual and theatrical with little, if any, emphasis on social dancing except as imported from the West. The dramatic, narrative character of song and dance demands some solo action, and so some highly gifted dancers become famous and to some degree "stars". It is not clear whether their tour performances in the West have, in fact, contributed to this concept.

Attempting to adjust traditional music to accommodate Western ears by means of introducing rhythmic meter and triadic harmony leads to annihilation of the characteristics which make an oral music system unique. Music is not a universal language. Once a cultural boundary is crossed, music must be regarded in terms of a particular rather than a generality.

What can be said generally about music is that it seems to be part of humanity, for all peoples have some type of musical expression. Musical composition, even that which is improvised, is structured and can be described in terms of features as they recur or contrast. Some form of repetition gives cohesion to musical structure, and this repetition may be obvious or so subtle that an expert is needed to demonstrate its occurrence. One expects also to find a tonal center which serves as a referential point in the selection of a limited pitch inventory. Rhythm is also present, but it is organized by means of widely varying concepts. Music is supramundane, heightening experience and expressing what speech alone cannot. This is perhaps all that can be said about music in terms of universals, and any subdivisions of these require an investigation of specifics. There are music boundaries, like linguistic boundaries, beyond which one cannot step without learning new concepts and practices which define a people's musical behavior. Motivation for making music, standards of performance, musical structuring, the entire music aesthetic, differs from culture to culture.

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