

Musical culture in various regions



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Through research and studying about the different musical culture in various regions, one can often link the different characteristics of music with the particular place. Music shares a close connection with place as it helps shape the ways we make music. In different places, ideas about the aesthetics, contexts as well as history of music will vary. The uniqueness of place is critical in our understanding of music as different perceptive and judgments incite differences. Disparity in environment also gives rise to the different levels of appreciation of music. The effectiveness of music will also be questioned when it is presented in a completely different environment as there are bound to be a difference in understanding the background of music, which includes the different influence, functions and representation of it.

The discussion of music's connection with place can be framed by broad boundaries concerning the ecological, political, acoustic and social context of the environment, which somewhat affects the type of music that is made and how it is regarded in the area. The musical situation and concept may mean different things and involve different activities among the people in various societies. In the following essay, I will explore the wide array of differences and perception of music due to the diverse environment they are made in.

In Papua New Guinea, it can be said that music of the Kalulis share a close connection with their rainforest. This relationship between music and ecology is important and the never ending dense soundscape play a major role in the daily lives of the Kalulis. The sensuousness of their everyday life is closely tied to the experiences of places. An evident example being the

pattern of sounding- 'Dulugu Ganalan', also known as lift-up-sounding, is an important musical trait of Kaluli music. It is characterized by having one sound that stands out momentarily, and then just as quickly fades into a distance, overlapped or echoed by a new or repeated emergence in the mosaic. Feeble or rather, no attempts are made to coordinate the singing or playing of the instruments in Kaluli soundmaking so as to somewhat imitate the music of the rainforests where the sounding of the creatures and nature is never in unison. This pattern of sounding in the natural environment is the inspiration for many Kaluli vocal and instrumental forms.

The significance of creatures inhabiting the surroundings, such as birds, plays an important role in their music. Birds are commonly associated with the spirits of the dead and the calls of the birds are commonly imitated by human vocalizations as well as drum calls. The importance of birds to the Kalulis is such that they are 'voices' and are vital in delineation of social spaces, between the non-spiritual and spiritual realm. Birds are like 'voices' to the Kalulis. They recognize and acknowledge the existence of birds primarily through sound and likened them to be spirit reflections of deceased men and women. The construction of musical instruments such as the Kaluli drums, as well as vocalizations in Kaluli music are grounded in the perception of birds, as indicated foremost by the presence of sound. These calls of the birds are particularly important because it embodies much of the way Kaluli identify with their forest home and so much of their feelings about the death and the reflection realm. As Feld suggest, the incorporation of characteristics of the different bird calls in drumming and certain types of song (eg. Gisalo) brings about much emotional intensity to the musical

performances. This is because the souls of the dead are thought to be revealed in the voices of the rainforest birds.

Such association between music and the ecology of the environment is especially apparent in the Bosavi region. Songs and weeping not only recall and announce spirits, but their texts sung in a poetry called ‘bird sound words’, sequentially name places and co-occurring environmental features of vegetation, light and sound. These songs become what Kaluli call a ‘path’, namely a series of place-names that link the cartography of rainforest to the movement of its past and present inhabitants. These song paths are also linked to the spiritual world of birds. As Steven Feld notes, the link between the birds and the Kalulis shows a local ecology of ‘voices in the forest’.

Place is also regarded a critical factor in determining the song structure of the Kaluli music. The formal structure of Heyalo songs as ‘trees’ where ‘trunk’ is marked as the refrain usually refers to the whistling sound of a local bird and ‘branches’ is marked as verses reflecting such songs as maps of lands and human relations. Musical dialogue with the sounds of the environment is also an interesting trait that shows the connection between music and place. The Kalulis creates musical counterpoint with the environment such as singing duets with the Cicadas or waterfalls. The poetic sound words such as ‘da: da’, ‘siya siya’ and ‘wo-wo’ creates counterpoint with the imitation of the cicadas. The movement of water through the environment is also paralleled to the sound in song. Water flow animates much of Kaluli musical imagination, as all waterway terms are also names for the musical intervals, the segment of song, the patterns of rhythm, and the contours of melody. Kaluli compose their songs by creeks or waterfalls,

singing with and to them, and the texts of these songs are maps of waterways or trails, viewing them from above as spirit birds might-in Feld's words, 'sense that in song, sound flows and connects people and places- in the same way as water constantly flows through the environment, connecting, dividing bodies of land.'

In the Gisalo songs, its organization is identical to muni bird representation and to the tonal structure of weeping. Gisalo songs make full and dramatic use of all poetic resources and such dramatic performances in the song, dance, costumes and weeping makes the Gisalo performance likened to 'the form of a bird'. This shows the close connection between the music of Kaluli and the significance of birds that are present in their rainforest environment. From the above, one can conclude that the connection with place in respect of the environmental ecology is critical to aesthetics, structure and emotive power of the Kaluli music.

Such connection between music and the forest environment is also evident in the music among the Mbuti in Central Africa. The immense, ancient, thickly canopied tropical rainforest exerts a powerful influence on life of the people, namely the ethnic group of BaAka. Communal singing is part of their daily life in the forest as well as the rituals they perform when they are not in the village. An example being molimo, in which the Mbuti sing to the forest. It is sung to restore the tribe's connection to the forest and 'make the forest happy,' generally after some crisis, such as death or a period of bad hunting. Older men sing songs of praise to the forest and in reply, the forest also 'sings', with sounds varying from animal-like growls to high, melodious sounds. These sounds appear to come from a source moving through the

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forest, sometimes near the village, sometimes far away. For the Mbuti, the molimo evokes their intense love for the forest, which is their provider and protector: in real sense, their deity. As Turnbull suggests, ' song is used to communicate with the forest, and it is significant that the emphasis is on the actual sound, not on the words.' Through this case study, we can see how music is connected to the ecological environment such as the rainforests.

The music across State borders in the Northern Fringes of Europe shares close connections with the environment as well. Musical practice is shaped where through joiking; insights are offered about our eco-system to a global audience as arctic populations feel the effects of polar warming and notice changes in the eco-system first, alerting to us the global dimensions of environmental changes. Musicians contribute to the environmental, climate and global warming issues through joiking. An example being Valkeapaa's composition of the Bird Symphony where he encourages listeners to ' consider creative practices in thinking about environment, alongside social, political, developmental and scientific perspectives on the environment' as suggested by Ramnarine. Music in this case is studied in relation to the environmental crisis of the place. Its connection with place is through composing of the environment through joiking. Music is also regarded to have close connection with the environment as Valkeapaa referred joik to be ' like a ring that circles in the air and its structure can be compared with water moving in harmony with the landscape or the wind that touches the ground on the mountain plateau.'

In a different perspective in viewing of the environment, one can say the landscape and acoustics of the particular place plays an important part in

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the making of music. The music of Tibet had close connections with the vast open landscapes. Singers in Tibet are usually not trained professionally and they have extremely strong vocals which are developed due to singing frequently in the open pastures. Their vocal projection is powerful with characteristically condensed and focused singing sound which can be carried through in the open. Such nomadic vocal style shows the connection of music making in Tibet where open pastures and large open environment is apparent. Countless Tibetan songs and ballads are also equipped with lyrics that describes and sing praises of the environment of Tibet. Praises are sung of the brilliant sun of Tibet, the beautiful rivers, mountains and vast green fields. All these show the close connection between place and music where the place influences the different aspects of music making.

Conversely, the difference of agricultural environment of the place affects the different types of music made. The connection between the contrasted environment of the Amazonia and Andean highlands has a significant impact in music making and gave rise to different musical ensembles. In the Amazonia, which is largely governed by tropical forests, a meditative and ‘individual’ quality of music is preferred. The reflective and relaxing nature of the music made can be contrasted to music of the High Andes. One rarely hears meditative sounds but rather, strident and vibrant music is characteristic of the music. High tessitura is employed, instruments are often blown strongly to exploit the high registers and multiphonics, almost outwardly to put across the sense that they are compensating for the silence of the barren, treeless mountainscape. Musical ensembles in the High Andes tend to play monophonically in groups of the same family of instruments and

are often accompanied with drums. In contrast, musical ensembles of the Amazon rarely play monophonically with regular drum accompaniment.

In different places, the function music differs as well. With regards to the music of the High Andes, music is very much associated to agriculture as well as seasonal changes. Different sets of instrument, tunings and song genres invoke different emotional qualities and are alternated throughout the course of the year and are closely connected with the agricultural production. People play on their flutes and panpipes to the llamas and sheep as it is believed to promote fertility and sometimes are also said to ‘console’ and bring ‘joy’ to the surrounding landscape ensuring abundant herds and potato harvests. Music is a ‘contextualized activity’ and is usually not heard when there are no festivals but in contrast, one will be virtually surrounded by music during festivals. It is also important to follow the conventions of only a certain specific group musical instruments are allowed to play during different seasons as it is believed that music ‘orders the seasons and cycles of production’.

On the other hand, the function of Sundanese music in Indonesia differs from that of the High Andes. Sundanese music is more frequently associated to ceremonies and celebrations where vocal music or instrumental music is performed for either ritual or entertainment purposes. Music serves as an accompaniment for dances such as the ketuk tilu, which is a flirtatious open air dance where the female entertainers sang and dance to rhythms produced by the kendang drum. Music also serves to function as an important accompaniment during theatrical performances such as the Wayang golék-a rod puppet theatre. Through the case studies of the High

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Andes and Sundanese music in Indonesia, one can clearly see how functions in different places give rise to different types of music. (AM I GOING OUT OF POINT BY MAKING THIS LAST LINK TO THE QNS?)

Music's connection with place can also be discussed in the context of the political climate of the particular place. The political climate of the place also plays a role in the influence on the type of music produced, one example being the music in Tibet. It is necessary for one to understand the political context first before being able to accurately grasp the understanding of Tibetan music. Reform of culture due to the political control by the Chinese Communist Party, Cultural Revolution and post-Cultural Revolution policy, all play a significant role in the music of Tibet. Traditional songs were banned during the Cultural Revolution and national ideology is imposed on the performing arts. Propaganda songs were composed and national unification of the musical style was evident during the Cultural Revolution. Great massive symphonic works written for large orchestras portraying grandeur and power, and these were favored to the traditional smaller scale works. Secular music also fared better under the Chinese rule than the monastic music that was distinctive of Tibet. This shows the how political climate of the particular place affects the composition of music, which in this case, the cultural revolution in Tibet.

These case studies show that the particularities of place are critical in understanding music. There are different important implications for the different experience of landscape and social differences among the different case studies mentioned above. The diversity in organizing and understanding of music, as well as the varying stylistic features diverge

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between the different places are closely connected with the specific setting, way of life and associations to place.

In addition, other individuals who come from a different environment or 'place' may or may not appreciate the particular musical type. Experiences and sentiments raised vary among these outsiders and that their experience of music will be different to that of the concerned group. Scientists tell us bird calls are for mating and marking territory and give them no significance outside the bird world, but for the Kalulis, bird sounds are part of a song pattern that connects to human world and involves feelings of sadness. It is evident that the cultural and social differences in the different places give rise to different musical features as well as the functions of music in the different contexts.

In conclusion, one can affirm that music shares a close connection with place. The different ecological, acoustic, social and political environment gives rise to the different styles of music as well as different levels of understanding and appreciation of music.