

Music of the World's Cultures

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Music is many times referred to as an international language. We are not long in finding out however that in the strict sense of the word, it is not true. If we venture into the study of ethnomusicology, the study of music in culture, we realize that music is an aspect, namely one of the more powerful and easily recognizable aspects of cultural identity. William P. Malm in an article on "Music as an Aspect of Cultural Identity", states that though music is not an international language it does seem to be a universal need and an essential element in every culture. Granted, the systems for understanding the music of other cultures may seem to be closed to us because of the difference in the logic used in their expression. We cannot expect to apply the formula for the understanding of an Indian *raga*⁽¹⁾ to the Japanese gagaku court music. We cannot even move readily from a rice planting song to noh drama music, let alone a Bach cantata. It is necessary for us to realize that the very structure, the unique make-up of the music of various regions can give us a good reflection of that culture's identity. As soon as we put a musical event into its actual social setting, we begin to realize the power that is inherent in music. This may be the truth that has given rise to the expression, "Tell me what you sing and I will tell you who you are." Music also seems to me to be a largely untapped resource for deeper understanding between the peoples of our world. We have many times tried to solve the problems of our world with military might or economic sanctions only to find that all problems are not amenable to these types of solutions. In a sense, economic, political and military systems exist as external entities and do not speak to the inner person. Music may not be an international language in its

manifestations, but in essence it has to do with the spiritual center of persons and expresses who they are and what they value. In this sense, music has the power to unite the peoples of different cultures. It is a cohesive force which has not been fully recognized or made use of. In reality, music provides expression in daily living and the activities connected with it. It provides their religious expression. For example, in the Arab/Pan-Islamic culture, music permeates the life of the people from the humble peasant's folk music to the sophisticated music of the Cairo conservatory and from the lullaby of the mother to the hypnotic music of the snake charmer and the janizary Turkish march music. In war and peace it propels and is propelled by the life-style and tempo of the entire culture.

Music in south-east Asia is dominated by a well integrated, highly cultivated style characteristic of the whole area with only minor differences among the many people who inhabit it. These are differences of style, language and performance covering the range from folk songs and work songs to the sophisticated music of the gamelan.

Although the raga of Indian music is not fully understood by peoples of other cultures in many instances because of its complex nature, still many listeners are entranced by the highly artistic playing of the sitarist, Ravi Shankar and the sarodist, Ali Akbar and willingly sit through performances lasting three or four hours. Indeed, there is ample evidence to suggest that though we are not always consciously aware of it, music is important to our society and plays a major role in our daily lives.

We only need to listen to the music of nature to realize how fundamental and absolutely basic music is to our very being. As humans we can look back at our humble beginnings. The cave-mother happily singing her baby to sleep, gave us our first lullaby. Some time would pass before we would hear the "Cradle Song" of Brahms. Her grief expressed over her baby's dead body was perhaps the song of sorrow which would be followed by the Requiems of later masters. Darwin believed that the birds taught man to sing. The birds give us tones of rare sweetness

and the cuckoo, whip-poor-will and English black bird give us melodic motifs. Beethoven in his "Pastoral Symphony" introduced actual excerpts of bird music that he had heard in the forest hills above Vienna.

Nature is rhythmic and tonal, and her sound voices stimulate the imagination more intensely than articulate words. Primitive man heard these tones and rhythms of nature and naturally imitated them. It may be noted that if a person sings naturally, the rhythm of the song will correspond to the heartbeats of the singer. All normal rhythms and rhythmic divisions are reducible to the duple and the triple meters, and these rhythms are manifested in a person's waking and sleeping breathing patterns.

We follow the development of instruments from the clapping of hands to drum, reeds, pipes et al. We follow them in their use through work, play, religious life, ceremonies, rites of passage and indeed into every area of life. The oldest picture in the world of any musical instrument is that of a long-necked lute used as a hieroglyphic character above the doorway of a tomb 5,600 years old at Gizeh, Egypt. As a hieroglyphic emblem it was called "nofre: -- meaning "good". Hand-clapping was used among the Israelites to accompany their choral singing. The 47th Psalm says, "Clap your hands together all ye people and sing unto God with the voice of melody." The Egyptian crotala was really only a substitute for the hand clapping, and the wooden castanets of the black minstrel are only a slight modification of the Egyptian crotala used 4,000 years ago.

The science of instruments and their classification is relatively new, the first definitive work being published by Eric von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs in 1914. However, instrumental music has been a solace for the peoples of every culture through the years. In my own personal experience, I have known the joy of blowing a grass reed, a squash stem flute, a bamboo whistle, a cornet, a didjeridoo and an alpine horn as well as a host of other instruments. Needless to say, there is a vast difference in the degree of sophistication of a grass reed and a trumpet, yet the deep joy experienced may be just as great in either case. My

feeling of accomplishment in playing the Ainu mukkuri (jaws harp) gave me no less pleasure.

Perhaps because music in its various forms has been and continues to be such an integral part of our lives, we have tended to take it for granted and therefore have not been more aware of its true potential. We are reminded that when enemy soldiers faced each other in a previous war on Christmas eve, one soldier leaped from the trenches and began to sing the haunting carol, "O Holy Night." Not to be outdone, a young soldier jumped up from the opposite trench and began to sing. The bond of understanding created by the song in one young soldier's heart was stronger than the guns of war that night. The encouragement we receive from the *Israeli folk song, Hinay Mah Tov* ⁽²⁾ is the message, "How good it is that brothers shall dwell together." We might add -- in peace.

(1) See Appendix

(2) See Appendix

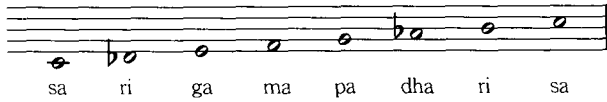
Appendix

(1) Raga:

The raga is the basic melodic material that colors the mind and gives mood (nova rasa). The nine moods may be classified as distress, wonderment, anger; tranquil, pathetic, comic, erotic, heroic and frightful. The style of the raga indicates the time of the day, night or year. It is usually performed by a group consisting of a sitar and or sarod, a tambur used as a drone, possibly a sarangi, and definitely a pair of tabla. Sometimes a flute, (bansuri) and a shenai will always be used. The raga will begin with an alap with the tuning moving imperceptibly into the melodic introduction of the composition minus the drums. When section one is finished, section two (jors) will begin, and then section three (gats) will follow. This section begins when the tabla drums enter, and each successive gat will have more fervor, the tempo will increase, and the performer will play higher pitchwise. Finally, the climax will be a cadenza and coda which will end some

three or four hours later. (The American version lasts twenty or twenty-five minutes.) To obtain a better understanding of the raga, it is useful to know something of the rhythmic structure which consists of tala, the time cycle which is additively constructed to indicate the rhythm for precomposed or improvised compositions. The beat (matra) must be present, then the down-beat (sum), and then the additive tala time cycle plus the anza (grouping of two or three beats as in a measure of music. Following are three especially popular scale patterns.)

Bhairav



Purvi



Todi



(2) Israeli folk song, Hinay Mah Tov :

Am Dm E⁷ Amin
Hi - nay ma fov u - ma na - yim, She - vet a chim gam ya - had

Am Dm E⁷ Amin
Hi - nay ma - a tov She - vet - a chim gam ya - had

Am Dm E⁷ Am Fine
Hi - nay ma fov u - ma na - yim, She - vet a chim gam ya - had

“How good it is that brothers shall dwell together.”

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Discography

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