

D. The Process of Change

VI The Parameters of Change

Change is a natural and recurring process in all cultures. The pace of change and what causes it and effects it may vary. Some cultures may appear to us to be quite static and others changing at a rapid pace, but all are changing steadily and continually. Some of the broad patterns of cultural change we can observe are the results of innovation, by chance or deliberate creation, the diffusion of ideas from one individual to another or from one culture to another, cultural loss and forgetting, and forced change processes, such as acculturation and directed change.

Culture: Choice, selection, and Rejection

When it comes to culture, nothing remains static, at least not for long. Just as individuals are continually seeking and being exposed to new stimuli, the aggregate pattern that many individuals share together, their common culture, also changes. The process of this change and its rate, as well as what brings it about, all have important impacts on the delineation and development of music cultures.

Cultural attitudes develop like other aspects of the culture, by a long process of selecting certain elements, new ideas or borrowed concepts, while at the same time rejecting others. The pattern of this development may appear haphazard only because such a great number of seemingly separate factors come into play.

Looking only at the pattern of new creation and the adoption of elements from outside the culture, fails to consider the potential effect of extra-musical events, such as political developments and influences, and this may create the false illusion of isolated chance development. Without recognition of the Ottoman Turkish incursion into Vienna and of the Turkish military bands which came with them, a musicologist working hundreds of years later would have great difficulty in explaining the sudden bizarre appearance of Turkish military music in the works of Michael Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. By the same token, future musicologists would not be able



An old Turkish Janissary band, or Mehter, from an old engraving. The stringed instruments were not usually employed in this ensemble and may have been the artist's fancy.

to understand the appearance in America of a music of such distinctive African origins as Rock during the mid 20th century, if they do not take the history of slavery into account.

The period during which there was a fascination with Turkish military band music in Western European Art music was very short. It did have later an important and determining influence on the development of the Western military band, one which can be noted in the brass band ensembles of even today. What began as a isolated and seemingly unrelated historical event, became, after hundreds of years, a firm cultural bias forming the basis for acceptance and rejection of other concepts.

Remembering and Forgetting as Part of the Process of Change

The way we remember things, unless our memory is refreshed by being reintroduced to the original stimulus, is the way it is going to stay. We have all had the experience of remembering something clearly and then being reminded by someone or something else that it was not quite that way. Sometimes we even resist the idea that we could have been wrong. In the process of cultural transmission, this sort of thing happens all the time.

In the process of trying to understand each other, we often get things wrong. Sometimes these changes in transmission stay that way and the cultural process moves in that direction. These are not mistakes, but just part of the long process of change. Let's look at a cross cultural example of how this happens. During the 1940s there was a film with Bing Crosby, called "Going My Way". The song in film, and indeed, the spirit of the film was, "this is where I'm going and would you like to come along with me?" During the 50s, the film "Going My Way" was somewhat popular in Japan. Following the post war Japanese custom of taking a phrase in English and using it as a kind of motto, it was popular for a while to use the English phrase, "Going My Way", in the course of a conversation in Japanese, however, the phrase was now used as a statement instead of a question and so the meaning changed to become, and this was the general Japanese understanding of it, "I'm just going my own way, alone.",

The Guitar as a Metaphor for Change and Retention

The Guitar in the US

We have become so familiar with the sound of the electric guitar in modern popular music that it is a surprise to recall that the idea of electrically amplifying the jazz or blues guitar did not occur to anyone until shortly before W.W.II. Black country blues singers had been using the guitar in a manner which combined both the picking out of melody, sometimes sliding a small piece of bottle neck attached to one finger for a more fluid melody, while interspersing it with harmonic ground accompaniment. Jazz musicians were not often expected to use the guitar to play melody and usually played only harmony.



T-Bone Walker

The blues singer, T-Bone Walker, who came to be associated with the West coast style of blues, was one of the first to use electric amplification for his guitar. In essence he simply attached a pickup mike to the guitar and thus amplified the sound, making his instrument louder than it sounded before. The West Coast blues style, growing as it did out of Black country blues style, already had the melodic element there which now stood out much more clearly with amplification.

For Jazz, the possibilities of electric amplification brought a greater change to the style. Charlie Christian playing with the Benny Goodman band, was able to profoundly effect the

development of the Jazz guitar style. The electrically amplified guitar allowed it to speak in a clearer and stronger voice than before, to contribute to the overall ensemble in a way that previously only the wind instruments could do. It also added a new sound quality to the group, one which heretofore had never been heard.

The first electric guitars were simply ordinary guitars to which a small "pickup" microphone was attached and then connected to an amplifier. It took a surprisingly long period of evolution, it seems, for the realization that the traditional acoustic body of the guitar served no viable purpose since the amplification system replaced all of the acoustic function of the guitar body. Eventually the flat guitar shell with electrical controls and connections built in became standard. Jazz guitarists, however, because they do not play at extremely high volume levels still prefer the electrically amplified guitar which retains some degree of hollow body. Meanwhile, the electric guitar used by rock bands seems to be constantly going through a process of regular modification and addition of new sound producing effects.

The development and availability of easily accessible electronic amplification systems had an important affect on the role which the guitar was to take in the unfolding of popular music in the West. While a similar series of events also affected the piano, it was the guitar which assumed primary importance as a definer of the sound of the new music and as its symbol. While not all rock musicians openly recognize their debt to the old country blues musicians, it is undeniable that the playing and singing of such as Muddy Waters, Chuck Berry, Lightning Hopkins and Howling Wolf are the ultimate source of this music, along with borrowing of stylistic elements from the later generation urban blues musicians.



Charlie Christian

something very different from the original intent of the both the song and the entire film as well. Rather than being simply a misunderstanding, this might be better thought of as another example in the process of cultural change.

Teachers often play a great role in cultural change. In an attempt to clarify and simplify things, the original is gradually replaced by a clear working and easily explainable model of it. This often happens in the tradition of music theory. It also happens in many cultures as part of the transmission of playing techniques. Ornamentation techniques or other aspects of performance, breathing and posture, for example, become codified to such a degree that the new simplified and clarified form becomes the norm and the original, perhaps, freely improvised or stylized form becomes lost.

Forgetting is another aspect, often of the same teaching process. In recent historical times, entire languages have been lost forever, because the only speakers of these languages have died without the opportunity of teaching any others to speak the language. In this same musical practices and entire traditions die away regularly. Family traditions of the performance of certain kinds of music disappear when the last members of the family die without passing on the tradition.. Often in the process of passing on the tradition, certain parts of the tradition get left out, the student goes off before having learned it all, or the teacher dies before getting teaching the remaining part of the tradition. In India, in the strict and careful process of transmission from master musician to pupil, as the student learned more and more, that student gradually came to be regarded as a disciple. Nevertheless, the teacher would retain certain “secrets” about the tradition until on his or her deathbed, at which time they would be transmitted to the disciple. Many such masters have died, however, either suddenly or far from the presence of the disciple and thus these secrets are lost forever. But loss is part of the natural process of change.

Political and economic control and influence also play a great role in forcing the acculturation of all those cultures within its sway to the practices of the dominant culture. The forced imposition of Spanish on all of the native peoples of Latin America by the Spanish Conquerors also brought with it the forced assimilation of many forms of Spanish music creating the blend of Spanish, Indigenous and African elements which we know today as the many varied forms of Latin music.

In the Far East, China has for centuries been the dominant cultural force, both because of its political power and

because of the prestige associated with its political dominance. In very recent times, however, the rapid economic development of Japan since World War II, has made some forms of Japanese popular music function as a model for the new and modern in other Asian countries because of the attractiveness of the economic prestige of Japan.

Political forces can require change to take certain directions. The effect of slave policy in the United States on the transmission and retention of African music traditions is one clear example. Another is the strictly controlled and governmentally endorsed policy of national musical styles during the years of socialism in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. These are cases in which a policy was put into effect expressly for the purpose of controlling and influencing musical culture.

Dynamic Pace of Change

In our society we are accustomed to witnessing the dynamic effects which technological and scientific developments have on the way we live. We find it natural that music should also change. But dynamic technological development and change are so much a part of our lives that it is difficult to avoid the pitfall of thinking that as the arts reflect changes in technology and science and make use of these developments, that they are improving as well. The methods for persevering and disseminating the arts may improve, but their content remains the arbitrary result of all the stimuli being processed within the culture.

Yet many of these changes have come about only very recently. Radio only came into general usage only during the lifetime of many people who are still alive today and television only much later. Yet we have now already relegated radio to something which many people only listen to when they drive and the rapid spread of car cassette systems and CD players appears ready to even further reduce the influence of radio. Meanwhile television has taken an importance in lives of all who live in the technologically developed societies that seems to increase with each year and new development.

Not long after World War II a few people began to have television in their homes but by the mid-50s, it was almost universal in all American homes. This was also largely the case in most of Western Europe and has



Creative Labs NOMAD Jukebox MP3 Recorder and the Aiwa XP-R100 Personal CD Player. The Nomad uses MP3 technology and while it is about the same size as the Aiwa CD player, it can store and play the contents of approximately 150 CDs.

already reached the same prominence in Japan. Thirty years later, aside from the fact that Japan has outstripped us in TV production and technology, as well as in the number of TV sets per home, the development and introduction of satellite transmission and cable television home followed by the general adoption of video cassette recorders and cameras has radically affected the way in which most of us live.

The rapidity and profound effect of these changes we tend to take for granted because we quickly become accustomed to their benefits. Nevertheless changes in technology, like other aspects in a society are also imprinted on the development of stylistic and formal changes in music.

Individual Creativity in the Historical Process

In music, each new step is either taken up or rejected by the audience and by other musicians. But the path taken by music in its progress through history is not entirely predetermined by the changes in the culture. Each individual musician responds differently from every other musician in his own time to that which he is exposed and therefore what he does as a result of this stimulus must be unique. Yet, while it would be impossible except in abstract theory for an 18th century central European musician to independently hit upon a Chinese musical idea, there are such infinite possibilities for individual reactions, it is equally inconceivable that

Asian and European Origins and the Lute

What happened to the guitar in America after it became electrified is something which is happening now and the changes can be noticed right in our own times. But let us think for a bit about how the guitar got to be a part of our popular culture. Although plucked lutes, like the guitar are, in various forms, very popular throughout the world, they seem to have had only one or two different origins and all variants have stemmed from those. The origins seem to go back to the ancient world of many hundreds of years ago.

The change in musical style which took place between the Renaissance which basically ends in the late 16th Century and the Baroque period which begins in the early 17th Century, is a parallel to the change in our own times between the influence of Jazz and of Rock in the evolution of Western popular music. The Renaissance counterpart and predecessor of the guitar was the lute. The lute actually became established in Europe during the middle ages. The instrument originated in Persia and spread both eastwards to China and eventually to Japan, where in both countries it still survives, and to the West. The lute was taken by the Arabs and spread with Islam. By this means it reached Spain and eventually to the rest of Europe.

We have only the sketchiest idea of how the instrument might really have been played in those early times. Unlike the present-day Western tradition, notation was in those times, primarily as a simple memory aid. In fact, notation continues to be used in this way in many of the other cultures of the world which do possess a notation system. The notation is often only a mere sketch or outline with the player being expected to remember the details. The notation which survives from the Middle Ages basically gives only the melody line and yet descriptions from the time tell us of great speed and virtuosity among lute players of the middle ages. Clearly the notation which survives is not telling us much about how they might have played.

We can only piece together by conjecture and drawn from the parallel evidence of other surviving music traditions from the same period and from what we know of the playing method of other lute-like instruments in other parts of the world. On this basis we can make some assumptions about the probable playing technique of the lute in the Middle Ages. It was essentially a melody playing instrument with the melody usually plucked out on the higher pitched strings. The lower strings were employed as rhythmic drones to alternate with and support the melodic line. The contemporary *ud* of the Arabic speaking world, the historical predecessor of the European lute, makes use of this same technique, albeit in a very distinct musical language. In essence, the style and fundamental technique used for playing the Chinese *p'i-p'a* and the Japanese *biwa*, the contemporary easternmost counterparts of the lute, is the same.

The basic lute-like instrument type, exemplified by the Renaissance lute, the Middle Eastern *ud*, the Chinese *Pi-pa* and the Japanese *Biwa*, has a short neck with a varying number of strings and is plucked either with the bare fingers or with some type of plectrum which varies by location. Such an instrument is ideally designed for strumming across several strings, for rhythmically alternating between high pitched melody playing strings and lower pitched strings drone or

rhythmic strings. These are the basic techniques which most easily “fall under the hand” when playing the lute.

Music during the Renaissance period was marked by the rise and dominance of multipart vocal music, or polyphony, that is, music in which several voices perform distinct melodic lines simultaneously. Instrumental music followed the polyphonic vocal style which was soon established and very popular. Keyboard and instrumental ensemble music quickly adapted to these demands. In fact, instrumental ensembles came to function almost interchangeably with voices, since each part could be played by an instrument or sung in any combination and the basic polyphonic texture would be maintained.

For the lute, however, the new style created difficulties since the instrument was designed not to produce a simultaneous independent lines, but as noted above, more easily produced a form of drone or harmonized accompaniment to a single melodic line. Although it was possible to play a single melody line on the lute, the instrument was still thought of as a popular solo instrument or one which could accompany the voice. In order to retain its popularity the lute had to adapt its playing technique to that of the current polyphonic music. In fact, performing polyphonic or multipart music on the lute is almost as difficult and as unusual as it would be to attempt such a technique on a bowed string instrument like the violin. Still this is exactly what happened and the lute continued to serve as a solo instrument and to accompany the voice.

One might therefore have certainly expected that an instrument as difficult to adapt to polyphonic or multi part music as was the lute, would have faded away. But the lute appeared to have other factors in its favor. In a manner similar to that which occurred in the case of the guitar with modern rock musicians, there may have been a romantic or historical image associated with the lutanist that needed to be preserved. He was seen as someone who had travelled widely, often a nobleman or someone vaguely associated with nobility, versed in poetry and speaking several languages who thus in many respects may have served as an important connection with the world outside the immediate locality in which he was playing.

In addition to this romantic view of the lutanist himself, the instrument is ideally suited in terms of delicacy and potential subtlety of sound for a single player and a small audience. Being cradled, as it is, close to the body, it is one of instruments with which it is comparatively easy for a player to feel a strong sense of unity, that particular and important sense of identity which occurs when the instrument and the player function almost like one indivisible unit. This is, of course, the ideal relationship between player and instrument in any combination of the two, but in the case of certain instruments, for example, the piano or the organ, the physical distance which exists between the player and his instrument requires that a considerable period of practice occur before the same sense of oneness between player and instrument takes place.

The most important factors contributing to the survival of the lute in the renaissance were, in addition to its easy portability, two: one was that the lute was ideally suited for the accompaniment of the solo song and the second was the

continued need for instrumental accompaniment to the dance. Dance music, unlike the liturgically influenced vocal styles, required a clear and fixed rhythm as a guide to the dancers and in this task a light and easily portable instrument was of great value. Since the requirements of dance music for portability and full accompaniment were easily managed by the lute, it found a place for itself in the new music of the renaissance.

any two musicians could ever come up with the same solution either.

In some ways these differences may be accounted for if all possibilities are carefully examined and considered. However, most of what we regard as unique in music is the result of such complex chains of influences and reactions and conscious and unconscious modifications that they are impossible to unravel. Let us consider the early 19th century Viennese composer, Franz Schubert. We know of Schubert's respect for the music of Mozart and Beethoven and thus, indirectly through them of the potential indirect influence of Haydn on Schubert. In Schubert's music it is not difficult to find those elements shared in common with the music of Beethoven and of Mozart. It is also possible to hear in Schubert the pattern of his own background, his trials, his ambitions, the tragedy of his frustrations and at the same time the reflection of his own particular corner of the world and of the times in which he lived. Yet all of these elements together do not reconstruct the uniqueness of what constitutes Schubert. Schubert was the result and product of all of those things which were the culture of his times, but at the same time, his own individual creativity took all of those elements and influences and made a unique and personal statement in his music. Thus Schubert is both a product of his times and a solitary and unique individual.

Just as a complex set of influences and events created the musical style we associate with the name of Schubert, so too does a complex set of factors, events and influences determine how we will react each time we hear Schubert. In this way the process of change in any culture takes place. Thus far, there is nothing new about this. However, something different is beginning to take place in the global process of change which suggests a new parameter to the seemingly never ending process which cultures have endured.

Technology and Tradition

In the late 19th century when Franz Liszt transcribed for

the piano, music ordinarily heard in the concert hall he was attempting to provide this music for possible enjoyment of it away from the concert hall. People could play his piano versions of music which previously could only be heard in the concert hall. This was a practice parallel to that which had taken place centuries earlier in the Renaissance lute settings of polyphonic vocal music. The solo lute player could enjoy the music without a chorus of voices to sing it, or could play the group part to accompany a solo singer in a performance of the same music. In both these cases, the new settings made the music more widely accessible.

With the advent of recording techniques people were free to enjoy music out of its original context and at any time they might choose. At first there was reaction on the part of some traditional music lovers against this non-human means of sound reproduction. Eventually, however, and rather quickly, the convenience of the idea won out and reproduction of music through recordings became a distinctly new aspect to the enjoyment of music and one which has come to identify the 20th century. The reaction against mechanical recording techniques is a response to a new technological development which has many parallels, particularly in our own times. There was not very long ago a reaction, particularly by performing musicians, against the use of electronic and then later, computer generated music. Currently there is still considerable discussion concerning the development of digital recording techniques and compact discs. Some traditional musicians insist that they can hear the difference between analog and digital sound and the digital recording process does something to destroy the beauty of the music for them. Yet these new technological media are in a sense no different than what occurs in a radio transmission or even than the effect of the bias oscillator in the tape recording process. After all, when digital recordings are played back, they once again become analog in the sound waves that reach us.

But this is only to reiterate the consistency of the process of change. Within the process of change something else is changing. We seem to be getting better and better at finding effective, efficient and inexpensive means of communicating with each other. We have moved in the space of a few short years from radio to satellite TV communication systems and from the local printing and distribution of newspapers to a single national newspapers and from small special interest production of recordings of music to a vastly complex and far reaching

distribution for records which spreads around the world.

Who could argue against the marvels which our industriousness and inventiveness has blessed upon us? Who could argue against the inevitability and necessity of change?

Pace of Communication

Our methods of communication have been improving so rapidly and so effectively that the rate of change itself has now become a matter of concern. What had until not long ago been allowed to develop at the local level and in response to local taste is now increasingly provided by major distributors of culture in the larger urban centers.

The increased effectiveness of communication systems is not only bringing us closer together but is helping to make us more alike. Local and regional differences in music as in speech are being compressed into common national styles and types. The performance of music is increasingly moving away from the forms it took during the last century when a large percentage of most populations created or performed their own music. After the middle of the 20th century with increasing regularity the performance of music is being left to professionals and to records, tapes and radio instead of live performances.

This phenomenon is taking place not only in the highly industrialized societies. Now that the benefits of radio, records and most recently, cassettes are reaching almost everywhere in the world, their accessibility is also having profound consequences. Some fifteen years I returned to my father's birthplace in Southern Oaxaca in Mexico. Since my childhood I had heard stories of the marvelous marimba music of the city of Tehuantepec. When I visited there already the music was not frequently played in the traditional manner by three or four men on one large marimba. I was able to find a group of musicians who still remembered how to play the traditional repertoire in the old style. Already the more international "dance" band with saxophones and electric piano had taken over in much of the Isthmus. When I returned some ten years later most of the traditional repertoire of Tehuantepec, although still remembered, was hardly played even by the dance bands. When the older songs are played they are given a modern treatment with a touch of the bolero or cumbia as they are heard coming from the radio generated from Mexico City. Sad, perhaps, but not really surprising. The gradual focusing on the major urban center for the determination of new styles is an inevitable

result of better and cheaper distribution systems.

Central Java has been long renown for its rich musical traditions, for the sound of its numerous gong orchestras, the gamelans, so profuse that there were several in each village, each with its own unique tuning which gave a special character to the performance of the music and each with its own unique combination of instruments. In the past few years with increasing frequency a cassette recording of a gamelan is being used for village festivals rather than the local gamelan. It is more convenient, less expensive, usually well recorded and dependable. The Indonesian record companies ensure that the basic repertoire is always available on cassette tapes. The tradition is somehow kept alive, so perhaps one should not complain.

In the Socialist countries, it is felt that regionalism and local folk music styles tend to keep peoples divided into small separate groups rather than unified as a more effective and functioning cohesive unit. The ministries of culture in these countries in the name of preserving the folk traditions of their culture are helping to reduce the variant elements and to encourage the dissemination of new, pan-regional folk styles made up of bits from all regions.

Where Does This Lead?

One of the lessons we learn from biology is that an indication of the health of many species lies in the diversity of its variants. While we are making more music available to more people by current methods of dissemination and distribution, the level of available diversity is being drastically reduced. An increasingly large percentage of the world's population is moving from active participation in music to the passive mode —of allowing someone else to make the decisions about what we can hear, of having someone else perform it for us and of listening passively. The diversity of musical languages is being reduced in favor of those musical styles which will be appreciated and paid for by the largest number of consumers.

But this is not the result of some conspiracy. The process for deciding the directions and methods for the dissemination and distribution of music are being made on the basis of the efficiency of those channels and on the best potential for economic gain. Unless someone can show what harm might result from the dogged pursuit of

these ends, it is certainly bound to continue until all the world options will be reduced to singing “The One Big Song”.

It is not likely that this grim picture will come true. such a terrible reduction of choice could never come to pass. We may never ever be reduced to quite that level. Music is too closely related to the syntax, stress patterns and accents of spoken language to avoid being influenced and even molded by speech. Although the number and variety of local languages is being reduced and radio and television broadcasting are greatly reducing local regional accents in areas where one language is spoken, probably as long as there are different languages spoken, there will also be different musical languages and thus different songs to sing in them.

Today Rock has become an international musical style. There are US, British, French, Italian, German, Australian and Japanese counterparts and even bands in the Soviet Union and other East Block countries. There are all of the many new African popular musics also. While all these share much in common there is great variety among these vast modern musical languages. Even in the comparing the two most prominent types which use the same language, US and British Rock, it is noteworthy that most of the British tend to sing with an “American” accent which lends them indistinguishable from the singing of American Rock groups. Even so, most teenagers living in the US can distinguish between US and British groups on the basis of musical style. The surviving differences in the musical language of these two groups must be an outgrowth of the differences in the accent and stress patterns of the two spoken languages.

As long as we retain individual spoken languages our distinctive musical languages may also survive. If it is true that music provides an increased diversity in shadings of mood and feeling which in turn can have an effect on our process of thought and on the diversity and intensity of our emotional vocabulary then it must follow that the steady reduction of variety and subtlety in the music which generates these important aspects of our lives can only have increasingly debilitating consequences for our ability to cope with the future and to survive in it. If there is too great a loss in music cultural diversity, can the species itself become endangered?