POLYPHONIC EXAMPLES FROM THE MUSIC OF SOME TURKIC PEOPLES

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Abstract: The folk music of the Turkic peoples is quite varied, and the relationship between their music is basically different as compared to the relationship between their languages. However, one can find a common feature: their melodic world does not favor multipart music. In some cases, however, art music affects the folk tradition and we may discover traces of polyphony. In my paper, I will show a few examples of this phenomenon based on my 25-years Asian research.

The music of the religious zikr ceremony of the Turkish Sufi Tahtaji communities is played by the *dede* (father) or by the *zakir* (music specialist). Because *dedes* usually serve on a larger area and are in connection with and learn from each other, the religious repertoire of the Tahtaji communities living far from each other is very similar. Here, similarly to other Turkish Sufi communities, polyphony can be observed only in the *bağlama* (long-necked lute) accompaniment. In the second example, I present one of my recordings from 1999. A group of Azeri women migrated from Karabakh sang in a specific polyphonic mode taking example from the Azerbaijani Mugham 'court' music. The Mugham analogy of the lament

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presentation will be shown as well. In the third example, Karachay people from the Caucasus Mountain accompany their 'jir' songs by a multipart vocal 'eju'. Similarly to several cultural phenomena, this kind of accompaniment can be heard in the music of different Caucasian people. It was instructive to observe that Karachays migrating to Turkey have preserved their language and many layers of their old costumes, but as far as music is concerned they abandon the 'eju' so quickly in the dominantly monophonic musical world of Turkey.

Finally, I present a finding of my Turkmen research trip in 2011. Here, the recently emerged dance groups use composed music. This music has an impact on the village music and as a result the accompaniment in thirds and other polyphonic phenomena appear as well.

THE OLD FOLK MUSIC STYLES of several people are basically monophonic or heterophonic. This holds true for the folk songs of Turkic peoples, and in general advanced polyphony is absent in Islamic areas. In the Eastern music theory of Abu 'Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina (980–1037), better known in Europe as Avicenna, polyphony is only mentioned as one of the ornaments. Here the *tarkīb* is an ornament in which two consonant sounds are heard at the same time. The noblest consonants are of the large intervals, among them the best are the octave and the fifth.

Polyphony is also absent in the folk music of Turkic peoples even in places with long-lasting and massive Russian influence like Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, etc. On the other hand, due to the multipart Russian musical culture, polyphony became widespread among many Finno-Ugric people.

Of course, in the music of Turkic peoples we can discover several manifestations of the simple and, we may say "unintentional" polyphonic phenomenon, e.g. when men and women sing in parallel octaves, or when a number of people sing the same song and the personal variations give a polyphonic impression. Below I give a brief overview of some polyphonic phenomena existing in the basically monophonic or heterophonic Turkic

music. Quite a few of them are to be observed among other peoples in a similar or a slightly different form.

In the instrumental music of the Turkic peoples there are definite polyphonic phenomena. However, they never converge towards the polyphony in the Western sense. At the very most, they show similarities to the beginnings of the development of European classical music. All these are not surprising because we know that till the 8th and 9th centuries polyphony was to be found at the most in the sense of the heterophony.[1]

First, let us have a closer look at the drumming. Drums are not only percussion instruments; their membranes give musical sound, though the pitches may not always be described precisely. The center of the membrane provides a deeper sound while the edges higher ones. The drummer may use a variety of techniques of which the most important are as follows: 1) simple blow on a place being a distance of one third of the radius from the edge of the instrument. This blow results a long-lasting and well defined pitch, 2) beat on the center gives blunt and harsh tone, the pitch is less determined due to the dominance of harmonic overtones, 3) blow on the edge gives a dry tone and resonance felt in the upper fifth, and 4) staccato beats, when after beats the other hand dampens the sound.

Turkish classical music has a developed theory, defining not only the rhythmic patterns of every *makam* but also the different pitches in the pattern. The deeper tones are called *düm* and the higher ones *tek*.[2]

Though Anatolian folk drummers are not aware of the classical theory at all, their techniques can be efficiently described with it. Here I show you an excerpt from a wedding ceremony, recorded by me in 2009 near to the town Osmaniye in Turkey. The footage clearly highlights how important a role drummers play, and also we may observe the different pitches of the drum beats. (Video 1[3])

In the example above also another kind of polyphony can be heard: the simplest drone accompaniment. While one of the *zurna* players was playing

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1 More in Hornbostel 1909.

2 The Turkish rhythm system contains 40-50 different rhythm patterns consisting of accented and unaccented beats. The Turkish makam system also known *Türk Sanat Müziği* or *Türk Klassic Müziği* is a product of the Seljuk and peculiarly the Osman Court.

3 Two Turkish *zurna* players with drum accompaniment – video recording of the author.

the melody, his companion held the tonic. Besides being static, drone also may follow the melodic line from a distance. I show a nice example for that in my shooting in Shamaha village, Azerbaijan. The *zurna* player blowing the melody paraphrases first the D then the C tone with small motifs, while his companion blows the drone D or C accordingly. (Figure 1, Music 1)

Figure 1. Azeri *zurna* duo with moving bourdon accompaniment[4]

4   Sipos 2004: No. 41.

∿ KAZAK AND KYRGYZ DOMBRA

The intstrumental music played on the two- or three-stringed plucked lutes in Inner Asia is polyphonic. In certain cases, e.g. that of the Kazakh or Kyrgyz dombra players, this instrumental music was gradually renewed, evolved and reached a high virtuoso level over the centuries.[5] Of course on the two-stringed dombra only two-voice texture can be played. The possibilities are even narrower because the lower string is played by the thumb, and the musician can move his other fingers only in relation to this fixed position.

Figure 2. Kazakh dombra *küi* from Zataevich 1925[6]

There are two basic techniques. One is when the *dombracı* plays the melody on the upper (higher) string, and the lower string serves as a fixed drone. Another possibility is when the player plays on both strings in parallel fourths or fifths, using occasionally other intervals as well.

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5   Beliaev 1975.

6   Zataevich 1925: Nr. 307 , see Beliaev 1975: 87.

As an illustration, let us listen to the introductory measures of an instrumental *küi* melody from Zataevich's 1000 pesen Kirgizskogo naroda. I transcribed the melody with a music notation software and show you the first few measures with the help of a MIDI player. (Figure 2, Music 2)

∽ ACCOMPANIMENT WITH TWO-VOICE TEXTURE DRONE FOLLOWING THE MELODIC LINE

Even more complex – we might say more "advanced" – is the phenomenon when the melody is accompanied by two-voice textures of fifths or fourths. It can be heard in the music of several Caucasian peoples in a form of a chorus as well.[7] Now let us see an example of the Karachay polyphony.

Figure 3. Karachay *eju*[8]

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7   Unlike most of the other North Caucasian polyphonic traditions (where two-part polyphony is the leading type), Chechen, Ingush and Karachay polyphony is mostly three-part.

8   Sipos and Tavkul 2012: ex. 12. 9b.

Figure 4. Azerbaijani *Kocheli* dance tune on accordion and drums[9]

The melody is accompanied by a double drone called *eju*, following the melody somewhat freely with fifths or fourths. In the Figure 3 I show the melody and the most typical form of the *eju*. (Figure 3, Music 3)

Using the potential of the instrument, more complex polyphony might be suspected in pieces played or accompanied by accordion. However, in

9   Sipos 2004: Nr. 43.

Figure 5. Accompaniment with major chords following the melodic line from a distance

many other cases in the Turkic musical world, for example in rendering of the Azeri *Kocheli* melody, we hear again a drone following the melody in a very similar way we heard in the Karachay case before. For the most part the accordion plays C–E or E–G two-voice textures. As usual the *darbuka* player tinkles more than one pitch, enriching the polyphonic sounding considerably. (Figure 4, Music 4) We may say that in the folk music of the Turkic peoples polyphony reaches the zenith with the examples shown above.

At this point, let us have a look at a special Hungarian dance music tradition in Transylvania, where the viola player accompanies the contour of the melody by major chords. Here we can grasp the shift from

the drone accompaniment using one or two tones (being sometimes polyphonic) to an accompaniment following the melody tune by tune by major chords. This accompaniment is different from the polyphonic systems of European classical music, and at the same time, there is no parallel phenomenon in the folk music of the Turkic people. The following example shows this "Transylvanian" style, recorded by László Lajtha in 1941.[10] (Figure 5, Video 2)

∾ MAQAM-MUGAM

Let us now turn back to the music of the Turkic people, in peculiar to the traditional art music of the Azeris. In the mugam music of the Azeri Turks we may observe an especially beautiful realization of heterophony. Mugam is the Azeri form of the *maqam* music based on common principles but showing considerable differences in its existing forms from Western-Africa to the land of Uyghurs in Xinjiang (East Turkestan) in China. This musical form reached a very high level in the Nagorno-Karabakh region being recently under Armenian occupation.

In the *mugam* suite vocal and instrumental sections alternate. There are vocal-instrumental and entirely instrumental parts as well. In vocal-instrumental parts the singer is accompanied by a small orchestra called "mugam trio" consisting of a plucked instrument *(tar)*, a string instrument *(kemenche)* and a percussion *(def)*. The trio may be completed by a wind instrument *(balaban)* which usually provides a moving drone.

Instrumental parts are performed in strict time, while vocal parts are sung usually in *parlando-rubato* style. In the long vocal movements, melodies are performed on instruments as well. Between the *parlando* vocal movements there are instrumental interludes played in strict time.

Using the potential of their instrument the two soloists improvise the melodies while the *balaban* player blows the tonic. The drum plays a role mainly in strict-time sections, but sometime it might color the parlando-rubato vocal movements as well.

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10 The transcriptions (made partly by Benjamin Rajeczky) were published only after the World War II. See: Lajtha 1954: Nr. 24.

Figure 6. The sceleton of a Segah tune from an Azeri mugam suit

The vocal parts of the *mugam* suite are in close contact with the traditional layers of the Azeri folk music. It happens often that at the climax of the suite we hear a typical Azeri folk song moving on Segah being the most typical scale of the Azeri folk music. (Figure 6, Music 5)

In 1999, I recorded a one-hour long lament series from woman expelled from Nagorno-Karabakh by Russian and Armenian groups. Their style was similar to that of the mugam, but contained many specific elements as well. Two women led the lamenting, dominating alternately. When one of them sung the main melody, the other woman kept in the shade or joined the "leader" with her own variations. Besides, what was the most interesting: she colored the leading treble with short comments and specific musical expressions.

The part of the third woman moves on three adjacent minor seconds stepping up or down. What is more, the women sang for a longer period of time in fifth parallels. Similar phenomena can be observed in psalm singing during the religious *Sufi zikir* ceremonies.

Although there are lots of eventualities in these polyphonic phenomena, they cannot be regarded as mere chance. The performers had a great musical sense and during the long mourning process they were improvising in compliance with each other, quite like the professional members of a free jazz trio. (Figure 7)

Figure 7. Exerpt from an Azeri lament from Karabakh[11]

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11 Sipos 2004: Nr. 42.

∾ SUMMARY

In the typically monophonic/heterophonic music of the Turkic people there are different polyphonic phenomena as well. These phenomena can be divided into the following groups:

1. Unintentional, accidental polyphony, e.g. men and women singing in parallel octaves or a number of people singing the same song and the slightly different personal variation give a polyphonic feeling,
2. Intentional heterophonic rendering, when the musicians "improvise" the same melody according to the potential of their instrument,
3. The melody is accompanied by a single held drone,
4. In the accompaniment a number of tones are repeated periodically (percussion),
5. Polyphonic drone following the contour of the melody. In some cases, two voices accompany the melodies being usually a fifth or a fourth apart from each other,
6. The mixture of the phenomena listed above, as we have seen in the rendering of the Azeri *mugam*.

 The musical world of several peoples does not easily gives way to the more developed forms of polyphony. As an example, the pentatonic folk music of the Hungarians, Tatars, Bashkirs, Mongols and Amerindians can be mentioned; and the same is true for the non-pentatonic folk music of different Turkic peoples as well. However, monophonic and heterophonic music cannot be judged as inferior; they offer to their fans the same musical joy as their great successor, the polyphonic music.

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