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Do They Sound Like Bells or Like Howling Wolves?

Interferential Diaphony in Bistritsa



**VERGLEICHENDE
MUSIKWISSENSCHAFT**

PL ACADEMIC
RESEARCH



1. PART ONE

1.1 ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to gratefully acknowledge that the English rendition of this book has been made possible by the determined support of Prof. Em. Dr. Franz Födermayr who was also my very encouraging supervisor at the time when this thesis was written, by Ass.-Prof. Mag. Dr. August Schmidhofer and Mag. Monika Jaroš, with their outstanding editorial and organisational contributions and, of course, by Prof. Dr. Marlene Norst with her dedication and invaluable help with translation and comments.

The idea for the work presented here came to me before the beginning of my musicological studies, when I participated in the Second International Competition for Young Opera Singers which took place in Sofia in 1963. On this occasion I met the Alexandrov family, who resided in the village of Bistritsa. It was Mr. Assen Alexandrov and Mrs. Dobrinka Alexandrova, who drew my attention to the very fascinating polyphonic vocal folk-music of this village. From that point on my interest was engaged and in 1970 I began my musicological studies at the University of Vienna, with the express intention of working on this vocal multi-part tradition.

It cannot be sufficiently emphasized that without the tireless and wholehearted support of this extraordinary family, and in particular, the efforts of Mrs. Alexandrova who helped to overcome the many difficulties we all encountered as well as the support of so many other people, this study could definitely not have been completed.

Indebted acknowledgement is made therefore to the following individuals and institutions: the singers of Bistritsa; the family Alexandrov from Bistritsa: Dobrinka for her invaluable advice, coordination and administration of the field research, Assen her husband, Borjana her daughter, Andrej and Dobrin their sons; my excellent teachers Prof. Dr. Walter Graf and Prof. Dr. Othmar Wessely (Vienna); further Prof. Dr. Stojan Džudžeff (Sofia); Dr. Theophil Antonicek (Vienna); Prof. Tanja Khristova (Sofia); Dr. Eva Diettrich (Vienna); Dr. Werner Deutsch (Vienna); Dr. Dietrich Schüller, then director of the “Phonogrammarchiv der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften Wien”; The Austrian Science Fund (FWF); Doz. Dr. Gerlinde Haas (Vienna); Institut za Folklor (Skopje); Raijonen Soviet Deveti Septemvri (Sofia); Slavijanski Komitet (Sofia);

Centăr za Bălgaristika and Institut za Folklor (BAN = Bulgarian Academy of Sciences); Dr. John Blacking for his encouragement to translate this work into English; Guy Noyaux for his invaluable all round assistance with the English version; Dr. Steven Cross for his most appreciated corrections and comments; Dr. Marlene Norst for her dedication and invaluable help with translation and comments; Deakin University Library and Judy Wells (School of Education); Ass.-Prof. Dr. Emil H. Lubej for his technical support in regard to the sonagrams/spectrograms of the English edition. I am specifically grateful to Mag. Georg Messner, Executive Director, Raiffeisenlandesbank Kärnten and Mag. Ernst Rosi, Senior Adviser of the Board of Directors of RZB (Raiffeisen Central Bank) Vienna, for Culture, Sponsoring and Memberships both of whom made financial support available, and last, but not least, all those whom I could not list here but to whom I owe a debt of gratitude for their support.

1.2 FOREWORD TO THE ENGLISH EDITION OF THIS STUDY

It was Professor Dr. John Blacking (General Editor of the series: Cambridge Studies in Ethnomusicology at Cambridge University Press) who encouraged me to provide an English translation of this work, after it had been published in German in 1980. Unfortunately Prof. Blacking died unexpectedly during our collaboration on this project. This was indeed a great loss for all of us. A chain of ill-timed circumstances that followed were the reason for the extensive delay of this edition of the English version.

It was then the alliance with the eminent linguist Prof. Dr. Marlene Norst in Sydney that finally made the completion of the translation possible.

Professor Blacking suggested to me in 1987 that I introduce current concepts of some scholars in the field of Social Anthropology into the Foreword and Introduction of this book to elucidate my underlying arguments. I gladly agreed.

Since I started my inquiry into the phenomena presented here, the concept of scientific objectivity in the old sense has long ago changed. Today it would be an anachronism to believe that an 'objective' scientific investigation of songs from a different musical culture can be undertaken.

The concept of scientific objectivity rests upon the assumption of an external world which is 'out there' as opposed to an 'I' which is 'in here' [...] To observe something objectively means to see it as it would appear to an ob-

server who has no prejudices about what he observes [...] his prejudice is to be 'objective', that is, to be without a preformed opinion. In fact, it is impossible to be without an opinion. An opinion is a point of view. The point of view that we can be without a point of view is a point of view. (Zukav 1986: 55f.)

We should also bear in mind what R. D. Laing in 1967 already had to say:

The 'data' (given) of research are not so much given as taken out of a constantly elusive matrix of happenings. We should speak of capta rather than data. The quantitatively interchangeable grist that goes into the mills of reliability studies and rating scales is the expression of a processing that we do on reality, which is not the expression of the processes of reality. (Laing ¹⁵1985: 53).

All our scientific investigations are based upon observations. The observer and the observed are co-determinants within the process of observational investigation and affect each other's system reciprocally. In the course of this study, therefore, the reader will encounter two principal elements:

- a) 'data' or rather capta to quote R. D. Laing, acquired through field recordings and other means of gathering information, processed and made accessible via the application of linear analytical and other cognitive processes,
- b) reflections on our Western tradition, on ourselves, our methodological approaches and on the way our mind operates, which result from the above mentioned co-determinative interactivity of the observer and the observed.

As I discovered several mistakes, misspellings and printing errors, this English version of my dissertation has therefore been revised and updated and the sonagrams/spectrograms have been refashioned in order to achieve a better discernibility. I hope all this may contribute to a better understanding of the environment of Interferential Diaphony (*Schwebungsdiaphonie*), as well as of the phenomenon itself.

Sydney, Thursday, 13 September 2012

1.3 INTRODUCTION

This work is intended as a contribution to a more profound understanding of a peculiar type of autochthonous multi-part singing tradition, which is still practiced in many different regions ranging from the Balkans to Africa, and from South Asia to Oceania. The investigation presented here is devoted to the traditional vocal polyphony of the village of Bistritsa in Central West Bulgaria. The song cycles were collected between 1970 and 1973. In the course of my field research, the socio-cultural, psychoacoustic and audio-physiological aspects of the musical tradition were carefully considered, which helped enormously to elucidate many of the problems with regard to transcription and performance practices.

Preliminary historical and mythological analysis of the song texts yielded valuable information about the possible origin and age of this musical culture. For a more fundamental understanding of the ethno-linguistic and historical implications of these song texts a dialectological and ethnographic study carried out by Bulgarian researchers is imperative. The aim of the study presented here is to examine the songs and their performance within the social dimension of the entire village culture in order to elucidate their interrelationship with other polyphonic traditions throughout Bulgaria and beyond.

Subsequently a preliminary comparative analysis was carried out by simply looking at samples from other multi-part traditions in the Balkans and beyond. This, of course, depended on available recording samples and literature. Walter Graf's essay entitled "Ein deduktiver Ansatz musikethnologischer Forschung" (Graf 1948: 211-217) proved to be a valuable stimulus for this work.

In order to develop a more or less satisfactory notation for the songs from Bistritsa, relevant problems relating to the history of Western notation have been carefully taken into consideration. The verbal self expression of the singers as well as analytical recordings have also influenced the notation and graphic representation of these songs.

The results of this study are presented in three parts. The first part deals with the general historical and ethno-genetic background of the research area, including the distribution of the vocal multi-part tradition in Bulgaria and the generic legends relating to the origin of the village of Bistritsa. This is followed by a phenomenological analysis of the recorded songs in their socio-cultural context. The phenomenological investigation is partly based on sonagraphy and leads towards the definition of the term Interferential Diaphony (*Schwebungsdiapho-*

nie). I would like to draw attention to the factor that was most significant for the formulation of this term. It derives from the ‘fast beats’ (fast intermittent sound wave interaction) or ‘interferences’ (German *Schwebungen*) which are so characteristic of this vocal style and which, in fact, are generated through the performance of extremely narrow intervals – intervals that are smaller than a minor second in our Western tuning system of equal temperament and which in traditional Western musical terms are considered to be maximally dissonant. This is the constant, style-specific characteristic of these forms, and is found from the Balkans to as far a-field as Indonesia and Oceania.

The second part also deals with the various problems related to the ethnomusicological ‘transcription’ of vocal folk-polyphony, and especially of Interferential Diaphony. The transcription of music is the transformation of an acoustic process in time into the written symbols of a system of musical notation, and as such it changes a dynamic four dimensional reality of communication (performance – space – time – perception) into a static two dimensional plane of graphic symbols. In ethnomusicology it is common practice to use this plane as *the* basis for analytical differentiation and representation by means of graphs, tables and charts; however this fails to take into account the fact that the original dynamic process of the musical performance has been locked out.

The third part is the crucial section of the study in which I have tried to demonstrate the interpenetration and interdependency of all aspects of the music, and of the so called ‘parts’ which have resulted from the analytical processes involved. This helps to highlight the extent to which the network of the socio-cultural background functions as the generic matrix of this musical culture. Examples of the song texts have been examined with regard to their pre-Christian, magico-religious components. Finally there is a discussion of the results in light of new literature concerning Interferential Diaphony (*Schwebungsdiaphonie*).

The Appendix includes illustrations, the analytical tables, sonagrams and maps. Two monographical studies on the *Schwebungsdiaphonie* in Baluan Manus Island, Papua Niugini and in East Flores, Indonesia are to be found in the Appendix 2.