

**MUSIC IN SOCIETY:
A Guide to the
Sociology of Music**



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SOCIOLOGY OF MUSIC NO. 4

*PENDRAGON PRESS
STUYVESANT, NY*



I • SOCIAL GROUPS IN MUSICAL LIFE

It has been often observed in the course of history, starting with primitive societies, that a musical fact was related to a social fact. "Of all the objects which a Black African population uses, musical instruments are the most bound to the play of its institutions, to the rhythm of its activities. All divisions between musical instruments correspond to divisions in the society or among the rites it practices . . . One type of instrument is far from having an identical function in all the societies which use it."¹ But divisions appear everywhere according to sex, profession, or rituals in which individuals or groups of individuals participate; these divisions are those of the society.

"In many societies, certain songs are for singing and certain instruments for playing by individuals of one or the other sex only. Throughout the Western world, children carry traditions on music which can be considered folk songs. These are not learned from the elders, who have usually either forgotten or pay no attention to them. Constantin Brăiloiu believed that traditions of children's songs were universal and exhibited

¹André Schaeffner, *Les Kissis, une société noire et ses instruments de musique* (Paris: Hermann, 1951) 3.

music-technical traits in common."² André Schaeffner reported that, in the village of Katako, in Africa's Boga country, he found an instrument normally belonging to young girls in the hands of men: it was a question of men taking over the social functions of women for a certain length of time.³

In France, as another example, we could note an instrument, the toulouhou of the central Pyrenees, which is exclusively reserved to a given community, the boys;⁴ and, more generally, the use of a musical instrument as the symbol of the chief of an organization or tribe.⁵ In the Congo there were even trials that were pleaded musically, where defendant and prosecutor, assisted first by their groups (who alternately offered their chanted interventions) then by the wood drum (by its conclusion—the battery pronouncing judgement), composed a clearly structured musical "suite."⁶ The further we look back into the history of humanity, the more we see music existing not in the form of entertainment or as a purely artistic manifestation, but as an element bound up in the most earthy details of daily social life.⁷

In the middle of the sixteenth century in Paris, in a highly civilized society, "musical participation was inseparable from the various stages of family life: betrothals, marriages, days of churching for birth, all sorts of anniversaries; it was inseparable from professional life: 'chef-d'oeuvres' of new masters, feast days of the guilds' patron saints, festivals of the corporations (some of these, such as that for the clerks of Châtelet, had a very

²Charles Seeger, "The Music Compositional Process as a Function in a Nest of Functions and in Itself a Nest of Functions," in *Studies in Musicology 1935-1975* (Berkeley-Los Angeles-London: U. of California Press, 1977) 151.

³See André Schaeffner "Ethnologie musicale ou musicologie comparée," 30, and "Musique et structures sociales" (Sociétés d'Afrique Noire) *Revue française de sociologie* IV (1962) 389-390.

⁴See Claudie Marcel-Dubois, "Le toulouhou des Pyrénées centrales," *Les Colloques de Wégimont III-1956, Ethnomusicologie II* (Paris: Société d'Édition "Les Belles Lettres," 1960) 16.

⁵See Gilbert Rouget, "A propos de la forme dans les musiques de tradition orale," *Les Colloques de Wégimont I* (Brussels: Elsevier, 1956) 135.

⁷See Marius Schneider, "Sociologie et mythologie musicales," 13.

special sort of celebration); inseparable from municipal life: the bonfires of Saint John's Day, May feasts; or simply from life: 'a departure, the buying of a house . . . the happy outcome of a trial or bet.' It is a traveller from Basle [Thomas Platter] who speaks, and he forgets some: games of tennis (which was at the height of its popularity during the sixteenth century) are most often enhanced by the presence of instrumentalists; the many masquerades, 'bâtons,' 'réveils,' and divertissements of college students never took place without violins, cornets (with a mouthpiece), and oboes."⁸

In seventeenth-century Austria we also find an interesting example of the expression of a social reality in the arts: "in these presentations of tournaments and equestrian or naval feasts, even the places reserved for princes and dignified spectators were subject to the demands of the most tyrannical symmetry, symbol of Spanish ceremonial, and of the implacable hierarchy of the society. The coordinated parallelism of groups is the guiding principle of the 'entrées' in these ballets. Thus we are not surprised to see the Viennese J.H. Schmelzer base the orchestration of his dances for an open air ballet, on the figures of the choreography: an orchestra of brass and strings for centaurs, a second orchestra of strings alone for nymphs, and for the ensembles of nymphs and fauns, a third group of strings and woodwinds; and finally, for the choreographed ensembles, a pompous tutti of all three orchestras . . . This ballet was performed at the Schönbrunn in 1674."⁹

At this point we could mention another aspect dealt with by François Lesure in a particularly interesting way: namely, the position of music in society in light of the relationships between music and painting.¹⁰ His work is not a "history of music in

⁸François Lesure, "Réflexions sur les origines du concert parisien," *Polyphonie* V (1949) 48.

⁹Paul Nettl, "L'évolution de la musique autrichienne au XVII^e siècle: de la barcarole à la valse," *La revue musicale* CLV (1935) 259.

¹⁰François Lesure, *Musica e società* (Milan: Istituto Editoriale Italiano, 1966); Ger. tr. *Musik und Gesellschaft im Bild* (Kassel-Basel: Bärenreiter, 1966); Eng. tr. *Music and Art in Society* (Pittsburgh: Pennsylvania State U. Press, 1968).

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pictures" of the type produced by Georg Kinsky in 1929, or more recently, from 1961 on, by others.¹¹ Lesure compares two types of evidence for the dependence of music on social life, one taken from the history of music itself and the other from paintings illustrating various aspects of social life in which music had a function. Choosing European art from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries for this study, the author examines his subject, supporting his conclusions with some 100 reproductions of original paintings from that period (by Holbein, Giorgione, Carpaccio, Guardi, Laneret, Hogarth, Titian, Caravaggio, Vermeer, Canaletto and others). These paintings make clear how deeply music can be involved in social life at a given time.