

# Keynote Talk - 2

## Acoustic Singularities of Some Songs of Oral Tradition

Michèle Castellengo

Emeritus Research Director  
CNRS, Sorbonne Université

### Abstract

After studying the acoustic properties and sound qualities of several musical instruments (flute, organ) as well as those of European vocal techniques, I have directed my research towards the study of songs of oral tradition - thus without notation - for which problems of analysis and transcription arise, as well as difficulties due to our own listening references, fundamentally different from those of native musicians.

In the course of the presentation we will travel to Central Africa with the Aka Pygmies, to Taiwan with the Bunun, to Central Asia with the Mongols and their "diphonic" singing, and back to Europe with a religious polyphonic song of the Sardinians.

At the end of this journey we will show that the classical notions of musical acoustics: pitch, intensity and timbre rarely correspond, for the human listener, to independent physical parameters, and that it would be necessary to consider the apprehension of global forms coordinating these parameters to account for the musical listening.

### Biography

After studying music and musicology, Michèle Castellengo joined Emile Leipp's laboratory of musical acoustics where she defended a thesis under his direction. In 1982, she joined the CNRS and became director of the laboratory (LAM). Her research focuses on the acoustics of flutes, the organ and the sung voice, and more generally on the perception of musical sounds. Strongly involved in the dissemination of musical knowledge to musicians, she created in 1989 the class of musical acoustics at the Paris Conservatory (CNSMDP) and wrote an exhaustive book of musical acoustics for musicians. Director of the LAM and head of the Atiam master's program (University of Paris 6/Ircam/SupTélécom) until 2002, she is now an emeritus research director at the CNRS. She pursues her research on the musical perception of sounds within the framework of cognitive categorization and more particularly in the field of ethnomusicology.