Music of the Common Tongue

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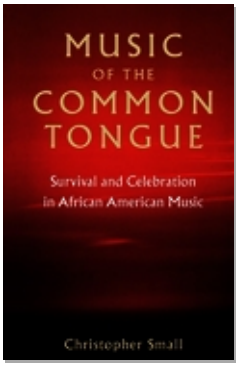

Chapter 4

ON CULTURES AND THEIR FUSION

There are in most societies legends and theories concerning the origin of music, of which western 'scientific' theories are in the main the least interesting or illuminating. T.H. Huxley, for example, suggested that music might be a factor in sexual selection, in which the ability to make sweet sounds helps in obtaining a mate; this banal conjecture may look at first sight attractive in view of the proverbial sexual attractiveness of musicians from Orpheus onwards (probably more to do with the musician's presumed personality and lifestyle than with his actual music) but it leaves us where we were, with any number of questions begged, including that of why we should find such sounds attractive. This is especially true since, as Harry Partch was not the first to point out, there is no sound that is enjoyed in one culture that is not thought of as a horrible noise in another (that two or more cultures may find themselves coexisting in a single British or American household is a well-known source of friction). The trouble with virtually all scientific speculation on music, I suspect, lies in the fact that it is the work of people whose habits of thought militate against their having the faintest idea of the real function of music in human life.

Much more interesting and valuable are those myths and legends which tell how music arose, often conveying profound insights into the matter; myth, as we have already noted, is not only descriptive but prescriptive, since in telling how things came to be it tells how things are, or should be. In that sense we could say that scientific theories in general partake also of the nature and function of myth, pretty impoverished myth much of it, if we think in terms of its usefulness in guiding

human thought and action. One remarkably consistent feature of these stories of how music came into the lives of human beings is the idea that it happened in response to a desperate need; thus, in Hindu mythology, the god Brahma, after meditating for a hundred thousand years, finally decided to give music to the human race when they begged him for something to relieve their sorrow and hardships. David Reck, who retells the story, comments: 'Music, most people of the world say, originated somewhere other than in man. It came some time in the past from gods or other supernatural beings who, perhaps when man needed it or asked for it, perhaps even at the moment of man's creation, gave music as a gift'.[1] The psychological truth of this would no doubt have been recognized by the black slaves in the Americas who found in musicking a tool for spiritual survival; it must have seemed as if the art were given as a gift in a time of desperate need. It was not just any music; neither the old musical art of Africa nor that of their new masters would do, but an art of their own creating, a music that seemed to be created anew (as indeed the art does seem to be created anew with each new social situation), and it took from the two sides what was needed, no less and no more, to make a new musical art which partook of the nature of both but was not the same as either. It spoke of and to them in their particular predicament, and it came into being, not by deliberately willing it, but as a spontaneous generation which must have seemed like a divine gift of relief in their need.

It must have been by no means the first time that a people has found itself in such a desperate situation during the turbulent history of the human race. We gain a hint of the same feeling when the captive Children of Israel asked how they could sing the Lord's song in a strange land. The era of written history is only a minute fragment of the whole human adventure so far, and that of written music even smaller, and there is no reason to suppose that the humans who painted the caves of Altamira and Lascaux twelve thousand or so years ago, themselves the product of more than a hundred thousand years of recognizably human history, should not have been engaging in equally sophisticated musicking and dancing. The practice, common among present-day classical

musicians, of labelling everything prior to about 1750 as 'Early' or even 'Ancient' music would seem to betray a certain narrowness of vision.

With every movement of people, every conquest, every enslavement, every absorption of one human group by another, something of the kind must have taken place, and we might say that we have lost more musical cultures than we presently possess. Only those who treasure the created object over the creative act need deplore this, because what remains, what is more precious than any created object, however magnificent, is the inexhaustible creativity of the human race. But in any case, nothing human is ever quite lost; no culture ever quite disappears but is transformed over and over again, so that every one of us carries within him or herself elements of who knows what cultures and societies, in shards and fragments, passed down from grandmothers to sleepless grandchildren, nursemaids to their charges, older children to younger, in snatches of old songs, garbled tales, odd words, expressions and proverbs, little personal rituals and superstitions. To that extent, we are all Phoenicians, Vandals, Greeks, Egyptians, Africans (who *could* the Ancient Egyptians have been if they were not African?), even perhaps Trojans.

The idea becomes easier to contemplate when we consider what a culture really is, and what its function is in human life. Although the word is a noun, we can be seriously misled if we think of culture as a thing or an entity, not only because it is dynamic rather than static but also because it is not simply a matter of institutions, though institutions can act as repositories and as shaping forces of culture. Raymond Williams has called the word 'culture' 'one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language',[2] and this is not the place for an exhaustive discussion. It is, however, clear that the word has a wider meaning than simply that which is contained in the phrase 'a cultured person' — that is, one who is versed in the high arts and in intellectual works. Rather, I suggest, as a rough-and-ready definition, that culture is a set of attitudes, assumptions and values by means of which a person or a group of people is able to find meaning in, or give meaning to, not only the objects and events of the environment but also to inner experiences, and to construct from

them a consistent and usable picture of the world and of relationships within it. In this sense every single human being is cultured, since it is by means of the choices governed by culture that he or she is able to find some order in the seemingly limitless variety of experience. Culture thus mediates also between human potentialities, which although not limitless are very wide indeed, and the realization of that potential in life as it is actually lived. As Clifford Geertz says: 'One of the most significant facts about us may finally be that we all begin with the natural equipment to live a thousand kinds of life but end up in the end having lived only one'.[3] Although it is at least partly external to us, culture is nevertheless part of our essential equipment as human beings, without which we would certainly not be able to function at all in the world, and it must have developed, in evolutionary terms, not after but simultaneously and in parallel with the complex nervous system that produced in our species the need for it. 'Rather than acting to supplement, develop and extend organically-based capacities logically and genetically prior to it,' says Geertz, 'it would seem to be an ingredient in those capacities themselves. A cultureless human being would probably turn out to be not an intrinsically talented though unfulfilled ape, but a wholly mindless and consequently unworkable monstrosity.'[4]

It is not by conscious rational thought that we learn to perform this selective interpretation of the world, since the attitudes and values which govern our selection underlie any process we call rational thought; indeed, the very notion of 'rational thought' may itself be culturally determined. These attitudes and values underlie and govern not only how we think about things but even how we feel about them (the latter being more fundamental than the former). We receive them without as a rule consciously thinking about them from the moment of birth, from elders and authorities; we may modify them, or find them modified for us as we go through life, and we pass them on to our juniors.

This brings us to two important points. The first is that the interiorization of culture, to the point where it becomes a major part of who we are, is a matter in which the emotions play an important role, and the second is that, while no two

individuals are identical from a cultural any more than from any other point of view, people do tend to form groups which are joined together by broadly similar sets of these attitudes, assumptions and values which we call a culture.

In the first place, because of the importance of the emotions in the formation of the individual's attitudes and values, as can be seen from the strongly emotional response we make when anyone tries to detach us from our really important values, it is the inseparable trio of myth, ritual and art that are their principal bearers. The latter are, to use Geertz's telling phrase, the 'public images of sentiment' through which a specific kind of order can be imposed on experience. The word 'public' is important here, since, as we have seen, the function of ritual and of art (it is unclear where one ends and the other begins) is to dramatize the myths that shape and justify attitudes and values, explain us to ourselves and assist each of us in the task of discovering who we are in relation to our fellow humans and to the world. Thus the very notion that the human race might ever outgrow the need for myth and ritual is clearly absurd.

And in the second place, the tendency of human beings to form themselves into groups of like-minded, or like-feeling, individuals is often taken for granted, but is interesting. All of us in fact belong simultaneously to a number of groups: families, economic interest groups, political groups, professional or occupational groups, religious and ethnic groups, the two sexes (and assorted sexual orientations), not to mention clubs, societies and workplace associations, all of which overlap one into another but do not necessarily coincide. Each member of a group looks to the others for validation of his or her own sense of self and self-esteem in that part of life with which the group concerns itself; in 'traditional' or village societies those groups tend not only to coincide but also to exist in a single geographical location, while modern groups — associations of scientists, for example, or of world leaders (for we may be sure that the latter form a definite interest group of their own, whatever public noises of antagonism they may make) — may be scattered over the face of the globe. Some groups are powerful and some powerless, some high in social status and some low, but for each

individual his or her place in society is a kind of aggregate of the various groups to which he or she belongs. Each group has its own mythology (including of course its mythological heroes) by means of which it justifies its existence, and its rituals by means of which that mythology is acted out and its values interiorized in its members, and by means of which the members tell themselves, one another and the world who they are.

What we call a society is in reality nothing so unified as the term suggests, but a system of interlocking groups. Today most societies are thought of as being naturally coterminous with nation-states, but the latter are in fact of quite recent origin, the oldest of them being not more than a few hundred years old, notwithstanding the efforts made, through the citation of long lineages of monarchs, for example, to make them appear of more ancient date and thus of more natural origin. Despite what political leaders may claim, there is little in terms of attitudes, values or assumptions that can be said to be common to all those groups within a nation-state and that could unite them all. What social cohesion does exist in a nation-state is owed partly to the assiduously fostered notion of 'nationhood' (which has to be evoked sparingly and carefully, and only at moments of carefully prepared crisis), partly to a measure of coercion (the 'rule of law'), partly to a reluctant acquiescence by lower-status groups in the values of the higher-status groups, which are propagated by the education system and by the various official media of information, and partly to a degree of overlap, of genuine coincidence of values, of human understanding and empathy between members of what would sometimes seem the most unlikely of groups.

The cultural relations between the groups in a society are worth discussing. Suppose we have two groups within such a society, one of high status, possessing economic and political power and control over the formal media of cultural transmission, and the other relatively powerless and at the receiving end of those media. It is to be expected that members of the higher-status group will attempt to impose their myths and rituals, their symbols and their art as not only superior but as universally and permanently valid, and that they will use their control of the media to impose upon the

lower-status group their own definition of legitimate 'cultural' activity. This will take place not necessarily through any deliberate conspiracy; the simple conviction that their values and their art are superior is sufficient. The power of definition may be used to dismiss the artistic activities (that is, the self-definition) of the inferior group as unworthy of serious consideration, if not downright destructive to the social order. Resistance by the lower-status group to being thus defined is sporadic and unsystematic, understandably since consistency and system are themselves characteristics which are elements of that industrial order which is responsible for the dominance of the upper class in the first place, and it is also hampered by the attractions of social status which the upper-class culture can exert.

Nevertheless, the dominant culture can fall victim to the consequences of its own dominance. In the first place, what would seem to be the ideal conditions for cultural and artistic development — abundant leisure, material resources and access to prolonged periods of training — what Pierre Bourdieu calls 'distance from necessity' — permits the development of an endless cycle of self-reflexivity, a 'play of cultured allusions and analogies, endlessly pointing to other analogies, which . . . weaves around the works a complex web of factitious experiences, each answering and reinforcing all the others, which *creates* the enchantment of artistic contemplation'.[5] This 'aesthetic disposition', as Bourdieu calls it, 'a generalized capacity to neutralize ordinary urgencies and to bracket off practical ends, a durable inclination and aptitude for practice without a practical function, can only be constituted within an experience of the world freed from urgency and through the practice of activities which are an end in themselves, such as scholastic exercises or the contemplation of works of art'.[6] High-status artistic activity, in fact, lacks the life-or-death urgency of lower-class art, such as we have already seen in the case of the enslaved Africans, who had to retain their power of self-definition or perish.

Those same favourable conditions can result also in the growth of conformism and in stultification of the imaginative faculties through over-concern with the maintenance of status, not only in relation to the lower group but also within

the dominant group itself. The members of the lower group, on the other hand, have few worries about status, since nothing they can do will place them in the upper group (the fact that some do make the attempt does not invalidate the general statement); they may be afforded only the upper group's leftovers and outworn artistic materials to work on, but they are free to explore then without preconceptions. without worrying about conventions or notions of correctness, to take over the objects and the symbols of the upper group and subvert, deconstruct or reconstruct their meanings, all without the dominant group even noticing what is going on. Indeed, if the lower group are to succeed at all in giving meaning to their experience (another way of saying 'construct a culture') they are bound to do this. Thus, the lower-status culture will always contain within it a much wider variety of self-defining artistic activities, a larger 'gene pool' of identities and styles of relationship than the virtual monoculture which the upper-class culture tends to become — and monocultures, as any biologist knows, court extinction, while variety is the strongest force for survival.

There is another reason why the upper class culture is condemned to endless self-reflexivity. Having proclaimed themselves as superior to all others, its members cannot allow the fertilizing influence of other systems of values and attitudes to penetrate, not, at any rate, on anything like the equal terms that are necessary if anything other than colonization is to take place. Only another 'high' culture can be allowed to penetrate, but high cultures pass each other like ships in the night, perhaps saluting each other in passing but each too isolated in its own assumptions and values to be able to accept from others anything more than a few superficial gestures; any real social empathy such as is needed for genuine fusion seems to be beyond the powers of their members. Each has, in a word, too much to lose.

The one musical phenomenon of recent years which would seem to contradict this assertion — the thoroughgoing penetration of, in particular, the old 'high' musical cultures of the East by European classical music — is in fact no exception. What has taken place in the societies of Japan, South Korea, and to some extent in China and India, has been less a

transaction or exchange of values than a wholesale takeover by western industrial values, of which western classical music, as we have already seen, is such a powerful vehicle today. The oriental artists, many of whom show not mere competence but real mastery and creativity in the styles of western classical music, have completely entered into that music, its values and the sense of identity it embodies, leaving their own traditional culture behind. The only trace of that traditional culture that one finds in their compositions is an accent or a dialectical flavour which is used in ways that are not dissimilar to those found in the work of European 'nationalist' composers from the early years of this century such as Bartók or the young Stravinsky. It is interesting that all those Eastern musicians whose backgrounds I have been able to trace come from families in the new industrial middle class of those countries.

In so far as the members of the dominant cultural group are aware at all of lower-class forms and activities, their attitude to them tends to be ambivalent; on the one hand they feel strongly the need to preserve the purity of their own cultural forms from what is seen as pollution by the inferior culture, while on the other they are fascinated with the forms and activities of that culture, especially with what is seen as their freedom and exuberance, as well as a desire to be seen as familiar with, if not master of, those forms — after all, mastery of an inferior culture ought to come easily to the masters of a superior one. That such a desire has repeatedly opened the gates to a trojan horse is something we shall see later, especially when the lower-status culture is Afro-American. We see it at work in the way that upper-class English people borrow words and phrases, for example Cockney rhyming slang, and mimic the accent and cadence of working-class speech. They do it, of course, not because they want actually to be taken for members of the working class, but in order to exhibit their mastery of working-class cultural forms. Similarly, when a famous classical performer appears in public playing ragtime or what is evidently meant to be jazz, his public admires him for his broad-mindedness and accepts it as light relief from the real business of 'serious' music.

The musician of the underdog class has no time for such games, nor can he afford such exclusiveness. To him,

musicking is a matter of life and death, being concerned with the very stuff of identity and with resistance to imposed definitions. The games and rituals of upper-class music are of no interest to him, appearing frivolous and lacking in nourishment for his sense of who he is (the observant reader will no doubt notice that this amounts to a reversal of the conventional system of relative values, in which classical musicking is 'serious' and vernacular is 'light'). Nonetheless, if the upper-class audience care to dally with his music, he will go along with it up to a point, if only because there is a living to be made from it. They may patronize him, but they will pay him for his ability to bring a dash of hybrid vigour to their social rituals; this has been a feature of Afro-American musicking since the first slave musicians played for their masters' dancing. At the same time, being based in a position of cultural strength, he will, in Edwin Mason's words, 'invite the stranger group into the trap of reciprocity'[7] to which the masters can only respond with that mixture of fear and fascination which has characterized their side of the encounter from the beginning. This they can deal with only by that process which has been called minstrelization.

On the other hand, while the rituals of modern concert halls may be repugnant to the vernacular musician, that does not mean that he has no access to the musicians whose works are played there. The barrier between classical and vernacular music is opaque only when viewed from the point of view of the dominant group; when viewed from the other side it is often transparent, and to the vernacular musician and his listeners there are not two musics but only one. The musician is free to draw from either in whatever manner he pleases, uninhibited by notions of correctness or good form. To him Bach and Beethoven and other 'great composers' are not dead heroes but colleagues, ancestor figures even, who are alive in the present, and he will treat their work with the same respect and love as he treats that of his own more immediate colleagues — no less and certainly no more. The jazzmen's time-honoured practice of 'jazzing the classics', so unendurable in concert-hall circles, may in fact be seen as a gesture of love and empathy, and perhaps even of sympathy for a fellow-musician whose living music is being otherwise buried

beneath the rituals of the concert hall.

So, too, with those Caribbean steelbands who play Bach and Chaikovski with such panache and idiomatic command, having learned the pieces by ear (it cannot be said too often that to play a piece by ear you have to understand it) and who do so without engaging in any of the rituals of modern concert-hall life. In separating the music act from the middle-class ritual in which it has become interred, they have made the performance into a ritual through which at least a part of their identity can be celebrated, cutting out the other identities which the music has been made to serve in the dominant culture. It is, however, a fragile ritual, and easily co-opted by the dominant culture; indeed, to judge from the number of steelbands to be found today in British schools, the process of co-opting steelbands may be well under way.

I am inclined to believe that, through its very nature, upper-class culture is incapable of generating any genuine innovation, being dependent for renewal upon the activities of untold thousands of musicians working in the vernacular, which the upper-class musician then refines and elaborates according to his own criteria. Some of his activities will then be picked up by vernacular musicians, so that the cycle starts all over again. There is nothing wrong with this; certainly the compositions of some of the greatest masters of the classical culture — Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and especially Schubert are good examples — not only took from the vernacular (indeed, their whole art is rooted in it) but in turn fed back into it; what happens when a classical-music culture cuts itself off from the vernacular I shall discuss in a later chapter. There is of course nothing new under the sun; one of the amazing and, to me, heartening things about human music in general is the extraordinary variety of relationships that can be explored, affirmed and celebrated through what is really a quite narrow spectrum of sounds, and of types of sound-relationship, which come from quite a small number of kinds of source. What is sometimes seen as progress is just another permutation of the materials, so that an advance in one direction is matched by a retreat in another; neither our twentieth-century music, nor the industrial society of which it is a model, would seem to represent a more complete realization of human

potential than, say, those cultures of West Africa which were so brutally disrupted, first by the slave trade, and later by varieties of colonial domination which have not yet finished their destructive work. Nor does it seem likely that new musical technologies, however ingenious or expensive, have anything new to contribute to that celebration of human relationships which we have seen to be the real business of music; indeed, like those other modern-day technologies on which they are (consciously and deliberately) modelled, they look like contributing further to the impoverishment of those relationships as fewer and fewer people are empowered to take any active part in the musical process, while the rest are reduced to the role of lookers-on (or listeners-in) at the society of the spectacle thus brought into existence.

Some, especially those who are committed to the idea of human progress and its corollaries, the theoretical perfectability of human nature and the limitlessness of human achievement, may find these thoughts depressing, but I cannot find them anything less than inspiriting, since they leave the human adventure equally open to each succeeding generation, and allow us to raise ourselves up to enjoy the only life that any of us are ever going to live. In any case, to be everything at once, which is clearly impossible, is the only meaning that I can find in the idea of perfectability or limitlessness, and the attempt to be so will only reduce the individual to that 'unworkable monstrosity' of which Geertz speaks. It is surely one function of those patterns of thought and feeling imposed by culture to protect us from the impossible attempt.

What we do need, if we are to realize our human potential, is to avoid becoming so deeply committed to any one set of cultural attitudes or values that it is impossible to adapt should the situation demand it, and, secondly, and no less importantly, to recognize the existence of other and equally valid cultures, and the possibility of learning from them. These two conditions are in reality the same, and are less a matter of intellectual stance than of emotional openness. Just as individuals will learn only from those who can evoke a positive emotional response (a simple fact that both our educational and our penal systems overlook), so in the same way when the

characteristics of one cultural group diffuse into another, it is a sign of two things: first, that each of the groups involved is not so completely committed to its own cultural values that it cannot admit the possibility of change, and, secondly, that there is some emotional response from the members of one group for those of the other, a response which may be brought about by a genuine and conscious empathy, a not fully conscious compatability of myth (probably in reality the same thing), an admiration for some aspect of their lifestyle, or even sheer envy. In practice it seems that it is those groups who are at the bottom of the social scale, as a whole rather than just as a few individuals, that are most likely to preserve that uncommittedness, that willingness to look outwards (probably also a consequence of the life-or-death nature of their cultural concerns which we noted earlier) and who can recognize, often across quite wide social barriers, those common concerns which make possible genuine cultural fusion. We shall see that all of these factors were involved in the birth of the hybrid we call Afro-American music.

Other kinds of encounter have, of course, been immensely destructive, especially when delicately-balanced peasant and tribal communities have found themselves in the path of western industrial culture, which admits no empathy with any values other than its own. Professor Alain Daniélou describes the process from his own observations in the East:

> 'It must be recognized that in the industrial civilization customs and traditions tend to disappear to make place for the uniform life which one encounters on all continents. And the necessity to play — or to listen to — music tends to disappear, especially when music is associated with a way of living or social and religious rites which are no longer practised. In this case, how is the shadow-theatre to hold its own against the movies and the folk-dancer against rock-and-roll? Because, in most cases, the industrial civilization obliterates the ancient cultures and takes their place or it forces a hybridization which depersonalizes or deforms the survivors of ancient cultures by making them parodies for tourist consumption.'[8]

Musicking, as an embodiment of the subtle and delicate

structures of social relationships and identities, is naturally disrupted when those relationships are disrupted. Nonetheless, it is also possible to see ways in which it can also function as a tool in the rebuilding of societies, and this can happen in the most unlikely ways. We have to remind ourselves once more that cultures are not things that can be created or destroyed, but sets of learned predispositions to perceive the world in a particular way; it is not accurate, therefore, to speak of the 'death' of a culture, since, as long as the existence continues of those people among whom those predispositions are to be found, so will traces of their culture remain, even if transformed by the need to find new meaning in the world under changed or even disastrous circumstances. We have seen how this happened among the enslaved Africans in North America, and it can still be seen in many places in the contemporary world.

For example, the musicologist Isabel Aretz, writing in the UNESCO quarterly *Cultures*, reports the destruction of the 'authentic' musical culture of those South American peasants who have come to the cities in a search for a better life. For the most part these ex-peasants live crowded into improvised shanty towns on the outskirts of great cities such as Caracas, Rio de Janeiro, Mexico City and Lima, called variously *barrios*, *vecindades* and *favelas*, excluded from the municipal life of the cities, lacking in services such as electricity, paved roads, sewage, sometimes even water, often raided by police and officials, when their shelters are demolished and they themselves moved on. These barrios may constitute as much as half of the real population of a city, and one might expect them to be sinks of poverty, degradation, filth and crime; indeed they are tough and difficult places in which to survive (Oscar Lewis's books on the Sanchez family[9] give a dismaying picture of life there) but chaotic they are not. Peter Lloyd, who has studied the barrios of Lima and other South American cities, says: 'These experiences have given me an image of the city immigrant living in material poverty but enjoying a stable family life, law-abiding and rationally choosing future goals for himself and his family. This view contrasts starkly with the conventional image of the slum population.'[10] And again: 'Those outsiders who have lived and researched in such areas

often report strong feelings of corporate identity and well-developed local organizations.'[11] Lloyd points out that this phenomenon, which can be seen in practically all the great cities of what is known as the Third World, from Kano to Calcutta, Nairobi to Manila, is not an isolated matter, but 'stems from the economic development of the industrial nations, which draws ever remoter areas into its field of dependency.'[12] And because these urbanized peasants are being drawn into the industrialized world, albeit at the lowest level, it is inevitable that their culture will be changed drastically with the new range of urban experiences; of particular concern for our investigation is of course their musicking.

Dr Aretz says in *Cultures*:[13] 'they bring with them their own music, but they take on the way of life of their new surroundings, and as an important part of those surroundings they receive the message of the mass media, which usually has a harmful influence on their own cultural background, and, as far as music is concerned, whether "rock" or academic, may turn out to be incomprehensible to them.' She goes on:

> 'It should be a matter of great importance to us who have access to academic culture not to be instrumental in causing the diminution or loss of the culture of other groups of people who are not yet [*sic*] in a position to enjoy our culture . . . In addition to that it is of the greatest concern that those cultures should not be lost, because they represent the real musical reserves of the future, just as forests represent the reserve lungs of the towns . . . so it is important that we should strive to prevent any of the decline of true folk and native music . . . because . . . the music which our culture destines for them, that is to say commercial music, in addition to the fact that it is generally of very poor quality, is an expression of feelings and ways of life that do not correspond historically to the native or the man with a folklore tradition.'

Among the measures Dr Aretz proposes are not only such harmless activities as the collection, filing and studying of the ethnomusic but also its revival, recording and broadcasting, and the introduction of traditional music from nursery school

to university, as well as 'to diffuse music on records, well produced and accompanied by pleasing commentaries so that it can be used by the same mass media as now reproduce poor commercial music, and to do everything possible to have singers and musicians include such music in their repertoire or enable the best folk singers to have access to radio, television and live public performance.'

I quote at length from this article because it seems to me to contain a number of unexamined assumptions that are all too common concerning the nature of a culture and of cultural change, as well as a number of quite unwarranted assumptions about popular music. We cannot but agree that radio and TV, especially commercial, have little regard for the cultural development of their listeners and viewers so long as they deliver them in sufficient numbers to the advertisers. We cannot doubt either that Dr Aretz has observed the situation of these urbanized peasants at first hand, but her intepretation of what she sees and her prescription for remedying it (if remedy is needed other than alleviation of the social and economic situation as a whole) seems questionable. Her first assumption is that intervention by cultivated middle-class musicians will have any effect on the survival or otherwise of a way of musicking; but in fact, either it will or will not survive according to the extent to which it continues to embody the identity of those who practise it, and no number of well-produced recordings or radio broadcasts with attractive commentaries will make the slightest difference. The only people who will listen to these will be members of the same middle class, including quite possibly composers looking for new musical resources to exploit. Secondly, it is a mite paternalistic towards the 'natives' to assume that they do not know their own needs in this respect, and even more so to assume that middle-class musicians know those needs any better, and dangerous to assume that people who are capable of making the appallingly difficult transition from village to *barrio*, and of surviving in an extremely hostile environment, would not be able to understand the music of the city. And finally, it seems both insulting and exploitative to regard these 'true folk' musicians as a 'musical reserve' to be used presumably to inject fresh life into an exhausted classical

tradition, as Bartók used the music of Hungarian, and Stravinsky of Russian, peasants.

But above all, this musicologist would seem seriously to underestimate the creative power of these erstwhile peasants, the same people whose ancestors presumably created, without the assistance of middle-class musicians, the music which she is now trying to protect from their apparent ignorance and helplessness. We can take as axiomatic the idea that whenever a social group is managing to carve out for itself a new kind of life, however difficult (in fact, the more difficult the more likely it will be) as in these South American *barrios*, there will be new kinds of musicking taking place, which will take as its starting points both the old experience and the new. In those places, grossly materially deprived as they are, and lacking in all the services that should be provided by state and municipal governments, harassed by police and officials and faced by a constant daily struggle for survival, but at the same time unhampered by all the restrictions and inhibitions that inhere in either 'high culture' or in the old peasant culture, what is taking place is an outburst of creative activity that reduces the loss of the traditional ways of musicking to insignificance, if loss it really is; one may be equally sure that there will always be some musicians who, without bothering too much about the preservation of the culture, just continue to play and sing in the old manner. If that is speculation, we have a concrete example in the successive explosions of musicking which have issued from the appalling slums of Trench Town and Back O'Wall in Kingston, Jamaica, to become a powerful social and musical force across the world; each has been an amalgam of traditional Jamaican folk music and that commercial music, beamed in from America, which is so despised by the musicologists.

It must be repeated: if musicking is one way by which human beings order their experience, and explore and celebrate their sense of who they are, then what is to be treasured is not created objects, however splendid they may be, but the creative process itself. We can further see that no canons of correctness or quality laid down by members of a dominant or high-status culture are going to be of the slightest use to lower-class people in their task of self-

definition; only those whose musicking it is can decide what is of use to them and what is not. If the history of western music over the last two hundred years or so has anything to teach us, it is that the most vital new developments in the art have come from materially deprived people who have taken whatever lay to hand, without inhibition or second thought, and have made of it something new and expresive, and above all *useful* to them in their struggle for the most basic of human rights: the right to define for oneself who one is. That black Americans are not the only people in western society to have proved richly creative in this way can be seen, both from the variety of folk song which has not only survived but has thriven in European and American working-class societies as a weapon of resistance, and from the ways in which lower-class white people have taken the musicking of black people and made of it something of their own. But the fact remains: it is the musicking of the blacks which has been at the root of all the most potent developments in western musicking today. This in turn suggests that there is in that musicking something more than 'naturalness' or 'primitiveness', something that contributes to the collective experience of all people in industrial societies, which seems to fill what is otherwise a void in their lives.

NOTES

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