

## **Filming the transmission of musical knowledge: the *oral-aural-visual* communication process.**

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One of the common features related to most of the music belonging to traditional societies and cultures is based on the transmission of musical knowledge through orality rather than writing. Concerning the way of transmission of musical knowledge, Bruno Nettl suggested to add the term "aural" to that of "oral", focusing on auditory perception of musical phenomena to emphasize the process of transmission "from mouth to ear" (Nettl 1983). Usually, we deal with oral tradition when the musical knowledge is learned through repetition of melodic and/or rhythmic patterns. Although the imitative process of the apprentice is considered fundamental in the transmission of music, memory plays a major role in the processes of creation and transmission of the musical heritage. Since every musical performance is not an exact reproduction of an existing model, the memory acts as a reconstructive process that induces a process of *recreational* oral composition at each performance (Nettl 1983). Therefore, we deal with oral-aural tradition when practicing music is learned through imitation and performed by memory.

*Imitation* and *memorizing*, however, are processes that cannot be separated from the *observation*. The observation of musical practice implies first of all the use of visual perception, as well as acoustic, that creates a link between image and sound. Watching and listening are cognitive activities that are inseparable in the process of music enculturation. Frequently, interviewing traditional musicians, answering to the question «how did you learn to play?», the most frequent answer is «*looking* at the player». This kind of response shows the important role the visual information plays, on our perception of a music performance, at a cognitive level.

The musical knowledge transmitted by master to pupil is not composed only of repertoires, ie *what* you sing or play, but also *how* you sing or play, a combination of postures, body movements, gestures involved in music making. The visual perception of the music becomes a significant factor in the processes of interaction between teacher and student. The process of transmission of musical knowledge (including musical forms, vocal and instrumental repertoire, rules and techniques of musical practice and construction of the instruments) should therefore be redefined as *observation-imitation-memorizing*.

Considering the concept of oral-aural tradition expressed by Nettl to indicate the transmission "from

mouth to ear", we might consider the non-written music as music of *oral-aural-visual* tradition to emphasize the nature of the multisensory process of enculturation. The multisensorial relationship eye-ear highlights the importance of observation and complementary of vision and hearing in the transmission of musical knowledge.

The audiovisual documentation may be revealing of meaningful information relating to physical behavior relating to vocal and instrumental practice, the processes of interaction between producers and users of the musical event, or between musicians and dancers, or to "visualize" the process of enculturation in the traditional musical practices.

If we adopt as a theoretical framework the John Baily's definition of ethnomusicology as «the study of human beings as music makers and music users» (Baily 1992), it is evident the methodological importance of audiovisual communication in documenting the processes of enculturation in the traditional musical practices.

The film of ethnomusicological interest, in its various types - documentary film, research film or docu-fiction - is able to document the "sound space" (as a physical-acoustic space and as socio-cultural space) in which the musical communication takes place.

The camera is the only tool able to record the musical behavior of the filmed subjects in their cultural context and provides a source of data that can be the subject of a systematic analysis. A comparative analysis of excerpts of ethnomusicological films will help identify, in a cross-cultural perspective, those modes of non-verbal communication, factors associated with posture and gesture, which are crucial in the process of transmission of musical knowledge and heritage in traditional societies.

The project *Growing Into Music: Musical enculturation in oral traditions*, developed by the SOAS in London, looks at children learning and making music in six cultures of Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas, through the medium of video. The videos made by Lucy Durán are centered on two families of malinké griot belonging to the same lineage: the Kouyaté of Ganana (Mali) and Kouyaté of Niagassola (Guinea). In the video entitled *Dò farala kan* ("Something has been added") (2013), we observe the first lesson of *balafon* by the little Cheick Oumar Diabaté, trained by his father, the *jeli* Lassana Diabaté, while teaching him the song "Jawura". The father sits in front of the child to show the movement of the mallets. The child grabs the sticks while his father takes the tips of the

sticks and guides the movements on the xylophone keys, telling him to «look at bala's keys» and indicating the bars to hit.

The first stage of learning, therefore, seems to start from the observation of the movements of the hands that produce the sounds rather than from hearing. Lassana plays some melo-rhythmic patterns on his xylophone that the child has to repeat on his instrument until it is memorized properly. The motivation of the young apprentice plays a key role in learning music: it is interesting to note that the parent-teacher tries to capture the attention of the child-student, reprimands him with the threat of a rebuke for his inattention and motivates him with the promise of a prize in sweets.

In another scene, following the same procedure, another *balafon* player belonging to the Kouyaté family teaches to another child, Sekou (son of singer Djanguiné Kouyaté) the part that each hand has to play, in a polyrhythmic style (hemiola). This procedure needs the coordination of the arms: to perform the interlocking technique, the teacher plays both parts first, and then the individual parts, beginning with the left-hand pattern, while the student performs the right hand pattern, and then guides the movements of the mallets on the xylophone keys.

In the first documentary of the series *Masters of Balafon*, entitled *Funeral Festivities* (2001), Hugo Zemp shows a short sequence concerning the processes of learning the technique of the *balafon* among the Senufo of the Cote d'Ivoire. Again, the teacher does hold the mallets and, holding hands of the apprentice, guiding him to perform a melodic phrase on the xylophone. The teaching / learning process then passes through observation, imitation and memorization of the movements of the player's hands and arms.

In traditional societies, art and crafts are inseparable parts of music heritage. Apprenticeship involves not only learning instrumental technique but also construction technique of the instrument. In *Yiri kan: la voix du bois* (1989) by Issiaka Konate, the Burkinabe musician Mahama Konaté teaches his son Foko the construction and use of the *balafon*. The film is a docu-drama in which the protagonist, a "real" *balafonist* griot, plays the role of himself as an actor following a script. The narrative pretext chosen by the director to show the construction techniques of the *balafon* is the transmission of this traditional knowledge and practices from teacher/father to student/child. All the process of instrument making is shown: the cutting of the tree trunk to be carved to obtain the bars, their finishing and putting them in the oven (to lose moisture, as explained by the father to the son), the construction of the frame, the arrangement of the bars on the frame, the pitch of the bars using

another xylophone as a model (with "mother" tones that will serve to create the "daughters" tones), the emptying of dried calabashes as resonators and the application of a cocoon of spider on the hole to create the mirliton effect, the placing of calabashes below the bars, the arrangement and the lacing of the bars on the frame and the final test of the instrument.

In Burundi, the royal drums *ingoma* are played by male percussionists, called *batimbo*. The ensemble consists of 24 drums, arranged in a semicircle around the central drum *inkiranya* played by the soloist, who has the low drums *amashako* to his right, whose characteristic is to play a homorhythmic pattern, while on his left the high drums *ibishikizo* follows the rhythm imparted by the central drum.

The *ingoma* drums are the subject of the documentary *Umubugangoma. L'arbre qui fait parler les tambours* (1992) by Emilio Pacull. In this film, the boys, who are prohibited from using royal drums, learn the hand-to-hand technique and the rhythmic patterns on toys-instruments, small drums made with banana leaves and roots, under the guidance of the elders percussionists.

In the first scene of the documentary *Djembefola* by Laurent Chevallier (1991), the great *djembe* master Mamady Keita gives a lesson for *djembe* beginners at the school Tam Tam Mandingue in Brussels. The Guinean percussionist explains the technique to perform the three main tones of the *djembe*, using onomatopoeic sounds: *tan*, *tin*, *doum* (French: *claque*, *tone* and *basse*) that indicate the high, medium and low pitches. The teacher shows the students the exact point where the hand has to hit the drum's head: the three shots are obtained by striking the skin at the center (*basse*) or edge (*tone*) with hands, or giving a slap (*claque*), with the concave palm near the edge of the membrane.

In another scene of the film, which takes place in the village of Bangoura (Guinea), the camera takes another great *djembefola* Famoudou Konaté, while teaching to a child some *djembe* rhythmic patterns. The teacher says a rhythmic pattern, using as mnemonic nonsense syllables, which is the signal or "call" (*blo cage*) that marks the beginning and end of a tune. In the next sequence, Mamady Keita performs a rhythmic pattern on the *djembe*, inviting the child (his namesake) to play the same pattern on his drum looking at his hands. At the same time, the other *djembe* player, Famoudou Konaté, sitting next to the child, repeats the same pattern on his ear.

Another study case is represented by the typical musical instrument of Trinidad, the steel-drum, called also *pan*, considered the national instrument of the island. It is a metallophone that consists of

an oil bin whose rounded and pitched bottom is beaten with two mallets. It is a relatively "modern" instrument, although considered "traditional", since it was born at the end of World War II when some oil bins of US warships were abandoned on the island. The inhabitants of African origin reused them turning them into musical instruments. The steel-drums are placed in large ensemble (*steel bands*), which may include more than 100 musicians, divided into sections: *tenor pan* (or "ping-pong"), *double tenor*, *guitar pan*, *cello pan*, *tenor bass*, *bass pan*.

The repertoire consists mainly of *calypso* and *soca* (*soul-calypso*) tunes, and despite the complexity of the compositions and arrangements, there is no written score, but also in this case learning process occurs through oral-aural-visual transmission. Several rehearsals are necessary to percussionists to memorize their parts for the repertoire. The conductor entrusts the sheets to the section leaders and provides guidance on the correct interpretation of the tune.

The documentary *Pan in "A" Minor: Steel Bands in Trinidad* (1987) by Jean-Daniel Verba and Jacques Mréjen shows Amoco Renegades steel band during a rehearsal, in which the director relies on the score based on the arrangement of "*Pan in "A" Minor*", a *calypso* composed by Lord Kitchener. In one of the scenes of the film, the leader of the *tenor pans* section shows to a young apprentice the melo-rhythmic phrase she has to play on her *pan*. Here again, the young apprentice observes and plays her part trying to imitate the leader's one and to memorize it.

Another example of musical enculturation process centered on oral-aural-visual tradition, in which observation is crucial, is that of the *launeddas*, triple clarinet of Sardinia. The practice of *launeddas* was traditionally combined with the craft of shoemaking. The difficult playing technique and the structural complexity of the repertoires requires a specialization and hard training (the *launeddas* players are professionals or semi-professionals). The performance practice of *launeddas* is based on the circular breathing technique, called "*fiato continuo*", which consists to inhale through nose and exhale with mouth continuously.

The learning method of this technique is to blow into a straw immersed in a glass of water to produce bubbles without interruption. This method of learning was recorded in the documentary *La musica è quattro* (1993) by Rosali Schweizer, in which the teacher, the late *launeddas* master Aurelio Porcu, explains the "fiato continuo" technique to his young apprentice.

In the late 1990s, Barthélémy Fougea produced a series of eight ethnomusical docu-fiction titled *Kids, Music and Dance* (1998). In one of these films, *Rimpa Shiva, Princess of the Tablas* (1998), the director Patrick Glaize shows the *guru-sishya parampara* learning system: a thirteen years old girl (Rimpa Shiva Shankar), learns to play the *tabla* from his father and guru (Swapan Siva Shankar). Memorizing rhythmic patterns is obtained by a rhythmic solfege of mnemonic nonsense syllable (*bol*): the father/teacher recites the rhythmic formulas that the daughter/pupil repeats exactly on *tabla*. Here, again, the visual approach is important since the apprentice listens to the rhythmic formulas, and at the same time, observes the chironomic gesture of the master: The teacher, articulating the measurement of time or rhythmic cycle (*tala*) alternates strong and weak times respectively with the palm and the back of the hand, giving a space-time dimension at the sound.

In some rare images shot in the late 1960s, we can appreciate Ravi Shankar teaching to George Harrison the interpretation of a *raga* on the *sitar*. Even in these images, which represent the beginning of the "popularization" of Indian classical music and his main instrument, the *sitar*, the method of transmission of musical knowledge is made by the verbal communication of melodic formulas and their repetition on the instrument.

In the documentary *Ravi Shankar. Between Two Worlds* by Mark Kidel, the great Indian master of *sitar* tells about his past with his guru Ustad Alauddin Khan playing *sarod* in a rare film footage while teaching a *raga* to Ravi Shankar intent to play the *sitar*. In this system of intensive learning called *gurukula* (nowadays rarely practiced), the student spent many years in the house (*kula*) of the teacher (*guru*); this prolonged cohabitation allowed not only to follow individually the full-time student, but also to establish an enduring family relationship, so as to bring the disciple to regard the *guru* as an adoptive father ("Baba"). The musicians belong to a particular *gharana* (lit. "family"), a "school" in the sense of style, referring to a family tradition, which usually takes the name of the city in which it developed and which refers to the master founder of the school.

Nowadays, although the system of teaching-learning is not individual but collective and practiced in music schools, academies or ashrams, the transmission of musical knowledge occurs always through oral-aural-visual tradition. In a sequence of the documentary *Pandit Ravi Shankar* by Nicolas Klotz, is shown a rehearsal in Hemangana, the Ravi Shankar's ashram in Benares (Varanasi), in which a selected group of apprentices musicians can live for a short time, attending classes and practicing their instrument. In this scene, shot inside the ashram, Ravi, with his sister

Sipra Bose singing and a *tampura* player, teaches his students a *raga* (melodic pattern) and *tala* (rhythmic cycle). The melodic phrase is first sung and then played on the instruments (*sitar*, *sarod*, *santur*, *sarangi* and guitar), performed repeatedly until it is memorized, with the rhythmic support of a *tabla*. These *sounding images* make clear the primary role that occupies the vocal music in relation to instrumental music in the Indian aesthetics. The chant represents the model which should inspire every instrumentalist who has to express a *rasa* (feeling) using a *raga* (melodic pattern).

On the occasion of his last European concert, held at the Salle Pleyel in Paris on 1 September 2008, Ravi Shankar, with his daughter Anoushka, offered a lesson on Indian classical music, explaining to the audience the distinction between Hindustani music and Carnatic music, their scales (10 *thaat* and 72 *mela* or *melakarta*) and the concepts of *raga* and *tala*. The *lectio magistralis* was shot by Frédéric Le Clair in the documentary *Ravi Shankar: The Extraordinary Lesson* (2009). Ravi Shankar, with a support of a *tabla* player, shows the rhythmic cycle *Tintal tala* composed of 16 pulses with emphases on the 1st and the 5th pulse, while the hand turns on his back on the 9th and then pulse returns on his palm on the 13th pulse. In the next sequence, the Indian master shows the rhythmic cycle *Rupak tala* composed of 7 beats with emphasis on the 1st, 4th and 6th pulse (3 + 2 + 2), while the hand turns on back on the 1st pulse. Finally, the master sitarist states that today, unlike in the past, learning is much faster being facilitated by the widespread use of new technologies related to music recording.

Nowadays the transmission of traditional music takes place both through the forms of *primary orality* and *secondary orality*. The *primary orality* is that which occurs directly from teacher to student, on the basis of oral-aural-visual tradition, while the *secondary orality*, which currently has often accompanied or replaced the primary one, is the one that is reconstructed through cassettes, compact discs, video, digital devices and other media. The sound recordings and especially audiovisual media have a growing role as a vehicle of cultural transmission in contemporary society.

## Conclusions

Filming or videoing is necessary to document music making as performance, especially in those cases where it can "see" both textual and contextual aspects of music making, for which the literal description and musical semiography is insufficient in represent them as dynamic processes of musical action and interaction. Only filming music enable to catch in its completeness the "visual"

aspects of the musical experience, as the motor behavior of the musician and the interaction between teacher and student in the process of music enculturation.

The visual representation of music is crucial in ethnomusicological research, since it allows to give visibility to the "music makers" and "music users", where the sound recording reveals its inadequacy in representing the music as a *process* and not as a *product*. Filming music becomes an indispensable element to document the processes of transmission of musical knowledge in traditional societies, where the teaching-learning stands on *oral-aural-visual* tradition, through *observation, imitation* and *memorization*. Filming the process of transmission of musical knowledge will bring a decisive contribution to the advancement of ethnomusicological studies.