

FOLK MUSIC ATLAS IN CD-ROM:
THE APPLICATION OF MULTIMEDIA TECHNOLOGY TO THE
CONSERVATION AND DIFFUSION OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC

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The Flog Centre for Folk Traditions has been organising every year since 1979 the international festival "Musica dei Popoli" (Music of the People), the first and most important international festival of ethnic and folk music in Italy. Conceived to diffuse the knowledge of musical cultures of the world, the Festival has tried to voice the most distant people, thus anticipating times of more than a decade as to the "world music" phenomenon, inviting to participate hundreds of artists from every continent, chosen on the basis of their authenticity and respect of their own originate traditions and on their artistic value.

The Centre also promotes the "Rassegna del Film Etnomusicale" (Ethnomusicological Film Festival). The first edition goes back to 1983, promoted by the Maison des Cultures du Monde, CNRS and Musées de l'Homme in Paris, in collaboration with the Ateliers d'Etnomusicologie in Geneva. The festival proposes to offer a general vision of the recent documentary production supplemented with rare archives, dealing with traditional musics.

The activity of recording production began in 1996 with the publication of a record of West-African music ("Aïra Yo, La Danse des Jeunes Griots. La Famille Dembelé" Amiata Records) and continued till 1998 with the publication of an anthological CD about Italian Folk music ("Italie", Auvidis). The idea of realising a multi-media support about traditional music from all over the world developed from the meeting of many indicators.

On one side the increasing interest, by now generalised in the last years, for ethnic and world music, testified by

the large participation to the well attended ethnomusical festivals - both the concert and the film one - and the demands for intervention on didactic matters coming from many schools and professional institutes. All symptoms of changes in progress in the Italian society, due to continuous migratory flux, and also to a mentality, which is opening towards multiculture.

On the other side, the interest shown in this field from an independent recording label (Amiata Records) and from a company of multimedia products (SiLab), which have guessed the great potentiality of a sector market already giving good profits, after the "forerunner" experience of Peter Gabriel under the label "Real World".

The Flog Centre, for its part, is in possession of a rich sound and audio-visual archive, including audio and video recording of most of the concerts presented in Florence on occasion of the Festival "Musica dei Popoli", and videocassette copies of the films shown at the "Rassegna del Film Etnomusicale", as well as private collections of audio recordings carried out on the field by single researchers fruit of donations made since 1975.

Given the progressive deterioration of these materials and their scarce use determined by years of carelessness, helped by the total lack of funding, Flog decided in 1997 to realise a publication to document, in part at least, the extent and variety of music in the world, and their artistic and sociocultural value as well.

The project also had the double purpose of "rescue" through digitalization of magnetic tape-recording, and of autofinancing of our Mediateca (a Centre that collects and places video or sound documents at the public's disposal) through the marketing of the editorial product.

Hence the ambitious decision to realise a sort of musical journey or sound atlas, the "Folk Music Atlas", a series of 4 (or more) volumes each one dedicated to a continent;

thus the first volume was dedicated to Africa. The work was expected to go far from the traditional paper support (the book), using sound-tracks, video-clips, photographs, informative schedules about genres, styles, instruments and musical practices, and making use of ethnomusicological competencies provided by scientific consultants.

In this olistic perspective, the interactive model should be complementary and not substitutive, of the book, offering two teaching and learning tools - read the book and travel simultaneously through the CD ROM - to maximize learning possibilities.

The main question was about the tone to confer to the work, always keeping an eye to the target, the potential user of the object on the basis of its knowledge on the matter and its interests and aims. The primary object had to be the exploitation or increase of value of music as artist and cultural asset. Therefore the first purpose was to realise a means of knowledge, with didactic-instructive aims, useful for all the people who, by many ways and by many levels, showed interest in euro-folk and extra-european music, avoiding on one side approximations and generalisations, which could degenerate into an simple video-game, and on the other side, attention too much analytic and detailed on styles, genres, instruments, musical repertoires, which - besides requiring a great amount of work of years of studying and researching - could reveal useful just for a small élite of scholars and researchers in the field.

The second problem was the research of a possible method to classify African musical cultures. Notwithstanding the apparent unity and exterior compactness of African people's music, it offers itself to an in-depth examination by the researcher and the scholar in a large number of regional variations. A principle to adopt in "vertical" sense, on the basis of the nations, ethnic group, or geo-cultural area, or an "horizontal" approach

drawing a parallel among styles or repertoires or musical genres or musical instruments of the African populations?

Each one of these solutions had its limits. In fact, a distinction for each nation wouldn't reflect the ethno-cultural reality of the African continent (the political borders of the African states absolutely don't correspond to the African ethnical and cultural settlement, but they are the consequence of arbitrary partitions of European colonial powers). However, given the complex ethnical mosaic of the Black Continent, a thorough, detailed examination of musical African traditions specific for every single ethnic group, would make the work impossible and would give a too fragmentary vision of African music.

The utilisation of a classification system of music on the basis of function to which it was associated, turned out to be ended in failure. In fact, even though a great part of music results to be linked to specific activities, and is not performed in other occasions, an other part can be present in other circumstances.

On the other hand, the comparative process among genres, styles, repertoires, connected with various ethnic groups, would compromise the general vision. The corpus that the different kinds of music belong to, like artistic and cultural heritage, would be decontestualized, with the risk of overshadowing the community that gave rise to it and gave symbolic meanings to it.

The relationship between tradition and modernity was another problem to face. Cultures are dynamics, they are always changing to adapt theirself to new internal or external "in-puts". Tradition is in transition. So, the choice to deal exclusively with "ethnic" music, in the strict sense of the word, that music handed on from generations through the oral and practical tradition linked to rural societies and cultures, would provide with a partial, limited picture (short-sighted as well) of the African contemporary musical reality. Thus, it also

appeared necessary for a greater completeness, a look at the various forms of African pop music, born in a metropolitanmilieu from the cross-over with pop music and western rock.

The solution adopted to answer the various requirements was to create a didactic means which was quick, easy, pleasant, practical and which could allow the individual choice of personal, alternative, complementary ways, with a considerable number of links, which may facilitate the creation of a personal "route".

Thus, we have decided to create a display screen with a menu divided into 5 areas:

ETHNOHISTORY.

The knowledge of history of the African Continent is the necessary base to understand easier the cultural picture and consequently music. It is a short excursion into the historical events of the African continent with historical maps and poetic notes.

MUSIC OF THE AFRICAN PEOPLE.

In this section you can travel through the various musical traditions of the most important (from a numerical point of view) ethnic groups and cultures. This groups are combined according to geo-cultural areas. Each entry contains a selection of musical excerpts, an introductory text and other photographic and video materials.

At the same time, it has been tried to give a general vision of the African music, with an introduction divided into two parts (Northern Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa) according to a scheme based on a geographical distinction, classical by now, not completely arbitrary and conventional also from the ethno-antropologycal point of view.

VOCALITY.

MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS.

We have introduced the sections on "Vocality" and the one on "Musical Instruments" with some links to informative files about belonging ethnical groups to give an indirect feature or a comparative one among vocal styles and musical instruments belonging to various cultures.

MODERN AFRICAN MUSIC.

The last section , which conciliates the relation tradition-modernity, is dedicated to African pop music; the origin and development of hybrid musical forms, converged into the so called world music, born from the blending with the languages of pop music and western rock.

Conclusion

The choice of the multimedia support to document the large heritage of traditional music of the world, seems to be a useful and sometimes necessary choice, especially in the didactic-formativeworld.

Music cannot be described using *only* words, mediated by a paper support, but should be listened to and watched. A musical performance is a sound and visual event at the same time, being gestural expressiveness implied in musical production. The visual approach, acoustic as well, is indispensable to get to know , in more complete and detailed way, those musical phenomena belonging to oral tradition cultures, both Euro-folk and extra-European ones. Music-making is a human behaviour, a cultural event including, beside the sound production, also a complex whole of kinemic behaviours (gestural expressiveness, dance, mimic, and so on), of ritual or ritualised practices, of a natural habitat and a socio-cultural context in which it shows itself. Thus to make music is a phenomenon that implies a totality of textual (musical) and contextual (extra-musical) elements, which evidently cannot be caught by a magnetophone or by a pentagram or less by the written word.

Therefore the CD-ROM is , in my opinion, the informative and cognitive means, which thanks to its versatility, answers in the best way to the need of learning, reconciling it with the entertainment need: to learn having fun, taking part actively to the "game", building personal ways, according to personal interests. A didactic route made to one's own, polyfunctional and multidirectional.

A valid method not only to get to know traditional music, but also cultures, like those in Africa, in which music is the fundamental and founding part of society. Agglutinant element of community, necessary to do rites and feasts, but also essential part of the daily life, of its routine, its rhythms, which finally are the rhythms of life.

Finally, I guess it would be important to focus the role that Man plays to make survive culture identities in the progressive process of omologation as fruit of the globalization.

Undoubtly, the practice of live performance is a necessary condition to give a life to traditional forms and behaviours (otherwise it become as latin language, a death language because nobody use it). Their survivings or extinctions depends on transmission. In contemporary society communication is the primary role in all kinds of activities and technology can help to save a richness that belongs to our memory, the memory of all the human beings.