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## *On the tenors of the symphony of nature-culture*

ABSTRACT: The question of nature-culture and music is approached in the text from several perspectives as points of gravity and profiles, as the 'tenors' of considerations of the nature-culture relationship within the context of musical behaviours:

1) the *biological* tenor – culture as the simulation or imitation of nature (the dominant feature of the art of the Palaeolithic and the rituals of the Neolithic; derivatives in agrarian cultures); in this context, all musical behaviours, the kinetic, verbal, social and symbolic were centred around obtaining and celebrating crops – the results of purposeful activity, patient waiting and the benevolence of supernatural powers. The joy from a powerful hope in the survival of a community through abundant harvests seems to have been the source of the synergy (mutual stimulation) of all the components of socio-musical events, collective rituals and free individual expression.

2) the *social* tenor, where verbal-dance-musical behaviours (generally speaking – amusement) serve to 'hew off' and distinguish an individual within a group ('nature'). Thus the nature-culture relationship is translated or reflected in the interplay between the collective and the individual. The dance itself is a play between the ('natural') group action and the ('cultural') individualised performance. The oscillation between the action of a group and the display of an individual also occur in whirling dances of couples interspersed with individual sung ditties. The social tenor, the transition from collective nature to a culture that is also individual, also concerns the practising of song repertoire, and it is an important factor in understanding cultural change.

3) the *conscious-psychological* tenor, in which music and musical behaviour are conscious manifestations of culture within historical processes, without necessary references to nature. The fundamental question in this aspect of discussion is the relative extent to which culture is given or created. There is no doubt that nature is given to man, whilst culture needs time. Reflection on the link between music and the social environment leads to the conclusion that nature tightens, while culture loosens, music's bond with the situational-social context that is strictly ascribed to it.

4) the *structural* tenor of the musical work/behaviour, which highlights the microworld of nature-culture, particularly the oscillation of openness/change and closedness/constancy of musical works or behaviours. The nature-culture model can be referred to the logic of development or stylistic change in musical output itself.

Following that quartet of tenors, it is worth posing the question as to whether there exists a fifth, linking all the previous four, a 'cosmic', theological tenor in the symphony of nature-culture; in other words, whether there exists a 'school' of tenors.

KEYWORDS: music behaviour, culture, nature, dance, transition, ritual, culture change, stability, musical system, emotion, expression

'Music between nature and culture': in this constellation, one first pictures the art of sounds as a bridge connecting those two realities – nature and the results of human activity. In reference to musical notions, one might put forward the term 'symphonia', in its ancient understanding expressed by Clement of Alexandria as the harmony between heaven and earth,<sup>1</sup> since one inevitably considers these two elements in conjunction-symbiosis rather than in radical opposition. Nevertheless, these very notions – the pillars of that bridge or symphony – are products of the human mind. The distance between nature and culture derives from the observations and reflections of the Neolithic farmer, who sowed his ploughed patches of land and then, rejoicing, ritually danced and sang the praises of the harvest. In the opinion of Walter Wiora,<sup>2</sup> the musical cultures of Europe and Asia have common foundations in the way of life of the settled agrarian communities of the Neolithic. Rock art leads us even deeper into the history of nature-culture. Fleeting images of the acts and rituals performed by a group of dancers circling around a drummer, animal horns on their heads, simulations of hunting and successful catches, appear to attest an effort to capture the action in graphic form and to make manifest its aim. Perhaps already then, there was some notion that nature happened, whereas culture endured.

Following the example of rational thinking, I will approach the question of nature-culture and music from several perspectives (since it is difficult to break it down into fragments). I will treat these perspectives not as views from different observation towers, but as points of gravity and profiles, as the 'tenors' of considerations of the nature-culture relationship within the context of musical behaviours:

1) the *biological* tenor – culture as the simulation or imitation of nature (the dominant feature of the art of the Palaeolithic and the rituals of the Neolithic; derivatives in agrarian cultures);

2) the *social* tenor, where verbal-dance-musical behaviours (generally speaking – amusement) serve to 'hew off' and distinguish an individual within a group ('nature');

3) the *conscious-psychological* tenor, in which music and musical behaviour are conscious manifestations of culture within historical processes, without necessary references to nature;

4) the *structural* tenor of the musical work/behaviour, which highlights the microworld of nature-culture, particularly the oscillation of openness/change and closedness/constancy of musical works or behaviours.

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<sup>1</sup> Clementis Aleksandrini, *Protrepticus* [Exhortation to the Greeks], ed. Mirosław Mar-covich (Leiden, 1995).

<sup>2</sup> Walter Wiora, *Die vier Weltalter der Musik* (Cologne, 1988).

Ad 1) Walter Wiora emphasises that such key notions as tone, harmony and music took shape in the period of pre-Indo-European language. The Latin etymology of culture, meanwhile, leads us into gardens and tilled fields. After the image of the 'work' of nature, nothing should be wasted in the activity of man, but he should gather fruits and occupy himself with organising the community-society and leading it out of chaotic human assemblage. In this context, all musical behaviours, the kinetic, verbal, social and symbolic (in the terminology of Alan P. Merriam),<sup>3</sup> were centred around obtaining and celebrating crops – the results of purposeful activity, patient waiting and the benevolence of supernatural powers. The archaic joy (unimaginable today) from a powerful hope in the survival of a community through abundant harvests seems to have been the source of the synergy (mutual stimulation) of all the components of socio-musical events, collective rituals and free individual expression. Could it be that culture emerged from nature through the force of irresistible emotions?

The understanding of culture during the nineteenth century placed the emphasis on multiplicity and diversity (see the title of Oskar Kolberg's work: *Lud. Jego zwyczaję, sposób życia, mowa, podania, przysłowia, obrzędy, gusta, zabawy, pieśni, muzyka i tańce* [Ordinary folk. Their customs, way of life, speech, tales, proverbs, rites, sorcery, amusements, songs, music and dances]), on cultural 'seedlings', growth, refinement, development. Reflection on culture was conditioned by the legacy of the cultivation of the biblical vine, but also by the functioning of the whole agrarian world. From the end of the nineteenth century and during the twentieth century, ethnographers and anthropologists devoted more attention to non-European, tight-knit primary ('primitive') societies, and the interpretation of culture mined deeper principles, which concerned in particular the standardising and regulating of social life. In the twentieth century, culture was understood not so much collectively, as the fruit of various fields of human activity, but more as the selection and restriction of the potential of nature, as a mechanism guiding man's life. The patent shift in reflection on culture seems to have resulted also from the expansion of technology, an engineering approach to the world, and the retreat of 'naturalistic' agriculture based on the cycles of vegetation and the observation of nature.

However, the first and most important tenor of culture will remain an intellectual intimacy with nature, its figurative duplication, cultivation and moulding, establishing a distance in respect to nature, sidelining it, and also a possible aversion or disdain as a developmental conundrum. Transferred to the history of music, we hear this tenor in the oscillation of creative and natural tendencies, immediate human emotions and expression, and especially

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<sup>3</sup> Alan P. Merriam, *Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, 1964).

pastoral-rustic-vital motifs; on the broader social plan, meanwhile, we see this tenor in the ubiquitous need for acoustic-kinetic recreation.

If we attempt to grasp, in a single casting of an 'eye-ear', the musical cultures of the Far East, but also of Central Asia, then the status of nature in the world of representations or musical forms is fundamental. It derives, among other things, from the nearness between the composer-performer and the listeners. Figures of nature in music (for instance, the mimicking of the sound of horses hooves in Mongolian epics with the accompaniment of the morinchur, the soundscapes produced on oriental zithers or the realisation of ancestors' voices in playing on the bowed one-string pikolute among the Siberian Nanays along the River Amur) are a thread of understanding between the performer and his audience, a symbolic circle common to the particular environment in which the continuity of local (traditional) culture is reborn.

Reference to nature in traditional cultures is not so much an illustration of the oldest aesthetics, the mimicking of nature, as an example of synaesthetic activity. For instance, just by looking at birds, forest, trees, sun, flowers, stones, sky and clouds, Kurpian singers were directly inspired to perform songs referring in some way to the looked-upon phenomena or objects.<sup>4</sup> The poetic symbols that take shape in the various scenarios of those 'woodland' songs derive from a melting-pot of visual-acoustic-olfactory-verbal-melodic impressions; they are a compound of recollections and emotions capable or inducive of the repeating of musical realisations. In traditional terminology, this was not even 'song', which was associated rather with an activity within the chamber, but rather *olekanie*, or sung calls in the open space of the forest. Only man's dwindling intimacy with nature began to spell the end of these wonderful artistic 'packages'.

Ad 2) Let us turn now to the second, *social*, tenor of the discussions on nature-culture which engulf and permeate music. The observation (into the twenty-first century) of the dances of tribes in Namibia makes one think that the nature-culture relationship is translated or reflected in the interplay between the collective and the individual. In the course of the cultural event that dance most certainly represents, individual dancers take it in turns to move from the circle into the middle, in order to imitate, in a individual way, to the clapping of the other dancers or some other accompaniment, a bird taking flight. The element of 'nature' would refer to the open collective (every member of the tribe may join in), whilst the 'cultural' impulse would relate to the individual display. The dance itself is a play between the ('natural') group

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<sup>4</sup> Piotr Dahlig, 'Stanisław Brzozowy (1901–1983) jako klasyk wśród śpiewaków ludowych' [Stanisław Brzozowy (1901–1983) as a Classic among folk singers], *Przegląd Muzykologiczny* 3 (Warsaw, 2003), 5–22.

action and the ('cultural') individualised performance, and so dance would be a sort of 'second order' cultural event.

The oscillation between the action of a group and the display of an individual also occurs in cultural realities closer to home, e.g. in whirling dances of couples interspersed with individual sung ditties. The unwritten (and now historical) obligation in Mazovia of performing a solo ditty in front of a 'music', that is, a group of instrumentalists, attested the efficacy of enculturation (i.e. induction into the culture through learned musical behaviours), reiterated the feeling of village unity and renewed a relatively controlled 'immersion' in collective relations (these were observed in Podhale by Karol Szymanowski and in harvest festivals in western Mazovia and Dobrinland by Fryderyk Chopin).

The social tenor, the transition from collective nature to a culture that is also individual, also concerns the practising of song repertoire, and it is an important factor in understanding cultural change. Ethnomusicologists with experience in the field of Slavic musical cultures speak of the 'lyricisation', or personalisation, of song. The old collective ritual song characterised by the considerable emotional intensity of unison-heterophonic group singing was gradually supplemented by the less intense, individual expression typical of lyrical song. According to research carried out by Tamara Varfolomeyeva,<sup>5</sup> the lyrical element appears more often in the family song system of western Belarus than in eastern and northern parts of that country. The wedding repertoire also includes songs with melodies different to the old melodic formulas. From the Polish point of view, this soloistic trend would be the result of the action of western currents, including that of the Polish (Mazovian) yeoman culture, in which solo performance played an important role and the percentage of 'universal' songs, not belonging strictly to a particular rite, made up perhaps as much as half the entire folk repertoire.

Ad 3) Objective changes in musical cultures, reflection on passing, time and history, and finally the very nature-culture distinction and evaluations of the status of the two elements, allow us to speak of a further tenor of discussion: the *conscious-psychological*.

The fundamental question in this aspect of discussion is the relative extent to which culture is given or created. There is no doubt that nature is given to man, whilst culture needs time. Reflection on the link between music and the social environment leads to the conclusion that nature tightens, while culture loosens, music's bond with the situational-social context that is

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<sup>5</sup> Tamara Varfolomeyeva, 'The song systems of Belarusian rituals of the family cycle', in *Traditional musical cultures in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. Piotr Dahlig (Warsaw, 2009), 49–66.

strictly ascribed to it. Let us note how the notion of music has evolved in traditional peasant communities. 'Music' was amusement, play, a social and dance situation, a performance apparatus of a group of instrumentalists. For traditional, folk environments, music as a world of acoustic beauty and something only to be listened to is most probably a trend of recent centuries, although, as Jerzy Bartmiński stresses in the preface to *Lubelskie* [The Lublin region] in the series *Polska pieśń i muzyka ludowa* [Polish folk music and song] (forthcoming), there is a perceptible need among folk singers for a sort of acoustically received beauty and order. The high level of music's natural integration with the whole situational-environmental-social context evolved in the direction of a split between performance and reception, an increase in the distance between expression and impression. Of pivotal significance in this distance, this lengthy 'cultural' process, was the appearance of stages and the theatricalisation of rituals, including primitive spectacle-like 'productions' – Christmas and Shrovetide customs.

Belarusian ethnomusicologists are of the opinion that, in the distant past, the systems of annual rituals (dictated by vegetation, nature) and family rituals (conditioned by the cycle of human life) formed an integral whole: wooing took place in the spring, weddings immediately after the harvest, and death was linked to winter. The fact that death and birth do not, however, 'choose their hour' contributed to a split between the two systems. A within-system seed of change in the family cycle, meanwhile, was a lyrical moment in songs addressed individually, and with tenderness, to a woman in childbed; this lyric presaged the personalisation of folklore – a pivot of cultural change.<sup>6</sup>

Commenting on the changeable character of folk songs, the first Polish folklorists, such as Łukasz Gołębiowski,<sup>7</sup> referred to natural, atmospheric-climatic phenomena: non-ritual songs were drifting 'clouds', ritual songs like fruits of the earth. A less poetic comparison may be taken from the chemical laboratory: a highly concentrated solution and its vapours. Thorough integration also concerns the domain of performance. Musical behaviours – singing, playing, dancing, gestures – are connected vessels in a natural, 'authentic' state, and subsequently, as a result of historical-cultural processes, they become diversified and specialised. From these modes of thinking, it emerges that the natural state is not simple, but seems to be a complex embryo. The development of culture does not automatically mean increasing complexity, but also involves the disintegration of an original unity. The 'natural' music of

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Łukasz Gołębiowski, *Gry i zabawy różnych stanów w kraju całym, lub niektórych tylko prowincjach* [The games and amusements of different estates throughout the country or in only some provinces] (Warsaw, 1831; Warsaw, 1983), 242.

social or isolated environments generally succumbs to disintegration under the influence of both internal and external changes.

The freeing (itself) of music from its social foundation may be understood as an effect of culture. This attachment/non-attachment of song to a specific social-ritual situation, to an age group or to ritual roles is common to the reflections of both Slavic-orientated ethnomusicologists<sup>8</sup> and German musicologists<sup>9</sup>. The latter, however, do not look beyond the direct functionality of popular music. The music 'of nature' is to a certain extent only mass, 'trivial' music. The music of 'culture' is created by trained composers. The lineage of such a distinction and valuation lies in the sixteenth-century musical treatises of Sebastian Virdung and Martin Agricola, who, for example, treated folk instruments, close to nature, as inferior to instruments linked to musical art, since the sounds of the latter were written into tablatures – the 'instruments' of the development of musical knowledge. The instruments 'of nature', mastered solely through listening and memory, supposedly led a merely vegetative life, and in scholarly interpretations they functioned as forerunners of professional instruments. This valuation was informed by the notion of music as a skill or craft.

Aesthetic reflection, or matters related to nature, as the foundations of a musical system in modern times, from the Renaissance onwards, was to a large extent the domain of belief-religious culture. Over the course of music history and its interpretation, the category of historicity comes to the fore, just as the problem of cultural change becomes music's second nature among music anthropologists and ethnomusicologists. For the eminent Belarusian instrumentologist Inna Nazina, music (instrumental, in the broad sense) is a synthesis of experience of 'primary' nature (i.e. the natural environment) with experience of culture.<sup>10</sup> Nazina regards the Austrian ethnomusicologist Wolfgang Suppan's view of historicity 'as twofold historicity: natural plus cultural' as being particularly close to Slavic experiences.

Ad 4) Finally, the nature-culture model can be referred to the logic of development or stylistic change in musical output itself. If we suspend the tendency to evaluate each of the elements separately, then music history – particularly that of recent centuries – may be considered as the changeability of the nature-culture relationship. A musical system, an evident product of culture, arises with the intention of self-sufficiency, typical of natural states. The gradual exhaustion of the system, resulting from the inherent non-finality or

<sup>8</sup> Zinaida Mozheyko, 'The Belarusian system of annual songs in the world of temporal "cyclisation"', in *Traditional musical cultures in Central-Eastern Europe*, ed. Piotr Dahlig (Warsaw, 2009), 29–48.

<sup>9</sup> Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Henrich Eggebrecht, *Was ist Musik?* (Heinrichshofen, 1985).

<sup>10</sup> Inna Nazina, 'On early forms of traditional instrumental music among the people of Belarus', in *Traditional musical cultures*, (see footnote 8), 13–28.

imperfection of human activity or perhaps from superior – as Merriam supposed – supernatural law, sharpens observation of the outside world. The system needs to be boosted by new inspirations from culture or nature, by internal or external impulses. The ideological-stylistic pairs of classical-Romantic and neoclassical-folkloric (naturalistic) arise from a dual, or even split, view of the world: the stable ‘cultural’ and the dynamic ‘natural’. The quotation marks derive from the fact that the stable versus dynamic dichotomy has been variously understood in different social environments. In peasant environments of the nineteenth century, it was the absence of change, stability, that was natural, a divine commandment, as is attested, for example, by Kolberg’s dialogue with a violinist from Kujawy,<sup>11</sup> in which the ethnographer vainly urged the musician to end a melody on the tonic instead of suspending it constantly on the dominant. The enduring space of reference for musical phenomena in traditional folk environments was the constancy of nature (the guarantee of a harvest) and the stability of family ties.

However, social environments that were able to devote more time to discovering the capacities of the mind were closer to the configuration stability=culture and change=nature. In music with artistic pretensions, stylistic change/renewal is generated not only by the genius and inventions of creative artists, but also by the forces of nature. The emergence of opera was also a turn in the direction of spectacle as a seed of culture, towards the ‘nature’ of myths, with all its available expressions. The discovery of dance for the construction of musical form (the baroque suite) and the penetration of national peculiarities for musical output took place against the background of the natural exhaustion of the earlier style, and it then constituted an equally natural reflex for the creation of ‘new worlds’ in music.

The question of the stylisation of folklore or the construction of compositional identity via recourse to primary cultural resources is often discussed by older-generation musicologists in terms of ‘natural music’ and ‘cultural music’. Henryk Opieński treats Chopin’s mazurkas as a manifestation of ‘cultural music’. However, he does not pass judgment on the transition between nature and culture or compare common planes with mountain peaks for the select few. He understands these miniatures as ‘truly folk’ music. In this way, he renews the notion of ‘folk’ as integrally national, a view which perdured into the first decades of the nineteenth century, and he returns to regarding society as an organic (‘natural’), and not conventional, relative (‘cultural’), community, as is easy to understand given that it occurred on the eve of the celebration of the centenary of the composer’s birth and at a time when nationalist-centrist ideologies were gaining in vitality.

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<sup>11</sup> Oskar Kolberg, *Kujawy* (Warsaw, 1867), 9; re-edn as vol. 3 in *Dzieła Wszystkie Oskara Kolberga* (Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań and Wrocław, 1962), 9.



Chopin himself was closer to efforts to 'disentangle the truth' from the folk model – an activity more appropriate for an ancient thinker than for the realisation of an aesthetic programme, including Cyprian Kamil Norwid's raising of the popular to the heights of humankind itself (with the possible intermediate, national, stage in this Sisyphean hoisting).

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Following that quartet of tenors, it is worth posing the question as to whether there exists a fifth, linking all the previous four, a 'cosmic', theological tenor in the symphony of nature-culture; in other words, whether there exists a 'school' of tenors. The great texts and religions of the world stress the path to a state which is most generally speaking a result of purposeful human activity and also derives from an innate chance to develop, from omnipresence and omnipotence, from a highest (deepest) being. Man's exploiting of his own natural potential is an imperative, regardless of the degree to which his behaviour is determined in the light of texts, faith or beliefs.

However, nature is an essential space of reference for all forms of growth/development or 'conversion'. The young Flathead Indian<sup>12</sup> would be left alone on the prairie once in his life not so much to practise 'extreme sports' as to discover his power and also the individual song which belonged to his personality alone, which was to constitute, on his assumed return to the tribal group, his mark of identity. The fathers of the wilderness went off into the 'back of beyond' in order to experience visions and sing psalms. Slavic religious studies and historical sources emphasise the significance of invocations to deities in ritual-musical actions. Ritual, wedding songs refer to a culture's primary gods. Somewhat less exalted lyrical songs, meanwhile, are imbued with symbols taken from the world of nature. Kolberg's documentation from the nineteenth century was still capturing invocations with refrain to the goddess of Order [*Lady*]. *Ładkanie* as a pre-chant is a common term among folk singers of the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands, can be a determinant of generational-cultural change ('older women *ładkają*, younger women sing', as they say near Janów Lubelski), and also appears to be a source of aesthetic notions (order as a distinct beginning and end, continuity and sufficient differentiation of a musical utterance). The above-mentioned *olekanie*, another name for the pre-form of song ('wordsing') on the north-eastern, Slavic-Baltic trail, conceals, as do the spring *łałymki* on the Polish-Belarusian-Lithuanian borderlands, traces of extinct cults and names of deities. Christianity created new addressees of songs, e.g. in a song accompanying the weaving of wedding

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<sup>12</sup> Alan P. Merriam, *Ethnomusicology of the Flathead Indians* (Chicago, 1967).

garlands in the Lublin region, 'Zawitaj Boże z nieba, / bo nam Cię dziś potrzeba' [Come, O God from heaven, / for we need you today].

In the opinion of Inna Nazina, a natural incubator of the world of music is hunting and the imitation of the voices of birds and animals in order to enter into contact or 'dialogue' with them, including a sort of 'embodiment', and then... to kill them.<sup>13</sup> A mutual 'chasing' between man and God has also lain at the heart of an intellectual 'hunting' – of mysticism. Musical behaviours that are fundamental to human experience and survival (calling and signalling) subsequently began to function as independent expressions in herding, becoming a seed of musical contrast – in the juxtaposition of a long sung call and the melorecitational enumerating of the names of animals.<sup>14</sup> These rudiments of musical form are mentioned by Jan Długosz, who writes that a watchman first emitted a voice (*vox*), to indicate that he was alert, and then launched into his song (*cantus*).<sup>15</sup> Traces of this interweaving have been preserved both in herdsmen's songs and in Advent calling on the *ligawka*.<sup>16</sup>

It would certainly not harm human thinking to assume that God trains 'tenors', teaches mental order and fulfils ultimate human desires. Music in this 'school' not so much *is*, finds itself between nature-foundations and culture-edifice, as *becomes*, derives, is born, emerges, emanates from the symphony or symbiosis of 'nature-culture'. One could certainly find composers willing to assert (if musicologists organised such a panel on earth and in the heavens) that music is simply from God the Deviser and Executor of the nature-culture programme. Even if we rid ourselves of this sort of (let's assume) illusion and lower our cognitive horizons, then is it not out of the hope for a better, superior, more direct 'enlightenment'?

*Translated by John Comber*

<sup>13</sup> Nazina, 'On early forms'.

<sup>14</sup> Ludwik Bielawski, *Rytmika pieśni ludowej* [The rhythms of folk song] (Kraków, 1970), 168–172.

<sup>15</sup> Czesław Hernas, *Hejnały polskie* [Polish bugle calls] (Wrocław, 1961).

<sup>16</sup> Piotr Dahlig, *Muzyka Adwentu. Tradycja gry na mazowiecko-podlaskiej ligawce* [The Music of Advent. The tradition of playing on the Mazovia–Podlachia *ligawka*] (Warsaw, 2003).