

Joseph Jordania (2011). *Polyphonic regions of the world*. In: "Why do People Sing? Music in Human Evolution", pp. 19-37. The publishing program Logos.

World Distribution of Vocal Polyphony

As soon as ethnomusicologists learnt about different polyphonic traditions from different parts of the world, they were puzzled by the mosaic distribution of traditions in polyphonic singing. Some regions of the world are mostly monophonic, while others are mostly polyphonic, and in some regions monophony is dominating while there are isolated islands of polyphonic singing.

Despite the strong interest of ethnomusicologists towards the concept of polyphony, and particularly towards the origins of polyphony, there are surprisingly few works where an interested person can find the information about the world distribution of vocal polyphony. Marius Schneider's book "The History of Polyphony" (1934-1935, second edition in 1969) and two books by the author of this book (1989, 2006) are in fact the only works that try to represent all the known traditions of vocal polyphony of the world.

I will now discuss the distribution of vocal polyphony on the different continents. In this survey I decided not to have notated examples as the book is aimed to the general educated reader as much as it is to professional musicians and musicologists. If you want to find notated examples of polyphony from different cultures, you can see them in my book 'Who Asked the First Question: the Origins of Human Choral Singing, Intelligence, Language and Speech' (2006), and if you want not only to see the notated examples, but to hear recorded examples from different cultures as well, you can see my forthcoming book 'Choral Singing in Human Culture and Evolution.'

The most polyphonic regions of the world are sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, Melanesia and Polynesia. Asia and the Americas are mostly monophonic, although they contain extremely interesting isolated polyphonic traditions as well. To view the general picture of the distribution of polyphony in the world, you can see the maps provided in the forthcoming book 'Choral Singing in Human Culture and Evolution.'

Africa

In popular belief, Africa is arguably the most musical continent of our planet. This impression is hardly an exaggeration, as Africa does have uniquely vibrant local musical traditions. Many genres of popular music, including blues and rock music, stemmed out from African roots.

Musically Africa can be divided into three different zones: North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the Sahara desert. They are very different in regards of the tradition of vocal polyphony.

North Africa is one of the most monophonic regions of the world. Solo singing, particularly professional singing, with the accompaniment of virtuoso instruments (often ensembles of instruments), is widely spread. Some minor elements of polyphony are found among Bedouins, and also in Egypt and Oman.

Sub-Saharan Africa is a complete contrast to North Africa. If North Africa is one of the most monophonic regions of the world, Sub-Saharan Africa is the largest and the most active region of distribution of vocal polyphony in the world. You can hardly find a tribe or a society in sub-Saharan Africa which does not have live traditions of group polyphonic singing. Rhythm and dance are so important in African culture that according to the belief of some African traditional musicians, if you can not dance to it, it is not music. Performance practice in most sub-Saharan African societies is also peculiar: there is no division of the society on 'listeners' and 'performers,' as all the members of society are actively involved in the performance. Even during the paid concerts listeners join the performers with singing, clapping and dancing. Going to a music performance is a different experience for native Africans in Africa than for most Europeans in Western Europe. As Simha Arom remarked, in Africa 'People do not go to "listen music", they make music together' (Arom, 1991:15). Alan Merriam wrote that in Africa the 'Distinction between the artist and his audience are not so sharply drawn as in our own culture. In some parts of Africa the cultural expectation involves almost everyone as potentially equal in musical ability' (Merriam, 1962:129). You may have had somewhat similar experience if you have ever been to an African-American church in the USA.

Another important feature of African traditional singing is a very close connection between singing and language. Sub-Saharan African languages are tonal like Chinese, Vietnamese and many Native American languages. This means that the change of pitch in speech changes the meaning of the words. Because of this reason, the most widespread polyphonic type in Africa is parallel polyphony, where all the parts are moving in the same direction.

Discussing the distribution of vocal polyphony in sub-Saharan Africa, we will follow the division of Sub-Saharan Africa into east, central, south, and west Africa.

In **East Africa** polyphony is mostly based on parallel movements of melodic lines. The Maasai tribe from Kenya and Tanzania is a bit unusual for Africa as they use drone polyphony. The Wagogo tribe in Tanzania has a unique singing style consisting of unusual scales, the mixture of parallel polyphony and wide use of the yodeling technique. Their polyphony also widely uses the mixture of several compositional techniques of polyphony, resulting in rich contrapuntal polyphony. Polyphony among the Dorze tribe from Ethiopia reaches six different parts. Regarding contemporary development of choral singing, we can mention here that East Africa

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adopted a European choral singing style earlier than most of the other regions of Africa, and that blend of European choral music, African-American gospel, and tradition is thriving here.

Central African singing style is different primarily because of the unique musical traditions of the Pygmies. Pygmy polyphony is one of the most complex polyphonic traditions in the world. Yodeling technique is the most characteristic feature of Pygmy polyphony. Pygmy songs often do not have words, and as a result, melodies are moving more freely. Polyphony is based on the principles of ostinato and contrapuntal polyphony, where each singer sings a short repetitive phrase over and over again. There are no professional musicians among Pygmies. Instead, all of them are expected to perform traditional polyphonic songs. Their musicality and ability to sing naturally in parts is quite astounding. 'When two or three Pygmies are gathered together, they always sing polyphonically; I have never heard Pygmy choral singing in unison,' wrote an expert of Pygmy music Gilbert Rouget in 1959. Polyphony up to seven and eight parts had been documented among Pygmies. Even among the black Africans, whose outstanding musicality and rhythmic sense has been highly revered by Europeans, Pygmies are considered to be the most skillful and talented musicians. According to Lomax, 'Even today Congo Pygmies are regarded by their Negro neighbors as master entertainers who can outperform them on their own drums and in their own dances' (1968:18). Interestingly, borrowings by the Pygmies from the Bantu neighbors' musical cultures were those of different musical instruments. As for the vocal style, Pygmies had a tremendous impact on the singing styles of the whole of Central Africa. Central Africa, apart from Pygmies, houses plenty of Bantu peoples, who also have vocal polyphony, based on parallel polyphony, very much like in East Africa.

If the music styles of Central Africa are very much affected by Pygmy vocal polyphonic traditions, singing styles of **South Africa** will have some unique features due to the Bushmen's singing traditions. Bushmen and Hottentots are the aborigines of this region, and they have lived in Southern Africa for many thousands of years. About one thousand years ago, Bantu-speaking peoples came to this region from the north and pushed indigenous Bushmen and Hottentot populations into the deserts. Today there are virtually no Hottentots left, but there still are some groups of Bushmen, also known as San People. They are widely known for their unusual language, which uses plenty of specific click sounds. Bushmen have polyphonic singing which has very interesting parallels with the Pygmy polyphonic style. For example, the wide use of the yodel technique and the use of polyrhythm based on the rhythm of 'swing', consisting of combinations of two and three beats, is common both for Pygmy and Bushmen polyphony. Unlike Pygmies, Bushmen sometimes use polyphony based on canonic repetition of the main melody. Among the Bantu speaking peoples of South Africa (for example, among Zulus) the main type of polyphony is based on parallel movements of the voices, as it is in most of sub-Saharan Africa.

In **West Africa** there are two very distinct ecological regions and musical styles. The first region is close to the Atlantic Ocean and is covered with forests. These peoples who live in the coastal forest regions generally have more polyphonic traditions which are based on the similar pan-African principle of parallel polyphony. The second region is more distant from the ocean and represents arid savanna and

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semi-desert. West Africans living in this region have close cultural, religious and commercial contacts with the peoples of North Africa and Sahara. Because of these links there are plenty of professional musicians and monophonic singing traditions in the savannah regions of Western Africa (influence from North Africa). Also, there is a tradition of drone polyphony, unusual for most of sub-Saharan Africa (apparently influenced by influence from the Tuareg tribes of the Sahara desert).

The island **Madagascar** is not a part of sub-Saharan Africa. Although it is geographically close to Africa, musically (and culturally) Madagascar has strong connections with the Austronesian world of South East Asia and the Arabic countries. The Sub-Saharan element was possibly the latest to arrive to Madagascar. Madagascar vocal polyphonic traditions show links to African and Oceanic singing traditions.

The **Sahara** desert is usually considered a buffer zone between the monophonic North Africa and the polyphonic sub-Saharan Africa. However, because of its rich traditions of polyphony it must be discussed separately. I suggest that the Saharan polyphonic traditions belong to the European (particularly Mediterranean) musical family. This is particularly evident from the wide use of drone polyphony. This is hardly surprising, for the indigenous peoples of North Africa, Berbers and Tuaregs, belonged to European type of population and culture. After the advance of Arabian populations in the 7th century, some indigenous peoples were assimilated, and others moved into the Sahara desert. That's why the musical style in North Africa is so close to the Middle Eastern musical traditions with the developed traditions of professional music, virtuoso instrumental playing, and richly melismatic monophonic singing style. The Aborigines of North Africa, Tuaregs, who moved deeper into the desert regions, preserved their polyphonic traditions much better. Tuareg singing traditions also influenced the musical style of the peoples of West Africa. Older Tuareg traditions are better preserved among Tuareg women. Although Tuaregs are officially Moslems, old animistic religion is clearly visible in their religious beliefs, and an unusually high status of unveiled women (among Tuaregs, the men are veiled), their freedom of behaviour and social rights is unique among Moslem cultures.

So, to conclude, we can say that the sub-Saharan Africa and Sahara regions together are the biggest and most active regions of vocal polyphonic singing in the world. For celebrations and other musical activities in an African traditional society it is usual to have all the participating members of society at the occasion singing, dancing and clapping. Music still plays a crucial part in everyday life in Africa. It was not accidental that the brilliant study on human musicality, written by British ethnomusicologist John Blacking, was mostly written from the perspective of sub-Saharan African musical traditions.

Europe

Although contemporary ethnomusicology was started by European scholars, most of the European polyphonic traditions came to the knowledge of European ethnomusicologists much later than the polyphonic traditions of the faraway regions of the world. This was largely due to the attitude of European ethnomusicologists towards the study of traditional music: it was believed that 'proper' traditional music can only be found in non-European societies. Because of this, for example, European scholars learned about African and Polynesian polyphony much earlier than about the polyphony of northern Greeks or southern Albanians.

Unlike Africa, where the distribution of polyphonic traditions is represented as one unbroken geographic region, most of the European traditions of vocal polyphony represent certain isolated 'islands', scattered all across the Europe.

A very important factor that must be taken into account in Europe is the influence of professional choral singing. As a result of the strong influence of European professional music, the original character of many European local polyphonic traditions has been strongly affected. Ethnomusicologists often mention the existence of 'old' and 'new' styles in the polyphony of European countries. The most important stylistic elements of the 'old' polyphonic style are the presence of a drone and very dissonant combinations of the sounds (internationally known from the Bulgarian or Georgian singing styles). 'Old' European polyphonic style is found in mountain ranges, continent fringes, forests, and islands. The 'new' polyphonic style, developed from the 18th-19th centuries under the influence of European professional music, can be recognized by the softly sounding triads and parallel thirds. The 'new' polyphonic traditions are found today throughout most of Europe.

East Europe. Russians, Ukrainians and the Belarus peoples, living in eastern Europe, have two different styles of singing: heterophony and drone polyphony. Heterophony, as we may remember is an intermittent form of singing between monophony and polyphony. Heterophony in this region often has a specific character: apart from the heterophonic singing of the melody by a group of singers, there is often another, higher voice, sung by a single person, which provides a contrast to the heterophonic 'thick' melody. This style of singing is widely known as 'podgolosochnaia polifonia' (literary – 'polyphony of subsidiary voices'). Among Russians, Ukrainians and Belarus peoples, heterophony is distributed very widely and covers virtually all regions of eastern Europe. Drone polyphony, unlike heterophony, is distributed in several widely isolated regions: in the Bryansk, Kursk, Voronezh, and Belgorod districts of Russia. The most important regions of drone polyphony in East Europe are the Ukrainian and Belarus Polesie regions ('Polesie' means 'forest region'). Drone polyphony is also strongly present in eastern Europe among the Mordva and Komi peoples who live between the Volga river and Ural mountains. Elements of polyphony are also present among Udmurts, Bashkirs, Mari, Tatars, and Chuvashs.

One of the richest polyphonic regions of the Europe and the world is **Caucasia**. Caucasia, named after the Caucasian mountain ranges (highest in Europe), is known for its unbroken cultural history (language, traditional culture, music). Most Caucasian peoples have vocal polyphony. Georgian polyphony has several

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polyphonic styles in a relatively small geographical region. In eastern Georgia the most widespread style is drone polyphony, based on long melismatic melodies in free metre. In Western Georgia drone polyphony is also widespread, but the best known singing style here is the extremely complex contrapuntal polyphony with dissonant chords. Several international conferences on traditional polyphony were organized in Georgia from 1984 onwards, and in 2002 an International Research Centre for Traditional Polyphony was established at Tbilisi State Conservatory. Vocal polyphony, mostly based on drone, is also widely present among North Caucasian peoples. These are mostly peoples who speak indigenous Caucasian languages: Abkhazians, Circassians, Chechens, Ingushes, and Dagestanians. Polyphonic singing is also present among Ossetians, who speak Indo-European language, and Balkarians and Karachaevis, who speak Turkic languages. Two other big Caucasian peoples, Armenians and Azerbaijanis, only have rich monophonic singing traditions.

Another very important region of distribution of vocal polyphony in Europe is the **Balkans**. There are two main styles of polyphonic singing in the Balkans: the old style and the new style. The old Balkan style of polyphony includes such characteristics as very dissonant, piercing harmonies, and the wide use of the drone. This style of singing is present in virtually all Balkan countries (southwestern Bulgaria, southern Albania, most of Serbia, Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina, southwestern Montenegro, mountainous regions of Croatia and Slovenia, and the northern tip of Greece). This style is mostly present in more isolated mountainous areas. The new polyphonic style is heavily influenced by European professional choral music, and is known in Balkan countries under the term 'singing on bass.' Romania is possibly the most monophonic country in the Balkans, although there are some isolated polyphonic traditions here as well.

North Europe. North Europe stretches from Scandinavia and the Baltic countries to Iceland. By the beginning of the 20th century the live traditions of older style of vocal polyphony were found only in the Baltic countries and Iceland. Among Baltic countries, the Lithuanian vocal singing style 'sutartines' is best known among western ethnomusicologists. It is a unique blend of canonic polyphony and secondal dissonances. In Latvia drone polyphony is totally dominating, and is sometimes based on very sharp dissonant chords. Estonia is mostly monophonic, although a small group of people, Setu, have vocal polyphony, and also examples of drone polyphony were recorded in the western regions of Estonia. In Scandinavia the situation is different: Finland is almost completely monophonic; from Norway and Sweden there are literary sources indicating that they had rich traditions of vocal polyphony which were gradually lost. The situation is mostly the same in Great Britain among English, Irish, and Scottish peoples. Literary sources of the 12th-13th centuries describe their rich traditions of polyphonic singing, but today there is very little polyphony found, instead there is the late European singing style. In nearby islands (Shetland, Hebrides and Orkney) more traditional types of vocal polyphony are still alive. In Iceland a very interesting tradition, known as 'twisongur,' was recorded in the beginning of the 20th century. This tradition is mostly based on the parallel movement of voices in interval fifth and has a truly unique scale with an augmented octave, unheard in European classical music and most traditional musical styles, where the octave is always perfect (augmented octave is also present in Georgian, particularly western Georgian polyphonic traditions).

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Central Europe. Singing in Central European countries has been strongly affected by the European professional musical culture. Austria is possibly best known for its classical music-influenced polyphonic traditions, and particularly for rich traditions of yodeling. Possibly because of this Austria is very active in organizing conferences on European traditions of vocal polyphony. Switzerland is another very polyphonic country, particularly German and Italian parts of Switzerland. Germany, Belgium and Holland, and particularly Czech Republic also show a late European-influenced singing style. In Slovakia the ancient 'Balkan type' secondal polyphony makes appearances in a few villages in the northwestern corner of the country.

Western Europe. France, together with Finland, are the most monophonic countries of the Europe, although a centre for the research of traditional polyphony was operating in France (organized by Simha Arom) during the 1990s. Only ethnically different Basques from the Pyrenees and also particularly Corsicans have rich traditions of vocal polyphony in France. In Corsica, richly ornamented two melodic lines freely develop on top of the drone bass. In Portugal, women's polyphonic tradition is present in the northern tip of the country, and men's polyphonic singing is mostly alive in the southern half of the country, the region Alentejo. Polyphony in Spain is also mostly influenced by European professional music (including the polyphony of pre-Indo-European Basques), although in the Albacete region more unusual, rhythmically free drone polyphony with melismatic melody was recorded in the 20th century. Italy is one of the most polyphonic countries of Europe. Northern Italy (alps) is the home of late European style choirs, and Italian cities are also known for their elaborate urban polyphonic singing traditions (like Genovese 'trallalero'). In central mountainous Italy there are regions with interesting older style close to the Balkan dissonant style, and according to historical sources, this style was wider spread in medieval times in Lombardy and Milan. Polyphonic traditions are also strongly present on Italian islands – Sicily and particularly Sardinia. Sardinian polyphonic tradition, known as 'a tenore' is based on four part polyphony where drones and specific timbres play an important role.

So, polyphony is represented widely in Europe. More mountainous regions retained the earlier style of polyphony, based on drone and dissonances, and other regions have a later style of polyphony, based on parallel thirds and triads, influenced by professional choral singing practices.

Asia

Asia is generally known among ethnomusicologists and the general public as a region of very rich and elaborate forms of monophonic music, but with very little polyphony. The size of Asia, and particularly the size of Asian population makes it very difficult to be sure that all the polyphonic traditions of Asia are already known. In most Asian countries local scholars do not pay attention to local polyphonic traditions. There are several reasons for this: (1) polyphony in Asia is only found in the most isolated geographical areas, among high mountain ranges and deep forests, and it is not easy to find these traditions and study them (2) polyphonic traditions are mostly present among national minorities, not the main populations of the respective countries, and (3) scholars mostly concentrate on the most important musical traditions of the cultural identity of Asian countries, usually the rich traditions of professional music, so the traditions of vocal polyphony remain mostly outside of their interests. Because of these reasons I expect that we will be learning about more polyphonic traditions from Asia in the coming years.

Let us now review Asian vocal polyphonic traditions.

A very interesting tradition of vocal polyphony is found in the **Persian Gulf**, mostly among the Bahrain pearl-fishers. It is based on a very deep drone (considered to be an imitation of the sound of a whale from the deep of the sea), sung by a group of fishermen, and a highly melismatic melodic line. In the Middle East we can also mention elements of vocal polyphony in some Jewish groups, particularly drone polyphony among **Samaritans**. Elements of polyphony are also found in Syria and Yemen.

One of the most interesting polyphonic traditions in Asia is found in eastern Afghanistan, in the impenetrable Hindukush mountains, among **Nuristanians**. Their long cultural isolation is believed to be the main reason for the survival of many unusual features of Nuristani culture and even their physical appearance (blue eyes and fair hair). Nuristani traditional singing is amazingly close to the 'old style' of European polyphony, using secondal dissonances around the rhythmic drone (see the box "Nuristan: Descendants of Alexander the Great?")¹.

¹ **Nuristan: Descendants of Alexander the Great?**

Nuristan polyphony is possibly the second most isolated tradition of vocal polyphony in the world. Hidden from the expansionist politics of Arabs, Mongols, and Persians behind the impenetrable Hindukush mountains in East Afghanistan, about 150 000 Nuristanians maintained their independence until the end of the 19th century. As you would expect from people who live in such isolation, Nuristanians maintain plenty of elements from their pre-Moslem practices, most notably music with unique polyphony and dancing. They also look differently from neighboring peoples, with a large number of men and women with fair hair and blue eyes. Both men and women sing three-part polyphonic songs with a drone and secondal dissonances. With all its characteristics, Nuristani polyphony is amazingly close to Balkan and Baltic polyphonic traditions.

So, what is Balkan-type polyphony doing in the Hindukush mountains in Afghanistan? According to local legends, the unusual features of Nuristani culture and physical appearance are a result of a prolonged friendly visit of the army of the Alexander the Great in the 5th century BC. The amazing musical closeness to the Balkan singing style can also add to this romantic hypothesis. To be more realistic, it seems to me that Nuristani polyphony is a remnant of the ancient common layer of European polyphony which was once widely spread from Europe through Central Asia to the regions of East and North Asia (up to the Ainu people on Hokkaido). Unfortunately, Nuristani polyphony is

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According to the available information, polyphonic singing is also present in the highest mountainous region of the world: in Tibet. At least one example of drone polyphony from Tibet was known to European scholars almost a century ago, and recently Chinese TV broadcasted Tibetan singers singing extremely interesting 'old European' style three-part dissonant polyphony. Apart from Tibet, there are more than 20 ethnic minorities in China who have vocal polyphonic singing, and they mostly live in the southwest of China. Different styles of singing can be found among them: drone polyphony, canon, ostinato, and heterophony. Unlike many other Asian countries, Chinese ethnomusicologists paid great attention to researching the polyphonic traditions of their minority peoples.

In India polyphonic singing is present in the southern part of the country, among the so called 'tribal peoples' of India. It is mostly based on parallel movement of voices and is mostly neglected by local scholars. Parallel polyphony from the north-eastern part of India, Assam, is much better known among ethnomusicologists. According to some information, there are also traditions of drone polyphony in Northern India, in Jammu, Kashmir, and Kumaon.

South-East Asia is one of the most important regions of distribution of polyphonic traditions in Asia. Marius Schneider was sure polyphony was 'invented' here. Mountainous national minorities of central and particularly north Vietnam have polyphonic singing, among them parallel and drone polyphony, some with sharp dissonant chords. According to available information, some other South-East Asian countries (like Nepal and Burma) also have vocal polyphonic traditions, but they are not documented and researched. In Indonesia polyphony is only present on some islands, like on Flores and Sulawesi. Polyphony on the island Flores became widely known to ethnomusicologists relatively early and caused a strong shock among scholars for its obvious resemblance to the polyphony of Balkan peoples.

Possibly the richest and the best researched polyphonic traditions in South-East Asia are found in Taiwan. Millions of western listeners have heard Taiwanese traditional two-part polyphony without realizing they were listening to a Taiwanese traditional song, because when the British rock-band 'Enigma' used the recording of an Amis' two-part polyphonic harvest song as the main melody for their 1994 worldwide hit 'Return to Innocence', they did not acknowledge the source of the song, singers, the original recording and even ethnic origin of the song. Polyphony in Taiwan is found among different tribes (like Ami, Bunun, Paiwan) living in mountains. There are several different styles of polyphony in Taiwan: contrapuntal polyphony, canon, heterophony, chordal and drone polyphony, including very dissonant 'old European' type polyphony. Taiwanese polyphonic traditions were researched in depth by Japanese scholars before the World War 2. In 2002 the international conference on traditional polyphony was organized in Taiwan (so far this was the only such conference held in Asia).

The most isolated polyphonic tradition in the world is in East Asia, amongst the Ainu, the aboriginal people of the Japanese Islands. Ainu live on the Hokkaido and Kuril Islands, and despite the important studies of Tanimoto Kazuyuki, their

still mostly unknown even to professional ethnomusicologists, who are interested in traditions of vocal polyphony. Furthermore, no research on the history of Nuristani has taken into account their unique tradition of polyphonic singing. Finally, I want the readers of this book to know that many more parallels with the same 'Balkan' type of polyphony can be found in other regions of the world, however we will be discussing this issue later in the book.

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polyphony is still relatively unknown to European and American ethnomusicologists. Ainu polyphony is based on the principles of canon, drone, and contrastive polyphony (see the box "Mystery of Ainu Polyphony")².

Central Asia, as we mentioned earlier, is home of unique overtone singing tradition, where one person produces two pitches: drone and very high whistling melody. This tradition is spread in Tuva (particularly western Tuva), western Mongolia, and in the Altai-Sayan mountain ranges.

To summarize, we can say that although Asia is definitely more monophonic than polyphonic, there are still some very interesting and rich polyphonic traditions. These traditions are found in isolated regions, mostly among high mountain ranges, islands or big forests. These traditions are difficult to find and study, and they are also often neglected by local ethnomusicologists. Study of Asian polyphonic traditions is a very prospective field for Asian native ethnomusicologists.

America

Among the **North American Natives**, group singing (particularly with the accompaniment of drumming) is widely spread but singing is mostly done in unison. As we remember, singing in unison is social polyphony, although musically it is still monophony. True polyphonic singing (where both the social and musical factors are polyphonic) is also present among native North Americans.

Northwest Coast natives from so called British Columbia (Nootka, Kwakiutl, Salish, Makah) are possibly the most polyphonic in North America. They often use drone polyphony. Drone was in some traditions the highest part (as among the Makah) as well as the lowest part (Salish Indians). The drone was sung mostly by women, and they were often ridiculed by the men for 'not being able to sing the melody of the song.' There are also bits of information available on the vocal polyphony of the Eastern Coast natives (for example, Menomini, Delaware and Fox Indians). Drone was the leading form of polyphony here too, and again mostly women

² **Mystery of Ainu Polyphony**

There are many isolated polyphonic traditions, but I believe that the polyphony of the Ainu is the most isolated vocal polyphonic tradition in the world. Land-locked in East Asia, one of the most monophonic regions of the world, Ainu polyphony is a total mystery for scholars. Ainu are also unique on many other accounts. Their language is a so called 'language-isolate'; their physical appearance with huge beards still creates heated debates between geneticists; the central element of their culture, the Bear Cult, has amazing similarities to the bear cult of European Neanderthals'. There are several possible explanations for the origins of the Ainu people, suggesting that Ainu might be connected to: (1) early Asian population, (2) ancient European populations, (3) Australian Aborigines, (4) Taiwanese Aborigines. Considering their prominent beards, the Ainu should not be related to East Asian populations and Taiwanese aborigines, but can be related to Europeans and Australian aborigines; According to their polyphony Ainu cannot be related to the monophonic East Asians and Australian aborigines, but can be related to Europeans or Taiwanese Aborigines. Genetic studies cannot make a definitive contribution to the origins of the Ainu, even more so as there is hardly a single pure-blooded Ainu left. Unfortunately, in the search for the Ainu origins, their truly unique polyphonic singing tradition has been totally neglected thus far. To those who would be interested in incorporating Ainu polyphony in the search for Ainu origins, I can say that the Ainu traditions of vocal polyphony point to the direction of the ancient European populations or Taiwan Aborigines. The central principle of Ainu polyphony – canon – shows interesting parallels to a polyphonic tradition of one of the European countries – the Lithuanian 'Sutartines'.

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were singing it. Among Southwestern USA natives polyphony was noted among the Yaqui, Papago, and Creek groups. In these traditions again mostly women sang the drone, which was placed higher than the melody. Among the Plain natives vocal polyphony was noted among Oglala Sioux (parallel thirds), and the Arapahos practiced polyphony in cadencial sections of songs. In an article dedicated to the polyphony in North American native music, Bruno Nettl also mentions the tradition of Peyote songs from the Arapaho, where the singer was specially 'tuning' his kettledrum to accompany his own singing with a kettledrum rhythmic drone. Vocal polyphony has also been recorded amongst southern Californian natives, although today this traditions is lost.

According to Bruno Nettl, out of the six musical areas identified in his seminal work on Native American music, 'only two, the Great Basin and the Athabascan, one an exceedingly simple style and the other represented only by the Navaho and Apache, lack references to Polyphony' (Nettl, 1961:360).

Among **South American natives** the traditions of vocal polyphony are ostensibly richer than amongst North American natives, but the available information is rather unorganized and vague. Also, to my knowledge, no musical examples are available.

Possibly the most interesting is the singing tradition of the Q'ero people, who live near Cusco in Peru, on the high slopes of the Andes. Currently only about two thousand Q'eros are left. Scholars consider them as carriers of pre-Inca traditions. Most importantly for our topic, the Q'eros have a unique tradition of polyphonic singing where several melodies are sung together with the drone occurring in the cadences or ritual refrains. Among the Waraos from the eastern Venezuelan tropical forests, a ritual for curing, involving polyphonic singing by shamans, had been recorded. If the patient was an important person, the singing of two or three shamans was required, with the audio result resembling a free round.

Natives from the Amazonian region of Peru are known for their heterophonic-like two-part polyphony in intervals of fourths and canonic singing. According to Anthony Seeger, 'most Indian music is associated with ritual; it has little harmony or polyphony, and what polyphony it has is unfamiliar to unaccustomed ears' (Seeger, 1998:135). Heterophonic and canonic singing is present among the Venezuelan natives. Although free rhythm is quite common in their solo songs, polyphonic songs, particularly those accompanying dances, have a strict rhythm. The influence of European choral singing style is felt in the singing of different South American tribes. For example the 16th-17th century European polyphonic style is preserved among the highland Maya.

Another important feature of South American musical traditions is the abundance of polyphonic blown instruments – double, triple and even quadruple flutes were found during the archaeological excavations of pre-Columbian America. We will discuss the issue of polyphonic blown instruments and their possible indication of the earlier presence of vocal polyphony in the next chapter of the book, where I will talk about the possibility of the practice of vocal polyphony in ancient civilizations.

Polynesia

Polynesian polyphony became known in Europe in the 18th century, possibly earlier than any other polyphonic tradition. It was actually a shocking discovery for European musicians, as they believed that polyphony, as a feature of a higher musical civilization, was invented by Christian monks in Europe. Then suddenly, the very first encounters of European travelers in the 18th century with the Pacific Ocean Island communities brought to light their strong polyphonic traditions. According to some early descriptions, Polynesians had drone polyphony with dissonant harmonies. While early travelers' notes were very precise about the wide distribution of polyphonic singing tradition in Oceania, some European professional musicians still doubted the ability of Polynesians to sing in different parts, as they believed it 'a great improbability that any uncivilized people should, by accident, arrive at this degree of perfection in the art of music, which we imagine can only be attained by dint of study, and knowledge of the system and theory upon which musical composition is founded . . . It is, therefore, scarcely credible, that people semi-barbarous should naturally arrive at any perfection in that art which it is much doubted whether the Greeks and Romans, with all their refinements in music, ever attained, and which the Chinese, who have been longer civilized than any other people on the globe, have not yet found out' (cited from Kaeppler et al., 1998:15). It took more than a century and the discovery of many more vocal polyphonic traditions in different parts of the world untouched by European civilization (including the central African rainforests and Papua New Guinean jungles) to convince professional musicologists that not all polyphony was an invention of medieval monks. But let us leave this matter until the second and third parts of the book.

The great success of Christian hymns in Polynesia was the result of the natural closeness between European polyphonic traditions and the polyphonic traditions of the Oceanic peoples. Although polyphonic singing in many Polynesian islands is strongly influenced by European choral music, we can still say that Polynesia is one of the most important regions in the distribution of traditional vocal polyphony in the world. This is true not only for such big and well-known groups of islands such as Tonga, Samoa or Tahiti, but for small and isolated islands, like the mysterious Easter Island in the east, or tiny islands like Luangiua, Bellona, Tikopia, Anuta) in the very west of Polynesia.

Melanesia

Together with Polynesia, Melanesia represents one of the richest regions of distribution of polyphonic singing. At the same time, unlike Polynesia which had been strongly affected by late European choral singing style, polyphonic singing in Melanesia has retained traditional features. Possibly the best-known polyphonic style in Melanesia is two-part singing based on drone and dissonant intervals. The parallels with so called ancient European polyphonic styles are so obvious that, shell-shocked, Jaap Kunst dedicated a special book to the comparative study parallels between the polyphonic singing of Flores, Indonesia, and that of the Balkan mountains. Later, Australian ethnomusicologist Florian Messner also researched this amazing closeness of these polyphonic traditions and found out that even singers themselves find it difficult to distinguish their own singing from a singing style of a place many thousand kilometres away. As we will see later, amazing parallels are present not only between Flores and the Balkans, but between many other polyphonic regions around the world. In the polyphony of Guadalcanal Island and a nearby small volcanic island Savo there exists a drone above which two solo parts interweave melodic lines. They also use the yodeling technique. Women's polyphonic singing is also based on a continuous drone. Guadalcanal is also famous among ethnomusicologists for the rich traditions of polyphony in panpipe ensembles.

New Guinea is also an important region for polyphonic traditions. West Papua is home to several mountain peoples (Moni, Dani, and Yali) from the Central Irian Jaya regions, who widely use vocal polyphony. Drone-based polyphonic tradition with secondal dissonances has been recorded in the north-east of New Guinea, on Manus Island. Vocal music of the native peoples of Borneo (most notably, Kenyah and Kajang) also features drone polyphony.

According to the available information, Micronesia does not have the same strong polyphonic traditions that we discussed in relations to Polynesia and Melanesia. Group singing is widely distributed in Micronesia, but singing is mostly based on unison or heterophony.

Australia

Despite the fact that traditional music of the Australian aborigines is largely defined by group singing, polyphony is not characteristic of the indigenous populations of this continent. If we do not take into account the singing traditions of late migrants from different parts of the world, we may say that Australia is the most monophonic continent of our planet. The only tradition that contains polyphony is the vocal-instrumental forms, particularly in the northern tip of Australia, where the didgeridoo provides a drone and the singing voice creates a two-part vocal-instrumental polyphony. According to available information, polyphony is not performed in a purely vocal form among Australian aborigines.

We have now finished the overview of the distribution of vocal polyphony in the contemporary world, and we have seen how complex it is. In many parts of the world (Europe, Asia, Americas) polyphonic traditions are often distributed in geographically isolated regions, mostly mountains, islands, forests, or continental fringes. Only in sub-Saharan Africa is the tradition of polyphonic singing spread in one continuous region.

To answer the question of why do people sing, we must remember that the reasons why humans sing today can be different from the reasons why people sang a few centuries or few thousand years ago. Yet still, the best chance for us to start understanding the role of singing in human life is to observe the phenomenon of singing in the contemporary world. As we have already done this, now we can move on and discuss the origins and interaction of different polyphonic styles, which we will do in the next chapter of this book; and then, in the third chapter of this book, we will discuss the origins of the phenomenon of polyphonic singing.