

'Universal' music and the case of death

In memory of Dr E. D. Tagg (1913-1988)
 mathematician and humanist¹
 'One World — One Music'
 (MTV Jingle, 1988)

Introduction

It is often said that music is a 'universal language'. This is a questionable viewpoint. Unquestionable is the biological truism that all humans are mortal; reasonably incontestable too the statement that, with the exception of mass casualties in wars and natural disasters, the death of every human is marked by some form of ritual in all cultures.

If music is a 'universal language' — 'universal' in the sense of globally transcultural and 'language' in the sense of 'symbolic system' — we should expect the global phenomenon of human death to give rise to the same music all over the world. Since, as we shall see, this is clearly not so, the aim of this article is to discuss the cultural specificity of music connected with the universal phenomenon of death and to suggest that the notion of music as a universal language is not only a misconception but also an ideological statement.

In order to polarise the question of how the universal phenomenon of death might or might not be connected to the universal phenomenon of music, I conducted a small experiment during a symposium on cross-cultural communication.² The thirteen participants who voluntarily handed in their responses in written form during my session were students or professionals interested or involved in the education of immigrants or in the administration of immigrant culture in Sweden. The participants were first told they would bear eight short examples of music which were all connected to one and the same thing — an important event in any culture and something which happens to every human being'. 'Death' was not mentioned. The participants were asked to guess what the common denominator might be and, if they could not think of anything, just to jot down on a piece of paper whatever mood, type of action, behaviour, images or thoughts they felt the music communicated to them. The music examples and responses can be summarised as follows.³

1. *Dissoumba* — music for an old man's funeral (Massongo).⁴ Presto (176 bpm — beats per minute), strong, loud male voice solo, unaccompanied. Responses: joy, ritual, work, work song, epic, adventure, Africa, confidence, 'vandring'⁵ desert, heroic, ceremony.
2. *Music for a wake* (Ba-Benzélé).⁶ Allegro (132 bpm.), extrovert, solo

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1. This article is a total rewrite and elaboration of the Swedish text 'Musiken: språket som alla förstår?' in *Tvärkulturell Kommunikation*, ed. J Allwood (Göteborg: Papers in Anthropological Linguistics, 1985). That text is in turn based on notes for a talk given at a symposium on Cross-Cultural Communication, held in Göteborg in November 1983. This English version was first published in English in *La musica come language universal — genies e storey di unmade*, ed. R Pizza («Hysteria Musical Cultures» Biblically lieu, Florence, 1990), pp. 227-266. Subsequently published in *Critical Quarterly* 35/2 (ed. S Frith, Oxford, 1993), pp. 54-98.
 2. Organised by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Göteborg in November 1983.

and responsorial, singing, intricate polyrhythm. *Responses*: celebration, feasting, war, fighting, ritual, alcohol, groups, hunting, abandon, Africa, happy, wild dance, jungle.

3. *Burial Music* (Senufo).⁷ Allegro (152 bpm), lively drumming and harps in birhythmic 12/8 metre. *Responses*: war, wedding, sadness, jungle, desert, India, people, ceremony, birth, dancing.
4. *Funeral Music* (Sim Reap Orchestra, Cambodia). Moderato (108 bpm), monorhythm, xylophone accompaniment, strong drum beats marking ends of period, double-reeded melodic instrument with sharp timbre and large pitch range. *Responses*: Chinese, happiness, game, complaint, Turkey, wailing, suffering, love, tenderness, harvest, emptiness.
5. *Marabout* — music from ceremony at holy grave (Bogherra, Tunisia). Resolute shouts followed by allegro (144 bpm) energetic drumming in monorhythmic 6/8 metre. *Responses*: war, agitation, threat, manhood ritual, initiation, sorcery, dancing, gymnastics, ceremony, street parade, India, energy.
6. Giresun Kol Havasi — lamenting folk tune from Northern Turkey (Buhara). *Parlando-rubato senza misura*. Double-reeded unaccompanied solo instrument in low register playing mainly in small intervals (including 'microtones') around one note. *Responses*: classical, serious, monotonous, moonlight, idleness, an Arab, camels, mystery, meditation.
7. Σαν πεθανω — 'If I Die', *rebetiki* (Anon.). Moderato monorhythmic 5/4 metre, male voice *forte* in high register (dorian mode) with bouzouki playing accompanying semiquavers. *Responses*: joy, contentment, sea, squibs, dance, Greece, Arab, bazaar, cafes.
8. *A szép szüz Maria* — Hungarian Csángó song (Tóth). Although this example, a Christmas lullaby of probably German origin, has lyrics connected to birth rather than death, it was included because the first time I heard it myself I mistook it for a lament.⁸ Slow, *parlando rubato*, unaccompanied female solo singing. Sharp vocal timbre with melodic ornamentation but without tremolo or vibrato. *Responses*: story telling, wisdom of life, sadness, tragedy, love, Yemen, camp fire, old woman, poverty.

Although this experiment and its results (only thirteen respondents, music from only eight different cultures) obviously cannot be regarded in any sta-

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3. There are not necessarily thirteen separate responses to each music example because some respondents left blanks for some examples while others mentioned two or three associations for certain pieces. Multiple occurrences of the same association (e.g. 'ritual', 'Africa') are not taken into account in this summary and nor are blanks. Besides, the number of respondents is so small that there is no point in making a big statistical-empirical scene about this unpretentious little experiment. Names in brackets after the title of each example refer to the alphabetically ordered 'Discography'
 4. The Massongo inhabit parts of Gabon and the Congo Republic.
 5. *Vandring* (Swedish) translates as 'wandering, way [through life], migration [of people, animals, souls], walk or excursion on foot [long], travelling [mostly on foot, not by vehicle]'.
 6. The Ba-Benzélé inhabit parts of Cameroun, Congo, and the Central African Republic.
 7. The Senufo inhabit areas of the Ivory Coast, Mali and Burkina Faso.
 8. The Hungarian lyrics mean: The sweet Virgin Mary years ago sang to her little child: Sleep my little son, my rose, sleep in the hay. I hug you to my heart and I kiss you'. I love you with all my heart and I put you to sleep with my heart. Sleep my little one.

tistical sense as verification or falsification of the hypothesis that music is or is not a 'universal language', they do raise some points of vital importance to the issue, especially considering the fact that all responses had, by virtue of interest, study or profession, greater than average experience of cultures other than their own.

From the responses given above, we may observe the following.

- ♦ No one thought 'death' was the common connotative denominator.
- ♦ 'Death' did not occur as a response to any of the examples.
- ♦ Standard Northern European funeral connotations (the 'funereal') occurred twice in connection with example 8, and only once in connection with examples 3, 4 and 6. The only example to be given the connotations 'suffering', 'wailing' and 'complaint' (the latter two hardly suitable connotations for Protestant burial rituals) was no. 4.
- ♦ Connotations totally incorrect for Northern European notions of death rituals — 'happiness', 'joy', 'contentment', 'abandon', 'adventure', 'wedding', 'game', 'agitation', 'gymnastics' — were much commoner than 'correct' ones and together with eurocentrically unsuitable or totally irrelevant connotations dominated the responses as a whole.
- ♦ Geographical connotations ('Africa', 'India', 'Arab', etc.) were frequent — also frequently incorrect — this implying that respondents related the music examples to their own music culture and perceived far more in connotative terms of 'another culture' than when associating to music conceived within the general compositional framework of their own culture.⁹

Bearing in mind (1) that the common denominator for these pieces (except no. 8) was their association with death and that death connotations occurred nowhere among the responses, (2) that Northern European funereal connotations were far less common responses than connotations of joy, it seems nonsensical, at least on the basis of this small sample of empirical evidence, to pursue the quest for meaningful symbolic connections between the universal phenomenon of music and the universal phenomenon of death. It seems rather that death or music or both must be treated as culturally specific and not as universal phenomena. However, it still holds true (a) that all societies have music and (b) that all mortals die. This contradiction means in turn that death and music are universal and culturally specific at the same time and that we shall therefore need to clarify the ways in which music or death or both are not universal. Let us take last things first and start with death.

Death and music in a West-African culture

During my preparations for the seminar at which the experiment described above was conducted, I was visited by Klevor Abo, a Ghanaian friend and

9. By 'compositional framework' is meant the musical, structural and aesthetic norms which determine whether a musical event can be considered by members of a musical culture as belonging to that musical culture. The concept is similar to, but more general than, the term 'style' and refers to such phenomena as the melody-accompaniment dualism plus equal tone temperament of 'Western' music or to the polyrhythmic structures of Nilo-Sudanic music or to such basic compositional principles as the *maqam/iqa* or *raga/tala* of Arabic and Hindu classical musics respectively.

colleague of Ewe parenthood.¹⁰ Confused by the obvious structural differences between the various types of music for funeral or burial rituals I had been listening to, I asked him what sort of music was traditionally used amongst the Ewe in connection with death. He asked for something metallic to hit with and on. Armed with dessert spoon and stainless steel litre measurer, whose timbre he said were satisfactory, he played a rhythmic pattern in allegro tempo which I interpreted, probably eurocentrically, in 6/4 time as



Over this pattern and (in my ears) with warm but clear vocal timbre he sang mezzo forte pentatonic melody ranging an octave in what to me sounded like varying additive metre¹¹ at what he said was 'normal talking speed'. Like my respondents at the symposium, I found that this bore no resemblance to my own musical experience of how death should sound, so I asked him to translate the words:

||: If I leave one morning, carry softly and bury me. :||

You have plenty of money. When the hour comes, the *palava* (= 'word', matter') is finished.

||: I have no relatives, that's why I joined the (music) 'club': ||

||: If I leave one morning, carry softly and bury me. :||¹²

I could not bring to mind from my own culture any poetry dealing with or used in connection with death that contained anything emotively associable with carrying people softly in the morning and 'music clubs',¹³ nor could I off hand think of any Northern European funeral music using such active but flowing rhythm or ranging an octave inside one melodic phrase.¹⁴ I therefore asked my Ghanaian colleague to explain the relationship between the music he had just performed and the sort of feelings, attitudes and behavioural traits that are considered proper in connection with death in the community.

It was a long explanation of which no more than the main points are included here. He started by clarifying Ewe concepts of 'music', explaining that although they use the English loan word 'music' to refer to such European musical events as hymns in church or what comes out of a cassette recorder, they have no equivalent of our word 'music' when referring to their own (what we would call 'folk' or 'traditional') 'music'. The most common morpheme in these contexts seems to be *vù*.

'*Vù* really means "drum" and *há* is the word for "club", "association" or "organisation". "Voice" is called *BA*, so "singing" is slid *vù ba*. *Vù* is used to signify the whole performance: music, singing, drums, drama, etc.'

Since the rhythm pattern he had just played sounded quite cheerful in my European ears, I asked him if it had any symbolic value (T = Tagg, A = Abo).

A: No, it's the time line. It regulates what's played or sung... It can be

10. Klevor Abo of the Department of African Studies, University of Ghana (Legon, Accra). The encounter described in this section took place in my kitchen on 2 November 1983. The Ewe people are mainly found in Togo and eastern Ghana.

11. I have noted, with question marks, groupings of 5/8 + 7/8, 7/8+5/8 (2/8 and 3/8 sub-groupings in both orders) as well as some 'bars' in 3/2, 3/4 and 6/8 'metre'.

12. The Ewe word *kpoo* seems to be pretty close in connotations to adverbial sense of *piano* in Italian.

13. 13 Thanks to Anahid Kassabian for reminding me of an important exception: the US American folk song *The Streets Of Laredo* (Owens).

14. Unless we count the octave upbeat at the very start of the *Funeral March of the Revolutionaries* (Ikonnikov).

fast, slow or medium.

T: Is the time line fast or slow for burials?

A: It depends on which club (*vù há*) you belong to. Maybe you belong to a club with fast drums, like most youngsters!

T: So young people automatically get fast music at their funerals and tempo has nothing to do with death as such but with what club (*vù há*) you belong to?

A: That's right.

T: Do the Ewe have any other sort of music connected with death?

A: Yes. Sometimes someone can come into the room where the body has been laid out and speak to the deceased through a song. It might be a defiant song against death itself or recommendations to the deceased, like 'we don't know why You died but when you get to the next world you'd better deal with whoever did this to you'. It doesn't have to be a song he's made himself, as long as it fits the situation. It's always performed in a heroic manner, a bit like swearing an oath.

Death in the mainstream European music tradition¹⁵

It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the dirges, laments and burial chants of European folk music traditions past and present, because (as exemplified in nos 7-8 above) we (modern, urban, Northern Europeans) are unlikely to register the connotations intended in those musics. Therefore, if we wish to describe the ritual character of death in our own tradition, we should start on common European ground in the music of this continent's first really international set of styles: in classical music. With this in mind, the experiment described above continued.

Having collected in the written responses to examples 1-8, I then suggested to the participants that they would surely recognise the common connotative denominator after hearing the remaining six extracts of music, drawn this time from our own continent's mainstream music history:

9. Introduction and first 4 bars vocal of 'Dido's Lament' from Purcell's *Dido & Aeneas* (1689).
10. Largo from the scene 'Romeo in the Capulets' tomb' from Berlioz's *Roméo et Juliette* (1839).
11. Extract at 'Den alles Fleisch es ist wie Gras' from Brahms' *Ein deutsches Requiem* (1867).
12. First 16 bars of 'Aases død' from Grieg's *Peer Gynt* (1888).
13. First 8 bars of 'Marche funèbre', 2nd movement from Chopin's Piano Sonata No. 2 (1839).
14. First 8 bars of 'Funeral March of the Revolutionaries', Ikonnikov (1920?).

15. 'Mainstream' is used here not in the sense of 'mainstream jazz' (between traditional and modern) but to denote a commonly shared set of musical rules and practices into which other musics feed and 'from which other musics can derive certain (structural, symbolic) practices. 'Mainstream music' Generally implies a much greater degree of sociocultural heterogeneity of populations involved in its production and reception than is the case for culturally more specific musics (e.g. subcultural, regional, ethnic). 'Mainstream musics' (e.g. (a) European classical music 1730-1910 including offshoots such as operetta, parlour songs, film music and brass band music, (b) Afro-Euro-American middle-of-the-road rock and disco) tend also, in relation to their constituent genres, to take on the character of musical *lingua franca* for a much wider cross-section of cultural communities.

The symposium participants had no difficulty in orally identifying the common connotative denominator here: mainly 'death', 'sorrow' or 'tragedy' for nos 9-12 and total connotative agreement on 'death' and 'sorrow' for Chopin's 'Marche funèbre', of course, the most frequently used death music in our culture.¹⁶

The music in all these examples is quiet and slow in the minor key. None of the examples contained any short accentuated tone beats and the largest melodic leap was a major third (from d to f# in 'Aases død'),¹⁷ the commonest interval being tones or semitones. With the exception of 'Dido's Lament', the melodic line of all examples consisted of short, repeated melodic phrases. In all examples, one of the descending minor key semitone 'leading note' intervals (b3-2, b6-5) occurs several times in either melody or accompaniment while the ascending minor key leading note (#7-8) is much rarer. No examples had a total melodic ambitus of over a minor sixth, individual phrases having an average pitch range of a third or fourth.¹⁸

There is no room here to write the semantic history of death music in the European classic tradition¹⁹ and I shall therefore restrict this account to discussing the relationship between the musical structures and general connotations of the music just described and to comparing those with the Ewe and urban Ghanaian musical interpretation of death.

If funeral (noun) means 'a ceremony at which a dead person is buried or cremated' and *funereal or funebrial* (adj.) means 'suggestive of a funeral; gloomy or mournful'²⁰ it also implies, at least as far as the English language and Northern European culture are concerned, that both funerals and funeral music are likely to be funereal. What might such funereal connotations be?

a Minor key

There is nothing intrinsically sad in Northern Europe about the minor key, as anyone who has sung *What Shall We Do With The Drunken Sailor?* or danced to a minor mode reel, *rull* or *polska* will willingly witness. However, these are all examples of Northwestern European rural *popular music*, not of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century historical Central European mainstream. In this latter tradition, the heptatonic Ionian mode, with its ascending midlands and leading notes, is gradually established as basis for the construction of melodic and harmonic tension to the extent that all other modes are ousted,

16. As part of the experiment, participants were only asked to write down associations for examples 1-8. Arriving later in the presentation at example 9, four examples were played in succession (nos 9-12) and the connotations given orally were 'death', 'sorrow', 'tragedy', 'lament'. There was total unity about 'death' and 'funeral' for nos 12 and 13.

17. Excluding the octave upbeat at the very start of Ikonnikov's *Funeral March of the Revolutionaries* (example 14).

18. Apart from small variations in the degree of introversion, gloom and grief expressed in these few short examples — most of them have a section in the major key or played *forte* (otherwise there is nothing to be gloomy about!) — it would be interesting to know how and why the slow, minor third and minor sixth saturated sections of masses and requiems — the *Kyrie eleisons*, *Miserere* *meis* and *Agnus Deis* rather than the *Dona nobis pacem*, *Benedictuses*, *Libera* *mes* or *Dies irae* of this world — came to be considered as appropriate for our deaths in the form of Chopin's *Marche funèbre*.

19. European discussion of minor modes and the affect of melodic descent using small intervals probably date back to at least the pre-Baroque and its notions of music's rhetorical devices like *katabasis* (καταβασις) — a fitting concept in the context of sadness and death!

20. Definitions from *The New Collins English Dictionary* (1982).

except the aeolian/dorian 'minor key' to which we Europeans saw fit to attach a 'harmonic' major seventh (ascending leading note), so that our thirst for harmonic progress (and material expansion?) might be partly quenched by this new, more directional element and its dominant, completive, 'perfect' cadence potential. Whether or not one agrees with this almost iconically connotative view of ascending versus descending leading notes,²¹ it is at least plausible that the 'unimodal' development of our tonal system put minor modes into the cultural position of archaisms. Ousted by the then 'more modern' major key, minor could acquire general connotations of oldness and the past and, by further connotation resident in the European bourgeois symbolic universe, lead associations into nostalgia, quietude and sadness.²²

b Low volume

It would be a truism to say that performing music at low volume is quieter than loud music. However, the Italian — and musical — word for 'low volume performance' — *piano* (adv.) — means not only 'quietly', but also 'softly', 'calmly' and 'gently', at the same time as 'unassuming' can be found amongst the meanings of *piano* (adj.) which is, once again, the clear opposite to 'loud' (as in 'loud colours', 'loud behaviour', etc.). This linguistic circumstantial evidence points clearly to the bio-acoustic fact that music performed quietly will be more likely to find its connotations in unobtrusiveness, introversion, stillness and control than in affirmation, extraversion, action and abandon. It should also be obvious that singing, blowing, bowing, plucking and hitting notes softly entails less energy than doing so when you wait to produce a loud sound.

c Slow tempo

Similar connotative and bio-acoustic connections can be drawn between slow tempo and low energy. Not only do older people (nearer to a natural death) tend to move slower than young ones — even the Ewe seem to have this convention in their music clubs — it is also highly probable that musical pulse is related to the human heartbeat and to particular physical activities

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21. It would probably be necessary to go at least as far back as Zarlino's *Istituzioni armoniche* (1558) (Strunk, 1952: 228-261) or Galilei's *Dialogo della musica antica e della moderna* (1581) (Strunk, 1952: 302-22) to find the start of explicit discussions of affect of what we call 'major' and 'minor keys'. Kepler, in his *Harmonices mundi* (1619) (Walker, 1978: 64, cited by Ling 1983: 559), described the minor third as 'passive and wanting to sink to the around like a hen ready to be mounted by the cock'. Cooke (1959: 54-80) offers many examples of differences of affect in the European classical tradition between major and minor thirds, sixths and ninths/seconds. Particularly gloomy examples of minor thirds are offered by Cooke in his sections on 1-(2)-b3-(2)-1 (Cooke 1959: 140-3) and 8-b7-b6-5 (minor). Many examples cited are pre-Baroque, suggesting that it might even be necessary to look for the roots of the major-minor affective dichotomy as early as pre-Renaissance times.
22. This notion of 'archaism' and 'lack of modernity' in connection with minor modes in Central Europe might also date back to the middle ages, at least if we are to give some credit to Cooke's theory (1959: 51-2, in connection with a quote from a decree issued in 1322 by Pope John XXII), suggesting 'the Ionian mode belonged to secular music — as is obvious from its prevalence in the troubadours' songs — but the church preferred to adhere to the sterner modes'. The reader should also bear in mind that Mood Music (Library Music) catalogues (Tagg 1980), basing their practices on traditional film music which in turn largely bases its compositional practices on European classical traditions, frequently categorise, group or cross-reference 'sadness' with 'religious', 'old times' ('archaic'), 'nostalgia', 'purity', 'quietude', etc.

related to different (heart) pulse rates. This means that slow music will tend to have connotations of deliberation, caution, stasis, reluctance, sloth, leisure, ease or sleep rather than spontaneity, rashness, dynamism, eagerness, activity, work, hurry or being awake. Obviously, the slow tempo is not enough on its own to provide connotations of sadness and will need Qualification by other musical parameters (rhythmic, melodic, harmonic, timbric, instrumental, etc.).

d Restricted ambitus and short, repetitive phrases

Observations about connotative lack of energy can also be made about restricted melodic ambitus and short, repetitive phrases in slow tempo. It should not need to be argued that monotone melodic statements will have a greater chance of communicating monotony than those varying in timbre, volume, rhythmic figuration types of interval or total ambitus. Moreover, melodic ambitus and intervallic patterns can be related to conventions of speech intonation so that — at least in the European languages I am acquainted with — lack of melodic pitch variation will tend to signal either depressive (self-repressive?) sadness or boredom rather than emotional involvement, anger, enthusiasm or heart-rending grief: it is a question of 'depression' rather than 'mania'. Giving Northern European mourners the benefit of the ethical doubt, we shall opt for depression rather than boredom as a culturally correct connotation for repetitive melodic phrases with restricted ambitus in funeral situations.²³

We should also add that the frequent repetition of short phrases in music can also be associated with the emotional state of individuals whose voices modulate and body gestures move in slow and small repetitive patterns. No-one in a joyous, extrovert, wild, happy-go-lucky frame of mind will slowly repeat the same vocal statement or bodily gesture. Such behaviour is more likely to be seen as expressing sadness, introversion, calmness, care or control.

e Low tessitura and descending movement

General performance pitch — both melodic and accompanimental — below the musical-cultural average is yet another common and important trait of examples 9-14. There is only room here to state that, not to discuss how and why, our culture associates low pitch with darkness and heaviness, high pitches with light and lightness,²⁴ apart from stating the bio-acoustic obvious: that vocal chords, strings and lips have to be tighter to produce high pitches which then vibrate faster whereas low pitches vibrate slower and require less tension to produce.

23. Mersenne, in *Harmonie universelle* (1636) (Walker, 1978: 64, quoted by Ling 1983: 559), describes small intervals in these terms: 'Whether they rise or fall, they are like children or the elderly or people who have recently been ill for a long time and who cannot walk with large steps and who take a long time to cover short distances'.

24. For connections between high pitch and light, see Tagg (1979): 107-21. The symbolism of light/dark and black/white seems obvious to us Northern Europeans whose nature (including ourselves) lives less intensively (or dies completely) during the long, dark winters than during our short, light summers. However, it is clear that death, illness, sadness, etc. can be white or pale under other natural and cultural conditions. White is the colour of mourning in some African cultures or in Vietnam, and my Ghanaian colleague's little nieces hiding under the bed in fright the first time they saw me because I was pale enough to be a ghost will serve as examples of this point.

Except for the rising minor triads in the Grieg example, every melodic contour in examples 9-14 is (excluding short upbeat) either descending or more or less level at a low pitch. The downwards pull of minor thirds and, more importantly, minor sixths has already been commented on and can be seen as effectively consistent with the many descending melodic contours found in the material. Bearing in mind the relative tension involved in producing high and low pitches, a descending phrase will (unless it is a *crescendo* to a low pitch accent) — entail a process from high to low tension (vocal chords, strings, lips), from faster to slower vibrations and, by analogy, from more to less energy.²⁵

The connotative characteristics of death music in our culture, as represented by examples 9-14, can be visualised by enumerating them in adjectival form. Our ritualised relationship to the death of a member of the community should be sad, quiet, nostalgic, introvert, unobtrusive, unassuming, still, slow, calm, controlled, careful, cautious, deliberate, dark, heavy, depressed, monotone, inactive. These are the factors that make our funeral music funereal.

Funerals compared

We have just enumerated the connotative characteristics of our ritualised relationship to death through music. Let us compare this with some examples of Ghanaian funerals.²⁶

Although the only affective connotative word to occur in the first Ewe funeral song described above — 'softly' — equates well with our own 'careful' and *piano*, the basic musical parameters were quite different. Sluggishness, heaviness, reluctance, darkness, nostalgia, deliberation were not present but 'morning' (=light) was. In the second type of Ewe song, energetic epic delivery seemed to be the order of the day — 'defiant', 'heroic manner' and 'like swearing an oath' being descriptions offered affective connotations totally absent in the list of Northern European characteristics.

If we want to know what makes their funeral music so different from ours we must consider other cultural differences than musical ones. The sort of cultural differences envisaged here are easiest to grasp by exemplification.

When a Ghanaian footballer died in 1983 he was embalmed and laid in state by his nearest and dearest. Sad songs were sung privately by next of kin.

25. We choristers must have had natural tendencies to slack off and make many descending phrases into simultaneous diminuendi. I remember being told to take care with singing phrases that went down into chest register and to ensure that there was neither audible change of vocal timbre nor any unintended diminuendi. Pre-Baroque musical rhetoric figures include the *anabasis* (ἀναβασίς) for 'ascendit in coelis' and *katabasis* (καταβασίς) for 'deseendit' (just before 'homo factus est') in the Credo. *Katabasis* was also good when humbling oneself (Ling, 1983: 558). Cooke (1959: 162-5, 146-50) presents convincing examples of more depressing connotations for descending than other minor key melodic contours.

26. It is both beyond the bounds of my anthropological knowledge and outside the scope and intentions of this article to give a general account of Ghanaian funerals. However, since the object of this discussion is to clarify concepts of 'universality' in musical meaning, using music's relationship to death as a starting point, some cultural comparison is obviously necessary. This means that the Ghanaian funerals and their music described here are no more than examples of actual practices observed or reported by ear-and-eye witnesses. In one case (Paa Gyimah) I actually attended one evening of the funeral celebrations myself. The other reports have been delivered orally by Klevator Abo (Accra) who has taken part in the events recounted.

The funeral celebrations, however, were the responsibility of his team mates and football-playing colleagues. They took it as the natural course of events to organise exciting matches in his honour.²⁷

When highlife guitarist Paa Gyimah died and his funeral was held, I happened to be attending a music conferences in Accra,²⁸ his home town. Having clearly understood from local friends and colleagues that Ghanaian funerals are (a) extremely important — and frequently large — social events, and (b) 'where a lot of the best music is played'²⁹ I joined other conference participants who had been invited to visit the event. Our host that evening was distinguished guitarist Koo Nimo³⁰ who took it as a natural course of events to play without remuneration at the funeral of a respected brother musician. Koo Nimo escorted us to an area of Accra near the Ring Road and across the open sewer of a ditch that runs along almost every street in the city. We were led through a dense crowd of about five hundred and into an open space about the size of a tennis court. Underfoot was the orange-brown earth. At the other short end of the square, the deceased's friends, neighbours and colleagues had constructed a tarpaulin roofed stage which was now laden with instruments, amplifiers, mixer and PA-system. The three other sides of the square were defined by a line of benches occupied by Paa Gyimah's family (including relatives, in-laws and close friends), while his nuclear family was seated up front on the two sides nearest the band. With our pale faces and hands we walked round paying our respects to everyone in the front row on the three sides of the square. I counted over a hundred handshakes and twenty short but meaningful conversations. First in English and then in Twi — or was it Ga? — Koo Nimo explained that we were friends of music who, through coming from so far away, brought additional honour to the occasion. This elicited a round of applause. Then we bought red handmade cardboard visors sporting Paa Gyimah's name, his photo, the motto 'Rest in Peace', all bordered by a rim of tiny white 'In Memoriam' crosses. We talked cheerfully to others present at the occasion, watched some boys cause mirth amongst onlookers as they imitated women dancing by wiggling their hips and shaking their bottoms. We watched others dance and enjoyed hearing both highlife and palm-wine music, after which we put our contribution towards the costs of the funeral in the large barrel provided for the purpose just in front of the stage, and left. When we passed the same place in the bus on the Ring Road two days later, the party was still in full swing.

It is doubtful if many Northern Europeans would consider it proper to conduct funerals resembling those of the Ghanaian footballer or highlife musician just described. We would probably find visors sporting photos of the deceased, loud music, rude dancing, jive talk, the assembled company of

27. Conversation with Klevator Abo, 2 November 1983. During a phone call (5 November 1988), Abo said that funerals in Ghana seemed to him to be becoming sadder occasions. He also mentioned that speech, music and gestures tend to become louder and 'ruder', the further you move from the body of the deceased and the immediate family circle.

28. IASPM (International Association for the Study of Popular Music), 4th Conference, Accra July-August 1981.

29. John Collins, British-Ghanaian guitarist and producer, living and working in and around Accra.

30. Koo Nimo (Daniel Amponsah), who has created 'a fascinating combination of traditional Ashanti Palm-Wine music, classical guitar techniques and Jazz' (Collins, 1985: 46-i), is also President of the Musicians' Union of Ghana.

colleagues, not to mention a busload of people from another continent, all highly inappropriate to the occasion, perhaps even insulting. On the other hand, a Ghanaian with as little experience of our culture as we have of theirs — if you can find such a person — might wonder how we can be so rude as not to celebrate the life and works of the deceased by throwing a party in keeping with the personality and identity of the deceased and thereby also worthy of his/her memory.

The cultural relativity of these funerals and their music seems to depend on norms governing certain aspects of ritual:

- ♦ Who is responsible for organising the funeral?
- ♦ Whose relationship to the deceased is ritualised?
- ♦ What emotions are ritualised?

Having sadly had to bury my own father exactly one year after going to Paa Gyimah's funeral, and having acted as organist at a number of religious funerals in Britain and civil funerals in Sweden, I will use myself as a source of empirical information in answering these questions.

Some Northern European funerals

When my father died in 1988, it was up to us, the nuclear family (my mother, my brothers and me), to put notices in the newspaper, inform family and friends, contact the undertakers, the church, etc. Although we managed quite successfully to fulfil my father's explicit wish for his funeral not to be a miserable occasion for all concerned' — not least by choice of assertive rather than depressive voluntaries and vans — and although the church was packed with former colleagues, co-workers, students, we (the nuclear family) nonetheless found ourselves as the main centre of attention. Although the opening voluntary was major key moderato, we were still driven to church in big black limousines at 25 rather than at 50 kilometres per hour and we were the last to enter the church, being led down the aisle behind the coffin at much closer to 60 than 120 footsteps per minute. Although the Methodist church rang to affirmative hymns sung with great gusto, the only individual to laugh, audibly cry, utter loud noises or make quick, large or energetic movements or gestures was my one-year-old (i.e. preverbal and culturally untrained) nephew. In short: although Chopin's 'Marche funèbre' was not on the programme as a piece of music at the funeral, its *behavioural* connotations were nevertheless in clear evidence.

At every funeral I have attended in Northern Europe it has been manifest that the nuclear family is primarily responsible for financing and organising the ceremony and that it is also primarily their relationship to the deceased and only secondarily that of a larger collective that is ritualised. When I have played organ at funerals, I have always been contacted by the bereaved, either directly — in the case of civil funerals — or indirectly via the church, never by the deceased's colleagues, workmates, party comrades, etc. I have occasionally been asked to play something a bit more stirring or affirmative as closing voluntary³¹ but all other music has been largely compatible with the funereal characteristics enumerated above.³² The fact that my father

31. I remember two funerals for Swedish communist party veterans where the bereaved strongly felt it would be in keeping with the personality and beliefs of the deceased to mark the idea that the struggle goes on by playing the *Internationale* as the closing voluntary.

obviously thought it necessary to express the elicited wish for his funeral not to be a 'miserable occasion for all concerned' as well as the fact that most of the explicitly requested pieces I have played at funerals have on several counts diverted from the musical-structural norm of examples 9-14 clearly imply that unless anything is stated to the contrary, the music used and the mood created at Northern European funerals will be in line with an implicit norm of 'sadness', 'control', 'darkness', 'heaviness', etc. Whose emotions are these?

Judging from my own experience of funerals in Northern Europe, I would say that the musical-functional norm in such situations is to concentrate on certain types of affect felt primarily by *those with closest family ties with the deceased* and to ritualise such affect as a yardstick for public behaviour in the funeral context. By underlining some affective aspects and avoiding others, Northern European funeral music seems to help the closest mourners suppress public expression of possible feelings of grief-stricken distress, bitterness or torment (in the case of an agonising loss) or relief (in the case of death after years of dehumanising disease). By putting the lid on assertive emotions and by totally excluding taboo expressions of sentiment, emotional behaviour (gestures, attitudes, tone of voice, etc.) is moderated or corrected into less anguishing, less conflictive forms of expression. Since this socialising process is based on what next of kin rather than the larger community of funeral attendants are expected to feel, our funerals and their music can in general be seen as ritualising individual rather than collective relationships to the deceased. This observation is also borne out by the fact that at funerals I have attended where music diverging from the funereal 'norm' has been explicitly requested, the deceased has in every case, either in practice or in belief, had a far greater degree of social identity and collective commitment than in cases where the musical norm has prevailed and where there has been almost exclusive retaliation of the deceased's relationship to the nuclear family.

Summarising the descriptions and short discussion just offered, it is clear that whereas we expect next of kin to initiate funeral proceedings, such responsibility was, in the case of the footballer and musician from Accra, assumed not by the deceased's family but by his colleagues. This implies also that the prime relationship ritualised or made public by these Ewe and urban Ghanaian ceremonies is not that between the nuclear family and the deceased but that between the deceased and a larger community.

All of this implies radically different processes of social learning and reinforcement. The examples of Ghanaian funerals, as well as the burial music of the Senufo, Ba-Benzélé and Massongo cited earlier, seem to put the community's relationship to the deceased into a central position in the communal ceremonies connected with death and burial, whereas our funerals also communal ceremonies, be they public or private — ritualise the individual's re-

32. Quiet and slow non-dissonant major key pieces whose beginnings and ends have restricted melodic phrase (not total melodic) ambitus and generally low accompanimental pitch, like Händel's 'Largo' or Schumann's Andante Pathétique No. 1 (cf. Rapée's 'Funeral' section, Rapée (1924): 161-2), would usually be considered suitable. At one communist burial I was asked to play 'The Evening Bell' (Russian folk song arrangement), whose large melodic ambitus in E \flat flat major was counterbalanced by very slow tempo and thick, sluggish, consonant chordal sonority. In all those pieces, minor key 'archaic' sadness is replaced by what might be called major key 'nostalgic beauty'.

lationship to the deceased. This is further underlined by the fact that although a bereaved Ewe wife, husband, sibling or parent has the fully respected right to mourn the dear one departed, it is not that nuclear family member's feelings that are ritualised in any funeral ceremonies but the relationship and meaning of the deceased to the community at large.

By ritualising individual at the expense of collective relationships to the deceased through funerals and the music, our culture reinforces an alienating bourgeois individualist ideology according to which (a) it is taboo to view the subject as a social object and (b) being a social object has no subjective character. In simple terms this means that our culture's funereal funeral music plays its part in reinforcing alienation: the more our collective identity feels meaningless and the less influence we feel we have over matters public (leisure, family, etc.). The more matters private are officially (publicly) celebrated (advertising, family dramas, funerals), the less likely our chances of finding any justifiable identity as collective beings.

This ideological picture of Northern European death music is as lugubrious as the music's perceived connotations in this part of the world. It would, however, be misleading to leave the discussion at that and return to the question of musical universals without first discussing some changes in death music stereotypes in our own culture.

Changes of meaning in death music stereotypes

In order to clarify the semantic relativity of music traditionally associated with death in our culture, let us isolate one important archetypal element and trace its recent usage. The *museme*³³ we have chosen is a repeated accompanimental alternation of the tonic minor and submediant major triads (I ↔ VI or T ↔ Sp in the minor key), which we shall call the 'aeolian pendulum'.³⁴ It is the main harmonic device in Chopin's *Marche funèbre*, B♭m ↔ G♭ occurring 32 times during the first 16 bars — the main statement of the main theme. I have played the aeolian pendulum at different speeds in all keys using all built-in voices on a Yamaha DX7S and am still unable to locate any usage of the device in my tactile and auditive memory apart from in rock music recorded in 1966 or after.³⁵ Using mainly Björnberg's (1984: 381, ff) list of rock recordings in which the aeolian pendulum (with or without major triad of VII in between) plays an important part, we choose to mention the following:³⁶

- 1 The Kinks: *Dead End Street* (1966)
2. Bob Dylan, Jimi Hendrix: *All Along The Watchtower* (1968)
3. Derek and the Dominoes: *Layla* (1970)
4. Wishbone Ash: *Phoenix* (1970)
5. Jeffrey Cain: *Whispering Thunder* (1972)
6. Pink Floyd *Money* (1973)

33. For definition of 'museme', see Tagg (1979): 70-3.

34. Term borrowed from Björnberg (1984).

35. The only (modern) classical piece I could readily call to mind was a setting of Rirnbaut's mystical and existential words 'J'a'i seul la clef de cette parade sauvage' from Benjamin Britten's *Les Illuminations*. However, if my memory serves me correctly, the pendulum there is between the major, not minor, tonic and flat submediant triads. If readers can help me with blank spots where aeolian pendulums might possibly occur (e.g. Mahler, Sibelius, Vaughan Williams), I would be very grateful.

36. For a much more thorough account of aeolian harmony in rock music, see Björnberg (1984).

7. David Bowie: *1984* (1974)
8. Nationalteatern: *Barn av vår tid* (1977)
9. Dire Straits: *Sultans of Swing* (1978)
10. Flash & The Pan: *California* (1979)
11. Police: *Message In A Bottle* (1979)
12. Frank Zappa: *Why Does It Hurt When I Pee?* (1979)
13. Ted Gärdestad & Annica Boller: *Låt solen värma dig* (1980)
14. Phil Collins: *In The Air Tonight* (1981)
15. Kim Carnes: *Voyeur* (1982)
16. Irene Cara: *Flashdance* (1983)

Without going into the verbal details of these songs, it is possible to summarise some important areas of connotation for the lyrics of each title as: (1) pointlessness of always being 'second best' in the dreary everyday of 'Dead End Street'; (2) waiting, resignation, apocalyptic vision; (3) painful separation; (4) mythical rising from the ashes; (5) distant but immanent threat; (6) the absurdity of economic greed; (7) dystopia; (8) teenagers hardened by cold, grey soulless concrete tower blocks; (9) trad jazz band playing for inimical audience one cold and rainy night; (10) sick general presses button by mistake and nukes California; (11) loneliness and alienation; (12) VD problems; (13) love /sun parallels, worrying about the future; (14) waiting for something unknown, possible imminent showdown; (15) loneliness by the video; (16) sadness and fear in a world of steel and stone.

A remarkable number of these lyrics deal with such subjects as fascination with and fear of modern technique and civilisation, uneasiness about the future and the threat of war, alienation in general and in particular situations, static moods of waiting and premonition, historical or mystical events. As a whole the lyrics circumscribe a relatively uniform field of associations which might be characterised by such concepts as 'modernity', 'cold', 'waiting', 'uncertainty', 'sadness', 'stasis', 'infinity in time and space'.³⁷

How these pieces of rock music with their aeolian pendulums came to have such inhospitable, sad, static, uncertain and almost fatalistic connotations and why these connotations are so close to those enumerated as typical for Northern European funeral music are both questions requiring far more research. One small observation should nevertheless be made.

At least two highly popular pre-1966 rock tunes contain aeolian pendulums. It is possible that the quasi-apocalyptic (*Ghost Riders In The Sky* (Ramrods, 1961) and the 'Indians on the plain' character of *Apache* (Shadows, 1960) owe much of their 'serious movement and dark destiny in the wide open spaces of the West' to renderings of such Western theme classics as Tiomkin's *Rawhide* or Link Wray and his Ray Men (1958) and Frankie Laine (1959). Remembering the tendency for Western themes to use archaic folk modes — either 'New World Symphony' major pentatonics (e.g. *Shane*, *Gun-smoke*) or minor mode (aeolian or dorian) tonal vocabulary (e.g. *The Virginian*, *Rawhide*, *The Good The Bad And The Ugly*) — and that these archaisms owe much to North American folk harmonic practices as well as to 'classical' harmonisations of British folk song (e.g. aeolian cadences in *Kingsfold* (1933)), it is possible that the aeolian pendulums of post-1965 rock have acquired their connotations of 'serious and implacable timelessness' by reference to Western theme music's use of British folk modes which in the US

37. My translation of Björnberg (1984): 382.

American context in turn refer to olden times.

It is nevertheless just as probable that the continuous use of Chopin's *Marche funèbre* as funeral music No.1 in our culture had so fundamentally established the aeolian pendulum as a sadness-death-and-destiny archetype by 1968 that rock music, having reached a mature age and an experimental period, was able to integrate it into its own store of connotative symbols and change its meaning. For not only do the death, darkness and sadness connotations undergo a slight shift from gloom, sadness and death (Chopin) towards eternity, alienation and impending doom (rock); the aeolian pendulum's accompanimental function also changes; it is louder, faster, provided with rhythmic figuration so as to acquire riff status, while many of the melodic lines, vocal and instrumental, acting as figures set off in relief against this accompaniment, are not only obviously far more 'up front' than Chopin's funereal tune but also more assertive in relation to their own already assertive accompaniments.³⁸ The clearest example of this shift in the meaning of the aeolian pendulum can be found in Irene Cara's rendering of *Flashdance* (1983).

The title sequences to *Flashdance* show the film's young heroine cycling to work through the streets of Pittsburgh one inhospitably grey and rainy morning. She is a welder and the scene is that of industrial decay with unfriendly streets, wires, puddles in the asphalt, stone and metal. The lyrics say: 'first when there's nothing' ... 'fear seems to hide deep inside' ... 'All alone in a world made of steel, made of stone'. Still at 90 bpm., with no more than synthesiser accompaniment marking onbeat chord changes in the bass and straight quaver movement in simple triadic arpeggios, the voice of the heroine sings (ex. 1):³⁹

Ex. 1. *Flashdance* — verse 1 (words and music by Keith Forsey, Irene Cara and Giorgio Moroder. Published by Warner Chappell Music Ltd., Famous Chappell and Gema, 1983).

Conceived within the general framework of the rock idiom (instrumentation, miking, etc.), the music referred to in this citation is slow (90 bpm), low (vocal register), quiet (volume) and intimate (mike distance, vocal timbre, especially at 'alone', 'cried', 'tears.', 'world'). It also refers to the 'serious' by referring to 'serious' music (no anticipated downbeats in melody or accompaniment) and the singer delays accentuated downbeats (bars 3-4, 6-7), thus adding an effect of personal reluctance or heaviness.⁴⁰ At the end of the second eight-bar verse just quoted, the 'Western' half cadence (A \flat \leftrightarrow F / \flat VII \leftrightarrow V / SS \leftrightarrow D) marks the entry of full rock-disco accompaniment (drums, bass guitar, rhythm guitar, etc.) at a sudden and regular 120 bpm (ex. 2). Another eight bar verse is rendered with this accompaniment and at

38. For more detailed account of connotative meaning in rock music melody/accompaniment dualism, see Tagg 1987.

39. The singer — Irene Cara — is of course not the heroine — Alex Owens, played by Jennifer Beals — but the music and its lyrics are phenomenologically the heroine's by the process of figure-ground, melody-accompaniment identification between music and picture.

40. Of course, delaying downbeats can also give positive combinations of ease or idleness, e.g. Frank Sinatra's *You Make Me Feel So Young* (Myro, Gordon) (1956).

that tempo before we reach the main hook of the song. The words here — ‘What a feeling seems to be then’ and ‘Take your passion and make it happen’ are set to the aeolian pendulum $G^m \leftrightarrow E^b$. Counting also the melodic continuation of this example with the almost ecstatic fervour of ‘I can have it all, now I’m dancing for my life’ (reaches with gospel ornamentations), average vocal pitch has been raised almost an octave⁴¹ and downbeat anticipations are in clear melodic evidence.

Ex. 2. *Flashdance* — main hook (credits, see ex. 1)

♩ = 120

G^m F E^b F G^m F

Take your pas - ion
(What a feel - ing)

and make it hap - pen
(seems to be there)

synth: bright strings

synth. 8va bass.

The only common denominator between the total sound of the hook lines in *Flashdance* and Chopin's *Marche funèbre* is the aeolian pendulum. If Björnberg's and my interpretation of verbal (and visual) connotations in aeolian rock songs from the seventies and early eighties is correct and if our understanding of melodic or harmonic oscillation between minor sixth and perfect fifths not totally wild,⁴² we can presume that the aeolian pendulum in *Flashdance* still holds at least some degree of rock's 'gloom and doom' connotations. If this is so, the chorus of *Flashdance* represents the victory of the gospel-ecstatic and dance-crazy subject over her 'gloom and doom' environment, just as she wins her own self-confidence and defeats the alienation and depression of her nine-to-five job in the film narrative.

If the process of semiosis in the case of the aeolian pendulum can be considered as in any way exemplifying how feelings of threat and alienation might be handled musically by young people in industrialised capitalist societies, an important parallel issue to raise is: how can the first-hand experience of death, destruction, terror and oppression in its crudest, most brutal and blatant forms be handled in a musically — and politically — meaningful way? Victor Jara's words, smuggled out of the football stadium in Santiago de Chile, were:

41. I was advised by a Greek comrade (Alex Christopoulos) to raise my voice an octave and to use a 'sharper' (=more piercing) tone when shouting *slogans* in political demonstrations. This helped the sound carry much better in the street and did not strain the voice so much as producing the same volume at a lower pitch.

42. One of the most convincing pieces of evidence in Deryck Cooke's *The Language of Music* (1959) is the section entitled '5-b6-5' (pp. 146-50). Although (5)-b6-5 is the only semitone change and therefore the most harmonically directional element in the aeolian pendulum, Chopin's funeral march does not figure amongst Cooke's examples. However, some other connotatively very relevant pieces cited by Cooke are (1) opening — Josquin des Prèz: *Déploration sur la mort d'Ockeghem*; (2) 'Maria' ... weinet draußen' — Schütz: *Auferstehungs-Historie*; (3) Donna Anna discovers her dead father Mozart: *Don Giovanni*; (4) 'Quantus tremor est futurus Mozart: *Requiem*; (5) Florestan languishing in the dungeon — Beethoven: *Fidelio*; (6) 'By the waters of Babylon' — Walton: *Belshazzar's Feast*; (7) Lucretia the day after — Britten: *The Rape Of Lucretia*; (8) 'Vous qui tremblez' — Berlioz: *Les Troyens* (9) Lament over the future fate of Russia — Mussorgsky: *Boris Godinov*; (10) 'M'hai legato al croce' — Verdi: *Otello*. For falling semitone motifs in Wagner's Ring, see Donnington 1976: 278-315.

Canto que mal me sales cuando tengo que cantar espanto!
 Espanto como el que vivo, como el que muero, espanto.
 De verme entre tanto y tantos momentos del infinito
 en que el silencio y el grito son las metas de este canto.
 Lo que veo nunca vi, lo que he sentido y lo que siento
 hará brotar el memento... 43

Latin Americans face to face with death in the guise of tortured and 'disappeared' comrades, friends or family members have ritualised their loss in sad and quiet laments that we would recognise as such too.⁴⁴ However, although Chileans and Salvadoreans put the experience of bereavement into music more or less in accordance with our own society's norms of what is proper in connection with death, this is not enough on its own. Whereas bereaved Northern Europeans are only immediately obliged to work through their own sorrow in order to manage their future tolerably from an emotional viewpoint, those living under continuous threat of death in their immediate vicinity have *both* to work through their own sorrow and express anger, defiance and bitterness and promote behavioural strategies that will contribute to removing the causes of that recurrent sorrow, anger and bitterness. The latter requires a *collective* effort and behavioural connotations of the collective are, as we have suggested, not provided by funeral music ritualising only the ideal affective state of the bereaved next of kin.

It is therefore not surprising that one of the best-known pieces associated with the struggle to overthrow the terrorist and fascist movement in Chile was 'El pueblo unido', written hastily one evening in July 1973, when it was clear that the disunity of the left, the treachery of the military — not to mention ITT, the US government and reactionaries inside the country, would bring about the demise of *Unidad popular*, i.e. not long before Jara had to write the words cited above. *El pueblo unido* was never recorded before the fascist coup and was really only used as a song of defiance and determination from the 'valley oil the shadow of death'.⁴⁵

Please note that the following parameters of musical expression diverge from the funereal norm:

- 1 tempo — 100 bpm is a moderate to brisk walking pace;
2. volume — the 'norm' is *piano with più forte* in the middle somewhere, here we have *piano* only preceding the final *crescendo*;
3. melodic phrase ambitus — apart from the final chromatic rise between a minor sixth and an octave;
4. melodic contour — 6 of 16 bars descending, 10 ascending;
5. patterns of phrase repetition — direct repetition of 2-bar phrases and 8-bar periods, sequential (not reiterative) repetition of 1-bar phrases;

43. Jara 1973. 'How hard it is to sing when I must sing of horror. Horror which I live, horror which I die. Seeing myself among so much and so many moments of infinity in which silence and screams are the end of my song. What I see I have never seen. What I have felt and what I feel will give birth to the moment' ...

44. e.g. *Canción para Juanito* — Karaxú (1981), *Compañero* — Banda Tepeuani (1979).

45. Please excuse the mixed metaphor. *El pueblo unido* is composed by Sergio Ortega (1973) with lyrics by Quilapayún and Ortega. Thanks to Pedro van der Lee (Göteborg) and Coriún Ahronián (Montevideo) for help with the background to this song. See also Joan Jara 1984. I first heard this song in the version transcribed here at the tenth Festival for Political Song at Berlin (GDR) in February 1974, after which it was sung at almost every Latin American solidarity rally or meeting attended for at least six years afterwards.

6. melodic motifs — no concentration on or repetition of 3-2 or 6-5; chromatic *crescendo* in coda leading into shouts of the crowd;
7. type of harmony — directional triadic harmony, mobile bass line, tonal circle of fifths movement in subdominantal direction, no pendulums or drones, dominantal (upward and outward) harmonic direction in coda;
8. vocal techniques — collective slogan shouting incorporated at start and end.

Ex. 3. Sergio Ortega: *El pueblo unido* (lyrics by Quilapayún and Ortega).

Gridando E^{m7} $E^{m7}/7$ C^{maj7} B^7 *Cantando*

ff El pueblo u-ni-do ja-mas sera ven-cido! El (v1) La

E^m $E^{m7}/7$ C^{maj7} B^7 E^m $E^{m7}/7$

patria está for-jando un-i-dao De norte al sur se ple can-tar el pueb-lo va a triunfar. Million - es ya im-

C^{maj7} B^7 A^{m7} D^7 G C^{maj7} $F\#m7-5$ B^7

mov-i-liz-er-á. Desde al sa-lar ardiente y mineral al bosque austral u-pon-en la verdad. De a-ce-ro soy ardiente ba-tal-lion, sus ma-nos van lle-

E^{m7} E^7 A^{m7} D^7 G C^{maj7}

-ni-dos en la lucha y al tra-ba-joi-ran la patria cu-bi-ran, su -vando la jus-ti-ci-a con fue-go, con va-lor y la ra-zón, mu-

$F\#m7-5$ B^7 E^m B E^m/s B^7 E^m

pe - so ya a-nu-ncia porvenir. (v2) De to al tra-baj-a-dor. Y a-

cresc. A^m $F\#7$ E^m/s *cresc. sempre*

-hor-a el pueb-lo que se_alsa en la lu-cha con voz de gi-gant-e gri-

cresc. al f B^{sus4} B^7 *ff* *gridando* E^m E^{m7} C^{maj7} B^7

-dan-te ad-e-lan-ter! El pueblo u-nido ja-mas sera ven-cido!

This music, written in dark times and sung by millions of Latin Americans in

even darker moments, retains a sense of dignity and sorrow through its traditional use of the minor mode, descending bass line, tonal circle of fifths using chords of the seventh, etc. At the same time, within this general connotative framework, the piece allows for loud singing, includes both implicit (bar 8) and explicit (bars 13-16) *crescendi*, moves at a brisk pace and also both starts and ends with the shouting of a collective political slogan. In this way not only can solemnity and sorrow be catered for but also drive, energy, dynamism and determination.

Conclusions

It should be clear from the arguments presented above that death is anything but universal when considered as a cultural phenomenon. We have seen not only how behaviour and attitudes towards death vary radically from one society to another but also how such attitudes vary inside our own cultural sphere. For these very reasons we have also been able to offer evidence suggesting that there is little or no structural correspondence between music associated with death in one culture and that of another. In *Flash-dance* we were able to see the socio-historical relativity (and death?) of our culture's 'museme of death' while with *El pueblo unido* we saw a more overtly collective musical treatment of the problem. In both cases it is the collective subjectivity, based on experiences shared of the same objective circumstances — such things as alienation in work and education for *Flash-dance*, for *El pueblo unido* fascist terror and oppression — that bring about a need on the part of those making or using music in those contexts to find more adequate forms of musical expression than those offered hitherto. This means that musical as well as other symbolic relationships to such matters as death, destruction, injustice and alienation — or any other important reality to which humans must relate as individuals and collectives in order to survive — will change as much and as frequently as the social factors (including ourselves) interacting in the formation (or deformation) of that reality.

If matters are in fact as culturally relative as they are presented here, how, the reader may well ask, was it possible for the respondents in the small experiment accounted for earlier to agree, even to a small extent, on some vague connotational characteristics of each piece from the foreign music cultures? Let us look more closely at this final issue.

Returning shortly to the responses reported on pp. 1-3, it will be remembered that the symposium participants, although wide of the mark as far as connotative competence was concerned in all the examples taken from foreign music cultures and intersubjectively contradictory about the Senufo and Cambodian burial musics, did seem to agree about something in the other pieces. What is that 'something'?⁴⁶

- ♦ no. 1 (Massongo) had an epic or heroic profile;
- ♦ no. 2 (Ba-Benzélé) and no. 5 had quite a few energetic connotations;
- ♦ no. 6 (Turkish) was slow;
- ♦ no. 8 (Csángó) had a profile of slow, perhaps sad and lonely but tender, intensity.

Before discussing the more 'obvious' connotative universals ('slow', 'energetic'), we should state that the Hungarian solo song of German origin (no. 8) uses melodic material, metre, periodicity and, most importantly, a vocal

timbre that are all highly familiar to any indigenous inhabitant of Central or Northern Europe. It might, so to speak, have been our own mother singing to us. The vocal quality is slightly 'thin' but the obvious care the old lady has taken with pitching the notes right and the sensitive slurs with which she slightly bridges certain intervals create an ambience of considerable intimacy. This is further enhanced by the fact that the song has been recorded in a small room (no extraneous noises, little or no reverberation) with the singer quite close to the microphone (no cheap 'heavy breathing' tricks here, though!). This might throw a little light on the 'lonely' or 'tender' connotations. However, the connotation of sadness, probably caused by parameters of vocal expression, is difficult to analyse.⁴⁷ Moreover, since vocal techniques and melodic vocabulary seem to be clearly compatible with traditional and popular forms of musical expression used in practically any part of Europe, it seems wiser to treat responses for this tune as intracultural rather than cross-cultural musical competence.

Possible reasons for remaining intersubjective agreement between respondents can be summarised as follows:

- ♦ 'Slow' is almost certainly related to the slow tempo of the pieces eliciting the response.
- ♦ 'Energetic' can be related not only to tempo and rhythm (more speed needs more energy) but also to volume (more sonic energy means louder), to tessitura (more tension to produce high notes), to ambitus and melodic contour (large intervallic leaps suggest larger gestures, which in turn require more energy to execute than small ones, and larger space, which takes more energy to cover in sound or on foot than small space). At least two of these parameters have been clearly energised' in the examples that produced the energetic connotations.

46. We will ignore the connotative agreement on no.7 (rebetiki) in this discussion about musical universals because that agreement concerns touristic connotations (geographical or national location, cafes), i.e. phenomena to which we have a direct relation from our own experience of leisure. This makes both the phenomena connoted and the music itself part of our own culture, not in the sense that Swedes or Brits are competent in Greek urban proletarian culture but that it can, from inside our own cultural reference sphere, be recognised as Greek or Mediterranean. Agreeing on this implies anything but cultural competence inside the culture recognised as not being ours. To suggest otherwise would be like crediting connotative musical competence in our tradition to unwesternised Africans or Asians who say 'Europe', 'cold rain' and 'immigration offices' on hearing both the Bridal Chorus from *Lohengrin* and Chopin's *Marche funèbre*.

47. One of the reasons for choosing this song as one of the test pieces was because I personally found the old lady's voice tenderly and nobly sad. The actual vocal qualities that had this effect on me may be partly attributable to personal experiences but this would not explain why other respondents, with personal histories probably quite different from my own, also found the example sad but tender. It just seems that we happen to read the singer's vocal timbre and inflections in similar ways. Barthes' pioneering essay on the grain of the voice notwithstanding, if we can consider the analysis of semantic aspects of musical discourse in general still to be in the cradle, we would have to say that the description of relationships between acoustic and phenomenological aspects of voice quality in particular has yet to see the light of day. My Ewe colleague can assure me until lie is blue in the face — and I believe him — that his voice *is* sad when he sings his 'bury me softly' song and yet I still find his voice quite cheerful without being able to give him any real indication of what it is in his voice that sounds cheerful to me.

- ♦ For the delivery of a text or song to be judged as 'epic' or 'heroic' it must be steadily *mezzo forte* or *forte* (epic = 'a long narrative poem recounting in elevated style the deeds of a legendary hero'), unwavering, controlled and clear. Bearing also in mind the acoustic facts of epic delivery (one person's voice in front of many people, frequently in a ritual situation), it is clear that fast, slurred, Whis- pering or frenetic yelling would not fit the bill. However, although we might agree within our own culture about the characteristics of 'epic', this does not mean that the same sort of vocal delivery need necessarily have the same connotations in every culture.⁴⁸

Expanding slightly on this discussion and using general observations made from a far wider range of musical expression from many more cultures than those mentioned here, we suggest four main categories of general cross-cultural similarities of relationships between musical sounds and their Paramu- sical contexts or areas of connotation. We call such cross-cultural similarities of relationship 'musical universals'.⁴⁹ The relationships thus designated are those:

1. between (a) musical tempo (pulse) and (b) heart beat (pulse), breathing pace, walking or running speed, etc. (Nobody sleeps in a hurry or hurries while sleeping);⁵⁰
2. between (a) musical loudness and timbre (especially attack, enve- lope, decay) and (b) certain types of physical activity. (Nobody caresses by striking, nobody yells jerky lullabies at breakneck speed, nobody uses *legato* phrasing and soft or rounded timbres for hunting or war situations);⁵¹
3. between (a) speed and loudness of tone beats and (b) the acoustic setting. (Quick, quiet tone beats are not discernible if there is a lot of

48. What, one might wonder, becomes of epic speech and vocal delivery when singers and rhetoricians all have mikes pinned to their lapels and when meeting halls, streets and squares turn into everyone's sofa in front of the TV? *Do Star Wars*, Ronald Reagan and Iron Maiden constitute new forms of epic expression?

49. Apart from European classical traditions (especially Tudor, Baroque, tone poems, pro- gramme music, film music), we are chiefly referring to rock music, some Latin American and West African musics and a small part of the Hindu classical music tradition. Although *intellectually* understanding most of what one *reads about* other musical cultures, it seems rash to claim that it has been understood musically.

Sonic anaphones (musical onomatopoeia) and musical stylisations of natural human, non-human or mechanical sounds have been excluded from the list not only because they frequently vary drastically in their stylisation, but also because the vocabulary of available noises varies both inside one music culture and between cultures. Would you recognise wind or know what it stood for if you heard it in Mongolian music? Would you recognise the cry of the jackal sung by a Masai herder and get the real feel of what jackals mean to him? Would he hear Schubert's various brooks or get the right associations hearing com- puter beeps or laser flashes if he were able to identify them in disco music? If the answer to any of these questions is 'no', it is safer to keep these anaphones out of the 'universals' section.

50. According to my Swedish neighbour's 'Home Doctor Encyclopaedia' (*Bra Böckers Läkar- lexikon*, vol. 5: 145-6), a highly trained athlete's pulse rate can, if measured during sleep or deep rest, be as low as 40 bpm and the pulse of a small child or baby in a state of excitement can exceed 200 bpm. This coincides perfectly with the range of pulses on a normal metronome, i.e. from 40 (*largo/lento*) to 212 (*prestissimo*).

51. It should of course be remembered that musical volume must be considered also as a cultural- ly *relative* concept, in that variations between societies in the loudness of the sound- scape (Schafer 1973, 1977) will require concepts of 'loud' and 'soft' to adapt to what is actually audible above the noise of the soundscape (Tagg 1987).

echo, and slow, loud, long ones are difficult to produce acoustically if there is little or no reverberation);

4. between musical phrase lengths and the capacity of the human lung. (Few people can sing or blow and breathe in at the same time: this means that musical phrases tend to last between one and ten seconds).⁵²

It should be observed that the general areas of connotation just mentioned acoustic situation, movement, speed, energy and non-musical sound — are all in a *bio-acoustic* relationship to the musical parameters cited — pulse, volume, general phrase duration and timbre. These general bio-acoustic connotations may well be universal but this does not mean that emotional attitudes towards such phenomena as large spaces (cold and lonely or free and open?), hunting (exhilarating or cruel?) or hurrying (good or bad?) will also be the same even inside one and the same culture, let alone between cultures. One reason for this could be that the musical parameters mentioned in the list of 'universals' (pulse, volume, general phrase duration and certain aspects of timbre) do *not* include most aspects of rhythmic, metric, timbric, tonal, melodic, instrumental or harmonic *organisation*. Such *musical* organisation requires some kind of *social* organisation and cultural context before it can be created, understood or otherwise invested with meaning. In other words: only extremely general bio-acoustic types of connotation can be considered as musical 'universals'.

The main points of this article can be summarised as follows:

- ♦ The universal phenomenon of music associated with the universal phenomenon of death does not give rise to the same music.
- ♦ Music understood as sad or associated with death in one culture is not necessarily understood as sad or associated with death by members of another musical culture.
- ♦ There are very few universally understood aspects of musical expression. These establish no more than extremely general types of bio-acoustic connections between musical structure and the human body and its acoustic and temporo-spatial surroundings. All evaluative and affective musical symbols are culturally specific.

If we agree with the gist of these points and with the general drift of the descriptions and argumentation preceding them, we may well ask ourselves how people can even conceive of calling music a 'universal language'. Yet statements to that effect are still to be heard, not so much in serious contemporary writings on music⁵³ as in the catch phrases and slogans bandied about like self-evident maxims and items of general consensus by the music and media industries. MTV's update of the 'ein Volk, ein Reich, ein Führer'

52. Accomplished wind instrumentalists can of course practise circular breathing. For example, Roland Kirk can inhale through a nose flute and blow through his sax, while there are also all sorts of bellowed (e.g. bagpipes, organs), mechanical, electromechanical and electronic instruments that can make melodies without being hampered by the restrictions of the human lung. Some people even sing while breathing in. More importantly, no percussion instrument (including mbiras, pianos, xylophones as well as drums) is at all dependent on inhalations/exhalations to measure its phrases. Nevertheless, studies of rhythmic or melodic recurrence (reiterative, sequential, varied, etc.) in any music will almost certainly show that most rhythmic/melodic statements can be divided into motifs or phrases seldom occupying more than ten seconds. Even the didgeridoo player, who inhales while chanting into his eucalyptus trunk, measures his constant flow of sound with rhythmic and timbric motifs that also fit in with phrase durations.

motto into 'One World, One Music' is one such example, the Eurovision Song Contest another, with its annual reminder that even though we don't speak each others' languages, we do at least understand each others' music — a lie if ever there was one, seeing how Mediterranean, not to mention Turkish, entries are more or less consistently outvoted by Northern European nations. In such contexts it would not be unreasonable to ask in whose interests such untruths are uttered.

It was our aim to do no more than suggest the ideological character of the misconception 'music is a universal language'. If it is true that the misconception is in less favour with academics and classical buffs these days than with the media business, and if we consider which and whose music is labelled 'universal' in such contexts, we start, to approach an attitude resembling that of the Pentagon National School of War.

On this ever-smaller globe of ours, all cultures are engaged in an inevitable competition for predominance and survival. Those who will fashion tomorrow's world are those who are able to project their image (to exercise the predominant influence and a long range influence)... If we want our values and our life style to be triumphant we are forced to enter a competition with other cultures and other centres of power. For this purpose the multinational company offers considerable leverage. Its growing business arsenal with its foreign bases works for us 24 hours a day. It is a fact of osmosis which does not only transmit and implant entrepreneurial methods, banking techniques and North American commercial relations, but also our judicial systems and concepts, our political philosophy, our mode of communication, our ideas of mobility, and a way of contemplating literature and art appropriate to our civilisation.⁵⁴

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53. e.g. Gorbman (1987: 12-13), in her otherwise useful book on narrative film music, states 'If we listen to a Bach fugue, independently of any other activity, we are listening to the functioning of *pure musical codes*, generating musical discourse'.

54. Wallis and Malm 1984: 7, citing J Collins, 'États-Unis et transnationales américaines: retour à l'envoyeur', in *Politique d'aujourd'hui*, 1-2, January-February 1975.

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