

ICTM Study Group on Multipart Music

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The foundation process

Since the foundation of the ICTM Study Group on Multipart Music in 2009, I have been asked on different occasions by colleagues about the idea and the path which led to this development. I am therefore all the more grateful to the initiators of this publication for the invitation to “overview the history of the Study Group, its symposia, and its publications, but particularly also reflect on your personal involvement, accomplishments, and challenges” (email from Svanibor Pettan, 12 Apr 2018).

The ICTM Executive Board approved the establishment of the Study Group on Multipart Music in its meeting of 8 July 2009, after the ICTM world conference in Durban, South Africa. In the minutes of this meeting the following is noted:

Multi-part Music: Rice outlined the proposal for a new Study Group for Multi-part Music by interested members. All requirements needed were met although originally some board members were concerned the area of study was not well enough defined to be a separate group. Rice held discussions with the proposed chair of the group to clarify this issue. The new group has elected Ardian Ahmedaja (Austria) as Chair. Board unanimously agreed to approve the group. (EB minutes, 104th meeting, 8 Jul 2009:§5207)¹

I would like to take the opportunity to thank Timothy Rice for his commitment and support in that important stage of the foundation process of the study group, Wim van Zanten, another ICTM Executive Board member at that time, and Svanibor Pettan, ICTM vice president, for the very helpful consultations in Durban in this context, as well as the other EB members for agreeing with the proposal. Moreover, I want to thank Stephen Wild, then ICTM secretary general, with whom I was in contact for several months before this decision was taken, and who supported and encouraged the whole process from the very beginning.

The establishment of the ICTM Study Group on Multipart Music was carried out with the cooperation of many individuals. Their number increases when one considers that this process was preceded by the work of the Research Centre for European Multipart Music (EMM), which began its activities in 2003 at the Department for Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. Significantly, many members of this network were ICTM members.

The establishment of the EMM was the result of a research necessity. In 2002, work on the research project “Albanische Volkslieder und byzantinischer Gesang” (Albanian folk songs and Byzantine chant), supported by the Austrian Science Fund (project number P 13355), was being finalized in the department. The project had also given me the possibility to conduct fieldwork in the border area of Albania, Greece, and FYR Macedonia. Experiencing directly how much the music practices in the area, of which multipart music is an important part, have in common, the need for exchanges with colleagues working on the topic increased. However, hardly any research with a cross-border focus in this area had been undertaken. This situation was influenced primarily by the very restrictive political situation in each of these countries and by their relations with each other after World War II and during the wars in the former Yugoslavia in the 1990s with their impact on the entire region. I also talked about these concerns with the director of the department, Gerlinde Haid. One of her main research fields was musical traditions in the European Alps (cf. Hemetek and Morgenstern 2013). She remembered that for her it had also been a challenge to undertake cross-border research in the countries of the European Alps (from the 1970s onwards), although the political situation in that area was much more favourable than in the Balkans.

An analysis of the research situation showed that multipart music practices as a fascinating phenomenon in European musical life has been a favoured object of research for a long time, but mostly in a national context. Studies which extended beyond of the political

¹ I am very grateful to Don Niles who made this important document from the history of the study group available.

borders were rare and sporadic (see further discussion in Ahmedaja and Haid 2008a). Since, as a rule, regional and the political allocations in Europe do not coincide, there was an almost untouched area for research here. Therefore, the establishment of an international network of specialists on the issue seemed to have become more than necessary.

Due to the great diversity of multipart music in Europe, the intended research could take place by concentrating on a certain topic step by step. At the centre of the first step was multipart singing in the Balkans and the Mediterranean area (cf. Ahmedaja and Haid 2008b). One of the reasons for this choice was connected with the attempt to investigate local musical practices in the Balkans as a part of European ones, which was still rather uncommon at that time. In addition, the cooperation between scholars from Eastern and Western Europe helped to reflect changes in the research traditions since the 1990s within a greater perspective. Part of the symposium, which took place in Vienna, 11–13 March 2005, was performances of groups from Albania, France, Italy, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia.²

I mention these details here to illustrate the similarities of the aims, the format, and the kind of the collaboration within the network to those of ICTM. However, it was during the final discussion of the second EMM symposium on cultural listening and local discourse (cf. Ahmedaja 2011), which took place 24–26 October 2008, that the question of establishing an ICTM study group on multipart music arose. Acting within ICTM was considered to be a crucial help because of the advantages such a broad network with its worldwide radius offers for increasing the possibilities of scholarly exchange. By that time, fragments of the EMM work had been already presented in panels at ICTM world conferences in Sheffield (2005) and Vienna (2007).

Having been asked to get in contact with the ICTM Board, I wrote on 28 October 2008 to ICTM General Secretary Stephen Wild. As noted in the above-mentioned Board minutes, one of the requirements was a definition of the term “multipart music.” In consultations with many colleagues, especially Ignazio Macchiarella, Ankica Petrović, and Žanna Pärtlas, who became members of the executive committee of the study group and whom I particularly want to thank here for their engagement, the following definition was formulated:

Multipart music is a specific mode of music making and expressive behaviour based on the intentionally distinct and coordinated participation in the performing act by sharing knowledge and shaping values.

This definition was and is the object of discussions in the study group’s symposia. Its contents and understandings are being steadily illuminated and evaluated from different perspectives through the discussion of the topics of each symposium.

The term multipart music

Before continuing with issues regarding the path of the study group up to now, I would like to give some insights about the term “multipart music,” which has been chosen for use in the name of the study group. In spite of the fact that this term has been used for a long time in records of and writings on local musical practices, only in 2019 did it become possible to define it in an entry of a music dictionary: the *SAGE Encyclopedia of Music and Culture* with Janet Sturman as general editor (see Ahmedaja 2019). Some of the first approaches are those concerning the songs of the inhabitants of Rarotonga, the most populous island of the Cook Islands in the Pacific. James Cowan, a well-known writer in New Zealand during the first half of the twentieth century, wrote in the *Official Record of the New Zealand International Exhibition of Arts and Industries*, held in Christchurch from 1 November 1906 to 15 April 1907:

Chanting their ear-haunting tuneful *himenes*, and clattering away with a strange barbaric rhythm on their wooden drums, the brown Islanders from the Cook Group were day after day the centre of intensely interested groups, Ahoris as well as whites. One never tired of listening to the delightful part-singing harmonies of these South Sea people ... (Cowan 1910:353)

Sound recordings of these songs were made in January 1907 in Otaki by Alfred John Knocks (Knocks 1907) with a group of singers participating at the Christchurch exhibition. Percy Grainger listened to these recordings in January 1909 and wrote very enthusiastically about them (cf. Dreyfus 1985:263; Bird 1999:147–148). In his article “The Impress of Personality in Unwritten Music,” Grainger also draws attention to the performers:

It will be seen that a great range of personal choice was left to all the members of this Rarotongan choir, in each of whom a highly complex, delicate and critical sense for ensemble was imperative. Each of these natives had to be a kind of improvising communal composer, and to a far greater degree simultaneously creative and executive than is the case with peasant songsters in Great Britain or Scandinavia, though a somewhat similar gift for complex improvised part-singing is displayed in the wonderful Russian choral folk music so admirably collected and noted by Madame Lineff. (Grainger 1915:425)

Here it should be emphasized how striking it is to realize that although Grainger was interested in musical traditions of different parts of the world and could be

2 Cf. the website of the Research Centre for European Multipart Music (EMM), <http://mdw.ac.at/ive/emm/>.

so sensitive towards the potential and the role of music makers, in letters to friends he expressed extreme anti-Semitic and racist views (cf. Gillies and Pear 1994:4–6). On these issues, David Pear underlines that “His private writings reveal a more insidious racism than his mellowed words for public consumption” (Pear 2006:33).

A later, very well-known use of the term multipart music in the ethnomusicological literature was already included in the title of the book *Metre, Rhythm, Multi-Part Music* by Jaap Kunst (1950). Bruno Nettl remarks hereof: “The term ‘multi-part music’, as used by Kunst, comes closer to our definition of polyphony than does the term *polyphony* in its narrow sense” (Nettl 1963:247). This view has applied to many studies up to the present, including, for example, some of the latest publications by Gerhard Kubik about multipart singing practices in several regions in Africa (Kubik 2010, 2014).

It is important to mention at this point that the use of English as a lingua franca represents a major challenge because of the diverse languages we work with. The reflection of the potential of different ways of thinking, acting, and talking about music embedded in them is therefore an important issue in discussions. This is connected both with local terminologies as well as with the question of language, informing the philosophical rationale of and the methodological approach to research.

Connotations of the term multipart music which are connected with the musical outcome have a longer history. The parallel German term *Mehrstimmigkeit* had already been used in that connotation by Guido Adler in his renowned article “Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft” (The scope, method, and aim of musicology) from 1885; and additionally in his study *Die Wiederholung und Nachahmung in der Mehrstimmigkeit: Studie zur Geschichte der Harmonie* (Repetition and imitation in multipart music: A study about the history of harmony) published in 1886; or by Erich Moritz von Hornbostel in his article of 1909, “Über Mehrstimmigkeit in der außereuropäischen Musik” (About multipart music in non-European music); and by Carl Stumpf, who entitled the fourth chapter of his book *Die Anfänge der Musik* (The origins of music), “Mehrstimmigkeit, Rhythmik, Sprechgesang” (Multipart music, rhythm, *Sprechgesang* (speech song)) (1911:42–53).

Other connotations of the term multipart music and parallels in other languages are connected with the ways in which this music comes into being and with the action and interaction of music makers. They became pivotal for research only later. Alan Merriam’s interpretation of music (1964) with three areas of equal importance – concept, behaviour, and sound – and, more specifically, John Blacking’s view of music-making as a

special kind of intentional, meaningful human action (1979) have had a strong impact on research into the roles of protagonists in the making of multipart music. However, observations on specific phenomena connected with the second tendency of connotations of the term can be also found every now and then in early studies, as in the above-mentioned statement by Grainger. In this context the “part” as an element of a whole appears to a greater extent in the sense of “taking part,” “playing a role,” “participating in the action,” “influencing interaction,” “performing behaviour,” than it does in a “purely” musical context. These understandings are fundamental to the discussions and the publications of the study group.

Symposia and seminars

The first symposium of the study group took place 15–20 September 2010 in Sardinia, Italy. It was hosted by the Facoltà di Lettere e Filosofia dell’Università degli Studi di Cagliari and the Unione dei comuni della Valle del Cedrino (The union of the municipalities of the Cedrino Valley). Planning and organization was led by Ignazio Macchiarella. The call for papers was published in the *BICTM* 115 (Oct 2009:39–41). The symposium’s theme, “Multipart music as a specific mode of musical thinking, expressive behaviour and sound,” was discussed from various viewpoints, as can be seen from the programme on both websites of the study group. I would like to thank Ignazio Macchiarella, who runs both of them. The first one (<http://www.multipartmusic.org>) was prepared right after the symposium. After it was hacked in 2014, the address was changed (<http://www.multipartmusic.eu>). The second website is part of the ICTM website (<http://www.ictmusic.org/group/multipart-music>).

Another strong reason to begin our journey in Sardinia was the very intensive practice of multipart music on the island. We were able to experience many performances both in Cagliari and in the Baronia region and could come into contact with many local musicians.

Collaboration with local musicians during our symposia is an important feature of all of meetings of the study group. Additionally, this was the first symposium of an ICTM study group in Sardinia. This fact is connected with another issue we are trying to pursue: to actively bring the study group to places where ICTM does not have a strong presence.

The proceedings of the symposium were published by Ignazio Macchiarella under the title of the symposium’s theme in paperback and as an e-book, which includes audio tracks (cf. Macchiarella 2012; <http://www.multipartmusic.eu/publications>). Here I want to add that



Figure 1. Participants and musicians of the second symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Multipart Music. Llogara, southern Albania, 28 April 2012 (photo by Tristan Wagner).

the publication of the symposia presentations by local organizers is a third feature that we encourage.

This first and very positive experience also helped us to prepare guidelines for local organizers, which continue to be gradually improved. This was the case during the preparations for the second symposium, which took place in Albania, 22–29 April 2012. It was organized by the Ulysses Foundation based in Tiranë, led by Emi Aliçka-Ebhardt with the co-organizer being the Department for Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology of the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna. In the presentations (including films) and discussions, questions focussed on multipart music practices as creative processes and their role in religious practices, as well as the impact of awards for local music. In addition to contacts with local music and musicians from several parts of the country, the participants were able to experience performances from the medieval Mediterranean and Sephardic traditions, religious and profane music from Sardinia, as well as music and dance from Austria, as can be seen from the programme on the above-mentioned websites.

Scholars and musicians (figure 1) also helped to disseminate the symposium's contents and significance to a broader public in the country. This aspect was particularly important, because this was the first ICTM symposium held in Albania. The publication appeared with the title *Local and Global Understandings of Creativities: Multipart Music Making and the Construction of Ideas, Contexts and Contents* (Ahmedaja 2013).

The third symposium took place 12–16 September 2013 and was hosted by the Institute for Musicology

at the Research Centre for the Humanities of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Budapest, Hungary. This institution had already had considerable experience with ICTM symposia. However, it was not an obvious choice as a place for a symposium on multipart music because of the still formative idea formulated by the well-known Hungarian researcher Benjamin Rajeczky in 1976: “Even Kodály propagated that Hungarians are a monophonic nation,” as the leader of the local organizers' team, Lujza Tari, pointed out in a recent article (Tari 2017:223–224). Nevertheless, presentations at the symposium and musical performances in Budapest and during the excursion to Szob distinctly showed the significance of multipart music practices in the country.

Presentations and discussions concentrated on three themes: “Scholarly terminology and local musical practice,” “The role of educated musicians and missionaries in local music practices,” and “Individualists in company.” The proceedings of the symposium, edited by Pál Richter and Lujza Tari, were published by the host institution (2015).

One of the issues discussed during the general assembly of this symposium was the idea of organizing a meeting on theoretical approaches connected with the terminology in research on multipart music. Žanna Pärtlas from the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre in Tallinn assumed responsibility for this. The result was the first seminar of the study group under the title “Multipart music: Theoretical approaches to terminology” on 19–20 September 2014 in Tallinn. In our understanding and according to the experience we had, a seminar, as a form of academic exchange, has the function of bringing together a small group of researchers, focus-



Figure 2. Participants of the fifth symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Multipart Music. Nanning, China, 8 May 2017 (photo by the organizers).

ing on one particular subject, which everyone present is requested to discuss. These are the main differences to the symposium format, in which the group of the speakers is relatively large and that of the audience often larger, and where more than one theme is discussed. In addition, the context of a seminar is more favourable to follow the so-called “Socratic method,” a form of cooperative argumentative dialogue between individuals, based on asking and answering questions to stimulate critical thinking and to draw out ideas and underlying presuppositions (Vlastos 1983). In our first seminar, each of the eight speakers had ninety minutes to lead a discussion—rather than give a lecture—on a topic connected with the main theme. The distribution of the abstracts and the texts with the contents and questions of the previewed discussions in the preparatory period led to exchanges of literature in languages other than English between the participants, enriching the content of the discussions. The seminar was characterized by unusually intensive discussions, so we intend to use this type of format again in the future work of the study group, alongside symposia. The peer-reviewed publication edited by Pärtlas was published in *Res Musica*, the yearbook of the Estonian Musicological Society and the Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre. In addition to the paperback version, the publication is also available online (Pärtlas 2016).

Alongside attempts to try out different formats for discussion, we also tried to pursue the idea of organizing study-group meetings outside Europe. A first step was realized with the fourth symposium, which took place

in Singapore, 4–7 July 2016. The local organizing team was led by Larry Francis Hilarian.

Singapore was a good start in this context, also because of its multi-ethnic structure, which we could experience during the presentations of colleagues from the country itself and other parts of Southeast Asia, and during performances of diverse musical practices such as those of the group *Firqah Alwehdah*, the *Bukit Panjang Khek Community*, the *Guild Hakka Folk Song Choir*, and the *Sari-Sari Philippine Kulintang Ensemble*.

The themes of the symposium were connected with multipart music as a means of social and/or intercultural interaction, the methods of analytical representation of multipart music processes, music education and its role in the community, and with multipart music-making as a shared experience.

Chu Zhuo, one of the participants of this symposium took on the responsibility of organizing the next. The fifth symposium of the study group took place the following year, May 7–12, 2017, at *Guanxi Arts University* in Nanning, China (figure 2). At the centre of presentations and discussions were understandings of multipart music in a wide range of research traditions, the specific uses of sound in space and time, *polymusic* and *soundscape*, as well as new research. Different viewpoints about understandings of multipart music in diverse local and research traditions were debated particularly intensively. A remarkable aspect was that a considerable number of students from the host university attended the symposium, despite it being during the exam period, and actively took part in the discus-

sions. Participants were also able to learn about local history and religious practices, music, and musical life, and could listen to performances and discuss with local musicians from the Guanxi region during the presentations and the wide-ranging social programme of the symposium, including the day in Ma Shan.

Selected papers from the last two symposia will be published in 2021 in a joint peer-reviewed volume under the title “Shaping Sounds and Values: Multipart Music as a Means of Social and Cultural Interaction.”

The most-recent symposium was organized in cooperation with the ICTM National Committee of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Academy of Music, University of Sarajevo, where it took place from 23 to 27 September 2019. The local organizing committee was led by Jasmina Talam. The themes this time were “Emotion and aesthetic experience during the performance act,” “*A capella* singing,” as well as “New research.” Among several new members who joined the study group, there are students who are very much involved in music making. The participants were able to experience a great deal about the people, music, and history of the country and the broader region during the presentations and the accompanying programme. The presentation of the book *Umjetnost pjevanja gange: Kulturna tradicija Dinarske zone* (The art of singing *ganga*: A cultural tradition of the Dinaric Zone) by Ankica Petrović (2018), provided us with the opportunity to handover to the author a certificate of gratitude on the part of the study group for her contribution to the study group, as well as to the study of multipart music, particularly in southeastern Europe. This was done based on an idea by Svanibor Pettan and in cooperation with the ICTM Secretariat, and is considered to be the beginning of a new tradition of the study group.

In this symposium, as in all the others, there was no registration fee. Since this is not a matter of course, especially nowadays, I want to thank the local organizers of each symposium and of the seminar, who have made this possible. I would also like to thank the former and the current ICTM secretaries, Svanibor Pettan and Ursula Hemetek, for their exemplary co-operation, and particularly Carlos Yoder, the ICTM executive assistant, whose availability and advice have always been so helpful and effective. Last, but not least, a special thank goes to all members of the study group who bear the brunt of the work in all activities and publications.

Outlook

Trying to summarize the path the study group has followed so far, it can be said that our scholarly exchange has grown and is being intensified. Our understandings

of multipart music as a human action are being steadily broadened and deepened. The focus on both the creators and the ways in which this music comes into being is very rewarding.

Increasing our knowledge about the processes which occur in multipart music practices worldwide is one of the long-term objectives of the work of the study group. Another important focus is connected with the changes which occur in these processes and which affect both the music and the music makers. Important aspects for the future will also be collaboration with researchers from other fields of music in order to enrich and refine our views of phenomena which are not yet part of discussions.

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