
SUSANNE ZIEGLER

POLYPHONY IN HISTORICAL SOUND RECORDINGS OF THE BERLIN PHONOGRAMM-ARCHIV

1. Introduction

The subject of my paper are the earliest sound recordings of polyphony in traditional music, which were recorded in the first half of the 20th century and are preserved today in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv. I shall follow the traces of polyphony in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv and discuss some of the wax cylinder recordings with special regard to their presentation (discussion and transcription) in publications. Numerous publications, mostly case studies, but also substantial theoretical papers and books have been published on this subject. Due to the limited amount of time here, I shall cite only two examples in detail: the first article on polyphony in non-European music, written by Erich M. von Hornbostel in 1909, and, second, the comprehensive book on the history of polyphony, written by Marius Schneider in 1934.

I should like to mention that my paper is related to my first visit in Georgia in Bordzhomi in 1988. At that time we discussed publications about polyphony, among them J. Jordania's paper about M. Schneider's book and my paper about Georgian polyphony in German ethnomusicological literature, which is published in *Sabchota Khelovneba* 1989.

At the present conference the audience is international, so I shall use the opportunity to present not only examples from Georgia, but also from other areas of the world where polyphony is found.

I would like to share with you some ideas and thoughts that emerged from my research in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv since 1993. This work has resulted in my recent book on the wax cylinder collections of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv (Ziegler, 2006).

2. Polyphony in Historical Recordings

The recordings in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv date back to 1900, when Carl Stumpf, professor of psychology at Berlin University, made the first recordings for the Archive with a theatre group from Siam. Recording different kinds of non-European music was successfully continued, first in Berlin during presentations for the public of ethnic groups ("Völkerschauen"), and later also in the field. Due to the good relationship with the Museum für Völkerkunde, and especially with the director of the African and Oceanic department, Felix von Luschan, many expeditions and researchers were provided with phonographic equipment and asked to record examples of indigenous music in the area of their research or during their extensive expeditions.

Erich M. von Hornbostel was of the opinion that all kinds of musical expressions should be collected in order to gain insight into the heterogeneous practises and concepts in music, including polyphony, which was found to play an important role in many musical cultures.

The “Guidelines for Collectors” (“Anleitung für ethnographische Beobachtungen und Sammlungen in Africa und Oceanien”) were first published by von Luschan in 1899, and in cooperation with von Hornbostel, who came to Berlin 1901, the section on music was enlarged and improved. In one of the paragraphs it was recommended to pay special attention to polyphonic music and to record this music in a specific way:

“Von Musikstücken, bei denen Mehrere zusammen nicht unison musizieren, sind auch die einzelnen Stimmen, jede für sich, aufzunehmen, und zwar in der Weise, dass die eine Stimme unmittelbar vor dem Trichter, die anderen im Hintergrund aufgestellt werden, so dass bei jeder Aufnahme zwar alle spielen, aber durch den jedesmaligen Platzwechsel immer eine andere Stimme in den Vordergrund tritt.” However, in practice it seemed to be very difficult to follow this instruction. Had von Luschan’s advice been followed, it would have been of great value for research.

On his correspondence with collectors, von Hornbostel and later Schneider drew attention to polyphony, vocal as well as instrumental. Two examples:

Hornbostel an Viktor Lebzelter (Roman Catholic Mission, Windhuk Afrika), 1927
„...Falls die Leute *mehrstimmig* singen, würde ich bitten, diese Gesänge besonders zu berücksichtigen (vgl. Punkt Bm der beiliegenden Anleitung). ...

Schneider an Arnold Bake (20.III.32)
„... Daß Sie jetzt nach Ceylon kommen, ist besonders wertvoll. Ich würde mich sehr freuen, wenn es Ihnen gelingen würde, ganz primitive Mehrstimmigkeit zu finden. Letzteres ist nämlich mein Steckenpferd. Für jede Auskunft, ob Sekunden, Terzen oder Quinten, wäre ich Ihnen recht dankbar!...“

The fruits of this engagement can still be followed in the Phonogramm-Archiv, not only in the overwhelming amount of sound examples of polyphonic music, but also in the written archival sources, where we sometimes find remarks indicating what kind of polyphony was found.

3. Theoretical Discussion of Polyphony

Recordings of polyphony from different musical cultures of the world – vocal as well as instrumental – make up a considerable amount of the historical wax cylinder collections in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv. Thus, great attention was paid to all forms of polyphonic singing and multipart instrumental music, which were consequently discussed in publications, that is to say, at first in case studies, mostly written by Hornbostel himself, and later in more or less theoretical papers written by Erich von Hornbostel (1909), Carl Stumpf (1911), Georg Schünemann (1920), Mieczyslaw Kolinski (1930), Marius Schneider (1934) and others.

It is interesting to note that in the first years and first publications (up to ca. 1905) polyphony was not particularly stressed. However, the more field recordings from Africa and the South Seas arrived in the archive, the more they required attention and scholarly discussion. Polyphony outside of Europe was quite unexpected, and the first examples were regarded as incidental or influenced by European music. To give just one example, many missionaries recorded Christian songs, which of course stemmed from European sources. The growing amount of recordings documenting indigenous polyphony led to substantial considerations about the origin of music in

general, and of polyphony in specific. Researchers were thus faced with several problems: 1. How should the findings be described? (This resulted in a terminological discussion), and 2. How should the findings be classified? (This resulted in theoretical discussions and hypotheses about the origin of polyphony). The discussion was dominated by the assumption that non-European music was basically in unison, and, further, "... all these [exotic] forms of multi-part music ... are clearly different in principle from our harmony, which is based on the consonance of simultaneously sounded tones" (Hornbostel, 1905).

The organization of the material, in some cases quite astonishing new sounds (such as parallel seconds, fourths and fifths in recordings from the South Seas and Africa) required a special terminology. New terms were necessary, but naturally the existing vocabulary that was already in use for historical musicology was adopted. A clarification and standardisation of terms have been undertaken several times with more or less success, but a terminology independent of European musicology is not yet in common use, even today. This is also true for the term "polyphony" itself; for polyphony was known only from European music history. Hence, it is no surprise that terms were taken from European music history, since exactly at that time (around 1900) the study of Medieval music was en vogue. For Medieval, and consequently also non-European polyphony the term "Mehrstimmigkeit" (multipartite singing) was used in contrast to the term "Harmonie" (harmony), which was restricted to European polyphony only. In fact, the term "Harmonie" is not only a musicological term; it designates much more than music, namely a psychological condition as well. Of course, any kind of translation will render the situation even more difficult, especially the translation of vernacular terms. But I shall not pursue this aspect here.

In the early writings about non-European polyphony up to 1910 a difference can be recognised in the descriptions of polyphony from Africa and from the South Seas. Here I shall present two examples.

1. Africa

In his article "Wanyamwezi-Gesänge", published in the journal "Anthropos" in 1909, Hornbostel discusses recordings from East Africa, which were collected mainly by Karl Weule in 1906. In a special chapter, entitled "Harmonie" (pp. 1038-1041), the recordings of non-European polyphony are immediately viewed as Medieval: "... the harmonies of the Wanyamwezi songs correspond surprisingly with the kind of polyphony, which has been used in Europe not today, but 1000 years ago." (p. 1038). By comparing these examples with others from West Africa, Hornbostel does not exclude the autochthonous origin of African harmony. And even if they would be merely an imitation of European models, they should be treated as "a separate form and a sign of higher musical talents".

2. South Seas

In his article about the collection of Dr. Emil Stephan recorded in New Mecklenburg in 1904, Hornbostel does not mention polyphony at all. Unfortunately the transcriptions in this article do not include polyphonic songs. More information can be gained from Hornbostel's short contribution entitled "Musik", published in Richard Thurnwald's

article “Im Bismarckarchipel und auf den Salomoinselfn” (Hornbostel, 1910). Hornbostel’s observations are based on Richard Thurnwald’s extensive wax cylinder collection from this area, recorded in 1906 – 1909 and comprising 343 cylinders. In a preliminary report Hornbostel refers to different kinds of polyphony, some of them resembling yodels of the Alps; others, namely dance songs from Baluan (Admiralty Islands), are totally new and “... most interesting and remarkable...”, because they proceed in parallel seconds and also finish with this interval (Hornbostel, 1910:141). (One sound example) According to Hornbostel, European influence as well as coincidental use can be eliminated in this region. “The parallel seconds on the Admiralty Islands represent a new problem for the evolution history, music theory and psychology; and in the first place they represent a crux for general music aesthetics” (ibid).

The phenomenon of “harmony” or “polyphony” in non-European music was first observed and discussed in case studies, but it took quite a long time before any theoretical discussion about polyphony began. For instance, in Hornbostel’s paper “Über den gegenwärtigen Stand der vergleichenden Musikwissenschaft”, presented at a conference in 1906, published in 1907, polyphony is not mentioned at all.

An initial attempt to summarize the observations on non-European polyphony was given at the Third Conference of the International Musicological Society in Vienna in 1908 and published in 1909 (“Über Mehrstimmigkeit in der außereuropäischen Musik”, mit Vorführung von Phonogrammen).

Without any introduction Hornbostel begins with the question about the origin of polyphony, which he sees as a logical consequence that follows the question on the origin of music. He states that only with the help of the phonograph is it now (means 1909) possible to access to material equivalent to European music history. He sees obvious analogies between the early Medieval period and “exotic forms of polyphony”. The examples found in exotic music should enable a chronological order and provide the missing links in the European polyphonic tradition. In contrast to the pure one-voice harmony (“reine Einstimmigkeit”), which he calls “Homophonie”, Hornbostel distinguishes two different kinds of multi-part music, which are based on two different mental attitudes: “Harmonie” (harmony) preserves the melody in all its entirety, but provides the melody in fuller chords. On the opposite, the term “Polyphonie” (polyphony) should, according to Hornbostel, be restricted to several melodies, which are more or less separate from one another, but sounding simultaneously. He discusses the different forms of polyphony and illustrates them with sound examples, unfortunately without naming them precisely. So the aim and purpose of this article is clearly defined: it is a demonstration that non-European polyphony reveals the different early stages of European medieval polyphony. Once this hypothesis had been stated, all the articles that followed fell into the same slot.

In his publication “Anfänge der Musik” (1911:97 -101) Carl Stumpf enlarges the categories and distinguishes aside from Homophonie and Polyphonie three more categories: “Organum” which is parallel cords in octaves, fifths, and fourths as basic, thirds, sixths, seconds, only if the interval is not changed according to the scale; “Bordun”, meaning one or more tones (one or more chords) sustained during the whole piece or constantly changing (ostinato); and “Heterophonie” meaning the

simultaneous performance of several variants of the same theme. All five categories cited are understood as stages of polyphony, culminating in the European functional harmony. This concept is continuously repeated in Hornbostel's articles and in Curt Sachs' publications, and it also acts as the starting point for Marius Schneider's book, "Geschichte der Mehrstimmigkeit" (*History of Multipart Music*, 1934/1935).

Schneider, however, combines the categories with melody and tonality, resulting in four circles or "Kreise": 1. Primitive cultures in South Asia and South America, 2. South Asia, Oceania, 3. Samoa, 4. Africa. His basic principle is: "Die Form der Melodik bestimmt die Harmonik" (the melodic form determines the harmony). A second edition of this book, published in 1969, comprises the first and second volume of Schneider's book, but is enlarged with a third part, entitled "Die Kompositionsprinzipien und ihre Verbreitung" (with 115 musical examples). In the first chapter Schneider lists 12 basic principles of polyphonic compositions; in the second part he studies the relationship between European and non-European polyphony.

4. Critical Remarks

The substantial contributions of the Berlin School of Comparative Musicology to the study of multipart music in the world were valid for a long time, but they were often criticized as well. Earlier criticism concentrated mainly on the following points: 1. the cultural evolution theory which has become obsolete in the meantime; 2. the independent origin of multipart music in different corners of the world is no longer doubted; 3. in cooperation with other disciplines such as ethnology, anthropology, history, organology, archaeology, etc. the different forms of polyphony have already been or are now being studied in detail. These studies will help to enlarge our knowledge about the origin, dissemination and history of polyphony.

My criticism here is not general, but concrete and is based on contextual information.

After a long period of silence we only now have the chance to look at the sound recordings themselves in combination with all the related material, correspondence and papers. It is a wonderful experience to have the sound of the wax cylinders available today, even if they are not of the best quality. Finally it has become possible to listen to the historical recordings, which have often been discussed and can now be compared with the music notations, and moreover, be discussed - or better re-discussed - on the basis of the available sources.

Thus we can better understand how recordings of polyphony were made in the field. Some collectors did not realize that multipart singing was substantial for the music under discussion, since "harmony" (meaning the European kind of polyphony) did not exist. We have evidence that a collector refused to record a group singing polyphonic, because he was not aware that this (in his understanding) "unorganised" polyphonic singing was essential. Therefore he asked the people to sing not simultaneously, but one after the other. Since it was not expected to find other and different forms of polyphony in the world besides the European harmony, these forms were apparently regarded as not worth being recorded. Hornbostel recommended as early as in 1907 that the choice of what should be recorded be left to the indigenous

people and not decided by the collector.

In other cases collectors had great difficulties in recording polyphony due to the technical restrictions of the phonograph. The horn of a phonograph was normally too small for catching more than one or two voices, so several techniques were discussed (in the correspondence with G. Herzog, M. Küsters and others). For example M. Küsters writes (1934) to Hornbostel: ... "So bin ich für den alten Edison schon recht dankbar. Vielleicht ist es Ihnen möglich, mir dazu einen grösseren Aufnahmetrichter anfertigen zu lassen, denn mit dem kleinen Trichter muss man die Leute so nahe herantreten lassen, daß eigentlich nur die wenigen, die unmittelbar in den Trichter hineinsingen, zu Gehör kommen. Ich habe seinerzeit bis zu 50 Personen singen lassen, ohne freilich mehr als ein leises Untergeräusch feststellen zu können. Da aber die Lieder oft mehrstimmig sind, wäre gerade von Wichtigkeit, daß der Chor zur Geltung käme..."", or Hornbostel an Herzog (1930): ..." Wir haben Ihnen vor einer Weile die 3. Walzenserie geschickt und einen Trichter beige packt, den uns Quadfasel (unser spezieller Phonograph-Mechaniker) eigens gebaut hat und den Kolinski gut fand. Er ist doppelt so breit als hoch, so dass bequem zwei Sängerköpfe davor Platz haben und vielleicht noch ein dritter zwischen diesen Köpfen über die Schultern ihrer Besitzer weg in den Trichter hineinsingen kann. "

Another problem is that we do not understand why specific kinds of polyphony were recorded, while others – no less important – are missing among the recordings. For example, in his collection from the Caucasus made between 1909 and 1914, Adolf Dirr has no examples of Georgian polyphony except Svan Songs. He does have Ossetian and Svan pieces. What is the possible reason for this selection? Did he not have a chance to listen to that kind of music, or did he not realize that it would be important for musicology to have examples of polyphony from Georgia? Or, quite simply, did he not have enough blank wax cylinders? On the other hand, the examples of Georgian polyphony among the recordings in Austrian and German prison camps in World War I caused a musical revolution and led to a new understanding and new theories about polyphony in Europe (here just to mention R. Pöch, Siegfried Nadel and M. Schneider).

A special kind of criticism is connected with M. Schneider, who in his comprehensive "Geschichte der Mehrstimmigkeit" never published the whole piece, but only excerpts which are (coincidentally) polyphonic. If we wish to understand polyphony, we must view the whole piece and not excerpts of it. A wax cylinder recording of 2 or 4 minutes can only present a small part of a more extensive piece, and it is by no means justified to reduce it to only a few notes. Today by listening to the complete recording on a wax cylinder we can finally judge the role of multipart music in the given context.

5. Summary

Allow me to summarize.

It is the first time since World War I, that the different materials of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv may be reviewed in entirety. With the unification of Germany

the wax cylinders were returned to the Phonogramm-Archiv in 1991. Since then we have been devoted to making the collections accessible to the public, together with the necessary additional information. Many collections are now available on digital sound carriers; their publication is part of the Archive's work. Even if the sound quality lacks hifi-quality, the historical sound examples are more than (acoustical) sound. They represent the individual and personal history of the collectors as well as of the informants, while they also reveal the history of a discipline and its methods at different times.

Thus, examples of multipart music on wax cylinders must be presented against a background of the correspondence and publications, in which they have been used and discussed. The value of the historical sound recordings is unique, and it increases the more we know about their history and especially the circumstances surrounding their recordings.

References

Hornbostel, Erich M. Von. (1905). Die Probleme der Vergleichenden Musikwissenschaft. In: *Zeitschrift der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*, 7 (30) : 85-97.

Hornbostel, Erich M. Von. (1909a). Wanyamwezi-Gesänge. In: *Anthropos*, 4:781-800, 1033-1052 und Noten.

Hornbostel, Erich M. Von. (1909b). Über Mehrstimmigkeit in der Außereuropäischen Musik. In: 3. *Kongreß der Internationalen Musikgesellschaft*. (pp. 298-303). Wien und Leipzig.

Hornbostel, Erich M. Von. (1910). Musik. In: *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 42:140-142, In: Richard Thurnwald. "Im Bismarckarchipel und auf den Salomoninseln". *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 42:98-147.

Schneider, Marius. (1934). *Geschichte der Mehrstimmigkeit. Historische und Phänomenologische Studien*. Erster Teil. Die Naturvölker. Berlin: Julius Bard.

Stumpf, Carl. (1911). *Anfänge der Musik*. Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth.

Ziegler, Susanne. (2006). *Die Wachsylinder des Berliner Phonogramm-Archivs*. Staatliche Museen zu Berlin – Ethnologisches Museum.