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THIS TYPE OF RESEARCH

Ethnic Music and STS

The investigation of **ethnic music** as a means of insight into the more complex aspects of early immigrants is not a new idea. Manuel Pena in his book "Texas=Mexican Conjunto: History of a Working-Class Music," notes in the Preface that ethnomusicologist John Blacking in 1974 proposed such an idea.

"...the interpretation of musical activity can serve as a key to understanding other aspects of a group's culture and social organization. This interpretation can be especially useful when we link theoretical musical culture to its social base."

Linking ethnic music to Science, Technology and Society [STS] may still be **novel enough** to pursue in order to try to better understand the continuing many dramatic, global STS issues of today with the **goal** of better managing them on a global, national, local and even personal level, for the overall benefit of mankind.

Available Research, References and Other Sources of Documentation

However, the research sources, methods of access, interpretations and eventual use must be **clearly delineated**, so that any results are put in **proper perspective and given appropriate credence accordingly**.

As Greene even notes in his book "Passion for Polkas," as others have in this and similar areas, this type of research is **very different** from the more strict and rigid scientific research.

Possible resources and references are particularly very different and diverse. Much of the area of polkas and ethnic music was **not** well documented in the traditional senses. Many just took it for granted as very common parts of their every day life, so "why fuss over it and make it more than it is – it will be there tomorrow and forever".

Many people resources from those distant past eras, of course, have died off and age may have dimmed memories of those still living. Other later generations do have some memories from their deceased relatives, but these are "second hand" and subject to so many of the human aspects of listening, remembering and very personal interpretations of what they "think they may heard and remembered" –

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with all good possible intentions. So oral histories can be very limited and suspect as to strict accuracy.

The **music itself** however can be a source of information with some reliability, since much of it has been recorded and thus preserved for posterity [e.g., LP's, 78's and today CD's, internet, etc.], as have some **interviews** with the people involved in it [many even tape recorded, besides the usual method of taking written notes, so fallible memory does not have to be depended upon as much].

Naturally, due to especially just human nature in such very human endeavors, **interpretations** can vary a great deal as to the true meaning of these sources of information, much more than in traditional scientific research.

As we continue to see today, as the years past, much begins to be sifted out – “the chafe from the wheat” and a much more realistic and truthful version of history evolves. This can take about 100 years [e.g., WW I publications today], but can dramatically begin in about 30 – 40 years [e.g., Vietnam War recent revelations].

Before the generation that actually experienced an era passes, their personal information needs to be recorded in many different and effective and efficient illustrative ways for posterity.

Limitations / Realistic Expectations

However, one way of approaching this research is to very critically look at this topic and what you particularly **want to** and **can** accomplish, given the sometimes very severe limitations as to what can be adequately, accurately and properly documented / referenced, so misinformation can be minimized.

The eras, people, music, etc. are very diverse and ever changing, as society itself continues to ever evolve. The “**myth**” that they are all just homogeneous and uniform can “**mask**” much of the unique and specific details that can help to gain a richer and deeper understanding and appreciation of these areas.

Of course, for those who tend to resist change and new ways / ideas of looking at things, especially as STS relentlessly bombards them with new information and very serious consequences as to how this information is **used and even not used**, can find some **comfort and satisfaction** by embracing such “myths” [e.g., the Archie Bunker type syndrome of TV fame?, racism?, prejudices?, etc.].

In the other extreme, “**proof**” [documentation, references, etc.] of interpretations as in science [e.g., beyond reasonable doubt, “data indicates / supports,” etc.] can be very difficult in such research as this.

However, is this required / needed for a general better understanding of this area?

People, society, humanity, etc. are already so diverse and constantly changing / evolving, what would the point be to try to “prove” something very narrow and specific was such over a very short / limited time period [a few years?]?

Exploration of Different Possible Approaches & Some Questions

Better - more effective / efficient / illustrative - approaches might be to try to identify and support in many different ways – some even non-traditional / innovative - **overall very general trends / patterns of change / evolution** over a greater time period [e.g. at least decades?]. What is the **“overall flow”** of this evolution, where is it headed and why? Where is it **not** headed and why? What would be needed to change this flow and redirect it to something else specifically? What would be needed to reasonably stop this flow or at least redirect it – but redirect it to where and on what basis?

So looking for the **main mountain tops** [trends] rather than minute introspection of the many valleys, may be more productive and informative overall in such a “different kind” of research and the documentation involved.

Fully acknowledging and accepting the traditionally severe and very limiting role of what resources are presently really available to document these trends is also necessary. This is all we have and will have for documentation. It greatly limits the extent and credibility of what can be said. However, not to say it because of these great limitations, would have a very dampening effect on the exploration of such areas.

Do different ethnic groups, in different time periods and in different locales go thru some of the **same types of patterns of change**? If so, why? If not, which groups don't and why?

Are these patterns of change desirable, and on what basis? Should some of them be changed? Could some of them be even reasonably changed? What would be specifically required for such changes?

What are the functions of STS in these changes?

Can **ethnic music** be used to further elucidate some of these changes so they can be **better understood and managed**, even at the individual personal level? Could this give individuals **better control** over some of the more important and intimately personal aspects of their lives?

How do intimate personal **“values”** of the individual members [e.g., subgroups, etc.] of various ethnic groups influence the **“choices”** made from the options available? Many of these options may be new and “foreign” to the past cultures of such ethnic groups, since STS can provide **“new ways of thinking about and implementing”** life styles never comprehended or even realistically possible in the past.

Can ethnic music specifically influence these values, options, choices, lifestyles, etc.? If it can provide such influence, how specifically and what would be the basis of deciding the outcomes of this influence? How should ethnic music be specifically changed to meet these goals?

What are the **competing factors** provided by STS to the influence of ethnic music with respect to significantly influencing the intimate aspects of personal lives of individuals?

Again, many complex questions with numerous options for some answers, thoughts, impressions, etc.

Hopefully, this research and publications may provide some **structure** in approaching this topic with the **goal** / focus of providing some concrete, practical and realistic possibilities for consideration with respect to the sometimes overwhelming influence of STS on our lives, opinions, options, lifestyles and values, along with **better addressing and dealing with** these many important questions.

Possible Abuses

If indeed music and ethnic music did & can substantially influence, change and control certain segments of various immigrant groups, this is a **powerful tool** that can be easily abused. This raises the spectra of “propaganda” and the misuse of such music to foster the aims of a select few.

Certainly, music and audio / visual media in general has been used in the past for specific purposes [e.g., military march music to motivate troops to fight, speeches to rally people for a cause {e.g., Churchill and WW II, video to show the horrors of tragedies so people will be inclined to action {too obvious and numerous to mention}, etc.].

Therefore, people must also be alert and on guard for such abuses and make their own decisions about such matters. This is especially critical as STS provides even more emotional, intellectual, vivid and appealing audio / visual treatments of events and causes.

Critical, creative thinking and decision making becomes a premium in such situations. However, how many are realistically trained in such skills, besides the school of hard knocks / experience?

Role of Public Opinion

After all, “**public opinion**” [hopefully adequately informed] is what can ultimately influence STS issues on our lives. There are many instances of this throughout history, even when information was less available and reliable. People just had to use their “common sense” [which may not be so common today!].

In our information age / society, where there can be a “glut” of information resulting **in information overload** from so many different and diverse sources in our everyday lives. The challenge is to only let in our lives what is ultimately important and useful for our daily decisions. But how and what are further questions to be answered.

This information can also be in the form of “**emotional stimuli**” like music, among many other forms [e.g., TV, “spirit of the times – holidays, newspapers, magazines, walks, friends, hobbies, interests, trips, vacations, jobs, education, etc.].

Music is a very pervasive and powerful “tool” in our daily lives that can greatly influence such “public opinion” in the long term. STS has **greatly increased this power of music**, especially by making it so much more pervasive, effective and efficient in society by providing numerous new practical and facile ways for it to enter our lives [e.g., iPODS, internet, MTV, CD’s / DVD’s, cell phones, video + the music sound, inexpensive, readily available in almost all locations, etc.].

Even if public opinion **does not and possibly cannot change** certain STS issues, at least immediately, the many people involved with such issues may want to have their **reputation and place in history** [“their historical legacy?”] appropriately reflect their personal stance on such issues. This can be a great motivating factor for those in power “**to do the right thing**” ultimately and eventually, so that their place in history is more positively represented.

Decisions and Decision Making Process

Some decisions can have very little consequence in our lives [e.g., what to have for supper tonight, do I use the pink or yellow highlighter in this document, etc.].

However, there are decisions that are “**life altering**” that will affect our lives and well being forever [e.g., personally – who to marry compared to more worldwide - global warming, etc.].

The **decision making process** can be very complex. It can involve intellectual and emotional activities, goals, spheres of influence, work, family, friends, future plans, interests, education, areas of expertise and non-expertise, etc. along with personal values and beliefs, besides what specific information available that you decide to use and which to ignore.

With respect to **information used**, which is more / less important, reliable, reasonable, believable, etc. What is known and what is not known, but needed.

Individual and personal aspects can include personality type [e.g., Myers-Briggs, etc.], ways of thinking / learning, emotional / physical states, past experiences, ethnic / family roots, risk / benefit preferences, etc.

Obviously, **music and ethnic music meaningful to you personally in particular**, can be a big influence in the **emotional aspects** of many decisions and the mental processes you use and do not use in deciding among many attractive options.

Ultimately, decision making can involve a **very complex interaction and balance** among many of the factors involved. Only “**you**” can provide what is necessary so that you are as pleased as you can be under the circumstances, with respect to what is ultimately decided. However, there can be some “unforeseen consequences” that may develop and you must be prepared to accept them as part of your own “personalized” decision making process.

The better you **understand and manage** your own personal decision making processes, the better you will be able to understand, accept and manage any “unforeseen consequences” that may evolve.

Likewise the same can apply with respect to better you understanding and managing STS issues.

Any role **music and ethnic music** in particular may play in these decisions is best used with respect to your full understanding, acknowledgement and acceptance of it in this regard, especially the emotional aspects of it.

Ultimately, a particular decision can be on a “**whim,**” **emotion of the moment**, etc. without regard to any future adverse consequences.

However, some decisions can be **very analytical and based almost totally on the intellectual factors involved**, devoid of almost all emotional and other factors.

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But, in both of these decision making processes, this does not necessarily mean there may not be any “unintentional consequences” that you may be displeased over or even pleased over.

What is important is that you are as pleased as possible over your decision making process, all factors considered.

The Future

Of course, only time will tell how society continues to deal [make choices / decisions] with the many critical issues STS presents on almost a daily basis. Optimistically, society [we / you] **have survived** so far, despite all these many very dramatic global continual changes due to STS, although many have suffered severe consequences because of them.

However, our chances of continued survival and avoidance of much [but not all – just try to minimize it for a many as possible] future such suffering, depends on “**properly informed and properly made decisions.**” STS provides many options, but also **much new information** to use in making such life / society altering decisions, from sometimes an overwhelming number of complex possible, attractive and reasonable choices.

A Quote From An Important Person Involving STS

As an ending for this section, it may be appropriate to offer a quote from an important person involved with STS issues and education.

Bassam Shakhashiri, Professor of Chemistry at the University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI, was honored by the National Science Foundation National Board in 2007 with their Public Service Award for his “extraordinary contributions to increase public understanding of science.”

His response to this award was:

“I consider the award to be a charge to maintain my efforts to advance science and to communicate its value to the general public.”

“Science literacy enlightens all people, enabling them to make informed choices; to be skeptical; it reject shams, quackery, and unproven conjecture; and to avoid being bamboozled into making foolish decisions where matters of science and technology are concerned.”

[Chemical and Engineering News, April 16, 2007, page #34, www.cen-online.org]

Summary

As my wife always says: "And so it goes!"

Yes, and you are a part of it. How will you decide to be part of it and on what basis?

So how to proceed specifically on an individual and practical basis in your everyday life?

Hopefully, this research and the publications that result from it, will in some small way assist you in better understanding and managing STS issues in your every day life through illustrating some of the **practical aspects** of ethnic music and STS.

Exploration of research on music and ethnic music in particular with respect to STS, may have a greater impact on society than many other approaches, since it has a **very emotional, personal and intimate nature** to it. It may be able to better "penetrate" our all too human nature to more effectively and efficiently assist us in "making the best decisions overall for the benefit of society," despite some personal discomfort, inconveniences, disagreement, etc.

Sincere all the best and luck in your lives!

I hope is some small way for at least a few people, all of this has some helpful aspects in your decision making processing, besides genuine enjoyment to the fullest of life in general!