

# Composing Heterophony: Arranging and Adapting Global Musics for Intercultural Ensembles

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Résumé de l'article

L'utilisation du terme « hétérophonie » a considérablement évolué depuis qu'il a été inventé par Guido Adler en 1908 pour désigner un autre en opposition à la polyphonie occidentale. Il a d'abord été utilisé pour démontrer une progression évolutive d'une forme primitive de création musicale vers une polyphonie prétendument plus développée, qui n'aurait été atteinte qu'en Occident. Partant de l'idée d'un continuum entre la monophonie et la polyphonie, l'hétérophonie se situant quelque part au milieu, cet article soutient qu'il est plus utile de concevoir les trois comme coexistant et reflétant des expressions de différentes fonctions de la musique. Un concept plus fluide des trois termes descriptifs est beaucoup plus utile en tant qu'outil analytique et peut aider à révéler une grande variété d'hybridation et d'interaction collaborative entre des musiciens d'origines musicales diverses.

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# COMPOSING HETEROPHONY: ARRANGING AND ADAPTING GLOBAL MUSICS FOR INTERCULTURAL ENSEMBLES<sup>1</sup>

*Jon Silpayamanant*

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The use of the term heterophony has been fraught with colonial baggage and race pseudoscience ever since it was coined by Guido Adler in the early twentieth century. The more neutral usage of the term in more recent music theory literature and today's classrooms as a formal distinction between types of multi-vocal or multi-instrumental textures masks that history. This uncritical usage, absent historical understanding, helps to reinscribe the same hierarchies by regularly defining certain types of music in an essentialist way as being heterophonic (i.e., non-Western musics) or polyphonic (i.e., Western art music).

In musical contexts where intercultural, transcultural, and cross-cultural collaborations happen with much greater frequency, there is a need to develop forms of transmission and rehearsal styles that do not center common Western notation and the musical practices that developed with them (Kolbe 2022; Silpayamanant 2023). The activities that reinforce the ensemble playing that developed alongside this type of notation create an environment that fosters a kind of notational fundamentalism often preferred in presentational versus participatory forms of music making (Turino 2008).

## HETEROPHONY AS ONE OF MANY UNCRITICALLY ACCEPTED NORMS

Heterophony exists on a continuum that could be situated between the two nodes of polyphony and monophony.<sup>2</sup> Treating these three types of musical phenomena as a trimodal distribution rather than as purely distinct and non-overlapping categories is far more useful as a theoretical and pedagogical

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is an expansion and follow-up on some of the ideas presented at my 26 January 2022 talk "When Heterophony Becomes Polyphony: Two Ways of Looking at Multipart Music on a Continuum and how that Influences Composition and Performance Practice" (Silpayamanant 2022h) as part of the "Towards a history and a transcultural theory of heterophony" seminar at Université de Montréal. See Silpayamanant (2022f and 2022g) for supplementary materials for the presentation.

<sup>2</sup> In the talk from which this article emerged, I used two sets of three Youtube videos to demonstrate how versions of tunes coexist in monophonic, heterophonic, and polyphonic forms. See SLIDE 2 and SLIDE 9 and 10 on Silpayamanant (2022g).

tool. This also more accurately reflects musical practice in a wide variety of music ecosystems.

As noted, Guido Adler coined and defined heterophony as a descriptive term to place non-Western musics into a cultural hierarchy (1908).<sup>3</sup> This hierarchy implied an evolutionary progression that led inevitably to a form of Western polyphony.<sup>4</sup> So much of that usage depends on and presupposes assumptions that are central to Western music theory and practices. In this framing, diatonic collections of pitches and tertian harmonies must be considered universal (and neutral) so that musics that deviate must be considered heterophonic. That framing of diatonic pitch sets and octave equivalency, a range within which the full set of non-repeating pitches fall, is necessary to maintain the opposition between heterophony and polyphony.

What happens if we do not treat stacked tertian intervals as the normative behavior of harmony in music? What if harmony works as it does in the Macedonian folk tune *Devojko mori drugachko*, with its consistent use of microtonally inflected secundal intervals (Gaston88441 2013)? How would secundal harmonies inform our understanding of Tang Dynasty sheng and modern shō harmony with their thick tone clusters?<sup>5</sup> What if an interval other than an octave becomes the frame within which collections of notes sounded? Georgian polyphony has sometimes been described as being based on a quintave rather than an octave (for example, see Yasser 1948). What if the intervals of the scale are larger than half and whole tones?<sup>6</sup> Quartal harmonic traditions<sup>7</sup> exist, and very often accompany musics in anhemitonic pentatonic scale systems.<sup>8</sup>

3 Coleman (2021) elaborates on the historical context of this hierarchy, explaining how this can inform other music practices, such as Free Jazz. This was also the subject of his talk on heterophony as part of the “Key Terms in Music (Theory): Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Music Knowledge” at the AMS/SEM/SMT Joint Meeting in New Orleans, 10–13 November 2022.

4 This evolutionary view of music from primitive to “cultivated” coincided with views about racial hierarchies. This was the era of human zoos and world expos that occasionally showed musics of different cultures side-by-side so audiences could hear the evolutionary progression (Breuer 2011, 73–74). Talusan (2021, Chapter 2) describes how, during the 1904 World’s Fair in St. Louis, the Philippine Constabulary Band was juxtaposed in performance next to the Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines to show the U.S.’ successful civilizing of Filipinos.

5 See Huang (2018) for a discussion of the connection between Chinese sheng and Japanese shō.

6 While the augmented second of the harmonic minor scale is one obvious example, there are maqams/makams (e.g., Hijaz, Hijazkar) which also utilize them. In some cultures, even larger intervals exist in tetratonic and tritonic scale-like systems. See Merriam (2011, 235) for tetratonic scales of Indigenous peoples of the Great Plains and McLean (1969 and 1996, 239) for tritonic and tetratonic scales of Polynesians and Melanesians.

7 Aydin and Ergur (2004) give a nice survey of the history of Kemal Ilerici’s quartal harmony system distilled and developed from Turkish and Greek folk music traditions. Cheong and Hong (2018) discuss the history of Chinese quartal harmony in the context of the debate surrounding the adoption of Soviet Harmony as a way to modernize Chinese music in the early to mid-twentieth century. See Tagg (2014, 293–352) for a summary of quartal harmony in popular musics and Persichetti (1961, 93–108) for a look at its usage in classical music composition. For further information, see Silpayamanant (2022a) for a bibliography on Quartal Harmonies.

8 A pentatonic scale, especially those with an anhemitonic arrangement could be considered a macrotonic scale where the smallest intervals are a major second and minor third. Semitone pitch variants are sometimes used and are explicitly defined in some music theory traditions (see Cheong and Hong 2018, 65) while in others, they may be implicitly part of the embodied practice but not explicitly defined (see Fernando 2007).

Eurocentric music theory and practices tend to be treated as universal and neutral, thus depicting musics that do not adhere to those norms as deviant or othered.<sup>9</sup> Standardizations are part of those norms and this makes it difficult to analyze musics which do not fit into those normative standards. As a theoretical concept rooted in racial hierarchy, heterophony is used as a convenient category to place types of multi-part music that do not easily fit into a polyphonic (or monophonic) bin. Theoretical treatises on pitch, tonality, and tuning standardizations start to operate like fundamentalist texts<sup>10</sup> on how musics should be, becoming prescriptive rather than descriptive of how culturally and historically situated musics actually are.

Indeed, heterophony and polyphony would be more usefully described as types of musical practices embodied as variations across different cultures and historical periods. For example, in the first episode of my *World of Classical* series, “Pious Voices and Plucked Strings,” I discuss how different Christian chant traditions had different solutions to polyphonic textures.<sup>11</sup> In Corsica and Georgia, we can find relatively dense vocal polyphonies, while Ethiopian *zema* chant, and much later Armenian *sharakan*, would interplay percussion or melodic instruments polyrhythmically or polyphonically with a single group or solo vocal line. How they vary this line will depend on the collection of pitches used, the functional range of intervals (including the octave), and what intervals count as salient harmonic units within the music theory or practice.

## HYBRIDIZED, INTERCULTURAL, AND TRANSCULTURAL ORCHESTRAS

With the rise of intercultural and transcultural music makin, a growing need for facilitating diverse musical collaborations in more efficient ways has manifest itself. This goes beyond simply adapting musics for specific ensembles or performing groups. The histories of these kinds of adaptations can be traced to the emergence of what can be referred to as folk orchestras, traditional instrument orchestras, or Indigenous instrument orchestras.

The tamburitza orchestras that were first created in Osijek by Pajo Kolarić in 1847 serve as an early documented example of such ensembles.<sup>12</sup> The tamburitza was a type of plucked lute that originated in the Ottoman Empire and became a popular folk instrument in eastern Europe, especially in what would

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<sup>9</sup> This is not a new phenomenon and it could be argued that the whole foundation of modern music theory as a discipline was complicit. See Adler, Schenker (Ewell 2020), and Riemann (Rehding 2000).

<sup>10</sup> Garzoli (2015) and Wangpaiboonkit (2021) explore the context surrounding the erroneous assumption that Thai tuning systems in classical Piphat ensembles is a 7EDO/7TET system given that the metallophones and *Ranad* xylophones exhibit tunings that are, similar to Gamelan, not standardized and idiomatic to each ensemble set; Walden (2021) explores histories of standardization and how that leads to fundamentalist practices and viewpoints that he refers to as “Pitch Fundamentalism.”

<sup>11</sup> 2022c. This appeared as part of the BBC Radio 3 *World of Classical* series (Silpayamanant 2022c, 2022d, 2022e) I often used this kind of framing as a way of engaging with other musical histories in a global context.

<sup>12</sup> Tamburitza orchestras were part of the Illyrian nationalist movement which was a nationalistic movement against the Hapsburgs. See Vesić (2021, 111).

become modern day Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia, and Southern Hungary. Kolarić and other Croatian musicians developed soprano, alto, and bass versions of the tamburitza in imitation of the string section of the central European orchestra. By the turn of the twentieth century, and with the mass emigration of Croatians and other Eastern Europeans globally, tamburitza orchestras would be in various locations, such as the United States, South Africa, and Australia.

The emergence of a new type of orchestra created a need for new repertoire. Folk and Indigenous tunes would be arranged for the ensembles, as well as adaptations of European classical music. Within a few decades composers would begin composing new works for the groups. Today we find a great number of works for tamburitza orchestras,<sup>13</sup> from Domagoj Vukadin's "Makedonski Ples" to full operatic productions with tamburitza orchestral accompaniment, such as Gregor Zagorc's "Ambrož in Katarina," which premiered in 2019 (Tamburaški Orkester Dobréč 2019). These compositions were often hybridized forms of folk styles, many of which were heterophonic with classical music forms and structures—an approach that aligned with the types of nationalistic compositional activity happening in a late Romantic style that pervaded the classical music world.<sup>14</sup>

By the end of the nineteenth century, plectrum orchestras were formed in different parts of the world using instruments that would often be associated with or emblematic of countries as a "national" instrument. Balalaika orchestras, mandolin orchestras, bandurria orchestras, and other types would follow a similar trajectory to the tamburitza orchestras with regards to the repertoires and performing styles. In many cases, these ensembles became a show of modernization as much as a form of nationalism.

Early twentieth century folk and national instruments orchestras would become a defining feature of many communist states and by the mid- and late-twentieth century, anti-colonial orchestras emerged as former colonies gained independence (Silpayamanant 2021 and Silpayamanant 2022b). This phenomenon has grown to the point that there are now dozens of different types of these ensembles worldwide;<sup>15</sup> by the turn of the twenty first century a growing number of what might be called intercultural or transcultural orchestras had also manifest.<sup>16</sup>

Such trends also differ significantly from the Romantic Musical Nationalism found in the classical music world, as the musical instruments, embodied musical practices, and styles tied to these ensembles led to a slightly divergent

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<sup>13</sup> Australian composer Tanya Jones (2020) has even published a guide to composing for tamburitza orchestra as part of a research project. See Silpayamanant (2022i) for further information about global music composition traditions.

<sup>14</sup> See Gelbhart (2021) for a discussion on Romantic Music Nationalism in the Western classical music world. See also discussions of Musical Nationalism in folk instrument ensembles and orchestras in Buchanan (1995), Kendirbaeva (1994), Kuo-Huang and Gray (1979), Nercessian (2000), and Wong (2012).

<sup>15</sup> See Silpayamanant (2020) for a twitter thread currently documenting 162 different types of orchestras.

<sup>16</sup> Yo-Yo Ma and the Silk Road Project and the Atlas Ensemble are probably the most well-known of these types of ensembles. I founded my own ensemble, Saw Peep, in 2017.

path. We do not, for example, consider much of this music “classical music” or part of the Western Art Music world in the same way we would, say, compositions by Grieg, Dvořák, or the Russian Five. The composers that write for these folk or national instrument ensembles occupy their own music ecosystems, only occasionally overlapping with the Western classical music world when they also compose for classical music ensembles.<sup>17</sup>

Again, with each new orchestra type came the need for repertoire and as with the tamburitza orchestras, the model for repertoire development was to either adapt or arrange folk, Indigenous and Western classical music, or to compose new works. As with the earlier tamburitza orchestra compositions, these newer works were often hybridized fusions between native idioms and Western classical music forms and styles. This compositional practice often brought heterophonic musics, and other harmonic traditions into direct contact with Western classical music common practice harmony.

## COMPOSING HETEROPHONY

With the early nationalized orchestras of folk and Indigenous instruments there was a need not only for developing standardized soprano/alto/tenor/bass versions of instruments to mimic the function of bowed string sections in European orchestras, but also for training the musicians to either read music or develop new methods for learning to perform in large ensembles, which often had large sections of similar instruments. With the intercultural and transcultural orchestras came the juxtaposition of instruments from many different and often wildly diverse performing traditions. These instrumentalists brought many different ways of ornamenting or elaborating melodic lines into direct contact with each other, sometimes resulting in very different heterophonic performing traditions coming together.

In most cases, individual parts needed to be explicitly written out. For example, with a string section in an Arabic orchestra, all ornaments either need to either be written out or transmitted to the section as a whole—distinguishing it from the practice of each individual string player ornamenting their own part idiosyncratically. Standardization thus became very important with large sections of instruments and in some cases standardized ornaments then became highly stylized and methodically taught in a rote fashion.<sup>18</sup>

As such instrumental practices are translated into intercultural and transcultural ensembles, a much more recent phenomenon into the turn of the twenty-first century, the workload for directors of these ensembles expands,

<sup>17</sup> This is, however, becoming more and more common. In compiling various resources for Solo Piano, String Quartet, and Symphonic works by Southeast Asian composers, I was struck by how often their works lists included compositions for Traditional Chinese Orchestra, Gamelan, Kulintang in addition to these “canonical ensembles.” This is not to mention that many of those works are also hybridized or intercultural works.

<sup>18</sup> In many cases, especially in the Soviet Union, national folk orchestras became highly trained and professionalized instrumental groups. This also meant that local heterophonic styles became standardized to facilitate the performance of large ensembles with large instrumental sections—all of which would be playing ornaments perfectly in sync. See Buchanon (1995).

as instrumentalists from many traditions come together with their particular ornamentation practices. Adapting and arranging music for such ensembles requires having a grasp on the different roles played by instruments from varied cultural contexts and performing traditions, and how this can be conveyed in a musical score. For example, adapting a string part from a classical Turkish composition for an erhu or huqin player demands a working knowledge of the style of Turkish and Chinese erhu string playing from the arranger or director, in addition to having an understanding of how the former can be conveyed to the erhu player. Slides, trills, ornaments, and vibrato differ significantly between the two string playing traditions. Given different tuning and scale structures between Turkish and Chinese music, the stylistic differences can either be interesting if juxtaposed, or jarring, especially if the intended heterophonic style ends up being mismatched in ways that makes no sense in either tradition.

This challenge becomes especially apparent when members of similar instrument families are used outside of the cultural contexts within which the instruments developed, especially as it pertains to different developmental stages of the instruments. In my intercultural ensemble, *Saw Peep*, we use huqin instruments from East and Southeast Asia. The Southeast Asian instruments differ significantly from East Asian instruments—such as the erhu—not only in stylistic ways, but also in that the former often still use traditional silk strings rather than modern steel strings. The response time and bowing techniques used for silk versus steel strings, in addition to the skill level of the musicians, shapes how our arrangements can or cannot incorporate specific stylistic and ornamental idioms. This alteration in bowing technique and style will subtly alter the heterophonic structure and sound of particular arrangements, especially of musics that are neither East or Southeast Asian.

In some cases, music notation itself can become an issue. Cipher or number notations are far more common in East and Southeast Asian musical ecosystems<sup>19</sup> and some notation systems work much better in the cultural context they were designed for or are a much better fit and consequently easier to read by musicians that perform in those music ecosystems (Bhagwati 2013a; Bhagwati 2013b, 99–100). Further complicating this are the ways that musics that are not traditionally transmitted through notation can become “fixed” when notated in an arrangement; another challenge is how to notate structural elements, which may seem ornamental from a Western music standpoint. For example, *Saw Peep* was commissioned to arrange and perform three dance pieces with a Bharatnatyam dancer. While Indian raga may have some superficial similarity to many Western scales, they also include Gamakas, which are ornamental elaborations structured on specific pitches that uniquely determine which raag is being performed. Several of the 15 or so Gamakas are structured forms of glissandi that are easily performed on non-fretted instruments or with the voice. *Saw Peep*’s flautist is one of our main soloists, so several

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<sup>19</sup> I have recently started playing with the University of Kentucky Balinese Gamelan Angklung Langen Kerti and all the scores and parts are in cipher notation, in some cases more than one notation system. While native players do not often use these types of scores to learn or perform the pieces, it has become a daily common method of learning repertoire in the US and Canada.

of the melodic lines she played had to either omit some Gamakas or recreate a running note emulation of glissandi. This was not as much of an issue for our string players, but it did create a slight disconnect and sometimes an odd heterophonic structure in the scoring of the dance tunes.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

My experiences with intercultural ensembles have highlighted the importance of decentering Western musical norms—a practice that can help us to see heterophony as a highly developed practice rather than just one step on an evolutionary musical ladder towards polyphony. This year has seen the addition of new Saw Peep musicians who have been trained, or are culture bearers of, other heterophonic (Hindustani music), colotomic (Sundanese Gamelan), or polyphonic/harmonic (Filipino folk music) traditions and with that comes a renegotiation of the ensemble's performing and rehearsal style. As we hear monophony, heterophony, and polyphony existing together, often in the same music ecosystems, it becomes much easier to see how cross-cultural, intercultural, and transcultural practices often co-evolve or develop side-by-side rather than as a linear progression. This understanding can also be helpful for seeing how to adapt musics from other cultural contexts into newer ensembles and orchestras, especially those with a wide diversity of musicians and instruments that are not normally found in collaborative environments. This perspective can also help us navigate the structural issues that may arise when large sections of instruments of any type need to play individual lines as a group and the solutions that heterophonic focused styles have done to achieve ensemble playing even without the tools (e.g., common Western notation) at their disposal that Western classical music ensembles take for granted and treat as universal and neutral.

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## ABSTRACT

The usage of heterophony has changed significantly since it was coined by Guido Adler in 1908 to signify an other in opposition to Western polyphony. It was first used to demonstrate an evolutionary progression from a more primitive form of music making to a purportedly more developed polyphony that had supposedly only been achieved in the West. Starting from the idea of a continuum between monophony and polyphony, with heterophony falling somewhere in the middle, this article contends that it is more useful to conceive of all three as coexisting and reflecting expressions of different functions of music. A more fluid concept of all three descriptive terms is far more useful as an analytic tool and can help to reveal a wide variety of hybridization and collaborative interaction between musicians with diverse musical backgrounds.

*Keywords:* heterophony, polyphony, intercultural music, performance practice, history of music theory

## RÉSUMÉ

L'utilisation du terme « hétérophonie » a considérablement évolué depuis qu'il a été inventé par Guido Adler en 1908 pour désigner un autre en opposition à la polyphonie occidentale. Il a d'abord été utilisé pour démontrer une progression évolutive d'une forme primitive de création musicale vers une polyphonie prétendument plus développée, qui n'aurait été atteinte qu'en Occident. Partant de l'idée d'un continuum entre la monophonie et la polyphonie, l'hétérophonie se situant quelque part au milieu, cet article soutient qu'il est plus utile de concevoir les trois comme coexistant et reflétant des expressions de différentes fonctions de la musique. Un concept plus fluide des trois termes descriptifs est beaucoup plus utile en tant qu'outil analytique et peut aider à révéler une grande variété d'hybridation et d'interaction collaborative entre des musiciens d'origines musicales diverses.

*Mots-clés:* hétérophonie, polyphonie, musique interculturelle, pratique du spectacle, histoire de la théorie musicale

## BIOGRAPHY

Jon Silpayamanant is an independent scholar, composer, and educator based in the Louisville metro area. As a biracial Thai American with musical families on both sides of the world, he has been navigating *musical code switching* and *bi/polymusicality* while doing research that focuses on the history of *forced musical labor* and *slave orchestras* and on how music ecosystems interact, hybridize, and create systems of exclusion. He is also founder and artistic director of Saw Peep, a pan-Asian ensemble which performs traditional and blended intercultural music from South, Southeast, and Central Asia.