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Music of Makran: Traditional Fusion from Coastal Balochistan

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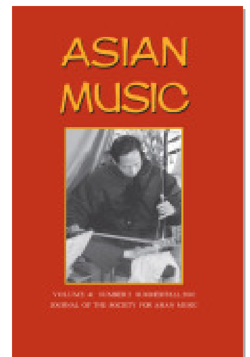

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their knowledge by reading Aubert's own book (2004), which includes about 100 pages on the ritual of the trembling of snakes. Another forthcoming publication by Christine Guillebaud deals with various aspects of Puḷḷuvan songs. This book will be particularly useful because it includes a DVD in which songs are depicted in their ritual context.

On a personal note, I was extremely glad to listen to this CD because it brought back musical memories from my younger days in Allappuzha, Kerala, where I grew up (Allappuzha is home to many Puḷḷuvan families). Aubert's work is all the more valuable because the art of the Puḷḷuvan is slowly going out of vogue. In 1998, three years before Aubert's fieldwork, George S. Paul, a music and dance critic for *The Hindu* daily, quoted Ambujakshi, a female performer, saying, "It is no longer possible to make both ends meet with this profession of singing alone and further, fabrication of the rare instruments is also beyond our means nowadays" (Paul 1998, 2). Aubert has provided in this CD a set of audio samples that can be used for discussion of such issues as interaction among indigenous traditions, scholarly representations, and music transcription and analysis.

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Music of Makran: Traditional Fusion from Coastal Balochistan. Recordings, text, and photographs by Anderson Bakewell. From the International Music

Collection of the British Library National Sound Archive. Topic World Series, Topic Records Ltd. TSCD916. 2000. One audio CD, fourteen pages of notes, photos, map.

This elegantly styled, musically rich, informative CD, prepared by Anderson Bakewell in collaboration with Dr. Sabir Badalkhan Baloch,[1] was produced by the International Music Collection of the British Library National Sound Archive. It features music of Makran, the dry region of southern Balochistan situated between modern Iran and Pakistan. Inland from the Arabian sea, coastal plains quickly give way to rugged mountains, and most of the population lives in port cities such as Jiwani, Pishukan, Gwadar, and Pasni. The region's inaccessibility (military treks from Cyrus to Alexander suffered considerable losses here) has precluded much ethnomusicological research, while helping to fuse a unique blend of musical influences.

Indeed, Makran exhibits stunning cultural diversity, the product of a variegated history. Migrating from northwestern Iran about a thousand years ago, the Baloch layered pervasive cultural, social, and religious influence upon indigenous Indus Valley culture (the region contains one of the only Dravidian languages outside South India). Other influences filtered in from Arabia and Africa, creating a rich admixture. For nearly two hundred years—until 1958—the area was under partial control of the Sultan of Oman (who also ruled portions of east Africa), and a considerable population of Siddis of African descent maintain unique cultural practices. The prevailing religion is an unusual form of Islam known as *zigri* (*zikri*), which emphasizes the performance of *zikr* (remembrance of God).

The result is a rich traditional musical culture reflecting diverse influences, including Balochi praise songs (*sipatt* and *nazenk*), love songs (*dastanag*), elegies (*motk*), lullabies (*lilo*), wedding and circumcision songs (*halo* and *lado*), songs of separation (*zahirok, liko,* and *dehi*), and epics (*sher*)—as well as non-Balochi genres, such as fishermen's songs (*amba* and *lewa*); healing songs (*gwati, sheki, sheparja,* and *malid*); *zigri* ritual songs (*chogan*); and *sot,*[2] songs of love and praise. *Sot* are sung primarily by lower-caste professional women singers called *sotis.* Siddis continue to perform in an African style, singing in a language of possible Swahili origin that is no longer understood. But mixing also occurs: Siddis perform Balochi songs, and African rhythms appear in other genres. Much musical exchange occurs in the context of healing ceremonies derived from Africa and Arabia, such as the *gwati leb.* Here, aesthetic principles are shaped by the need for musicians to support the development of trance states, and these inform Makrani music more generally as well. Bakewell eloquently

relates the gradual manipulation of repetitive rhythm and melody, subtly shifting from one modality to another, inducing corresponding transformations in the listener.

Cultural diversity reappears in the instrumentarium, which can be loosely related to castes, classes, and gender. Professional hereditary musicians are primarily of the Luri caste. They perform *sot* and *sher,* and on the double reed/drum combination (*surna/duhl*); the subcaste *Domb* is thought to be related to the European Rom. The *suroz,* a bowed lute (often known elsewhere as *sarinda*), is typically accompanied by the *damburag,* a long-necked fretless lute, which may also accompany the *donali,* a double flute. Other instruments include the *bansari* (transverse flute), *dukkur* (cylindrical drum), *chinchir* (finger cymbals), and the *benjo,* a kind of zither apparently derived (remarkably enough) from the Japanese *koto* in the nineteenth century. Throughout Balochistan, *suroz, damburag,* and flutes are traditionally instruments of higher castes, though in Makran they are performed by hereditary musicians as well.

The CD includes an informative booklet, providing concise background on the region, musical structures, performance contexts, and instruments. Four high-definition black and white photos illustrate performers of *donali, suroz, damburag,* and *benjo.* Notes for each of the thirteen tracks provide personnel, instrumentation, and limited contextual and genre information. For the most part, the transliteration and translation of song texts provide a most commendable contribution towards cross-cultural communication.

The music was recorded in 1991, mainly in coastal Makrani cities, as well as the inland city of Panjgur. Two tracks were recorded among Makrani emigrants in Karachi. The recordings raise certain questions: Do these recordings represent the dominant music of the region, or was it necessary to seek performers and performances at the margins of more pervasive currents of the modern media? Or does that media carry music such as this? Is the CD an archival piece or a snapshot of living musical tradition? Were recordings made in the field? Within the context of live events? Or in the studio? While sound is clear, performance context is not.

Track contents raise more questions than they answer. Bakewell rightly remarks that the time limitation imposed by CD technology ill-serves the aesthetics of trance and concomitant extended performances. This fact renders contextual information all the more important. Performance genres—particularly ritual ones such as *gwati* and *sheik*—should have been better contextualized not only within Makrani society, but also in their relation to the neighboring regions of the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia from which influences are said to flow and fuse. Such information would not only have helped expli-

cate the notion of "fusion," but also would also have helped avoid the inevitable implication of musical exoticism which ensues when musical formations are presented out of context.

Additional research might help trace the rich network of connections suggested by name, style, and morphology. After all the general talk of fusions and the meeting of multiple cultural influences, it is somewhat surprising that apparent connections to local and adjoining cultures (Arabian, Sindhi, Gujarati, Rajasthani, East African, Rom, Balochi) are not drawn more explicitly, especially since tracing such links could only enhance the overarching theme of cultural-musical fusion. What is the relation of Makrani *rāg* to that of Hindustani music, or to Middle Eastern modalities? The relation of the Makrani *sot* to the *sot* of the Arabian peninsula? How is the *suroz* connected to other south Asian instruments? The wider domain of the transverse flute (*bansuri*) could have been noted. The *malid* genre certainly participates in the broader Islamic concept of "*mawlid.*" Historically, the *zigri* sect is thought to be linked to the northern Indian Mahdawiyya movement (whose adherents are known in Sind as Zikris) (Bosworth 1981; Arnold and Lawrence 1999). Are there musical connections as well?

Minimally, one wishes for more information on recording locales, at least introducing the various places and contexts where recordings were made and addressing issues of variation in musical genre, style, and ethnicity. Although notes describe Makran as both culture and geographical locale, the two Karachi tracks—including a recording of *sheki*—implicitly problematize the whole concept (common enough in ethnomusicological series) of "territorialized" CDs. Yet this fact inexplicably passes without comment. How does "music of Makran" transcend Makran *qua* geography? How are meanings transformed in a minority context (Karachi)? Are ceremonies such as *sheki* actively practiced among minority emigrant communities, or only upon request? The sociomusical implications of performance in such an emigrant community and concomitant issues of musical change are not explored.

The religious dimension inherent in the sound of this disc is highly intriguing, and yet its meaning is difficult to assess from the notes alone. More extensive descriptions of the significance of the musical genres should have been included. For instance, track 1 contains music of the *sheki* ceremony, defined as being "similar to the *gwati leb,* but differing only in its emphasis on the intercession of Sufi saints to effect a cure." The word "*sheki*" is likely derived from the Arabic "*shaykhi*" (since Sufi saints are often titled "*shaykh*"). One would like to know more about Sufism in Makran, its relation to *zigri,* and the role of *sheki* and its relation to *gwati.* Perhaps then parallels to the Egyptian *zar* and related

practices of North Africa—featuring Sufi Muslim saints as well as non-Islamic metaphysical entities—might be drawn. The lack of broader contextualization tends to imply an isolated (hence exotic) "music of Makran," whereas Makran is really more of a crossroads, a place of "fusion," as the disc's subtitle ("traditional fusion from coastal Balochistan") indeed claims.

Yet the concept of fusion is also problematic when featured as a distinguishing characteristic; it is not clear that Makrani music is any more "fused" than any other. While there has been considerable musical cross-fertilization between the various groups living or passing through Makran, such is the case in most music areas. The term "fusion" has typically been applied since the late 1950s (but especially in the 1970s) to musicians' self-conscious attempts to bridge musical worlds in order to create something new—from 1950s Third Stream, to 1960s Indo-Jazz, 1970s rock/jazz/funk, and more eclectic concoctions thereafter. But "traditional fusion" is near tautology; artist intention aside, all musics are already fused in this sense. Underscoring fusion therefore appears mainly as a strategy to capture attention in the clamorous world music market. Broadening the audience for ethnographic music recordings is certainly a good thing, but should not be accomplished at the cost of obscuring the fact that musical fusion and change is always and everywhere inevitable.

What then is special about Makran? The implication that Makrani music is more "fused" than some other musics appears to stem more from its geo-social position as a counterexample to Western assumptions about the separability and independence of geo-musical areas, a by-product of colonialism. The assumed existence of independent geo-musical domains—"Indian music," "Arab music," "African music" as pure, homogeneous types—is derived largely from the old colonial divisions of the world into "continents," "regions," and "races," yet these types continue to define the basic categories of the "world music" market. The falsity of such a model appears at interstitial locations such as Makran—a meeting point between "Indian," "Arab," and "African" domains—where the illusion of a clear separation of types can no longer be sustained. Such a location, whose existence subverts the assumed purity of the categories it borders, is dangerous (to follow Mary Douglas); perhaps it is precisely this perception of danger (positively spun as "fusion"[3]) that is commodified in much world music.

Besides "fusion," other emphases also appear in this CD as typical strategies in the "world music" marketing game: trance, spirit healing, religious heterodoxy, syncretism, African rhythm and ritual, gypsies, what is "ancient," what is "sacred," the traditional, and the exotic (fostered by fusion's antithesis, the ethnographic construction of uniqueness and isolation).

Yet though much is made here of unusual variety, juxtaposition, and fusion, the recordings themselves are not nearly as diverse as they could have been.

Many genres are introduced in the notes without accompanying audio examples (e.g., *sipatt, dastanag, sher,* and *amba*), while other genres are reiterated. Rather than repeat *gwati, sheki,* and *zahirok* tracks, it would have been far better to have included even a single instance of *malid,* or of *chogan* (*zigri* religious music), and at least one example each of Siddi music, or "gypsy" music (on *duhl* and *surna*) (the latter might have helped establish aural connections for the many potential listeners familiar with Rom music in Turkey and the Balkans).

Other items for the wish-list include fuller biographical information about performers, and a map indicating places mentioned in the text (the tiny inset map provided is barely sufficient to locate the region as a whole). It would have been helpful to have included systematic explanations of the various genres more thoroughly in relation to context, meaning, and one another (e.g., *sheki* and *gwati*). Instead, the reader is likely to be confused; for example, *lilo* is first introduced as "lullaby" then later as "love song," *sheyrwandi* (track 4) is undefined, and *sot* is multiply glossed. From the text provided it is unclear why track 6 is classed as *zahirok.* Another conundrum is the word *saz* which often occurs in track titles; in Persian and Turkish *saz* means "musical instrument," but the notes provide no explanation. Logically enough, *saz* turns out to mean "tune" (see Badalkhan 2000, 775).

Some limitations can be attributed to recording medium. Bakewell perspicaciously calls attention to distortions in the listening experience induced by the Procrustean time-limits imposed by the CD (this problem in audio representations of field-experience should help convince music producers to begin issuing extended ethnographic recordings using MP3 format, or on audio DVD, or else via the boundless Web). And one cannot expect a single CD to include everything. But similar considerations cannot excuse the brevity of the notes, at least for a putatively scholarly disc. One such disc in my possession (*A musical anthology of the Arabian peninsula,* VDE-782) contains thirty-five pages of notes, whereas *Makran* contains only fourteen. More detailed notes would have gone a long way towards providing historical, cultural, musical, and performative contextualizations that listeners cannot easily assemble (if at all), particularly in the case of world music (so unlike the folk music that is Topic Records' staple), and *a fortiori* given the stated desire of the British Library National Sound Archive's International Music Collection to make its archives more accessible to the general public (15). While Topic Records, aiming for a more popular than scholarly market, may well fear the potentially chilling effects of lengthy scholarly notes (perhaps as much as popular book publishers dread footnotes), the British Library, aiming also for education, research, and posterity, should resist purely commercial considerations whenever possible.

But despite certain drawbacks, this disc provides important scholarly value,

sounding a seldom-heard musical area and comprising an essential addition to any serious ethnomusicological audio collection. This is so not only for the remarkable music-sound and music-knowledge it carries, but for the new vistas it opens on the relatively unknown district of Makran and its remarkable multicultural layerings of sound, practice, and discourse. One hopes that this CD may inspire further research in this ethnomusicologically under-explored region. Finally, while commercial compromises should be avoided as far as possible, the National Sound Archive's objective to recreate itself as a "living archive" of accessible, widely disseminated material, is most commendable, and succeeds—to a great extent in this production.

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Notes

[1]Credited in liner notes with "assistance in the field and translation," Dr. Sabir Badalkhan Baloch is also the author of an independent encyclopedia entry on music of Balochistan (Badalkhan 2000), which should be considered required co-reading for a proper understanding of the music on this CD. See also Sakata 2000, 754, 761.

[2]The word *sot* (in Arabic, literally meaning "voice") has been used since medieval times to denote "song," especially in Arabia.

[3]A more negative spin on categorical ambiguity in ethnomusicology is provided by Hornbostel and Sach's characterization of those instruments not fitting neatly into their organological taxonomy as evincing "adulteration . . . [*Kontaminationen*]" (Hornbostel and Sachs 1961, 9).

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