

# **Music, context and culture: the contribution of the ethnomusicological research in the field of music therapeutic research**

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## **Abstract**

This article looks into the relationship between musictherapy and ethnomusicology because, if the use of music for therapeutic aims is an antique, varied and diversified practice, then the actual practice of musictherapy is also incredibly varied and even if it has been established a more science-based autonomous discipline in the last 50 years (thanks for the contribution of the neuroscience, medicine and psychology...) not for this has it remained immune from its ancestral heritage. In fact, the therapy of music is based on the 'humanity of music', that is on all that is universally human in music concerning the body, the mind, the soul and the emotions in a global point of view.

After a short overview and comparison of the two disciplines, a window is opened to F. Giannattasio's splendid ethnomusicological research, which is of grand influence and richness of particulars, followed by things to ponder in the field of musictherapy and in particular on the role and value of context as cultural container to identify and deal with the forms of discomfort, disorders. Music in fact acquires therapeutic value only if it is put in a frame of references, that is a context or setting.

**Keywords:** Musictherapy, ethnomusicology, concept of music, culture, man-sound relationship, musical behaviour and musical context, interdisciplinarity, rite as a container, setting, role of community, functions of music in rituals.

## **Music therapy and ethnomusicology**

There are plenty of disciplines which deal with music from different standpoints, with different approaches and aims, as it is a complex and articulated phenomenon connected to a wide range of aspects. Starting from the definition of music itself we can see plenty of possible definitions which vary according to the type of approach, historical period, culture and the individuals. There is no absolute answer but a series of possible answers which change with the changing of the people's needs following the transformation of the culture and society.

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In the field of music therapy music takes up a central place: it is the intermediary subject, the means of contact and transformation in the therapist /client relationship. To define therefore what music is and how it works in the human experience or in the man-sound relation in general represents an important epistemologic element in music therapy and is also the actual goal of ethnomusical studies. As a matter of fact, its final aim is the comprehension of music as a universal human activity of expression. Ethnomusicology does not study only exotic music, but it is a discipline that holds out hope for a deeper understanding of all music (Blacking, 1986).<sup>2</sup>

Along the long course in music therapy I saw different uses, modes, aims of music which made me interested in musical practices present in the other parts of the world to have a wider view. In this sense the encounter with ethnomusicology becomes a logical and natural consequence.

The ethnomusical field is an articulated and interdisciplinary area with different tendencies and fields of interest whose focus is on 'musical' and deeply bound to people. The research is dedicated to the documentation and interpretation of forms and human behaviour in the world. It is the study of music harmony as the universal expressive form of the human behaviour, so it is the study of all the musical expression in relation with the culture that has determined it. In other words it deals with the man- music relationship from the point of view of the function of music in people's lives and tends to show the specification of the generalizing principles on musical behaviour.

'Comparing music forms and comportment of the different societies and cultures, the ethnomusicological research has at the core the concept of music itself, suggesting having one of the most universal extent.' (Giannattasio, 1998).<sup>3</sup> The western scholars who are used to conceive music as the product purely motivated by aesthetic aims, with the ethnomusicological studies met societies where the sound activity was used in a deeply different way and much more clearly connected to their existential necessities' (Magrini, 2002).<sup>4</sup> Especially in the western tradition, music seems to take up an autonomous aesthetic expression while outside the cultured european area music appears to be connected to the outstanding moments of the social life (rites, celebrations etc) and is not conceived 'in itself'.

The ethnomusical studies can help therefore to broaden both the concept of music in general and the understanding of man-sound relationship in relation with the cultural context. Moreover, they can help us not to have prejudice easily, for example to consider the extraeuropean music as 'other' music and therefore to accede to a new music world and to a deeper understanding of 'our' music. They help us be aware of the whole of proper musical values (repertory, compositive and executive techniques, musical taste and ability) which are brought by the social and cultural environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Blacking J. (1986). *Come è musicale l'uomo?*. Ricordi Lim, Collana Le Sfere, Lucca.

<sup>3</sup> Giannattasio F. (1998). *Il concetto di musica: contributi e prospettive della ricerca etnomusicologica*. Bulzoni, Roma. [p.12]

<sup>4</sup> Magrini T. (2002). *Universi sonori: introduzione all'etnomusicologia*. Einaudi editore, Torino. [p.169]

As a matter of fact J. Blacking says that after his studies in South-Africa he began to understand and appreciate his own culture and music as well (Blacking, 1986).<sup>5</sup>

The ethnomusicology beyond being a method puts itself up for anthropology of music and musical behaviour; therefore can help understand the interaction of the psychological, social, cultural factors together with the pure musical ones in the process of the production and the fruition of the organized sound. To know and understand the way of making music in the different cultures brings us to have a better awareness of the relationship between music, context and culture because the operative systems are universally given while the models of expressing are culturally learnt (Blacking, see before).<sup>6</sup>

That is how the music therapeutic field for its interdisciplinary nature enriches from the contribution of another interdisciplinary area that is of the ethnomusicology, in particular of the importance of the environment, that is the society and culture in the individual person's structuring in its all appearance. Every new ethnomusical research and documentation represents a small wedge in the construction of a 'great map' from which one can extract the expressive potentials/capacity of man and music for a complete understanding of the man-sound relationship.

Musictherapy and ethnomusicology each represents a tangle of streets which often interleave on the common tems and which take us toward the cognition of man and music: to understand man in order to comprehend music, to understand music in order to comprehend man. Man and music are indissolubly connected to one another. Music cannot exist without men (Merriam, 1983).<sup>7</sup> In the centre there is the man and his relation to other people; man is meant in his entirety, that is in his biological, social and culture-bearer being. This way music, meant as a peculiar tract of the human species, is produced by universal physiological and cognitive processes, and as a system related to sounds its structures are the product, the expression and the feature of a particular social system.

## Definition and comparison

To understand how and when the collaboration of music therapy and ethnomusicology can be profitable one can think of a mere speculative comparison of the two fields. As a matter of fact, to point out the resemblances and the differences results to be a useful and necessary task if one wants to understand why and how the ethnomusicological research can represent a valid contribution to the music therapeutic field. The first step is to compare the respective terms and definitions.

Music therapy 'is a systematic process of intervention wherein the therapist helps the client to achieve health, using musical experiences and the relationships that develop through them as dynamic forces of change' (Bruscia, 1987).<sup>8</sup> It is composed from two

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<sup>5</sup> Blacking J. see above

<sup>6</sup> Blacking J. see above

<sup>7</sup> Merriam A. P. (1983). *Antropologia della musica*. Sellerio, Palermo.

<sup>8</sup> Bruscia K. E. (1993). Definire la musicoterapia: percorso epistemologico di una disciplina e di una professione. Gli Archetti,

great disciplinary aggregations around the two fundamental terms , music and therapy, each rich in implicit facet. Thus we are not dealing with a single discipline with well-defined and unchangeable borders, but a gathering of plenty of disciplines around the two main areas :music and therapy (Bruscia, see before).<sup>9</sup> Music therapy is characterized by the knowledge and the combination of disciplines from art to science and interpersonal relationships. We must underline that there are different therapeutic ways and approaches, we are talking about a young area therefore it is not easy to have a unique and universally accepted definition (Bruscia, see before).<sup>10</sup>

Ethnomusicology is also the dynamic combination of plenty of disciplines around two huge areas: anthropology and musicology: ‘Ethnomusicology is a comparatively new word which is widely used to refer to the study of the different musical systems of the world’ (Blacking, 1986).<sup>11</sup> ‘From the etimo part of etno-music-ology two different but equally right interpretations can be derived: a) ethnic musicology (of the different people); b)ethnology of music . Actually, both of the formulations corrispond to two tendencies really present in the ethnomusical research and alternately present in the history of the studies’ (Giannattasio, 1998).<sup>12</sup> ‘Ethnomusicology is born with the discovery and the observation of musical ‘alterity’ [...] it mainly aims at [...] interpreting every musical phenomenon in relation with the particular culture that has produced it, adopting instruments and cathegories of universal reach and validity’ (Giannattasio, see above).<sup>13</sup>

Some important analogies and differences can be seen from this concise picture: both music therapy and ethnomusicology are human sciences, they are relatively recent, are in progress all the time, therefore nothing can be taken for granted or seen definitive. Value judgement is not espressed on music and all the possible manifestations of music are considered with equal dignity. We can retain similar the interest of both in the relationship between text and context, between analysis and musical description and analysis and the decription of non-musical aspects of music (symbolic, aeshtetic, social, psychological, physical etc). Both in music therapy and in ethnomusicology there are several theoretical models of reference and several practical areas. The research and practical activities have a strongly interdisciplinary character, as a matter of fact the approaches derivated from other fields of knowledge can be usefully applied. The disciplines akin to one another concern especially the musical areas (musicology, musical analysis, anthropology of music, psychology of music, sociology of music, semeiotics of music) but also the field of psychology (general psychology and psychiatry, developmental psychology, pedagogy). The focus is on musical and human in both where ‘ the sound may be the object, but man is the subject‘ (Blacking, 1986).<sup>14</sup>

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ISMEZ, Roma .(1998) Defining Music Therapy, Gilsum NH, Barcelona Publishers. [p.47]

<sup>9</sup> Bruscia K. E. see above

<sup>10</sup> Bruscia K. E. see above

<sup>11</sup> Blacking J. (1973) How musical is man?. University of Washimgton Press, USA. [p.27]

<sup>12</sup> Giannattasio F.see above[p.17-18]

<sup>13</sup> Giannattasio F. see above [p.31]

<sup>14</sup> Blacking J. See above [p.3]

It can be seen that both terms of ethnomusicology and music therapy have a double identity and in this double identity the similarity of the central focus of the two disciplines, that is 'musical', is clearly visible, however, a fundamental difference also appears in their type of approach. As already mentioned, while the former is a research activity dedicated to the documentation and the interpretation of forms of music and musical behaviour in the world with the aim to individualize the generalizing principles of musical comportment, the latter is a practical intervention where the musical experiences are used as a dynamic forces of the individual change in order to improve the psychic-physical health of the person throughout the therapy of music.

Thus the aims of the two disciplines are different: ethnomusicology is essentially a theoretical discipline although a phase of fieldwork can be necessary. Its aim is the study, the documentation and the formulation of general theories. While music therapy uses this great garner of knowledge for a practical intervention which aims at the wellness, the psychic-physical and social balance of the person through a process of dynamic change. The music ethnologist has a musicologic education which he uses for an anthropological research and not for changing or transforming the culture he is observing.

To sum up we can say: what both disciplines have in common are the music and the man-music relationship, and what diversifies them is the goal, that is one aims at the comprehension, the other aims at the change.

Moreover, music therapy looks for the key to understand the person in the man-sound relationship, while ethnomusicology searches for the understanding of a culture in order to discover general models.

It is recognized for ethnomusicology being the first to present the problem of observation, collection and the analysis of data, that is the relation between the observer and the observed culture, the text and context, the modality of transcript etc. Therefore, though having different aims, the common territory of the two disciplines is vast enough: the ethnomusicological studies can share both the documentation related to the therapeutical usage of music in the various cultures (documentational part) and the studies about the understanding of the man-music relation in general (interpretative part). It means an essentially theoretical but hugely pregnant contribution.

From the ethnomusicological literature plenty of particularly important and complex themes can come up for music therapy: for example the definition of the concept of music, the relationship between the biological and cultural aspects of music, the functions of music, the motives of musical behaviour etc. A particularly significant contribution concerns the relationship of the person and the musical phenomena of the culture. As a matter of fact the signification of the sound depending on the associations and significations which are culturally understood cannot be ignored. Moreover, for example Blacking's presumptions on the biological and social origins of music could make an impact on the way of regarding musicality and the system of

musical education. Thus, they could evoke new ideas on the role of music in the education and generally in the society.

As a music therapist I cannot be indifferent or ignore certain musical practices with therapeutic purpose used in other parts of the world even if they can be or seem to be distant not only geographically, but also culturally. Let us see for example through a short part how a possession cult practice in Africa shows interesting, even fascinating parallelism between musician-possessed and music therapist-client: 'the possessed is in the mercy of the drummers who accompany her motions imparting them a more and more rapid and violent movement. In fact, starting from this moment a close interpersonal relationship develops between the drum and the possessed. The way they accompany her is certain: the drummer keeps himself very close to her and does not abandon her any more, accompanying her smallest movements, continuously observing her behaviour and adjusting by speeding up or slowing down, to choose the necessary percussions and to adjust the intensity. Huffing the rhythm of the dance into her, the drummer keeps her under his power and drags her in the more and more violent whirl of music. But if he is able to lead her to his liking, it is made possible because he could establish an agreement. If he can dominate her and impose his will on her, it is because he can accompany her. It is the drummer who leads the game, but it is a dialogue: he speaks through music and she responds with her dance' (Rouget, 1986).<sup>15</sup>

The therapeutic use of music seen through an ethnomusicological 'fieldwork' research: from F. Giannattasio's research 'Music and trance in the possession cult in Somalia'<sup>16</sup>

This part will be a sort of journey of reconnaissance through an extract form one of the greatest Italian ethnomusicologists' 'fieldwork' research. The purpose is to explore questions of music therapeutical interest from another point of view with every traveller's hope, that is to find new things to ponder.

Given the connection of the theme discussed here, instead of paraphrasing the research in question I suggest that we look at an extract from Giannattasio's original work leaving out the parts that are addressed to people with special musical competence.

This way one can see how the ethnomusical research faces these themes, which can offer a significant contribution to the music therapeutical field.

It will be a fascinating journey, rich of suggestions but in particular raising useful questions for a further elaboration: for example the relation between divinity-illness-music, between music and altered state of mind, ritual and the structure of setting, the modality for the therapy's sake, the cure and healing, the role of the community, the importance of the culture etc.

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<sup>15</sup> Rouget G. (1986). *Musica e trance: I rapporti fra la musica e i fenomeni di possessione*. Einaudi, Torino. [p.155]

<sup>16</sup> Giannattasio F. see above [p.245-263].

‘Mingis (pronounce Minghis) is the name used in the costal areas of Somalia for a Zar possession cult practiced in the whole north-west Africa. ... As the other Zar cults (in somali Saar) the Mingis also has its bases in the belief of a rank of spirits—which in Somalia are assimilated to the jinni of the popular islamic religion and set in a complex hierarchy—being believed to be able to ‘possess’ the persons causing psychic-physical disorder in them. The possession can appear through various symptoms (hypochondria, headache, vomiting, but more generally in neurotical and psychotic state) and can affect a person directly or by transmission from another person or can even be inherited.

The cult consists of a circle of practical rituals directed by priests called calaqad (pronounce álacat) around whom the adepts form a real and proper community with different grades of novice. The aim of the practical rituals is essentially therapic in so far in the following stages they can allow a negotiation between the possessed and possessing spirit/s removing the hostility to eliminate the disease; the stages of trance ritually induced to the ill person with the help of music and dance are fundamental to this aim and through them the identification of the possessed and possessing spirit publicly appears. A therapic circle has a rather long duration (generally 2 years ) for the person who is submitted and high costs especially to buy the objects used during the rites and to gift the calaqad (and the community) and to sacrifice animals (sheep, goats) to the spirits.

In the community of this study the individual course of cure takes up different stages from the moment the calaqad diagnoses the ‘Mingis’ until thenine-day rite called Muul, which is decisive for the therapy. Some of the ritual practices like for example the individuation of the ‘possessing’ jinni can have a public process and take place without the community, but the dancing-musical therapy takes place in the public functions which the ill person is subjected to in each phase of the circle.

Every public function is set up as the sequence of the individual treatment through music, dance and particular objects and expedient rites. The differences between one treatment and another depend not only on the stages of ‘therapy’ gone through by the different sick people, but on the type of ailment (and spirit) that torments the person and on the their behavior during the possession which varies according to their personalities.

A treatment generally has the following stages:

1. preliminary (partially repeated in the course of the rite), which consists of the relationship of the calaqad and ill person and includes various operations: fumigate with incense, perfusion of profumes, ritual dressing,; ritual conversation;
2. musical where the calaqad and his assistents begin to sing and then play music, immediately followed by the whole community, while the ill person ,sitting on the ground ‘takes in the spirits’ listening to the drums;
- 3.dancing-musical,which arises from the previous one at the moment the ill person starts the possession dance and goes on with the calaqad’s continuous interruption to

help him/her (doing strong massages if he/she has cramps, talking etc) until the person reaches the trance;

4. high point, the critical moment when the trance takes over and comes the jinni 's identification;

5. ending dancing-musical part, in which the possessed returns from the trance to the normal state and leaves the centre of the ritual circle.

[...] The rituals usually take place inside a 4 metres by 5 metres big rectangular tent with no decoration or particular ornaments (except for some simple mats on the floor); the only scenographic element is the semidarkness which gives the place a solemn atmosphere. Besides giving a shelter from the sun and strong wind, the tent circumscribes the ceremonial space, the cult temple, where only the participants of the ceremony can enter and only barefoot. Its borders define the sacred place (mowlaq) and separate the participants from the spectators formally connoting the roles: anyone coming out of the tent, even after a trance, stops being helped by the community that takes part in the rites and no act of the dancing-musical possession therapy can take place outside the tent.

### *The object of the rites*

Before the tent fills up with people, the four ceremonial drums which will be beaten by the calaqad and his assistants during the ritual are arranged on the opposite side of the entrance. The role of the drums is fundamental not only in leading and conducting the singing and dancing but also for their sound—as the priests themselves state--- they have the power to evoke the spirits. [...] When they are beaten together the four drums reach a very intensive volume of sound, the limit of supportsbility (at least for those who are not used to it).

Another essential liturgical object is the incense burner used for the fumigation. [...] We must think that the inhalation besides being an act of purification and favouring it also has a psychotropic effect. The incense burner is used to 'consecrate' the drums warming and keeping their leather warm with the hot fumes of the incense.

During the ceremony a rich and continuing use of profumes takes place too. [...] The stinky intensive profumes mix up with the harsh smell of the incense filling up the tent to the point of disallowing any other perception of smelling.

For the ceremonial decoration the veils and cloth with bright colours are fundamental, which are brought for the calaqad by the patients and will be mostly given to the participants in the course of the rituals. [...]

Drums, incenses, profumes and colourful clothes build up the paraphernalia of the liturgy of the Mingis, where they perform the function of determining the ceremonial context satisfying the jinni in order to please them and make them appear in the course of the rite. The objects therefore take up a sacred character: they are handled exclusively by the calaqad (and his assistants) ; their 'declared' action is addressed to the spirits and to the community. However, though undeclared, a more evident and

direct influence of them is seen on the men: the musical instruments, the incenses, the perfumes and colourful clothes combine into a hyperaesthetic alteration of the participants' perception. These sensory strains can be considered as contributory conditions with the purpose to help reach the trance in the particular space-time dynamic created by music and dance.

### *The participants' disposition*

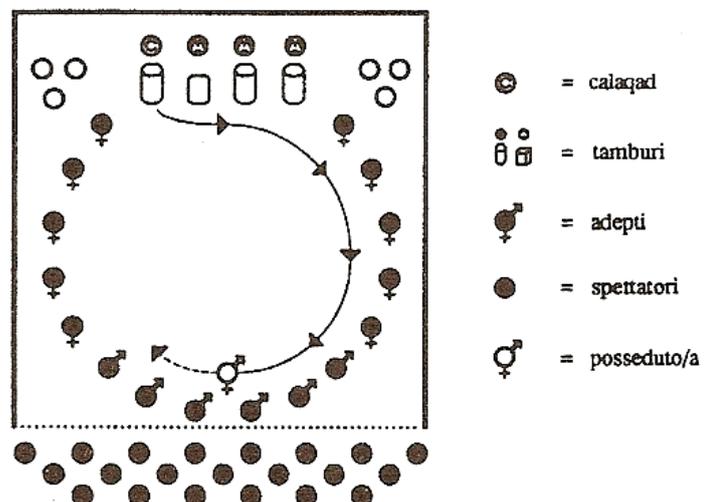
The tent begins to take up the feature of a sacred fence in the moment the followers take their places according to an order determined by their different roles. The ritual circle is formed like this in the centre of which the possession dances will take place:

- in the back of the tent the calaqad and his three assistants are sitting behind the four drums;
- in parallel with the two longer sides of the tent the adepts of the cult stand (the calaqad's devotee and assistants) almost all women;
- on the side of the opening of the tent the circle is closed by a line of men whose tasks are particular and give them an ambiguous statute (among worshippers, assistants and 'labourers' of the cult);
- outside the tent there is a crowd of people consisting of other followers, the family and spectators who watch the ceremony without taking part in it directly.

In the ceremonies I took part the possession turned out to be predominantly a female phenomenon. This prevalence is a general characteristic of the possession cults. In the Mingis the possession has its precise formalisation in the ritual disposition of the participants.

Besides those for whom the session is organized (for example the patients who start or finish the therapy) only some of the women forming the circle throw themselves in the dance in turns: to help those already dancing (often invited by the calaqad) or spontaneously 'called' by the jinni. Otherwise the role of the women in the circle is limited to singing, clapping their hands and to the incitement of the dance with stereotypic shouting (the characteristic you-you). [...] The women are completely excluded from the sector near the door. On the other hand, none of the men standing there enter in trance or abandon their places if not substituted by another man.

The position of the men is a key-position in the structure of the circle: lining up on the open side of the tent delimit, not only in the symbolic sense, the inside and the outside of the temple. This role of 'guards of the entrance' has a concrete usefulness: to prevent the possessed people from throwing themselves out of the



tent in the impulse of their altered state escaping from the control of the calaqaad and the group of the cult.

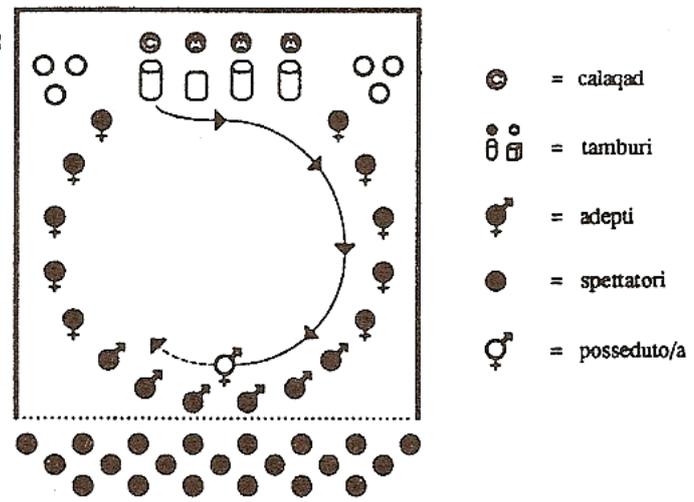
[Figura 1, N.d.T.: Tamburi=drums, adepti=adepts, spettatori=spectators, posseduto/a= possessed (trad.)]

**Music and the ‘musical symbols’**

The musical repertory of Mingis consists of a series of songs sung by the whole community to the rhythm of the drums and clapping. This repertory appears homogenous concerning the form, style and the mode of performance. [...]

In the beginning of the singing the drums repeat the pattern: ||: ♪ ♪ ♪ :||

which immediately transforms into: ||:



The change from the first to the second pattern of rhythm has no other influence on the singing but to intensify the voices. The two rhythmical phases are emphasized by the clapping different between women and men.

The formal features of the musical repertory of the Mingis can be reconsidered on the base of their double functions performed by the singing: to evoke the spirits and to accompany the possession dance.

The various songs are connected to different spirits of the Mingis which are said to praise their features and describe their qualities, habits, desires etc. In reality the names of the different jinni can hardly be recognized in the text (Wadhooye, Maame etc) since it is used in a cryptic language unknown even to the adepts. In principle one or more songs correspond to each jinni and these songs are their own songs and must be sung to evoke them. In this sense the verbal texts associated to the different melodies make them the different jinnis’ ‘musical symbols’ (‘musical uniform’, according to Rouget, 1986 pp 134-43).

Unlike in other possession cults, in the Mingis the rhythm does not participate in the characterisation of the notes as all the songs have the same pattern given by the drums. The transformation of the rhythmical pattern mainly seems to be connected to the second function: to accompany the dance. The passage from the first rhythmic

pattern is given by the drums in an obsessive repetition in quavers, which bring a variation (and diversification) of the clapping and increase the intensity of voices [...] increase the dynamic and emotional stimulus of which the possessed gets subject to in the course of his/her dancing experience.

### The distribution of musical roles

Possessed, calaqad and 'drummer' assistants, followers (novices, adepts, other assistants), man-guards: in the course of the function each of these groups acts in a well-defined area of the tent and have differentiated tasks and behaviour among which the musical ones are particularly important as they involve the whole community.

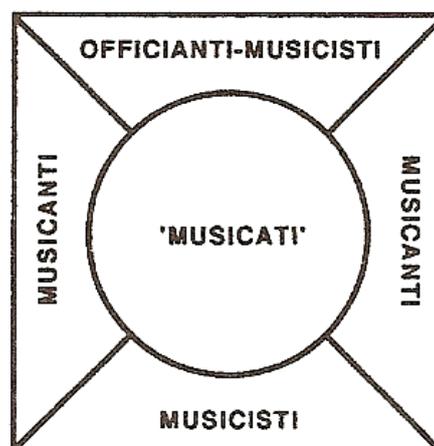
Those who will be in the state of possession during the service are the only ones to be excluded from the musical production at least in the phase when they are dancing. In those circumstances they do not play music but undergo the music. [...] This does not mean a passive behaviour in the musical event: their rhythmical wheeze and their shouting are the proof how they internalize music and are subject to it. On the other hand the singing and the rhythm clapped by the hands and beaten by the drums reach them from each side in a kind of a four-side-sound, placing them in the centre of the musical event all the time.

On the internal side of the tent the calaqad and the assistants play the drums and sing the songs. They are responsible for the music even if their being 'musicians' is a part of their being the priests of the rite: the drums, that is the mediating instruments between divinity and the worshippers could not be in other people's hands than those who ensure the mediation. The priest among others has the task to stop and restart the singing and the percussion every time it is necessary during the service.

The men act on the other side. They also have precise responsibility in the musical production. [...] Their task is to guarantee the exact and complete realization of the musical ritual in every moment. Therefore they can be considered the real 'musicians' when their vocal and instrumental role is complementary to the calaqad's and the drummer assistants. Probably it's not by chance that this complement corresponds to the frontal and oppositional setting of the two musical groups.

The adepts (mainly female) of the cult find themselves 'stuck together' in the remaining two sectors of the circle between the priest-musicians and the 'musicians' and depend on them concerning the musical performance. The followers can be considered 'amateur musicians' in the sense that their singing and percussion activity is accessory (and incostant) even if it is requested and formalized in the collective performance of the musical ritual. Of course the individual adepts get from the state of 'amateur musicians' to 'music-receivers' in moment when they become the protagonists the possession dance.

Generally the two rows of worshippers act by reflex as regards the music produced in the



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two sectors of the circle. [...] Unlike the ‘musicians’, the worshippers give a feature the musical performance with their strong emotional participation in the ‘drama’ which is happening in the centre of the circle. Such a volatility shows also under the form of verbal exhortation to the possessed stereotypical cry (you-you) etc.

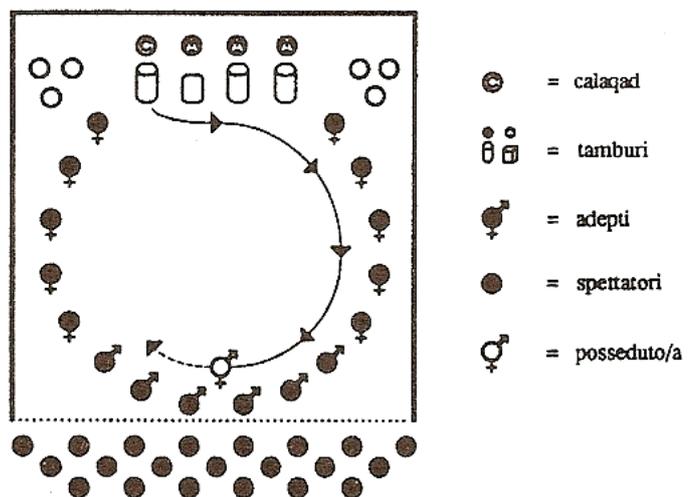
[N.d.T Figura 2: officianti-musicisti=priest musicians, musicisti=musicians, ‘musicati’=‘music-receivers’ (trad.)]

### *The dance*

In a Mingis session the dance activity involves the following people in different forms and measures:

1. those who undergo the therapy;
2. the followers who form the ritual circle;
3. the calaqad.

The first ones are the protagonists of the real and proper possession dance; the followers who form the circle accompany the possession dance with simple and constant movements building a coreographical complement in a certain sense; in the end the calaqad dances in a particular moment of the session: when



providing the summary assistance [...] to some worshippers waiting for the initiation [...] receiving from them a modest amount of money in pay in return.

1. The individual possession dance takes place in the determined circuit of the ritual circle. After ‘having taken’ the spirits [...] the possessed throws her/himself in the dance starting the dancing-musical phase : she/he begins to go clockwise the ritual circuit with long skipping steps [...]. The skipping step is a constant element of the first phase of the dance [...]. But the sign activity varies on a large scale from dancer to dancer even if the use of some stereotypical movements show the existence of a formalized kinesic-dancing behaviour. [...] The more the possessed draws near the trance the more her/his dance becomes convulsive.

2. Nevertheless, it is not easy to clarify to what extent the ritual circle’s groups’ movement can be considered dance. When their singing is performed on the first rhythmical patterns played by the drums they limit themselves to clap their hands but

doing it in a stereotypical way with a symmetrical and rhythmical movement of the arms [...]. When the second pattern begins, the participants of the circle begin a series of skips with two feet [...]. This second action of the circle can be considered a simple form of 'skipping' dance. Altogether the musical and the kinesics activity of the ritual circle is considered functional to the possessive dance that takes place in the middle of it: the worshippers' coreographycal action also helps to encourage and excite the possessed in order to reach the trance. Not by chance does the circle close in certain moments to infuse energy and support.

3. In the end, the calaqaq's dance is not convulsive but rather seems to be extremely measured and elegant [...]. The calaqaq's self-control can be explained by the 'mediating' function of his/her dance putting him/her in the condition to divine and become the jinni's spokesman (without becoming possessed). [...]

### ***The function of music in the Mingis ritual***

[...] [In the Mingis the] olfactory (the incense and perfumes), visual (colours and forms of veils and clothes) and sonorous (the women's you-you, the verbal encouraging, the volume and obsession of the sounds) stimulations combine into a formalized picture of kinesic (the dance), proxemics (opening and closing the ritual circle) and musical-verbal (the singing and rhythm) behaviour to determine the context of the trance. But in the 'involvement of the five senses' what is the specific role of the music?

Anyhow willing to consider- emotional, communicative or capable of producing neurophysiological effects – the 'power' of music in the Mingis possession is of divine nature according to the conceptual categories of the protagonists. For this, music can establish a liturgy bearing element and has numerous functions.

Above all, it makes the whole community's expression possible during the ritual. As mentioned above, every individual musical behaviour is proportioned to a role that each participant takes up in the sessions, inasmuch as it is possible to set up a correspondence between the musical organization and the ceremonial disposition of the worshippers.

Moreover, the other rituals are stuck to music and thanks to it coordinated by it. This ordinating function of music is realized in a 'conventional' time dimension where the continuous and regular beat of the drums gives a so to say chronometer.

Finally in the Mingis as in many other possession cults music allows the rite to be rhythmized in a magical-religious time different from that of the profane everyday one putting it in a virtual, metastorical time, where the signs, spaces and behaviour are coordinated and measures reciprocally inside of a 'canvas' to be memorized and replicated. This is equivalent to saying that thanks to the musical dimension in particular which channels expressiveness (verbal, signal etc) in an obligatory sequential and fairly redundant (the repetitiveness of the rite) order, in the Mingis it has to do with a system of closed, completely formalized communication, for more verses

similar to that set up in a game. In fact, like in a game, every communicative act, every object, every sequence of action has a symbolical value and a predetermined effectiveness.

Perhaps it is not by chance that in Somali 'take part in the Mingis' is translated with the verb *ciyaarid* (play) which at the same time means 'play an instrument', 'sing', and 'dance', aspects that are inseparable from a unique action – 'play the Mingis' – steadily defined by rules (ceremonial system) that determine its patterns. However, as Ernesto De Martino observed once (1977, pp 229-30) what differentiates the ritual action from an otherwise self-referential game is the presence of the myth that makes the action real making it effective by comparison with 'becoming historical'. Such a distinction underlines the primacy of the motivation and the aim rather than the mechanism and the rules of the ritual action. The religious belief is fundamental for the good result of the rite: as a matter of fact, taking the vestments of the jinni the illness can be socialized and cured inside the community whose members share or have experienced the 'possession' and are able to accept the newcomer proving him/her the effectiveness of the faith and leading him/her in the difficult course he/she is about to undergo. It can be stated that without a believing adhesion to the myth the ritual game would hardly bring about its therapeutic effects.

Moreover, if the possession rite is seen as a traditional practice to overcome and to resocialize the existential discomfort of the individual state, one must notice that on the conceptual level it is guaranteed by an entity above the events (divinity, spirits), while on the material level it is realized by a series of specific procedures. These latter allow the ill person to overcome his/her own insecurity and inhibitions and the passage (the trance) from one 'disorderly' and uncommunicative behaviour to a new one – the possession, as the identification with the presumed causal agent (in the Mingis the jinni) – which although paroxysmal, results to be 'ordered' in the socially shared patterns and therefore become understandable.

In this sense, exactly like in the child game analyzed by Piaget (1945, 1964), the rite seems to develop on three interrelated levels: symbolic, that of the rules of the action and sensory-motor level. It is enough to redefine this three-dimensionality by replacing:

- a) the symbolic level with 'mythical-ritual' meaning, which is controlled by the priests of specific competence (the *calaqad* and his assistants);
- b) the 'rules' level with the 'ceremonial' system, which is managed by the whole community of the adepts;
- c) the sensory-motor level with the technical-therapeutic and the behaviour patterns aiming at the induction of the trance in the possessed.

[...] If on the mythical-ritual level music is suitable for making events sacred and without history (virtual time versus real time) and on the ceremonial level for regulating the behaviour of the adepts in a liturgical sense, on the technical-therapeutic level music is associated with the dance and plays its role of 'ordination' in the possessed person's behaviour. The order music calls for the ill person influences

his/her instinctive reactions and does not imply a contemporary consciousness: it gets his/her body involved before his/her mind. It could be said that led by the calaqaad and encouraged by the worshippers the possessed lets him/herself go in the dance leaving his/her movements and steps to follow the implacable rhythm of the drums. [...]

However, some questions remain open: «how does music ‘talk to the head and the legs»<sup>17</sup>? Why does it take up this privileged mediatory role between human and divine, between diversity and normality, between action and aim? In what measure can music be considered a trance technique?

In the Mingis cult music is able to guide the dance and lead to trance despite its extremely simple form [...]. Nevertheless, to seek a specific ‘power’ of the induction of the altered state of mind in the music of the Mingis – apart from the intercourse that it entertains with the dance and the formalisation of signs, with other sensory stimulations and generally with the whole ceremonial and mythical-religious system - would prove to be an improper and limiting operation. [...]

However, as seen above, the ‘sensory-motor’ is not the only level which music operates on. It is the case to ask if its total capacity to carry out the rite and to catalyse the trance is due to the fact that it can also share entirely the other two dimensions: the symbolical one (mythical-ritual) and that of the rules (ceremonial one). [...] What makes the possession rites absolutely particular is the fact that music is used in all its potentiality for an extreme game which has reality and its deepest psychological implications as a background, which has the unknown and its metaphysical interpretations as justification, which has a ‘therapeutic’ balance between the unknown (the risks of the illness, or the divinity, the jinni etc) and the everyday reality. [...] In no other context besides the possession rites does music appear as a metalanguage able to ‘represent’ the logical and emotional mechanism of the human psyche and to give them a space-time limit which legitimizes the repeated passages from the reality to the supernatural, from ‘normal’ to the ‘altered’, from physical to mental without interruption. [...] Regardless of the specific question of the trance, the traditional possession practices – for the particular overlap among rite, game and music which characterizes them- also establish a forced passage for those who are willing to understand the most basic aspects of musical behaviour. But leading the course of ethnomusicology towards the actual cognitive objectives of the human sciences the walk is still long on this path .

## **Indication**

To conclude and sum up it can be said that music therapy is sensitive to the following themes present in the ethnomusicological research:

1) the comprehension of music, of all music as a universal human expressive activity, for a wide epistemological definition of the ‘music’ component inside the music therapeutic field ;

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<sup>17</sup> Rouget G. see above [p.436]

2) the research of general principles in the musical behaviour, in the cognitive, social processes and those expressions of music for a more complete comprehension of the various aspects connected to the production and the fruition of the musical phenomenon;

3) the studies about the role of the context and the culture, therefore about the importance of the social and cultural environment in the structuring of the person, the expressing patterns and all the aspects of music and therapy that are connected to the cultural models;

4) the documentation of the therapeutic uses of music present in the world, to have a wide view of the phenomenon and why the knowledge of other practices stimulates the consideration and the consciousness of one's choice.

The ethnomusical studies enrich the western music therapeutic practice, giving the opportunity to widen the knowledge, which is reflected in the way of approach in the music therapy. This knowledge aims a better consciousness of our own musical values and a deepening of the relation between music, context and culture for the adoption of a transcultural prospective which is needed these days. 'Culture is like water where the fish swim: the fish sees through the water, but it does not see as it is. The cultures would be the waters where the different groups of people swim; waters certainly with different characteristics, but which remain the variety of the same thing. [...]. The fish can become aware of the water where it swims only by coming out of it or trying really different waters' (Coppo, 2003).<sup>18</sup>

As a music therapist I believe the role of the culture with its numerous implications is important and the encounter with ethnomusicology reveals to be fundamental and unique in this way. The cultural factor is reflected in the conception and value granted to music, therefore, in their possible effects and in the development of musical attitudes. Other aspect of great relevance is the value of the context as an element to understand the roles and significations of the sound. To be aware of the dialectics that binds the person to the culture as 'the dimension where the single persons belong to [...] is an instrument to know and share the world, a way to be able to orientate in the behavior and to interpret the others' actions and their consequences [...] thus the culture takes on a group's orientation who live in similar conditions of existence, and becomes real in every individuality' (Coppo, 2003).<sup>19</sup>

From the concept of culture hang down the others, the structuring of the person, his/her values and behaviour are bound to the culture, on the other hand 'it is every culture that can repress or on the contrary encourage the expression of emotions choosing those that will or will not be advantageous' (Rouget, 1986).<sup>20</sup>

As underlined above, the features of music vary according to the culture: if music is a product of the human behaviour and man is a culture-bearer then the musical manifestations are the results of the social and cultural conventions. Accordingly the

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<sup>18</sup> Coppo P. (2003). *Tra psiche e culture: elementi di etnopsichiatria*. Bollati Boringhieri, Torino. [p.99-100]

<sup>19</sup> Coppo P. see above [p.99-100]

<sup>20</sup> Rouget G. see above [p.402]

meaning of music must always be seen in connection with the comportment and the culture that had determined it. It is certainly not a new theme in the literature of music therapy<sup>21</sup>, but as seen above, I would say that the contribution of ethnomusicology is rich of connotations and things to ponder.

The valuation is also impregnate with cultural connotations as a matter of fact it cannot be noticed that it is always about a cultural evaluation; the researcher even if trying to be objective is part of the system and a context of values.

The rite is a cultural phenomenon, a dimension of the experience that we had lost but which is present in many traditional cultures as therapeutic practice for the healing. It can be defined as a container to recognize and hold forms of discomfort offering the opportunity to resolve the irrational impulses through an outburst, a form of a catharsis.

The concept of healing, like that is of the illness are culturally connoted concepts. There are several ways how music accompanies rites of healing. To this end it is to be underlined that music although not being a medicine gets therapeutic value only if it is inserted inside a frame of reference, a context or setting; as a matter of fact, changing the environment that is the cultural frame, the significance given to music also changes. In this sense both the motivation of the persons and the whole community's investment towards the musical event has certainly a relevant load. The use of music in music therapy seems for certain manners similar to musical conceptions present in the traditional cultural environment in which the aesthetic function of music is subordinate to the function of practical usefulness.

Ethnomusicology and music therapy both agree in recognizing that music has an extramusical capacity: to provoke behavioural modifications, to stimulate psychological and physiological reactions (cardiac rhythm, respiration), to condition the emotive states.

Being a particular way of communication which is beyond the scope of the possibility of the spoken language, music can satisfy the need of feeling to belong to a group whose components share the values and can offer the possibility to raise the level of awareness of the sensations, the emotions the participation and the relationship inside the group itself..

In the end the hint on musical communication present both in Blaking's and Magrini's writings cannot be unmarked, that is the body resonance is an effective prerequisite and the best way to enter in resonance with another person.

I am convinced by all these considerations that 'today any research and any complex action cannot exist without an inter- and multidisciplinary method' (Coppo, 2003).<sup>22</sup>

If willing to get to a complex understanding of the musical phenomena an interdisciplinary approach is desirable to get in contact with music in its entirety through its numerous relations: 'Music can and must be studied from many

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<sup>21</sup> See the ISO cultural concept of Benenzon R. (1997 and 1998). He means with ISO the person's sound identity in general, which cannot be separated from the original ethnic cultural identity.

<sup>22</sup> Coppo P. see above [p.94]

standpoints, for its aspects include the historical, social psychological, structural, cultural, functional, physical, psychological, aesthetic, symbolic and others. If an understanding of music is to be reached, it is clear that no single kind of study can successfully be substituted for the whole' (Merriam, 1983).<sup>23</sup> All the more so, the dialogue and the mutual collaboration between these disciplines is worth elaborating on, knowing the possibilities and the limits of both of them.

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<sup>23</sup> Merriam A. P. see above [p.48]