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ESKIMO MUSIC IN GREENLAND

Past and present Eskimo musical activity in Greenland is best considered and summarized by region, thus: that of Northwest Greenland; that of West Greenland; and that of East Greenland. The Eskimo population distribution is as follows: 500 in the Thule (Northwest Greenland) region; over 35,000 in West Greenland, and 2,500 in the greater Angmagssalik (Northeast Greenland) region.

THE NORTHWEST GREENLANDIC ESKIMO MUSICAL SUBAREA

The Northwest Greenlandic Eskimos have been described as the group most representative of the "High Arctic Culture", in Birket-Smith's well-known threefold Eskimo classification (1959).

They live in ten villages on the Hayes Peninsula between latitudes 76° and 79°, and had been isolated from human contact for several hundred years when discovered by Ross in 1818. The use of the kayak was reintroduced along with the bow, deer hunting, and salmon fishing, by ten immigrants from Baffin Island in the 1860's. The population proved cooperative during Peary's North Pole expeditions during the 1900's, and during the Thule Expeditions of Rasmussen, Freuchen, Birket-Smith, and Mathiassen, starting in 1910.

In 1954 the Thule Eskimos relocated themselves on account of the large U.S. airbase at Thule, settling a hudred miles north, at their old village of Kranak (Malaurie 1954: 465)), where they now hunt seals, walruses, bear, belugas, narwhals, and foxes. Musical change is being signalled by the discrediting of the shaman-drummer, and the decrease in respect paid to the older, traditional hunters, carvers, and song composers. There are few illiterates, and every family possesses a book of Psalms.

The American R. Stein spent the winter of 1899—1900 at Cape Sabine, collecting thirty-eight songs, which he published in 1902. The Norwegian composer Christian Leden collected thirty-one songs, which he published in 1952. The Danish professor Erik Holtved collected one hundred and twenty-six songs in 1937. Dr. Jean Malaurie, of the Centre d'Etudes Arctiques, Sorbonne, recorded about twenty tapes during 1950—1951. Michael Hauser and Bent Jensen, working together, collected three hundred and thirty-five songs in 1962; these are deposited with the Danish Folklore Archives.

Of Stein's collection, Thalbitzer has the following to say: "Among the Smith Sound Polar Eskimo we have the impression that they have at their disposal a certain number of melodic motifs, composed by themselves or inherited, which are bound together to form melodies" (1939: 68). Hauser has explored and elaborated upon this theory, in a recent paper: Structure of Form in Polar Eskimo Drumsongs (paper given at the International Folk Music Council Meetings, Regensburg, Bavaria, August 14-21, 1975). In Thalbitzer's analysis, several characteristic motifs are given, consisting of ascending and descending fragments utilizing tetratonic, pentatonic, and hexatonic melodic patterns. The examples from Umanak Fiord include several drumsongs, but also game songs and a shaman's whistling song. An examination of the examples reveals that common features are the use of recitative, of accented grace-notes, and of mixed eight- and quarternotes. There is a preference for the interval of a fourth in both ascent and descent. The songs are relatively short and assymetrical. No drum part is given. There is frequent use of a-ya-ya-a vocables.

In a 1950 publication, Estreicher makes a comparative study of all known Eskimo musics, in which he places in the same analytical category the

central Eskimo studied by Boas (1888, 1901), and the Smith Sound Eskimo of Northwest Greenland, visited by Stein in 1900. Using a sample of ten musical examples, Estreicher shows tetratonic, pentatonic, and hexatonic melodic usage, particularly of gapped scales, i.e., D is frequently omitted between E and C in both ascending and descending patterns. Fourths are very common, as are - - most unusually - - triadic constructions such as GEC, CEG. Many songs proceed either wholly in quarternotes, or wholly in eighth-notes. Sectionalized repetition is common, as is the use of alternating verse and refrain.

Leden's thirthy-one songs from Northwest Greenland were published along with some forty other Greenlandic songs, in a 1952 work which included a useful scale-use table for the songs. The archetype appears to be a pentatonic descent AGEDC, with some admission of the B above this and the A below. Additionally, A flat, E flat, and the lower B may appear as passing or auxiliary notes, and there is much use accented grace-notes microtones. There is considerable brief, rhythmic repetition of notes within songs, and particularly at song-endings. Recitative, vocables, rhythmic and melodic asymmetry, and consistent melodic descent are all common. Surprisingly, there is little use of large leaps. Text translations and drum parts are not given.

In the same publication, Holtved provides translations of some folktales from Northwest Greenland; included among them is a tale in which a being makes string figures out of his own guts, a tale in which two birds have a drum fight, and a tale in which a man hides his drum when his friend dies (Holtved 1951: 37, 64, 103).

From an examination of several collections, it appears that there are three main types of form in Northwest Greenlandic songs, use of the first two types being related to the geographic origin of the singer. The first two types are used mainly in songs for fishing, sledding, rowing kayaks. They are also used in shaman's songs. These songs generally possess a magical connotation. The offspring of incoming Eskimos from Baffin Island (the 1860 migration) often use the second type of form, a rather unusual or marginal type. Children's storysongs generally possess three or four notes, with a short range, simple structure, and follow the third type of form in song.

In a valuable descriptive account given in 1963, Jensen reports a 'thanking' dance performed by women upon the return of three hunters at the village of Ikerasak, near Umanak Fiord (1963: 187 to 198). Fifteen hunting families, assembled on the beach, perceived a killed reindeer in the hunters' boat, whereupon two women commenced performing a stamping dance known as tukartarneq. This step is customarily used at local dances featuring reels and polkas. Raising their arms above the head, the women imitated the antler and head movements of a reindeer, accelerating and uttering louder and louder shrill sounds. The motions were so violent

and extreme, and vocal exertion so great, that breathlessness and hoarseness ensued. In a second case observed, at Niagornat on the Nugssuaq Peninsula four rifle shots from the hunters signalled to a crowd of a hundred assembled Eskimos that four reindeer had been killed. At this, a woman in her forties removed her footwear and began jumping with high steps, following this with rolling in the sand, all the while crying out loudly about the fine meat that was forthcoming. The 'thanking' act is well-known; Jensen postulates that it derives partly from the *qutsaserneq*, a beach dance thanking returning hunters, and generally performed by an elderly patroness of one of the hunters. The practice was at one time particularly evident as a first-catch celebration, in which case the dancing woman disguised herself in strange clothing and sprinkled ashes on the youth and also upon his catch (Jensen 1963: 193). There appears to be a degree of parallel here with the Alaskan Eskimo women's thanking act at the taking of a whale (Lantis 1938: 445, Spencer 1959: 345).

A second current musical activity in the Umanak Fiord region is that of the children at Christmas and New Year: youngsters "mask and dress in ragged clothes, making themselves quite unidentifiable. They appear in the houses where they spread horror and laughter at the same time, dancing solo. stamping the tukartarneq time on the floor. They attack the women by very direct sexual hints, and they demand various dainties with which they finally disappear" (Jensen 1963: 195). The custom has been traced throughout Greenland (Porsild 1915: 248). Thalbitzer claims to perceive a relationship with the Alaskan 'asking' festival (1925: 247), and Kleivan makes a comparison with the Canadian Eskimo ceremonies honoring the Sea Woman (Kleivan 1960). However, it should not be overlooked that the Sea Woman rite occurs during times of scarcity, while the Greenlandic and Alaskan events mark times of plenty. The discrete social function of such 'thanking' acts is of considerably more anthropological import than the superficial likenesses in behavior and costume, and caution is necessary when drawing crosscultural musical comparisons.

We have noted that Estreicher perceived certain similarities between Central Eskimo songs and those of Northwest Greenland. Michael Hauser has followed up this geographical association with an intensive and thorough study of Northwest Grennlandic song motifs and song units, perceiving a dominating type of form which he calls Form 1: A -- A' -- Group I -- Group 2 -- Conclusion -- Formula Finalis. Hauser identifies and describes the function of various melodic units, such as the Pleonasms, the Transitionmotifs, the Headlinks, etc. A second form, Form II, commonly appears in songs which have their origin west of the Greenlandic mainland.

Hauser, in a 1975 paper, provides interesting insight into Northwest Greenlandic polyrhythm, as follows.

Normally the rhythm of the drum consists in three beats and a pause as in this song, but in parts of other songs one may hear "joy-drumming" — series of continued beats.

The interplay of drumming and singing is complicated, but in reality it is our deductive analysing process which discovers the complications which the performing eskimo simply does not give a thought. With an unescapeable demand for the correct structure and homology between the stanzas the singer is forced to have his attention firmly directed towards the oral side of the trilogy, singing, drumming and dancing. The movements used in dancing and drumming he performs by "reflex from the spine", a proby training since childhood. There is a relation between singing and drumming, mostly in such a way that an accentuated tone gets the first or the last drumbeat in a series. But with the expert drumsinger the series of beats change little by little through the stanzas, so that the same points of melody in different stanzas recieve an unequal part of a drum-series, cf. several places in the score, f. inst. the beginning of the stanzas.

To this must be added an extraordinary ability for increasing or decreasing the tempo of the drumming or the singing, just a little, in relation to each other. By this means an interesting kind of polyrhythm and polytempo

develops.

(Hauser 1975: 13-14)

In a 1972 publication Olsen mentions some recordings made in 1962 in the Thule region, without identifying their collector. Olsen is known to have made recordings in Greenland during 1961, and the Danish ethnomusicologist Hauser is known to have made some in 1962. Of the 1962 recordings. Olsen states "the traditional music of the north Greenlanders exploited a limited number of patterns . . . even in the acculturated songs the traditional pattern is easily recognizable" (1972: 34).

Musical acculturation and even synthesis has occurred with regard to the rhythm of Eskimo music in Northwest Greenland. In one of the few reports which does not dismiss the divergence between song rhythm and drum rhythm as musical anarchy, Olsen first states that "in the traditional songs one always meets a very subtle play between the drum rhythm and the song rhythm." He then goes on to say "But in some 1962 recordings from the region, we can recognize the occidental conception of rhythm. This is apparent when there is an accentuation in the melody; one will almost automatically hear an accentuated drumbeat at the same time" (1972:34). Two transcriptions are given to illustrate the point.

THE WEST GREENLANDIC ESKIMO MUSICAL SUBAREA

Ruined house remains, artifacts, and some genetic influence all indicate that Norsemen inhabited this region 1000—1400 A.D. Dutch and Portuguese whalers made contact with West Greenlandic Eskimo in the 1600's and 1700's, and their decimation of the blubber whales at that time had profound effects upon the ceremonial cycle and hence the music (Birket-Smith 1924). In the 1860's local, regional, and provincial representative councils were created, consisting of the preachers, traders, and local leaders. The first fish landing station was

created in 1910. In 1948 the world's second largest shrimp beds were discovered in Disko Bay, and canning factories were built. In 1950 a National Council was set up for the entire island, plus thirteen local Municipal councils, and Greenland became a county of Denmark. In 1955 there were 21,000 sheep in West Greenland (Birket-Smith 1959; 227), and reindeer have since been introduced (Therkilsen 1961).

West Greenlanders are now of mixed heritage; they reside in some dozen population centres of about 100-2,000 inhabitants, most of whom speak Inupiaq and 15 % of whom speak also Danish. Seven years of bilingual schooling is mandatory.

West Greenland is, together with Labrador (to a more limited extent), assumed by Hughes and others to have possessed "permanent villages of the size and stability known on the Bering Sea coast of Alaska and Siberia" (Hughes 1965: 13). For this reason it may be assumed that ceremony and ceremonial music once played an important part in the daily lives of West Greenlandic Eskimos. That little or nothing remains of former musical traditions is to be expected, concidering the contact, interbreeding, acculturation, and assimilation which has occurred. Olsen paints the picture clearly, as follows. "If we go down the west coast the picture changes. This part of Greenland was colonized more than 250 years ago, and, consequently, the music which you may hear today is almost exclusively of European or, at least, of occidental origin ... fiddlers have been playing in a virtuoso manner a great deal of dance music, which has been supposed to be of Scottish origin ... the Scots, just as the Dutch, for a long time regularly visited these regions as enthusiastic whale-hunters" (1972: 35).

Olsen gives a musical transcription of reel music in 2/4, consisting mainly of sixteenth-notes in scalar and repeated patterns. He states: "The normal reaction to occidental music has been to accept it or to reject it, but not to combine it with the traditional music. This musical blend is seldom found, but it does exist, especially in the regions to the extreme north and south of West Greenland" (1972: 35).

Because of the early contact date, it is difficult to ascertain the original nature of traditional Eskimo music in West Greenland, that is, before considerable loss and mutation took place. In a 1939 publication, Thalbitzer gives fourteen transcriptions of harmonized, modern songs collected, 1900—1938 (1939: 13—32). plus eleven ditties from the northcentral part of West Greenland (1939: 38—43). He also gives seven pieces of dance music for fiddle and concertina (1939: 45—46), and a photograph of Eskimo fiddlers performing (1939: 44).

THE EAST GREENLANDIC ESKIMO MUSICAL SUBAREA

The population here (2,500) represents a marked increase over the mere 413 inhabitants discovered at Angmagssalik by Gustav Holm's expedition in 1884. There had previously been a larger population

south of Angmagssalik, but by 1884 it had dwindled to 135 Eskimos. The relatively late European contact was due in part to the mass of polar drift ice coming down from the north, impassable except where local currents and land forms create open water leads where sea mammals and polar bears can survive, as at Angmagssalik. A hundred miles to the west of Sermilik Fiord, the glacial ice reaches heights of between 7,000 and 8,000 feet, preventing overland communication.

Priests soon banned the famous drum fights, the last of which took place in the early 1920's (Olsen 1967: 54). The new village of Scoresbysund was founded nearby in 1937, by Danes and Angmagssalik immigrants. A U.S. airbase during World War II speeded acculturation. Concerning the traditional music of the area, Thalbitzer spent twelve months in 1905 making cylinder recordings of 96 items at Angmagssalik. Leden make a cylinder collection 1910—1926, including many from Angmagssalik. Paul-Emile Victor made some disc recordings there in 1935, and Olsen made tape recordings there in 1961.

In an analysis of Thalbitzer's recordings, Thuren makes a careful examination of the intervals and scales, using Hornbostel's Reisetonometer and the Ellis cents system to indicate by how much intervals exceed or otherwise differ from the European scale (1911: 36-56). Ellis cents are worth a hundredth of a semitone (halfstep), so that, for instance, in a hunting song in which a melody note one fourth above the reference tone (most frequent, 'key' tone) appears sharp to the extent of 0.25 of a cent, this fourth may be understood as being sung a quarter of a semitone higher than in the European system. Thuren incorrectly explains Angmagssalik intonation by stating that "each executant has his own peculiar scale and intonation, no musical instrument is in use to make it desirable that there be an absolute scale; he makes for himself the tuning he wishes to use" (1911: 54). In another publication Thuren incorrectly states that "No fixed system of tones has been evolved" (1910: 35). However, from the recordings, which the present author has heard, it is evident that while the interval between any two scale degrees varies in size within different songs and within different sections of the same song, they do this according to melodic context and hence according to logical principles.

As has been noted for other regions, "the drum line moves independently of the melody which it accompanies. It forms a rhythmic base, over which the melody floats capriciously" (1911: 55). Thuren gives two photographs of drummers, one of a seated male and one of a standing female. Both beat the rim of a large frame drum from underneath with a short, thick baton, holding the drum in the left hand and beating it with the right. On the word-melody relationship Thuren states that "the movement of the melody is often in complete disaccord with the prosody of the text" (1911: 53). This tallies with Cavanagh's recent findings at Gjoa Haven in

Canada (1973). The songs possess strophes, and some have sections of recitative.

A 1939 publication by Thalbitzer contains three photographs of ancient musical scenes at Angmagssalik. One shows a male drummer singing a satirical song (1939: 4); the next shows an outdoor drum fight in which the drummer-singer is leaning forward heavily toward his opponent, and the audience is seated around them (1939: 7). The next shows a very large crowd outdoors watching a drum fight (1939: 50). There is also a drawing of an outdoor drum fight in which the drummer-singer leans threateningly toward his opponent while the audience stands and observes (1939: 49).

The same publication also contains thirteen songs from Angmagssalik (1939: 57-64). Most of the items are short compared to Alaskan Eskimo songs, consisting generally of about forty or fifty quarter-notes, or the equivalent of twenty measures of 2/4 time. Here a distinction should be observed between dance songs and songs-within-stories - - the latter tend to be shorter and of narrower range than the former, and generalizing tends to confuse the issue. Even the longest of the given songs is comparatively short.

There is much note repetition in the non-dance songs, more melodic variety in the dance songs; the latter often contain large leaps of a seventh or more (see transcription in 1939: 59). There is much use of accented grace-notes, and of vocal syncopation against the drumbeat, if one can judge by the single transcription for which a drumbeat is given (1939: 59).

In 1952 Leden published transcriptions and an analysis of a group of traditional songs from East Greenland, giving a useful table showing scale-use in each song (1952: 65—66). Included with the transcriptions are twenty pages of interesting commentary (1952: 14—34), and three photographs of traditional drummers (1952: 10, 12, 14). Leden points out that "the drum part and the dance create metrical and rhythmical polyphony" (1952: 27), which statement is a considerable improvement on the many published superficial observations which state merely that anarchy prevails. Melodies possess three or more short strophes; these latter repeat fairly consistently, with the melodic motifs varied "to accomodate new text" (1952: 28).

In dance songs there is usually a refrain strophe using the vocables a-ye-ya-ye, and a text strophe in which a single, long, expanded word may occupy a whole musical phrase (1952: 27). In the majority of the transcriptions Leden has not attempted to use barlines, because of the rhythmic asymmetry. In some, however, there is regularity. In one there is some use of 5/4 time, prompting one to wonder if there can be found any distant relationship to the 5/8 time so common in Alaskan and Siberian Eskimo dance songs.

In most of the songs there is much use of descending pentatonic patterns, typically AGEDC. Some songs use the pattern EDCAG. These pentatonic patterns are never found in the reverse (as-

cending) form, melodic rise generally taking the form of a leap. Noting inconsistencies of pitch, Leden offers the explanation that it is not pitch which is significant to the Eskimo, but melodic motif. Here he may be overlooking the likelihood that

context conditions pitch.

In 1961 Olsen found that "the tradition has remained stable to a remarkable degree", but at the same time notes that it is confined to a few elderly Eskimos: "in 1961 only men and women over 50 years of age were able to display a large repertory of songs, and only five or six drums were to be found in the whole district" (1967: 54). Olsen considers that the songs fall into four groups. Certain lullabies and songs-within-stories use only two tones, from a minor third to an augmented fourth distant. Women's songs and magic songs commonly use three tones. Certain women's songs contain recitation. The fourth broad category is the most common; it includes the men's songs and is characterized by the use of at least four tones. An additional tone may be found above and/or below these four.

While repeating the oft-made statement that the music is based on patterns rather than on scales (probable true), and implying that pitch is of secondary consideration (probably untrue), Olsen demonstrates that he is aware of the importance of context when he austutely observes that "the melodic movement cannot be anything you please, but it can vary within a certain field. Every tone chosen which belongs to that field will be considered correct if it comes at the right moment according to the pattern ... not all combinations of intervals are possible within the styles" (1967: 56). A detailed study of the contextual variance of intervals in each Eskimo region would be of inestimable value in throwing light upon Eskimo musical perception.

Olsen gives twenty-five analytical musical reductions showing vocal range and scale-use; the latter appears to be mainly tetratonic with some admission of auxiliary tones and microtones. Normally the solo drummer also sings, and he or she executes rhythmic dance movements. Eskimo informants state that only four rhythms are used, the most common being that used for drum fights. Frequent accelerandi and ritardandi occur within songs, without changing melodic shape.

MUSICAL REVIVALISM IN GREEN-LAND

In the modern, urban Greenlandic environment, new, revivalistic groups are springing up. These groups perform at town festivals, folkdance clubs, national congresses, and on television shows. In a typical performance, a circle of young men and women of mixed ancestry clap and sing, encouraging two 'drum-song contestants' in the center, who lean threateningly toward each other (see photograph, Howes 1964: 23). The participants wear heavy, Scandinavian-style sweaters. Some groups wear a dance uniform of sealskin trousers, red jackets, white knee-high boots which are brightly

embroidered and lace-banded, broad striped sash, and short fur-collared capes bearing brilliant motherof-pearl beadwork. Typical song subject-matter includes the sled-dog, the whale-hunt, and the Aurora borealis. Included in the repertories are whalers' dances, which Howes attributes to the visits of Scottish, Dutch, and Canadian whalers (1964: 23).

Taking a typical troupe — the MIK Dancers we see that they are composed of college students, and were first formed while studying in Denmark. One participant is a priest; his father is a member of parliament and president of the council at Thule. Another is a hairdresser; her father is a carpenter. Another is an electrician; his father is a coalmine office-manager. Another is a theology student; he is also president of The Eskimo Society, and his father is a ship's carpenter. Another is a hospital dietician; her father is a chief clerk. Another is a bilingual broadcaster; his father is a telegraphist at Amanak Fiord. Another is a nurse; her father is a Greenlandic missionary, and she is married to a Danish Navy lieutenant. Another is a radio technician, while another is a mechanical engineer. A member of this troupe performs as the dance violinist during the whalers' dances; this member also features his own Folk Dance Quartet. There are twenty-two members of the MIK Dancers; they have made films, and a phonograph record entitled "The Songs Of Greenland". All of the members of this particular troupe possess strong social, economic and political links with Denmark's involvement with Greenland commenced with the 1721 arrival of the Danish missionary Egede, and was reinforced in 1933 via pronouncements of the International Court of Justice. Greenland is represented in the Danish Parliament by two elected members.

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