

ONE MICROPHONE AT THE MUSICIAN'S EAR: SPECIAL RECORDINGS OF THE MALAWIAN FRICTION BOW

Manfred Bartmann

University of Salzburg, Austria

Background

Ten years ago Auhagen and Gätjen proposed a new way to record the sounds of musical instruments by putting a microphone at (or very close to) the musician's ear. This method considers the musician as a part of his instrument. Because it is him who continuously tries to optimise its timbre while playing it, his ears are considered the most reliable places to learn about the preferred parameters of sound. Apparently a more direct approach like this is required when dealing with foreign musics. Ethnomusicological field recordings are usually played back to the informants, but often lack the opportunity to have different positions of the microphones evaluated by the informants themselves.

Aims

- To set up a more direct approach to idio-cultural conceptions of sound.
- To have the analysis guided by the informants' idea of sound.
- To establish a more reliable recording standard for comparative purposes.

Method

Special 2-channel recordings of the playing of Moya Aliya Malamusi (Malawi), spectrographic analysis, special filterings (STx software package, Viennese Institute for Acoustic Research), special videos in order to have motional aspects taken into consideration, field experiments.

Results

Signals recorded „at the ear“ tend to be preferred by the musicians. Analysis reveals that formants appear more pronounced in these recordings. High frequency as well as noise components are diminished.

Conclusions

This recording method is salient for musics that are chiefly relevant to the musician himself - such as mouth bow music. Beyond these genres, it is generally useful to elucidate sound conceptions, especially the intended figure/ground relations, from an intracultural point of view.