

# An Anthropologist Studying Music

David P. McAllester

In my discussion, I should like to define the theoretical position of at least one anthropologist in ethnomusicological field research and then outline some of the special problems that await any field worker engaged in study among the American Indians in the United States today. I will then describe the evolution of my method of recording in the field and will finish with a brief account of what I feel to be the fruits of this particular method.

The perspectives of social anthropology are not unknown in the other social sciences but we do have an emphasis all our own. For one thing, the nature of our fieldwork has made a consistent demand on us to feel responsible for the description and analysis of culture as a whole. The anthropologist is often the first, or the only student to describe the small homogeneous and often exotic cultures in which, partly by choice and partly by default, we are likely to do our work. It is true that in these days of extensive financial support, research teams, always desirable, are now possible. Large-scale and detailed studies of complex civilizations are often undertaken, nowadays, also. But the sense of responsibility for the study of culture as a whole remains with us. It is interesting to speculate on how much of this particular perspective we owe to our native informants who are also our teachers. We hear in the classroom of the interrelatedness of the many aspects of culture. But, bound as we are by the categories of our own culture, no amount of such instruction can reach us with the impact of one day of living with a group of people who simply do not separate music from dance, theater,

medicine, religion, and recreation. The Navaho language, for example, does not even have a separate word for "music" as such. Other disciplines examine their subjects in the social matrix, to be sure, but anthropologists are particularly fortunate in having this constant exercise and object lesson in the unity of culture.

The other special perspective of social anthropology is its emphasis on the cross-cultural view of social phenomena. In our studies we are exposed to the description and analysis of many different cultures in various parts of the world.



When we think of marriage, comparative data from polyandry in the Himalayas, the absent husbands of the Nairs, the polygamy of the Bushongo, and many subvarieties of these forms are present in our minds. When we think of music we have in mind the silent women of the Navahos, the utterances in deep trance of the Siberian shaman, and the swinging polyphony of the Chopi. The result is that we are a little bit freed from the categories of our own culture. We are at least somewhat aware of our ethnocentrism, that subtle lens through which all men

see their worlds.

Both perspectives aid us in seeing our object of study not in isolation but in context. The perspective of culture as a whole gives us the context of the particular situation, and the cross-cultural perspective gives us the context of human behavior as a whole.

With this as a theoretical underpinning, one can see that the modest goal of the anthropologist studying music is simply to find out everything

about music and compare it with every other music. One result of this perspective is that the ethnomusicologist trained in anthropology is as likely to be interested in tribal music as he is to be interested in sophisticated music, wherever he goes. In this he is different from the ethnomusicologist who is highly trained in Western art music. It is very natural for the latter to be drawn to "high" musical traditions and to the professional musicians who are his analogues and who are the people he can most readily "talk with." It must be added that, unless the anthropological ethnomusicologist has had an unusual amount of music training as well, he may feel diffident about approaching a "classical" music, but less so about a "tribal" music. A classical music is more self-conscious and articulate about its forms and techniques than a tribal music, and is likely to possess an extensive literature centuries old that must be mastered into the bargain.

I do not need to labor the point here that a tribal music may well be as complex as a classical music—that the "simplicity" may only be apparent because of the lack of explicit terminology and theory, the real point is not that one music is more "social" or more "musical" than another, but that the interests of the observer are likely to be more social or musical according to his background. This does have an effect on his choice of the area he will investigate.

Granted, in my case, an anthropological bias, let us see the implications of the point of view for the methodology. I will discuss first the approach to the people whose music is to be recorded and then the methods of recording that have yielded the best data for the kind of analysis am interested in making.

Entree to North American Indian communities is notoriously difficult and I believe, is becoming more so. Like the colonial peoples elsewhere in the world, the Indians are showing a lively resistance to accepting Euro-American culture on the terms on which we usually offer it: i.e., admit that they and their ancestors have been living in darkness and should be grateful to become "American." As Indian communities learn more of our ways they are showing a tendency to

use some of our methods as a means of remaining Indian. They are hiring lawyers to protect their landholdings, upon which tribal identity often depends; they are using our principles of organization to found pan-tribal religious organizations many of which extol the Indian way of life and are sharply critical of certain aspects of "white" religion and philosophy; they have organized tribal courts which operate according to native restitutive and rehabilitative principles rather than the white men's punitive law; they have organized a National Congress of American Indians, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., to act as a watchdog, over legislation that infringes on Indian Interests and as a lobbying agency to protect and further those interests.

These are only a few of the ways in which American Indians in the United States may be seen to be closing their ranks against further exploitation by non-Indians and for greater self-realization as Indians. All this has a bearing on the approach of the ethnologist, or ethnomusicologist who is now likely to be met by a tribal chairman who demands just what kind of money may be realized by the project and does not quite believe in scholarly investigation for the sake of pure knowledge. The ethnomusicologist may be interrogated by a tribal lawyer who wants to know just what kind of copyright and money is involved in the publication of myths, songs, and photographs.

These difficulties, the harvest of a "century of dishonor" in our dealings with the Indians, require a certain care in approach. There are Indian communities that are famous in our profession for the number of anthropologists and other white men who have been declared persons non grata and told to leave and never return.

Proper credentials, properly used, are of great value in situations such as have been suggested above. A letter from the president of one's university, from a supporting foundation, or from an institution such as the Library of Congress may be very apropos in obtaining the approval of a tribal chairman who is also a business man and a college graduate. If he is convinced that your project is non-profit and worthwhile, you will be in a stronger position if you are challenged in a local

situation and asked by what authority you are there.

Not all Indian communities are as yet highly organized enough to make this preparation at the administrative level necessary. But where it does seem advisable it may be well to reserve the approval thus obtained for the right situation. American Indian philosophy in general resists authority from above: a chairman's approval is by no means an open sesame. It might, on the contrary, create local resistance to your project, if it were used in this way. At the local level the ethnologist is basically obliged to rely on his own tact and ability to engage the sympathy and respect of others.

Relatives and acquaintances, particularly the former, perform a key role in effecting one's entree in a local community. The approval of someone already known and trusted is a universal credential in Arizona or Timbuctou. Such contact persons are beyond rubies in work with American Indians.

One's role at the local level also has much to do with one's acceptance in the community. In regions where the chief white contact is the trader, the missionary, or the Indian Service employee it may be difficult to establish another role for oneself, quite different from any of these. I have felt most success in the role of the preserver of the tradition, though why a stranger from outside should feel the call to do this understandably escapes the imagination of many of the local people. However, it is possible to point to the loss of tradition and appeal to the concern that the older people feel in any culture because of this loss. One can cite the grandchildren who do not speak the native language or the ceremonies that have fallen into disuse. It is not hard to find ceremonial practitioners who are the last living repositories of particular rites and knowledge and who have no pupils. . One's role, vis-a-vis such a person may very easily come to be half archivist, half pupil and be understood as such by the community.

A helpful by-product of the pupil role is a uniquely morale-boosting function that the anthropologist often serves. He is often the only outsider to come to a community to learn, rather than to teach or exploit in one way or another. The fact that a member of the dominant culture is

there in a submissive role, learning slowly and awkwardly, speaking the language like an idiot child and willing to be laughed at and still keep on trying can give the "informants" a sense of their own value that no other outside contact affords. The very genuine respect that the anthropologist feels as he finds his way deeper into the culture serves as one of his most important credentials.

It is hard for the outsider to realize how minutely his behavior is scrutinized for signs of distaste. Unfortunately most American Indians expect visitors to not want to eat native food, sit on the floor, shake hands with "dirty Indians," and the like. One's daily behavior is the measure of the respect mentioned in the paragraph above. This includes the effort to discover and abide by local etiquette and not intrude where one is not wanted.

Let us assume that the difficult matter of the entree is going satisfactorily, at least for the moment, and return to the implications of the anthropological perspective for field method.

If we intend to learn everything about the music and compare it with every other music, the initial approach is obviously very broad indeed. Ideally the ethnomusicologist will record every musical item in the repertoire of the group he is studying. This may be literally possible, for any moment in the group's history at least, but it is much more likely that sampling will have to be resorted to.

Here the whole-culture approach can be seen in action. The anthropologically trained ethnomusicologist will be aware of the categories of culture and will automatically look for music in relation to the life cycle, the religion, the economy, the social structure, the crisis points, etc. He is very likely to feel a responsibility to provide a description of the music over-all before he narrows his attention to particular research problems. There is a burdensome awareness that much of the future research in particulars will be based inevitably on the recordings he is able to make and that they must be as comprehensive as possible. If this is the case how does one go about it? Since nearly all the music of the North American Indians is vocal, with percussion accompaniment, the methodological discussion to follow will largely

ignore the complex problems of recording instrumental solos and ensembles.

Stated simply, I feel I must record the song and as much data concerning its cultural matrix as possible. Though the melody itself may be recorded in less than a minute it may take all day to record the accompanying data that gives the song its ethnomusicological significance.

The complexity of the recording process may be seen in considering the text of a song. One rarely hears the text clearly in any culture: it is almost universal that one must "know" a song before one understands the text. The outsider can play back his tape and write down, phonetically, the sounds he hears and still be a long way from the meaningful text. My procedure is to go through the song, word for word, with the singer and an interpreter present and write down in the native language not only the text as sung but also the text as it would be spoken, and a word-for-word literal translation. Next must follow a free translation and a painstaking effort to ascertain whether the sense does justice to the sense of the native text. "Traduttore traditore" in any translation,<sup>1</sup> but nowhere is this more true than in the realm of poetry.

Difficult as this may seem, it suggests the even greater difficulty in ever coming to an understanding concerning the "meaning" of the melody. One may write down the "notes" in our very limited European notation or some elaboration on it and be as far from the native melody as one is from the text with one's imperfect, limited European system of phonetic writing. But melodically the problem in apprehending the native meaning is far greater since we have only the vaguest notions concerning the meaning of music even in our own culture. There is no musical interpreter to help with the syntax. Musical communication with this culture has probably never been attempted before: one is exactly in the position of the first explorer to set foot in this strange land. The analogy would be closer if one could imagine the explorer as a person who has ears but only a general idea that there is such a thing as speech.

The effort to record another music sounds impossibly complex and difficult. But the ethnomusicologist feels that even the faintest glimmerings of communication are supremely worthwhile. The enormity of the task is a challenge and a stimulus. I would like to describe what I consider to be improvements in my technique, over the years, in attempting to record "everything."

At first, knowing the attitudes of many Indians toward tape machines and cameras, I hesitated to try and record the music in actual performance. A second best way was to take my informants to a private place, have them sing out of context but at least record all the songs they could think of, and then work out the texts with the informant and interpreter as described above. I often recorded all the songs a particular informant knew in half a day and then worked for a week or two obtaining the texts and all the relevant social data possible. Any given song might lead into a discussion of gambling, courtship, and ceremonialism, and all such material was pure gold. The recording session was an ideal stimulus by means of which to evoke such material. Music intersects so many other aspects of culture that the ethnological harvest of such sessions is very rich indeed, and far richer in the natural flow of information than direct questions ever are.

Ethnologists have long been familiar with the value of language study in establishing rapport and providing an occasion for casual questioning over a wide spectrum of the culture. My experience is that recording music works in much the same way only much more so.

During this period of recording music in private sessions with my informants, I attended whatever ceremonies I could in order to observe the context in which the various kinds of music functioned. However, in many American Indian communities including some of those in which I worked, much of the music is performed in private, even secret, sessions at which only those who have been initiated into the ritual are allowed to be present. Wherever possible, I obtained descriptions of the ceremonies I was not allowed to see and for some time I was satisfied with this as the best approach under the circumstances. It is

---

<sup>1</sup> Editor's note: "translator, traitor."

quite possible that I might have become institutionalized in this routine with no thought of changing or improving it in years of subsequent research.

However, I happened to work for a summer with a related group of Indians in another region and found the situation there so different that I began to see new possibilities in recording technique. I had initial difficulties because the tribal chairman was unsympathetic towards my enterprise. However a good friend from previous visits pleaded my cause and won me a grudging permission. Thereafter, I steered clear of the administration and worked out from my good contacts as best I could. To my surprise I found that it was perfectly acceptable for me to record during actual ceremonial performances. I found that my equipment activated the lively interest of a host of potential sound engineers and that even the ceremonial practitioner would advise on the placement of microphones and stop the proceedings to tell me when a song cycle was coming that I must be sure not to miss. My hope was then to sit down with the singer and an interpreter and go over the tapes in the prolonged sessions that I had found so profitable elsewhere. But in this group, I found the practitioner too elusive or too busy for such sessions. It is possible that the chairman may have found ways to discourage cooperation with me even though I had his official consent for the project I still think it was better for me to have come before the tribal council as I did; without this move the chairman would have been in a position to require me to suspend operations altogether.

Whatever the subtleties of the situation, my experience with this group suggested the possibility of an improved field method. Subsequent discussions with some of my colleagues brought out the fact that in a number of American Indian communities they had been able to attend private rituals where they had put up some or all of the money needed for the costs of the performance. When I found myself in the field again, with a whole year to work in and generous foundation support I found that I was able to do the same thing and so hit upon the field method that I now use.

If all goes well, I record the ceremony first, in private, in as much detail as I can possibly obtain. This includes the texts, mythological material connected with the texts, a running account of every step in the ceremony and its meaning, and the pursuit of every side issue that comes up in the course of the recording session.

I then make arrangements for a performance of the ceremony over an actual patient. In my experience the interpreter or practitioner are almost certain to have a relative for whom the ceremony is apropos. By paying a share of the costs, I "buy" the right to be present at all that goes on and to record it in actual performance. I run a tape machine, and also take notes on the procedure, make sketches of whatever properties and paraphernalia are used—in short, get as complete a record as possible to compare with the privately recorded version. And I have the advantage of having heard the song sequences and of having studied the ceremony in absentia. My observation of the actual performance is the keener for having studied it in advance with the practitioner.

The next step is to go over the tapes of the actual performance, again in private, with the practitioner and an interpreter. During this session all kinds of material comes out concerning differences in the two renditions: differences in song sequence, discrepancies in ceremonial procedure, variant renditions of particular songs and, of course, whole episodes that the practitioner forgot to mention in the first recordings, or episodes that he took for granted and mentioned in a phrase but for which I found I had half a dozen pages of notes.

I have now been able to record three ceremonies following this technique. One of these I was able to film, as well, through a rare sequence of lucky events. The initiative for the idea of filming actually came from the family of the practitioner.

It is obvious that the method I am describing is laborious and extremely time consuming. Unless the yield is extraordinary it would be hard to justify so much effort.

From my anthropological viewpoint, the occasion the method creates for discussion with

native informants is enough, in itself, to justify the effort. I do not know of any situation like these recording sessions in which one can very naturally sit with a ceremonial practitioner or other singer for days or even weeks in constant discussion. When one runs out of comment on one song there is always the next, and there may be as many as four or five hundred of them altogether. There is no problem of running dry though I have sometimes failed to take sufficient care not to fatigue my Indian co-workers or myself.

The information obtained is, of course, of all sorts. Certain areas of investigation that are of particular interest to me, however, seem to be especially well served by this kind of method. One of these is the whole field of values. I am interested to know what a song means to the people who sing it. I hope that music is an avenue to an understanding of the philosophy of a culture and

my method of collecting seems to give a maximal opportunity for this kind of discussion. Integral to the study of values is the area of esthetics. I hope to be able to go deeply enough into these matters in certain American Indian cultures so that I will have useful material to bring to bear on the general subject of esthetics. The emphasis on linguistics in my approach is the result of my interest in the relationships between poetic and prosodic communication and also in the relationships between language and music.

In the last analysis there is a theory or a particular research interest behind any organization of method. Implicit in much of what I have said is my basic interest in ethnology, linguistics, and esthetics. It is no surprise that the methods I have described are contrived to find answers to questions in these areas.

## Discussion Following David McAllester's Paper

### **I. Categorization into Art, Folk, Popular, Primitive**

Malm: Yesterday we were playing around with the problem of art music, pop music, and folk music. I don't suppose the terms "functionally" or "expressiveness" would be of any use here. Do you think they have any defining advantage or categorizing advantage in music?

McAllester: I do, and I want very much to investigate this area. Allan Merriam and I have already been talking about this. I have used the term "functional-aesthetic," and Allan feels that this is really a contradiction in terms, that you are not really talking about aesthetics any more at all. It is certainly true that with the Navajos, every time I asked what I thought was an aesthetic question I got a functional answer. I would say, "What is a beautiful song?" and they would say, "It is a song that brings happiness and long life." I wouldn't get an answer about how the song sounded, and if I pushed it that way, they would say, "All right, there are songs that *sound* as though they bring happiness and long life."

I am very interested in the difference of function. For instance, in Navajo music, there are different levels of taboo. There are songs that only people who have been initiated into that ceremony are allowed to hear or sing, and they are considered downright dangerous for anybody else. You might get sick and die if you dealt with those songs. There are other songs that even women and children can sing without harm, and this is the closest they have to pop music. It is still ceremonial music. It still gets rid of enemy ghosts. Its original function is that, but it also has the function of recreational song. There is also the function of competition. It is the kind of music with which one group competes with another group in a singing situation. They are not only getting rid of ghosts, they are "beating each other out" in song skill. Now in this aspect, it makes you think of the Meistersinger. You wonder if you aren't getting a little bit of an art element in it. Anyway, our ordinary functional categories get strangely blurred when we find the function of a song in another culture, when we try to define it from their point of view.

Malm: What about the expressive side? You have spoken very nicely about the functional.

McAllester: I don't know this at all. I know that one hopes to pick up remarks from people or one questions them a bit. One tries to find out if there are songs that cheer you up, or songs that you would like to sing when you are in a good mood. Then it turns out that the only songs you can sing when you are in a good mood are these Ghost Laying songs, but they are the only ones that can be sung in a recreational situation too. Then someone will say, "Well, the songs that make me feel depressed are the songs that I know don't bring happiness and long life." You get back to that. Where to sort out the expressive function of music in Navajo culture is very difficult for me to see at this point. I am sure it is there because I have seen people singing happily, and in a long ceremony there is a general feeling about Dawn Songs. You have been singing all night, and the Dawn Songs indicate that you are getting to the end of the singing. Everybody kind of rouses up and looks cheerful, the singing gets louder, and there is clearly something going on in the emotions of the people with these songs. Everybody looks forward to the Buffalo Songs in the Shooting Chant. I don't know quite why they do, but these are favorite songs. They are marvelous sounding, but I don't see the difference between those and others. I am sure there is an expressive element, but it is very hard to get to.

England: Does the music itself give you clues about the functional aspect of the expressiveness?

McAllester: The songs go higher, for one thing. Each group brings them in at a higher key. Sometimes they change key right in the middle of the song and push it up. The group that wins is the one that gets so high that the other group has to start down low. That is one way in which you could win in this competition. Another is rather like "capping quotations." There are songs that fit well with other songs. You sing a song and the opposing group knows the right songs to follow it. If they don't, they fall behind and everybody kind of laughs at

them. If they do, then they are one up. In some cases the sequence of songs is fixed, but in other cases it is free, and it is a matter of your genius and repertory to know skillfully the best one to come.

England: And in the music itself—the manipulation of the musical system—can you tell any difference between the different categories of music?

McAllester: There is the matter of sheer melodic movement and freedom. The more religious music has much less movement, and the more nearly secular music, the more recreational, has the greater variety. That is a very obvious thing. I am expecting to see, as I get into all this material, more subtle things too.

I have gotten into this dilemma that we sometimes talk about among ourselves. I have literally several thousand Navajo songs, and I have hardly begun to analyze them. It is getting embarrassing. I just have to stop recording and start looking at those things.

## **II. Field Work Problems**

Hood: In learning to sing, have you found that you can get criticism from them: Do they talk about voice quality as such, or in some way suggest that this is something to strive for? Do they talk about ornament?

McAllester: The only criticism that I have gotten so far is that I was trying too hard. That is the only sort of training or coaching remark that I have gotten from a Navajo yet. It is clear to see the kind of quality that they are after—a certain degree of nasality. The Apache have much more than they do. I could tell an Apache voice right away.

Hood: Do the Navajo register that difference?

McAllester: I haven't heard a Navajo describe that difference.

Hood: Would he recognize an Apache immediately?

McAllester: I believe he would. But he would hear the whole song. He would never just hear a tone and say that. He wouldn't isolate it the

way we do. The Apache songs are built differently enough so that he recognizes it.

### **III. Translation**

Maceda: I would like to ask a few specific questions about translation. You first mentioned a literal translation and then a free translation. How do you go about this?

McAllester: I get close to a word-for-word translation. Words can easily be separated. They have a feeling for the separation of words or a verb complex. A verb complex sometimes takes a small paragraph to translate, and each little element in it has a cluster of words to explicate it. You begin to learn what these are, bit by bit, and then you begin to learn that they are not always as simple as that. You get a whole different set of connotations around certain verbs too, according to the context. This is the whole business of becoming aware of the connotative subtlety of any language. This word-by-word translation doesn't look like anything, of course. I try to get my interpreter to tell me in general what that is all about and then I try several ways of putting it together myself in a free translation to see what he will accept. We then refer back to the singer. I don't know what happens to my free translation when the interpreter translates it to him, but hoping for the best, he refers something like what I said in the free translation to the singer, and the singer says "No, it's nothing like that," so then you start over again.

When I get home, I start to think how, in the poetics of my own language, I can get some of the flavor, the poetic flavor, of the native language. There was an Iroquois Indian who said that translating speech is like passing a flower through a flame. It is a flower when you get it through on the other side, but it is not recognizable any more. We all say this about translation. There are several people here who have worked very hard on trying to translate poetry into poetry again. I find that the frosting on the cake, the most exciting part, is to think that maybe by a judicious use of the

English language, I have hit the precise meaning and it still is poetical, but I don't know whether you ever really know if you have achieved it.

I try to check not just one person, and not just with one interpreter. Right now I am working out this nine-day chant. I hope to go back to the two singers from whom I obtained different versions and see what they said. You could, of course, spend a lifetime on one verse this way too, but I want to be satisfied, in general, that this is what he means to say, and then let it go.

### **IV. Relationship between Text and Mimic**

Maceda: How about text and melody? How do you correlate these? For example, linguists have a certain way of analyzing sounds as being phonemic or non-phonemic. Do you relate these linguistic analyses to the melodic analyses?

McAllester: So far, all I have put my finger on is that certain linguistic formulae seem to go with certain melodic formulae, and I am very eager to try and see more subtle things such as you described too. A few cases have been pointed out to me by Navajos of melodic onomatopoeia. There is a song in which Coyote speaks, and in the chorus of the songs before the meaningful text begins, there is a kind of warble: e-oh, e-oh. They say, "That is a coyote. It sounds like a coyote." Now there are lots of other songs that sound pretty much the same way that don't have anything to do with coyotes, but their feeling is that in this one, here it is.

There is another case where a song is being sung while soapsuds are being made in a waterproof basket full of water for a bath. While the riffing sound of the water is being made, the song is about a certain deity in the Navajo religion called Corn Beetle or Harvest Beetle Boy, and that riffing sound is the wings of Harvest Beetle Boy present there as the song is being sung. So they have taken advantage of an incidental sound and used it as sort of a dramatic prop. They do this with the whole ceremony.

There is one that I am dying to ask about, as soon as I get back again. I just noticed that after a long series of songs about other things, a song about snake appears. In all the others, the melodic part of the choruses is very varied. They go an octave in range with all kinds of movement. When you hit this snake song, suddenly it just goes: (demonstrates). And I can just feel a snake going along, and I wonder whether they do. Now the question is, how to find out and feel sure that that is what they feel without putting words in their mouths. Here is where the possibilities for interest in this music of relatively simple and "unsophisticated" people are enormous. You discover the further in you get, the less unsophisticated they are. You begin to learn that there is enormous subtlety in the poetry, that there is metaphor, that the allusions go back to very deep philosophical ideas about balance of male and female in the universe and color symbolism. The further you get into it, the further behind that word "primitive" gets in your mind.

## **V. Anthropological versus Musicological Method**

Maceda: Would you be able to apply exactly the anthropological methodology here for *gagaku* in Japan?

McAllester: I think that maybe if I came into Navajo culture from a purely musicological point of view, I probably wouldn't succeed in making recordings. I think that the rapport and the entree situation requires a certain kind of know-how that anthropologists have developed in dealing with small homogenous groups that aren't used to having strangers, or when they do have strangers, they are accustomed to its being a disaster.

When it comes to actually dealing with the material, I agree with what I remember Mantle Hood saying, that either method could be applied. I think that I could perhaps start studying *gagaku* from my kind of particular emphasis. As a matter of fact, I do look at Japanese music as an anthropologist in one of my courses. I look at it as a reflection of the culture: the very way in which the tone is

produced, and the texts as well as the musical situation. I look at everything that I can think of that helps me get a feeling for Japanese culture.

Garfias: In Japan, you have a very small select, suspicious, apprehensive group in the Japanese court musicians. Since they are very much taken advantage of by everyone, including the Japanese government they feel, they are suspicious of everyone and very bitter about their position. In going to study their music, there are so many extra-musical factors that had to be taken into consideration. For example, I found that there was one whole age group, the men who had been in the Japanese army, who were the most difficult to get information from, I had the greatest difficulty in proving myself to these men, and getting these men to open themselves to me, because for a long time they always had this feeling that they were the defeated people, and I simply represented the conquering army. I was moving in, and I had a right to do everything, but they were damned if they were going to let me have it easily. It took a long time; I think it is a parallel situation. Any situation could be approached from either way.

McAllester: I don't mean to imply that anthropologists have some magical gift either. Perhaps a storehouse of experience. But in my knowledge, there is no formula for making out with a pre-literate culture, other than respect and sympathy and being careful, but not too careful.

Powers: When you were talking about the culture and about the music, I had the feeling that I would like to go next summer. Then when you started talking about the kind of work that you do, and how much you do, I figured I would spend the summer at the seashore! You have been going at this for heaven knows how many years before you got to the point that Bob Garfias got to after a year, or however many months it took him to establish the rapport, and get some notion about the musical categories. The fact that you can even get to this point astonishes me.

McAllester: It may well be that if I had, say, two and a half years steadily there, I would have gotten very much further very much faster. I have this problem of having little bits and snatches of the field. When I think of you learning three Indian languages I feel like going to the seashore.

Hood: I suppose we are all aware of it, but I think we need reminding. Bill made this point too very neatly. This is, if we stop to think of western music studies and the number of individuals in the last twenty-five years, let us say, who have devoted their entire careers to the music of one composer in the west and then think what David said a moment ago that he only had forty or fifty people working with him, or Bill took in a whole country, or the many levels in different tribes. I think just quantitatively alone, you have tackled such a mountain, all of us have.

David Morton: Would you say that in a musical culture such as that of the Navajo, that the actual amount of time that it would take to learn the musical procedure, once you got to the point where you could, might be shorter in time than learning a highly organized system? Not that I want to say that it is simpler or less sophisticated, but there might be less music.

McAllester: I wonder... I am tempted to say yes. When you listen to Indian singing, it sounds sort of like chanting, and that is all there is to it. And yet I was out there summer before last, and I got involved in a round dance. I began to have the feeling that this was the art music of the Navajos. These men were singing, every one of them like an operatic tenor and they got up so high. The vocal technique was simply extraordinary. I had heard them singing in other contexts, but here they were really letting loose. It seemed to me that I was hearing Navajo music for the first time. It was incredibly loud. It was a glorious sound as they danced around, and they were completely caught up in it. One man's wife wanted him to leave the group and do something else. He just ignored her for nearly an hour, while she stood there glaring at him. He was so lost in this material.

Morton: Was the repertoire limited?

McAllester: The songs were quite similar to one another; and they were short, rather simple songs. I could learn them as they sang them. I think the number of those songs is almost unlimited.

Then when you come to something like the chants, here it takes nine nights to sing through this whole thing. There are hundreds and hundreds of verses. It is like a Yugoslav epic. It adds up to thousands of lines, and the medicine man knows this by heart. I asked an old gentleman who was seventy-two years old how long it took him to learn the one he was doing. He said, "Well, I started in my twenty's and I don't know it all yet. As a matter of fact, I have forgotten some I did know."

It may be that the way in which the complexity is very great is different, but the complexity is there.

## **VI. Cross-Cultural Comparison**

Anthropology Student: Is there any difference between Zuni and Apache in terms of freedom of improvisation?

McAllester: Zuni and Apache? Or Navajo and Apache?

Anthropology Student: Comparing Navajo with either Zuni or Apache, which you describe as a more flexible situation.

McAllester: I don't know anything about improvisation in Zuni. I don't know whether there is any song tradition there where there is improvisation. I haven't heard of one where there is, but somebody must have started all that music somewhere. The Apaches improvise in another way, in my experience. They don't have Squaw Dance songs, but they, improvise verbally in the middle of songs, right in very serious ceremony, somebody who is good at verbal improvisation will get up and make a long, funny speech, and bring in everything from the Indian administration to the peccadillos in the neighborhood, and just have everyone in stitches. The drums are beating and people are carrying on the chorus while he makes his long speech, and then they

will get going with the song again. That is another thing that would scandalize Navajo if that happened. This is a very typical thing, at least with the White Mountain Apaches.

Anthropology Student: Another problem in the translation quite often are the puns. One can seldom get these successfully in translation.

McAllester: But you can try, and that is where the communication gets most interesting.

Malm: Do you find, from your knowledge of Navajo singing, that there are things that you could say are definitely points of expectation or prediction that the Navajo is listening for.

McAllester: Yes. For instance, there is a point in certain song series where you break in with the next song, and there is a kind of build-up to that point, and then the break-in. It seems to me that there is one kind of point of expectation.

Malm: If you had not heard that series of songs before would you feel that point coming?

McAllester: I doubt it; I don't know. I know where it comes now, so I know where to expect it; and they are all ready for it, and bangs, they hit it. I wouldn't expect that if I didn't know the culture.

Malm: But you know the culture. Are there any series of songs in the culture that you don't know?

McAllester: Sure. I don't know the Moccasin Songs at all. They are secret, and they are done in the wintertime. The gambling situation—I never have had enough Foundation money to get into that.

Seeger: How about that singing that the wife came out trying to get that husband out of? You said it was a special kind. Was it that high, almost falsetto?

McAllester: It wasn't flutelike; it was a piercing falsetto, extremely loud, and it went up to high C.

Seeger: Almost like a yodel?

McAllester: No, it was loud and piercing. It made Alfred Deller sound like a sissy. This is what they are after. This is just a particularly powerful thing they are after, but when an

Indian is singing by himself, he will sing softly. But it is when they are in a group that this real power comes out, and they are vying with each other for it then, and you would think they would tear their throats out. The throats seem tense, but they can't be tense because they do that all night.

England: You were talking about depariculating your material and trying to compare it to the other groups that speak Athabaskan languages. Are there materials with which to pursue that kind of thing?

McAllester: There is only a fair amount in Apache, only a few Hupa texts, but there is enough to do something with. I was interested in the difference between Navajo and Apache music, since they were the same tribe 600 years ago. But then they have very different historical developments, and the Navajo music is far more complicated and varied. The Apache music is like the sacred music of the Navajos, the more monotonic, melodically simpler music. With the Apaches, their love songs and their drinking songs as well as their sacred songs are all in this one form, and that to my mind is un-Athabaskan as far as music goes. It will be very interesting to look at northern Athabaskan music, and I have just found somebody who has some. Nancy Lurie has quite a lot of northern Athabaskan Moccasin Game songs. I want very much to listen to those to see if they make me think more of Apache.

It strikes me that the Navajos can be characterized as a culture with an artistic flair. They have gone in for all kinds of things: sand paintings, silver work, rug weaving. They picked up these things and made them very Navajo and have gone on with them. I think they might be said to have done the same thing with music. In this hypothetical reconstruction that I have in my mind, they have created a whole lot of new musical styles.

The Apaches don't seem to give a darn. They used to make beautiful baskets, but they don't any more. They make little sand paintings, like what the Navajos used to do long time ago, and they have never developed them into

anything. It is just a little drawing on buckskin. It is as though they are more relaxed. They spend their time making home brew rather than developing in all kinds of artistic directions. They are a much more relaxed people. It would be interesting to check this feeling about the different aesthetics of the two related people, and try to follow this out in some detail.

Malm: When you speak of cross-cultural orientation, how far across are you going? Just at the moment you are speaking about Athabaskan. Can you take it out of the whole Indian context to some other non-Indian context?

McAllester: I think that we eventually have to if we want to talk about music or aesthetics. I would like to look all over the world. Then I think we might get some valid generalizations about music and aesthetics for mankind. This is what I hope we eventually succeed in doing.