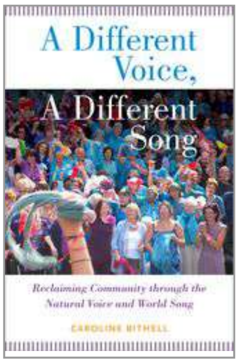

## A Different Voice, A Different Song: Reclaiming Community through the Natural Voice and World Song

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# Performing the Other

## Appropriations and Transformations

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### Abstract and Keywords

Chapter 6 continues the focus on songs from elsewhere through case studies of bodies of repertoire that have proven especially popular in natural voice and community choir circles in the UK: gospel songs, songs from different parts of Africa (in particular, South Africa and the equatorial forest region of central Africa), songs from the Balkans, and Georgian songs. The adoption of these repertoires is contextualised with reference to the individuals who have served as their conduits. Comparisons are also made with the cases of gospel singing in Australia and Balkan music and dance in the United States. The chapter advances the argument that these more-detailed stories of how music travels and how music accomplishes its work invite us to reconsider questions of authenticity, appropriation and ownership while also attending to the dialogic and transformative potential of intercultural performance.

*Keywords:* songs from elsewhere, gospel song, African song, Balkan song, Georgian song, authenticity, appropriation, transformation, intercultural performance, performing the other

### Framing Intercultural Encounters

The picture painted thus far of the song world inhabited by natural voice practitioners and choir members seems to offer clear confirmation that, as Huib Schippers puts it, “many musics travel remarkably well” (2010: 54). In some respects, music might seem to travel of its own accord. Yet it does not follow a straight, obvious, and uneventful path. It does not simply arrive. As with any journey, there are prompts and callings, preparations and diversions. Things happen along the way. How exactly, then, does a particular music make its journey? By what means and by which route does it travel? What happens to it in the course of the journey? Where does the path lead, and why? Who takes it in? How does it adapt to its new location? How does its use and function there relate to its use and function in its place of origin?

In this chapter I focus on some of the musical genres and styles from other places that have called most strongly to singers in Britain: songs from the African continent, the Balkans, and the Republic of Georgia. I also pursue further strands relating to the journeys of gospel music. All the song traditions considered here are deeply rooted in contemporary cultures, where they continue to thrive as part of a living oral tradition and to occupy a meaningful place in the life of the local community, even if in some instances their practice has declined in recent times. Each is therefore rich in potential for direct encounters between culture-bearers and non-native students. There is, quite obviously, a world of difference in the sounds and structures of these different musics, and also in the cultural and historical contexts in which they evolved; yet each has, in its own way, proved well suited to being absorbed into the community choir repertoire. In considering some of the mechanisms **(p.166)** involved in these musical journeys and transactions, certain points of commonality will emerge at the deeper level of functions and affinities. Individual cases will also offer revealing and sometimes unexpected answers to some of the questions raised earlier and in the previous chapter. Alongside my own case studies, I bring into the discussion analyses of individual musical genres that have taken on a new life in places other than the United Kingdom, such as gospel singing in Australia and Balkan music and dance in the United States. While providing insightful critiques and useful points of comparison, these also serve as windows through which we catch a few more glimpses of a wider field of activity that exists beyond the boundaries of the British scene that has been our main focus thus far.

It is worth noting that polyphonic singing traditions from Georgia, Bulgaria, and the Central African Republic have, in recent years, been recognised by UNESCO as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity.[1] "Georgian Polyphonic Singing" achieved this status in 2001; "The Oral Traditions of the Aka Pygmies of Central Africa", in 2003; and "The Bistritsa Babi—Archaic Polyphony, Dances and Ritual Practices from the Shoplouk Region", in 2005. Also worthy of comment is UNESCO's description of Intangible Cultural Heritage as "traditional and living at the same time", something that is "constantly recreated". Its dependence on living human beings for its transmission is emphasised: "The depository of this heritage is the human mind, the human body being the main instrument for its enactment, or—literally—embodiment" (UNESCO 2011: n.p.). In becoming a party to the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, the nominating state commits itself "to take the necessary measures to ensure the safeguarding of the intangible cultural heritage present in its territory” by compiling inventories and documentation, and by “endeavour[ing] to ensure the widest possible participation of those that create, maintain and transmit the heritage, and to involve them actively in its management”. As part of an action plan for revitalisation, the state also undertakes to promote and disseminate the material to the wider global community. Bulgarian singing became popular in the United Kingdom long before the UNESCO proclamation, of course. The introduction of Georgian singing likewise preceded its recognition by UNESCO, but in this case the intensification and diversification of activity that followed the proclamation fed into the continuing expansion of the non-native Georgian singing diaspora.[2] The duty to ensure transmission to future generations within the home culture has, as elsewhere, led to the establishment of specialised teaching programmes, supported by new educational resources, and only a small step has been needed for some of these materials to be made available to interested parties further afield. Thus, while the project of global promotion of once local traditions that has taken root more broadly in recent years has focused principally on creating markets for cultural exports and developing cultural tourism (both of **(p.167)** which have economic as well as cultural goals), it has also paved the way for initiatives that allow direct contact on a more intimate scale between cultural insiders and outside enthusiasts.

As we consider the different orders of attraction—aesthetic, affective, pragmatic, ideational, and ideological—that come into play when musical styles find new audiences, Turino’s model for explicating the success of worldbeat artists in the global marketplace offers itself as a useful point of reference. In seeking to explain the appeal of reggae legend Bob Marley and of Thomas Mapfumo, star of Zimbabwe’s *chimurenga* music, by looking at how their musical products and personal images were promoted, Turino identifies three main criteria or “streams”. Coming under the umbrella of what he refers to (adapting a statement made by Chris Blackwell, founder of Island Records) as “the sociological side of the Bob Marley worldbeat legacy”, these are: liberatory politics (especially as pertaining to the African diaspora), “exotic” spiritualism, and “a distinctive ‘roots,’ yet familiar, musical style indexing a unique [foreign] locality or community” (2000: 338). Even if the audiences for some of the song types that concern us here are far more circumscribed than the audiences for reggae or *chimurenga* (and here Turino is talking about those who listen and dance to commercially produced world music as opposed to performing the music themselves), similar lines of attraction can be discerned.

Many of the musics embraced by aficionados of world music, from festival goers to amateur singers, have, of course, already called out to others. Ethnomusicologists are prime examples of people whose professional and personal lives have come to revolve around musical styles and practices from elsewhere that have, for whatever reason, captured their attention. Several cases spring to mind of ethnomusicologists who have devoted their academic carers to the “foreign” music cultures they first encountered, and fell in love with, when they joined college-based music and dance groups in their student days. Timothy Rice and Jane Sugarman, for example, became interested in Bulgarian and Macedonian music, respectively, via their involvement in the international folk dance movement that flourished in the United States from the late 1950s (Rice 1994: 4–5; Sugarman 1997: 34–35). Many of these scholars went on to supervise the types of student ensemble discussed in Ted Solís’s *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles* (2004), which have their roots in the “study groups” pioneered by Mantle Hood at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). Hood’s initiative was based on his conviction that practical musical experience—involving bodily as well as intellectual understanding—should be a requirement for students of ethnomusicology. As Charles Seeger expressed it in his introduction to Hood’s *The Ethnomusicologist*, “We have realized that to the speech knowledge of music…there must be added the music knowledge of music” (Hood 1971: vii). While by no means remaining free of pedagogical or ethical dilemmas (a point to which I return at the end of this chapter), student-based **(p.168)** world music ensembles have become increasingly integrated in educational institutions alongside the principles of participant observation, bi-musicality, and learning to perform as part of research methodology.

At a broader level, the 1960s saw a move towards a deeper understanding of other cultures that was aligned in part with the search for alternative lifestyles. Victor Turner’s *The Ritual Process*, based on a series of lectures delivered at the University of Rochester in 1966, became (to quote Roger Abrahams’s assessment in the foreword to the 1995 edition of Turner’s book) a way “to teach about cultures radically different from the West in terms relevant to the present American situation”. “This approach to the intense experience of other cultures,” Abrahams goes on, “fed that generation’s drift toward education through experiencing different ways of life” (Turner 1995: viii). Turner’s work, together with that of his close collaborator Richard Schechner, was fundamental to the development of the academic field that would become known as “performance studies”. Of particular relevance to my later discussion are two concepts now in general circulation that were popularised by Turner and his followers: liminality and *communitas*. Turner’s work on liminality built on that of Arnold van Gennep, with whom the term originated. Both used it to designate a transitional state—corresponding in anthropological terms to the middle phase of a rite of passage—between two different existential positions in which the usual conventions are suspended. The state of *communitas*, characterised by a heightened feeling of togetherness and common humanity, can be achieved at this point of liminality as the differences that normally separate individuals from one another are temporarily dissolved.

Another useful concept for us to have in mind is that of interculturality. In chapter 1, we encountered Mark Slobin’s use of the term “affinity interculture” to denote “like-minded music-makers drawn magnetically to a certain genre that creates strong expressive bonding” (1993: 98). In other contexts, “intercultural” is employed as an alternative to “multicultural” to distinguish different kinds of cultural plurality and co-habitation. While multiculturalism suggests the co-existence of diverse but separate cultures, interculturalism indicates interaction and collaboration, resulting in a marriage of cultures. While the musical material with which I am concerned here is not in itself a cultural hybrid, it will nonetheless be helpful to view the stories that follow in terms of intercultural encounters and negotiations in which each party plays an active and conscious role. In the natural voice and community choir networks, we find an ever-increasing number of individuals involved in first-hand, long-term associations with musical practitioners from other cultures, whether through attending (or organising) workshops led by singers from overseas who regularly visit the United Kingdom or through coming into personal contact with communities in the music’s home country. The immediacy and sustained nature of this contact underpins the histories to which I now turn. **(p.169)**

As will become ever more apparent, these tales of musical journeys and re-inscriptions of musical meaning also complicate matters of appropriation and authenticity. The notion of ownership lies at the heart of sensitivities about adopting other people’s songs. But what if those other people want to share or gift their songs? How does the picture change when the motives, aspirations, and rationalisations of culture-bearers who choose to teach their songs to foreigners are brought into the frame? What should we make of Edisher Garakanidze’s assertion in his introduction to *99 Georgian Songs* that “workshop participants become the co-owners of a culture that stems from the depth of centuries and millennia”? (2004a: ix). What responsibilities might come with such a privilege? What do “they” want of “us”? Scenes from the stories that will better equip us to answer this last set of questions are spread through the remainder of the book. The trail, however, starts here.

## The African American Continuum and Gospel’s Global Journeys

I begin by picking up the threads of my discussion of songs from the African American heritage, viewed from the perspective of Turino’s three-pronged explanation of the appeal of successful worldbeat artists as described earlier. In chapter 4, I considered the characteristics that made gospel songs accessible and attractive to non–African American community choirs. (From here on, I use “gospel” mainly in the generic sense that encompasses the spiritual, jubilee, and quartet traditions as well as contemporary gospel.) Predominant among those features that make the songs seem so close to home for other anglophone communities are English-language lyrics, familiar subject matter including stories from the Old Testament and themes of Christian salvation, and vernacular-sounding harmonies based on Western-style chords. The fact that some of these songs may also have been part of our musical diet in our schooldays further qualifies them as in some sense “ours”.

African American musical styles are comfortingly familiar at a more general level because of the way in which they have underpinned most genres of Anglo-American popular music since the 1950s—genres that in an even more prominent way form part of the collective memory of entire generations. As Nick Prater reasons:

> Most people grew up with the African American tradition because that was the basis of all the pop music we grew up with....So you can do stuff like “Amazing Grace, How Sweet the Sound” and everybody else understands this sort of thing. And the harmonies people understand because they’re what we all grew up with in pop music.
>
> (Prater interview 2007)

**(p.170)**

This sense of affinity lies behind Nick’s description of his first time attending a gospel-singing workshop led by Tony Backhouse in New Zealand. He immediately felt “like a duck back in the water” (2005: 14). He goes on to speak of how he recognised the potential for using gospel songs in his own work but was at first diffident about doing so. When he later attended a series of talks and workshops given by Bernice Johnson Reagon in Auckland, however, she reassured him with the idea that

> although this music came out of the trials and sufferings of a whole people, in some way it also belongs to all of us, and if we can approach the songs with respect and an understanding of where they come from, then we can receive the deep healing that is the basis of this musical tradition.
>
> (Prater 2005: 14)[3]

In my discussion of Ysaye Barnwell’s *Singing in the African American Tradition*, we saw that her beliefs about the function of the songs and about matters of accessibility and empowerment are a remarkably close match with the philosophy and methodology of the NVPN. We also encountered her own conviction that “sharing the music, its values and its contexts with others can create an experience that in some way transforms the spirit of all who participate” (1989: 5). Sue Harris identifies her attendance at a day workshop led by Barnwell in Birmingham as a key point on her journey as a voice practitioner: “That completely opened my eyes and mind to masses of available material that was very accessible for people who had no musical background at all and could learn by ear.” *Singing in the African American Tradition*, she says, provided her with her first real “wodge” of repertoire, and in those early days she used a lot of material from the spiritual, gospel, and African traditions because of what it represented as well as its accessibility: “It struck a note with people who wanted to really sing together, didn’t read music, and needed to feel some sort of solidarity and sharing” (interview 2009).

The allusion here to “what [the music] represented” and the need to feel a sense of solidarity points us towards the second of Turino’s “streams”: liberatory politics. I pursue this lead with reference to E. Patrick Johnson’s case study (in his book *Appropriating Blackness: Performance and the Politics of Authenticity*) of gospel music in Australia and, more particularly, of Tony Backhouse’s Sydney choir, Café of the Gate of Salvation. His New Zealand origins notwithstanding, Backhouse—considered to be at the centre of the broader *a cappella* revival in Australia and New Zealand—has considerable authority and experience as a teacher and performer of gospel music. In 1990, with a Bachelor of Music (BMus) degree in composition from Victoria University of Wellington and a career as a rock singer behind him, he received an Australia Council International Study Grant to research black gospel traditions in the United States. While there, he studied blues and gospel history at Memphis State University and worked intensively with gospel choirs and **(p.171)** quartets in the southern Baptist churches. He has since led several gospel tours to the United States taking singers from Australia and elsewhere to immerse themselves in the black church culture of New Orleans, Memphis, Birmingham, Chicago, and New York. The Café of the Gate of Salvation, which Tony directed for twenty-one years (1986–2007), is generally acknowledged as Australia’s foremost gospel choir; its debut CD won three awards at the 1993 Contemporary A Cappella Recording Awards (USA). In focusing here on Johnson’s critique of certain aspects of the choir, I do not mean to imply that his assessment is wholly negative. Part of the interest of Johnson’s study lies in the way in which he charts his own changing reactions and understanding over the six years he was closely associated with the choir—a period in which the choir itself also evolved in interesting ways.

At a purely musical level, Johnson—writing from his vantage point as an African American and a professional performer—identifies some features of the gospel aesthetic that are “lost in translation”, noting that “clapping, rocking, discipline in rehearsals and dress...are not the Café’s strongest suits” (2003: 167). He adds, however, that the singers do not necessarily try to “sound ‘black’” and concedes that on his first visit to a rehearsal he was “impressed” by the degree to which the choir did, in fact, approximate a “black” sound and recreate the ethos of a black devotional service (162). It is in connection with the theme of liberation that Johnson’s reservations about the appropriation of gospel music by white Australians come most strongly to the fore. He writes, for example, of how some choir members—as part of the broader tendency “to generalize [the black American] experience to struggles over other forms of oppression” (180)—link their history of descent from convicts exiled from Britain and deported to Botany

Bay to that of black Americans’ descent from their African ancestors who were sold into slavery. At this level, the Australian singers had embraced gospel music for its cathartic potential to heal psychological wounds and as a tool for reconciliation with the past. For Johnson, however, there was a puzzling mismatch between a romanticised empathy with the suffering of an oppressed people thousands of miles away and an apparent downplaying of the ways in which this might be complicated by the plight of the Aboriginal population of their home country and their own privileged position in contemporary Australian society.[4]

At a more technical level, Johnson remarks on the way in which features of the music itself—rhythm, syncopation, repetition, and call-and-response—“all coalesce as a generative force that facilitates psychological release”. In the case of the Australian singers, he suggests, part of this cathartic effect derives from “the shedding of the residual traces of British propriety”, allowing them to break free of the decorum and restraint that normally holds them in check (187). What they are really connecting with, in his view, is not the oppression of black Americans but “a part of themselves that had been underdeveloped or lying dormant”, and it is the sharing of these previously unexpressed parts of **(p.172)** themselves with one another that creates such a strong sense of community (188).

Another case of mismatch has to do with the inescapably religious nature of gospel music. Johnson comments on the way in which members of the Australian choir, many of whom are agnostic or atheist, rationalise the fact that they are singing explicitly Christian words by replacing religion with a more universal spirituality—Backhouse uses the term “non-specific spirituality”, referring to the need to reserve a place for “spirituality that doesn’t necessarily attach itself to a label or a messiah” (166). At the same time, some singers—especially those who have visited black churches in the United States—are drawn to the transcendental quality of the style of religious expression with which gospel music is associated. Here another order of release occurs, this time from the constraints of Anglican-style Protestantism.

Johnson’s critique has other, less predictable dimensions. Central to his interest in the cross-cultural appropriation of gospel is the nature of the relationship between music and power. The way in which he phrases his initial question, however, alerts us to the suggestion that the stakes are not one-sided: “How does performance reproduce, enable, sustain, challenge, subvert, critique, and naturalize ideology?” (161). Taking issue with what he terms “the authenticity bug”, he goes on to develop a muscular, if sympathetic, critique of the notions of authenticity to which many of his Australian interviewees gave expression, viewing them not as a welcome sensitivity but as restrictive and misguided insofar as they “fail to articulate the discursivity of music” (198). Here, Johnson has recourse to the work of Paul Gilroy in turning normative assumptions about authenticity on their heads and suggesting that to ascribe authenticity to black Americans alone and to cast supposed appropriations by others—including oneself—as inauthentic is to perpetuate and collude with the essentialised racial discourse of authenticity that has furnished the unchanging basis for the mass marketing of black folk-cultural forms to white audiences (190; see Gilroy 1994). At the same time, he is critical of his own complicity, admitting that in interviews for Australian radio and television he has sometimes found himself reinforcing these same stereotypes by playing into the hands of interviewers who position him as an "authentic" black gospel singer. From this perspective, then, an over-emphasis on authenticity, and an overly fundamentalist interpretation of what authenticity means and what its markers are, may be viewed as a type of continued segregation or ghettoisation.

While the nature of the UK gospel scene is rather different, not least because of the greater numbers of gospel choirs that are led by, and draw significant proportions of their membership from, British citizens of African or Afro-Caribbean descent, Johnson's analysis provides us with some useful perspectives from which to view the issues surrounding appropriation and intercultural performance more generally. Once the authenticity question is put to **(p.173)** one side, Johnson concludes, "another set of possibilities emerges". He joins Barnwell and Reagon in arguing that gospel music is "too rich a cultural form to be confined to a simplistic essentialist/antiessentialist binary" if we accept that performance has "the potential to alter one's epistemological frame of reference" (197–198). It is here that the opportunity for personal transformation lies. Referencing Victor Turner, Johnson elaborates:

> Because [white Australians'] gospel performances are in striking contrast to the socially and culturally sanctioned Australian cultural performances, they hold the potential of transgressing the strictures of white hegemonic systems that sanction behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. It is specifically the liminal space of performance that provides this occasion for cultural reflection and critique.
>
> (Johnson 2003: 207)

## Back to Africa

It is in part because of their African roots that spirituals, gospel, and other songs from the African American tradition serve as an auspicious point of entry for working with songs from different parts of the African continent. The language of the lyrics may change but there is obvious continuity, broadly speaking, at the level of song structure, approaches to rhythm and syncopation, harmonic foundation, and use of the body. Here, however, the winning combination of foreign yet familiar is at work in even more complex ways, reflecting a history of mutual cross-influence with musical idioms and sensibilities moving in both directions—some elements being taken from Africa to the Americas via the slave trade and then later finding their way back to Africa in forms that were already hybrid, and other elements arriving in Africa from Europe during the colonial period and becoming integrated into vernacular styles that would later find new audiences in the West.

The fusion of African, American, and European elements is perhaps most audible in the case of South African vocal genres. These have absorbed influences from multiple incursions and visitations, from colonial administrators and missionaries, on the one hand, to performing troupes and entertainers, on the other. The four-part hymn singing style introduced by European and, later, by American missionaries was able to take root relatively easily due to the predominance of vocal music in the indigenous musical heritage, including choral as well as polyphonic forms. The cross-fertilisation that resulted provided the foundation for many of the styles of southern Bantu vocal music that developed in the twentieth century, including popular genres such as *marabi, mbaqanga, mbube, isikhwela jo, cothoza mfana*, and *isicathamiya*. This explains further the sense of familiarity that many Western European and North American listeners experience when confronted with South African **(p.174)** singing. At the same time, the songs retain an aura of exoticism at the level of timbre, texture, vocal technique, and styles of ornamentation.

American minstrel groups and vaudeville artistes toured widely in South Africa in the late nineteenth century. Veit Erlmann identifies the “seminal” tours of a group of African American performers under the banner of Orpheus McAdoo and his Minstrel, Vaudeville, and Concert Company, in 1890 and 1898, as having made the deepest and most lasting impression on black audiences, to whom they introduced jubilee songs and songs from the black minstrel repertoire (1996a: 47). South African mission school graduates were soon inspired to form their own minstrel troupes. Spirituals introduced by the Philadelphia-based African Methodist Episcopal Church provided further inspiration to local composers. Ragtime was also popular with both white audiences and the urbanised black elite around the turn of the twentieth century. Later, black South Africans took a keen interest in the development of the civil rights movement in the United States and noted the way in which collective singing functioned in the context of a struggle that in many ways mirrored their own resistance to the apartheid regime. Religious music in gospel style enjoys great popularity in contemporary South Africa, drawing on models of African American gospel heard on radio and television in more recent times but Africanised through the use of local languages and voices (Muller 2004: 2).

The adoption of African material by singers in the West has also been eased by the kinds of declarations made by Barnwell and Reagon about the universal dimensions of gospel music. A similar statement can be found in the introduction to the collection *Let Your Voice Be Heard! Songs from Ghana and Zimbabwe*: “African music is not for those of African extraction only. It is, rather, music to share with the world, with all who would experience the fellowship of cooperative music making” (Adzinyah, Maraire, and Tucker 1986: 3). Innumerable songs from across the African continent have become perennial favourites with community choirs and voice camp veterans in the United Kingdom. In my interviews, choir leaders often identified these as the songs that called to them most strongly when they first set out on the natural voice path, as well as being among the most effective songs for working with relatively inexperienced singers. Nick Prater, for example, remarks that “the easiest songs and the most common songs that are sung around the campfire are African songs”. He attributes this in large part to the familiarity that derives from the kind of cross-fertilisation with Western idioms, including African American genres, summarised earlier:

> We’ve got the parts, the chords are simple, the rhythms can often be quite straightforward, and we really understand them and we love them….It’s just a very interesting thing that it brings something out for us.
>
> (Prater interview 2007)

**(p.175)**

Nickomo observes, in similar vein, that his attraction to African music was prepared by his prior love of African American music and black-influenced popular music:

> I felt I *knew* it, I felt I could *sing* it….It was like I could feel a part of me that could do that….Other people feel that, so in a way it’s a very liberating thing to teach because people kind of feel that they know how to do it and it’s a nice way in, often, to singing.
>
> (Clarke interview 2007)

Bruce Knight recalls learning some simple African songs when he attended Rowena Whitehead’s singing group in Cambridge:

> I think that’s the moment I found my voice and thought, “I can sing, I can do this”, and I sang without any inhibitions. And I think it was singing songs in another language, in a kind of tribal language, I accessed my, you know, “tribal person” [laughs], and it was when I was singing and dancing at the same time, shuffling free from side to side, I got into a kind of a trancy state, when you’re singing something over and over and it just feels really, really natural.
>
> (Knight interview 2008)

When Rowena taught English songs, he didn’t experience the same sense of connection, whereas “with the African songs, and some of the Maori songs also, I’d put my heart and soul into it”. Of particular interest here is not only the role of African songs in the “finding my voice” narrative but also the reference to “accessing my tribal person” and entering “a kind of trancy state”, formulations that clearly point, once again, to the transformative potential of performance and the liminal state to which it allows access.

Jackie Roxborough also finds value in the bringing together of voice and body that African idioms facilitate and, in her experience, this in turn can help to prepare singers for less familiar, more demanding repertoire:

> I think the African is a big way in for most people. I think there’s freedom in the African, which has to engage your body. You cannot stand still, you cannot just stand and deliver a voice.…Once they’ve done that and they’ve freed that up and they’ve realised that they can sing anything they want…the one that really does seem to draw people incredibly—which is then bringing them back into formation—is Georgian.
>
> (Roxborough interview 2007)

Similar sentiments lie behind Una May Olomolaiye’s use of African material, and these combine with other now familiar themes in her explanation of her voice-work philosophy:

> I absolutely believe that people are less inhibited when they sing, especially African music. They let go and don’t have to worry about understanding the **(p.176)** words. They are just conveying the spirit of the song. I love watching people realise their own potential.…You know, there is no mystery to singing. You just give yourself, let go, be free. When people realise there is no mystery, when they see me give myself, they just do it. They think, *“This is something I can do!”*
>
> (http://www.yamanu.co.uk/about.php, acc. June 18, 2013)

The fit between African American and vernacular African styles becomes abundantly clear in Una May’s workshops, which typically feature a combination of African songs (mainly South and West African, including her own arrangements of some of the songs she has collected on her travels in Africa) and African American songs (including her arrangements of popular Motown songs with which many workshop participants are, of course, already conversant).

Alongside that of Una May, the work of Anita Daulne is of particular interest as another example of inter- or cross-cultural encounters being facilitated by a professional performer well versed in both European and African culture.

Together with her sister Marie, Anita is best known in international circles as part of the female *a cappella* group Zap Mama. While Marie has concentrated on pursuing her performing career, Anita has been more active on the teaching circuit. Based for several years in the United Kingdom, she directed her Afropean Choir in Oxford and also maintained a busy schedule as a workshop leader in Europe and Africa.[5]

Of mixed parentage (a Belgian father and a Zairian mother), the sisters grew up in Belgium after their mother fled the Belgian Congo following the death of her husband in 1965 at the hands of revolutionaries carrying out a purge of mixed-race couples and children. Marie went on to study at the Antwerp School of Jazz and to pursue her interests in composition and ethnomusicology. After hearing Didier Demolin's recordings of pygmy music from the Congo, the sisters were inspired to return to the region to explore their African heritage and more specifically "pygmy" vocal techniques, which have been an important influence on Zap Mama's distinctive style. Anita has travelled extensively throughout Africa and now teaches songs from the different ethnic groups she has encountered along the way; these include songs of the Maasai, Tuareg, Peul (Fulani), and Zulu peoples, as well as the Mangbetu and pygmy peoples of her mother's homeland.[6]

Anita describes how neither she nor Marie played a musical instrument well but they wanted to make music and so they decided to use their voices: "We tried to imitate instruments and at the same time using some songs and the way of singing that our mother taught us when we were young" (interview 2009). Their mother was surprised that her daughters should show such a keen interest in these traditional songs because in the Congo, during the period of Belgian colonial rule, indigenous songs were viewed as uncivilised, and only church songs or the French songs children learned at school were approved **(p.177)** of. It came as a further shock for her mother to realise that there were many Europeans who, after all, liked these songs—as witnessed by Zap Mama's meteoric rise to fame following the release of their first album in 1991 and more particularly its US re-release, in 1993, on David Byrne's Luaka Bop label.[7]

The idea of running workshops came from Anita's desire to share the experience of singing the songs. She explains that she has always loved the rehearsal process "because it's such a good interaction and feeling that circulates between us, so I wanted to give more than what we give on stage: the experience of that way of singing". It was evident that Zap Mama's audiences derived great enjoyment from seeing them perform on stage, "but they didn't *experience* that way of singing and I was convinced that way of singing is accessible for everybody and I didn't want that way of singing [to be] just for *them*, far away" (interview 2009). Through the workshops she also wanted to offer people an experience of cultural mixing. What she refers to as "the mix of culture" was at the very foundation of Zap Mama, since the group's members were themselves “mixed” in terms of their parental origins. In using this notion of mixing, Anita makes a distinction between culture and race. Some people, she observes, are mixed race but they don’t really mix the cultures. In Zap Mama’s case, it was a mixed *cultural* background that had influenced both their way of singing and their way of working, and this included reinterpreting and rearranging the material to make it more accessible for a Western audience so that their music might then act as “a bridge or a door to make people understand…ethnic music [better]”. The same philosophy formed the foundation of her Afropean Choir, launched in 2007, whose repertoire was based on “ethnic” songs that Anita had rearranged, drawing on both African and European influences. She stresses that she teaches all her material by ear and she works a lot “with rhythm and harmony and overlapping”. “So really,” she explains, “I try to revalue the ethnic way of singing that was…crushed by colonisation” (interview 2009).

Anita also has interesting things to say about cultural stereotypes. At the time of our 2009 interview, she had just returned from leading a ten-day residential workshop in Burkina Faso, which brought together participants from Belgium, France, Italy, the Czech Republic, and Burkina itself. Because they were in Africa, the Europeans, she explained, had expected the Africans to sing the songs better than they. In Burkina, however, the dominant vocal genre is that of the griots—essentially a solo tradition of praise singing with instrumental accompaniment. There is not a strong tradition of multipart singing such as one finds in South Africa or the Congo region, for example. For the local participants, therefore, singing songs in two or more parts was a new experience, whereas for the European members of the group these kinds of songs, together with Anita’s way of working, were more familiar. Rather than the Africans having a head start, then, they were all starting from a similar position. “It was very, very interesting,” Anita reflects, “because every stereotype fell down and we had to readjust everything” (interview 2009). **(p.178)**

### Songs and Dances from South Africa

For the remainder of this section I focus on the contrasting cases of two very distinct kinds of repertoire that have arrived in the United Kingdom in different waves and via different channels: songs from South Africa and songs from the pygmy peoples, or forest peoples, of central Africa. South African songs are among those that have circulated longest among amateur choirs in the United Kingdom. “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”—composed (in *makwaya* style) by Enoch Sontonga in 1897 and adopted as the anthem of the African National Congress in 1925—was widely sung as an expression of solidarity for victims of apartheid during the years of Nelson Mandela’s imprisonment and the South African boycott.[8] Certain other South African songs have been especially popular with political choirs. Several of these can be found in the collection *Freedom is Coming: Songs of Protest and Praise from South Africa*, complied by Anders Nyberg and first published in 1980; favourites here include “Singabahambayo”, "Siyahamba", and "Azikhatali". Online customer reviews indicate that this volume was widely used in the United States and Australia, as well as becoming an integral part of choral life in Sweden, Nyberg's home country. Another readily available resource, intended for use by amateur singers and sympathisers outside South Africa, was Pete Seeger's collection, *Choral Folk Songs from South Africa*, first published by G. Schirmer in 1960. This followed the earlier release, in 1955, of the Folkways album *Bantu Choral Folk Songs*, which featured ten of the songs performed by Seeger with the group The Song Swappers. *Singing in the African American Tradition* also includes six songs from South Africa, some of which became favourites with British singers who attended Barnwell's workshops or purchased the teaching pack: "Babethandaza", the traditional Zulu song encountered in chapter 4; "Somagwaza", a version of the boys' initiation song also included in Seeger's book; the lament-like "Senzenina", whose lyric translates as "What have we done? What has Mandela done? Our crime is that we are black"; "Iza Kunyathel'i Africa", a more spirited anti-Botha song; "Woyaya" ("We are going"), with mostly English lyrics; and "The Freedom Tide is Rising", again in English, foretelling the fall of Botha and the apartheid regime.

A more singular and local story lies behind the collection of material assembled by Colin Harrison that was to serve as another source of South African songs used in fledgling natural voice circles in the United Kingdom from the late 1980s. This is now available as a series of three workdiscs, *Songs from South Africa* volumes 1, 2, and 3, which feature the songs broken down into individual parts, with *Songs from South Africa: The Book* including most of the songs from the first two workdiscs. The material originated in a series of visits that Colin made to South Africa together with his then partner, Anne Monger. The motive for their first trip in 1988 was to lead circle dance workshops. While there, they were invited to teach at St. Peter's Catholic Seminary **(p.179)** at Hammanskraal. Two of the young trainee priests attending their workshop sang and danced "Thanda" (the lyrics for which are a Xhosa version of "Love your neighbour as yourself"). On returning to England, Colin began to teach "Thanda" to his circle dance groups. Meanwhile, as he recounts, "the seminarians were getting together with the Pretoria circle dance group, creating more dances and even entering them successfully in competitions!" (Harrison n.d.: 2). When he and Anne returned to St. Peter's the following year, the group had many new songs and dances ready to show them.

It was later that same year that Colin and Anne first met Nickomo and Rasullah Clarke. Colin describes how Nickomo, when presented with the tapes, "was able to decipher layers of harmony that I had barely been aware of" (ibid.). That summer, as a foursome, they taught the songs and dances at a series of camps. Nickomo reflects that, initially, the songs were taught at dance workshops and dance camps due to the fact that they had originated in a dance setting. Voice work in the camps at that time "was kind of on the back of dance". What they offered, then, was “a kind of package where we’d teach all the parts to an African song and then we’d dance it” (interview 2007).

Back in South Africa a year later, Colin made contact with the Catholic-run Lumko Institute that published similar material in manuscript and on tape and he returned to England “with just about everything they had”. The repertoire brought together in *Songs from South Africa* includes the songs and dances from St. Peter’s, several Lumko items (including a version of “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika”), and additional songs from various other sources (including, once again, “Azikhatali”). In his introductory notes, Colin is keen to emphasise that neither the vocal arrangements nor the dance steps should be regarded as fixed in stone: “This booklet is no more than a rough description of how one group of people once danced to these songs.” In Africa, he explains (echoing other writings on African music), everyone sings what he or she feels like: “The only mistake one can make is not to participate, rather than not to get it right.” Describing the difficulty of notating the dance steps while also joining in (declining to join in not being an option), Colin again refers to the way in which “everyone seemed to be doing his own version. Moreover, each time I went back, they all seemed to be doing the dances somewhat differently anyway!” Hence his exhortation to the reader to “proceed with a healthy irreverence for what is written down here” (Harrison n.d.: 2).

Similar advice is found in the “Musical Instructions” that preface Nyberg’s *Freedom is Coming*:

> These are freedom songs, both in form and function!...In South Africa there are no two choirs that sing one and the same song alike, nor is there any choir that sings the same song alike twice in succession!...With the African way of telling a tale, it is impossible to “sing wrong.”...The essential thing is not how you sing, but that you mean what you sing and sing what you mean....Do not let the **(p.180)** notes become an inhibiting factor in the creation of the music, but a point of departure!
>
> (Nyberg 1990: 6)

Authenticity, or being faithful to the spirit of the source, in this case involves spontaneity and innovation rather than a slavish adherence to a past interpretation that is, is any case, not viewed as sacrosanct by its creator.

A more recent resource is the two-volume *The Folk Rhythm: South African Folk, Church and Protest Songs*, the result of a collaboration between Patty Cuyler, co-director of Village Harmony, and Matlakala Bopape, director of the Polokwane Choral Society in South Africa’s Limpopo province. Patty and Matlakala first met in 1999 at a music festival in St. John’s, Newfoundland, when Village Harmony and Polokwane Choral (a community choir that is part of the umbrella organisation, Polokwane Choral Society) performed together. The books contain

Matlakala's four-part arrangements of a selection of folk, church, and protest songs. The music is presented in staff and tonic sol-fa notation; the latter—originally introduced by missionaries in the 1850s as a means of enabling ordinary people to achieve musical literacy—remains popular with choirs across South Africa. Both audio (CD) and audio-visual (DVD) recordings accompany each volume, designed to convey an idea of the authentic sound and to demonstrate the steps for the dances that accompany the songs.

In her introductory notes, Matlakala explains that her motivation derives in part from the fact that music that relies on oral transmission runs the risk of disappearing as younger generations transfer their allegiance to other genres: "My documentation of this is therefore specifically to preserve this rich culture, and to share this with other nations of the world" (Bopape and Cuyler 2004: iii). Part of the mission of Polokwane Choral Society is to work "to bridge ethnic gaps in South Africa by fostering mutual understanding between people of different cultures and viewpoints" (xiii). It is a relatively small step to extend this approach to people outside the country. Several British singers have joined the Village Harmony groups that travel to South Africa to work with Matlakala there; others have learnt some of the songs at Village Harmony camps elsewhere in the world or at the workshops led by Village Harmony's directors during their UK tours.

Matlakala makes a useful distinction between "folk music" and "traditional indigenous music" in South Africa. Folk music, according to her definition, is dynamic and offers greater scope for creativity through improvisation and ornamentation. Folk songs—usually songs in four-part harmony—have a wide currency: they are known and sung by people of all ages across the country. Traditional music, by contrast, is both more ancient and more static and is usually tied to particular rituals and occasions (for example, circumcision or rain-making ceremonies) and confined to individual cultural and language groups. A third category is the "chorus" tradition cultivated in the churches **(p. 181)** that takes the form of Africanised Western hymnody, incorporating indigenous influences such as the characteristic leading-voice and the call-and-response format. Many songs that began their lives as church choruses were later adopted as part of the anti-apartheid project and became recast as "struggle songs" ("Senzenina" being a well-known example). Matlakala stresses two further points that should by now be familiar: indigenous, folk, and struggle music—including that sung in the churches—is always accompanied by dance and movement, and in the folk tradition there are no spectators or audience since the singing is communal and participatory (v–vii).

Finally, another injection of new material was provided by the documentary *We Are Together*, which tells the story of the Agape Children's Choir, based at the Agape Orphanage in KwaZulu-Natal that provides for children whose parents have died of AIDS. The theme song, "Thina Simunye/We Are Together", was taken up by a number of choirs following the film’s broadcast on British television’s Channel 4 and its commercial release in 2008, and the Rise Foundation, which produced it, went on to compile a songbook that includes choral transcriptions for fifteen of the songs featured, with translations and a pronunciation guide. Again, this resource is addressed to choirs anywhere who wish to use the songs, and again we find the now familiar explanation that “the same song is never performed in the same way”, followed by this injunction to the reader: “When you teach, learn and perform these songs, you should do so with freedom as the people of South Africa do and make them your own” (Rise Foundation 2009: 1).

### Songs of the Aka and Baka

The polyphonic songs of the equatorial forest peoples of central Africa with their characteristic use of hocketing and yodelling techniques offer a striking contrast to South African styles, even if they share a similar scope for seemingly limitless variation and reinvention in performance. In this case, part of their appeal rests on the way in which their life is imagined and represented in the West. Traditional “pygmy” society has lent itself to easy romanticisation with a succession of writers extolling the peaceable ways of these “primeval” forest dwellers that allow them to live in harmony with one another and with the natural environment—even if the present reality of communities ravaged by exploitation, inter-ethnic violence, alcoholism, and high rates of child mortality paints a far from idyllic picture. In the world of popular music, exoticised “pygmy” sounds—their value enhanced by whatever environmental, political, or spiritual associations their user chooses to attach to them—have been freely appropriated as one more gem with which to decorate the postmodern pastiche. As Steven Feld comments, “there’s a pygmy for any and all consumer positions and tastes”, but only at the cost of “a complex humanity” **(p.182)** being “fixed as a tape loop in the machine of both postcolonial devastation and primitivist fantasy” (2000b: 273).

This does not mean that every appropriation of “pygmy” music is a case of insensitive or ill-informed exploitation. It is clear, however, that when the music does cross over it is not the sound alone that is being consumed or more actively embodied; it is also the values that are seen to accrue to it. The structure of multipart songs, together with the manner of their performance, has been described by a roll call of anthropologists and ethnomusicologists as a musical manifestation of the democratic values that govern social organisation. In contrast to many other African styles, there is no division between leader and chorus, and no hierarchy of voice parts. Any member of the group may start a song and it is common for individual singers to cross from one vocal line to another as all possible permutations of a song’s raw material are explored. This fundamental flexibility is also highlighted in the UNESCO proclamation relating to the oral traditions of the Aka: “Unlike polyphonic systems that are written down in notation, the vocal tradition of the Aka Pygmies allows for spontaneous expression and improvisation….During performances, each singer can change his or her voice to produce a multitude of variations, creating the impression that the music is continuously evolving” (http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/index.php?RL=00082, acc. June 18, 2013). This freedom and spontaneity in music making is, once again, an aspect that recommends the songs to singers who adhere to the philosophy of liberation and empowerment espoused in natural voice circles.

The Aka and Baka are among the groups that have been most extensively studied by ethnomusicologists and it is their music that most often finds its way to singers in the United Kingdom. One British singer who has served as a conduit for this material is Su Hart, who with Martin Cradick formed the group Baka Beyond (styling itself an “original Afro-Celtic danceband”) in the early 1990s.[9] The adventure began when they saw Phil Agland’s documentary film, *Baka: People of the Rainforest* (1987).[10] The film made such a strong impression on them that they were inspired to travel to the Cameroonian rainforest, in 1992, to spend three months living and making music with a group of Baka near the border with the Congo. Martin and Su’s first recording venture as Baka Beyond produced a pair of CDs: *Spirit of the Forest*, a fusion-style album featuring Martin’s guitar and mandolin playing dubbed over Baka percussion and digital samples, and *Heart of the Forest*, which presents the original recordings made among the Baka. Via the charity Global Music Exchange, royalties from these and later recordings have been directed back to Cameroon to be invested in development projects.

Unlike many others who have passed through the forest, Su and Martin have maintained their relationship with their Baka friends for more than twenty years, regularly returning to offer help as well as to make music. When I asked Su whether she saw herself as a kind of bridge between the Baka and **(p.183)** the singers to whom she now teaches the songs in the West, she replied: “I want to be a two-way bridge because I do want them to get something back.” In addition to helping build a music house, Global Music Exchange has also been involved in setting up education and health projects. Since royalties have declined as a result of the way in which the record business has been hit by Internet downloads, they now have to find other ways of raising funds; a recent charity ball had raised £10,000, enough to keep a medical project running for the next two years.

On one of Su’s most recent visits, the Baka women told her that she should go out and teach the songs to more people. As well as taking her singing workshops further afield, she runs occasional teacher training days and workshops for primary schools that fit with the “rainforest” theme in the curriculum; these include background information about different aspects of Baka society, illustrated by slides and stories from her own first-hand experience of life in the forest. Since 2009, she and Martin, in partnership with anthropologists Jerome and Ingrid Lewis, have also organised three-day Baka Culture Camps in the United Kingdom as a means of sharing other aspects of Baka life.

Su sees the songs themselves as a vehicle for helping the singers she works with to re-learn the arts of listening and awareness and to re-engage with the humanity that the Baka still have but that many in the West have lost touch with. She also alludes to the way in which the repetitive cyclic patterns facilitate a kind of therapeutic transcendence, not unlike that described earlier in relation to gospel music:

> You can sing for ages; you get into this other space where you don’t know how long you’ve been doing it, and you’re together. And that’s the place, I think, that we want to be. We all want to be in this warm, cooperative, snug thing. That’s what humans want.…It is like a healing.
>
> (Hart interview 2011)

The perceived healing potential of the songs is also fundamental to the work of John Bowker, which in this case comes with more prominent New Age resonances. Based in Ireland, John is a regular teacher at the Unicorn Natural Voice Camp and also runs his own Earthsong Camps. Having built his repertoire of songs from the Baka and Mbuti peoples of central Africa primarily by working with ethnomusicological field recordings (as opposed to traveling to their place of origin), he makes no claim to cultural authenticity. He is motivated rather by the desire to share what he sees as “amazing cultural gifts” whose wisdom and values can benefit society at large. He often draws on his own creativity:

> It might not be the authentic original African chant that I have recorded or [had] taught to me that I’m teaching but, what I notice is, the chant might have more power if I bring my creativity to it. So do I inhibit that creative process? And **(p.184)** where is it coming from? Is it coming from me, or am I bringing in something from elsewhere?
>
> (Bowker interview 2007)

Some people might criticise his work, he says, “because if I’m teaching a Baka chant it’s not strictly original. And I’ll often say: well, I’ve tweaked this, this is a bit of my stuff.” Viewed in a different light, however, this approach could be seen as compatible, in principle, with how the songs would be treated in their original context as described earlier.

John explains his initial attraction to Baka music:

> When I was getting into this sort of powerful tribal music that was really calling to me, what *really* seemed to hit the spot was *their* music, their

> chants. And they seemed to have a use of music as a tool for community that is very profound.
>
> (Bowker interview 2007)

He mentions a chant that is sung to a child whose mother is expecting a new baby to reassure the child that the community will always be there for him or her and there is no need to worry. This is something that doesn't occur in our culture, John comments—the notion of being held and looked after by everyone in your community. In the West, much of our ancient culture has been lost without trace, he continues, "so to go to other areas seemed to be the only choice". He refers to the kind of "powerful magical music" that is still to be found in places like Native America, Africa, and India. "So we can draw from that well for humanity," he concludes. "We can say: they held the drum, and here it is" (interview 2007).

## Balkan Bridges

If African songs enjoy the most widespread popularity overall, songs from different regions of the Balkans are also well established as part of the staple diet of many community choirs in the United Kingdom. Songs from Eastern Europe—most notably Bulgaria, the countries of former Yugoslavia, and, to a lesser extent, Greece—were especially popular in the 1980s and 1990s. The Balkan trend in the United Kingdom may have drawn inspiration in part from the more established Balkan music and dance scene in the United States, but many people in Britain first became aware of Balkan folk music via the circle dance groups that spread across Britain in the 1980s. This initial encounter led some to seek out ways of immersing themselves more fully in the culture of origin by, for example, joining tours organised by the British-Bulgarian Friendship Society to the Koprivstica National Festival of Bulgarian Folklore that takes place in the village of Koprivstica every five years.[11] In addition to attending the festival, such tours often included the option of enrolling **(p.185)** on weeklong workshops in folk dancing, singing, and playing traditional Bulgarian instruments such as the *gaida, gadulka*, and *kaval*. Koprivstica offers clear evidence of the extent to which Bulgarian music has cast its spell ever wider since the festival's inauguration in 1965: the ninth festival in 2005, for instance, included twenty-three folklore groups who had travelled from Sweden, Switzerland, Denmark, France, the United States, Israel, and Japan to take part in competitions and demonstrations of Bulgarian traditional music and dance.[12]

The flourishing Balkan dance scene coincided with the "discovery" of the so-called "mystery of the Bulgarian voices" via a series of records featuring the Bulgarian State Radio and Television Choir, the Filip Kutev Choir, the Pirin Ensemble, and other Bulgarian artists. The three volumes that were released under the title *Le Mystère des Voix Bulgares* in the late 1980s featured all-female vocal ensembles performing "arranged folklore" in the form of elaborate choral arrangements and new compositions inspired by traditional idioms by approved state composers such as Filip Kutev, Nikolai Kaufman, Krassimir Kyurkchiysk, Ivan Spassov, and Kiril Stefanov. The year 1988 also saw the release of *The Forest is Crying* by the Trio Bulgarka, who came to the attention of mainstream popular music audiences when they appeared on two of Kate Bush's albums, *The Sensual World* (1989) and *The Red Shoes* (1993). Some of the songs from these Bulgarian recordings have also been adopted by community choirs.

As we have seen, Frankie Armstrong served as an early channel for the deliberate introduction of Balkan songs to what was to become the natural voice network, using as her starter pack the village-style songs she had acquired from Ethel Raim. Since the 1980s, there have also been ample opportunities to work directly with Bulgarian singers in the United Kingdom. Another professional female trio, the Bisserov Sisters, strengthened their British presence when Lyubimka Bisserova established a home in Manchester and began to lead workshops there as well as perform. Judy Greenwell and Vivien Ellis (who both attended Frankie and Darien's first UK training for voice practitioners) also offered Bulgarian workshops after spending time studying with the Bisserov Sisters in their home village in the Pirin mountains. Kalinka Vulcheva, who appears as a soloist on the *Mystère* recordings, was likewise active in the British voice network during her extended residence in the country. Members of the Bistritsa Babi (Bistritsa Grandmothers), who toured widely long before their music was given masterpiece status by UNESCO, were also invited to Britain to give song and dance workshops, bringing with them copies of their book *Ancient Magic in Bulgarian Folklore: Perls (sic) of Syncretic Folk Art, Village of Bistritsa, Bulgaria* (Aleksieva and Ancheva 1991).[13]

Balkan songs continue to form part of the standard offering in workshops led by Northern Harmony on their European tours. Thirteen songs (from Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia, and Croatia) are included in the Balkan **(p.186)** section of the 2007 edition of the Workshop Book, for example. A series of Village Harmony summer camps have also been held in Bulgaria, Bosnia, and the Republic of Macedonia, giving participants the opportunity to learn from a range of native teachers in situ. Some of these tours have been co-ordinated by Mary Cay Brass, who has also edited two songbooks, *Village Harmony: Traditional Songs of the Balkans* and *Balkan Bridges: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria* (each linked with a companion CD). Both include songs that Mary Cay collected while living in former Yugoslavia in the 1970s, supplemented by pieces transcribed from commercial recordings. Significantly, the theme of giving back to the communities from which the music came, as well as of music as a vehicle for intercultural understanding, recurs in the introduction to *Balkan Bridges*, in which Mary Cay notes that the songs in the volume have been performed all over Europe and the United States in concerts, festivals, and benefits for victims of the wars in Bosnia and Kosovo. "We have hoped through our singing of these beautiful songs to ‘humanize’ the peoples of the former Yugoslavia; to give a picture of their lives,” she writes, and at the same time to make them accessible to a wider public, and, by sharing them, to “help to build some new bridges between peoples” (1991: 1).

The Balkan case may escape the more obvious sensitivities surrounding issues of race and empire that attach to the appropriation of music from certain other parts of the world. It nonetheless raises similar questions about representation and the ways in which musical meanings are imagined and constructed. Why should British singers be so powerfully drawn to the Bulgarian sound and how does this relate to their own sense of identity? What makes the songs appear accessible, relevant, and rewarding to sing?

The distinctive timbre and voice placement are the first features to strike the listener exposed to this music for the first time, together with the impressive volume that the open-throated and “bellowing” techniques are capable of producing. Songs in this open-throated style, which requires singing in the chest register, favour musical structures featuring narrow-range melodies often punctuated by sustained notes, since it is not practically possible to sing wide-ranging, fast-moving melodies with this type of voice production. This in turn means that the melody lines—in their skeletal, unornamented form, at least—are not too difficult to learn. The melodies of many songs in the older, village style move mostly by step and rarely extend beyond the ambitus of a fifth, while the other voices in two- or three-part songs are often drone-based, making them supremely accessible to even the most tentative singer.

Loud singing is also necessary to create the desired ringing that is part of the Bulgarian aesthetic. The frequent use of what would in Western terms be deemed dissonances contributes to this ringing phenomenon, with intervals of a second being especially prized and with thirds and fourths often sung slightly flat of the Western norm. For Western singers, the resulting harmonies **(p.187)** offer a welcome sense of liberation from the constraints of Western harmony. They are also exciting to sing because of the surprisingly visceral quality of the bodily sensations they induce. For the listener, too, the singing can have a “hair-raising” effect, particularly at points in three-part songs where the voices create a three-tone cluster consisting of two intervals of a major second within the ambitus of a major third. The different vocal techniques and effects used to ornament a song add to the arresting quality of the singing, with trills, wide vibrato, dramatic glottal stops, and high-pitched yips or yodel-like sounds calculated to further enhance the ringing quality. Again, these ornaments add an extra layer of thrill, often providing a therapeutic release for the performer as well as adding an aura of exoticism.[14]

Another novel feature of Bulgarian music is its apparent rhythmic complexity, with asymmetrical metres that might be notated as 5/8, 7/8, 9/8, 11/8, 13/8, and 21/8 being characteristic of many song types. Again, this is something that sets Bulgarian and some other Balkan styles apart from the Western norm in a way that can be experienced as liberating. Many Croatian songs, by comparison, are more familiar because they use symmetrical rhythms and harmonies based on parallel thirds that reflect the country's Western orientation. These songs are therefore more immediately accessible for those who struggle with unfamiliar rhythms and harmonies.

Sue Parlby (co-director, at the time of our interview, of Cambridge's Good Vibrations Community Choir) describes how she spent years singing in traditional choirs as "a very sweet little soprano", until the day she went to a Bulgarian singing workshop led by Frankie Armstrong. There she discovered, as she describes it, "this huge voice, which was terribly exciting. I didn't realise there was one of *those* lurking inside me.…That voice had always been inside me somewhere, probably, but it hadn't been brought out" (interview 2007).[15] Part of her excitement was related to her experience as a woman: "For me to discover that I do have a powerful voice that will be listened to I think is working on other levels as well. It felt like I had found a strong part of me as well." She describes how her newfound passion took her to Bulgaria, where in addition to attending the Koprivstica festival she spent a week as part of a group taking singing lessons with a member of the Kutev choir. One of the most powerful experiences of the trip occurred during an evening shared with a local band. The band's singer discovered that Sue and another workshop participant knew the song "Što mi e Milo" and suggested they sing it together. Sue's description of the experience of singing at the side of the Bulgarian girl captures the intensity of the visceral dimensions of the Bulgarian sound referred to earlier:

> I thought I had quite a loud voice when I get into Bulgarian mode and I just felt like a nuclear bomb had gone off in my face.…She was so powerful—her voice—that we got to the end of it and I was literally shaking from the vibrations and I had to go outside for about half an hour in total quiet because my body **(p.188)** wouldn't stop shaking. And it was to do with the actual frequencies…and the hitting and the dissonances. And her actual voice—the power of her volume was extraordinary. I was trembling right through my body. It was like someone had put an electric current through it.
>
> (Parlby interview 2007)

Dessi Stefanova offered the following thoughts when I asked for her explanation as to why Bulgarian singing should affect listeners so deeply:

> I think it’s mostly that Bulgarian singers sing with a lot of conviction. You don’t get anybody just half-singing or quarter-singing. It’s just all full on, and I think that accounts for a lot of it, just the experience of hearing somebody putting their heart and soul into a song.…And I think for a lot of people the harmonies are very exciting, the fact that it’s never what you expect it to do. And the loudness: being loud is a big plus. Those are the three main things that people have said to me. Also the fact that it is kind of exotic and people are attracted to that romantic idea.
>
> (Stefanova interview 2008)

Dessi says of her own way of working with the London Bulgarian Choir:

> I always encourage people to try and express what they are singing in *every* way—not just to say the right words or the right rhythm but, really, through their voice and through their body and their eyes and their face…and that’s very empowering for people.…And it gives you a different level of communicating with an audience as well, which gives people a real buzz, to see that connection.
>
> (Stefanova interview 2008)

Perhaps not surprisingly, similar themes occur in Mirjana Laušević’s discussion of the attraction of Balkan music for American participants. In *Balkan Fascination*, she describes how the repertory is seen to “foster group experience and social enjoyment…in the ways many other musical styles do not”. Important contributing factors here are the “singability” of the melodies, “sitting comfortably in the average person’s register, allowing for easy harmonization and responding well to being sung full voice in a noisy room” (2007: 55). Balkan music seems to offer a democratic approach to music making where, in contrast to the world of Western classical music, music and dance are not reserved for “the talented few”, and “this accessibility of music making to all members of a community is very appealing to many Americans who do not want to be ‘perfect,’ but to make music in a communal and friendly atmosphere” (32–33). Added to this are “important musical and extra-musical associations with the ancient, the natural, and the spiritual”. For example:

> The presence of a drone or steady tonal center in much of Balkan music can suggest a sense of being “grounded” and connected to the rest of the world’s music **(p.189)** and people; a sense of the universal, transcending time and place. Combined with its “meditative” quality, a nexus of physical experience and cultural expectation, drone enhances the Balkanites’ feelings of being one with the sound, with the earth, and with each other.
>
> (Laušević 2007: 59–60)

Among Laušević’s respondents, the use of unusual modes was also associated with an experience of the communal, earthy, otherworldly, ancient, or exotic. The fact that those who became “hooked” initially responded to the music on a primal or “gut level” meant that the response “transcends the individual, cultural, and historical and is experienced as metaphysical, magical, or cosmic”, leading some to interpret this in terms of reincarnation theory (66).

Laušević also comments on the more particular appeal of Balkan women’s songs to those involved in the women’s liberation movement of the 1970s: “Recognizing the vocal power, musical tightness, and female bonding evidenced in these songs, many women welcomed the contrast to the aesthetic values dominant in the American mainstream” (211). As she stresses, however, in the home culture of the Balkans loud and vibrant singing is not linked with any notion of “women being powerful or speaking their mind” but rather is “part of demonstrating strength, endurance and a capacity for hard labor demanded by patriarchal village life”. As the songs were recontextualised, so was their meaning re-inscribed as the American women’s movement used Balkan female vocal polyphony creatively to communicate its own values, employing the songs as “a means of resisting patriarchy and expressing women’s liberation” (212). Laušević expands on the notion of female solidarity by explaining how “the realization of Balkan songs in two- or three-part harmony, especially in unmetered songs, demands great interpersonal concentration and silent communication between singers”. Many American women, she reports, have identified the bonding that took place as “one of the best outcomes of their involvement with Balkan music” (213). This way of engaging with the material on one’s own terms was in part prompted by Ethel Raim, who Laušević describes as having encouraged her students “to look internally for the very qualities they recognized in the music, and to use their study of Balkan vocal styles as an opportunity to learn about themselves, their own voices and cultural bias as well” (211). This points, once again, to the therapeutic and transformative dynamics involved in “performing the other”.

## Gifts from Georgia

As we turn our attention from the Balkans to the Caucasus we will find a degree of continuity with regard both to specific features of the music that appeal to Western singers and to the meanings and values that they ascribe to it. The Georgian story is especially interesting for what it reveals about the **(p.190)** way in which affiliations and networks develop. It also allows me to examine at closer quarters different kinds of teaching methodologies and to pursue in greater detail the theme of performance as a path to self-knowledge.

Su Parlby’s description of her close encounter with Bulgarian singing as quoted above offered a striking example of the intensely visceral level at which sound can be experienced. Similarly visceral imagery occurs repeatedly in interviewees’ narratives about their attraction to Georgian music, which often begins with a road-to-Damascus-style conversion or an experience akin to love at first sight. Helen Chadwick casts her mind back to her first encounter with Georgian singers in 1982, when she had travelled with Cardiff Laboratory Theatre to perform at a festival in France. Among the other performers was a Georgian choir. One evening, a feast was laid on for all the artists and in the middle of the meal the Georgians burst into song. Helen's memory of the effect this had on her remains vivid:

> The image that I have always had was that it was like sort of lightning going down and cutting my body up....And it was so powerful....So the falling in love happened actually then.
>
> (Chadwick interview 2008)

For Nina Chandler, too, after hearing Georgian singing for the first time there was no going back:

> It was like reaching into my heart and just grabbing me....[It] just spoke to me really....I love doing the other traditions. It's just something about *this* one that became important to *me*.
>
> (Chandler interview 2009)

The notion of instant recognition also appears in Roz Walker's account of her response to her first Georgian workshop experience: "This is really it...the music I've wanted to do for so long." She elaborates on what it was that held her spellbound: "You've got these ages of kind of waiting for the magic to happen and then suddenly it kicks in and you're like, whoa, you're really home, and it was very strong" (interview 2007). Images of homecoming feature more explicitly in Katherina Garratt-Adams's explanation of what Georgian music means to her:

> It's just so grounding. To me it's like home. It's hard to describe but it's like I've known it all my life and yet I haven't, but it's so familiar. It just feels very, very much a sort of primeval sound, if you like.
>
> (Garratt-Adams interview 2011)

Nina also talks about the "magic" of the harmonies. The individual parts, she muses, can sound deceptively straightforward when they're taught in isolation: "It's the alchemy of putting those three parts together and suddenly: spine-tingling" (Chandler interview 2009). **(p.191)**

Zaka Aman has been smitten by the Georgian bug ever since he attended a workshop at the Giving Voice festival in Aberystwyth. When I asked what it was about the Georgian songs that particularly “grabbed” him, he answered without hesitation:

> The harmonies. Definitely the harmonies. I mean, definitely, definitely the harmonies….It grinds, it rattles, it shakes me. It’s like the music gets into my bones and my body and whizzes me around in a way that I *really* love and enjoy….The sound takes me and there’s nothing else….It is like a hundred percent sound and it takes me and massages me and it brings me to the here and now and the whole rest of the world disappears and I just feel bathed in sound and absorbed in or by sound and it’s really *good* sound, it’s *nice*.
>
> (Aman interview 2009)

Zaka’s choice of words, together with the rhythmic pattern of his speech, is especially suggestive, pointing to a state that has obvious transcendental and ecstatic qualities and may be understood in psychological terms as a euphoric peak experience (see Maslow 1964). The fact that Zaka was able to speak at some length in such an animated and intensely engaged manner while sitting, late at night, outside a pub on a busy London side street with motorbikes roaring past would seem to indicate that the sense of euphoria experienced when singing the songs can also be evoked by the memory of singing.

As in the case of Bulgarian multipart singing, some of these effects can be attributed to the way in which the music, as a structural and acoustic phenomenon, is experienced as novel, exotic, and liberating when compared with more familiar Western idioms. Especially appealing is the fact that many of Georgia’s regions preserve seemingly archaic modal styles, with scales built around the fifth or fourth rather than the octave. For the listener, the music further derives its distinctive character from its finely-tuned but untempered intervals, unexpected harmonic sequences that bear no relation to those found in Western functional harmony, and a clear preference in some regional styles for chords that in the Western system would be termed discordant, such as the ubiquitous 1–4–5 chord (e.g. C–F–G, often referred to in early twentieth-century Georgian writings as a trichord or “Georgian triad”). Further thrills are derived from the penchant for parallel fifths, tritones, and other harmonic procedures that have long been proscribed in Western classical music. Like Bulgarian songs, Georgian songs may also appear to be vestiges of an archaic culture imagined as more organic, authentic, and infused with the supernatural, in this case not only on account of the sound but also because of the preservation in some song texts of a lexicon believed to be derived from pre-Christian, esoteric cults related to the sun or to ancient deities associated with fertility or healing.

The vibrancy of the Georgian singing scene in the United Kingdom is largely a legacy of the work of Georgian singer and ethnomusicologist Edisher **(p.192)**

Garakanidze prior to his untimely death in 1998. As a student and later a teacher in the Department of Georgian Traditional Music at Tbilisi State Conservatoire, Edisher undertook regular fieldwork expeditions to remote parts of the country, thereby acquiring expertise in the different regional singing styles as well as an intimate knowledge of village life and folklore. Together with his friend and colleague Joseph Jordania, Edisher first visited Britain in 1994 at the invitation of the Centre for Performance Research. The event in question was a week-long conference on the theme of performance, food, and cookery. As Edisher recalls, “The invitation was unexpected as I had never been good at cooking” (2004a: viii). It soon became clear, however, that he was being invited to teach Georgian singing in preparation for the closing event on the final evening, which (in typical CPR fashion) was to be a Georgian-style feast that would be incomplete without Georgian-style toasts and songs. The CPR assembled an ad hoc choir of around twenty-five singers and Edisher and Joseph spent the week teaching them a set of eighteen songs. Such was the success of the enterprise that one of the guests at the feast was heard to wonder how the organisation had been able to finance bringing a whole choir over from the Caucasus.

Edisher made several return visits to the United Kingdom in the years that followed; Helen Chadwick was instrumental in strengthening this connection, initially travelling with him as a translator on workshop tours she coordinated. In addition to leading more workshops for the CPR and other organisations (Figure 6.1), Edisher was soon working with community choirs across the country, many of which were directed by singers who had taken part in the original **(p.193)** sessions.[16] In this way, he helped establish a common repertoire that would be consolidated with the appearance of the book *99 Georgian Songs: A Collection of Traditional Folk, Church and Urban Songs from Georgia*, completed and published after his death. It was the enthusiasm, competence, and commitment of the expanding British Georgian-singing community that inspired Edisher to start work on the collection. Joan Mills, in her preface to the book, alludes to the speed with which the seeds planted by Edisher and Joseph propagated:

> That such a songbook is needed is a matter of much credit to both Edisher and his friend, close collaborator and colleague, Joseph Jordania....Only a few years ago it would have seemed unimaginable that a book containing nothing but songs, from a country that most people in the UK would have found hard to locate on the world map, should be not only viable, but awaited with impatience.
>
> (Mills 2004: vi)

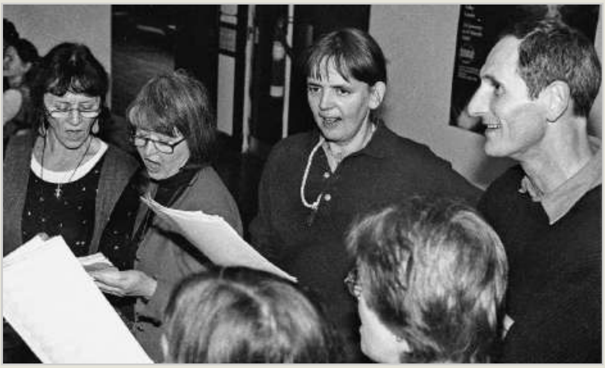

*Figure 6.1* Edisher Garakanidze leading a Georgian singing workshop at the International Workshop Festival, Glasgow, 1997.

*Source*: Photo courtesy of Simon Richardson (with thanks also to the International Workshop Festival).

As Joan goes on to indicate, Edisher's approach was in many ways compatible with the natural voice ethos, as in his conviction that "everybody without exception has the ability to sing, just the same as to laugh, cry, and run. It is from God." She also recalls how Edisher had once spoken of workshop participants taking a "step towards working at internal obstacles and complexes and one step to an internal freedom" and had coined the term "medicine for musical difficulties" to describe what he viewed as one of the book's defining qualities. He insisted that the volume should be primarily a workbook for singers and not a technical or academic work: "It is for singers in the west who want to learn these songs, but want to know about the meaning, where the songs come from, singing style and so on" (2004a: vi). In his introduction to the collection, Edisher writes:

> From experience I have learnt that a practical workshop is still the best way to come into contact with folk music and to go deep into it. This is because it allows participants to obtain ethnomusicological, historical, geographic and ethnographic information at the same time as communicating directly with the music. This kind of empirical knowledge cannot be replaced by lectures or seminars: workshop participants become the co-owners of a culture that stems from the depth of centuries and millennia!
>
> (Garakanidze 2004a: ix)

Edisher's style of teaching offers interesting insights into the process of adapting material in a foreign musical language in a way that makes it accessible for non-native apprentices and also better suited to the choir format. The majority of Georgia's polyphonic songs are in three parts, with a smaller number in two or four parts. In most cases, the authentic performance of a three-part song requires that each of the two upper parts be sung by a single voice. Furthermore, as Edisher writes in *The Performance of Georgian Folk Song*: **(p.194)**

> A performer who was educated in a traditional society does not have once-and-forever established single versions of songs. As a rule, a performer varies the different melodic and rhythmic features each time s/he sings a song.
>
> (Garakanidze 2007: 153)[17]

Anzor Erkomaishvili, long-time director of the Rustavi Choir and now president of the International Centre for Georgian Folk Song, underlines the same principle: “In general, there are as many variants of a song as good performers. Don’t take this as boasting, but each time I sing the same song differently” (2005: 30). This is one area in which compromises clearly have to be made in adapting a song for use by a larger ensemble with more than one voice to a part. A degree of standardisation—fixing melodic and rhythmic motifs that might otherwise vary from one rendition to the next and simplifying ornamental flourishes—has to take place to enable all of the voices on a given part to sing in unison. In the early days, therefore, Edisher and Joseph selected their material carefully, giving preference to songs from western Georgia that lent themselves more readily to being performed by large groups than the less measured and more highly ornamented table songs from eastern Georgia, for example.

The pronunciation of the Georgian language, with its complex consonant clusters and inclusion of several consonants that have no counterpart in most European languages, presents a considerable challenge to non-native singers. Edisher described his twofold solution to this problem: “I usually select songs with as little text as possible for foreigners. In workshops I usually deliberately decrease the number of consonants in the text” (2004b: xv). Making such compromises was in keeping with his categorisation of the authentic, rural performance style as “a higher level of learning which is by no means compulsory for all of those interested in Georgian music”. Achieving this higher level is not ruled out, he explained, but “it needs special training, which involves listening to authentic recordings, travelling to Georgian villages in different regions, and establishing personal contact with traditional singers” (xvi). Such training has, since Edisher wrote these words, been pursued by a growing number of his former protegés as well as more recent recruits, as we shall see in chapter 8. Initially, however, he did not want undue agonising over matters of authenticity to overshadow an endeavour that for him was informed by other, equally important objectives.

The process of adapting the material for choirs (as in Bulgaria, although not with quite the same aesthetic) began in Georgia with the fashion of formal ensembles offering staged performances. These can be dated back to the establishment of the Kartuli Khoro in 1885, but they were to proliferate in the Soviet years. Edisher’s use of the term “secondary folklore” to characterise these ensembles referred not only to the fact that the songs had been removed from their primary habitat but also to the way in which non-traditional **(p.195)** aspects of musical organisation and performance practice were adopted under the influence of modern European music. One European influence identified by Edisher was the deliberate teaching of individual parts and the permanent assignment of a singer to a particular part; this was in contradistinction to the natural method of learning by hearing the song in its entirety throughout one’s childhood and later not only coming to distinguish the separate vocal lines but also becoming adept at singing each of them (see Garakanidze 2007: 160–161). Town- and city-based ensembles were typically made up of singers from different regions, and their repertoire featured songs from all over Georgia; this was in contrast to village ensembles that specialised in songs from their own local heritage. This in itself often resulted in a degree of normalisation as the finer nuances of local tuning systems and timbres were lost. In the case of choirs like Anzor Erkomaishvili’s multi-award-winning Rustavi Choir, which undertook extensive overseas tours in the Soviet period, supposedly rough edges would be smoothed over and an extra layer of polish added in deference to the supposed expectations and tastes of Western audiences, as well as the practicalities of singing on stage in large concert halls. These processes of standardisation and adaptation, together with the narrowing of the gap between Caucasian and Western European practices, might be seen to have paved the way for the later transfer of the material to non-native choirs.

Joseph Jordania, meanwhile, has further perspectives to contribute to debates about authenticity:

> I think that when foreigners are learning Georgian songs there is this kind of fear sometimes that [because] they are singing some kind of a foreign culture, they have to stay as close as possible to be respectful to the tradition, and because of that sometimes they might restrain their creativity, restrain their feelings [about] how they would like to change there and to think the way that they would like to.
>
> (Jordania interview 2007)

For his part, he would like to hear people in the different places in which the songs settle singing them in their own way. A Mozart sonata, he says, is always the same Mozart sonata. A pianist of any nationality should play exactly the same notes, otherwise “it’s wrong”. It is equally wrong, on the other hand, to treat traditional songs as if they were written traditions. “It should be still a live tradition, because life for tradition is changing itself.” It is important to him to teach people to understand this principle. “When you’re learning,” he says, “the first few songs—you’re kind of more respectful...you don’t know. You can’t start improvising.” As you become freer, however, you can start to improvise and do different things with the material.

Another fundamental component of Edisher's work was to offer a window onto the sociocultural world from which the songs came as a way of allowing people to get closer to the spirit of the music. Helen Chadwick was especially **(p.196)** struck by Edisher's skill in presenting information about the social and historical context of the songs in such a way as to shape the sound made by the singers he was working with at any given moment. She describes how, having taught the parts to a song, he would stop and contextualise it by, for example, getting the group to imagine that they were in a tiny fifth-century church on top of a hill; or he might tell a story about the war in Chechnya. When they returned to the singing:

> The song would fly in a different way and that was wonderful....I guess it's making a connection between the people who are in the room and the material, as opposed to it just being some nice harmonies and a few words; giving a *reason* to sing—not just it's a healing song but imagine there's a sick child or whatever.
>
> (Chadwick interview 2008)

Edisher's more general evocation of the function of songs in his home culture directly informed the affective as well as the intellectual response of many of his British students. Frank Rozelaar-Green, for example, citing Edisher's edict that "singing is about meeting and about meeting people, and that is the community of song", goes on:

> It's a physical thing; it's a visceral thing. You don't just stand and sing. In Georgia...every human activity has a song attached to it....Every song has a specific relation to life. So in that sense I find that far easier to connect to because it's *about* something, it isn't just *a song*. The song itself has a history and has a root....They always talk about heart, singing from the heart.
>
> (Frank Rozelaar-Green interview 2008)

Speaking of how Edisher's way of working influenced her own work, Helen also pays homage to his selfless and uncomplicated desire to share the songs: "I was very, very influenced...by the way he *taught*, because...he had this phenomenal generosity....He just loved people to do it and he was just giving his stuff to everyone" (interview 2008). The fact that he gave permission for his transcriptions to be copied and freely circulated, and encouraged everyone to sing the songs in their own way and to the best of their ability, was fundamental to the joy, as well as the speed, with which the songs took root in British soil.

Frank Kane's methods for teaching Georgian songs to non-Georgian singers offer a fascinating complement to Edisher's methods.[18] Frank originally encountered Georgian music as a member of the Yale Russian Chorus. Following his first visit to Georgia in 1984, when the chorus performed in joint concerts with the Rustavi Choir and the Georgian State Ensemble, he co-founded the US-based Kartuli Ensemble. In 1988, he relocated to France to study Georgian language and culture at the Institute of Oriental Languages **(p.197)** and later launched the ensembles Marani and Irinola in Paris. Combining his intimate knowledge of Georgia’s regional singing dialects with an understanding of the starting point and pedagogical needs of singers from a Western background, he has become a key player in the dissemination of Georgian material outside Georgia; he now leads workshops in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the United States, and Canada, as well as in Britain and Ireland. In 1995, he was awarded a silver medal from the Georgian Ministry of Culture for his achievements in promoting Georgian culture abroad.

Frank has developed a range of techniques that are surprisingly effective in helping non-Georgians achieve a more authentic sound. His initial experiments were prompted by his conviction that, because what the Western apprentice hears is “put through the filter of their own prior experience and frame of reference”, simply listening and repeating was not sufficient (Kane 2003: 558). He therefore set out to devise exercises that would help his French students locate the untempered intervals used in Georgian singing and improve their perception of harmonics (an important component of timbre). Working with a French singer and voice trainer inspired by Tibetan and Tuvan throat singing helped his choir members develop the ability “to hear and identify those harmonics most audible in Georgian singing and also the points at which these harmonics converge when Georgian chorus sing in polyphony” (559). He then began to pay greater attention to what he terms the “physical disposition and intention” of the singers, in this case drawing on his study of tai chi and Alexander technique. Close observation of Georgian singers—how they stand, open their mouths, move their jaws, and use the breath—brought a series of further insights. These included, for example, the realisation that Georgian village singers deployed the larynx and its muscles differently from Western singers, and also that they rely more on the throat area behind the tongue for vowel formation, which then has an affect on the way in which harmonics are produced. He explains:

> By gaining a better understanding of how Georgian singers *produce* their sound, non-Georgian singers are no longer simply imitating a sound, they are imitating the physical gestures and intentions which form this sound.
>
> (Kane 2003: 561)

Of central importance in Frank’s work today is the idea of vibrations. In his own attempts to get closer to “the Georgian sound”, he says, he felt that there was “a big piece missing…until I worked on the notion of vibration” (interview 2012). Georgian village singers, he realised, produce a lot of vibration on the surface of the skin, especially in the face, and he now devotes a lot of time to exercises that help his students to locate, control, and amplify these vibrations.

In his workshops, then, Frank does not simply teach Georgian songs; rather, his goal is “to lead people to an experience of that sound”. This goal is **(p.198)** underpinned by the fact that he does not see a one-to-one correlation between *sounding* Georgian and *being* Georgian:

> For me, the Georgians have that kind of sound because they have implemented certain technical building blocks that get them there. In other words, they have a certain form of vocal production, a certain way of welcoming the voice in their own bodies, of harnessing vibration and using it, which produces that sound. Is it possible for a non-Georgian to learn to do that? Absolutely.
>
> (Kane interview 2012)

This in turn relates to his conviction that

> Georgian singing, as a point of entry to gain a knowledge of the voice, vibration and harmony singing, has a pan-human dimension and, like hatha yoga or tai chi, is a practice that can and should be shared with and available to all humanity.
>
> (Kane, pers. comm. 2012)

In this sense, Georgian music is not only a cultural phenomenon but also “a useful school of voice technique” that transcends national and ethnic borders (interview 2012).

David Tugwell (founder of the Edinburgh-based Georgian choir Torola, now reconstituted as Skotebi) explains that his first encounter with Frank’s work represented a major breakthrough in his engagement with Georgian singing:

> I met Frank and that really changed everything about Georgian music for me. I completely saw it in a different way, what it was about, how to sing it —everything. It was really a life-changing event.
>
> (Tugwell interview 2011)

Pressed to elaborate on the nature of his new understanding, he goes on to speak of

> getting into the *connection*—this idea that you’re not just singing the parts and it being a pretty kind of thing to do. It’s a way of really connecting, a way of changing yourself too; a way of working, feeling all kinds of parts of your body, and opening up in all kinds of ways.…I don’t think before I really

> realised why I was interested in it. If someone asked me “why are you interested in these songs?” I’d just say, “well, they’re nice songs…I don’t really know why.” Frank made me realise why I liked the songs, or what I was looking for and why they were appealing.
>
> (Tugwell interview 2011)

David’s subsequent reference to it being “almost an out-of-body experience when you’re really in the groove of singing with people you know” suggests that the kind of deeper understanding of what he describes as “the connection” **(p. 199)** then contributes directly to the transcendental state of *communitas* that is achieved in the act of singing.

As we enter the second decade of the twenty-first century, the Georgian singing scene in Britain and Ireland is more vibrant than ever. The largest and longest standing of the dedicated Georgian choirs is the London choir Maspindzeli. Originally named Songs of the Caucasus, it was set up by Helen Chadwick the year after Edisher’s death to raise money to help support his son, Gigi (Giorgi), who had survived the road accident that claimed the lives of the rest of the family. After several changes of leadership Maspindzeli is, at the time of writing, directed by native Georgian Tamta Turmanidze, who also leads a smaller female ensemble, Tabuni. Georgian choirs and ensembles can be found in a number of other towns and cities; they include Chela in Cambridge, Borjghali in Bristol, Samzeo in Leeds, Zurmukhti in Dublin, Alilo in Findhorn, and Thornlie Primary Georgian Choir in Wishaw (Scotland). Visits by Georgian singers continue to multiply; their workshop and concert tours are publicised via bodies such as the Georgian Harmony Association (formed in 1998 to serve as a forum for continuing Edisher’s work), the more recently established Northern Georgian Society, and the NVPN. The singers are typically hosted by community choir members, and this further strengthens personal as well as professional connections. In addition to attending workshops in their own locality, Georgian singing enthusiasts often meet at weekend or weeklong residential events. New singing groups continue to form on the back of such workshops, which also provide new converts with a starter-pack of songs. Members of the more established choirs regularly travel to Georgia to learn directly from songmasters in the villages (see chapter 8). They might also be invited to perform on stage at a festival or at the biennial International Symposium on Traditional Polyphony hosted by the State Conservatoire in Tbilisi, where they then encounter “foreign” Georgian choirs from other parts of the world as well (▶ see video tracks 06.01–06.06).

The many gifts that Georgia has bestowed—from Edisher’s initial generosity in sharing his songs to a more general perception of the therapeutic power of Georgian harmonies—have induced a strong sense of responsibility and an urge to give something in return. On learning of Edisher’s death, choirs with whom he had worked all over the country set about raising funds for his son Gigi's hospital care.[19] When Russian forces invaded Georgia in the summer of 2008, a worldwide action was promptly launched under the banner "Let's Sing for Peace in Georgia", both to express solidarity and to draw public attention to Georgia's plight. Support has also been extended to broader charitable and humanitarian causes and to cultural development projects, either through such organisations as SOS Children's Villages or via direct personal connections of the kind we will learn more about in chapter 8. **(p.200)**

## Authenticity, Alterity, and Possession

Viewed together, the cases surveyed in this chapter point to some interesting new themes and perspectives as well as reinforcing those introduced more generally in the previous chapter. Both the personal attraction to world songs and their suitability for natural-voice-style choirs, workshops, and summer camps clearly have many dimensions over and above the appeal of the songs as purely musical entities. While many singers do experience an intensely pleasurable and irresistible response to the sound itself—especially "the harmonies"—and delight in the richness of vocal and creative possibilities that different musical styles expose them to, the songs are also valued on account of the meaningfulness that is attributed to them. This may be with regard to their role in traditional societies associated with an "ancient", "natural", or more "wholesome" way of life, or in the sense of an explicit message that is carried by the lyrics. The songs are also seen to have educational and mediatory functions, being valued for the window they offer onto other people's lives and worldviews and the potential this has to contribute to greater empathy and global understanding. At the same time, singing songs from the world's oral traditions offers a means to enter into community with others closer to home. In providing an alternative to more familiar repertoire that may be tainted by unwelcome associations or constrained by convention, these songs-from-elsewhere can also be part of a process of empowerment. This in turn relates to the way in which at an individual level the trope of "finding one's voice" takes on figurative as well as literal dimensions.

Perhaps most importantly, these case studies underline arguments for the need to rethink dominant assumptions about authenticity, appropriation, and ownership. It has become customary to present musical appropriation as an ambivalent act in which, to borrow Steven Feld's terms, "a melody of admiration, even homage and respect, a fundamental source of connectedness, creativity, and innovation…is harmonized by a counter-melody of power, even control and domination, a fundamental asymmetry in ownership and commodification" (1994b: 238)—with the latter, more negative voice usually gaining the higher ground. Feld may be referring here to blatantly problematic cases involving popular music artists like Paul Simon, where (as was the case with Simon's *Graceland* project) the line between exploration and exploitation is thinly drawn; yet similar anxieties nag at the heels of those who, like the contributors to Solís’s *Performing Ethnomusicology*, promote participatory world music ensembles in educational settings. As Solís writes in the introduction to the collection, “whether we adhere fiercely to what we perceive as orthodoxy, or shed all pretexts to ‘accurate’ reproduction, we know we may be charged with either neocolonialism or irresponsible cultural squandering” (2004: 17). One of the objectives of the contributors to the volume is to work though these challenges and dilemmas and to present the case for the defence, **(p.201)** arguing that, as David Locke puts it, “good information about the non-West helps open a contact zone. We need not be trapped in an inevitable world of exploitation” (2004: 188). In a chapter aptly titled “Bilateral Negotiations in Bimusicality”, Anne Rasmussen points not to the imbalance of power but to the imbalance of anxiety when she describes how her “hang-up about playing the music of a people ‘whose blood doesn’t flow in my veins’” was dissipated by her two-year residence in Indonesia, where, in Jakarta, she witnessed professional Indonesian musicians playing all manner of “foreign” music, including rock and roll, reggae, *nuevo flamenco*, jazz, Western art music, disco, Christian hymns, and Arab religious and pop music (2004: 217).

The examples I have presented here certainly do not correspond to the image of a magpie-like stockpiling of gems and curiosities; nor, as a general rule, are songs simply plucked out of thin air, as if on a passing whim. In each case, the music’s path has been paved by a series of personal connections and initiatives. Culture-bearers have been willing and proactive parties to the exchange, either assuming the role of teacher or endorsing the efforts of non-native go-betweens like Frank Kane or Su Hart, whose practice is based on intimate insider knowledge of the songs’ place of origin and long-standing relations with communities in that culture. In *Borrowed Power: Essays on Cultural Appropriation*, Bruce Ziff and Pratima Rao introduce the notion of cultural appropriation as “just one form of cultural transmission” (1997: 5). As a more neutral term but one that also acknowledges the agency of the transmitter and the processes of dedicated teaching and learning that take place, transmission seems to offer a better fit for the kinds of crossovers and direct exchanges I have described here.

It is especially significant that many of the voices we have encountered speaking about cultural heritage as a human resource that should not be constrained by geographical, genetic, or political boundaries have been those of culture-bearers themselves. Here, we might again ponder Edisher Garakanidze’s statement that workshop participants become co-owners of a culture. A teacher like Edisher is a kind of channel who momentarily pushes aside the veil between worlds so that the wisdom and truth of one may pass over to the other. The “learner as initiate” might also be seen as possessed—with a different voice, a different spirit, a different understanding; seeing (to invoke again Heidi’s formulation, quoted in chapter 5) out of other eyes, singing out of other throats. Certainly Edisher would have his students enchanted and transported to the Georgia he conjured up for them. Here, the notion of “possessing” a song is cast in a different light. Perhaps this is a clue to what Edisher meant when he used the term “co-owners”.

The position adopted by those who share their culture in this way resonates with the more positive framing of transculturalism by theorists such as Ulf Hannerz. Observing how “cultural diversity within the global ecumene can be used as a kind of reserve of improvements and alternatives to what is at any **(p.202)** one time immediately available in one’s own culture, and of solutions to its problems”, Hannerz goes on to point out:

> One curious thing about the economics of culture, of course, is that this reserve, this particular kind of transnational common, does not risk becoming depleted merely because people borrow heavily from it, as people can keep giving meanings and their expressions away to others without losing them for themselves.
>
> (Hannerz 1996: 62)

Javanese musician Hardja Susilo expresses similar sentiments in a more down-to-earth way. Asked whether he ever has any qualms about appropriation (in this case, of gamelan music by American students) as an act of colonisation, Susilo replies:

> To me that is political talk. I am frankly honored that you guys are studying the gamelan, that you think it is a worthy subject. A lot of Indonesians don’t think so, you know. So, appropriate all you want. You see, it isn’t like “if you take it then I don’t have it anymore.” This is a case where if you take it then we have two, you see. If other people take it, too, then we have three of whatever it is you are supposed to take. So, it isn’t like a flute; if you take it, then I don’t have it. If this music culture is lost, that is not because you take it, but because they, the Javanese, are neglecting it.
>
> (Susilo 2004: 66)

One might even go so far as to argue that, faced with the invitation to join the party, keeping one’s hands off “other people’s music” might be tantamount to a form of cultural boycott.

Another strong thread running through these case studies is the notion of a song as a fluid entity that is never performed the same way twice. This, too, complicates notions of authenticity if authenticity is defined as “faithfulness to the source”. In the case of African music, Georgian music, or almost any other music from a living oral tradition, what is to be learnt—by insiders and outsiders alike—is not so much a fixed repertoire as a way of improvising in the style, and this may be seen as part of a broader project of fulfilling one’s creative potential.

Michelle Kisliuk and Kelly Gross's reflections on Michelle's teaching of BaAka music and dance to a student group at the University of Virginia are pertinent here. They suggest that the goal should be seen not as *imitation* but as *interpretation*:

> Since BaAka never sing the "same" song the "same" way, how do we even know when we have learned what constitutes a particular song? Were we to become objectivist thinkers and be solely bent on imitating the sound of recorded examples, we would not learn to improvise in the style. How, then, could we judge if the sound is a BaAka sound without having come to an embodied understanding **(p.203)** that sound is actually fused with social process? This performing and learning context allows us to ask fundamental questions about what it means to create expressive identities through performance.
>
> (Kisliuk and Gross 2004: 253)

The transformative potential of performance as a site for reconfiguring one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to the rest of the world has been another recurring theme. David Locke's answer to the question "why are people interested in music from other cultures?" is "because it enables them to encounter subjectivity quite different from their own" (2004: 180). In fact, performance is dialogic in a twofold sense: the performer enters into dialogue with external others but also with different aspects of the self. Once we accept that participants are not simply finding a singing voice but are rediscovering, at a far more existential level, hidden, suppressed, or unfulfilled parts of themselves, and that this is made possible precisely by engaging with "the Other"—in a way that liberates them from precisely those things that prevent such self-discovery within their own cultural norms—then this is surely too important a phenomenon to be dismissed as fake posturing or casual pilfering. If we cling to rooted historical cultural experience as the sole source of authenticity, then we miss many points about music itself: where its power lies and how it "works" in the interstices of the technical and the affective. And if the transformation offered by performance is seen (in psychoanalytical terms) as part of the process of self-realisation, then shying away from the challenge and possible trauma of this encounter becomes an expression of cowardice or what Dwight Conquergood has dubbed "the Skeptic's Cop-out" (1985: 8). The notion of performance as a route to liberation and transcendence may also be related to Patrick Johnson's insistence on the need to challenge racial stereotypes and look beyond what Stuart Hall has termed the "obsessive fascination with the bodies of the performers" that all too often precludes a more fruitful discussion "of music and its attendant dramaturgy, performance, ritual and gesture" (cited in Johnson 2003: 197). In challenging monolithic, essentialising notions of identity, then, performance does important political work. As Johnson puts it, "the mutual border crossing of identities may be a productive cultural and social process that furthers a progressive politics of difference” (197) with music providing “an opportunity to engage in a conversation with the Other and the self so that both may be better understood” (206).

Notes:

(1.) Nineteen masterpieces were recognised in the first proclamation (May 2001), twenty-eight in the second (November 2003), and forty-three in the third and final proclamation (November 2005). The proclamation format has since been replaced by the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, launched with the ninety “elements” from the three original proclamations, and the List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding. The first inscriptions to these lists were made in 2009.

(2.) For further discussion of the impact of the UNESCO declaration on cultural developments in Georgia, see Bithell 2014.

(3.) Gospel figured prominently in Nick’s work from that point on, and his songbooks (including *Heaven in my Heart* and *Everytime I Feel the Spirit*) feature a number of arrangements of traditional gospel songs, together with his own compositions in gospel style.

(4.) Johnson adds that this tendency to universalise gospel music that emerged in early interviews with choir members did change following a trip that the choir undertook to the United States to visit a series of black churches where they could experience what they saw as “authentic” gospel.

(5.) Following Anita’s return to Belgium, the Afropean Choir continued to operate under its new name, Mizike.

(6.) The English term “pygmy”—which technically applies to any ethnic group in which the height of the average adult male is under 150 cm—is now generally considered a pejorative. It is difficult, however, to find a satisfactory alternative that embraces the many different groups covered by this term. The Ba-Benzélé (a subdivision of the Aka) use the designation Bayaka to refer to all “pygmy” peoples in central Africa, themselves included, but this usage is by no means universal. In many sources, including those I am drawing on here, pygmy (or the French *pygmée*) continues to be used without further qualification and without scare quotes.

(7.) The Luaka Bop release remained at number one on *Billboard*’s World Music Album charts for a period of four months.

(8.) By the 1990s, “Nkosi Sikelel’ iAfrika” had been adopted as the national anthem of several other African countries, including Zambia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, and Namibia.

(9.) See http://www.bakabeyond.net/, acc. March 21, 2012.

(10.) *Baka: People of the Rainforest* was screened again on BBC2 in February 2012, in tandem with a new film, *Baka: A Cry from the Rainforest*, made during a follow-up visit to the same Baka family twenty-five years later.

(11.) The British-Bulgarian Friendship Society was founded in 1952 as a non-political organisation aiming to promote friendship, understanding, and cultural relations between the people of Britain and Bulgaria. See www.bbfs.org.uk, acc. March 22, 2012.

(12.) Data from http://www.bnr.bg/RadioBulgaria/Emission_English/Theme_Music/Material/ koprivshitsa_festival.htm, acc. July 20, 2009.

(13.) This slim volume contains transcriptions, lyrics, and translations for several songs, together with vivid descriptions of local rituals.

(14.) For a more detailed explication of the kinds of effects referred to here, see Rice 1988.

(15.) Sue’s account is reminiscent of Ethel Raim’s description of how, after hearing a fellow American woman producing an authentic Balkan sound and thus realising that singing in this way “was within my *physiological grasp*”, she “got on the parking lot and…started letting loose and to my amazement there was this whole recourse of sound that I never knew was there” (quoted in Laušević 2007: 210).

(16.) Helen also hosted Edisher in London, where she arranged for him to work at the National Theatre Studio. It was the singers from the National Theatre Studio Choir who would later form the core of the choir for the first Sing for Water.

(17.) From “Conclusions”, English translation by Joseph Jordania. The book was written by Edisher in 1992–1993 and published posthumously, with the addition of Joseph’s translation of the concluding summary.

(18.) My present exposition of Frank Kane’s teaching methods is a variation on an earlier discussion where I developed at greater length the theme of non-native teacher as transmitter and intermediary between culture-bearers and Western apprentices (see Bithell 2012).

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(19.) Gigi Garakanidze went on to assume leadership of Mtiebi, one of the groups founded by his father, and also taught regularly in the UK. When Gigi passed away unexpectedly at the age of only thirty, contributions were made to help his wife and small child.

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