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# **About musical performance in traditional French Guiana: expression of a singular cognitive sociocultural system through the art of “musical statement”**

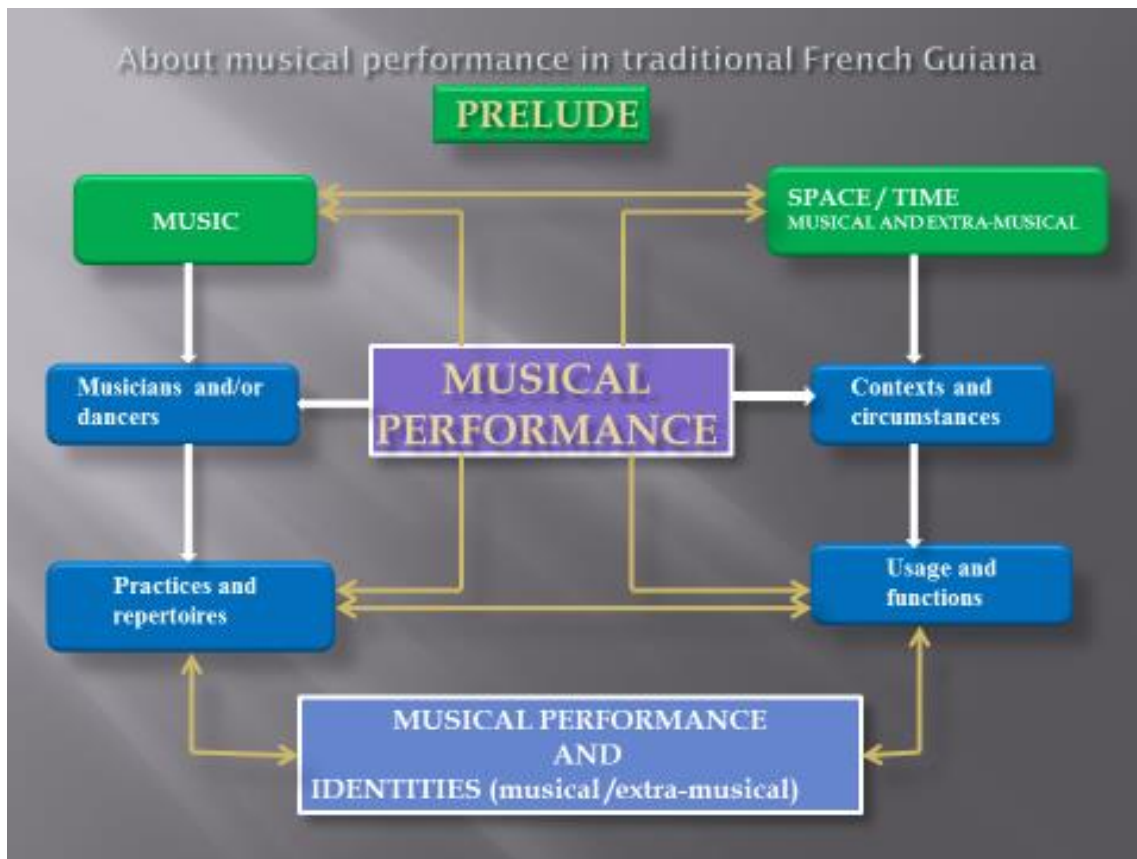
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In this article, I present one of the important aspects of French Guiana’s traditional music culture. As the reader will notice through the quoted bibliographical references, it is a research field which is still very little studied in musical and musicological fields. There are more general works in History and a few ones in Anthropology. So, this article is one of the unpublished contributions to fill this gap.

Guianese culture and traditional music, here evoked, are various. They are indeed the product of several – sometimes antagonistic – cultures. They are also the product of several languages and of diverse peoples such as European colonists, African slaves and autochthonous Amerindians. So, it is not an addition of cultures, but more a transcultural process, that, along centuries, gave an original result born in the Americas, in Guiana in this case. It is a form of refoundation, of recreation of cultures and new human beings generally called Creoles. The musical performance, that I study here, is the echo of social and cultural space of this reformulation of thought, life and conception of the world. It is, as well, a mean of transposition and transformation of the values issued of diverse sources and categories. It is in no way a second-rate cultural practice, as it is the place where were born philosophies and actions for common life as well as for individual life. It is the symbolic place of mixing cultures, of the major social and societal challenges too. Music that comes from it represents for every Guyanese the mean or the basis to read the world and to be related to others and to his community.

It seemed, to me, more pertinent in this first musicological presentation to offer a global reading (to get a better determination of its issues) in order to deal with such a problematical question, and to allow the reader to understand better its essence and signification. This is why I propose a cognitive approach with a multi-disciplinary point of view. It is especially linked with semiotics -so as to notice the signs, the symbols and the representations that give it a signification and allow to understand its goals and the significances of its cultural system. The socio-anthropological point of view is essential to put forward the representation and the representativeness of the Guyanese in his sociocultural environment through a musical performance. Musicology, through its historical, systematic, systemic and ethnological aspects, will allow us to be aware of the meaning of the music and of the practices that result from it, as well as of the underlying identity and socio-political constructions.

Here is, to begin with, a scheme that summarizes its components and their interactions.



Like in many cultures in the world, in traditional French Guiana, music is an act that has a multi-sensory dimension. It is implemented through a distinctive performance all in all. It remains a practice as well as a process during which the musical ideas are completed and played to be seen as much as to be heard and to say things in a singular way. Moreover, this performance is an ideal channel to transfer all kinds of messages. This is a practice that is realized through a musical performance which is not only the result of an organisation or even of a simple juxtaposition or synchronization of technical and aesthetic elements. Music is not only the result of an ensemble of sounds and visual events. It is also connected to the context, the circumstances and the specific spaces, all of them underpinned by various areas of temporal and timeless life. This results in multiple and rich knowledge and know-how, and various forms of intersection as well, all being developed based on the intrinsic cultural principles. These are principles that musicians, dancers and/or singers translate into musical pieces and dances. The latter are of a wide variety of perceptual configurations.

Indeed, like elsewhere, French Guianese musical performance turns out to be the expression of a unique tradition carried by a sociocultural system where the art of "say music" is a principle both capital and original. This art generates various languages. These are realized through some dynamic practices, in an original situation as well as in an adaptation or transposition situation. Furthermore, these languages leave reflected a real reviving of traditions, but a better adaptation and transposition of the ancestral musical heritage as well. These legacies nourish new creations and open promising future prospects for the plural musical culture of French Guiana.

The musical performances take place in multiple contexts here. Some traditional productions are often ritual or ceremonial. They are community or inter-community and can sometimes serve as collective entertainment or even solitary games. Other performances are

implemented during balls, concerts or under other forms of entertainment, sometimes circumstantial, some other times during reconstruction.

Like elsewhere, the music produced in French Guiana remains a complex process as well as a complicated mental activity. It is a movement and an exceptional heartfelt gesture. It organizes, links and filters what will be seized again and reintroduced into the sensory. It constitutes, at the same time, a culture of communication and of social representation from which result different forms of practices and of language discourse. Consequently, it is an important field of knowledge. It is used as means and as knowledge acquisition mechanism. In addition, music has a referential function generating various communications that, in many ways, serve to inform and/or translate a thought. Specifically, this music orientates and allows for organizing all kinds of behaviours and social communications. At the same time, it contributes to the diffusion of knowledge and the definition of identities. So, she is made of cognitive elements of actions, references, practices and descriptions that, among others, give a meaning to these identities and to the resulting cultures while being adapted to the circumstances and to the specific contexts of its fulfilment.

By its nature, this French Guianese music remains a "total social fact" (in the words of Marcel Mauss, 1940<sup>1</sup>). As such, it is a perception of the world that, over time, has allowed the representation, the reproduction, the reconstitution and the conservation of the cultural and identity elements while underlying the physical and spiritual human relationships. This organization of the musical experience requires several levels of readings to better understand the underlying performance that is the issue discussed here.

What is then the subject of the musical performance in French Guianese traditional society? What is its nature, its signification and its process of realisation? What contexts, situations and circumstances are underlying it? What nature are the dynamics, interrelations and interactions that compose it? What are the implementation techniques and the intrinsic forms of knowledge? What is the creation process and for what goal?

Without a doubt, questions arising from this issue are still numerous and varied. And the answers one can give are just as numerous. The few basic questions mentioned above are a theme for the reflection conducted here by the author on traditional music of French Guiana. This reflection is the result of a maturing of the readings the author devoted to the literature on this important and complex issue. It is as well the result of a set of *ad hoc* observations conducted on the French Guianese field. The investigations required, among others, some participant and reflective observations. Then was the author able to better comprehend the essence of musical practice, and with it, the sense of musical performance such as is thought and practiced in the French Guianese culture. This field work then allowed the author to submit this concept to the systematic and systemic analysis to enlighten the mysteries of the major parameters of the musical system studied here.

This subject is vast. To illustrate his statements, the author relied mostly on Amerindian musical cultures, Bushinengé and Creole who constitute the pillars of the peoples of French Guiana. However, reality and the sense of musical performance in French Guiana can only be truly seized if the musical thought that engenders it is previously understood. So let us begin by defining the concept here.

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<sup>1</sup> Marcel MAUSS, *Essai sur le don. Forme et raison de l'échange dans les sociétés archaïques* (1925), Introduction by Florence Weber, Quadrige/Presses universitaires de France, 2007.

## The concept of "music" and the musical sense in traditional French Guiana

In the French Guianese social system, the substantive “music” is a cultural marker, a plural concept. Here, the word music is a generic term. It does not only serve to express the reality of artistically and aesthetically organized sound materials to produce a work in specific contexts and circumstances. It also refers to some other underlying extra-musical values, in an inherent relationship of very strong interactions and interrelation between the musical and extra-musical elements within the very musical system that generates them.

Thus, the word *grajé*, for instance, is a substantive that refers to the songs, the dance, the frame drums, the reference rhythm, the costumes and the musical performance, but also the food and other comings and doings that one can see at a musical evening of the same name (*grajé*), specifically among French Guianese Creoles. Another example: the *Tule* term used by the Wayãpi Amerindians refers to both music and its performance, and at the same time to the large bamboo single reed clarinets without finger holes, as well as the orchestral formation and the resulting musical repertoire. Additionally, for them, the substantive *malaka* can refer to the shamanic session, the songs and the dance, as well as the accompanying rattle. The music produced allows or facilitates communication with divine entities, among others. Finally, it also helps healing the sick persons. Therefore, overall, the *malaka* form cosmological propositions that the villagers agree with or discuss, as Jean-Michel Beudet (1997, 43) observed rightly.



1. Tule dance performance



2. Shaman's malaka (Kali'na) Malaka





3. Performance Malaka's performance of Palikwene (Palikur)

In Bushinengé, the generic term *apinti* refers to the single membrane drum and to the ritual drum language (*apinti tongo*) it produces. It can designate the ritual as well and the musical practice that result from it.

Consequently, about the meaning given to the word music in French Guiana, such examples are numerous. In this context, the music, often primarily danced and functional, do not only constitute some community or multi-ethnic acts of collective joy. They are also both achievements and echo of a reference to nature and cosmogony. In traditional systems, especially in rituals and ceremonies, musical act is not a simple accessory compensating the action taken, even though, about this, some exceptions are observed especially among the Amerindians<sup>2</sup>. This act is as well involved in issues as important as the identity politics affirmation of each group of the peoples present on this territory. In general, each of these groups participates in a significant and distinctive way to the definition of a specific humanity, which adds to the cultural richness of the peoples of French Guiana. Here, music is a phenomenon that encompasses the entirety of the physique, the metaphysics and the emotional. From it results a singular culture of life, of communication and of social representation. It is a culture of life expressed in several ways, according to the precepts governing each of the concerned communities.

Besides, the music that result is put in different categories. They are made by means of characteristic performances: public and private, traditional, folk or variety; ritual, ceremonial or entertaining. They have the characteristics of an art both individual and collective, and the multiplicity of their nature adds to their richness.

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<sup>2</sup> Jean-Michel Baudet reached the same conclusion concerning some specific Amerindian musical evenings like the *tule wayāpi* concerts (see Jean-Michel Baudet, 1997 for more details).

However, the musical riches of French Guiana do not reveal as autonomous systems which nature can be understood only from technical and aesthetic parameters that are specifically musical. Indeed, their systems also take sense through a set of issues and differentiated and contrasting playing's. Moreover, because of historical conjunctions, this music requires to be defined and interpreted through an interaction between each other's, but as well in relation with other musical productions such as European and African ones, which constitute their original sources, and from which they were substantially influenced.

While we are on the subject, Creoles and Bushinengé people, like for traditionalist Africans, for example, have a musical conception that comprises a double signification, technical and symbolic, through which, among others, musical instruments are raised to the rank of beings who "speak" or "sing" and beings who "support" or "accompany". This is the reason why the author calls these instruments "cultural beings". This consideration allows establishing a relationship between these personified instruments and the characters of the society, and even those of the spiritual sphere. Indeed, some of these instruments are truly considered male and female beings. Others are considered as ancestors or deities. The Creole pair of drums *yangwé*, for example, forms a male and female instrumental couple. As for the Boni *agida* drums, equivalent to the *maa and gaan doon* of the Saamaka, they are male and female, and their nature is sacred. Hence their sound is akin to the "voice" of deities or ancestors, depending on the destination of the concerned instrument.



4a. Performance dance Kanmongwé dance performance, Yangwé drums of Creoles





4b. Performance danse kanmongwé



5. Sacred drum agida, Boni (Bushinengé)





6. Gaa doon, Maa doon (male & female saramaca's sacred drum; Bushinengé)

This is the reason why, to understand and elucidate the functioning of the performances of the music of French Guiana, it is necessary to observe, interpret and define multiple musical and extra-musical relations and interrelations, as well as the resulting interactions. These relations mainly concern the musical relationships of the sound objects, of the musical instruments and their acoustic, of the playing techniques, of the formal and stylistic structuring, and finally of the genres and the repertoires. In addition, they concern the extra-musical relationships associated with them. These extra-musical relationships can involve the stakeholders or the persons of the society who produce them, the socio-cultural and even natural environments where they are produced, not to mention the circumstances, representations, and contexts associated with them, and many more other factors.

Now let us take a closer look at the reality of music performance in the traditional French Guianese musical cultures.

### The essence of musical performance in the musical cultures of French Guiana

In general, the musical performance is primarily perceived as the technique and how to implement or interpret musically some sound materials. It takes place in varied circumstances of musical performances: concert, recital, show and other forms. This art of musical play first highlights different parameters and aspects of "sound objects", to use the words of Pierre

Schaeffer<sup>3</sup>. The parameters considered are linked with the melodic, rhythmic, tempo, dynamics and instrumentation. For the treatment of sound objects, one can sometimes use machines, including computer. It is especially the case for electronic music and/or electroacoustic, learned or not.

However, in most cultures with an oral tradition, like that of French Guiana, a musical performance, above this technical processing of the sound materials, confederates as well some other crucial issues that juxtapose each other: organize a lifetime experience (physical and mental), translate or express the relation to the other, maintain social cohesion through a collective artistic performance by singing, by instrumental playing and by dancing. This is the reason why the resulting music offers a plural representation of various sociocultural factors. It is also capable of substituting for the language and the spoken word while carrying essential symbolic functions that galvanise in multiple ways the life of individuals and communities. Here we are talking about a music that structures around a central idea, that of a singular social unit. It is based on a cohesion for a life in harmony in a plural and heterogeneous social context. Indeed, here, the endogenous differences, and even exogenous, are considered a positive factor of mutual enrichment between people of a same community, or not. Things are thought this way, particularly in the context of ceremonial and entertainment music. The protagonists, playing different roles, contribute here to the realization of a harmonious cohesion between the protagonists, without necessarily hiding some differences inherent to the groups that comprise them.

In general, a few stances underlie the different musical performance practices that exist in French Guiana. Here and there, one can easily observe some vocal and instrumental playing alternating with some solo play parts and some *tutti*. Musicians, singers, dancers and the public move in close interdependence. Either of the protagonists can however play several roles simultaneously or alternately. From audience, they alternate to successively become a musician, a singer or a dancer. Moreover, these musical practices are linked to the social structure of the communities that produce them. The musical gatherings that result reflect an obvious unity and of a well being shared through entertainments or festive occasions. These group reunion moments also allow participants to be, depending on the circumstances and contexts of the moment, in harmony with nature and/or the religious world. In this case, the underlying musical performances are symbolic systems that bring into play the men, their ancestors, the gods and the natural environment, particularly the forest. Some relationships and interactions may be created, linking the musical language, the body language (via dance) and the coded language (often instrumental) of the gods, often with an evocation or a reference to sounds and beings of nature.

Within traditional musical performances of French Guiana, musical language is reflected as well through instruments (including human voice). Let us remind that these instruments are sometimes thought of as "cultural beings" endowed with a "voice" and a certain power. They may therefore represent a mythical animal, an ancestor or a god. To this are adjoined verbal and visual elements as well as specific gestures underlying the body language, often very evocative and closely linked to the musical playing. The music produced then become, in some ways, the symbolic expression of the cosmic forces that human being seeks to reconcile rather than to appropriate them. In other ways, some aesthetic, stylistic and formal musical elements, very dynamic, participate in the social integration of the practitioners and their audience, while

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<sup>3</sup> Pierre Schaeffer, *Traité des objets sonores. Essai interdisciplines*, Paris, Seuil, 1966, 672 p. Also see, *Id.*, *Machines à communiquer*, 2 tomes (1. *Genèse des simulacres* 2. *Pouvoir et communication*), Paris, Seuil, 1970 et 1972.

giving a particular resonance to their different music. Their works then become a meaningful system that transforms both the language in the broad sense and the social exchanges.

One can then understand why, in French Guiana, musical performances also constitute spaces of interculturality and of encounters, spaces of traditions and of quickened memories. They also become a dynamic and a system of individual and community identity values and vectors. They are a cultural reference, the expression of an individual or collective conscience; a way of being and thinking the world in a specific way.

Technically, there is an exceptional fact that deserves to be emphasized here. During the musical performance, the different instrumental parts are defined particularly by spans or masses of sound and timbre heights rather than specific intervals constituting a melody. At the same time, the opposition of the treble-bass registers is included in this enhancement of heights and sound colours. Remind him, thereby do a certain number of links occur with, among others, the instrumental size (large-medium-small<sup>4</sup>), the status of cultural beings for the instruments endowed with a voice, a speech and gifted with a certain power, as well as the reference to ancestors and gods. Consequently, this sound opposition allows distinguish the roles of the musicians: they are either accompanists, rhythm markers, or soloists. Thus, the pitches-timbres associations appear to be fundamental in the French Guianese musical creation. Moreover, these oppositions occur on a very distinct way or gradually, depending on the people and their musical practices.

For the rest, and in a general way, the variations of intensity or the use of shades are never explicit. They are often the result of a change of instrumentalist during the playing, each of them having a different touch and a different instrumental playing than other musicians. But sometimes - as for the young *Bushinengé* in the way they play the *aleké* or the *bigi poku* or *kawina*, two types of entertainment music - musicians significantly slow down or accelerate their rhythm, which causes some pretty singular variations of intensity.



7. Aleke drums

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<sup>4</sup> Large, medium and small refer to the social relationship between the elders, the adults and the youth. This report also provides the authority, the person who accompanies him and the person of the one it controls.





8. Haïma, tibwa et chacha for kawina music

By their sizes, their properties and their uses, French Guianese instruments also mark the heterogeneity and acoustic thickness, which can be defined by some musical types realised through two major worlds: the ritual musical worlds and the non-ritual. The resulting music playing is as much of a symbol as a phenomenon illuminating various social factors. These can be of all kinds of relations. It can be exchanging relations, communications, socio-cultural and artistic ties, but also cooperation, opposition or harmony, as well as social interactions that individuals or groups maintain. Here, the music playing is sometimes the substitution of the word, which underlies the foundation of various forms of representations and of communication encoded by music. Music playing participates in all kinds of harmony or even of "fusion of horizons", to quote Hans-Georg Gadamer (1967). All these actions are based on three major acts: see, hear and do, that form the basis of the significations arising from the performance and the musical act of the French Guianese musical cultures.

*Essential acts of French Guianese musical performance: see, hear and do*

In French Guianese musical performance, see, hear and do are in fact three main acts ruling most of the practices, especially performed in groups. These three acts are associated with three actions: singing, dancing and "musiquing", through which the work and the musical playing really make sense. These acts and actions call, above all, for other extra-musical actions with which they associate in a strong interaction.



In this arrangement of musical facts are established close relations of communicational exchanges. They concern all the stakeholders (musicians, singers, dancers, public or spectators) and are realized through a musical playing of great fervour and of great dynamism.

In general, the French Guianese musicians pay a special attention to the showy dimension of the musical act. By doing so, they permit others to see some gestures, movements, and their costumes, often evocative and symbolic, are exhibited. Through this intervention, they invest, in the visual aspects of the musical performance, as much energy and creativity as in the sounds themselves. So, one can notice in the traditional French Guianese society some music logically associated with body movements, especially those of the dancers, as well as with costumes and accessories worn by the singers, musicians and dancers. This is the case for the *kaway* jingle of bells. Moreover, the costumes, often ornamented, have bright colours. The Amerindians add to their outfit curly shimmering feathers as well. Thus, the musical performances that result become a multi-sensory experience. Here, the part of the visual is made salient by different complex methods. Their difference is linked to the distinct repertoires practiced during the music playing.



9. Kaway

*See, hear and do meaning in the French Guianese music system.*

Among musicians, dancers and singers, to observe, listen and hear each other to do better (in terms of musical performance) and to act better are capital principles. They constitute an imperative to which musicians, singers and dancers pay a close attention. Their gestures and

the resulting expressions add to the effectiveness and beauty of their musics, chants and dances, in brief, of their performances.

Here the instrumental acoustic properties are conceived as both stylistic references and markers of the role played by each musician in the overall playing. The instrumental sound thus remains associated with a relation of singular language exchange. This language, often coded, is realized by specific rhythms and melodies. It is also the result of an expression of the sound colours, the registers and the parts of orchestra. This set of elements requires a strong attention of the actors (musicians, dancers and singers). They require an exceptional discipline and mental focus of the actors as well to implement the true musical gesture that gives a meaning to the performance while invigorating it at the same time.

For the public involved, as for any passive observer but interested though, seeing, distinguishing each instrument from the others and knowing their name is a necessary act, a prerequisite to better seize the musical reality performed. Moreover, it is useful to identify the mode of instrumental playing implemented by the musician. Indeed, the name given to every part of the instrumental playing constitutes not only a reference to the sound colours and the sound registers, but it can at the same time represent a voice, a coded language, a special musical says, and with it, a specific message.

*Singing, musiquing and dancing in French Guianese traditional music performance: signs, symbols and meanings*

*Singing and musiquing ...*

If, with few exceptions, the Creole and *Bushinengé* songs are accompanied by an instrument, the Amerindians, the *Wayãpi* men especially, have a particular repertoire executed *a cappella*. These are war songs, *yeenga yapisi leme wale*. They are said to have been created after each war to celebrate the exploits of their warriors and to mark the sadness caused by the results of war. These songs thus not being danced, the singers perform them seated when, as pointed out by Jean-Michel Beaudet (1997, 42), the "[...] men are taken by nostalgia for the past bravery of their people ". They are not strophic songs. They are performed in unison, in a low register and low volume by a group of a few dozens of men.

Still on Amerindian musical culture, it should be noted the existence of a capital notion: the concept of breath and its singular use in certain musical performance practices. This notion rules, in a particular way, a double directing: audible and visual. It results in performance means either ritualized or for entertainment. Singing, shouting and sounds of wind instruments, as well as the singular exaltation of tobacco smoke foaming during shamanic practices constitute here, at the same time, some tools and some processes of realisation of this double directing - musical and visual-, where breath is an indispensable engine. This breath allows the playing of the musical instrument and of the singer's voice on the one hand, and on the other, it allows to smoke the tobacco of the shaman.

In this process, the "breath-singing" for example, is determined by quite particular ways of singing and the breathing modes adopted to influence the energy of the beings and the immediate surroundings. The "breath of the shamanic scene" remains a particular musical experience. It is the fruit of the song executed through singular techniques of use of the tongue,

the lips, the throat and the breathing, allowing the sound to resonate in the body of the shaman. This leads to an extra-musical experience that, above all, enables a unique communication with the world of spirits. Here, songs and rattles, and especially the breath playing of the shaman, give rhythm to the sound production that goes beyond the simple musical setting of these different gestures. By the song and its artistically well amplified sounds - and often scattered with distortions - and by its smoky breath, the shaman invokes and communicates with the spirits as with the patient. Here there is a real dramatization of the breath. So, the shaman puts on stage a complex relationship between the audible and the sensible on one hand, and between the invisible and the apprehensible on the other hand, that he expresses in an outstanding musical dimension.

Regarding the breath that comes from the aerophones, the instrument family the most popular among the Amerindians, it spreads through playing in solo, duo or in orchestras of different sizes. These instruments provide a wide variety of acoustic materials with a rare sound subtlety. These sounds are very evocative, especially of the sound events of nature, linked to the world of the sacred.

Some Amerindian aerophones, especially those made of bamboo, are made for a specific occasion only. Their durability, relatively very limited, rarely exceeds a week as the materials used are fragile. So, these instruments quickly become unusable because they dry out and deform prematurely. Moreover, the properties of the materials used vary depending on the time of construction of the instrument. Therefore, one has a musical production that, over time, creates works each of which is almost unique in the expression of his harmonies, timbres and even of its aesthetic rendering. Only the formal principles of the piece and the melodic-rhythmic paths remain and are transmitted to the following generations. Indeed, regardless of the period of their performance, these melodic-rhythmic paths meet the identification requirements of their repertoire. Hence some seasons and fabrication materials of these aerophones regulate the frequency of the musical performances, where dance plays a major role. The dry season is more suitable to more musical gatherings compared to rain season where very few of these musical meetings occur.

This feature allows defining, within the French Guianese Amerindian musical cultures, some significant differences in the instruments as well as the orchestras that use them. Likewise, works and dances produced define themselves by this method. It is the same for the style differences and those that underpin the states of mind of the individuals who practice them.

### *Dances ...*

As for the dances, except the ritual ones performed solo, most of them remain collective. In the Bushinengé in particular, one can see some couple dancing, but also in groups, the women being separated from the men. In the Creoles, except for the dance formally requiring only one couple at a time to evolve on stage during the performance of the *grajé*, the other dances are usually either in bulk or through several couples dancing together on stage, or even do they dance in circle or linearly forming a chain. This positioning in line is globally adopted by the Amerindian musicians-dancers, whose choreographed movements remain synchronous. During these concurring movements, they advance in diagonal accordingly to the position of their bust, slightly slowing down. Each man moves with his instrument in his left hand, his right hand being placed on the left shoulder of the dancer in front of him. The female dancers who take part in this dance session never slow down.

Instead, they walk along their partner, holding his left arm when he is not a musician. There is an exception in the Oyapock region where the dancers hold each other by the waist. This exception, compared to the generally widespread chain dance among the Amerindians is a specificity of the Oyapock region for couple dancing. This musical marker is acknowledged as a reference or an identity or stylistic characteristic; especially for the *Wayãpi* and the *Palikwene* (or *Palikur*) of Camopi, in the lower Oyapock river.

One will also note that the chain of Amerindian dances is generally circular (either open circle, semi-open or closed), and the dancers move in an anticlockwise way. Never turning back to each other, they however cringe and have twisty moves.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that these large dances are performed in open or semi-open chains. The participants are dancers-musicians who either sing or play their instruments. According to tradition, these dances are coordinated by the village chief, and all factions of the community are fairly represented. During these performances, the female dancers being on stage and holding the arm of their partner can sing as well. Some of the sung dances are usually performed during inter-community meetings that often last several days and include regulated ritual dances. Such is the case for the "preludes for the souls of the dead" or the dances of "stealing food". These songs and dances are shared between individuals of several close villages gathered for special musical meetings.

There are other choreographic gestures. For example, the dancer can lift his foot while the others pass by his side and scratch his heel, as if to remove a thorn (called *eyu peyo'o* = take out my thorn). In the dance of Coati (*kwasi*), the leading dancer-musician plays his clarinet *ta'i* holding the loincloth of a dancer to evoke the tail of the coati animal. Furthermore, the dance of the toucan (*tuka*) consists in, for the musicians-dancers, squatting and jumping aside to imitate the jumps made by this bird on a tree. For the *Wayãpi*, the basic choreographic gesture is a march balanced walk performed with their feet flat, with a marked accentuation of the right foot (for more details, read Beudet, 1997, 80-87). This list of examples of Amerindian choreographies is obviously not exhaustive.

However, it should be noted that the various dances performed by the Amerindians, the Creoles and the Bushinengé often refer to either earth or to the nature (especially the animal world), or social facts. They adopt natural stylized motifs or even figurative. This is another way for the dancers to involve the audience.

Thus, the children and the elderly, take part in the hunting activities as practiced by these dancers-musicians before these musical meetings in the village, and in other realities of the social or community life. This adds to the entertainment of the village or to the distraction of a specific audience. However, in the Bushinengé and the Amerindians in particular, the figurations they adopt bear, on the cosmological evocation field, a symbolic and capital importance. They reflect a reality that indicates, in the Amerindian world especially, that the musical or choreographic creation is the result of an energetic manifestation that is not created but is rather a reality in perpetual motion. This reality in motion applies as well, in general, to moral



strength, the ability to undertake, to act or to do things, and it also applies to the extraordinary powers of the “spirits” who help the shaman. In this process, everything is transformed, traded or stolen, so everything circulates. Consequently, it is considered that what is new in this world is by no means an invention. It is rather a discovery that must be included in a process governing life overall, either a movement or a transformation. They may be peaceful or warlike.

On quite another matter, during the great Amerindian suites, like the systematized exchanges, some links are established between men and women through the dance-spectator link, male and female. For this occasion, the *cachiri*, a cassava-based beverage traditionally made by the women, brings a singular dynamic to the dancers who consume it continuously throughout the duration of their musical performance. It is the same for the Bushinengé during their community musical evenings or for the Creoles during their musical evenings, especially during the *konvwé* balls. They use various alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, local and imported, made by hand or industrially manufactured.

However, let us note that when performing the Amerindian, Bushinengé and Creole musical repertoires, the lyrics and their inner structure of the songs almost never vary from one performance to another, when it is a major song. It is the same for the arrangements of musical themes as for their alternation in the musical discourse. However, the choreographic performance as well as the elements of its staging, but also the extra-musical ornaments underlying and the overall dynamics vary according to the band, the context and the nature of the performance achieved. This set of parameters may also change depending on the need to single out from one band to another. Moreover, their treatment depends on the meaning of the different signs of the global performance staging, in connection with the music performed.

Therefore, numerous repertoires of the French Guianese music appear as unfixed forms. They are not the expression of a state but rather of a sensitive move. These music's are realised on the scale of one person or one group of persons who implement them through a significant musical playing, often singularly stylized.

### *The life of the musical playing: produce, reproduce, transform, and evoke via music*

In French Guiana, as in most musical cultures with an oral tradition in the world, whatever the position adopted for the playing of their instruments, their singings and dances, musicians are generally and physically very close to each other (by the touch, by the look, the listening and the understanding of their overall action). They are very close to the public as well. Music is like an umbilical cord that links musicians and audience by their breath, their touch and the dance performed by their bodies. Moreover, it is like a bridge that allows to establish all kinds of links. Its energy captivates the emotion and the feelings of the dancers, the musicians (instrumentalists and singers) as well as the public. This music serves as life skills as well. The people who participate in its performance often play, alternately or successively, this triple role of audience, of musician and/or singer and of dancer.

By the energy it generates, by the emotions it arouses and the life it creates, music reveals to be here as well one of the social facts underpinned by different kinds of subsidiary parameters. These extra-musical parameters interfere with the technical parameters in a relation of complex and varied interactions that determine its essence. Thus, the repetition with micro-variations, some cycles of improvisation, some imitations and the alternation of sound colours combine with the choreographic figures that follow almost the same development processes. Then all these musico-choreographic events transform into a very formal, global, dynamic and lively whole.

The musical discourse produced acquires a singular mobility of the musical materials. The layout of their timbres, intensities and rhythmic pulsations often creates some variations of the dynamic that musicians call "cadence". However, this cadence is not the sense of the rhythm or a kind of a form of rest as it is conceived in classical Western music. It is rather a dynamic and a nucleus of sound energies that, metamorphosing, regenerate themselves and enliven the assembly of musicians, singers, dancers and even the audience in a kind of global emotional euphoria. Let us note as well that during the konvwé balls and other Creole musical evenings in particular, this cadence is the driving force of their musical dynamic. Thanks to this dynamic, the music, songs and dances performed during these evenings hardly interrupt. So, it can be played from 9 p.m. to around 7:00 a.m. the following day. At this point, everything constitutes a sensitive unit, rich in movements and energies. So, everything is alternation of powerful emotions and joyful spurts governed by a musical continuum full of vitality. The audio chain (music and chant) is thus held without a stop by the musicians and singers. They alternate on stage, each knowing how to manage his energy to match the harmony of the band. This way of practicing music is also a symbol and a reference to their identity; this is one of their own ways of being.

## Music and identity symbols through the French Guianese musical performance

### *Music and identity representations*



10. Gaan doon, pikin doon, tun & kwakwa



11a. Kaséko's orchestra



11b. Kaseko dance performance

When an instrument is intended for ritual practices and vowed to represent a deity or an ancestor, its production will be subject to some rites and secrets. To symbolize their power or authority, some of these instruments have on their body some ornamentation (etching, calligraphy motif or another specific decoration) or a special accessory-ornament is attached to the instrument. These instruments are cultural beings. Therefore, their sound sources are endowed with a language that is associated with the voice of the ancestors or some deities they may represent. This is for example the case of the Bushinengé drum *agida* that is sheltered in a cabin. Another example is the rattle of the Amerindian shaman: a dark spherical gourd, garnished with white pebbles. This instrument, which origin is mysterious, is said to possess magical power. The musical performance involving such instruments is subject to very strict regulations.

Other instruments are or can be made in public. The Amerindians often make them especially for a musical performance. This is the case of the bamboo clarinets *tulé*.

For the rest, for the designation of the musical fact or the music itself, musicians often use polysemous terms that can evoke several realities at once. For instance, they can refer at the same time to the material used to make the concerned instrument, to its use and/or to the playing techniques, and even to the mythological signification it can represent.

Compared to the musical performance, the use of these instruments thus includes paradigms that offer various levels of reading or interpretation. These latter relate to the technical and musical aesthetic, but also to the performance that follows, as well as other extra-musical factors. The performances that result is often interspersed with a particular emotional dynamic, and their extra-musical amplifications often remain implicit. They are metaphysical or refer to nature. With the specific social spaces, the musical performances are some rich in symbols and in meanings interdependencies.

### *Social spaces and musical configurations*

The social surroundings of French Guiana are a kind of unique matrix of evolution and transformation of individuals of diverse origins with practices and specific representations. Here, the socio-cultural environments form a continuum of interlacing's of stratified configurations and of social spheres fundamentally structured into communities. Moreover, the social facts function in conjunction with the musical facts. These latter generate sensitive components typical to a configuration or to a community. In other words, the organization of the actions, the contents, the materials and the musical gestures, as well as the underlying performance and the musicians who implement it, can fall within a ritual family structure or a corporation. They can as well fall within the belonging to a common identity or even to a same place.

In French Guiana coexist in harmony various organic groups and established music systems. On a purely musical level, sound colours and rhythms form capital parameters of the design and of the musical organisation. Added to this are some gestures and characteristic attitudes. The musical sound especially is seized through some living mechanisms of listening, observing and setting in motion of the musical material. The works produced are related to social events and/or evoke some realities of Nature or of the sacred universe.



The link music-society is reflected in the houses and their positioning within the village as well. This is the case among the Amerindians and the Bushinengé. Not only is the position of their houses a symbol of the affirmation of the kinship links of the people who occupy them, but at the same time, this position prefigures the typical musical configurations mentioned above.

Thus, depending on the destination of a hut, a common house or any other symbolic place, the musics and dances that will be performed in these places will correspond to the criteria or will respond to the rules governing the use of the concerned site. It can be a place used to hold ceremonial, rituals or festive events, to hold drinking meetings and other community meetings or some social events entertained by specific music. This is the case of the *kasililena* (cassava beer house in the Wayāpi) or the big wayana traditional *karbay* (a kind of hut) called *tukusipan*, where ritual, ceremonial, but also entertainment music is performed during the drinking meetings and other community meetings. As another example, the Creole *konvwé* ballrooms are dedicated especially to entertaining music and dances while the Bushinengé wake places serve particularly to ceremonial and ritual musical performances.

One will note as well that if the position of the houses contributes to the affirmation of kinship groups, the position of the villages indicates the affirmation of the ethnic community. Music, performances, and knowledge transfer resulting participate in the consolidation of the underlying links. Besides, the members of a same extended family generally build their houses so that they fall into the "small neighbourhoods" of clannish nature, accordingly to a matrifocal tendency (mothers and sisters) for the Bushinengé and patrifocal (brothers and fathers) among the Amerindians.

This explains why, in French Guiana, there are interrelationships, interdependencies and even some interactions between social spaces and realities or musical configurations. These spaces and musical configurations have as well symbolic links rich in meanings. These are links underpinned by some locality links (village)-organisation social-musical practices that are very significant. Thus, the music is an essential element in an Amerindian or a Bushinengé community house where everyone who attends it always finds a "common bench" or a "personal bench" where to sit. This bench symbolizes the place occupied, in groups or individually, by the persons participating, among others, to a community meeting, to a drinking meeting or to any ritual event. Here, music is always used as an umbilical cord promoting social relations, but also establishing the links between man and the sacred world, between man and Nature.

Among the Amerindians, for instance, the word "individual" can be also thought as a notion of inclusion which, in Wayāpi in particular, is translated by the word E-lena: "my house". Lena refers to the house where a nuclear family lives, which house includes a cooking fireplace. Moreover, E-lena can mean "my village", where a group of houses is gathered under the political representation of a "chief" (*tuwiyā*). But in addition, it also means the part of river valley where the village is settled. -Lena thus refers to a double concept: the house and the place. In this regard, Viveiros de Castro (1993, 148) mentions a social configuration based on a "concentric arrangement of the social field" and on the "endogamous ideology" that prevails in French Guiana. As for Jean-Michel Beaudet (1997, 43), he uses the "notion of inclusion" to make a connection with the "musical configuration", whereby the ethnomusicologist "designates a group of musical events to which the organization of gestures, sounds, places, actors, moments ... is associated with a sphere, a given social configuration. "

Indeed, among the Amerindians in this case, but also in the Bushinengé, if a village is indeed a political unit, there also is a geographical unity between different villages and between different places of the territory. This unity favours economic and cultural exchanges: they invite each other to participate in ceremonies and danced musical performances.

Among the Amerindians, the link between the musical and the social configuration is seen through the orchestral suites. Their musical repertoires are quite animated. During the performance of the wind instruments, the relationship between the musicians and the dancers-singers is shown through some active exchanges, which are social referents. These referents allow the listener or the spectator who pays close attention to penetrate in the mysteries of the village, and of the society as well, through this collective breath emitted by the musicians: music became a way of being and living. Symbolically, this breathing allows to understand the men who make up this part of the Amerindian world. So, the orchestral suites and their representations are a sign of social integration and of socio-political merging in the village. In these suites, the *elewu* (panpipes) and the *tules* (bamboo clarinets) are a male exclusivity. The terms "father", "son" or "brother" here are used for the internal designation of the members of these orchestras. At the same time, they refer to the belonging of a political group (in the broadest sense) to which the musicians involved belong. Hence, there are large suites involving the entire village, and small ones that concern only a political faction or a group of people sharing a common interest.

During these musical practices and by way of relaxation, flute solos are often performed. This is a widespread practice in the territory of Oyapock. There, from a hammock or along the roads, it is usual to hear a solitary flute musical playing. The tunes played indicate indeed an atmosphere of rest, peace or tranquillity. This tranquillity shows a self-distancing of the musician towards the village space, towards the public space and its social games. The few times when this solitary music is publicly performed are during drinks meetings. And in general, they are performed comically.

On a ritual level, the musical production of the Amerindian shamans, of the Bushinengé *Obiaman* and the Creole *piaye* are rather singular performances, by the nature of these characters and the fundamental role they play in their respective communities. Indeed, from a social point of view, there is a continuum between the shamanic activity and music. It is often a support for these spiritual practices, which are especially used for healing and protecting the family, but also the village and even people outside the village.

### *Music as a self-defining and defining the other factor*

All the above shows how, in the French Guianese society, music as a total social fact, is also a factor by which the self and the other define each other. This is the same in many cultures around the world. Through music are determined at the same time some more tangible external relations: temporal and timeless, individual and collective, intra-community and intercommunity, endo-factional and exo-factional. This results in various "musical physiognomies," that the author would call "faces for oneself" and "faces presented to others." This is done with or through some sound identities specifically varied. They are characteristic sound and choreographic identities. They are produced by all sorts of melodies, rhythms, timbres, musical instruments, but also of steps and other danced gestures. The whole may constitute a symbolic representation or a reference, particularly to a mythical animal, an ancestor, a deity, some overpower, and yet other symbolisms.

Some representations even come under individuation. They are based on individual knowledge inherited by family or initiatory lineage, as is the case for the Bushinengé *Sabi Man*. Their rich knowledge, both musical and extra-musical, is taught by initiatory filiations that occur within the family. They express them through acts of distinct musical performance conducted in connection with the initiatory or ritual activity carried out.

On the issue of musical performance in traditional French Guiana, there remains much to be said. But what conclusion can be done about what have been discussed so far?

## As a coda

As we have previously seen, in the French Guianese cultures, musical performance is one of the major socio-cultural acts that - beyond their purely artistic essence - part in the description, to the affirmation and even to the identification of a state of being, of a social reality. This social reality is defined in relation to the individual, the social group (may it be parental, community or corporatist) and even territorial. Therefore, music, like the performance that results from it, becomes an identity reference. In this way, each community speaks its language, lives its culture, practices its rites, through music of genres and typical and varied styles. These are symbolic cultural acts by which the difference that asserts the identity of each person manifests. They form an open and relational identity. The music used allows to communicate with others, to share the differences within the plural unity of the French Guianese multi-community society.

In this context, some musical features, but also some characteristics of musical productions and the practices that make them up, are capital elements. They define the nature and the implications of the practiced music in correspondence with some social configurations. So, there is a close interdependence between the musical playing and some parts of the social organization. Therefore, some genres and forms of music serve here as tools to the expression of multiple realities, with temporal and timeless references. One can clearly note this in the Creole parties, the *bals Kasékò* and *bals grajé* for instance. It is the same within the other French Guianese communities where a few terms can illustrate this junction between music and social matters. Through this are made some associations, exchanges, but also the sharing, the alternation and even the oppositions, the complementarity as well as the harmony of the people living in a heterogeneous society yet in mutual understanding.

In French Guiana, making music is a major act of alliance games. Musical performances then regulate some issues not only musical but also social among men. They generate at the same time some relationships between humans and beings of the worlds of mind and of Nature. So, during these performances, one can see some symbolic exchange relationships between man, the natural environment and the metaphysical world.

Concretely, it may be noted that during a musical performance, musical exchanges are based on the relation of dialogue and even of opposition between the solo part and the other parts performed by the rest of the band. This process is especially crucial among the Creoles and the Bushinengé, to whom the socio-cultural organization is more organised into a hierarchy. Musically, the interrelations arising from different parts are generally made through various forms of expression symbolizing various social relations. These musical expressions are also of multiple nature. They can be songs performed solo, responsorial songs where the soloist opposes or alternates with the choir. They can be the result of an improvisation, particularly instrumental. It is often at the heart of musical exchanges that occur between different parts of the musical group. For some musical genres the role of the leader is essential. He may be is a male or female singer or a solo instrumentalist who guides the overall playing. This is especially the case in the Creoles and the Bushinengé.

To better understand the nature and meaning of the musical performance in the context of the French Guianese multiethnic society as well as its link with some identity markers, one

can link or draw a parallel with the principles of "individuation induction." In this regard, it should be first noted that the components of "individuation" and belonging to the group are operating in total interdependence. Indeed, here, individuation is not to be taken in the sense of individualization, which implies selfishness, a struggle for existence and the right to defend oneself and to attack others. It is to be considered more like Durkheim's solidarity: a solidarity that allows society to become "more capable of moving with, together, while each of its elements, at the same time, has more proper movements" (Cf. Durkheim, *Social Division of Labor*, 1893, 101). The link of the induction principle with the various musical performances, as practiced in French Guiana, lies within the fact that they operate on the similar model of the process governed by the embryological theory. This allows the creation of complete organic structures. Each organ has its specific physiognomy and its well-marked autonomy. However, it acts in the interests of the proper functioning of the whole organism. Induction is linked to the principle of individuation. It is a substantial form by which the individual participates in the organization and implementation of the general idea, giving it a musical reality and life, in the French Guianese plural society.

Thus, the various musical performances of French Guiana form, in some ways, some specific organic structures for each community that implements them and by which that community identifies itself. Its members are using it as a substantial form. Through it, individually or collectively, the members of the community involved contribute to keep alive their culture, but also to globally enliven the French Guianese culture. So here, making music becomes, as a reminder, a major act of alliance that regulates some socio-cultural and metaphysical issues. The music produced are not organized in a simple categorical opposition. They should therefore be observed as a real rich continuum of interrelations and contrasts. In this continuum, each repertoire, each genre and each musical style occupy a prominent position. And the resulting musical performances become, consequently, the reflection of the complex identity aspects of this society. They remain a world view and, at the same time, the medium through which a system of values is told; and an identity all in all plurals in a unified environment, French Guiana.

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