

‘Sweetening the Soul ‘

Abstract.

This paper seeks to explore the parallels between sounds made during early infant attachment behavior and “call and response” in Georgian polyphony. It examines the development of “safety containment and attachment” – the fundamental building blocks of healthy personality development in human beings, and explores the presence of this phenomenon in Georgian Polyphony. It presents an innovative project offering current day applications for this ancient musical legacy in terms of trauma resolution for Georgia’s marginalized, neglected, and abandoned children.

C.V.

Margery Bray, M.A. CQSW, Dip Pl Th. worked in the UK both nationally and internationally pioneering treatment approaches for severely abused young children. The organization SACCS/Leaps and Bounds which she co-founded was the recipient of the Meering Award for its contribution to Child Care Practice. She received a nomination as “European Woman of the Year” for her work in Eastern Europe and is a founder member of the Georgian led Non Government Organisation , “Mamatsi Guli” (Heart of the Brave).

Stress Arousal and Modulation in early Infant Development.

During early infancy one of the first sounds known to human beings is the sound of the mother or care-givers voice. In a totally dependant state, the child becomes aroused to a feeling of discomfort, such as hunger, physical discomfort, or fear, and expresses the arousal through sound in the form of a unique signalling cry. The adult, attuned to the sound, responds – commonly also by making an answering call .Then by soothing ,feeding, or other calming strategies relieves the discomfort. In this way, trust evolves within the relationship .As the child develops, this trust can be transferred by the infant to other relationships .In this way the world becomes a trustworthy place. A secure attachment relationship, offers safety containment and attachment –the cornerstones of the development of a healthy personality.

Researchers in early infant development , such as Cairns,2002¹ describe this process as follows.

Attachment behaviours are key to early infant brain development . Stress is toxic to the brain, causing profound changes in brain structure and function in the interests of survival. When the baby attempts to engage the caregiver through attachment behaviour the urgent desire is for the caregiver to enable the baby to modulate and recover from the stress that has produced the behaviour. Babies with available and responsive caregivers enter into a relationship in which each attunes to the other and together they experience

the relief of stress. Both baby and caregiver will go through a cycle of stress arousal ,stress modulation and pleasurable experience ,which follows the soothing of stress.”

Within the security of this early bonding relationship, central to the existence of every human being, harmony and balance are restored. Throughout the world, during this interactive “dance” between the mother and child , songs, usually in the form of lullabies or “crooning” may also become part of the interaction. The Georgian version of this, according to Nana Kalandadze’s study²(**nana kalandades naSROMI**) is cooing or “ghighini”, imitating the song of the dove .”Using the melody of ‘ Iavnana,’ with the repetition of verbal refrains, (used as a defence from evil) it shows the function of this magic and indicates the ancient origin of the genre.”

Insecure Attachment and its Effects.

It is an unfortunate fact of life however, that not all babies are born into families who are able to offer this quality of care. For a significant proportion , (Cairns ³ estimates between 30% and 45%),this critical early security is compromised, or sadly lacking. In a smaller number of children subjected to violence and abuse and neglect, lack of interactive stimulation leads to a lack of development of some brain connections , and a pruning of connections already made ‘There is a qualitative difference between securely and insecurely attached children. Securely attached children develop bigger brains. Furthermore, confronted with persistent unresolved stress the infant brain develops characteristic use- dependent structures of either hyperarousal , or defensive dissociation. Hyper-aroused infants show perpetual signs of distress and irritability, while dissociated infants show none-despite being in a psychological state of high arousal.”

Personal Background.

I am neither an ethnomusicologist, nor have I had a musical “education”. I come from a Scottish Traditional singing family. My mother sang to me in the womb and on the breast. In my early childhood my aunts and grandparents also sang and my grandfather played traditional Scots fiddle. My elderly father dances our Scottish dances to this day. My professional life was spent as a social worker and therapist with severely abused young children ,often deeply distressed, and mistrustful of the world, and all seeking, at a deeper level to find harmony and balance within themselves. As a healing modality, I became a specialist in offering non directive play therapy, and it was during these experiences that I first became aware of how the dissonant sounds of human agony could be modulated through interactive play experiences and the the use of my own voice, and could play a central role in the recovery ,by providing safety containment and offering the opportunity to turn deep mistrust into a more healthy response to life. I describe this process in my book” Poppies on the Rubbish Heap”⁴.

‘When I work with a child in this way ,I see myself as providing the child with a board game. It has four clear edges, within which it is safe to be. I say to the child ”Go ahead ! play.” The playroom is the square and the toys are the pieces. I give him the opportunity to make his own moves and sequences on the board”As he moves and glides

with the unfolding of his fantasy, he checks on many occasions to make sure the board is steady enough to take the strain of his discoveries, and sometimes he tests it severely. When he learns that it will endure, he is for a short time in control of this part of his world, and feels safe enough to travel on a journey into his fantasies, his sadnesses, anxieties and confusions. He plays out his life experience, and having encountered the strength and power of his own uniqueness, he can then take this strength out of the playroom into other parts of his life where he feels powerless.”

During interactions such as these, my work as a therapist was to enter into a “therapeutic alliance” with the child, in which together we could explore the anxieties, confusions and terrors which had characterized these young lives. Inside the non directive safety of the playroom the child would initiate sounds for me to mirror. There was often a cacophony of polyphonic dissonant sounds between us, which finally ended in resolution at the end of the play hour. As the process continued, week after week, fear driven behaviours began to dissipate, and balance began to be restored, with trust, harmony and relative peace in the wounded psyche of the child.

Georgian Polyphony.

After a professional life working in trauma resolution with children, it was not until many years later that I first heard and sang Georgian Polyphony for the first time. For me the effect was startling. To a musical ear familiar with major and minor scales of western musical expression, here it seemed, in Georgian Polyphony, was represented a much more complete panoply of human emotional expression. In particular the apparent additional dissonance of human agony in musical form which was represented here, seemed to offer a much truer, and therefore much richer form of human musical expression. To my musical ear, trained at my mothers knee in early childhood to listen to sound very carefully, and without the desire or inclination to read music through a more conventional musical education, this form of strange polyphonic musical expression had a ring of truth about it, and a familiarity too, which was compelling.

Listening more carefully, what seemed to be happening within the structure of the song was as follows. A call is made, usually by the middle voice, which carries an emotional content, or energetic tone. The energetic quality of the tone dictates the nature of the response. Once the call is made, reliably, and without exception, a tapestry of voices responds to “confirm” the call which is musically embroidered into it. During the execution of the song, many sounds are made as the voices interact in ways which follow certain rhythmic patterns, often with enormous dissonance, during which there is often room to explore sounds, often within set parameters. Without exception, the singers come together as one, in union, at the end of the song, while the process resolves itself naturally, and harmony is restored, with all voices coming together at a central point. The call is made, the response is elicited, and a shared resolution results ...-a dependable status quo.

During this process, however, the individual voice maintains its own integrity at all times, always in relatedness to the other voices. The call, together with the emotional

content generated within it, is not only accepted unconditionally by the other voices, but honoured, respected and validated within the shared delivery of the song. There is a fairness about this interaction which is entirely free of social standing or status. Furthermore, within the confines of the song, no one voice is allowed to dominate, and no voice is drowned. The emotional content of the call must be matched and mirrored equally in intensity, in order that harmony can be achieved. Simply put, then, the songs act as a musical container, in which otherwise difficult to express, often unbearable human emotions expressed through sound are shared, honoured, and held in love and connection. The psyches of the singers, not to mention the audience, can, in this way then, receive, often on a subliminal level, an exquisitely delicate vibrational massage.

Such forms of vibrational healing are likely to impact on the physical body, also. "Cymatics", developed by the British osteopath, Sir Peter Guy Manners, involves the application of sound for bodily healing through the use of harmonically related tones.

For Manners, disease is an 'out of tune' in some part of the body. The sounds resonate with particular parts of the body that are in imbalance and restore them to their natural frequency.

He states "A healthy organ will have its molecules working together in a harmonious relationship with each other and will all be of the same pattern. If different sound patterns enter the organ, the harmonious relationship could be upset. If these frequencies are weak in their vibration, they will be overcome by the stronger vibrations of the natural ones. If on the other hand the foreign ones prove to be stronger, they may establish their disharmonious pattern in the organ, bone, tissue, etc, and that is what we call disease.

If therefore a treatment contains a harmonic frequency pattern that will re-inforce the organs, the vibrations of the intruder will be neutralized and the correct pattern for that organ re-established. This could constitute a curative reaction"⁵.

As we develop as human beings, we develop the capacity for language and these linguistic forms of expression add meaning to the sounds we make. The words of a song are therefore central to it. This is beautifully expressed by the great Georgian social visionary Ilia Chavchavadze, who writing in 1886, states⁶..

"Singing and chanting are nothing but felicitously interwoven poetry and music..... harmonious sound supports poetry and vice versa, so that a human being might fully and completely express the motion of his soul, and the beating of his heart. More often than not, voice and word are separately incapable of evoking from the depths of the human heart, the large and small pearls with which it is filled, when grief and sorrow or joy strike the divine chords of a man's spirituality."

It is often said that contained within every individual human voice, lives the impact of every experience which that human being has ever lived. Indeed it is arguably the capacity of the singer to contain human emotions, and work with them through the voice in a way that is able to mirror and evoke the unexpressed or unexpressable emotions of the audience in a subliminal way, that is often the mark of a great singer.

In polyphony , it is the emotional content of the call, together with linguistic meaning of the words, which together determine the nature of the polyphony and how it is sung. The two cannot be divorced from each other, since they are inextricably linked and of mutual importance. Sadly one gains the impression that in many modern studies conducted in polyphony, the focus is on the musical content alone. The words of the song, which convey its meaning , often receive scant attention. And little light is focused on the essence of the song which is lies in the relationship between the two.(Clearly the opposite of Chavchavadze’s perspective. !)

By way of illustration of some of these concepts, I would like to focus on two simple examples of Georgian songs. *

OBOL ROM DAIBADEBA
BEDI AR IBADEBISA

(When an orphan child is born, Good luck is never born with him.)

TSAVA IS DAIKARGEBA
VIS RASHI DAA KLDEBISA

(He could disappear and not return.. Who will miss him?)

GADAVARDEBA KLDEZEDA
JOGI DAIQUEBA MGLEBISA

(He will fall over a cliff, chased by a pack of wolves.)

RA DEDA AUTIRDEBA
RA MAMA DAIGON DEBISA.

(No mother will grieve, no father will care.)

In this beautiful Tianetian song lie ,the combined musical and linguistic emotional expressions of vulnerability, fragility, abandonment , the pain of loss, and human emptiness , all explored within the boundaries of the song. In order for any rendition of it to have validity and authenticity to the human ear, these emotions must somehow be contained within the initial call. This call is then matched in intensity by the other singers. It is mirrored , honoured and empathized with. If this vital process does not occur, the song loses it s force. On an intuitive level we seem to know how the song should sound, based perhaps by our own individual experiences of some of these emotions in our own lives. The song either ‘ rings true’ , or it doesn’t.

In language, the singer asserts that when an orphan child is born, good luck is not born with him. Back comes the polyphonic confirmation, mirrored both in language and

musical expression. Implicit in this is contained the message "Yes, indeed, that is the case, we confirm your version of reality, and confirm too your emotional reaction to it and your right to feel this way. The early infant stress antidotes of safety containment and attachment to human arousal and insecurity are all present here, in adult interactive bonding behaviour.

This kind of adult bonding through song is well expressed anecdotally in the Georgian saying

"Tu gverdit mdgomi ar giqvars, is ever imghereb - if you do not love each other you cant sing together."

Indeed, there is much practical truth in this statement. No one who has attempted to sing polyphony whilst preoccupied with negative feelings and emotions can doubt its validity. When these thoughts preoccupy us and dominate thinking, the human voice conveys the tinny noise which results when the vocal chords contract through fear and cannot expand into vibration. The vital bonding shared vibrational connection with the other voices cannot then take place, and the song, although perhaps technically tuneful, has an unpleasant disconnected aversive quality. If the call itself contains fear and mistrust, it seems, the song is on some level, a disharmonious experience for everyone.

In marked contrast to "OBOL ROM DAIBADEBA" is the song "SHAVLEGO", the two choir Kartlian/Kakhetian song, which to an outsider, seems etched into the collective Georgian psyche. This is a noble, heroic song of great honour and dignity and tells of the 12th century Georgian Hero Shavla Akhaltsikheli, who was willing to sacrifice his life for freedom in service of his country.

SHAVLEG SHENI SHAVI CHOKHA, SHAVLEGO, **

(Shavleg, your black chokha (part of the traditional male dress in Georgia), Shavlego)

SISKHLSHI GAGIKHAMEBIA, SHAVLEGO,

(Is covered with blood, Shavlego)

QATSIMEBI GIKHDEBODA, SHAVLEGO,

(Qatsims (traditional shoes) suited you very well, Shavlego)

LAHSKRAD TSASVLA GIKHDEBODA, SHAVLEGO,

(Going to war suited you, Shavlego)

MTERTAN BRDZOLA GIKHDEBODA, SHAVLEGO,

(Fighting with the enemies suited you, Shavlego)

MASHVELI AR GCHIRDEBODA, SHAVLEGO,

(You did not need anybody's help, Shavlego)

SHAVLEG SHENI SHAVI CHOKHA, SHAVLEGO.

(Shavleg, your black chokha, Shavlego)

In direct contrast to the previous song example, the call to this song contains strength, courage challenge, and an invitation to triumph over adverse circumstances. Any legacy of rich musical tradition such as this threatens to become a museum piece to be studied if it cannot live through successive generations and find a context for current day application. In the dark days of 1989, when the very identity of the Georgian Nation was under threat, in the face of Soviet tanks, guns and truncheons on the streets of its capital city, this song was sung. At a time of enormous shared external stress, as the nation held its breath, on the brink of survival, the arousal call to freedom is made "Shavleg, sheni shavi chokha! Shavlego! The polyphonic confirmation is then mirrored and received. With the song as a container, overwhelming fear is expressed and safely contained, human values confirmed, and a shared reality acknowledged. Therapeutic alliance par excellence! Through Shavlego, the Nation arose with dignity, maintained its national honour and integrity, resolved its collective fear, and restored love and harmony through the singing voices of its own citizens consumed with a shared love of their traditional motherland. Through Shavlego, the Georgian nation cradled itself in its own arms.

As recently, as 2007, too, in much the same way, Shavlego entered the centre of war torn Baghdad with the soldiers of the Georgian Army.(a).

It is perhaps worth noting here that the creation of shared polyphonic sound in order to triumph over overwhelming fear, is not limited to human behaviour. Ethnomusicologists such as Joseph Jordania, also explore its presence in animal behaviour. In his book "Who asked the First Questions-The Origins of Human Choral, Language and Speech", he states that (presumably in relation to an initial danger call) "rhythmically well organized loud noise, or the predecessor of human choral singing was initially established as a safety measure against big ground predators in the African Savannah" (7)

This polyphonic response to fear and discomfort was personally recently illustrated to me during a supra in Dmanisi, where as a foreign guest, I was invited to initiate a Georgian song. I began to sing Shen Khar Venakhi, only to find that, despite some earnest attempts, and amongst the obvious deep discomfort of the assembled company, the song unceremoniously fell apart. As it did so, a rousing Svan song was immediately initiated and order was restored. Later, a singer turned to me, and said simply "When we get scared we sing!"

At Dzegvi, the alternative orphanage for street children, pioneered by the social visionary, Gia Razmadze in 1992, the supra, polyphonic song and closeness to Nature were the principle vehicles used to enable abused and abandoned children to restore trust in themselves. These were economically very hard times and food was scarce. One of these children Shorena Getiashvili, here singing with us today, remembers how, cold and weakened by hunger and exhaustion, the children found themselves lost in the woods. When faced with such adversity, they would sing. Among the first songs was always the Ratchan song” Lale “

The emotional tone of the song is that of abandonment and inner emptiness. “I was sitting crying waiting for you. I waited and waited. Why did you not come? At last this terrible night has gone and I hope it will never return!-but how beautiful this Autumn month of St George has come to us!”

“The song” she said, “gave us strength, and took the hunger away.” In the same spirit, a visit to a team of Social workers led by Tinatin Gogiashvili, and based in Telavi, revealed that they, too, were familiar with the use of polyphonic songs to relieve the suffering of social orphan children, and a number had used these methods. Indeed at our own first professional meeting together, the bonding process was richly enhanced by a small supra and shared song.

A New Direction.

Together with Gia Razmadze, the former founder of Dzegvi, Nana Mzhavanadze, herself a traditional singer who has enjoyed a musical education here at the Tbilisi Conservatory, and a group of Georgian people whose skills and experience range from teaching to child care and bio- agriculture, we are beginning a non government organization initiative here in Georgia to explore some of these questions. Georgia has thousands of marginalized children including many babies in institutional care who day in day out suffer the “persistent unresolved stress of lack of attachment.”

“Mamatsi Guli”, or “Heart of the Brave” NGO is situated in Tokliauri village in the Sagarejo Region of Kakheti. Among its aims are to find village foster families for such children, coupled with care and conservation of the environment, and the exploration of folklore and polyphony as a tool for the relief of human suffering. It also aims to teach polyphonic song in a village context and to disseminate any new knowledge and insights gained in this practical work. The project itself is in its infancy, but we believe it to be of critical importance not only in creating a contemporary context in which these songs can flourish, but in restoring to these dispossessed marginalized and stigmatized young children, access to a healing tool which is indisputably their Georgian birthright.

In conclusion, I would like to echo the words contained in a conversation with one of the greatest living exponents of Kakhetian polyphony, Andro Simashvili.

“Song and story “, he told me, “combine so that it touches and moves the human heart. We have to bring this message to future generations .Nobody sees the importance of these songs now.

A song is for sweetening the soul” .

And it is surely in the early sounds of bonding, between a child and its mother that Chavchavadzes “divine chords of a mans spirituality” first ring in the ears of a human being.

References.

- 1.Cairns,K.(2002) “Attachment, Trauma, and Resilience: Therapeutic Caring for Children.” , London BAAF Adoption and Fostering. P49.
 2. Kalandadze shroma
 - 3 Cairns,K. (2002) “Attachment, Trauma and Resilience: Therapeutic Caring for Children” ,London BAAF Adoption and Fostering. P50.
 - 4 Bray M ,(1997)” Sexual Abuse the Childs Voice –Poppies on the Rubbish Heap.” London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers. P50.
 - 5 Manners, quoted in Goldman(1992)”Healing Sounds-the Power of Harmonics,Shaftesbury: Element Books. Pp90-91.
 - 6 Chavchavadze, Ilia, In “Georgian Folk Music”, Essays in Georgian Ethnomusicology. Tbilisi State Conservatory , 2005. p17
 - 7.Jordania, Joseph. “Who Asked the first Question? The Origins of Human Choral Singing,Intelligence,Language and Speech.” Logos 2006, p304.
- (a)Verbal account of Kakhaber Ch’inch’arauli, Georgian Army Surgeon. 26 June 2008.

*,**. Song Demonstrations.

