

# Both Lowland and Highland Model Types of Music

This paper focuses on the practical part [of the colloquy], which includes the presentation of music that is locally unknown; some examples presented here may also suggest certain possibilities for the future years of the festival. In the case of my presentation last year, devoted to *tarantism*, such a prophecy proved to be true, because one of the presented groups, Nidi d'Arac, was invited to perform here in Náměšť this year.

Considering the connotations of the character of music and its geographical context, the music of the highlands is usually linked with qualities such as rawness, authenticity and maintaining connectedness to one's roots, which has vanished elsewhere. This leads to two questions:

1) Could this quality, which is usually linked with highland areas, be something more general, which also prevails in other more isolated places where people are more self-reliant? Could such places be deserts, islands or remote continental places, including mountains?

2) Could this mean that the music of lowland areas is dull, commercial, and derivative?

A positive answer to the first question can be confirmed with well-known arguments. Take polyphony as an example: originally, it was common on the European continent; now it has survived especially on the islands of Corsica and Sardinia. The most authentic Irish music can be found in the most remote corners of the Irish island. The mountain valleys of Transylvania have served as a music treasury to several generations of collectors. The Sahara desert is known as a source of distinctive music, untouched by urban civilization.

As for the music of lowlands, such generalizations cannot be applied, because apart from dull and derivative music, there are sources of unique styles in lowlands too. Let us look at the mountain regions and hinterlands first. Is there a typical flavour in the music of such remote

places irrespective of geographical co-ordinates?

In his blog in 2007, Piers Faccini, musician of British-Italian origin, depicts this flavour as follows:<sup>1)</sup>

“Uccio Aloisi is nearly 80 years old and is an olive farmer by living and although he doesn't know how to read or write, he knows all the songs by heart and has been singing longer than anyone can remember. We were staying nearby to where Uccio comes from and my brother through some friends had organised a dinner where I could meet him.

When I walked into the room, Uccio was already sitting at the table, his large gnarled hands resting before him, a flat cap resting on his sun lined face. His handshake was strong and his eyes piercing, directing the kind of look that comes only from someone who lives without everyday lies, in other words, without bullshit. Wine was uncorked and served and within a few minutes, Uccio began singing accompanied only by a younger man who is also in his group, these two voices filled all the room, brought everything to a halt and tears to my eyes. I wanted to sing something in return, something that I could sing out fully, so I sang an old gospel song for the room and although Uccio didn't even know which language I was even singing in, he joined in with me, picking out the rhythms he wanted to hear or syllables that sounded familiar. We ate and drank more and Uccio and Domenico sang well into the night. I love Uccio in the same way I love Ballake Cissoko who played on Tearing Sky; they represent something I have always had a great nostalgia for but will never be able to know myself.”

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**Music example:** “Pizzica Degli Uccio”, from the album *Bona Sera A Quista Casa*, Edizioni Aramirè, 2003.

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Moving north of [the town of] Salento along the coast and stopping not far from Venice, you will reach the Padua River estuary. The Padua Lowlands extend from there, one of the most fertile regions in Italy. It was there where the song originated and which can rightly be considered the musical image of Italy: “Bella Ciao”. During WWII, it was the song of resistance fighters and partisans who hid in the mountains and fought against Mussolini. “Bella Ciao” has been recorded many times,

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1) <http://www.myspace.com/piersfaccini>

including one by the Alexander Ensemble of the Red Army; one of the latest versions includes a very radical and anarchic recording by an Italian post-punk band. However, partisans did not compose the song; they only added more lyrics to an already existing version from the Padua Lowlands. The original version of “Bella Ciao” can be labelled a work song, similar to the work songs of African Americans. In the Padua Lowlands, women called *mondine* sang the song; they worked hard in the rice fields. In the song they lament the hardship of their lives. In a way, the original version of “Bella Ciao” is a parallel to the spirituals of African Americans, which are filled with pain and sorrow so strong that you can identify these emotions even without understanding the lyrics.

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**Music example:** “Bella Ciao”, from the album *Trio Rouge*, Intuition, 2004.

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Moving further north of the Padua Lowlands, we reach the Alps. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the music of the Alpine mountain men, their yodeling and folk costumes underwent a process which may be depicted as “tourist commercialization”. For foreigners, the music of the Alps has obtained a conservative flavour; on the other hand, for generations of musicians from Austria, Bavaria and Switzerland, it served as a springboard to original, within the local context, distinct and alternative creation. This music field is almost unknown in the Czech lands, but certainly not uninteresting; especially because of its affinity with the style known as Tex-Mex, the music of the Texas and Mexico border region. There are some rational reasons for this: the Polka and accordion came to Mexico through the Austrian Army, and to southern Texas thanks to Czech and German immigrants.

Even today, alternative Alpine music is alive and well. Just a few days ago, an interesting project took place at the Glatt und Verkehrt festival in the Austrian town of Krems, some 150 km from Náměšť. The Styrian band Broadlahn, which in the past played with Austrian compatriot Joe Zawinul, performed with the former bass player of Zawinul, Amit Chatterie, in Krems last Saturday. The following track is an example of the original Alpine music as played by the Husmusig Jeremias Vo Bärn band from Switzerland, free of fusions and layers of tourist commercialization.

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**Music example:** “Trüll Masolke”, Husmusig Jeremias  
Vo Bärn, from the album *The Alps*, WDR-Network, 1994.

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The broad mountain valleys of the Alps, similar to the vast expanses of the American prairies, virtually incite very specific vocal expression, such as the yodeling of American cowboys or Alpine mountain men, and the hollering of shepherds. Such hollering can even be found in the tropics; the rural musical tradition of Columbia is practically unknown in the rest of the world, so the first encounter with it may be a great surprise, as was evident at the Rudolstadt festival this year [2007]. The performance of singer Lucia Pulido was considered the highlight of the event, according to many, including the present program director of the Náměšť festival, Michal Schmidt.

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**Music example:** “Cantos De Vaquería”, Lucia Pulido,  
from the album *América Contemporânea-Um Outro Centro*,  
Nucleo 2006.

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In the survey of “both highland and lowland model types of music”, some relatively known phenomena should not be omitted:

- the music of fiddle players of Transylvania, which in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century inspired Béla Bartok and later on the Muzsikas band, among others
- the throat singing of the mountain and plains areas of Tuva, Altai and Mongolia
- the energetic dance style *forro* with its dominant accordion from the central parts of Brazil
- the music of the Appalachian Mountains, which gave birth to American bluegrass music, among others. By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, several generations prior to John Mayall, specific song types originated in this area which were called white blues; among these is the frequently recorded “Cold Rain and Snow”, best known through the interpretation by the Grateful Dead.

Perhaps the most peculiar genre of isolated areas is the *a cappella* singing called *mouth music* (*puirt-a-beul* in Scots Gaelic). It flourished

in the most poor and remote areas of Scotland, because according to some, Calvinist priests ordered all musical instruments to be burnt so they did not tempt one to sin; according to others, it was because there were no musical instruments in poor areas at all.

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**Music examples:** Audrey Saint-Coeur - Diddlage USA, 1976.  
John MacDonald (\*1905)- “Strathspey/The Reel Of Tulloch”,  
from the album *Celtic Mouth Music*, Ellipsis Arts, 1997.

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As was already mentioned, unlike the music of highlands and hinterlands, the music of lowlands resists generalization; lowlands may include both the forests of Amazonia as well as cosmopolitan harbours such as Liverpool, Hamburg, New Orleans, Havana, Oran and Buenos Aires. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, each of these played a specific key role in music, but this could be a theme for a completely different paper.

**List of music examples:**

“Pizzica Degli Uccio” from the album *Bona Sera A Quista Casa*,  
Edizioni Aramirè, 2003.

“Bella Ciao” from the album *Trio Rouge*, Intuition, 2004.

“Trüll Masolke”, Husmusig Jeremias Vo Bärn, from the album  
*The Alps*, WDR-Network 1994.

“Cantos De Vaquería”, Lucia Pulido, from the album  
*América Contemporánea-Um Outro Centro*, Nucleo 2006.

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