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## INTRODUCTION: LAYERS OF MEANING EXPLORED THROUGH A PRODUCTIVELY UNSTABLE CONCEPT

*Jonathan Goldman*

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We are told that heterophony is a term “coined by Plato, of uncertain meaning; now used to describe simultaneous variation of a single melody” (Cooke 2001). It has been in use since the beginning of the twentieth century, when influential musicologists like Carl Stumpf (1901) and Guido Adler (1908) began using it to designate a musical texture comprised of several voices singing or playing parts that are similar without being identical. In heterophony, parts “elaborate the ‘same’ melodic material with asynchronous rhythms” (De Souza 2019, 165–66). Sometimes, heterophony results from each instrumentalist or singer spontaneously adding musical ornaments or embroideries that then produce a texture of superimposed micro-variations on the same basic melodic shapes. At other times, it can result from a musical architecture that values melodic over harmonic consistency. What is certain is that this musical texture is incredibly ubiquitous; people who produce sonic textures that could be described as heterophonic are literally everywhere, since, as soon as more than one voice or instrument sound together, some degree of heterophony, whether deliberate or not, ensues. Arguably, notated European art music presents an exception to this ubiquity, since homophony and polyphony dominate and heterophony is apparently only perceived as an occasional effect. Indeed, a glance through musical dictionaries, encyclopedias, and music textbooks from the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries confirms that, if heterophony is mentioned at all, the inches of text devoted to it are negligible when compared to the multiple columns devoted to textures more commonly associated with Western art music. This lack of attention is due in part to a chauvinism that gave pride of place to musical features most typical of European music. Indeed, many authors have dismissed the term outright, such as ethnomusicologist Marc Perlman, who described it as “a murky term, introduced a century ago by Western scholars to stand for a generic musical Other [...] defined by the gap it filled, being whatever was neither monophony nor polyphony” (Perlman 2004, 62). Nevertheless, this journal issue is guided by the hypothesis that, despite the Eurocentric biases of earlier authors who have used the term, and however unstable this liminal musical category may be, it has the potential to

shed light on the nature of music making across a broad swathe of temporally and geographically distinct repertoires.

Some authors have expanded the meaning of heterophony to embrace *any* form of multipart music, following Curt Sachs' claim that heterophony is found "in every composition in which 'other notes' are heard at the same time, including a simple drone with a melody, but also including modern polyphony and harmony" (cited in Pärtlas 2016, 46). Tempting as this taxonomic move may be, it seems more fruitful to conceive of heterophony as an autonomous, if partially indefinable, category, one for which striking examples can be found almost anywhere, including within the Western art music canon. Cooke's article in the *New Grove* cites a passage from Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, and countless examples could be invoked from the fourth movement of Mozart's Symphony no. 36 ("Linz"), KV425, the re-exposition of the third movement of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, or the many works of Anton Webern, such as his choral song, op. 19, no. 1 (Evangelista and Goldman, 2024, 8–9). More recently, the late Spanish-Canadian composer José Evangelista (1943–2023), to whom this journal issue is dedicated, was inspired by several sources—including Balinese gamelan, Burmese piano, and Spanish folk music, as well as the so-called "New Simplicity" of some prominent students of Karlheinz Stockhausen—to use heterophony as the guiding principle of his compositions, including in his classic work *Clos de vie* (1983).

Like all musical objects, heterophony is not only a musical texture or a technique of musical performance or composition: it is also associated with a definable psychological experience linked to performance and perception and reflects a variety of social relations that at once make it possible and are enacted through it. At its core, heterophony is a pervasive experience shared by groups of people singing together who are at once conscious of singing "the same thing" and of individuals "singing in their own way." Some see this "collective individualism" as an ideal model for social existence. As spontaneous variation, it is often the result of an instantaneous internal negotiation between (free, personal, subjective) improvisation and (imposed, collective, objective) adherence to a norm. The social dimension of heterophony was characterized by Steven Feld's classic work on Kaluli music, in which he noted that the heterophonic style characteristic of Kaluli music was typical of a "particular interactional style [that] simultaneously maximizes social participation and maximizes autonomy of self" (Feld 1988, 84). For Feld, as Jonathan De Souza has noted, heterophonic "textures do not simply resemble social relationships; for participants, they indexically embody them as well" (De Souza 2019, 178).

Heterophony is a *non-category*: a fluid space between two stable categories (polyphony and monophony), by its nature mobile and flexible. But its very fluidity may also prove useful as a heuristic tool for allowing comparisons between disparate repertoire. Heterophony's marginal status in Western classical music confers a certain "minoritarian" status upon it, following Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's discussion of "minor literature," developed in their study of Franz Kafka. Deleuze and Guattari assert that "a

minor literature is not the literature of a minor language, but the literature a minority makes in a major language. But the primary characteristic of a minor literature involves all the ways in which the language is effected by a strong co-efficient of deterritorialization” (Deleuze–Guattari 1983, 16). Heterophonic instances of European concert music often function in a similar way—as minoritarian musics made within the context of a dominant musical idiom and sociocultural context. Heterophonic moments in concert music (broadly defined) are often perceived with “a strong coefficient of deterritorialization,” defined as the “dissolution of a cultural space.” Placed within Western score-based concert music, heterophonic elements often recall other forms of more collective and spontaneous music-making, thereby evoking music usually made at the margins of the bourgeois world the concert audience inhabits, as issue contributor Sandeep Bhagwati has noted. Heterophony’s very ephemerality and variability thereby hold the promise of entering into dialogue and learning from music of every musical tradition of the world. Recent discussions have underscored the unjust hierarchies that led an early generation of musicologists to posit the distinction between polyphony and heterophony in the first place, a distinction that reified race and class structures and effected lasting damage on music theory discourse; serving in the words of Anna Yu Wang (2023) as “an instrument of social class-making.” In a 2021 article, Kwami Coleman reframed the term heterophony, understood as “the dense and opaque sound of decentralized simultaneity” and applied it to the idioms of free jazz, thereby “turn[ing] away from heterophony’s troubling racist genealogy and decenter[ing] polyphony’s hegemonic Eurocentric hold on musical ‘order’” (263 and 279). In phase with these conversations, contributions to this issue remain open to the ways that discussion of heterophony can enrich transcultural discussions of music, while also remaining wary of its tendency to order objects into hierarchies.

The articles in this issue emerged from a graduate seminar that I gave at the Faculty of Music of the Université de Montréal in the winter of 2021 titled “Polyphonie du monde.” This seminar took advantage of the then newly-universal technology of Zoom videoconferencing to welcome scholars and performers from around the world into the classroom. The seminar was held under the aegis of the Observatoire interdisciplinaire de création et de recherche en musique (OICRM), with the generous financial support of an Insight Development grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) of which I was the principal investigator, along with collaborators Sandeep Bhagwati, Nathalie Fernando, and François de Médicis.

This issue takes up diverse areas of inquiry from this seminar, including composer **Sandeep Bhagwati**’s contribution, which extends the notion of heterophony with its characteristically superimposed layers in different temporal zones to encompass scales of time that surpass human perception and partake thereby in geological and even planetary timescales; finding ways for listeners to fathom these contradictory timescales becomes the basis for

Bhagwati's recent musical performances. Music theorist **Jonathan De Souza**, for his part, invokes research in music cognition to show how heterophony is a texture in which multiple parts create an emergent melodic gestalt, one that is both unified and varied. Employing music theoretical tools for measuring texture, he proposes a method for quantitatively accounting for heterophony, then tests his tools through close readings of specific heterophonic performances of silk and bamboo music from Shanghai. *Đàn tranh* performer **Nguyễn Thanh Thủy** and guitarist **Stefan Östersjö** study the history and performance practices of *Vọng Cổ*, a song that has its origins in the hybridized culture of southern colonial Vietnam in the 1920s, through musical experimentation via intercultural collaboration with master performers of the tradition, in order to explore its potential for further development in present-day musical culture in Vietnam. For her part, musicologist **Vicky Tremblay** mobilizes the notion of orality to understand the way Karlheinz Stockhausen develops explicitly heterophonic textures in works from the 1960s in an ultimately fruitless attempt to create a music that contains *everything* and thus achieves transcendence. Composer and performer of Balinese gamelan **I Wayan Sudirana** reveals the melodic complexity that undergirds the textural formations of various gamelan repertoires, including gender wayang, gong luang, gong suling, and the most celebrated genre outside the island, gong kebyar. U.S.-based cellist and seasoned performer of intercultural music **Jon Silpayamanant** discusses how the concept of heterophony comes into play when interpreting music of diverse cultural origins with his ensemble of *huqin* instruments, Saw Peep. Finally, composer and performer on the kamanche, **Showan Tavakol**, discusses his work for string quartet, *Hologramme modal*, recently performed by the Montreal-based Molinari Quartet, which recreates the heterophonic textures of several Middle-Eastern traditions via painstaking transcription and creative extension. Thus featuring writing by musicologists, theorists, performers, and composers, this issue combines scholarly articles, analytical treatments and reports on artistic projects. We hope it reflects the diversity of heterophonic practice through its variety of objects, methods and modes of thought.

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## BIOGRAPHY

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