

The (Musical) Performance at Stake: An Ethnomusicological Review

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I have always considered the observation of a musical manifestation more or less as the analysis of a musical “performance.” My recent interrogations and research about *what is, in fact, a “performance”*? have led me to formulate an observation. While looking for an answer in the *performance studies* literature, it is quite clear that music is not included as a subject of analysis but appears more as an object or a pretext to the analysis of the meaning(s) hidden *behind* the music, the best example being theater. A simple Internet search for “performance studies” only shows a few titles on music. Even *The Cambridge Introduction to Performance Theory* (2016) presents performance with keywords like “Drama and Theater” and “Literature.” Also, looking to different performance studies programs and courses syllabi from American universities like New York University, Brown, Northwestern, University of California, Davis, etc., it is quite clear that the notion of “performance” is widely associated with *communication*.¹ Though it surely is, this understanding appeals to a very particular intellectual lineage, characterized by the writings of eminent authors like philosophers John L. Austin (1962) and John R. Searl (1969), cultural anthropologist Victor Turner (1982), and drama theorist Richard Schechner (1988), for whom the performance is at first a way to observe language, ritual, and everyday life interactions.

As I am a French language speaker, it is interesting to see that the words “performance” and “performativity” are in English very inclusive and do not make a great deal of sense as English words if it is not to relate to a comportment or a behavior. Similarly in French, “*performance*” often only refers to the musical “manifestation” (*la manifestation musicale*), the concert, and the execution or, in other words: the event itself (“What a spectacular performance!”). Then, the linguistic difference between those expressions can be located somewhere between the event and its realization. In this vein, ethnomusicologist Monique Desroches sees performance as “a series of modes of production and set-up in communication [actors and audience] which contributes significantly to the edification of the stylistics of a musical practice” (2008:104-105).² Desroches then proposes different parameters for the study of performance which include the co-text and the context, the interaction and the communication (for example, with listeners), and the realization modalities (*ibid*). Additionally, anthropologist Bob W. White (2008) also gives the public an active part in the performance, just as texts of the songs which should be considered as

many elements nested in a performancial space or a communicative ensemble named after Austin's "performativity," *performativité*. These two scholars are not the only ones to show interest in the study of musical performance, and they particularly insist on the "layers" composing the notion of performance as it is applied to music, including the "non-musical." Thus, the aim of the present article is to reiterate the importance of observing the musical performance not only as an event but specifically as a construction in a non-musical paradigm, a construction also built in a long-term and continuous process by all the members of what we could call a "performancial community." Then, it would be necessary to return to the ethnomusicological works from the 1980s and 1990s, which describe musical performance not only as a sporadic, punctual event, but also as the conjunction of rites, rituals, beliefs and religions in a given community. As an example, I will illustrate my proposition through my own observations on choral singing as practiced among the Sereer-noon, in Senegal. But first, I will briefly summarize the conception scholars have had of the musical performance.

Music and Performance Studies: A Brief Introduction

As pointed out by music scholar Guerino Mazzola, music in performance *theory*—and not performance *studies*—was at first roughly defined "as pertaining to rhetorical aesthetics" and then "characterized by a switch from rhetorical aesthetics to the aesthetics of a musical work" (2011:12). Later, music was associated with performance "being an expression of analytical insights of the *qua* meaningful text" (*ibid*). Since then, in performance theory, musical performance has nearly always been associated with the communication of an emotion,³ and that is the way it is also presented globally in the cultural performance literature in anthropology: in its association with the body, the *embodiment*.⁴ It is possible to follow the historical development of performance theory amidst linguists, anthropologists, and sociologists, culminating in the formalization of the field as *cultural performances* (McKenzie 2005) and the crystallization of a conception of the performance as the sum of "(1) social and self-reflection through the dramatization or embodiment of symbolic forms, (2) the presentation of alternative embodiments, and (3) the possibility for conservation or transformation of both individuals and society" (*ibid*). So the question remains: why is the musical performance mostly related to "emotions" and their communication (live, disc, MP3, etc.)? The point here is not that this is false or irrelevant, but rather to question the possibility of seeing "something else" behind this act of communicating emotions... let's say, something constructed for "something else" besides the performance and the act of communication themselves?

The literature on music in the field of psychology is vast. Themes relating to musical perception, the psychology of music listening (Justin 2000) and musical generative processes (Sloboda 1988) are particularly present. In his *Music Performance Research at the Millennium* (2003), scholar Alf Gabrielsson conducts an important review of the large literature on music and performance, pointing out categories like: performance planning, sight reading, improvisation, feedback in performance, motor processes in performance, measurements of performance, models of music performance, physical factors in performance, psychological and social factors, performance evaluation, and so on. According to his results, along with studies by John Rink (2002) and Bruce A. Carr, Lukas Foss and John P. Thomas (2011), “performance” is the public manifestation of the interpreter’s capabilities and their reception; that is to say, an *event*, a moment displaying music in a communication and an aesthetic relation.

Those studies point to another fact: most of the recent research on the subject has been led by psychologists and neuropsychiatrists. It has been quite a long time since ethnomusicologists have taken the question of musical performance seriously *outside* of the sole moment of the musical manifestation. Christopher Small was already making this point in 1977 in his book *Music, Society, Education*. Steven Feld was dealing with non-human sounds in 1982 in his book *Sound and Sentiment: Birds, Weeping, Poetics, and Song in Kaluli Expression*. Ruth Stone’s ethnography *Let the Inside Be Sweet* (1982) is an early example of scholarship on performance in ethnomusicology and what she calls the “musical event,” as is Anthony Seeger’s classic *Why Suyá Sing* (1987). More recently, ethnomusicologists like Michelle Kisliuk (1998), Charles Keil (1998), Deborah Wong (2004), Timothy D. Taylor (2016), and Pavithra Prasad and Jeff Roy (2017) among others, have also extensively grappled with performance studies in their work. Finally, there is an important chapter entitled “Performance Theory in Ethnomusicology” in Ruth Stone’s *Theory for Ethnomusicology* (2008). Of course, preparation for a concert is important, and scholars have scrutinized the question in recent years, especially pedagogues, didacticians and physiologists, and even eutonists. But what if all that preparation was not “destined” or intended for the concert? What if the concert was only the object, the pretext and the “conveyal” of a musical purpose that is not situated *in musica*? Finally, what if musical preparation was not a “preparation” at all, but a way to induce people in borrowing and building an ideal to share with family and friends, with the community? What if that preparation was the performance itself as a way to enhance the community?

Those questions appeared on the field when it became clear to me that the performers in the choral did not conceive their performance as a concert but more as a manner to enhance

the community *without the will to participate in a musical manifestation*. Following the Sereer-noon from Kouidiadiène (Senegal), the next sections will not offer and explain a new way to analyze and observe musical performance, but a way to reconsider it from “outside” of the music itself; the musical event not only as a producer of communication canals, but the product of that same communication through time, in everyday life.

French Musical Restructuration: The Origins of Choral Singing

Before going further in my purpose to review the musical performance status as a process instead of an object to enlarge or liberate it from its “musical obligated frame,” let’s take a brief look at the context of those people for whom music is not the reason for singing. Choral singing (or simply polyphony) was not known among the Sereer-noon before the arrival of the French missionaries in the region of Thiès and later, in Kouidiadiène. The Mission of Thiès was founded in 1886 by the Spiritains, the French Catholic *Congrégation du Saint Esprit* (but a station had previously been built by the French colonial army in 1864) and the location rapidly became a huge center of activities, especially for missionaries for whom the Mission came to be a place of transit to other missions all around West Africa. If the colonial contact with the Sereer-noon had been a little difficult, it seems that it might have been easier on a religious level where music was the instrument *par excellence* for enculturation – or better in French, *inculturation*.⁵ Thereupon ethnomusicologist Christine T.N. Dang is categorical when she says that “on the musical level, these readings [of such an opposition through colonial archives reading] imply fundamental incompatibility between European-originated forms and authentic African expressivity, dismissing the long history of contact and exchange between these two categories” (Dang 2014:115). That is to say the encounter with missionaries, on a musical level, had been easier than the colonial contact itself among the global colonization situation because of the exchanges of musical symbols and the possibility to consider some symbolic equivalences between religious identities through music.



Figure 1: Koudiadiène is situated to approximately 12km from Thiès.

Source: <https://mapcarta.com/16835282/Map>.

Actually, the religious context of observation in this colonial territory is the key to understand the appearance of choral singing, and it further points to what makes it different from other places. Indeed, if the phenomenon observed in Koudiadiène is part of a context of Christian faith, there are more Muslims in the *Cangin* group than Catholics. Furthermore, several animist beliefs persist (Dupire 1992).⁶ In fact, while the Sereer tend mostly to adhere to Islam, the Sereer-noon are an exception and remain to this day mostly Catholic. Historian Ismaila Ciss also mentions that:

the Sereer were still convinced that being Christian was not incompatible with certain values of local culture, that syncretism was a way to strengthen their faith in a unique God, and to better protect themselves from evil spirits. It was out of the question for them to abandon certain practices. Such behavior should have led to their cultural negation. (Ciss 2000:331-32)⁷

After Senegal's independence from France on August 20th, 1960, the country's Catholic church was directed by Cardinal Hyacinthe Thiandoum starting in 1962 (Benoist 2008). Under his governance, Catholic plain chant was replaced at the church by choral singing structured in four voices (SATB) with texts sung in vernacular dialects (Benoist 2008;

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Dang 2014). This change coincided with the Vatican II Council (1962-65) whereby the Church sought to encourage the adaptation of worship to local customs (Dang 2014). In this, we witness the creation of a new performancial space in the Catholic faith in which many traditional symbols were adapted by the Sereer-noon. As Dang explains, “multiple ethical codes and spiritual paths may coexist like polyphonic layers upon each other – like a four-part harmony in which each voice enunciates a melodic contour of divergent yet fundamentally interrelated musical veracity” (Dang 2014:122). Here, the musical syncretism is not simply the sum of the beliefs from two *parties* or the full adoption by a group of those from the other one, but rather a complex construction within which each part, animists and Catholics, can have the right to choose and keep its own symbolic association in a common path to glorify a unique God through music.

Being “Catholic”: Beliefs and Cultural Practices among the Noon

Although it is difficult to find literature on and about the Sereer-noon, it would be wrong to say that the Noons have been forgotten and are absent from the different literatures (ethnological, colonial, missionary). Rather, they only appear in those literatures by “exclusion” which creates a sort of “epistemic silence” (Touoyem 2014:2) around them, a silence that however “expresses a full knowledge – the silence of the one who is silent because he knows, and vice versa [or] a gap in the knowledge – the silence of the one who knows nothing or not enough, of the one who abstains, stoically, in the absence of established or provisional knowledge, opinion or certainty” (Eni Puccinelli Orlandi 1991, quoted by Manao 1999:18).⁸ This abundant presence in the literature does not present them any other way than by mention of this state of difference: *what the Noons are not*. If archives could only highlight some elements of the Noon’s culture as opposed to that of other groups in Senegal, this information remains fundamental in my actual doctoral project of re-construction of their cultural identity, by qualitative triangulation with data collected on the field. This research will help sorting the ethnological observations of these ideologically oriented writings in order to draw a much more complete portrait of the socio-historical and cultural situation of the Sereer-noon before and during the colonization and their evangelization. For now, to understand in a better way to what extent the complexity of this case is, we’ll develop one example of symbolic beliefs that can be heard or analyzed in their contemporary cultural practices but that predates their conversion to Catholicism. During all my visits to Kouidiadiène since 2010, I lived with the Ndiolène’s family, in the village of Thiafathie, and participated with the community in daily tasks. In July and August 2015, during the *hivernage*, the rainy season and the period of agricultural work, I struggled with certain “rules” that were not explainable, or even, not explained by the

Noons themselves; in particular, the obligation to deposit three seeds per seed hole. To my question “Why not two?” I was systematically answered “But why not four?” And to my question “So, why not four?” I was told “Why not three?” And my questions inevitably led me to consider that three seeds were better “to grow.” In this regard, the importance of numbers that Catholic missionary Henri Gravrand recalls for the Sereer, numerical symbols are particularly important and present, even if they are not always aware of it (Gravrand 1987). There is the case here where people mobilize daily this type of numerical symbols without, however, objectifying their relevance since the importance of the action does not belong in the rule itself but in its expected effect. Some gestures are done a particular way since immemorable times and are considered traditionally the best way to accomplish it by the community. I followed this path and discovered that the number “3,” symbol of a better fertility for the seeds, is above all a symbol of fecundity: it is the numerical symbol of the feminine. Marie-Christine Ndiolène, a former chorister, explained to me that when a girl is sick, for instance, she is systematically given three sips of syrup, three tablets, three days of rest, and so on.⁹ Similarly, a woman giving birth to a girl will stay three days in the room where she gave birth before going out for avoiding to attract misfortune (interview of July 21th, 2015). Also, Marie-Christine continued telling me that when the Noons express their genealogy, the only pan of it they expose is the one of their mother, by their surname, while emphasizing the importance of the maternal uncle. Even a father still considers today that the brother of his wife will have a greater regard than himself on the future of his own children (interview with Joseph Ndiolène, August 1st, 2015). This reveals the importance attributed to women among Koudiadiène’s Noons, long before the arrival of Catholicism and patrilineality. In fact, it is rather today a system of matrilineal descent, but patrilocal and agnatic lineage (Dupire 1992). In the end, among the Noons, women possess such an importance in the village that they became a symbol at the core of the traditional and religious musical production. This role of the feminine will be conveyed both musically and by the rules governing the musical practice of the choir by the semantic transposition of the symbolic “3” in the Catholic liturgical music observed in Koudiadiène since “[m]usically, by transforming already classified musical structures that represent a well-known cultural identity by passing them into another cultural reality and observing the meeting points or the differences, we obtain what is called a *transmutation* – a change from one substance to another, a change of nature” (Surianu 1998:399).¹⁰

Here is the trick: in Koudiadiène, all the leaders and apprentices are men, but all the rules observed surrounding choral practice underline the feminine. If this situation is already reminiscent of the genealogical lineage mentioned above because of the importance of women in a male environment, the analogy continues musically with the choir. First, I

noticed this association between the choral and the Blessed Virgin Mary: before and after each rehearsal of the choir, they make a prayer to the Virgin Mary. When I asked the question “Why the Virgin Mary?,” I have always been told that “it is not the Virgin Mary that is prayed, it is a different Saint each time, but it is not obliged to be a Saint” (Interview with Lazare Ngagne Tene, July 14th, 2015).¹¹ In fact, the prayers for all the rehearsals I have attended were addressed to the Blessed Virgin Mary, with the exception of a few occasions when addressed to the Founding Father of the Congregation of the Adorers of the Blessed Sacrament, Saint Pierre Julien Eymard, especially in view of the Parish Patronal Feast concert which took place on August 1st and 2th, 2015. This is a very strong link between the rationale for the rehearsals, that is, literally being at the height of the expectations of the community for the good performance of the choir during the Mass, and obtaining the blessing of Saint Mary, Mother of God. Added to this is the obligation to include in the repertoire an outing song in honor of the Virgin Mary, as if the faithful returning home had to leave the Church, patriarchal, with a final thought for this woman, mother of the patriarch.

**Musical example 1. Jebal la suñu ligeey, Chorale Saint-Dominic Savio
(credits : Anthony Grégoire)**

Access audio at: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1eC2it4c7kstCZmaRa5q1By_vQuQgDCaT/preview

**Musical example 2. Nañu onox faaning go, Chorale Saint-Dominic Savio
(credits : Anthony Grégoire)**

Access audio at: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dglzuT-H4hpQi0C-fbnAklOuGtHbtYJE/preview>

Musically, I retain a few points. The association within the repertoire of the choir of measurement in 3/8 only to “tradition”: a ternary measure reminiscent of the traditional song of the *mbilim*,¹² a song traditionally performed by women. Also, the structure of the *mbilim*, in two parts separated by a transitory part where the tempo accelerates. That one finds structuring many parts of the corpus: it is a tripartite structure also symbolizing the implication of the woman in the musical genre. In addition, only ternary measures in 3/8 are accompanied by *tam-tams*, an identity symbol already reinforcing this link with Sereer-noon’s traditions. Finally, the intonation¹³ of a song is in all cases, except those where it is the choirmaster or the celebrant who intones, ensured by the sopranos, as if the women, in homophony, had a heralding role precursor of the polyphony to follow. What needs to be understood here is that the choir itself, a gathering illustrating and reinforcing the bonds that support the importance of the community in the tradition, holds its functional value in

the communion, through prayer of God and his people. On the other hand, it is through the symbolic value attributed to the whole that the feminine is still perpetuated today, as it is women who symbolically support this fusion between animism and Catholicism: a fusion that has allowed the creation of this new cultural departure of the Sereer-noon, and from which new perspectives could have been constructed, a new fruitful life to perpetuate the important symbols of the animist Noons by the voice of the newly Catholic Noons.

In sum, the context of observation and the origins of choral singing in Kouidiadiène brings to light a syncretic potpourri of Catholic and Animist symbols. These are built in the reciprocal acceptance, by both cultures, not only of the ritual conception of the cult but also of a performancial time and place – the past and the present, the faith and the cult, and the village and the church – to provide for them the sole spirit of what it means “to make music” together, a fertile milieu to strengthen the social fabric.

***Musicking*¹⁴ in Kouidiadiène: The Ensemble Instrumentation**

In regard to the description of the ensemble observed in Kouidiadiène, I refer to the four-voices Western choral group composed of soprano, alto, tenor and bass (SATB). The number of singers in the choir is not fixed and varies greatly depending on the time of the year. The choristers may also join it on a voluntary basis. However, the repertoire of the ensemble remains polyphonic at all times. The rare occasions when homophony is heard are musical pieces that are precisely associated with a request for intercession in favor of the community, such as *la prière universelle*, which is sung with all the parishioners, or when a group of choristers intones the initial part of a piece, intonation which will be followed immediately by the polyphonic choir. However, according to the liturgical context, this intonation in homophony can be replaced by the choirmaster or the priest celebrating the Mass and who then act as soloists.

In terms of organology, it is necessary to specify the terminology of certain musical instruments used in the choral ensemble as the *tam-tams*, whose name is attributed by the Noons to their traditional drums.



**Figure 2a. The thiole, the tougouni and the nder
(photo by author).**



**Figure 2b. The thiole
(photo by author).**

This name refers to a family of five membranophones struck simultaneously with a hand and a stick, literally a branch that has been torn from its tree before playing on the instrument. All the drums are single-skinned and are listed as follows, from the smallest to the largest: *thiole*, *mbal*, *tal-mbat*, *tougouni*, and *nder*. These are Sereer-noon names derived from Wolof appellations since those drums are constitutive of the Wolof *sabar* drums ensemble.

The structure of these instruments is at the crossroads between the *djembe* and the *sabar*, and the same goes for the playing technique. The first one is a membranophone struck with hands and whose cup-shaped body is cut in one piece of wood on which is stretched a single skin using braided ropes. The size of this instrument varies according to the artisan-sculptor and the origin of the instrument. The second one is also a membranophone with a unique skin which is struck with a hand and a stick, but its skin is stretched with studs inserted into the sides of the drums. The skin of the Sereer-noon's tam-tams is attached to studs inserted on the sides of the drums, by leather straps. The instrument is tuned by striking it on the ground to let in or out the studs that tighten the skin when inserted, and loosen it when partially removed. Some are pierced at the base, some are not, according to the manufacturer.

If these drums are fundamentally in the repertoire and have a great importance in the performance today, it has not always been the case. It is also possible to add a *djembe*, depending on the presence of the instrument or not on the premises, without any more justification. These drums are joined by an Ibanez electric guitar and a Yamaha electronic keyboard, both connected to a tinkering amplifier whose brand seems to be unknown. A sistrum also accompanies the choir, a small idiophone whose sound is produced by shaking where several metal discs collide by sliding on a metal rod. Those instruments are the only ones that I found in the village and are not particularly prescribed by any rules except by their presence or not on the premises too.

Musiking in Kouadiène: Saying “Music” with Words

Actually, the word “music” itself should be discussed separately here because it did not exist for the Sereer-noon prior to colonization by the French nor does it exist anymore except in the Occidental sense of the French word *musique* and the general understanding of the notion of “music” (i.e. the organization of the sounds). In the Sereer-noon's dialect (or at least amongst older people who remember living free of French domination) they say

rather *mbúmbaí* (*ambiance festive*; “festive atmosphere”) or *keñtokh* (*faire la généalogie*; “doing genealogy”) instead of “music” because of the underlying complexity of the whole thing often called “music” in making the distinction of the sound organization and the different processes involved in music making, performing, aesthetic, etc., or, conversely, to take apart motivations under the musical mobilization (dance, festivities, etc.). Thereby, these two expressions seem to be complementary rather than equivalent because the second allows people to remember the ancestors by “doing genealogy”¹⁵ in order to create the first and foster a festive environment in the community. These expressions are also important in their conception because they symbolize the links between people in a present-past relation, in which remembering the ancestors *is* the reason to do “music”: in a sense, *musiquer*, as defined by ethnomusicologist Gilbert Rouget (1980), is for them the reason to “make music alive” through relations between each member of the community (including the ancestors). The performance of that music-making, however, is not the purpose of the music event. In other words, an Occidental conception of the phenomenon would consider it like a performance but for them, it is what we could call a “causal effect.” In a complementary way, asking younger people how to say “music” in Sereer-noon reveals another dimension, particularly in the link between their “traditional”¹⁶ music called *mbilim* and their conception of what music is nowadays. The *mbilim* is at first considered like a music style, an aesthetic and a *genre*. But actually, it also refers to an event, a happening that elicits the festive atmosphere. Furthermore, *mbilim* as a musical genre must be divided into many types of chants associated with different periods of the year, age, agriculture, rituals, etc.; *mbilim* was the core of communication in the community. In fact, younger people tend to use that traditional heritage to answer my question with different expressions related to “music”: “faire le mbilim” (*ketúm mbilim*; “to do mbilim”), “danser le mbilim” (*keham mbilim*; “to dance the mbilim”), “battre [le tam-tam]” (*ketip [han]*; “drumming”, understood as “to beat the drum”), or “chanter” (*kethiek*; “singing”).

The complexity in describing what “music” can be for the Sereer-noon refers to musical and/or non-musical. It expresses heritage and clearly demonstrates the reconciliation with “performance,” but all the expressions collected refer to “faire de la musique” (*ketúm mbilim*; “to make music”) and are related to the notion of experience as described by John Dewey (1934), which is both an accomplishment and a process between people and their environment. Then performance is no longer an object or an act but a process (Small 1998). Thus, the re-consideration of the way the Sereer-noon “perform” their “musicality” demonstrates that it is quite clear that the conclusions will no longer belong only in the realm of the musical.

The (Non-)musical (Non-)performance at Stake: Faithful and Numerous in Communion

Musiking is about musical-practicing but it is also about community-making *in* a musical context. During my interviews, everybody talked about music and mentioned how music enhances people's lives; this is the reason why my informants decided to join the choir(s)¹⁷ in their village. The musical structure in place within the Church gives everyone a chance to take over the choral practice to distinguish themselves in the collectivity as part of a musical movement which supports the Catholic faith's message. As my informant Lazare Tine said:

choirmasters will never send back someone who tries to fit into the ensemble; it would be unthinkable and would certainly provoke grumbling in the Church; instead they say: "Wherever you are, whether with your friends, under the palaver tree, or in the fields, practice singing" (interview, January 6th, 2015)¹⁸

This perseverance is complementary with the fact that several singers have admitted to being a part of the choral for 10 to 15 years or more "by vocation," or simply *to help people pray*. Moreover, Louis Ndiolène, a chorister who takes part in the ensemble, told me that "the choral, it is singing in communion... The number of singers makes the quality, really..." (interview, July 27th, 2015).¹⁹ This constant return during interviews and discussions with the choristers of the community that willingly puts themselves at the service of everyone so that it can pray well, is really at the core of why they sing. The choir has become, for them, the means to help the community cultivate its faith in the Catholic Church. The structural ensemble remains only a functional tool to this end. In this way, musical performance during the mass is not to be considered a "performance" but rather as a way to support each other in prayer. It is also coherent with the religious *raison d'être* of the choir considering the texts sung by the choristers, which is for them equal to the prayer itself. Then, following the understandings of the expressions "musicking" from Small (1998) and "musiking" from Harris *et al.* (2013), *singing* becomes both, and at the same time, the act itself but also the process and the context that permits others to act in respect with their Catholic will and toward the function of the choir.

Musical Critique, Polysemy and the Atmosphere

One thing is also clear when I reconsider all my interviews in Kouidiadiène: to the question of *How did they appreciate or experience the performance of the choir?*, everybody

answered with so many factors and expressions that did not fall under the musical component as such. For all the performances of the choir I observed – around twenty in several different contexts – not once did a member of the community commented on the choir by describing the “musical” performance if not with generic expressions like “the singers sang very well.” For example, the critics of the choral concert given at the Parish Feast Day on Saturday, August 1st, 2015, were mainly focused on the “atmosphere” (*mbúmbaí*) the choir was able to induce among people, mentioning then the original choreography or traditional costumes, the great interaction between singers and spectators or, still, the lack of intelligibility of the text. However, the interview with Valéry Diène, one of my informants, gave me a brief glimpse of something I interpreted as a criticism of the music itself, but instead it turned out to be the result of a terminological polysemy. He told me about the performance that “there were false notes... The children, they were skidding... If you listened *well*... The way they sang, I’m referring to the girls... Some who were screaming, who were slipping” (interview, August 2nd, 2015).²⁰ With his observation, Valéry is telling me that when the music is too loud or the voices are not well balanced, we can’t understand the text, the “message”; the end result is that the whole performance suffers, especially *by the loss of interest of the spectators not being able to understand the meaning of the chant*. That kind of perception was also expressed the day after by Alice Ndiolène who told me that she preferred another performance because “it was clear” (“c’était clair,” referring to the sung text). Therefore, it appears that while this festive atmosphere is necessary for the performance to flow well, the most important element is the “message” conveyed by the text, precisely because of how central the communication of this message is in the act of worship itself and in “creating” the desired atmosphere.

So my observations shed light on the predominance of the text which features on the musical score. Lazare, who has a degree in music, focuses on the idea of the text “to pray well,” as does the rest of the community; but it seems to me that this parameter cannot be dissociated from the performance itself. If so, what is the necessity to have a choir singing for each ceremony? The musical manifestation taking place during the worship celebration must allow members of the community to live a communal experience built on the festive atmosphere created by the chants at the church in Kouidiadiène. Those chants are borrowed and sung *with* and *throughout* the community and must lead the parishioners to a common experience. This sharing can be constantly updated in the community, just like with the Lord, this God whose conception will never have been incompatible with that one of the Catholic faith. This atmosphere tightens and “evokes” this community but also – just as they remember the words of Jesus, Mary and other Saints from another era – the ancestors who are the fathers and mothers of the community. Although one might not be able to trace

the genealogy to (and of) Church, the act of remembering this past in the context of this sharing atmosphere created by the choral ensemble among the Sereer-noon recalls the experience of “doing genealogy” (*keñtokh*).

“Ce n’est pas un concert!”²¹ or How to Displace the Focal Point

After all, the musical structure in Koudiadiène is deeply rooted into the church’s activities and, as all other cultural practices in the village, it is regulated by what they call “le Conseil paroissial pastoral” (“Pastoral Parish Council”). Actually this Council determines the aesthetic rules and behavior to follow to ensure the “good” performance of the choir, and its decisions are highly observed and respected by each member of the community, whether that person is a member of the choral or not. The vision this instance has about the ensemble and the conception of the repertoire it promotes are mostly articulated around the voice and the text: the liturgy leads the behavior of the choir to help people pray. As said by Father Antoine Ndong, the priest in charge of the Parish, “People *must* understand; this is not a concert!” (interview, December 19th, 2014).²² This citation is enough to sum up the purpose here and to understand that the faithfuls do not constitute a proper audience (*auditoire*) and that the accent must be on the voice: not for its “beauty” but for the intelligibility of the message it conveys. Furthermore, the priest adjuncts the functional importance of the choral with the act of community-singing when he says “the choral should not vocalize because the people do not sing anymore; it becomes a concert . . . And the instruments must not dominate the voices!” (*ibid*).²³ For example, a communion chant will take its importance in its function, by sustaining the message that it conveys. With all that has been said above, the choir’s reason for being is, simultaneously, to offer a communal space and moment where the faithful can grow their faith with other members of the community, to assume the role of medium for the message to be shared and, finally, to sustain the prayers. It is a formidable example of what Kay Kaufman Shelemay calls “musical communities”: “a social entity, an outcome of a combination of social and musical processes, rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves” (2011:365). But it is also a conceptualization of the choral performance as an act of negotiation and a process which is built in everyday life *with no musical means of its own*. Rather, it is a way to enhance relationships in a particular kind of “performancial community” (Grégoire 2016b) following the work of ethnomusicologist Emmanuelle Olivier who conceives collective performance as:

the elaboration of the melody . . . eminently individual, necessary condition for the manufacture of counterpoint since all the voices are structurally equivalent. Beyond

the path of each of the voices, the analysis of such a collective performance makes it possible to approach the question of the interaction between [these voices while considering] that the shaping of a song does not result from the simple addition of individual melodies. (Olivier 2004:18)²⁴

The (Non-)musical Performance in Paradigm: A Conclusion

Theory tends to associate musical performance with *cultural studies* rather than *performance studies*, but we have seen here that, to some extent, it could be different. On the contrary, my observations among the Sereer-noon of Kouidiadiène demonstrate that musical performance can *also* be observed as a subject instead of always being the eternal object of communication – that is to say, the phenomenon inscribes itself also in a communication path, but not exclusively. Actually, the fact that the choral performance is part of a larger process focused on cultivating a faithful community in prayer, obligates scholars to reformulate the initial question. Instead of asking *What a “performance” is?* They should focus on what it *means* to perform and how. There is also a major point in this case which cannot be developed in detail here: the construction of the Noon’s “musical community” *through* the space called “performancial community” must be inscribed in a long-time (*longue durée*) performance building. The community in question is built not only among the multiple musical utterances, the *events*, but mostly in a day-to-day peer-building relationship. That is all the relevance of the expression “performancial community” which is constructed through time and generations in a continuous communication of faith, knowledge and passion and with a real statement of everyone’s vocation to prayer. That is the reason to keep an expression such as “performance” or “performancial” rather than using Small’s expression “musicking,” which is often understood to be more convenient when writing about the concept. Here, the “performance” is more *temporal*, and its “communication” is *punctual*.

Besides, some people in Kouidiadiène like to say that “Bien chanter, c’est prier deux fois” (“Singing well is to pray twice”): the community there constructs and makes its festive atmosphere “alive” by each member’s statement of the role of the Catholic faith in his or her own life. The musical performance is thus only a tool for the good flow of the Catholic faith. People are not “performing” to express their faith; it is rather the expression of their faith that an occidental conception considers generally as a performance. For those practitioners, choral singing *is* musical but the choral performance is not: it is an act of worship that makes people grow amidst a strong community fabric which is woven through time.

Notes

¹ See for example the work of Filippo Colnago (2007), “La communication musicale comme élément d’identité culturelle chez les Lobi du Burkina Faso,” *Cahiers d’ethnomusicologie* 20: 67-85.

² “une série de modalités de production et de mise en communication [acteurs et auditoire] qui contribue de façon significative à l’édification de la stylistique d’une pratique musicale.” All translations from the author.

³ See Patrick N. Juslin, Patrik (2000), “Cue Utilization in Communication of Emotion in Music Performance: Relating Performance to Perception,” *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance* 26, n°6: 1797-813.

⁴ See the work of J. Lowell Lewis (2013), *The Anthropology of Cultural Performance*.

⁵ *Inculturation* is a Christian term used in missiology to refer to the adaptation of the Gospel in a given culture. This notion is close, but significantly different from acculturation in sociology.

⁶ For the global picture, there are generally two accepted “families” among the Sereer in Senegal: the Sereer Singandum, in the south, who can be subdivided into two or three subfamilies according to different sources, and the *Cangin* group, located around Thiès, which is subdivided within Ndut, Palor, Saafen, Noon, Lala.

⁷ “les Seereer étaient toujours convaincus qu’être chrétien n’était pas incompatible avec certaines valeurs de la culture locale, que le syncrétisme était une manière de renforcer leur foi en un Dieu Unique, et de mieux se protéger des mauvais esprits. Il n’était donc pas question, pour eux, d’abandonner certaines pratiques. Un tel comportement entraînait leur néantisation culturelle.”

⁸ Un silence qui “exprime [pourtant] un savoir plein – c’est le silence de celui qui se tait parce qu’il sait, et vice-versa [– ou] une lacune dans le savoir – le silence de celui qui ne sait rien ou pas assez, de celui qui s’abstient, stoïquement, en l’absence de connaissances, d’opinions ou de certitudes établies ou provisoires.”

⁹ Similarly, a boy will systematically be given four sips of syrup, four tablets, four days of rest, etc. since the masculine numerical symbol among the Sereer-noon is “4”.

¹⁰ “[m]usicalement, en transformant des structures musicales déjà classées qui représentent une identité culturelle bien connue pour les faire passer dans une autre réalité culturelle en observant les points de rencontre ou les différences, on obtient ce qu’on appelle une *transmutation* – un changement d’une substance à une autre, un changement de nature.”

¹¹ “ce n’est pas la Vierge Marie que l’on prie, c’est une Sainte différente à chaque fois... mais ce n’est pas obligé d’être une Sainte.”

¹² See below for what the *mbilim* is.

¹³ The intonation, in the liturgy, is the initial part of a musical work sung by a soloist or a group of choristers to announce the entrance of the choir.

¹⁴ The act of “doing music” could be described different ways; among others, “musiking” as theorized by Rachel A. Harris, Rowan Pease and Shzr Ee Tan (2013) is understood like a

negotiation (p.92) while “musicking”, for Christopher G. Small (1998), is more like a *process* (p.112). This nuance is important to keep in mind for the purpose of the present article because doing music in Kouidiadiène is actually the mediation of both these understandings of the same musical act.

¹⁵ It is important here to note the difference between “doing genealogy” and “*doing* the genealogy,” the first being used to describe the act of searching for relative parents and/or ancestors, and the second understood as giving an active part and agency to those people literally “participating” to the building of their genealogy: they are “making” genealogies (Grégoire 2016).

¹⁶ I don’t want here to (re)open the debate about what is or is not “traditional,” and for whom; I just refer then to Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (1983) and Gérard Lenclud (1987).

¹⁷ Actually there is more than one choral ensemble but six ensembles dispatched unequally among all the six villages of the Parish, grouping people in different groups by age. There is also a seventh ensemble constituted by the members of the noviciate who come from all around West Africa. For the needs of the present article, and to simplify a little, I will use “the choral” to be understood as “an ensemble” – which is not so far from the reality when considered as an ensemble of choral ensembles.

¹⁸ “les maîtres de chœur ne renverront jamais quelqu’un qui tente de faire sa place au sein de l’ensemble; ce serait impensable et susciterait certainement la grogne de l’Église; on lui dira plutôt: « N’importe où, où vous vous trouvez, que ce soit avec vos amis, sous l’arbre à palabres, ou bien dans les champs, exercez-vous à chanter.”

¹⁹ “[I]a chorale, c’est chanter en communion... Le nombre de choristes, ça fait la qualité, vraiment.

²⁰ “il y avait des fausses notes... Les enfants là, ils dérapaient... Si tu as *bien* écouté... La manière dont elles chantaient, je fais allusion aux filles... Certaines qui criaient, qui dérapaient” (italics are from Valéry’s accentuation).

²¹ “This is not a concert!”

²² “[I]es gens *doivent* comprendre; ce n’est pas un concert!” (italics are from the priest’s accentuation).

²³ “[I]a chorale ne doit pas vocaliser, parce que le peuple ne chante plus; ça devient un concert... [Et] l’instrument de musique ne doit pas dominer les voix!”

²⁴ “l’élaboration de la mélodie [...] éminemment individuelle, condition nécessaire à la fabrication du contrepoint, puisque toutes les voix sont structurellement équivalentes. Au-delà du cheminement de chacune des voix, l’analyse d’une telle performance collective permet d’aborder la question de l’interaction entre [ces voix tout en considérant] que la mise en forme d’un chant ne résulte pas de la simple addition de mélodies individuelles.”

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