Notation musicale Charles Seeger

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On se propose ici de synchroniser les enregistrements étudiés avec les visualisations publiées par Charles Seeger en 1957 et 1958.

On a ajouté aussi (p. 6) quelques citations montrant que ce qui a été surtout retenu de l'article de Charles Seeger est la définition sémiotique distinguant notation prescriptive et notation descriptive, plus que la nécessité de baser les analyses et descriptions musiclogiques sur des documents sonores mis à disposition.

La synchronisation (voir Julien Debove, François Picard « Un protocole de visualisation du son ») permet aujourd'hui de rendre accessible les documents audio-visuels dont Seeger rêvait.

On trouvera les vidéos sur le site du Séminaire d'ethnomusicologie de Paris-Sorbonne http://seem.paris-sorbonne.fr/Un-protocole-de-visualisation-du

"An Mhaighdean Mhara"

Kitty Gallagher, "An Mhaighdean Mhara" (The Mermaid Song) recorded by Alan Lomax, Central Hotel, Letterkenny (County Donegal), North-west (Ireland), 2/5/1951.

Charles Seeger, "Toward a Universal Music Sound-Writing for Musicology", *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, IX (1957), 63. [Seeger 1957.pdf]

"An Mhaighdean Mhara" (The Mermaid Song) [Seeger écrit "Maighdean"] sung by Kitty Gallagher, Alan Lomax (Ed.), *Columbia World Library of Folk and Primitive Music*, Vol. I, Side I, No. 8, Ireland (n.d.) [recorded Central Hotel, Letterkenny (County Donegal), North-west (Ireland), 2/5/1951] [selon CREM, Enregistré et produit par Séamus Ennis et Alan Lomax].

http://research.culturalequity.org/get-audio-detailed-recording.do?recordingId=2795

> Our conventional notation will not serve — and we should no longer pretend it can serve — the need of a universal music sound-writing. To no one would I recommend abandonment of traditional techniques of writing music for the novel and still un-developed graph. For the present, I would urge the two to be used side by side.

Charles Seeger, "Toward a Universal Music Sound-Writing for Musicology", *Journal of the International Folk Music Council*, IX (1957), 63.

l'appareil utilisé est un électrocardiographe Viso-Cardiette, voir
http://www.cphr.fr/conservatoire/electrocardiographe-viso-cardiette/,
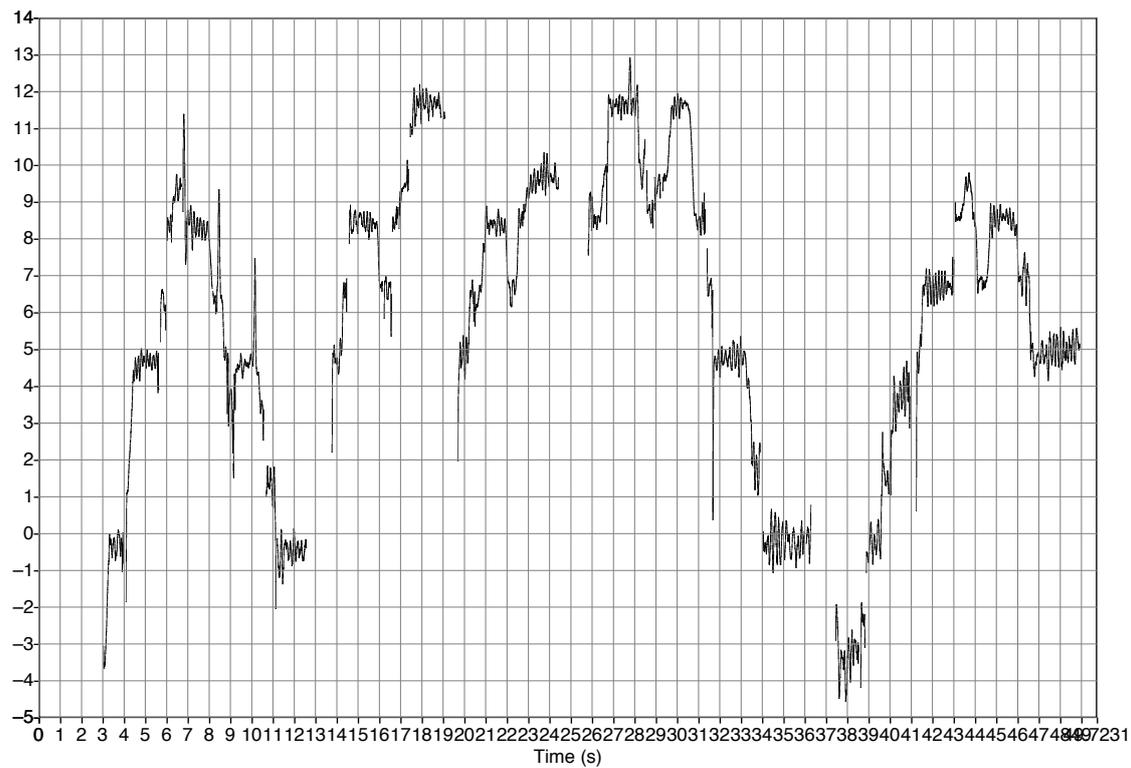
An Mhaighdean Mhara.swf

Abatutsi Traditional Song

Charles Seeger, " Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing", *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Apr., 1958), pp. 184-195.

Abatutsi Seeger p9

« Abatutsi Traditional Song » enregistré et publié par Merriam, A. P. (1954). *Voice of the Congo. [Tribal music of Central Africa*. Riverside Records. B4 [au CREM]

rééd. *Les voix du Congo - Musique tribale de Centre Afrique* Compilation congolaise / RDM Edition / 2012

voir aussi Alan Merriam, "Recording in the Belgium Congo", *The African Music Society Newsletter* Vol. 1 No. 5 (Jun. 1952), p. 15-17. (Jstor)
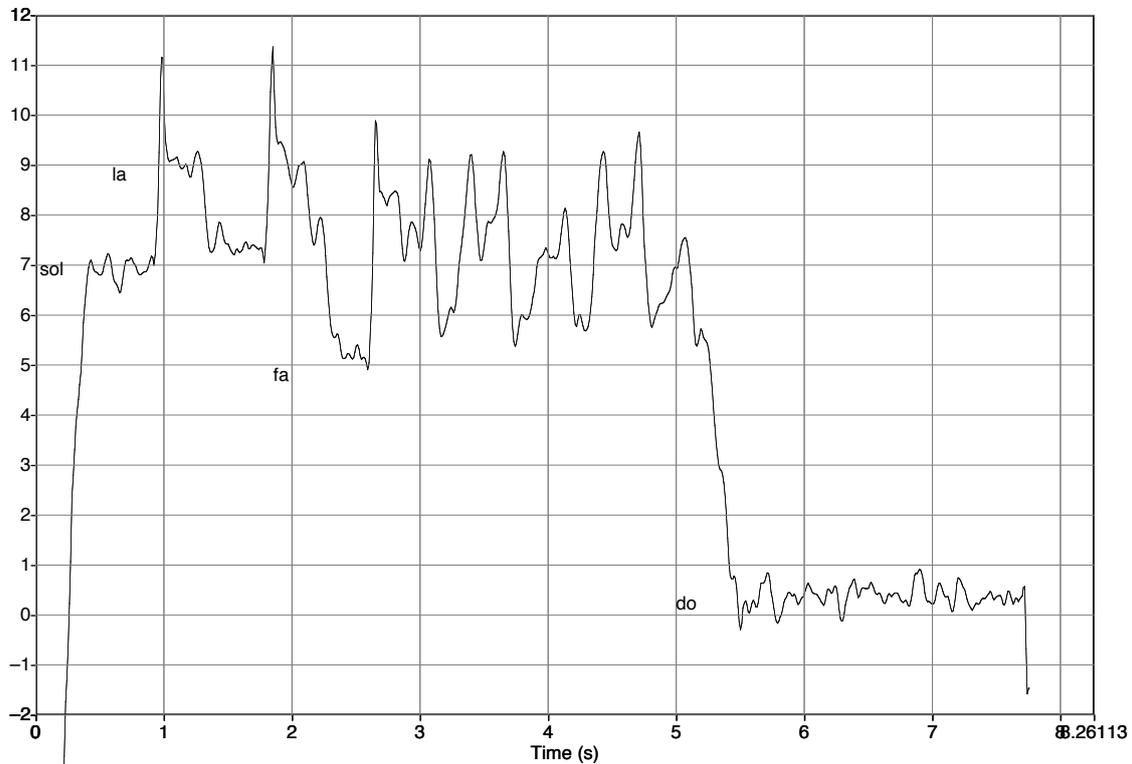

Illustration 1 Abatutsi visualisation sous Praat

Abatutsi Traditional Song (Seeger)
Abatutsi Traditional Song (Picard) volume.swf
Abatutsi Traditional Song volume (Sonic visualiser).swf
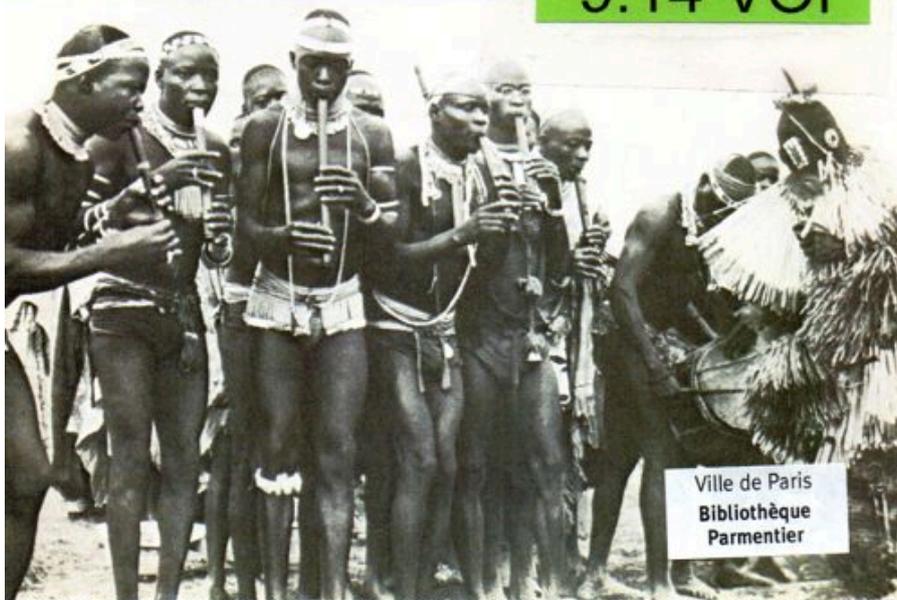Abatutsi Traditional Song volume (Praat).swf

Illustration 2 pochette du CD RDM édition 2012

Prescriptive and descriptive music-writing

L'article célèbre de Charles Seeger, « Prescriptive and descriptive music-writing » (1958), oppose avec force une écriture musicale « prescriptive », symbolique, qui « ne nous dit pas tant comment la musique sonne que comment la faire sonner » et qui requiert une connaissance des traditions qui lui sont associées, à une notation « descriptive », essentiellement fondée sur des représentations acoustiques, et qui indique ce qui se passe « entre les notes ». Cette opposition se situe en quelque sorte entre les notations traditionnelles et des dispositifs de représentation rendus possible par des technologies modernes – entre les notations proprement dites et les représentations.

Nicolas Meeùs, Notation, argumentaire, février 2016

to distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive uses of music-writing, which is to say, between a blue-print of how a specific piece of music shall be made to sound and a report of how a specific performance of it actually did sound.

Charles Seeger, " Prescriptive and Descriptive Music-Writing", *The Musical Quarterly*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (Apr., 1958), pp. 184-195.

Seeger contends that the melograph, used in conjuntion with conventional notation, gives us a better understanding of those aspects of music which are not necessarily perceived by the ear, that is, elements of music which may characterize a style but which, because of the conventions of present music-writing, go un-notated.

Alan Merriam, *The Anthropology of Music,* Northwestern University Press, 1964, pdf, p. 72

The distinction between prescriptive and descriptive notation was Seeger's terminology for music written in order to be performed and music to be analyzed. But there is an obvious correlate. It is "insiders" who write music to be performed, and they write it in a particular way. Typically, outsiders start by writing everything they hear, which turns out to be impossible. Some have tried, like Bartók in his incredibly detailed transcriptions of Eastern European folk songs (e.g. Bartók 1935, Bartók and Lord 1951), but of course even he did not have symbols for many aspects of singing style. Even so, it is hard to make head or tail of his notations because of their immense detail. On the other hand, the writer of a prescriptive notation normally includes only what is needed by a native who knows the style. In order to learn a new mazurka by Chopin, one must read his notes with an aural knowledge of how Chopin is supposed to sound. The simple notation systems of Asian nations tell only what the musician needs to know about a piece; they do not describe the style. But a descriptive notation tries in fact to provide a thorough and objective description of a piece, similar to that of the phonetician describing the details of speech. Thus Seeger might also have named his two kinds of notation "emic" and « etic," or perhaps "cultural" and "analytical".

The difference between prescriptive and descriptive notation insightful as it appears, is not always as clear as Seeger implies.

Bruno Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-nine Issues and Concepts,* Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1983, p. 69

Once back from the field, ethnomusicologists spend a lot of time analyzing the data they gathered there in a place they used to call, somewhat grandiosely, the "laboratory." When ethnomusicology was still emerging from its comparative, scientific phase, the lab might have included a sonograph for displaying sound waves, a tape recorder for playing back field recordings, often at half or quarter speed, and in a unique instance, a "melograph," a machine invented by Charles Seeger and his colleagues at UCLA to provide automatic transcriptions of individual melodic lines. Unfortunately, the detail the melograph provided was beyond the capacity of the researchers to interpret. They could find little or no meaning in the machine-produced graphs, and this innovation proved to be a dead end.

Although the scientific ethos of the field from the 1950s to the mid- 1970s seemed to generate some enthusiasm for using machines to register musical sounds, and to help in their objective analysis, most of the effort to understand the structural elements of music was poured into laborious, handwritten descriptive transcriptions of the sound recordings that ethnomusicologists had made in the field. Substantial parts of doctoral dissertations, including my own, were filled with transcriptions of the repertoire under investigation. These volumes mirrored the practice of musical folklorists in Europe, who had been ostensibly preserving their folk traditions in this fashion for more than a century. The kind of detailed musical analysis such transcriptions make possible has, since then, largely passed out of vogue in Anglo-American ethnomusicology, though it is still an important component of some countries' ethnomusicological practice.

Today, transcriptions, rather than being collected in books and dissertations, are used to illustrate the author's narrative, which may include a characterization of the musical structures of a piece, performance, style, or genre and then go on to discuss how those musical structures express local psychological, cultural, social, economic, and political patterns and ideas. Some studies along this line could be accused of abandoning musical analysis in favor of interpretive readings of music's social and cultural significance, but most ethnomusicologists would agree that musical analysis is necessary to understand how a particular musical tradition works, what is distinctive about it, and how, precisely, it bears the personal, social, and cultural meanings attributed to it.

Timothy Rice, *Ethnomusicology. A Very Short Introduction,* Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 40-41.