



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

A WOMAN'S SONG OF THE KWAKIUTL INDIANS.

A LITTLE before noon on the 3d of September of this current year, 1893, I sat in the lodge of the Kwakiutl Indians, from Vancouver Island, on the Columbian Fair Grounds, Chicago. Close at my right knee sat Duquayis, chieftainess of the tribe, a bright-looking, cheerful, responsive young woman of about twenty-two years of age. She was nursing her baby, a strong healthy-looking child. On the other side of me sat another young woman, whom she had called to sing with her a woman's song of the tribe, for my especial benefit. I had quite got into the good graces of Duquayis, and indeed, as I believe, of the whole tribe, as many as were on the grounds. The chieftainess had not been willing to believe, at first, that any white man could sing the songs of the tribe correctly; but after I had taken her and her husband, with the interpreter, to a room in Music Hall where there was a piano, and had played and sung with the Indians for an hour some half dozen or more of the songs I had been collecting, she was evidently ready to acknowledge not only that the white man could master the Indian songs, but that the harmonized piano version was very delightful. I ought, perhaps, to say that I do not pride myself on either my voice or my singing, and that the pleasure which my transcription of the songs gave to Duquayis and the other Indians was clearly due to the fine quality of tone of the piano, and to my bringing out explicitly the natural harmonies which were plainly implied or embodied in the songs, but which had heretofore appeared but dimly to the Indian consciousness, from the tones of the chords having been heard successively and not simultaneously.

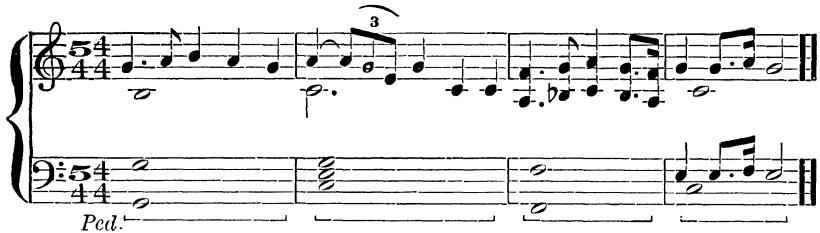
At any rate, I had won the good-will of Duquayis; and although I had been warned that woman's songs were very difficult to get, I found the young chieftainess ready and willing to oblige me when I called that morning and asked for a woman's song. With much laughter and pretty half bashfulness the two young women seated themselves on either side of me and began this song, clapping their hands for accompaniment.

No. 1. Song of the Chieftainess at the Potlatch.

The musical notation is written on a single staff in 5/4 time. The melody consists of several measures, including a half note, a quarter note, and a dotted half note. Below the staff, the lyrics 'Ya ah iya ah yi Ah - yi ah yi ah yi' are aligned with the notes. Underneath the lyrics, a series of rhythmic clapping patterns are indicated by vertical lines and small horizontal strokes. The label 'Hand clapping:' is placed to the left of these patterns.

Ya ah iya ah yi Ah - yi ah yi ah yi

Hand clapping:

**No. 2.****Song of the Chieftainess, harmonized.**

At first they were evidently a little abashed. They began at a low pitch, sang quite softly, and the intonation of the lowest tone was somewhat uncertain. I noted down the song as fast as I could; but, as they sang faster than I could write, I soon had to ask them to repeat a portion of it. Then I sang it with them, which seemed to afford them a good deal of amusement, whether because of the phenomenally unpleasant quality of my voice, or because of my peculiar pronunciation of the words, I could not determine. However, I was determined to get the song, so I did not mind their fun, or, rather, I smiled and laughed good-naturedly with them and sang away with as much assurance as if I had felt myself competent to take Alvary's place in "Siegfried." Considering how short the song is, it required a good deal of time to get it down. My principal object was to note down the music; but this did not at all satisfy Duquayis. She insisted that I must sing the words which she sang, not improvised musical syllables of my own, as I began doing. So the words had to go down, just as they were, although I afterwards found that they had no meaning to her, and were only musical syllables chosen for the sake of euphony. Both the women became extremely interested in what we were doing and eagerly corrected all my errors of pronunciation, clapping their hands and laughing gleefully when I had done it to their satisfaction. When it was all done, James Deans, the old Scotchman who represented the British government there and had been interpreting for me, turned to me and said, very impressively: "You must know, sir, that Duquayis has just done you the greatest honor in her power. She has not only given you a woman's song; she has given you her own particular song, — the song of the chieftainess, which she alone sings at the potlatch. This song is extremely old. It has been handed down, exactly in its present shape, for nobody knows how many generations."

This was the last of my work on the grounds of the great Exposition. Other duties claimed my attention : so I bade farewell to my Indian friends with a feeling of sadness such as I could by no means have anticipated a few weeks before, regretful that I should see their faces no more.

The song I have here recorded gives occasion for some comment. First, it is to be noted that it implies a natural harmony, precisely as does our own civilized music. The first measure implies the major chord of G. The second not only implies, but actually embodies the major chord of C, with an added sixth ; the effect of which, however, is rather that of an accented bye-tone. The third measure implies the chord of F major, while the fourth is most naturally harmonized with the chord of C. Curiously enough, while these three chords, C, F, and G major, are the decisive chords of the key of C major, the course of the melody is such that one can hardly avoid the impression of the song being in two keys, the first clause in G, with its close in the Subdominant, and the second clause in F, with its close in the Dominant. This is another illustration of the truth that tonality depends not so much on *what* chords are used, as on *how* they are used. This song shows that one may even take the Tonic, Subdominant, and Dominant chords of any given key and so group them that the Tonic shall fail of its natural preponderance and the tonality appear doubtful. How old this song is, nobody knows ; but it would seem clear that it must have originated at a time when the perception of tonality was very feeble, and the Indian mind did not yet demand musical coherence beyond the limits of a single clause. Within the limits of the clause, however, and, for that matter, between the two clauses, the harmonic relations of the melody are perfectly clear. The chord of C in the second measure is related to the G chord in the first measure as under-fifth. Again, the chord of F in the third measure is related to the C chord, which precedes it, as under-fifth. Then the melody returns to G, implying the C chord. Thus the melody is coherent enough at each successive point, only fifth-related harmonies being implied. But it does not give the impression, as a whole, of having the chord of C major as its real centre of gravity. The feeling for tonality would seem to be still wavering and uncertain. I have often noticed similar phenomena when studying Indian songs. The primitive mind certainly works in accordance with the laws of acoustics, which are universal, and primitive melody always runs on harmonic lines ; but the musical sense of primitive men often seems to be satisfied with short views of harmonic relations, frequently losing sight of the Tonic with which a song starts, and shifting the centre of gravity to some nearly related chord.

I have said that the intonation of the lowest tone of the song was at first doubtful. This circumstance may seem important; but I know of no good reason for attaching any more significance to it than we do to the false intonations we may hear in any prayer-meeting or other gathering of our own people where there is concerted singing without the guidance of an instrument, especially where those who sing are musically uneducated. In order to test these two women, I purposely sang the tone a fourth below; they shook their heads, most positively. Then I sang the tone a fifth below, just as I have written it; they nodded and smiled, evidently just as positive that I was now singing the correct tone as they were before that I was wrong. Up to this point they had not yet sung this tone once so that I could be sure of it. But from this point on, they sang it unmistakably, beginning the song, however, at a higher pitch than at first. Their voices were clear and pleasant in quality, and there was no wavering of intonation anywhere. I attributed the doubtfulness of the lowest tone at the beginning to its being too low for the natural compass of their voices. But whether this was the true reason or not is a matter of comparatively little importance. The really important question is what tone they *meant* to sing, and on this point there can be no doubt whatever. The song as given is exactly as they meant and sang it.

It is a very easy matter for those who are not musicians to be misled in the matter of Indian singing. The real music is often obscured by false intonations and also by unfamiliar peculiarities of tone-quality. But let us not forget that there is no such thing as music, either to the civilized or the uncivilized man, unless the tones of which it is composed are in some well-defined relation to one another. The savage does not emit a series of unrelated tones, and call the aggregation music, any more than we do. However dim his perception of tone-relation may be (and it must be remembered that he has not even the beginnings of a science of music, not so much as a notation), the perception must naturally be there, or there could be no bond of unity in his songs. And what he perceives must be the natural relations of tones, — the relations which exist in the physical nature of tone itself. He must perceive these relations by virtue of the correlations of his auditory apparatus with the physical laws which make the sounds emitted by his voice what they are. In short, the natural laws in accordance with which all music is made are universal, — the same for men of all races everywhere. And the laws, physical, physiological, and psychical, which determine the nature of music and of musical perception ordain that the first principle of Unity in music is Tonality, the relation of a given series or combination of tones to a Key-note or Tonic. The tones most

nearly related to the Tonic are those belonging to its chord. Then come those belonging to the chords most nearly related to the Tonic: the chords of the over-fifth (Dominant) and of the under-fifth (Subdominant), the relative minor chord of the Tonic, then the relative minors of the two fifth related chords, and so on to chords of other degrees of relationship. And in strict accordance with these natural laws, we invariably find the primitive man making melody along the lines of the Tonic and its nearest related chords. In studying some hundreds of primitive folk-songs I have not found a single exception. Folk-music is always harmonic, exactly as civilized music is harmonic. *Scale* is not the fundamental thing in music. The real foundation of all music, the world over, is *the Tonic and its chord*. The sooner we grasp this idea, and realize that all aberrations from harmonic pitch are merely incidents of imperfect training or incomplete experience, or can easily be accounted for in some way which does not in the least impair the integrity of the music as founded on the universal laws I have tried to set forth, the better it will be for our science.

There may be those, perhaps, who think the Indian discriminates smaller intervals than we do; but this, I am profoundly convinced, is a complete mistake. The uneducated ear of the primitive man is not *more*, but *less* discriminating than ours which have passed through a course of training. And this very lack of power to discriminate differences of pitch, due to lack of trained perception, is at the bottom of by far the greater number of the aberrations from true harmonic pitch which are so frequently to be heard in Indian singing. There are other causes also. It frequently happens with Indians, as with our own people, that an interval is missed because it is difficult for the voice of the singer. I have known Indians, in trying to sing the interval of an octave upward, where the upper tone was high and difficult for the singer's voice, to miss it by a semitone, without seeming to be aware of it. In the case of one song (No. 24 of those recorded in "A Study of Omaha Indian Music," by Miss Alice C. Fletcher, Mr. Francis La Flesche, and myself), the Indians habitually did this between the first and second parts of the song. Both Miss Fletcher and myself recorded the second part of this song in the key of G, just as the Indians sang it; although the first part was in the key of A flat. I had puzzled a good deal over what the abrupt change of key might signify to the Indian mind. One day I was playing it for an Indian, and he was singing it with me. He had always begun the second part with D, a major seventh above the E flat with which the first part ends. It occurred to me to test him by starting the second part with E flat, thus bringing the second part into the same key with the first. I

did so, without letting him know what I was doing. He sang with the piano, without hesitation. At the end, I asked him whether it was entirely correct as we had performed it; he assured me that it was. A second and then a third experiment gave the same result. I then informed him that we had been singing it differently from what he had ever sung it before, and showed him the difference. He was very much astonished and puzzled. As we were walking afterwards, I heard him singing it under his breath, and every time he gave the interval of an octave where he had formerly sung a major seventh. In the face of even one such fact as this, who will dare affirm that the Indian perception of pitch is nicer and more discriminating than our own? But I have made many similar experiments, any one of which is sufficiently convincing. One such, particularly, I remember, made in companionship with Dr. Franz Boas, on these same Vancouver Indians, who were under his charge. In brief, the Indians sang the tone G twice in succession. I played it with them with the chord of G, and they assured us that we had it correct. Then they sang it again, repeatedly, *substituting F sharp for the first G*. Dr. Boas and I looked at each other, but said nothing. I played it as they sang it, with the chord of G as before, and they again assured us that our piano version was entirely correct. So it was, in both cases. I am firmly persuaded that the explanation is to be found in a native sense of harmony which, of course, they could not explain, even to themselves. The feeling for the chord of G, which was the natural one, dominated all other perceptions in their minds. As the use of the upleading bye-tone, F sharp, did not in the least impair the effect of the chord, either for them or for us, they made no distinction between the harmonic tone G and the bye-tone which led up to it.

In this same session with the Indians, both Dr. Boas and myself were puzzled by the persistency with which the Indians sang a certain G nearly a quarter-tone flat. Dr. Boas afterward discovered that it resulted from the attempt to sing the F sharp as a short bye-tone before the G, the resultant of the two tones being about half way between them. Again, I have known Indians to sharp or flat from the effect of emotion. This is generally true in their love-songs, I think, and sometimes occurs in religious songs also.

I affirm once more that, in all primitive songs which I have studied, the predominating tones are harmonic, as clearly and plainly as in our own civilized music. If we fail to recognize them as such, it is because of the accidents of imperfect performance or the obscuration of them by noisy accessories; not because the music differs in its essential characteristics from the most civilized music we know.

John Comfort Fillmore.