

'De vijfde snaar als strijdkreet'

The fifth string as a battle cry

Résumé in English

Listening to yells of cheerleaders and battle cries of demonstrators I heard a sort of drone: at least the cheering was almost all the time in one tone. And it struck me in particular when I noticed similarity to the fifth string. It was likewise interrupted and constituted a boosting row of notes more. The function is to create drive and urge for the people around.

Analysing some yells and battle cries made clear that there is always a line of the same notes mostly 8, 12 or 16 divided in unequal groups usually divided by one note breaks. The one note breaks together form an irregular (contra) pattern that gets regularity because the yell is repeated over and over. The small breaks make it easier to join in with the yelling. They are a sort of rhythmic backbone in the line of words. A battle cry is pronounced at one tone and made up by breaking up a sentence by a structure of little intermissions, so it gets a backbone to emphasize the rhythm.

This may build up to the conclusion that the fifth string is the backbone structure, the battle cry, incorporated in an instrument designed to accompany the history, rise and struggle of the enslaved people (Laurent Dubois; *The Banjo*) (Peter Seeger would have been proud of me for this ;-)

As to the structure of the breaks in the battle cry and the notes that the fifth string produces, this structure is comparable to the notes the claves play in Caribbean music. And by the way, was n't this area the birdnest of the banza (Dubois)? Claves, the backbone of Caribbean music, sounds only one tone but produces many notes just like the fifth string does; those notes are deliberately placed (or sometimes left out) and they do not sound continually like one long note. And the claves are a percussion device like a triangle or snaredrum is; no one will consider to appoint a triangle or snaredrum as a drone just because they play at only one tone.

The fifth string of the banjo as a percussion string produces rhythms as a Claves Like Backbone (CLB) that facilitates speed, steadiness and syncopation.

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