

# Controlled Disorder in Polymusic: The Case of the Seto Wedding Song Genre *Kaasitamine*<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The term 'polymusic', which has been in use in ethnomusicology since the 1990s, designates musical practices where two or more autonomous musical entities are deliberately performed in the same space and time in a largely uncoordinated manner. The musical texts – which may be the same or different – that are juxtaposed in a polymusical performance may also be performed separately; when performed together, however, they constitute a new complex hypertext which has new meanings and functions and may to some extent be musically coordinated. Nevertheless, polymusical performance always engenders some kind of *musical disorder* which, being deliberately produced, can be characterized as a *controlled disorder*. Such disorder is a means to accomplish the ritual functions to which the polymusical genres are usually related and to induce some specific psychological effects, which are often connected with the manipulation of time and space. In this study the theoretical, ethnographic and cognitive questions of polymusic are discussed with reference to the case of the *kaasitamine*, the Seto wedding song genre from South-East Estonia. This research reveals the different traditional forms of *kaasitamine* performance characterised by the different balance between coordinated and uncoordinated components, analyses the more subtle mechanisms for the creation of controlled disorder, and considers the possible psychological effects of polymusic in relation to an altered perception of time.

## 1. Definitions and classifications of polymusic

Performance practices in which autonomous musical entities simultaneously co-exist in the same space and time are widely known in many musical traditions throughout the world. In recent decades these practices have often been referred to as *polymusic*. According to Dana Rappoport,

“Polymusic” is a neologism coined in 1991 at a seminar of the French Ethnomusicology Laboratory of the French National Scientific Research Center (CNRS). It was then defined by the acoustician Gilles Léothaud (n.d.) as being “the total result of the simultaneous, deliberate presence of several autonomous musical entities, without any coordination in time” (Rappoport 2013: 10).

Actually, however, the phenomenon of polymusic was observed by ethnomusicologists long ago. Rappoport refers in this context to such authors as Elkin (1967 [1938]), Schaeffner (1968 [1936]), Lomax (1968), Basset (1995) and George (1996), all of whom mention cases of polymusic around the world (Rappoport 2013: 9). The manifold polymusical practices of the

East Slavs are well described in Russian-language ethnomusicological literature by Rudneva (1975), Hippus and Kabanov (1977), Efimenkova (1980), Tavlay (1986), Engovatova (1997, 2008), Dorokhova and Pashina (2005), Berkovich (2012) and others; among these authors, the most influential theoretical ideas were proposed by Margarita Engovatova. Although the various aspects of polymusic have repeatedly been the subject of description, analysis and theoretical discussion, the phenomenon still offers considerable scope for ethnomusicological research. The great diversity of particular forms of polymusic makes generalizations on this topic quite tricky, and introducing new examples of polymusic may raise new questions and offer new points of view with regard to the topic. In this paper, I shall discuss the phenomenon of polymusic using the case of the *kaasitamine*, the Seto wedding songs from South-East Estonia.

With regard to the definition of polymusic it is interesting to compare Léothaud's definition, cited above, with that of Engovatova. In Russian-language ethnomusicology polymusical practices are usually referred to as *specific forms of collective*

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