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Response to Tim Rice

Richard Crawford

First, I'd like to say, as a historical musicologist nosing around the fringes of ethnomusicology, that I find very appealing the idea that the agenda of a whole field can be distilled into one comprehensible sentence. Rice has come up here with a kind of Swiss army knife of musicology. In effect, he has chosen those professional tools that are absolutely essential, reduced them to miniature form, and connected them in a smooth, thoroughly portable configuration. Rice himself calls his model "deceptively simple." And indeed, the question "How do people historically construct, socially maintain, and individually create and experience music?" does lack the portentous ring that one might expect from a comprehensive new model. But presumably, like the army knife's blades, it cuts more sharply than one might guess from seeing it out of action. Having lived with Rice's model for a few weeks now, I can testify that it has a way of getting into your subconscious and prodding your conscious thoughts too. Its economy and straightforwardness also make it accessible to beginners *and* experienced scholars, whether as an idea or as a working method. Rice's model is cast in the language of common sense, but unlike common sense, it's based more on tested precepts than unexamined assumptions.

I also like the model's structure. The idea of a three-pronged inquiry—history, society, and the individual—invites musical scholars to keep imagining the larger, complex wholes of which the details of their work form parts. As with the army knife, you can use any one tool separately (i.e., you can study history, or society, or individual creativity). But you can't separate one from rest, and the presence of all as parts of one entity is a constant reminder of their interrelatedness.

Rice's paper is written in friendly, welcoming tone. He believes that we are "living in an ecumenical age when the disciplines to which we are 'sub' are moving closer together." I'm more inclined myself to think that in our world, the drives toward ecumenicism, on the one hand, and sectarianism, on the other, are both strong, and that we scholars like to feel free to dip into both. But in either case, Rice's model is ecumenical in spirit, for it affirms a broad common ground between ethnomusicology and historical musicology. More than that, it envisions a musical scholarship in which each is urged to work the other's back yard. From my viewpoint, the real

promise of Rice's model lies in its invitation to cross over, applying skills we already *have* to problems we've traditionally avoided.

Let's take the social maintenance of music, a central issue in ethnomusicology and a "formative process" in Rice's model. Social maintenance has been pretty much a non-issue for historical musicology. We historical musicologists have occupied ourselves chiefly with art and artists: great music of the past, the process of its creation, and the people who have created it. Out of respect for great works, we've struggled to understand and preserve them in "authentic" and "original" form, while tending to denigrate later changes in them as insignificant "variants," or even "corruptions." But what about social maintenance as a historical process? What if we were to study, for example, the history of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* during the 19th century, finding out what of Mozart's own score/s was kept and cut, and when, and where, and by whom, in what institutional contexts? We know there were "standard" versions besides the composer's own. And we can be sure that their differences from Mozart's original helped to keep *Don Giovanni* popular. But we don't know the details. With our skills in bibliography, source criticism, archival research, musical analysis, and social history, we could discover a good deal about 19th-century musical values, aesthetics, practices, and musical contexts by studying how Mozart's classic opera was "socially maintained." Historical musicologists are perfectly equipped to undertake such work, which could contribute to the ethnomusicology of western art music that some scholars have called for. But lacking the kind of encouragement that Rice's model provides, we've been satisfied to focus on *Don Giovanni's* first incarnation, and to disregard the forms it took in the hands of musicians in later ages.

Or let's take history itself: diachronic study, which has been embraced rather gingerly, if at all, by most ethnomusicologists. I'd love to see ethnomusicologists get more involved in historical writing, because I think there's a lot they could teach us about it. Historical musicology has helped to bring certain composers of the past and their music more brilliantly to life. But musical masterworks can make their own way in western society, under the care of performers, who are not exactly poised in expectancy, waiting for the next musicological edicts to appear. There has been little pressure on musicologists from outside our own ranks to write intellectually convincing history. The ideas we have found to give meaning to the vast store of music and information we have uncovered—metaphors like "the main stream of music," for example, or the *evolution* of musical forms, genres, and styles—are based on such careful selection that few outside the field of historical musicology can believe in them as formative processes. Even *The New Grove*, our age's musicological monument, is openly skeptical, describing historical musicology's vision of the past, in Vincent Duckles's words, as "a

collection of images ‘frozen’ in time [see *Don Giovanni*], between which the historian constructs lines of cause and effect.”

I believe that certain aspects of ethnomusicological practice could be distinct advantages to writers of diachronic history. By studying living musics, ethnomusicologists are used to confronting the cultures they study whole. Historical musicologists’ fascination for remote ages dictates that they will encounter music history only in fragments—most often *musical* fragments. In contrast, ethnomusicologists must shape lots of empirical data into accounts of musical cultures as totalities in themselves, and as parts of larger cultural wholes too. Given their experience in studying *present* musical traditions *comprehensively*, I would expect ethnomusicologists to have a sharp nose for what’s missing from accounts of the musical past, and to be good at imagining either how to track it down or how to proceed responsibly without it. Having grappled with the complex reality of music in the present, they should be well prepared to study music *in* the past, rather than music *of* the past, to borrow a distinction made by Leo Treitler.

American composer Henry Cowell once rhapsodized: “I want to live in the *whole world* of music!” While that kind of enthusiasm may be a bit ingenuous for the scholarly mind, I think Rice’s model, emphasizing what musical scholars hold in common rather than what divides us, and hence making our worlds of music seem less claustrophobic, is an act of scholarly good citizenship.