

1. THE HARMLESS DRUDGE : DEFINING ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

DEFINITIONS.

For years, people have been asking me the question: "You're an ethnomusicologist?" Shortly after 1950 it was likely to be accompanied by expressions of wonder and of the belief that I was somehow involved with "folk" music, with "primitive music," and particularly with "ancient music," and also that I must have a great deal of companionship with a tape recorder. By 1960 the questioner would likely bring up participation in an Indonesian gamelan, or perhaps an ability to "play" many of the world's odd instruments. In the 1970s, the conversation might well include the term "ethnic" music or even the etymologically outrageous "ethnomusic," and in the eighties and nineties, free association might lead to "diversity" and "world music."

I have always found it difficult to come to a precise, concise, and readily intelligible definition. Dictionaries differ considerably but espouse limited views. In the 120 years in which modern ethnomusicology can be said to have existed, since pioneer works such as those of Ellis (1885), Baker (1882), and Stumpf (1886), attitudes and orientations have changed greatly, and so has the name, from something very briefly called "*Musikologie*" (in the 1880s), to "comparative musicology" (through about 1950), then to "ethnomusicology" (1950–ca. 1956), quickly to "ethnomusicology" (removing the hyphen actually was an ideological move trying to signal disciplinary independence), with suggestions such as "cultural musicology" (Kerman 1985) and "socio-musicology" (Feld 1984) occasionally thrown in. The changes in name paralleled changes in intellectual orientation and emphasis.

It is difficult to find a single, simple definition, to which most people in this field would subscribe, and thus ethnomusicologists have been perhaps excessively concerned with defining themselves. Alan P. Merriam, the scholar in our history most concerned with definition and the associated problems of basic orientation, frequently (Merriam 1960, 1964: 3-36, 1969b, 1975) cited the need for ethnomusicologists to look carefully at what they had done and wished to do in order to move in concerted fashion toward their goals. In a major essay discussing the history of definitions, Merriam (1977a) actually brought together a large number of separate statements defining the limits, the major thrust, the practicality, and the ideology of ethnomusicology (see also Simon 1978, Myers 1992:3, 7-9).

There are various types of definitions: some tell what each ethnomusicologist must do or be to merit the title, and some synthesize what the entire group does. Some focus on what has transpired in terms of research activity, and others, on what should in fact have been done or what must eventually be done. They define in terms of a body of data to be gathered and studied, or of activities undertaken by typical scholars, or again by the questions that are asked of the raw data. Some seek to broaden limits, including within the scope of ethnomusicology all sorts of things also claimed by other fields or disciplines while others envision a narrow specialty. A scholar finding order among all of these definitions (Merriam cites over forty, but stopped in 1976) would surely become what Samuel Johnson called (referring to himself, the lexicographer) a "harmless drudge." It's not, lest you've been misinterpreting the title of this chapter, the

ethnomusicologists who claim or deserve this title.

What, specifically, are some of these definitions, and how can one group them? In their briefest form, without elaboration or commentary: Those that seek – or sought – to define ethnomusicology by the material that is contemplated have opted for one of these alternatives: (a) folk music, and music that used to be called "primitive," i.e. tribal, indigenous, or possibly ancient music; (b) non-Western and folk music; (c) all music outside the investigator's own culture; (d) all music that lives in oral tradition; (e) all music of a given locality, as in "the ethnomusicology of Tokyo"; (f) the music that given population groups regard as their particular property, e.g. "black" music of the United States; (g) all contemporary music (Chase 1958); and (h) all human music. Those focusing on type of activity might choose among the following: (a) comparative study (of musical systems and cultures), a basically musicological activity; (b) comprehensive analysis of the music and musical culture of one society – also essentially anthropological; (c) the study of musics as systems, perhaps systems of signs, an activity related to linguistics or semiotics; (d) the study of music in or as culture, or perhaps music in its cultural context, with techniques derived from anthropology, often called "anthropology of music"; and (e) historical study of musics outside the realm of Western classical music, using approaches of historians area studies specialists, and folklorists. Definitions that look at our ultimate goals might include (a) the search for universals; (b) the description of "all factors which generate the pattern of sound produced by a single composer or society" (Blacking 1970a:69); and even (c) a "science of music history," aiming at the establishment of laws governing musical development and change. This sampling provides an idea of the number and variety of definitions and approaches. Beyond these, however, the disciplinary identity of ethnomusicology is often the subject of debate. Opinions: Ethnomusicology is (1) a full-fledged discipline; (2) a branch of musicology, or (3) of anthropology; (4) an interdisciplinary field; (5) the kind of all-encompassing discipline that "musicology" ought to be, but hasn't become.

No wonder that preoccupation with identity has been a major activity. When attending meetings of the Society of Ethnomusicology, the largest organization of the field, I used to be struck by the number of specialized papers that begin with statements giving the speakers' definition of and general orientation toward the field. Since about 1985, however, the obsession with defining ethnomusicology has declined, and some have decided to stop worrying about it while others have come to agree on a mainstream of thrusts and emphases. One might also define a field of research by the kinds of things about which its people argue and debate; in a sense, this series of essays is itself a somewhat clumsy attempt to define ethnomusicology in terms of abiding issues, concepts, questions, and problem areas of general concern.

WHO THEY ARE AND WHAT THEY ACTUALLY DO

There may be many definitions, but what those who call themselves ethnomusicologists or who otherwise associate themselves with this field actually do has been fairly clear. Who they are? The Society for Ethnomusicology has been conducting a survey as yet incomplete at the time of this writing. Descriptions of the ethnomusicological population between ca. 1950 and 1980 may be found in Myers (ed. 1992) and Hood (1971). Let me try an impressionistic overview of the present. Of those working in this field since about 1980, many have an initial background in academic

music, as a student of performance, theory, or composition; in the United States, this may culminate in a bachelor's degree in music. But increasingly, they have also come from backgrounds in popular music, and some are motivated from prolonged residence – perhaps as teenagers – abroad. A good many also come to this field from exposure to third-world cultures as members of the Peace Corps, teachers of English abroad, missionary work. Typically, they seem to me to have been turned on to the field by the love of some for or fascination with some music. There usually soon follows some kind of exposure to a culture or society, and then often more formal study of culture, broadly speaking, perhaps including graduate study of anthropology, or of a field of area studies such as South Asia, Africa, the Middle East. Some turn to ethnomusicology after a period of living in a non-Western culture as a teacher of Western music. Many students of ethnomusicology undertake very quickly a specialized allegiance to the music of a particular culture or area, and even a particular genre of music – Plains Indian pow-wow dances, Javanese gamelan music, North Indian classical instrumental music.

Most ethnomusicologists, in any event, undertake graduate study in this field; there aren't many (though there once were) scholars in other disciplines – music history, anthropology perhaps – who, in mid-career as professionals, switched lanes and moved to ethnomusicology. Graduate curricula in ethnomusicology vary considerably. Some of the leading ones are free-standing programs in their universities, many are attached to music departments and may be considered one of a number of specializations within musicology, and a few are in anthropology and folklore departments. But while the orientations of these programs in North America varied greatly when they first came into existence in the 1950s and 1960s, and they still differ considerably, there has gradually developed a kind of mainstream, a central core of preparation that includes some study of performance of the music in which one plans to undertake research – and perhaps incidentally also performance of other non-canonic musics that may be available – and considerable reading and study of anthropology, or of anthropologically-related theory. Near the end of one's graduate study one ordinarily undertakes field research in a society or culture or sub-culture or perhaps a genre or repertory in which one later becomes known as a specialist. This dissertation fieldwork, which is preceded by cultural and linguistic preparation, usually involves a year or more of residence in the field venue. Analysis of collected data used to include automatically the transcription of recordings into musical notation, and this is still important though the arsenal of techniques has been widened. Arriving at musical insights, and – more difficult -- developing a procedure for the analysis of human activities and attitudes revolving about the musical sounds should follow, and the final stage in this research process is the interpretation of data in accordance with certain theoretical approaches or positions.

Most ethnomusicologists, Ph.D. in hand, seek teaching positions in higher education, though other kinds of work – librarianship, museology, public service of various sorts, publishing – are also available. Ethnomusicologists appointed to teaching positions are almost always assigned a course in "musics of the world," or at least something going far beyond the scope of their specialized research, along with something more in their particular line of expertise. Advanced courses may be devoted to world areas – e.g. South Asia, sub-Saharan Africa – or they may be topical (e.g. world perspectives of children's music, improvised music around the world, or the study on a global basis of musical change). Interestingly, it seems that in middle age, many ethnomusicologists add a second world area to their fields of expertise; for myself, I started with Native American music and at the age of 39, added the classical music of Iran. My colleagues Thomas Turino, first a well-known Andeanist, added the music of

East Africa and Charles Capwell added Indonesia to South Asia; while Paul Berliner, authority on East African mbira music, became, as well, an authority on jazz. I wish I could assert that elderly ethnomusicologists become wiser and more inclined to take broad and long views of the world of music, but I'm not so sure.

A typical ethnomusicologist's profile? Despite all diversity, a good many of my colleagues will surely recognize themselves here. As for the definitions cited above, there may be a lot of them, but ethnomusicologists aren't all that different from each other. There is often a gap between what ethnomusicologists do and what, by their own definition, they claim to do or hope some day to accomplish.

What most of them do is to carry out research about non-Western, folk, popular music, and vernacular music, taking into account both the music itself, as sound, and how it interacts with other things that people do – that's really what we mean by "music in culture." However we define these terms, they are what authors in such journals as *Ethnomusicology* and *Asian Music* actually write about. The definition of ethnomusicology as the study of non-Western and folk music, although widely criticized, is descriptively correct. On the other hand, the definition as study of music outside one's own culture is not, for Asian and African scholars who call themselves ethnomusicologists typically do study their own music, but when they study the European music that is outside their own culture, they avoid the term, instead calling themselves music historians or just musicologists.

Ethnomusicologists are supremely interested in music as a component of culture. For some time -- perhaps the period between 1950 and 1970 is the most indicative -- they tended to divide themselves into two groups, frequently at odds, one concentrating on the music "itself," another on the cultural context. The one typically felt that they were properly studying the main point of focus, the music itself, in its cultural context, looking down on these others "contextualists" as amateurs unable to deal directly with music, while the others, espousing an anthropological approach, considered their opposite numbers as naive, unable even to understand the musical artifact because they could not deal with it as a product of culture, and unwilling to deal with musical concepts, attitudes, or forms of behavior other than the piece of music itself. After about 1980, the two groups tended to merge, but even in earlier times, I know of no ethnomusicologists who did not, in their total commitments, have a major interest in music as an aspect of human culture. Anthropologists, as a basic technique of their profession, know how to deal with the interaction of various domains in culture; musicologists are distinguished by their fundamental ability to make sophisticated analyses of musical artifacts. Most ethnomusicologists try to be both.

Most academic ethnomusicologists in North America associate themselves with music schools and departments; but many of the intellectual leaders come from anthropology. Yet, as the following chapters examine principal issues that ethnomusicologists confront, it will become evident that this is a field which frequently asks questions that are fundamental to musicology, the discipline that encompasses all kinds of music scholarship. Of course, many scholars concerned with music quite justly see themselves not as musicologists at all, but as anthropologists, folklorists, sociologists, linguists; and yet, when engaging in ethnomusicological work, they are contributing to this central core of musicological activity (see the essays in Cook and Everist, ed. 1999; Blum 1987). To be sure, they are at the same time making contributions to their home disciplines, such as anthropology and folklore, but typically their findings are not as central to these fields as they are to musicology.

Ethnomusicology may function well as an independent field, and surely it has multiple disciplinary associations, but I wish to assert that ethnomusicological findings, insights, and theories, no matter to whatever other disciplines they may also contribute, belong in the first instance to musicology.

The first generations of ethnomusicologist, from ca. 1900 to maybe 1970, were seen as academic oddballs involved in an arcane subject of no interest outside the academy (or even inside). After 1960, they tried to make their musics known by issuing records and promoting concerts (of, say, Indian, Japanese, Arabic, West African musics), and I would assert that they played a role in the rapidly increasing interchanges of musics that led to the styles and the culture of "world music" as a category in the listening habits of Western society. So now, while few outsiders actually know exactly what it is that ethnomusicologists do in their lives, they are a concept and a term known to all levels of education, in the mass media, in the world of government. The world of music has changed incredibly since the 1980s, and ethnomusicologists are recognized as having contributed to it, and sought as interpreters of what has happened. Their work has contributed greatly to what is now taught in public school music programs, to the variety of musics available on recordings to all, and the resources used by composers.

Ethnomusicology is actually not all that easily separated conceptually from historical musicology, from what is usually called "musicology." All musicologists deal with music as sound and in culture. And all dictionary definitions of musicology include the work that ethnomusicologists do. There are two main attitudes that really distinguish ethnomusicologists in what they actually do from other fields. One is the centrality of fieldwork. It wasn't always so. We began in the nineteenth century with a tendency to speculate on the basis of little supporting evidence, moving ca. 1900 to "armchair" research in which the ethnomusicologist analyzed materials collected and recorded in the field by others -- usually anthropologists and missionaries -- but as the twentieth century progressed, fieldwork became increasingly essential and, after World War II, a *sine qua non* of the ethnomusicologist's own style of life and study. Of course face-to-face investigation of exotic music and musicians was known earlier, and even in the "armchair" period most ethnomusicologists did venture into the "field" or at least recognized the desirability of doing so.

Today it is taken for granted that each ethnomusicologist must have *some* field research experience, and that most studies are based on the researcher's own fieldwork. But considering economic and political developments since 1980, the difficulty of doing research in many parts of the world, and the fact that the world's societies produce recordings of their own, it is possible that in the future there will again be more research done with the use of other people's field data.

The kind and quality of fieldwork on which given research is based have a profound effect on the conclusions, but ethnomusicological publications -- particularly those from before 1990 -- rarely tell much about the procedures used in the field. They may give data such as names of informants and teachers, machinery used to record or film, questionnaires, but rarely the whole story of how it really felt. There is a disinclination to reveal the emotional impact of the relationships that develop, their intensity, their disappointments, highs and the failures. There is something curious about the combination of centrality and mystery in this hallmark of ethnomusicological life.

Fieldwork is the primary technique for data gathering, but it also has broader significance as the ethnomusicologist's bridge to the cultural "other" (which includes

distant lands as well as societies close to home). It's a truism: Exposure to another culture stimulates empathy with both the strangeness and the common humanity, of another society of people, and incidentally with the complexity of the music and musical life in what may from a distance seem a simple situation. We believe that this understanding, once it has been gained in a particular culture, will carry over to further work not based on field research, that it will help to evaluate publications by others that may be based on fieldwork, and provide insights necessary for guiding the fieldwork of students who investigate societies with which the teacher is not directly acquainted. All of this is, of course, tied to the fact that ethnomusicologists study cultures outside their own and to the resulting assumption that there is a dichotomy between one's own culture and all others, the latter in a certain sense all alike. Of course we know that they are not, but our approach to foreign cultures initially lumps them into a single category; we begin by dividing the world into categories of "ours" and "not ours," into "familiar" and "strange." Later we try to overcome this simplistic view.

The second central attitude is the maintenance of an interculturally comparative perspective. Ethnomusicologists don't spend their time comparing the musics of different societies, and they certainly don't compare in order to determine who is better at this or that aspect of music-making. But they look at each musical culture from a viewpoint that relates it to the world of music, a world comprised of a multitude of musical culture that are alike in some ways and different in others, and they believe that insight can be gained from comparison. A comparative perspective, yes; but when it comes to brass tacks, what kinds of comparison are significant, and whether there is a good method for comparing musics, these are questions that the literature has generally avoided. The validity of comparative study has been debate (and the debates are followed in Chapter 6) . But to me, an interculturally comparative perspective is, like fieldwork, a hallmark of ethnomusicology, and our perspectives have not changed fundamentally since the time when ethnomusicology was called "comparative musicology."

EXCURSION TO TERMINOLOGY

Merriam (1977a: 192-93) believed that the terminological change to "ethnomusicology," ca. 1950, came from the recognition that this field is no more comparative than others, that comparison can be made only after the things to be compared are well understood in themselves, and that, in the end, comparison across cultural boundaries might in the end be impossible because the musics and cultures of the world are unique. In his classic book *The Anthropology of Music* (1964:52-53) he also pointed out that most of the general publications of ethnomusicology do not deal with methods and techniques of comparative study (Wiora 1975 and many essays in the *Garland Encyclopedia* from ca. 2000 notwithstanding). At the same time, it is difficult to find specialized studies that do not in some way, at least by implication, make use of intercultural comparison as a way of gaining and presenting insights. The proponents of comparative study, accepting the criticisms given here, nevertheless appear to consider the benefits of the comparative view so great that they feel it worth their while to indulge it.

But the adoption of the term "ethnomusicology" as a replacement for "comparative musicology" may have causes additional to those suggested by Merriam. I don't question the reasoning of Jaap Kunst, who is generally regarded as the first to have used the new

term prominently in print (Kunst 1950:7); he did so, he says, because comparative musicology is not *especially* comparative. But why then was the new term adopted so quickly, and particularly by Americans, who seem to have been the first to adopt it officially?

The participation of a number of anthropologists in the American leadership of comparative musicology seems likely to have favored the use of a term paralleling the names of several anthropological subfields: ethnolinguistics and ethnohistory, with others, such as ethnobotany and ethno-science, coming later. Among the academic disciplines around 1950, anthropology had greater prestige than did musicology, which often misunderstood even in midcentury. Musicologists, after all, were seen as the academic Simon Legrees for students of musical performance, and musicological study was frequently regarded as the refuge of the unsuccessful player or composer. The new term attractively symbolized association with anthropology or something that sounded anthropological. Nationalism too may have played a part. Americans were proud of their significant contributions to non-Western and folk music research between 1930 and about 1955, in comparison to their more modest work as historians of Western music. They might have needed a term that expressed their special role, that was not simply a translation of the established German term, "vergleichende Musikwissenschaft." The fact that one was dealing with a special kind of music, low in the hierarchy of musics with which the conventional musicologist dealt, may also have stimulated the need for a special term, a whole word, "ethnomusicology," instead of a term designating a subfield of musicology that dealt, by implication, with "sub-musics" worthy only of being compared with the great art music of Europe.

But whatever the attitude toward comparison and its role in the development of a self-image, ethnomusicologists use it to generalize about world music. The specialists in the music of East Africa, Thailand, the Navajo, or Croatia try to see their musics in a world context. When serious discussion of musical universals takes place, it is among ethnomusicologists. When general comments about the history of world music are made, they usually come from ethnomusicologists, from a vantage point of direct experience with at least two or three musical cultures and of a literature that describes a good many others. Function of human music at large are discussed it is in the same forum.

Ethnomusicologists are moderately effective here; before their advent, the same generalizations were made by philosophers and sociologists and historians of European music, and they could often be falsified by mere reference to standard descriptions of non-European cultures. Most of the comparisons that are made involve observations of change and its processes, or questions of origin, and thus we may conclude that most of the generalizing done in this field has some kind of relevance to history. The ultimate contribution of comparative study of musics provides central insights into the understanding of the world of music how it exists in the present and how it came to be.

A CREDO

We have talked about the multiplicity of definitions, the different ways of defining a discipline, the history of the term "ethnomusicology," the principal activities of ethnomusicologists, and the kinds of people who eventually find themselves in this field. Time for me to try my hand at my own definition, or at least give the one that is central to this book. It's a two-pronged definition, to which are added two corollaries, and I think

it is probably acceptable to at least some of my colleagues and so I should like to tie it to certain beliefs and understandings that might be considered a kind of credo.

1) *For one thing, ethnomusicology is the study of music in culture.* A concept that has its problems, when examined carefully (as in Stokes 2001), but in the end I think it holds up. We believe that music must be understood as a part of culture, as a product of human society, and while many pieces of research do not directly address the problem, we insist on this belief as an essential ingredient of our overall approach. We are interested in the way in which a society musically defines itself, in its taxonomy of music, its ideas of what music does, how it should be, and also in the way a society changes its music, relates to, absorbs, and influences other musics. We stress the understanding of musical change, less in terms of the events than in the processes.

2) *Just as important, ethnomusicology is the study of the world's musics from a comparative and relativistic perspective.* We endeavor to study total musical systems and, in order to comprehend them, follow a comparative approach, believing that comparative study, properly carried out, provides important insights. But we study each music in its own terms, and we try to learn to see it as its own society sees and understands it. Our area of concentration is music that is accepted by an entire society as its own, and we reserve a lesser role for the personal, the idiosyncratic, the exceptional, in this way differing from the historian of music. We are most interested in what is typical of a culture.

3) *Principally, ethnomusicology is study with the use of fieldwork.* We believe that fieldwork, face-to-face confrontation with musical creation and performance, with the people who conceive of, produce, and consume music, is essential, and we prefer concentration on intensive work with small numbers of individual informants to surveys of large populations. And we hope that this association will lead to some kind of benefit for the people from whom we learn.

4) *Ethnomusicology is the study of all of the musical manifestations of a society.* Although we take into account a society's own hierarchy of its various kinds of music, and its musicians, we want to study not only what is excellent but also what is typical and acceptable. We do not privilege elite repertoires, and we pay attention – but do not necessarily stress – the musics of lower socio-economic classes or of oppressed minorities. We believe that we must study all of the world's music, from all peoples and nations, classes, sources, periods of history. The fact that we have not done so results from convenience of certain sources, location of peoples, availability of time, and other incidental factors.

These four areas of belief are the basis of my organization of these essays, and they function here as both definition and fundamental understandings of what we do. Are they a kind of credo? Many of my colleagues, typical nonconformists among musicians and music scholars, are unlikely to accept any doctrine. And there are also some other, perhaps more fundamental beliefs that define the core of ethnomusicological thinking and should somehow be appended to a credo.

Ethnomusicologists seem to be driven by two major but apparently conflicting motivations. They search for universals, hoping to generalize intelligently about the way in which the world's cultures construct, use, conceive of music. They try to understand human music in the context of human culture as a unitary phenomenon. And yet they never cease to marvel at the incredible variety of manifestations of music. They delight in

imparting to the world the strange facts uncovered by musical ethnography and analysis: that among the Sirionó of Bolivia, each person may sing only one tune all of his or her life, identifying the individual with a personal musical stamp (Key 1963, Stumpf 1886:411); that in the classical music of India there is an almost incredibly complex interaction of melody and rhythm maintained over a sustained period by a musician who manipulates the rhythmic cycle in juxtaposition to improvised rhythmic units; that oppressed minorities have special uses for music in their struggles for improvement. Despite their interest in human universals, ethnomusicologists revel in their knowledge that most generalizations about structure and use of music can be overturned by reference to this or that small society. They vacillate between a view of music as a unified human phenomenon and as an emblem of the infinite variety of human cultures.

Fundamentally, ethnomusicologists are egalitarians. They become attached to cultures which they study and with which they identify themselves, they have special loves, obligations toward the musics they regard as an ethnic or family heritage. They may consciously or tacitly believe in the intellectual, technical, aesthetic, or artistic superiority of certain musics and be able to make a good case for this belief, preferring the classical music of Europe or Asia because of its complexity, or the music of "simple" folk because of its presumably unspoiled nature. But, at the bottom line, at some level of conceptualization, they regard all musics as equal. Each music, they believe, is equally an expression of culture, and each culture and each music must be understood first and foremost in its own terms. They consider all musics worthy of study, recognizing that all, no matter how apparently simple, are in themselves inordinately complex phenomena. And they believe that all musics are capable of imparting much of importance to the peoples to whom they belong, and to the world, and thus naturally also to the scholars who study them.

But there is also a sense in which ethnomusicologists are usually not relativists. Taking a sympathetic view of the music of all peoples, they come to believe in the right of each society to determine its own way of life, and they are likely to become dedicated to the improvement of life for the people with whose music they are concerned. This may move them in the direction of social and political activism in opposition to colonialism or neo-colonialism and in support of minorities, and perhaps more typically, of a kind of musical activism which insists that the musics of the world's peoples must be protected, preserved, taught, and the musicians treated fairly and with respect. Although they may wish to study their subject dispassionately, they are in the end often unable to avoid the results of extended contact with humans and their works in a foreign society. They try to bring an understanding of their musics to their own society, believing that the teaching of their subject will in a small way promote intercultural – maybe even international -- understanding, that it will combat ethnocentrism and build respect for the traditions of the world's societies. In their quest for knowledge of musical cultures, they try to be neutral, but they typically try also to err on the side of showing that the music of the oppressed people of the world, of lower classes in rigidly stratified societies, of isolated, tribal, technically backward peoples, is something innately interesting, something worthy of attention and respect – indeed, something truly magnificent. These attitudes are not a prerequisite of graduate study or a teaching position, not part of the definition of the field; and they are surely also found among members of other professions. But there are few ethnomusicologists who do not share them.