

The Seminal Eighties: A North American Perspective of the Beginnings of Musicology and Ethnomusicology. [1](#)

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In 1935, Guido Adler, then professor of musicology at the University of Vienna, published his autobiography.[2](#) He had had a long, illustrious career in which he had done much to further the study of musicology. His autobiography says little, however, about an article that he had published when he was quite a young man, in 1885, [3](#) but possibly this article, on the scope, method, and goals of musicology is, among Adler's achievements, the one we are most inclined to celebrate today -- more perhaps even than his founding of the *Denkmaeler der Tonkunst in Oesterreich*, or his famous methodology of music history[4](#) in which he laid down much of the generally accepted methodology of music historical research, or his edition of the first major compendium of music history.[5](#) The reason for our celebration of Adler's article of 1885 rests in large measure on the fact that in it he stated, in unprecedentedly broad perspective, what musicology should be. If Adler seemed later in his career to depart from his ideal, some of us now feel that we should return to it.

In his autobiography, Adler himself already made it clear why his article was so important, saying that music is an organism, [6](#) implying a complex of interactions and relationships, and going on to point out that in his "Habilitationsschrift," the study that gave him the license to lecture at a university, he had used the approaches of psychology, history, folkloristics and other fields to focus on the history of harmony.[7](#) Later, Adler became known as a kind of paradigmatic historian of European music famed particularly for showing the world the grand history of art music in Austria. But in 1885, he was a kind of firebrand, bringing to the world of scholarship a vision of a new field, musicology, approaching his task with wide scope that was not soon if ever shared by scholarship in the other arts.

The importance of the 1885 article lies in the way it lays out the field of musicology. Let me remind you of the structure.[8](#) There are two major divisions, historical and systematic, each with subdivisions. Historical musicology includes paleography, taxonomy, the study of chronology (in music, theory, and practice), and, as a kind of annex, the history of musical instruments. Systematic musicology includes theory--the bases of harmony, rhythm, and melody; aesthetics; music pedagogy; and, again as a kind of curious annex, something called "Musikologie," defined as "comparative study for ethnographic purposes." There are several auxiliary sciences whose inclusion persuades us that Adler regarded musicology to be closely related to other fields. It's important, by the way, to point out that the kinds of considerations of concern to ethnomusicology are not found exclusively in the annex of "Musikologie." Adler's discussion of his chart places non-Western and comparative study, and the relationship of music to the rest of culture, also within other aspects of the systematic branch of musicology, particularly aesthetics; and in the historical branch as well.

The classes of Adler's article stayed around for a long time; for example, in his methodological handbook[9](#) and in the textbook, *Introduction to Musicology*, by one of his North American students, Glen Haydon.[10](#) By the fifties, it had split into three classes, historical, ethnomusicological, and systematic, as indicated in the work of Jacques Handschin.[11](#) But it is significant that in all this time, musicology, despite some internecine strife and a lot of variety of opinion, has remained a single field in which most individuals recognise that the rest, however far-flung their musical interests, are colleagues. It continues to be thus defined in the dictionaries of music.

Well, if the division of a holistic musicology into such categories has become old hat, a hundred years ago it was surely a new thing. Historiography of music goes back a long way and includes such illustrious events as the histories, begun in 1776, by Charles Burney [12](#) and William Hawkins,[13](#) and the first music dictionary in 1732 by Johann Gottfried Walther. [14](#) I single out Adler's article as a starting point precisely because it provides an outline for a discipline that includes all types of scholarly concern with music. To be sure, Adler had predecessors, most obvious among them, Friedrich Chrysander, who for a few years, beginning in 1863, published a periodical, *Jahrbücher für musikalische Wissenschaft*. [15](#) In its preface, he asserts that this "Wissenschaft" has several branches, history, aesthetics, theory, folk music scholarship (including intercultural comparison), and the presentation, for practical musicianship, of newly discovered works. This periodical soon disappeared for lack of support, but Chrysander tells the reader that however many concerns are represented among scholars involved with music, they have much in common and ought at least to share a periodical.

In 1884, Chrysander, then about 59, the distinguished biographer and editor of Handel's works, and Philip Spitta, then about 45, the great biographer of Bach, joined with the youthful Adler, then living in Vienna but about to go to Prague to teach, in founding the new *Vierteljahrschrift für Musikwissenschaft*.[16](#) I have little data, but it is easy to imagine the older, established scholars permitting Adler, with his youthful energy and enthusiasm, to be the principal architect of this venture, while also leaving him most of the work. Anyway, Adler's view of the field as

encompassing all imaginable kinds of musical study, seems to have dominated this journal throughout the ten years of its life. Adler's article leads the others and is presented as a kind of position paper for what follows. In some ways, it reads like the work of a seasoned scholar, stating its points with authority and even majesty. But on the other hand, to lay out a field with courage and conviction, from scratch, may have been the characteristic approach of a young man.

But then, 1885 was a time when much was being done with a lot of courage and conviction, if not always with ethical conscience and good judgement. What was the context in which Adler was working? Let me at random list just a few of the things that were happening in 1885, and just before and after that year: Beginning in 1884, there was series of conferences of European powers in which the continent of Africa was, as it were, divided among them, in thoroughly cavalier fashion. In the United States, it was a period of unrest on the labor front, and of large-scale immigration from Eastern and Southern Europe; and the time of the infamous Haymarket riots in Chicago. But also, it was the period in which the last group of American Indians, of the Plains, attempted to oppose physically the domination by the whites, and it included the Ghost Dance movement that culminated in the infamous massacre of Wounded Knee in 1890. The 1880s were a period of great technological innovation. Phonograph, electrical devices in general, agricultural machinery, the single-cylinder engine, cameras. In 1885, the fountain pen was invented, gold discovered in Transvaal, golf introduced to America, and the first subway opened in London. 1885 saw the composition of Brahms' Fourth and The Mikado; and the Oxford English Dictionary began publication, while the decade also included publication -- never completed -- of Leopold von Ranke's grand history of the world. These are a few events, but enough perhaps to give something of the flavour of the time. Let me suggest that the history of musicology in the 1880s can be interpreted as part of three related themes in the cultural and political history of the period.

First, the 1880s were a time in which European society was ready to take on the world, to devour it, in various ways, politically and culturally, but also in its learning and art. It was a time when people tended very much to think big. Huge scholarly projects, incredibly ambitious schemes of invention, vast projects in the arts were typical, paralleling the insupportably grand political, social, and military schemes. Second, there was an increasing interest in nationalism and in understanding the culture of one's own nation. Taking on the world was to some extent a function of the growing nationalism of the time, particularly, at that late date, of Germany and the U.S. And third, a result perhaps of the first two, there appeared an interest in the relationship among cultures, as Europe, devouring the world, had to digest its variety. Taking on the world, doing the impossible; collecting and utilising one's own national heritage; and seeing what the world was made of, and how it came to be; these are three major themes of the 1880s. Let me move through them illustrating from the musicological literature of the seminal 1880s.

1) It is easy to see how an Edison, a Ranke, a Wagner, a Cecil Rhodes could be considered typical of an era in which people seemed to say; "let's grab the whole world;" or, less politically and militarily; "let's learn everything about the world," and also, "let's not be afraid to think big;" or perhaps, more to the point of scholarship. "we can find out everything." For musicology, the conception of a holistic science seems to me to fit this same pattern. Also, some of the large, comprehensive works of the field date from this period, and it was then that the tradition of publishing complete collections and comprehensive editions really took off, a movement also affected by other motivations. Or, take Victor Mahillon's celebrated catalogue of instruments.

It's the catalogue of the instrument collection of the Royal Conservatory of Brussels, begun in 1880, in five volumes.¹⁷ The collection had some 3500 specimens, and Mahillon developed a taxonomy (related to an old Indian system) that eventually led to the now standard classification of Hornbostel and Sachs. Mahillon divides the instrument groups into European and non-European, and gives a great deal of detail about many items, including scales, details of structure and cultural interest. It's a marvel of care and love. But the point is that Mahillon conceived of a work in which all imaginable instruments might have a place, in which the whole world of instruments, as it were, was encompassed. In the area of instruments, Mahillon was taking on the whole world. The idea of establishing a kind of framework into which one might place all phenomena, from all cultures, in a particular class was to become a hallmark of later ethnomusicology. For example, the kinds of frameworks for the description of all possible kinds of scales and melodic contours, produced by Mieczyslaw Kolinski¹⁸ in the 1950s, harks back to Mahillon's approach. So of course does the cantometrics type of analysis of Alan Lomax,¹⁹ and in a different way, the analytical procedures of Hornbostel and Abraham.²⁰

Another way of "taking on the world" is exhibited in the comprehensive collections of a variety of materials that were beginning to take shape in the 1880s. The idea of producing the complete works of a composer was well established by 1880, as editions of Mozart, Haydn, Bach, Handel, Beethoven had been published. Producing large sets of significant early works such as the various Denkmäler editions was beginning. But more to my theme, putting together comprehensive editions of music existing essentially in open corpus, a more difficult undertaking, may be illustrated by two collections of German hymns, one for Catholic songs, by Wilhelm Bäumker, in four volumes, 1883-1911,²¹ a huge undertaking in which comprehensiveness is attempted, and the Protestant counterpart by Johannes Zahn, six volumes, 1889-1893.²² Zahn's work, incidentally, became the basis of one of the

earliest attempts to establish a way of classifying folk songs, the system of Oswald Koller, basically a kind of alphabetical index that was quickly supplanted by Ilmari Krohn's more musical one, which in turn led eventually to the work of Bartók and others.

If the idea of taking on the world is reflected in musical scholarship, one would expect to find something like a world ethnography of music. After all, if Ranke could try to write a true history of the world (even if it turned out to be Europe to 1500), one might expect someone to attempt a history of world music. Of course there isn't really enough data for that today, and there certainly wasn't in 1885. The first large history of Western music, by Ambros,²³ a kind of musical Ranke, must have been considerably affected by social Darwinism and ideas of musical evolution, with non-Western people occupying a role of prehistorical artefact. And yet there began to appear works that showed that attempts at some kind of world ethnography of music might not be too far in the offering. There were no works about world music; but there were works which looked at a music from many sides, and saw it as a complex system.

Take for example Theodore Baker's dissertation, the first general work on American Indian music, published in 1882.²⁴ Born in New York in 1851, Baker went to study music in Leipzig, receiving his Ph.D. with the mentioned dissertation, eventually returned to the U.S. and became an editor and lexicographer best known for his excellent Biographical Dictionary of Musicians, whose latest edition appeared in 1985. His dissertation was written in German (was there an original English ms. from which he translated? I've never found out.), and only a few years ago published in English translation. It is usually mentioned as being only of historical interest. But it predated the earliest tribal monographs on Indian music and the first general works on ethnomusicology, and when I look at it, I continue to be impressed. There are chapters about the various elements or parameters of music: poetry, tonality, melodic form, rhythm, recitative, instruments, an organisation you might find in work of the 1950s. Most interesting to me is Baker's introduction to music in Indian culture, giving a viewpoint that's not really very different from one we might express today -- if with different terminology. In contrast to some later students, Baker does not denigrate Native Americans and their music, taking it seriously and pointing out that it has a long history, is closely related to social life, and shares in certain cultural universals. Let me quote a paragraph from the translation:

It would be difficult to say with certainty how the songs originated, or how they maintained their present form and particular design. The Indian simplifies (to his own way of thinking) the answer to this question by ascribing a supernatural origin to those songs which are used at particular religious festivals, and he believes the newer songs to be based on these models. Some writers are of the opinion that Indian songs were originally a simple imitation of certain birds; they nevertheless show no intellectual relationship between such trite attempts and the true and higher expression of feeling that every music ought to be, and that the music of the Indians certainly is. A much more obvious and legitimate hypothesis seems to be that these melodies are the result of a long evolution in which, at its simplest, are rooted expressions of joy or grief common to all people. This hypothesis is strengthened by the fact that according to it music rises directly out of the human heart. It is further supported by the actual situation of the music, which, as voiced by the Indians, is observed at its most basic stage of development. In such cases, however, singing seldom appears to be an independent art, but is almost always accompanied by various dances. In their general features, the performances of the different Indian peoples show striking similarities.²⁵

I also find myself impressed by Baker's sophistication in his description of performance practice, done, I remind you, before the advent of recording. Dividing this section into components rather in the manner of Lomax's cantometrics, but of course with fewer parameters, Baker deals with consonants and vowels and their treatment, with range, general quality of voice, aspects of singing style -- slide, growl, portamento -- and ornamentation. He was sensitive to issues of performance practice almost fifty years before Robert Haas's pioneering work on the subject.²⁶ Baker wanted to take on all of the variety of Indian music, and also all aspects of the music and its cultural context, and did what one could to do the field justice. Only lack of better and more data and of developed technique prevented a more comprehensive result.

If this sympathetic approach to the music of the Indians is noteworthy, it's interesting to see that it occurred at a time when Indians were very much in the forefront of white American consciousness. On the one hand, the Indians were getting the worst of treatment by white Americans, but they also began to be viewed as an issue in the American body politic, and their culture as worthy of serious study. The 1880s was the time in which the reservation system was finally being imposed on the Plains Indians. It was the period in which vast quantities of Western lands opened to settlement, granted to railroads, and fenced off. But also, in 1881, while Baker was writing in Leipzig, Helen Hunt Jackson published an influential book, *A Century of Dishonour*,²⁷ arousing concern over Indian problems and stimulating the founding of the Indian Rights Association that lobbied successfully for liberalised legislation. And in 1888, Franz Boas published his first large monograph, *The Central Eskimo*.²⁸ Baker's dissertation, perhaps a curio, at the University of Leipzig, fits well into the beginnings of American Indian study.

But if we speak of taking on the world, we can hardly do so without mentioning Hugo Riemann, a towering figure who in literally dozens of volumes in his long career tried to write about virtually everything musical. Born in 1849, he seemed to be almost at his peak in the '80s. The total output of Riemann is downright frightening, but is not

totally uncharacteristic of scholars of his time. Today, such productivity is virtually inconceivable, and one may marvel -- perhaps gratefully -- that times have changed so. In the decade of the 1880s Riemann's publications largely concern music theory (though his landmark history of music theory²⁹ was not to appear until 1898). There were about ten books of a theoretical or theory-text nature, a couple on notation, and most important, two major encyclopaedic efforts. One was the *Musik-Lexikon*³⁰ published in 1882, which is still being edited and reedited although by now the contents have turned over completely. Except for MGG and Grove, each with many authors, it is the largest encyclopaedia of music, and it was first written entirely by one man. The second major work of Riemann's in the 1880s was the *Opernhandbuch*, a comprehensive dictionary of opera.³¹ You can imagine that this didn't include a lot of the operas now in our standard repertoire, Puccini, Strauss, Berg. But it seems to have an entry for every opera known or discovered by then, and one on every subject on which an opera was written, to say nothing of composers. Even now there is nothing like it in comprehensiveness, given its time of publication. But in Riemann's oeuvre these two works are almost drops in the bucket.

Riemann was one of those people who evidently thought that nothing worth doing was too difficult to try. There were many scholars like that in his time, German and others. Think of all the folk songs Bela Bartok collected in several cultures, between 1900 and 1914, just in his spare time! Or think of Thomas Edison, if you will. Or, for that matter, Boas. It was a time people in Western culture thought they could do everything, conquer all worlds. Was it courage, or an incredible immodesty and greed? I'm telling you about the grand accomplishments of the early musicologists, but I can't quite avoid drawing a tenuous connection between Adler's dividing up the world of musicology and the European powers dividing up Africa in the same year; and between Riemann's incredible concentration and indefatigable work habits, his wish to contribute something to every branch of music, and the 20th century Germans as would-be conquerors of the world. But this is analysis long after the fact. Riemann surely wouldn't have recognised himself in this parallel; and if his theories were sometimes a bit zany, he seems in the vast majority of instances to have had his facts straight.

2) The development of national consciousness is an old story to students of 19th century history, of course. But indeed, if one was taking on the world, one was doing it in a sense on behalf of nationhood. And so, of course, there was much in the early literature of musicology one of whose principal values was love and admiration of nation. The *Denkmaeler* movement, emphasis on folk music collecting, national orientation to the writing of music history books, all this is an obvious corollary. Since I am approaching my task here largely through the examination of some major publications of the 1880s, let me mention two which seem noteworthy in illustrating an interest in moving through the various social strata that sometimes accompanied nineteenth century cultural nationalism. Both make their readership aware of the music of their whole society; all of the music. Along with the folk song collecting going on at that time, there also developed a formidable literature about the concept of folk song. Julian von Pulikowski,³² in his large compendium of folk-song definitions, gives five German publications of 1885 which discuss the concept of folk song or define it. (His book certainly supports the contention that we have not progressed very far in the delineation of categories or strata of music such as folk music.) The most interesting of his five citations of 1885 is by Gustav Weber, a Swiss composer (1845-87) who, near the end of his life, for some years edited the influential Zurich weekly *Schweizerische Musikzeitung*. There is an article curiously entitled "Die Musik der Sinhalesen und einige Bemerkungen ueber das Volkslied." Let me quote a passage, in my own translation:³³

"There are so many forms, and transitions between them, that it is often hard to distinguish where folk song ends and art song or folk-like song begins. That the composer may be unknown is a matter of coincidence, and cannot be a factor in the decision. The fashioning of a simple melody, on the other hand, as the folk might wish it, is so easy that any reasonably musical person could manage it. If someone, with more or less good luck, has invented such a song, then it depends on the text, or on coincidence, or extraneous circumstances, whether it becomes a true folk song. A true folksong can be understood by anyone without artistic education, and it can be composed, written, understood and sung by such a person. But it is maintained specifically by oral tradition.

"Popular songs result from occasions or events, or from the desire on somebody's part to show the folk how to sing; they are tossed into the folk culture and held fast by it. Such songs are usually first printed, and then diffused by school teachers, societies, or theaters. In the first category [folk song] we have before us artistic sounds coming from nature, the capability of the artistic as it slumbers in the totality of human spirit and breaks out in

many little flames. In the second, folk-like or popular song, these natural sounds are simply imitated."

Weber mentions a third category, popular art songs and choral songs. I don't think that this publication had much effect on later scholarship; but the attitudes that dominated folk song conceptualisation for fifty years are very much in evidence: the concern with definition; the categorization of music; the interest in transmission; the relationship of folk, popular, and art song; the view of musical culture comprising several strata.

My second example: In 1886 there appeared a two-volume work by Franz Magnus Boehme *Geschichte des Tanzes in Deutschland*. [34](#) The author was a man who was involved in many aspects of music, as composer, editor, choral conducting, collecting and editing of folk songs, teaching elementary school in Weimar, Dresden, and smaller towns of central Germany. In particular, he published folk song collections. This book has the subtitle, translated as "A contribution to German history of customs, literature and music." It's a rather comprehensive history, the kind of thing we might call a historical ethnography of dance. It has chapters on various early periods in the history of dance, but then also chapters on other topics such as these: Judgments and preachings about dance from the Middle Ages to the modern era; official proscriptions of dance; foreign dances in Germany in the 16th century; old German ritual dances that have been maintained into the 19th century; all sorts of folk dances still danced today; social dance in Germany; dance music and dance musicians; continuation of old folk dances in modern children's games. The book presents dance as a part of culture in that the attitudes towards dance are thoroughly examined, in its equal treatment of art, popular, and folk dance; and in its study of acculturation in the relationship of German and non-German dances. Boehme reflects the attitude of his time (or does he?) as at one point, he becomes involved, defending the art of dance but also criticising the current state of affairs:.