

# **New Perspectives in Ethnomusicology: A Critical Survey**

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## **RESUMEN**

Aunque la idea de una etnomusicología realmente amplia en sus concepciones, que incluyera aproximaciones sociológicas, y cuyo campo de estudio fuera toda la música del mundo, de cualquier época, es antigua, no ha sido hasta la década de los '80 cuando se ha realizado. La relativización de las influencias de la semiótica o la antropología y su contextualización en el conjunto de otras aproximaciones -de la hermenéutica, el posmodernismo o el mismo folklore- que también contribuyeron a su desarrollo, ha sido determinante para ello. Pero también otros fenómenos de dimensiones internacionales que se han producido en los últimos años, como las migraciones a gran escala, la world-music, o el mosaico cultural de las grandes urbes. Los términos "folk" o "popular" han quedado obsoletos para designar los idiomas locales que se han desarrollado de manera espectacular, y se proponen otros, como el término "vernacular", para sustituirlos. Los estudios sobre música "cultura" occidental comienzan a aparecer en la disciplina; se amplían las connotaciones sociales y la dimensión experiencial de la performance; aparecen trabajos sobre cognición y percepción, y se desarrollan las aplicaciones informáticas. Todo ello cierra la época en que se hablaba de musicología histórica, musicología sistemática y etnomusicología como disciplinas separadas.

Por otra parte, los etnomusicólogos ya no sólo se ocupan de la descripción y estudio de determinados lenguajes musicales (ya sean locales, regionales o nacionales), sino que profundizan cada vez más en las aproximaciones interculturales y los estudios comparativos. También el campo de estudio ha ampliado considerablemente desde sus inicios, incluyendo temas como ideología, el gender o las políticas culturales, y su relación con el fenómeno musical.

El estudio de la diferencia desde la etnomusicología ha provocado ciertas diferencias internas en la disciplina, como la compartimentación en etnomusicología americana y europea, creando fronteras imaginarias donde nunca han existido. Desde los años '60 el intercambio fluido entre ambas zonas ha existido, y debe ser fomentado en el futuro para el completo desarrollo de la disciplina.

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## **New Perspectives in Ethnomusicology: A Critical Survey**

In the past decade, ethnomusicology has advanced in striking ways. From about 1960 to 1980, ethnomusicology was often found struggling to maintain its identity alongside a more established and elitist "historical musicology". Frequently marginalized in academic circles as the study of "exotic", "non-Western", or Third World musics, it has finally begun to overtake and surpass its sister field in two ways: ideologically, in grappling with cultural and musical realities as global rather than delimited phenomena; and methodologically, in the range of techniques available to it from cross-disciplinary fertilization. This has materialized, first, because of profound demographic changes throughout the world; and second, because an increasing awareness of "world music" in the media has been brought about, primarily by a record industry based in metropolitan areas where emigration, exile, or ghettoization is the normal condition for Third World minorities. The jostling of cultures, then, because of ideological struggle, economic change, poverty, and immigration has resulted in a fertile mosaic of musical idioms that

collide, overlap, and at times revitalize older forms and styles. This evolution has been recently discussed by the American scholar Mark Slobin in a lengthy article on "micromusics of the West" (Slobin 1992). Converging definitions and models Part of the newly generated excitement within the discipline stems from a wider conception of ethnomusicology's scope. Ever since Jaap Kunst coined the term "ethnomusicology" in 1950 (to replace "comparative musicology") it has been the subject of attempts at precise definition, none of them wholly successful (Merriam 1964, 1977). This is because ethnomusicology, like folkloristics, is a discipline based on cross-cultural and interdisciplinary research methods into musical behavior. Like folkloristics or anthropology, it has become a discipline in its own right partly because it has generated a distinguished body of literature over the past century. Unlike musicology, it does not delimit for study a finite set of structures or cultures. Its nature is qualitatively different because of multidisciplinary input on the one hand and intercultural, synaesthetic objects of study on the other. In a recent article I suggested that, as a result of the confluence of semiotics and hermeneutics, ethnomusicology could be defined as: critical inquiry into, explanation of and mediation between, the musical gestures of Self and Other (Porter 1993: 88).

Frank Harrison proposed some time ago that it is the function of all musicology to be in fact ethnomusicology, that is, to take its range of research to include material that is termed "sociological" (1963). At the International Musicological Society's Twelfth Congress at Berkeley in 1977, John Blacking affirmed that "all musicology is an ethnic musicology" (i.e., admit its ethnic bias in its analytical goals and methods) and that "Western music must also be treated as strange and exotic" (Blacking 1981). In this light, ethnomusicologists have paid closer attention to the different strands in the history of the discipline as an index of its character. A 1988 symposium on the history of ethnomusicology drew American and European perspectives together in a converging communality of effort (Nettl and Bohlman 1990). As English became the language of international scholarly cooperation, it was hardly surprising that approximate terms in other languages (e.g., Ger. Musikethnologie, musikalische Völkerkunde) began to fall into line and employ the English term or its equivalent (e.g., Ethnomusikologie). The most promising research today lies in cross-cultural areas: aesthetics, acoustics and the sociology of world music. Some scholars nevertheless continue to cite Guido Adler's century-old division of musicology, systematic musicology, and ethnomusicology, as if concepts that pertained to a Eurocentric view of music in the 1880s were valid for the 21st century. Recently, for instance, one distinguished scholar claimed that ethnomusicology has been a part of musicology "ever since [Adler], in encyclopedia definitions and in actual academic practice", and that it is at the same time "a sub-discipline of anthropology" (Nettl 1992: 375), that is, a subsidiary of both musicology and anthropology. On the contrary, in at least one major ethnomusicology program (UCLA), ethnomusicology is an academic department in a School of the Arts, separated from departments

teaching Western music performance and [historical] musicology. It is worth repeating, too, that the influences on ethnomusicology in its various phases of development and in its methods and techniques have come, not just from musicology and anthropology, but from folkloristics, linguistics and philology, sociology, psychology, history, and cultural studies in general. One could even argue, with some justification, that the influence of anthropology is less potent than it once was, given the global scope of music technology and the fact that a great deal of musical communication is no longer face to face but disembodied and transcultural (Manuel 1990, Slobin 1992, Wallis and Malm 1984). The most convincing argument for an integrated definition and model of ethnomusicology is that of Rosemary Joseph (1988). Advancing what she terms a "holistic model", she bases this on the convergence of four intellectual traditions: musical semiotics, derived from structural linguistics; performance and contextual approaches, from folklore on the one hand, and from sociolinguistics on the other; and a communication and meaning model from cognitive anthropology. The convergence of these paradigms over the past few decades suggests a consensus of opinion in moving towards an integrative model. This model, as elaborated by Joseph, moves from the particular to the general, and involves the analysis of music sound, the performance event, the social context, value systems, and worldview (1988/2: 5). The holistic model brings together within a single interpretive framework approaches that inform and bring understanding of a musical system. Joseph's conclusion, logically and unsurprisingly, is that ethnomusicology is a discipline in its own right with a unique set of aims and methods (1988: 19).

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### **Fragmenting anthropology**

The anthropological and linguistic paradigms that animated ethnomusicology during the 1960s and 1970s have undoubtedly given way to a broader spectrum of investigative techniques. The neo-functionalism espoused by Alan Merriam, for example (1964), or the bi-musicality proposed by Mantle Hood (1960) were important for their time, and had considerable influence until 1980. Most work during those decades was directed at Third World musical cultures, in Africa, the Americas, Asia or Australia. Europe, except for the "exotic" Balkans, was left strictly alone by ethnomusicologists, for ideological reasons that were never clearly enunciated. The "comparative musicology" developed by European scholars in the late 19th and early 20th century, with its evolutionistic assumptions, was anathema to a younger generation of North American scholars fuelled by idealistic enthusiasm for the "pure", "the aboriginal", and the "native". This latterday search for the "noble savage", "societies without history" or, as it came to be called, the Other paralleled, even aped, anthropological research in the 1960s and 1970s, and continued to spark original work in the 1980s (Feld 1983, Seeger 1989, Stone 1982, Suojanen 1984; see also Asad

1979, Fabian 1983, Grenier and Guilbault 1990 for critiques of anthropological method).

Yet looming fragmentation within anthropology and music-anthropological approaches, as newer paradigms parted company from Malinowskian neo-functionalism (Merriam 1967) or behaviourism (Lomax 1968) on the one hand, and Levi-Straussian structuralism on the other (cf. Hopkins 1977), was obvious by the mid-1970s. Cognitive, applied, urban, symbolic, aesthetic and other subgroupings of anthropology had begun to take the stage (e.g., Tyler 1969). Clifford Geertz's "interpretive anthropology" (1973) in particular found its way into ethnomusicological debate (Rice 1986), and cognitive psychology contributed a layer of analytical insight (Harwood 1976). In studies of "cognition" the epistemological goals were related to childhood and learning (Madeja 1978). Historical research blossomed (Widdess 1992), highlighted by special attention to music archaeology (e.g., Hickmann and Hughes 1988). Studies of musical life in specific time frame, such as that of Mexican-Americans in Los Angeles from World War 2 to the present, have been based on oral history (e.g., Loza 1993). An exemplary account of music generated and performed under extreme conditions is built on songs sung in the Lodz ghetto, Poland, during the Nazi period, 1940-45 (Flam 1992).

For a while, semiotics seemed to offer promise of a release from the barrenness of structuralism. The semiology inspired by Saussure's work in linguistics was developed into a fairly sophisticated, if limited, tool for musical analysis (Boilès 1982, Nattiez 1975). However, ethnomusicologists suspected that semiotics was dwelling on musical signs and structures to the detriment of social context and significance. The objectification of music that was required by semiological analysis was diametrically opposed to the humanistic research established by anthropological and folkloristic models of the 1960s and 1970s. Simultaneously, the ideology of the field began to clarify itself under encroaching postmodernism. Ethnomusicologists began to recognize the limitations of accepted approaches and of technology: film, for instance (Feld 1974), and transcription devices (Jairazbhoy 1977), of linguistic methods applied to musical expression (Feld 1976), of "objective" analysis of musical structures through transcription (Nettl 1975), and in writing (Turino 1990). Marxist thought continued to exert a subtle influence despite the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, though some of this influence came from secondary sources such as the Italian social philosopher Antonio Gramsci or the British cultural historians E.P. Thompson and Raymond Williams (cf. Keil 1987). More patently, perhaps, the writings of Pierre Bourdieu and the reflexive principles of phenomenology and hermeneutics began to make an impact (Bourdieu 1984; see Blum 1990, Turino 1990, Sugarman 1989). Investigation of structures and signs yielded to the quest for meaning, and the search for musical meaning in particular gave rise to a more dialogic mode of field research that at the same time placed the ethnomusicologist, male or female, insider or outsider, squarely in the interpretive picture (Gourlay 1978).

The whole issue of performance, and what is understood by that term, came into prominence in the 1980s. Some have interpreted the word simply to refer to "musical" performance and to develop for ethnomusicology the implications of context -and performance analysis, what Blacking calls "context-sensitive analysis" (1972), that emerged from sociolinguistics and folklore in the 1970s (e.g., Midgett 1977, Porter 1976). A model for the analysis of performance (musical sound plus contextual input) was delineated by Qureshi (1987). A parallel direction in the theory of performance resulted from Victor Turner's work in the anthropology of ritual, one derived ultimately from van Gennep's seminal study of rites of passage (1908). Latterly folklorists, under the influence of the sociologist Erving Goffman, were drawn into analyzing "everyday" performative behaviour (Abrahams 1985). Turner began, somewhat later, to promote the idea that performance is not restricted to rituals, ceremonies, musical and theatrical events; as an important dimension of experience, it extends to major expressions of life, both in traditional and tribal societies and in the modern world (Schechner 1977, 1993, Turner 1982). This aspect has been considered by at least one ethnomusicologist (Messner 1993). Contrastingly, in a development related to historical and comparative studies, orality and literacy emerged as an issue from the pioneering study by Albert Lord on the epic songs of the Balkans (1960). A quarter century later, an ethnomusicological symposium in Japan built its discussions around the idea of the oral and literate in music (Tokumaru and Yamaguti 1986).

### **Developing study networks**

Equally striking areas of interest involve idioms formerly avoided or relegated to a lower level of scholarly attention: folk and popular musics (now designated by some as "vernacular music" to avoid semantic traps), urban and "ethnic" musics, and, most surprisingly of all, perhaps, Western art music. "Folk music" was often defined, in the past, as the music of the lower classes in a complex society, that is, the music of the producers rather than the consumers, especially in a European context (Bohlman 1988, Wiora 1952). "Popular music" was that produced and disseminated by the mass media, and demanded an appropriate analytical method (Frith 1987, Middleton 1990, Shepherd 1982, Tagg 1982). But these terms were inadequate to describe the dialectic of a process dating to World War 2: urbanization vs. pastoral escapism (symbolized in country-western musics) and the deindustrialization of an industrial society (brutalist, satiric, and parodic rock). The term "folk" was also some claimed, redolent of a romantic and class-based prejudice, although others maintain that it continues to serve a useful purpose in an urbanized context (Seeger 1980). Recent commentators have proposed "vernacular" as a means of avoiding the ideological coloration of "folk" and the vagueness of "popular". "Vernacular music" refers to all the music generated in the "vernacular milieu", that is, "the local environment and specific contexts within which people participate

in non-mediated forms and processes of cultural life" (Pickering and Green 1987).

Here, the influence of Gramsci has shaped notions of music in a highly urbanized society (England). Socialist influence tends to put down stronger roots in such European societies, whereas a national or ethnic ideology, sometimes fuelled by political oppression, often prevails in rural countries such as Ireland, Scotland, Wales or among the minorities of larger nation states (e.g. Basques, Bretons). Ethnomusicologists, with folklorists and cultural historians, have begun to examine the politics of culture, a dynamic that often takes the form of tension between socialist and nationalist ideologies (Porter 1993). Some of this had been prefigured in the work of the Frankfurt School (Adorno, Marcuse, Horkheimer) who dealt with the place of music (mainly art music and mass-mediated popular music) in an industrial society (Adorno 1962, Lull 1987). Yet the romantic pastoralism of the Folk Revival in Europe eluded these scholars for the reason that they considered "folk music" to be a regressive kind of musical idiom. The flowering of the Folk Revival in the 1950s and 1960s, first in Britain and Ireland, then in Italy, Germany, and Scandinavia, was a significant development that had serious political consequences (Gammon 1986, Harker 1985). While the Revival, stimulated by North American populism and Alan Lomax in particular, was often inspired by a romantic pastoral vision, other aspects were overtly political: an undercurrent of ideological resistance to North American pop music, for instance, later gave way to issues of regionalism, gender, and political empowerment (cf. Armstrong and Pearson 1979, Herndon and Ziegler 1990, Koskoff 1984, Shepherd 1982). A notable study of Native American music in Northwestern California involves central conceptions of gender and sex roles (Keeling 1992).

Perhaps the most surprising development has been the exploration of western art music by ethnomusicologists who, in the past, shunned this as part of a European cultural dominance they regarded with suspicion. Actually, Walter Wiora had initiated the study of European folk and popular music as, among other things, a source for art music composition (1957). But the historical divisions between "folk music study" and "ethnomusicology" began to break down in the 1960s and 1970s, mostly under pressure from key figures such as Charles Seeger, Frank Harrison, and Gilbert Chase (cf. Brook et al. 1972, Seeger 1977). The conceptual divorce of "European music" from "non-Western music", which had been part of ethnomusicology's debt to anthropology, gradually began to be resolved in a few publications (e.g., Kingsbury 1988, Nettl 1989, Porter 1993). Scholars began to realize that, if ethnomusicology is the study of "world music" rather than the study of "non-Western music" (a poor definition in any case), then one must include art music in such a scheme. John Blacking had emphasized the biology of music-making as a major concern in his later work, a topic that involves the nature of musical intelligence (1992). It also involves scrutiny of the body-mind continuum, one that has triggered several studies of music and trance (e.g., Rouget 1980). The insights that ethnomusicologists can bring to the study of western art music,

however, are in cognitive and performative features of music-making (Porter 1993), in the sociological analysis of audiences and rehearsals (Koskoff 1988), in the stylistic influence of popular musics (Manuel 1990), or in the culturally diverse interpretations of the same music: in other words, the synchronic areas of ideology, ritual, and patterned behaviour in widely differing musical contexts.

One other area of recent development has been in perception and cognition (e.g., Baumann 1992, Baily 1992) and in computer analysis of time series (Vaughan 1990) and tone measurement (Schneider 1990, Vetter 1989). This field of endeavour was formerly thought of as "systematic musicology", which Charles Seeger promoted as a continuation of Adler's earlier distinctions (Seeger 1977). Yet little support for the idea of systematic musicology as a discipline separate and distinct from historical musicology on the one hand and ethnomusicology on the other has been forthcoming. Few programs exist in Europe or North America. This is because the study areas concerned (acoustics, aesthetics, semiotics, psychology and sociology of music), while important, do not constitute an essential nucleus of related elements despite attempts to defend and promote them as a unified field (Duckles et al. 1980). Rather, they symbolize a certain analytical orientation in musicology that lay, in the past, outside both the historical dimensions of western criticism and the synchronic field studies of ethnomusicology. This "scientific" orientation has begun to recognize the cultural basis, and bias, that enters into all research, and almost all "systematic" work, in music perception for example, takes place now under the rubric of either ethnomusicology or [cognitive] musicology (theory, analysis) (cf. Kerman 1986, London 1992). Proliferating trends.

The great majority of studies carried out lately by ethnomusicologists still involves the description and analysis of local, regional, or national idioms. Some of these idioms are analyzed in their original, some in a transplanted environment. Cross-cultural and comparative studies likewise continue to occupy researchers. A recent international conference (1993) offered papers on, among multivarious other topics, the Tuscan May-play in Italy and Australia, the colonial image of the Scottish Highland bagpiper in New Zealand, Greeks and Greek-Cypriot immigrants in London and Los Angeles, the freeway radio music of Chileans in Los Angeles, Gypsies in East and Central Europe, revival of a minstrel sect in the Ukraine, and the image of Papua New Guinea music and dance abroad. Several papers focused on current issues: gender, ideology and politics, cultural policy, often as a reactions to tourism or the need for an imagined past, have generated a number of documented studies: those, for example, of Henry on Ireland (1988), Ronstrom in Sweden (1989), and Bolle-Zemp for Switzerland (1990). Symposia on ideology (Donner 1985) and on the impact of tourism on traditional music (Kaeppler et al. 1988) indicated attention to those issues as pressing in the mid-1980s. Yet another study analyzed the ideological intertwining of music, dance and politics in Greece (Cowan 1990).

Such issues must also be seen, according to Mark Slobin, in the context of disjuncture and difference in the global cultural economy, to use Appadurai's phrase (1990). In his recent article on "micromusics of the West", Slobin's main point is to identify common features of these, which specialized perspectives tend to overlook in favour of distinctiveness (1992: 82). The tenor of research in the immediate future, he believes, will be to take into account the multiple peoples and musics that impinge on modern sensibilities, as electronic communication speeds up and surrounds the human ear in diverse contexts. This issue had to some extent already been aired by Wallis and Malm (1987). While Slobin is correct in the sense that consciousness of multiple idioms has intensified because of technology, in depth studies of particular musics and cultures will undoubtedly proceed parallelwise, since particularism has always provided a necessary counterweight to "comparative studies". As social scientists are well aware, nomothetic and ideographic inquiries are not only complementary but essential to the health of the field.

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### **Cooperating Organizations**

A significant development in the past few decades has been the founding of the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology (ESEM) in 1981, largely through the initiative of John Blacking. Having met regularly since that year, the organization has published conference proceedings on historical developments and recent trends (Philipp 1989, Baumann, Simon and Wegner 1992). An allied development has been the emergence of European journals devoted to traditional music, such as *Cahiers de musiques traditionnelles* (1988-), *Culture musicali* (1992-), or the *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* (1992-). These have included work by scholars from the former Soviet Union (e.g., Boiko 1992, Ruutel 1992) as well as studies of Central Asian music by East European scholars (e.g., Zeranska-Kominek 1992). While the sanguine dream of a united Europe (Stockmann 1992) has faded in the agony of Bosnia, the breakup of the former Soviet Union has opened up new possibilities for cooperative and comparative research.

But tensions and a sense of competing paradigms lurk beneath the surface of international colloquia. A recent paper, for instance, perceived a differential pattern to the history of ethnomusicology in Europe and North America (Crowe 1992). In a summary of ESEM's development, the author claims that the influence of American ethnomusicology "is now less dominant than it has been over the past 36 years". While this is a matter of opinion, North American scholars can rejoice that Europeans now have their own internal (or "intracultural") organization for the furthering of the discipline. On the other hand, the assertion that a "European" ethnomusicology is in some sense opposed to a "North American" ethnomusicology is to draw boundaries that are largely non-existent.

First of all, there are many European ethnic groups in North America, some of whom have intimate cultural and musical ties to their European

homeland. Second, ethnomusicologists of European birth work in North America, some of them on European traditions, some on musics outside the European traditions, some on musics outside the European cultural orbit, others on both, or on various degrees of stylistic fusion. Third, it is evident, even axiomatic, that European ethnomusicologists are not limited to the study of the music of their own country or ethnic group, but have since 1950 (when Kunst invented "ethno-musicology") engaged in field studies of music outside Europe, thus paralleling the work of North American scholars. Lastly, John Blacking would surely have opposed artificial boundaries of this kind since he was fully engaged in the aims and aspirations of the Society for Ethnomusicology. He was President in 1981-83 and the only person not resident in North America to be elected to the office. One of Blacking's reasons for founding ESEM was practical, namely financial, for travel to conferences. The real goal, however, of all scholarly organizations in the field ("international", "intercultural", or "intracultural") is not merely to exchange ideas but also to clarify respective ideologies.

The question of whether there is an "American [i.e., North American] ethnomusicology" or not is moot. The work of Mantle Hood and of Alan P. Merriam has continuing influence outside the US (e.g., Hood's "quantum theory of music"), just as John Blacking has influenced North American scholars. In other words, reciprocal interchange between and among North Americans and Europeans has occurred freely since the 1960s, and is surely to be encouraged for the advancement of the discipline. More likely, any distinctions of theory, method and style between European and North American scholars stem from more deeply-rooted intellectual traditions: Cartesian versus empirical paradigms, for instance, or the rivalry between "mechanical" versus "statistical" models (Nutini 1970). These distinctions often translate into the "scientific" paradigms of systematic musicology on the one hand and "interpretive" models of ethnomusicology on the other. Such distinctions are now difficult to sustain when one considers the mutual influence that has flowed not only back and forth across the Atlantic but also among competing or converging paradigms.

As the year 2000 approaches, directions in ethnomusicology are as diverse as they have ever been. The split between musical and social analysis is not, however, as abrupt as it once was, largely to the perceived need to deal adequately with both aspects. The influence of social philosophy, whether Marxist, phenomenological, or hermeneutic, has been quite profound in recent decades. Marxism has urged the scholar to take a stance critical of society and of cultural policy; phenomenology and hermeneutics have emphasized the search for meaning, especially through negotiation between and among parties. Meaning and value for whom? is, of course, the deeper question. Further, the abstraction of musical sound from the context of community poses a severe challenge to a hermeneutics that is critical in the sense of incorporating social differences within its analysis. An expanding capitalist and multi-national recording industry that thrives on "world music" as a source for "new sound images" poses daunting problems (Lull 1987). The decontextualization of music on a worldwide

scale is perhaps the biggest issue to face ethnomusicologists since Mantle Hood's concept of "bimusicality", its goals and consequences. The locus of interpretive research must now include the sound studio as well as the village square, the individual musician as well as the group, and random listeners as well as the situated audience. Hovering perpetually above these contexts is the ideological framework of music-making, and, no less, the political awareness and ethical position of the researcher.

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