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Response to Rice

Kay Kaufman Shelemay

Although I was invited to comment upon the historical axis of Tim Rice's model, its dynamic nature really demands a more general response. The integrity of the model is as a whole, not broken down into a trinity of possibilities.

My first thought, not entirely inappropriate, is that on the same 1986 SEM annual meeting program is found another session which addresses the tradition of borrowing procedures in the Euro-American musical mainstream. American ethnomusicologists, evidently heir to the same aesthetic, seem to like to borrow as well! At first I was skeptical of our latest appropriation of Clifford Geertz's work. But after some thought I am less concerned that we wear a second-hand garment than that it fit well. Indeed, looking at music as "a symbolic system historically constructed, socially maintained and individually applied" seems at once descriptive of the best work already emerging in ethnomusicology today as well as a useful guideline for future inquiry.

Ethnomusicologists have always struggled with what may be termed the context/content dichotomy. I've personally experimented with doing things 'backwards' as a way to collapse these boundaries—working from the present backwards to better understand history, or employing content as a key to context. The Rice-Geertz model does achieve a reordered and more integrated approach by welding historical, social, and musical concerns together. The nature of music as symbolic action, too, finally becomes an explicit part of the ethnomusicological mandate.

Concerning the treatment of history, I find the model both sensitive and useful. I might prefer the order of the formulation to give the individual slightly more hegemony: historically constructed, individually applied, and socially maintained. This might better correct for an ethnomusicological tendency to see the past as an undifferentiated mass of socially maintained traditions, with individual contributions obscured or overlooked. Ethnomusicologists have traditionally been very reluctant to acknowledge great masters (or mistresses), I suspect, in part because of our residual mistrust of the individual focus of historical musicology. Hopefully, this model begins to redress the balance, perhaps even more effectively by simply juggling the order of Geertz's statement. It is appropriate that the seminal sentence from

which this model derives is taken from Geertz's essay exploring definition, perception, and reaction to the individual in Balinese society.

Rice's model not only incorporates historical studies at its very heart but can of course be reimposed to serve as a framework for explicitly historical studies. It provides a reminder to ethnomusicologists that approaches to history must take into account processes every bit as complex and multi-leveled as those of the ethnographic present.

I am slightly concerned that this formulation may implicitly encourage an historical perspective in which change somehow proceeds in regular, incremental motion. In fact, we need to be aware of dysfunction and disjunction in the historical process. Some of the most interesting (and perhaps common) processes may be those where historically constructed traditions may not be socially maintained, or may be abruptly reshaped or modified through individual idiosyncrasy or creativity. We need to remain sensitive to the changing relationships between the three dimensions of the model and be aware that musical life in different times and places may be witness to its own "revolution."¹

The model provides a cogent summary of our best efforts and also effectively reflects the interdisciplinary richness of our field. But it does not provide a clearer guide than do other existing models to its own realization. I would suggest that we probably need to spend more time discussing not only if this formulation adequately represents where we wish to go, but also how we might actually get there. If our historical work is to be richly textured enough to live up to the potential cited here, we must expand our data base. Specifically, we need to incorporate what are often for ethnomusicologists neglected manuscript and archival sources whose study require source-critical and text-critical skills. The Rice model of necessity foresees a day when the "complete ethnomusicologist" studies both written and oral sources *in relation to* each other. I endorse this call for a broader musical scholarship in which musicology and ethnomusicology begin to achieve synthesis and growth through cooperation and collaboration.

Note

1. After Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (2nd ed.). (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).