Response to Rice

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In his essay developing a "new" model for ethnomusicology, Rice critically examines an "old" model commonly associated with Alan Merriam and *The Anthropology of Music,* one that has guided our field for more than two decades. In doing so, Rice isolates what he sees as the central problems with Merriam's model. Throughout his essay, Rice uses these problems as starting points and, at times, justifications for his own arguments. In responding to Rice, I feel it necessary to examine his essay as a whole, not simply addressing the new model, for I believe that the arguments used to provide a context for "remodeling" must be examined as critically as the remodeling itself.

At the risk of appearing to be a Merriam apologist, I would like to return to his model as outlined in Chapter 2 of the *Anthropology of Music*—"Toward a Theory for Ethnomusicology" (1964). Over the years, as we have grappled with this model, a sort of folklore has grown up around its deceptive simplicity, which has perhaps concealed the more complex relationships between people, music and culture that Merriam may have intended. We have for the most part tended to see this model as a simple tripartite structure because that comes closest to the way Merriam first presents it to us, and, simply, because it is easier to see it this way than in its fuller, more problematic, complexity. Even Merriam, himself, as Rice has noted, initially described his model as a "simple" one with "three analytical levels." But a closer examination of the unfolding of his model through pages 32–33 reveals a far more intricate structure, both product and process oriented. I am now simply referring to the so-called model as presented in its entirety in the *Anthropology of Music,* not of Merriam's own re-thinking of the model in his later works.

I have separated the passage into three sections, which upon closer examination, do not together represent *one* model, but rather a continuum of models which changes perspective from the initial statement on p. 32, presenting a model for the "study of music in culture" to a final working out of this model on p. 33 as one for the "generation of music within a culture" (a very different kind of model). There are, in fact, three separate models presented, or rather, one initial statement and two attempts at working out the model in written form. The first two models seem to focus more on mu-

sic sound as a product of behavior and conceptualization, and the last ap-
pears to focus on music as a result of many varied cognitive and social pro-
cesses.

Initially, Rice isolates a central interpretive problem with Merriam's
model as he sees it, that of "finding ways to relate music sound to conceptu-
alization and behavior." Rice also states two main structural problems in
the model: 1) "sound is directly contrasted to behavior and cognition; and
2) "relations between his analytical levels go in one direction only and relate
one level to only one other." It is my contention that by the last statement
of his model, Merriam not only clearly states the relationships between the
three central areas (not levels) of his model, but also accounts for a bi-direc-
tional system that does not simply contrast behavior and cognition but
allows for a constant feedback and overlapping between the two. Further,
Merriam's model is not simply about the relationship of sounds, behaviors
and music, but much like Rice's model, about how sounds become music
and how musics and music-related behaviors change and/or stabilize.

Examining Figures 1, 2 and 3, you will see graphic representations of
statements made in the three sections of prose—actual graphic models of
written statements *about* models. Many of the problems and inconsistencies
that we have all noted throughout the last two decades are highlighted here.
Also highlighted, especially in the second and third graphs, are the more
subtle, complex and intertwined relationships between concepts, behaviors
and sounds which have been oversimplified here and elsewhere.

Below is Merriam's initial statement of his model:

> [The model] involves study on three analytical levels—conceptualization about
> music, behavior in relation to music, and music sound itself. The first and third lev-
> els are connected to provide for the constantly changing, dynamic nature exhibited
> by all music systems (32).

If we match this statement with Figure 1, labeled "A Graph Representing a
Model for the Study of Music in Culture," immediately certain questions
arise. Merriam does not indicate, initially, any connection between music
sound and behavior, and between behavior and conceptualization, although
he does state a connection (of what sort we don't know yet) between con-
ceptualization and music sound. Further, Merriam's first statements (and
Rice's as well) indicate three analytical levels, implying a hierarchical ar-
rangement. However, connecting the first and third levels of the hierarchy
creates a loop, a structure inconsistent with the hierarchy. We can no longer
speak of this model as containing levels, but rather of containing structural
categories on a prescribed path.

Turning to Section 2 of the prose (found on p. 32 through the first
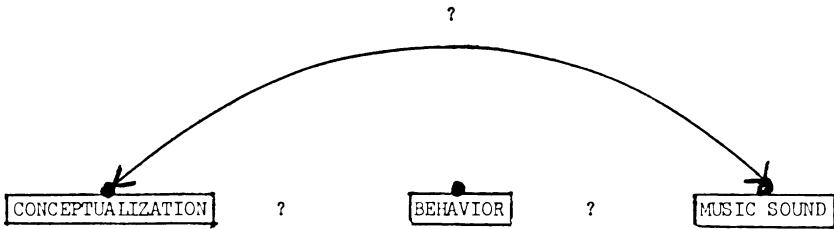complete paragraph of p. 33) we see the first attempt at an explanation of

?

CONCEPTUALIZATION   ?   BEHAVIOR   ?   MUSIC SOUND

Figure 1: A Graph Representing a Model for the Study of Music in Culture.

the initial statement of the model. Here, Merriam begins to flesh out more precisely what he means by "music sound," stating that it has structure and may be a system; "behaviors," delineating three kinds: physical, verbal and social with many sub-categories; and "conceptualization," which he subdivides into "of behaviors" and "of values." Values appear to "filter upward through the system to effect the final product." Merriam has begun a shift in perspective by assigning labels to the relations between conceptualization, behavior and sound which will lead ultimately to the final model showing the generation of music within culture, to which we will later return.

    In the diagram of this section, labeled, "A Graph Representing the First Fleshing Out of the Model," (figure 2) one can more clearly see the nature of the connections between sound, behaviors and conceptualization, so that certain questions posed by the initial statement are clarified; others, however, are left unanswered, and new ones generated. For example, we now see a connection between conceptualization and behavior, as well as one between behavior and sound, both labeled "produces." Notice, also, the bi-directional arrow indicating the flow of values back through the system. Still missing, though, is the precise nature of the loop Merriam sees as the vital link between conceptualization and music sound. Further problems arise: Is sound, with a structure that may be a system, actually "music"? What are the precise distinctions between conceptualizations "of behaviors" and conceptualizations "of values?"

    It is in the third section of the written prose (found in the second complete paragraph of p. 33), that Merriam unfolds the final version of his model, identifying at last the essential feedback link between the product and the conceptualization of what the product is and is not (sound? music?). In doing so, though, he makes a radical shift in perspective from his initial statement proposing a *model of study* and this one, proposing a *model of music* generation and experience:
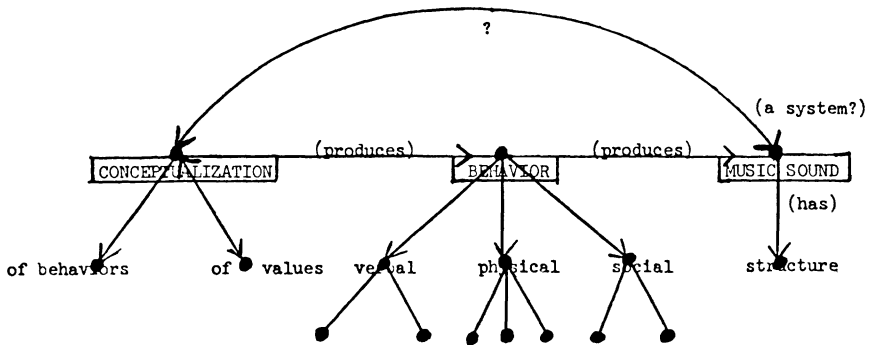
Figure 2: A Graph Representing the First Fleshing Out of the Model.

The product, however, has an effect upon the listener, who judges both the compe-
tence of the performer and the correctness of the performance in terms of concep-
tual values. Thus, if both the listener and the performer judge the product to be
successful in terms of the cultural criteria for music, the concepts about music are
reinforced, reapplied to behavior and emerge as sound. If the judgement is nega-
tive, however, concepts must be changed in order to alter behavior and produce
different sound which the performer hopes will accord more closely with judge-
ments of what is considered proper to music in the culture. Thus, there is a constant
feedback from the product to the concepts about music, and this is what accounts
both for change and stability in a music system (ibid.:33).

Figure 3 presents a graph of this last section, labeled "A Graph Repre-
senting the Processes of Transforming Sounds and Behaviors Into Music."
Of course, the structural simplicity of figures 1 and 2 has been abandoned in
favor of a far more complex graph that I believe represents more of the true
nature of Merriam's so-called "simple" model. The model presented here,
contrary to what Rice has asserted, is both process and product oriented; it
may be one which still contains problems but is far richer, detailed and in-
teresting than has been noted.

Looking at Figure 3, we see a two-cycled system, somewhat like a flow
chart (find the starting arrow on the left). Cycle 1 (follow solid line) begins
with the "product," first labeled "sound" which effects a listener (on be-
half of society). The listener, using conceptual values and beliefs of the cul-
ture judges the sounds and behaviors, which are not music yet. Now the sec-
ond loop begins (follow the dotted line). Here the performer joins the listener
to judge the product, this time using cultural criteria for "music" as the
evaluative tool. If there is agreement between the listener and musician, cul-
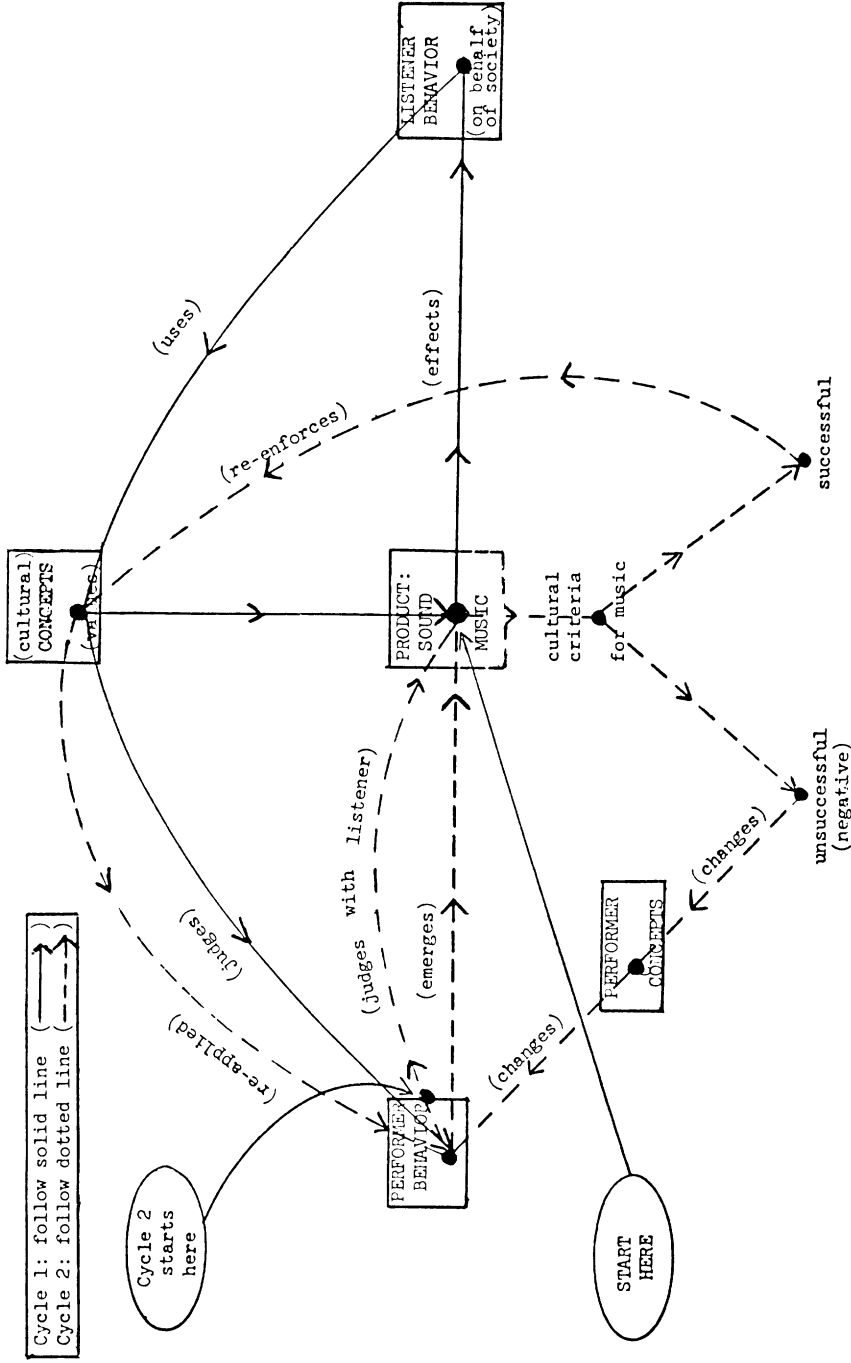
LISTENER BEHAVIOR (on behalf of society)

(cultural) CONCEPTS

PRODUCT: SOUND MUSIC

PERFORMER CONCEPTS

PERFORMER BEHAVIOR

(uses)

(re-enforces)

(effects)

(alters)

successful

cultural criteria for music

unsuccessful (negative)

(changes)

(judges with listener)

(emerges)

(judges)

(re-applied)

(changes)

Cycle 1: follow solid line (——→)
Cycle 2: follow dotted line (‑ ‑ →)

Cycle 2 starts here

START HERE

Figure 3: A Graph Representing the Process of Transforming Sounds and Behaviors into Music.

turally held concepts are re-enforced and reapplyed to "performer behavior" finally to emerge as "music." If there is no agreement, "performer concepts" and "performer behavior" must be changed so that "music" emerges.

Merriam makes certain distinctions here that were missing from his earlier statements. Here, he implies a separation between "culturally held concepts" (those more or less shared by the individual listener and the society of which he/she is a part) and "performer concepts" (which must be changed if there is disagreement about potential sounds becoming music); further, "behavior," seen earlier as one global category, is now similarly divided into "performer behavior" and "listener behavior."

Thus, the real "problem" with Merriam's model is not that he does not answer the question of how sounds, concepts and behaviors are related, but rather that we don't like the answer. What we have in Rice's critique is an over-simplification of Merriam's model, one which denies the model's complexity and structural integrity. The main question here is whether or not we need to "remodel" our theoretical house before carefully checking the true strengths and weaknesses of its original foundation.

Oddly, in spending time criticizing Merriam, Rice has missed an opportunity to highlight the truly significant difference between their models—the role of the individual in the overall system. In the Merriam model, two individuals, or rather, two social roles are polarized: the individual musician, on the one side, who is, for the most part, producing sounds and behaviors and the individual listener on the other, conceptualizing, judging and labeling. In the Rice model, the individual is not precisely defined—it is generalized—and discovering just who that person is can help us create and relate the "richest musical stories."

Rice's model allows the individual actor's role to be defined in many different ways, thus providing a multi-faceted perspective that is missing from Merriam's model. It is precisely the difference in emphasis from Merriam's vision of music as a product, born from a polarized relationship between specific social actors (performer and listener), to Rice's understanding of music as the result of general human social and cognitive processes that makes Rice's model more flexible and, ultimately, more satisfying.

Reference

Merriam, Alan
    1964   *The Anthropology of Music.* Evanston: Northwestern University Press.