

## **Should Ethnomusicology be Abolished? Position Papers for the Ethnomusicology Interest Group at the 19th Annual Meeting of the College Music Society, Washington D.C., November 1976**

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ONE OF THE WORLDS NATURAL WONDERS is the consistent way in which social organizations imitate biological ones. Once in existence they grow, reproduce, and hang on to life. How frequently do committees or commissions dissolve themselves when their original purposes are fulfilled?

My thesis is that ethnomusicology--specifically academic ethnomusicology as represented by the Society and its Journal--gives no evidence of having become an independent scholarly discipline, and has, therefore, no logical reason for continued existence other than the purely social needs of its members. Furthermore, the continued existence of the pseudo-discipline of ethnomusicology might well hinder rather than promote the avowed goals of its practitioners.

Since its inception, ethnomusicology has been searching for a definition of itself. There is still very little agreement as to its goals, boundaries, methods, requisite skills, or curriculum. As Alan Merriam points out in his recent article "Ethnomusicology Today" (1975), ethnomusicology has made little or no progress in developing a theory.

All sorts of people are identified, or identify themselves, as ethnomusicologists nowadays: anthropologists specializing in music; performers interested in learning to play music of other cultures (some years ago the term "ethnomusician" was proposed); musical tourists of the "Have Nagra, Will Travel" variety; music educators of multi-ethnic persuasion; media mongers interested in cross-cultural communication; and musicologists who do not limit themselves to the study of Western art music.

On the other hand, some people have reacted against inclusion in the ethnomusicological grab-bag. Ravi Shankar has expressed in print the dismay of Indian musicians and musicologists at being considered part of ethnomusicology rather than musicology. They consider "ethno-" synonymous with "primitive," hence derogatory. More and more of our subjects of study are beginning to feel this way. Despite all high-minded definitions of ethnomusicology as an all-inclusive science of music as human behaviour, those we study see it simply as a form of demeaning neocolonialism.

More than a few Western specialists in Oriental art musics feel that their work demands total

attention to one culture, even one period, exactly as in historical musicology, and feel neither a need nor inclination for comparative or ethnographic studies. Several years ago a Chinese graduate student in ethnomusicology asked me why she was required to take so many courses in anthropology, linguistics, and musics of Africa, Indonesia, et cetera, particularly when this prevented her from taking the courses in literary Chinese, sinological method, Japanese language, and other ones she would need in order to do advanced research in Chinese music. When I explained the premises of the curriculum, aimed at producing ethnomusicologists who could bridge the gap between music and anthropology and help advance our knowledge of human music-making around the world, she replied that that was all very well, but that she was in the program because it was the only way she could major in Chinese music.

What sort of training is appropriate, for example, for a Korean vocalist, with basic training in Western music theory, who wishes to do graduate work abroad and then return home to teach and practice Korean music? (I shall avoid, here, the question of such foreign students who prefer to remain abroad as permanent exiles.) A typical musicology program would excessively involve Western music history and literature; an ethnomusicology program would require excessive work in peripheral areas. Yet there is much that such a student could learn that would assist in his or her lifework: general methods of scholarship, mechanics of reference and bibliography, text-criticism, recording, filming, and archiving techniques, laboratory techniques such as pitch and tempo measurement, and so forth. Publications by Asians who have been exposed to the scholarly apparatus of Western musicology can be significant contributions to knowledge. Without such trained personnel, however, such publications are frequently unreliable--not due to insufficient ability of their editors, but to their lack of understanding of the kinds and quality of evidence and proof required by the international scholarly community.

The Society for Ethnomusicology was formed because musical anthropologists and musicians interested in non-Western musics felt that they had much to share and could talk to each other better than to their colleagues in anthropology and musicology. The two groups soon became armed camps, however, skirmishing regularly even today. Each pays lip-service to the other's expressed values, but neither group comes near to merging the two points-of-view into a synthesis.

When the Society for Ethnomusicology was organized in the early 1950s the musicological establishment was perceived as unreceptive or even hostile to studies of non-Western music, and anthropology was still busily compiling ethnographies of moribund tribelets. Charles Seeger felt that there was no real distinction between musicology and ethnomusicology, but that since historical musicologists had pre-empted the former name, ethnomusicology was a necessary, though ideally temporary, expedient.

From all outward indications, however, things have changed. Within ethnomusicology there has been a continuing broadening of horizons until most of my colleagues would accept Seeger's contention that no music (including Western art or popular music) should be rightly excluded from ethnomusicology. A similar broadening has been evident in musicology.

In 1963 Frank Harrison said ". . . 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" And in the same volume Claude Palisca considered the dilemma of the student of Asian art music, realizing that "neither comparative nor ethnomusicology is a fitting label.... Such a scholar is a musicologist in the same sense as a historian of Western music is, except that he specializes in a foreign musical culture.... The inevitable conclusion is that there is only one musicology and its branches are primitive music, folk music, European, Asiatic, Oceanic, African, North and South American music, and their subgroups."

A more recent statement of this exemplary ecumenism is anonymously published on the prospectus of the Twelfth Congress of the International Musicological Society to be held in August 1977:

Musicology today embraces the music of the entire world as the subject of its research. Scholars in every corner of the globe are studying their own music or that of others. And more than ever they are reaching outside their own discipline for tools and methods for analysis and research. The Twelfth Congress aims to reflect the global and interdisciplinary nature of contemporary musicology.

Let us not be afflicted with that ubiquitous disease of aging academics, hardening of the categories; and let us not allow false pride to prevent a reunion. Ethnomusicology has served its purpose, run its course. The study of music is not one of the highest of our national priorities today, and there is much to be gained both academically and strategically from putting arbitrary and obsolete divisions behind us and forming a united front to advance knowledge of music and, through music, of man.

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RESPONSE BY E. EUGENE HELM

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The background of these remarks is my conviction that we seem to have forgotten about quality. I do not advise my graduate students in historical musicology to resurrect inferior composers of the past, and by the same token I am not ready to treat all non-Western musics as equally worthy of study. All art is not the same. I agree with R.F. Goldman (in his article in Symposium, Vol. 16) that a Gothic cathedral is, pure and simple, superior to an igloo.

Yes, strictly speaking, ethnomusicology remains undefined, though we now often say that it is part of musicology, or that there is ideally no difference between the two. So back we go to trying to define musicology. Faced with many systematic outlines of the discipline, we disagree as to whose array of pigeonholes is most attractive. Nevertheless, in the past century our actions have at least broadly defined the field: musicology is what we do musically when we put our instruments down, when we stop singing, when we stop composing. Everywhere in the world, musicology is everything musical except performance and composition.

That definition is enough for anybody who is going to live forever. In real life, of course, we cut the definition down to size by declaring some of it to be peripheral, or by simply ignoring part of it. Thus we are willing to give up acoustics if only we can spend more time with a Mozart concerto or a Javanese Wayang. We care little if some of Adler's or Pratt's pigeonholes have remained virtually empty all these years. In limiting our actions and our interests, we follow, in the long run, the criterion of quality. In the long run we decide, perhaps unconsciously, that all music is not equal. Scholarly manifestoes notwithstanding, we turn out to be unwilling to devote as much time to the songs of Stephen Foster as we do to the songs of Brahms. What's wrong with that? Nothing. That's musicology self-defined; that's life. But it is only ethnomusicology if one belongs to the musicological rather than the ethnological side of the fence. If one belongs to the ethnological side, then musicology and ethnomusicology will never be equated.

Professor Lieberman reports that the natives are getting restless at the idea of being placed in glass cases for inspection by Americans. Indeed, this seems inevitable. In the future the natives are going to be the ones who most intelligently represent their musics to the world. When this happens, then

at some point Professor Lieberman's future students of Chinese music, realizing, as he says, that such a subject by itself is worthy of a lifetime of study, will go to China for all of their training, and his students of other musics (if their ambitions are similarly concentrated) will do the same in the appropriate parts of the world, and he will be out of business unless he is able to offer, and justify the existence of, a musicological smorgasbord. I don't think finished scholars from other countries will be coming to America or to any other "musicological" country merely to learn how to write about their own music.

Can ethnomusicology be defined at present? Yes, if it rides on the coattails of musicology. No, if it rides on the coattails of anthropology. Should ethnomusicology be abolished? Yes, if it is part of musicology. No, if, according to the ethnological view, all music is equally worthy of study.

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## RESPONSE BY CLAUDE PALISCA

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There are, of course, two sides to this question, but there are also two aspects. One concerns the definition of the field--is the term ethnomusicology necessary to define a particular field; does such an independent and discrete field exist? The other side is the association and organization of the practitioners of what is called ethnomusicology--should there be societies, departments, professorships of ethnomusicology as distinguished from musicology? These questions are more than a matter of terminology; how one defines and organizes a field affects very much how one operates within it.

There is no agreement among practitioners concerning what musicology is. The study of music, of all the arts, is the most difficult to circumscribe as a discipline. As soon as you probe its problems with any depth, it spills into neighboring fields--the social and physical sciences, literature, philosophy, and history. It is easier to identify musicologists than to define musicology.

Fluidity of boundaries is inherent in the nature of the subject. Of human sensations, sound is one of the least concrete or measurable; it therefore presents almost insurmountable problems to the psychologist and aesthetician, and the critic who seeks an objective appraisal of music must be a little of both. Music is a purely subjective experience, having no tangible physical existence save as a fleeting pattern of energy in a medium.

No wonder it is the object of so many subspecialists. Its complex raw material requires a student competent in physical acoustics. To study the sensation itself requires a psychologist. Music is made with instruments built by craftsmen and technologists, and to understand them one must be one or the other. It is also made with the voice, which involves physiology. To bring music to listeners often requires highly articulated social organizations; so some musicologists must be sociologists. Music is also associated with rituals and ceremonies, both sacred and secular, and the forms these take demand both theological and anthropological sophistication. Music as an art-product is studied to reveal its structure, its values, and its meanings. The various forms music has taken over the ages have to be subjected to the methodology of the historian. Music expresses the values, forms of thought, and human relationships of a people or ethnic group, and as such is susceptible to the methodology of the geographer and ethnographer.

By necessity, then, there are many subspecialties within musicology. You can, if you wish, give

them all names--ethnomusicology, anthropomusicology, physicomusicology, historicomusicology, psychomusicology, theoreticomusicology. One of the sessions in this meeting was entitled: "Women's Studies in Music"; so we now also have gynomusicology. Nor can we omit its correlate, andromusicology--what the gynomusicologists would say we have been pursuing exclusively all along.

"Ethnomusicology" is perhaps the least offensive of these sesquipedalians. There should be no stigma attached to "ethnic." We all belong to some ethnic group; it does not suggest to me, as to our Indian colleague mentioned by Professor Lieberman, something primitive. Besides, few of us subscribe any longer to such categories as "primitive." Cultures foreign to ours may seem primitive until we try to imitate their behavior, when we discover they are very complex. The prefix ethno suggests an approach to the study of music that recognizes its being imbedded in a particular culture. Not all music has an ethnic orientation--certainly much contemporary music is in an international style that does not lend itself to an ethnomusicological approach.

To me, then, ethnomusicology is a subdivision of musicology, just as historical musicology is. I once put forward a definition of musicology, and although it was published fourteen years ago, I would still stand by it:

The musicologist is concerned with music that exists, whether as an oral or a written tradition, and with everything that can shed light on its human context.

This definition does not exclude anything the ethnomusicologist does, but it does put the focus on music. It places the art of music, the works created, performed, and contemplated by men at the center. The musical work is the principal object, on which structural analysis, historical explanation, ethnic characterization, and critical evaluation converge.

Music-centered musicology has not been universally endorsed, even by historians of music. Jacques Handschin urged scholars to turn their lenses not so much on music as on musical man.

What, then, is the true object of musicology? It is nothing but man, who, standing in a certain location in space and time, impresses his artistic striving in an appropriate music; thus man in his musical activity, man artistically forming something that he leaves behind to posterity.

Francois Lesure has reinforced this thought:

The final goal ought, evidently, to be to discover what the music tells us about man that is different from what language, religion, law teaches us about him.

Lesure cautioned scholars to beware of isolating works of art from their context and the conditions which brought them into being, and particularly from the social, political, and economic functions in which musical life is embedded.

A cleavage between those who place the emphasis on music and those who center studies in man and society is even more characteristic of the field of ethnomusicology. Here the older German tradition of comparative musical studies clashes with the more recent orientation toward field work. Even among field workers there is a split between those who as detached observers study musical behavior and those who undergo rigorous apprenticeships with native musicians in order to know a musical practice from the inside. While the anthropologist musicologist tends to concentrate on the behavior of musicians and the function of their music, the musicianethnologist tends to study the character of musical art as a living component of a culture.

Both historical and ethnic musicologists, then, are divided in their opinions as to whether to place music or man at the center of their studies. If the ethnic scholars were clearly man centered and the historical clearly music centered, we would have a distinction. But, in fact, not the least of what we have in common is this division of opinion.

The other side of the question is whether there ought to be separate societies for historical and ethnic musicology. This is more a practical than an ideological issue.

The ethnologists broke off from the American Musicological Society in 1953 to found the Society for Ethnomusicology. The Western musicologists have made attempts to win the ethnologists back, and both national and international musicological meetings have striven to include ethnic material on their programs. The most integrated program that has ever been attempted is that of the Twelfth Congress of the International Musicological Society of 1977 in Berkeley. A high proportion of the panels wed the two points of view or are strongly ethnographic in their focus and personnel. In my opinion the Society for Ethnomusicology should stop trying to be an international organization; it should admit to its North American bias with respect to meetings and membership, continue to cultivate foreign members as do most national organizations, but work with the IMS to make that truly representative of all musicology in its membership and interests.

On the national level the SEM has demonstrated the practical advantage of organizing scholars around a subspecialty that shares a methodology and combination of interdisciplinary relationships. Independence has been all the more necessary to ethnomusicology because it had to break away from two traditional fields, anthropology&mdash;a social science&mdash;and traditional musicology&mdash;a branch of the humanities&mdash;to assert its identity as a field that is neither social science, history, linguistics, psychology, nor acoustics, to mention some of the principal components. The anthropological component no longer seems a dominant one, and I would question the proposition that a curriculum should aim to produce people who "bridge the gap between musicology and anthropology." The gap we should be bridging is that between cultures.

Ethnomusicologists have thrived since they declared their independence, because they have met together and strengthened each other's sense of identity and compared methodologies and findings. The number of university chairs is multiplying; as are the number of dissertations, books, articles, grants, prizes, and, too, the number of hangers on&mdash;perhaps the best measure of success. I should not want to see this movement stopped. A vigorous association of ethnomusicologists can do more to promote the field than an infusion or diffusion of ethnomusicologists within the AMS or CMS. Occasional joint national meetings such as we have had from time to time, and particularly international meetings such as that of 1977, are excellent means of bringing the Western and non Western oriented scholars together.

Even more beneficial, in my opinion, would be joint regional meetings. A number of the AMS chapters are languishing, and there are not always enough SEM members to form a viable chapter. Local meetings are an ideal medium for establishing relationships among those interested in Western and art music on the one hand and those interested in non-Western, popular, and folk music on the other. Regional inter-university cooperation can also reap benefits, as has been experienced by Yale and Wesleyan. In the spring of 1977 Mantle Hood occupied a joint visiting professorship sponsored by the two institutions. In the fall of 1976 David McAllester of Wesleyan taught a course on American Indian music at Yale, bringing Wesleyan students with him for each meeting. Previously Craig Wright of Yale taught a course in Renaissance music at Wesleyan while Gen'Ichi Tsuge taught Japanese music at Yale, and in spring 1977 Craig Monson of Yale taught a seminar in Elizabethan music and culture in Middletown.

We hope to continue this collaboration in the future, taking advantage of each other's strengths to plug some of our own curricular holes and to bridge a cultural gap that is bigger than the stretch of Interstate 91 that separates us. Well might we say: "Vive la difference!"

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