

Music.

The principal subject of the publication at hand, whose readers will almost certainly have strong ideas of the denotative and connotative meanings of the word. Presenting the word 'music' as an entry in a dictionary of music may imply either an authoritative definition or a properly comprehensive treatment of the concept of music, at all times, in all places and in all senses. That last would require discussion from many vantage points, including the linguistic, biological, psychological, philosophical, historical, anthropological, theological and even legal and medical, along with the musical in the widest sense. Imposing a single definition flies in the face of the broadly relativistic, intercultural and historically conscious nature of this dictionary.

Selecting from a number of alternative viewpoints, this article addresses issues and approaches to perspectives that exhibit the great variety of the world's musics and of the diversity of cultural attitudes and conceptions of music. The verbal definitions provided in standard linguistic and musicological reference works, even counting only those in English, differ substantially, and the *de facto* definitions as expressed in human description and activity provide even greater breadth. Different societies, subcultures, historical periods and individual musicians may have sharply differing ideas on what constitutes music and about its characteristics and essentials, its significance, function and meaning. Providing a universally acceptable definition and characterization of both word and concept is beyond the capacity of a single statement by one author, and this article is thus a modest compendium sampling the views found in the literature of historical musicology and ethnomusicology, perforce omitting detailed discussion of the viewpoints of a number of relevant disciplines including psychology, physics, aesthetics, pedagogy and music theory.

The following paragraphs thus consider, first, formal definitions and properties of the word 'music' in English and – to a smaller extent – its equivalents in some other European languages, including considerations of etymology, reference works of different kinds, European authorities of the past and local traditions; the fundamental ideas about music as a concepts and its characteristics, boundaries and relationships in a sampling of cultures; and third, the concept of music in its use by musicologists and as an issue in musicological thought, including consideration of definitions of the word and the concept in music dictionaries, its central characteristics, its relation to the other arts, human culture more generally and society, its classification, its existence as a universal phenomenon and the issue of approaching the art as the world of music or musics. For discussion of music from psychological and other relevant perspectives, and the concept in earlier periods of European music history, see (for example) [Psychology of music](#); [Philosophy of music](#); [Physics of music](#); [Sociology of music](#); [Sound](#); [Medieval](#); and [Renaissance](#).

I. The word: etymology and formal definitions

II. The concept in a variety of cultures

1. Contemporary Western culture.

In Western culture, generally, the word 'music' or its cognates denote or suggest a unitary concept, in the sense that all 'music' is to an equal degree music, and the term 'music' applies equally to art, popular, folk and other strata or genres. In the Western conception, however, not all music is equally valuable, and the shape of the concept tends to depend on the observer's social group. Adherents of art music usually see the classics as the pinnacle of a musical pyramid, below

which are the other kinds of music – folk, musical comedy, ordinary popular, rock and country music (in the USA) – in an ordered hierarchy. The hierarchical principle is present also within the sphere of art music. On the other hand, those who identify themselves with other musical styles or genres such as jazz or popular music may see the world of music less as a hierarchy than as a group of musics of equal quality, among which certain styles or, even more, certain individual performers stand out.

More specific characteristics of individual Western societies may sometimes be apprehended through the study of terminology. For example, instrumental music may be more quintessentially 'musical' than vocal music. Thus, the Czech word for music, *hudba*, denotes primarily instrumental music and suggests vocal music in a secondary way. The word *muzika* suggests instrumental music specifically. Basic terminology may also incorporate concepts of the shape of the musical world. For one prominent example, the words *Musik* and *Tonkunst* in German are synonyms, although *Musik* is the more comprehensive. More explicitly, however, *Tonkunst* suggests Western art music and is hardly ever encountered in literature about popular, folk or any non-Western music. It is rarely found in German literature about music outside a given culture area. Terms such as 'populäre Tonkunst' or 'Tonkunst der Stämme' ('tribal musical art') are not found, and while the musicological and belletristic literature may frequently refer to 'deutsche' and possibly 'italienische Tonkunst', it rarely mentions 'die Tonkunst der Engländer' or 'amerikanische Tonkunst'. The term is used to suggest both quality and familiarity. The Dutch *toonkunst*, similarly used for 'art music', is less widely found.

Cultures that demonstrably (by terminology or behaviour) possess the concept of music may nevertheless vary in drawing its boundaries, in the degree to which term and concept coincide with sound-spectrum and in the acceptability of sounds within the spectrum of music. In contemporary Western cultures, the boundaries are firmly drawn, if individually and without unanimity; something either is music, or it is not. Everyone might accept Haydn and jazz as music, and not all would include John Cage's *Imaginary Landscape no.4* (1951), for 12 radios, or perhaps music for *Sprechstimme*, yet a typical designation of the latter sounds would probably count it as 'almost, but not quite' music.

Although it associates music with the gamut of emotions and moods, assigning it a role in the expression of grief and branding some of it as dangerous, the Western world (and many but not all other cultures) most generally sees music as a positive phenomenon. In English, 'music' is used as a metaphor for beautiful, welcome or desirable sounds. Thus 'my heart sings' expresses happiness. The mewling of one's favourite cat or the barking of one's dog is 'music to my ears', as is the telephone voice of a long-lost friend or the jingling of coins. At the same time, various animal sounds are assigned musical quality. Birds 'sing', and the sounds of whales and porpoises are usually associated with music, as is the 'trumpeting' of elephants and the 'song' of swans – but not the barking of non-favourite dogs. The sounds of many species which, objectively, bear roughly equal similarity to some kinds or styles of music are relegated to noise. In part, this may reflect the standing of these animals in (traditional Western) human opinion; people view birds, whales and porpoises more favourably than cows, monkeys and wolves; the former are therefore capable of music-making, while the others, whose voices may be similar to certain conventional music sounds, are excluded. A person who is singing or whistling is assumed to be happy.

In Western culture, music is a good thing, and it is good people who are

associated with music. Shakespeare: 'The man that hath no music in himself, nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds, is fit for treason, stratagems, and spoils; ... Let no such man be trusted' (*The Merchant of Venice*).

If metaphorical extensions to incorporate the 'good' characterize modern Western popular culture, incorporation of the powerful, essential and universal could characterize European thought of the ancients and of the Middle Ages. The Pythagorean concept of 'harmony of the spheres', associating musical harmony (in the most general sense of the word) with mathematical relationships among 'spheres', that is, bodies in the solar system, relates music to other domains of culture but at the same time gives it a position emblematic of natural cooperation and concord. Boethius's conception of music as signifying the concept of harmony in various senses of the word, as suggested by the division of music into the familiar three areas – *musica mundana* (harmony of the world and the universe), *musica humana* (harmony of the human body and soul) and *musica instrumentalis* (musical sound) – played a major role in medieval thought. The tendency in many treatises from Boethius (see *StrunkSR*) up to the 18th century (e.g. Johann Walther's *Musicalisches Lexicon*) to concentrate on complex classifications of music by function and genre shows a shape of the music concept contrastive with that generally held in the 20th century and the early 21st.

2. East Asia.

Although no single word in Japanese encompasses the same ground as the English word 'music', Japanese culture accepts the broad definition of the music concepts used in the West, as suggested by the Japanese scholar Shigeo Kishibe (1984). Western music, traditional Japanese music and the music of other societies are all equally considered to be music. The shape of the concept, however, emphasizes a firm classification of categories and genres, determined by function, instrument, and time and place of origin. Thus the *gagaku* repertory of the Imperial Court Orchestra includes 'music of the left', originating in China and India, and of the 'right', including pieces from Korea and Manchuria. Various works on Japanese music distinguish importantly between *biwa*, koto and *shakuhachi* and shamisen music, between concert, dance, theatre and folk music. Despite the significance of stylistic combinations and syncretism among various Japanese traditions and between Japanese and foreign, and eventually Western musics, the significance of boundaries, symbolized by terminology and the use of distinct notation systems, is an important characteristic.

The multiplicity of genres and intercultural combinations is even more pronounced in Chinese culture. But it is important to understand that the concept of music in the broad sense, *yue*, has had a consistent history. The same ideograph, according to Ming Liang (1985, p.11), may also be pronounced *le*, meaning enjoyment and happiness. The ancient form of the ideograph 'embodies all the arts: the performing arts of music and dance, literature, the fine arts, architecture and even the culinary arts as well'. This use of a term for the arts with gradually narrowing scope to music parallels the history of the term 'music' – the domain of the Muses – in European antiquity. In its shape, the music concept distinguishes importantly between Chinese and other music, separating not by style as much as by origin, regarding Western music by Chinese composers as intrinsically 'Chinese' and closer to traditional Chinese music than to European, and maintaining the Chinese essence supported only by Western musical techniques.

3. Iran and the Middle East.

A system of nomenclature and conception in contrast with the Western is

provided by the musical culture of Iran, which may be considered illustrative of Middle Eastern Islamic cultures in general (and is thus discussed in somewhat greater detail than others). On the surface, the concept of music exists as it does in the West, its shape dominated principally by the division between vocal and instrumental music, with other important distinctions between sacred and secular, composed and improvised. A major characteristic of the concept is its use of two contrasting terms to denote musical sounds: *musiqi* and *khandan*. *Musiqi*, borrowed from Arabic (and in turn from Greek), refers to the broad spectrum of music as does 'music' in Western culture, but it is used explicitly to designate instrumental music and less for vocal music; it refers to metric, composed sounds more than the non-metric and improvised. It is not used for sacred music but is reserved for secular social contexts. *Khandan*, on the other hand, is glossed in dictionaries as 'reading, reciting, singing' and is used most to indicate non-metric, improvised, sacred and serious genres (see also al-Faruqi, 1985).

In authoritative treatises (medieval and recent, in Arabic and Persian languages), the concept of music as denoted by *musiqi* is often the object of ambivalence and criticism. The more it departs from the principles of *khandan*, the more it should be eschewed by the devout Muslim. Moreover, such authorities as al-Kindi, al-Farabi and Safi-uddin deal with music as a collection of genres and types, each of which must be considered separately, and do not follow a holistic approach. In contemporary everyday life, the concept of music is ordinarily presented as a set of genres as well, *musiqi* being designated with adjectives such as *sonati* (traditional), *mahalli* ('regional', folk), *khoregi* (foreign) and so on.

The term *musiqi* is widely reserved for instrumental, metric and (most commonly) composed and not improvised music, and it is possible to rank genres and types of music in accordance with characteristics of style, text and social context, arriving at the conclusion that they have varying degrees of musicality. Singing (or chanting) the Koran is totally *khandan* and has (by the Persian terminology) no musical quality. Classical vocal improvised music has some, while composed, metric pieces with ceremonial implications, such as the *pishdaramad*, are definitely *musiqi* but lack the full range of undesirable implications suggested in pieces with a primarily virtuoso intent, such as the *chahar mezbab*, or of Westernized music, to say nothing of totally secular music such as night-club performances. All of this suggests that, in contemporary urban Iran, the sounds that might be considered to be music in Western culture would be regarded as music to varying degrees.

The positive metaphorical extensions of music in Western culture seem to be hardly prominent, or perhaps even absent, in Middle Eastern Islamic cultures. Indeed, the failure to designate as music some genres that are musical in the sense of structural identity with what is labelled as music may be the opposite of the metaphorical extension, a kind of metaphorical contraction. One might conclude that the concept of music as highly valued and greatly desired in many contexts correlates with a broad definition, and the opposite – ambivalence of hostility towards music – with a narrow one. But the context for all of this is the fact that, in both cultural systems, music (by the Western definition) is widely used in many contexts and is ubiquitous in worship, ceremony, entertainment of the élite, narrative, dance and much more. The actual uses of music in the two cultures are similar, but in their conception, definition and evaluation of music the two differ importantly.

4. India.

It would be a mistake to assume that the various cultures of South Asia are united in their terminology and conception of music. The high culture of Northern India has concepts that parallel Western ones as well as those of China. According to Lewis Rowell (1992, pp.9–10), the word most closely equivalent to 'music' is *sangita*, which in early times encompassed music and dance (somewhat like the Chinese terminology) but which later came to mean something like 'music'. In modern-usage, it is the Indian vernacular word closest to 'music' but (being closer perhaps to *Tonkunst*) refers, most specifically, to classical or art music. The word *gita* or *git* in combination with other words designates different genres, such as *filmi git* (film music or film songs) and *lok git* (folk or people's songs).

Complex taxonomies are characteristic of Indian philosophy and cosmology. In the theoretical literature of Indian music, *sangita* is divided into categories involving stylistic traits, instruments and instrument types, association with religious categories, dance and drama; and is itself a subdivision of categories of thought and creation such as rhythm, emotion and ritual.

5. Some African cultures.

Except in their adoption of Western terminology and concepts, many African societies may not have a conception of music matching the holistic one in Western culture. On the one hand, a view widely expressed by African musicians and scholars explaining their cultural system to outsiders concerns the degree to which they regard music as a component of social life and culture. One often cannot speak about music outside its specific cultural context, and it may be difficult to consider musical events in totally different contexts to be part of the same cultural domain. On the other hand, the ease with which many African societies have adapted to the English or French conceptions of and terms for 'music' suggests that the domain exists, integrally, even where no term is available. A small sprinkling of examples follows.

The Hausa people of Nigeria, according to Ames and King (1971), have an extraordinarily rich vocabulary for discourse about music, but (p.viii) no single word for music. A loan word, *musika* (from Arabic), refers to 'a limited number of [Koranic scholars]'. There are terms for various kinds of performance, contexts and performers, but nothing that refers directly to organized sound. Ames and King conclude that the nearest equivalent to a generic word for 'music' is *rok'o* (specifically, 'begging'), but that it too does not cover all organization of sonorities, excluding, for example, amateur music-making, and is actually a reflection more of social attitudes towards the musician rather than a reference to his product.

Alan P. Merriam (1964, pp.64–6) showed that the Basongye of Zaire had a broad conception of what music is, but no corresponding term. Contrast between music and non-musical noise was presented to Merriam in aphoristic statements, such as 'when you are content, you sing; when you are angry, you make noise. A song is tranquil; a noise is not. When one shouts he is not thinking; when one sings, he is thinking'. To the Basongye music is a purely and specifically human product.

According to Charles Keil (1979), the Tiv people of Nigeria also have no word for music as a whole; but Keil questions the validity of using the presence or absence of a term for drawing conclusions about the existence and shape of the concept. Nevertheless, the close association of music with other activities suggests that the Tiv, like many of the world's peoples, have little occasion to talk about all the musical sounds made by humans as a unit, and in separation from their contexts.

Shona, the main language of Zimbabwe, has a word derived from the English 'music', *musakazo* (glossed as 'continuous instrumental music' in M. Hannan: *Standard Shona Dictionary*, Harare, 1984). But the most common Shona word associated with the concept of music is *tamba*, 'to play', which is also used for dance and for music and dance together.

In one of the few published syntheses of African music (1974), J.H. Nketia avoided dealing with the question of a comprehensive term in African languages, but, in the context of stressing the close association of music with social and communal events and dance, analysed the homology of music and speech in Africa. In contrast to other theoreticians who emphasize the contrast between these two modes of communication, Nketia wrote (1974, p.177) that 'African traditions deliberately treat songs as though they were speech utterance'. The distinction between speech and song, important in many societies for establishing the existence of a 'music concept', is blurred in some African societies, in which in heightened speech, spoken and sung solo and choral recitations, the use of 'rapid delivery of texts, explosive sounds ... vocal grunts, and ... whispers' is important.

Although it is dangerous to generalize about African musical cultures, it would seem that the African conception of music is similar to that of the West in its use for designating desirability and positive value; and that it may be related to that of the Middle East in the absence of a single concept with sharp boundaries and its use of a continuum extending from conventional speech to (by Western standards) typical music-making.

6. Some Amerindian and Oceanian cultures.

In some (or perhaps many) North American Indian languages, there is no word for 'music' as distinct from the word for 'song', possibly because of the predominance of vocal music; flute melodies too are widely labelled as 'songs'. In some Amerindian societies – no information on the vast majority of cultures is available in publications – the concept of music nevertheless is substantially unified, resembling Western culture more than African and Middle Eastern ones.

The Blackfoot people of Montana may serve as an example. Their traditional culture distinguished sharply between songs, which had supernatural sources, and speech, of human provenance. Songs were not principally vehicles for conveying verbal meaning and had an existence outside the natural world. There were no expressive forms intermediate between speech and song. Music was human-specific; animals did not 'sing'. To the ethnomusicological observer music seems to have been, and to continue to be, a system that reflects or reproduces the social system, a kind of conceptual microcosm of society and culture. Songs varied in significance, but all, unlike the musical forms of Iran, were equally 'songs'. Normal music had percussion accompaniment but drumming alone was not covered by the term for song. Additionally, the Blackfoot language has a word, *passkan*, which applies to events including singing, dancing and ceremony – in English usually rendered as 'dance' even when dancing itself is not the most prominent component.

An attempt to define music in Blackfoot culture illustrates the different results from the three approaches mentioned. Using authorities such as myths and language dictionaries, one finds no specific word for 'music' but there is the less comprehensive 'song' and the more comprehensive 'dance-song-ceremony'. Asking the casual Blackfoot bystander did not yield definitions but produced indications of the positive value of music, its close relationship to the rest of Blackfoot culture and its categories, and its importance. Observations of behaviour, however, have suggested that music is a clearly defined and

perceived domain of culture, distinct and integrated (Nettl, 1989).

In a detailed discussion of musical terminology of the Oglala Sioux, William K. Powers (1980, pp.26–8) suggests that the concept of music is definitely present but must be discovered by a different approach from those mentioned above. Although no single word to translate 'music' exists, two important linguistic morphemes (*ya*, relating to 'mouth', and *ho*, relating to 'sound') serve to integrate a large number of objects, ideas and processes involving music. Pointing out that the place of music may vary in the conceptual universe of various cultures, Powers suggests that 'where Euro-American music is conceived to be cultural and employs an analytical model for purposes of description and analysis, the Oglala perceive their music to be natural [i.e. not man-made] and employ a synthetic model [i.e. displaying a tendency to combine two or more elements to form a unit] to describe and analyze it' (p.27).

The 'Are'are people of Malaita, in the Solomon Islands, also have no term uniting all kinds of music (Zemp, 1978, p.37), but they 'perceive twenty musical types with variants which they classify in four categories of unequal size': '*au* (bamboo), '*o'o* (a slit-drum), *nuuha* (song) and *kiroha* (referring to a sound game played under water, leading to specific glosses of stamping-tubes, panpipe ensemble and beating the slit-drum). The basic 'Are'are musical terminology is derived from these four morphemes, and the fact that the particle *kiro* is used for designations in all four categories suggests the existence of a unified conception of music.

According to Anthony Seeger (1987), the Suyá of Amazonian Brazil have a conception of music whose shape and area of emphasis differ from those of the modern Western conception. Song 'is the result of a particular relationship between humans and the rest of the universe, involving an unusually close relationship and merging of states of being into a single combined state of being expressed through music. When humans, birds, animals, and other aspects of the universe are conjoined, the result is sound. ... The non-human order provides a model for music' (p.62). Seeger believes that this description would also be appropriate to certain other societies.

Contemplation of the concept of music and the term itself among the world's cultures indicates that in most cases, but especially in those cultures that have a broad concept of music and a term to accompany it, the derivation is from an even broader base – as music (*musica*) applied first to the occupations of all Muses and was later narrowed; as the Indian *sangita* originally meant music and dance; and the Chinese *yue/le* indicated music, well-being and happiness. Elsewhere too, however, the concept of music is often inseparable from other domains of culture, particularly dance and drama. Similarly, the concept of play (suggesting lack of seriousness as well as recreation) is in several societies closely associated with music, providing the word for instrumental performance.

The absence, in many small societies and tribal cultures, of a single term for 'music' has been amply illustrated. But everywhere – so it is usually claimed by the ethnomusicologists expert in the various areas – there is a conception of music whose boundaries do not differ too greatly from those of Western culture. The character and shape of the music concept within its boundaries, however, differs very greatly from culture to culture, and among the world's tribal cultures.

III. The concept in scholarship

BIBLIOGRAPHY

BRUNO NETTL

Music

I. The word: etymology and formal definitions

1. Etymology.

The English word, 'music', whose first appearance in writing is set in the 13th century by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED), was adapted from the French *musique*, in turn an adaptation of the Latin *musica* which was taken from the classical Greek *mousikē*. Referring originally to works or products of all or any of the nine Muses, it began gradually to be restricted to the arts generally covered by the modern term. It may be argued that this suggests a conception of music as the quintessence of arts and sciences of which the Muses were patrons, though none of these deities was explicitly associated with music in the modern sense. Although not a part of early Indo-European vocabulary, 'music', the word and its cognates are almost universally used in Indo-European languages spoken in Europe, having often been introduced as a loan word from Latin, French, Italian or Spanish. Thus, the German *Musik*, Norwegian *musikk*, Polish *muzyka*, Russian *muzika* and Dutch *muziek* presumably came about through direct borrowing rather than through the gradual sound-shifts and spelling reforms that changed the Latin *musica* to the Spanish *música* and French *musique*. Some Indo-European languages, however, maintained older words for the concept of music: for example, Czech *hudba* and Croatian *glazba*, the latter related to the word for sound (although both languages also use the alternative *muzika*), and a large number of words used in Indo-Iranian languages. Cognates of 'music' were introduced to members of other language families. Most prominently, the Arabic *musiqi* was borrowed from Greek and further introduced to Persian (by the 17th century), Hebrew (by the 10th century) and Swahili (later). Modern Indonesian (*musik*) and Shona (*musakazo*) are examples of languages in which the word was recently introduced. In a number of these, the traditional language did not provide a word comprehensively encompassing the concept of music as it is maintained in modern Western culture.

At least three approaches are helpful in determining a society's definitions of components of its culture. First, one may consult the formal statements of authorities generally recognized, that is, dictionaries or reference books (in Western and certain other cultures), and perhaps sacred texts or wise elders (in certain smaller societies). Further, one may ask average members of a population; and finally, one may construct formulations of the system of ideas about a concept and even a word by observing relevant behaviour.

2. Language dictionaries.

Most dictionaries of English and other European languages, as well as general encyclopedias – the general authorities on definition in culture – focus on one of two approaches. There may be a definition that attempts to specify all salient traits of music but clearly uses as its model Western music in the fine art tradition, seeing music principally as a series of sounds and a group of compositions, and on musical activity consisting mainly of composition, expressed as the combining of sounds. Or the definition itself may be taken for granted, and the work moves on to explanations, etymology and classification.

For example, the OED definition of music begins: 'That one of the fine arts which is concerned with the combination of sounds with a view to beauty of form and the experience of emotion; also, the science of the laws or principles (of melody, harmony, rhythm, etc.) by which this art is regulated'. *Webster's Third International Dictionary* (New York, 1981) begins: 'the science or art of incorporating pleasing, expressive, or intelligible combinations of vocal or instrumental tones into a composition having definite structure and continuity'.

But both dictionaries also provide secondary definitions indicating the performing of music generally, and they include agreeable sounds such as the song of birds or running water.

A survey of older and recent dictionaries of some other European languages provides variations on those themes: *Brockhaus-Wallring deutsches Wörterbuch* (Wiesbaden, 1982) defines music: 'die Kunst, Töne in ästhetisch befriedigender Form nacheinander (Melodie) und nebeneinander (Harmonie) zu ordnen, rhythmisch zu gliedern, und zu einem geschlossenen Werk zusammenzufügen' ('the art of combining tones in aesthetically satisfying form in succession and simultaneously, organizing them rhythmically and integrating them into a completed work').

The *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (ed. S. Battaglia, Turin, 1981) moves in a similar direction: 'Arte di combinare e coordinare variamente nel tempo e nello spazio i suoni, prodotti per mezzo della voce o di strumenti e organizzati in strutture quantificate secondo l'altezza, la durata, l'intensità e il timbro; scienza dei suoni considerati sotto il profilo della melodia, dell'armonica e del ritmo' ('the art of combining sounds and coordinating them in time and space, produced by the medium of voice or instruments and organized in many structures according to pitch level, duration, intensity and timbre; science of sound subdivided into melody, harmony and rhythm').

E. Littré's *Dictionnaire de la langue française* (Paris, 1873), one of the classic practical dictionaries of French, gives as its second definition: 'science ou emploi des sons qu'on nomme rationnels, c'est-à-dire qui entrent dans une échelle dite gamme' ('science of using rationally derived sounds, that is, those based on scales'), indicating the dual presence of science and art, knowledge and activity, the rational basis and the primary importance of scales.

To the literate population of Western Europe, if major dictionaries reflect beliefs about language generally held and uses widely carried out, the word 'music' refers in the first instance to composing. Music is art and science, it involves the satisfactory combination of constituent materials – but mainly tones – and it is intended to be beautiful, expressive or (but not necessarily and) intelligible. The dictionary definitions suggest that music serves both aesthetic and communicative functions. The combining of tones is the main activity of the musical artist, whose purpose and aesthetic consideration are not emphasized but replaced by attention of elements of music and to music as a 'science'.

3. General encyclopedias.

In contrast to language dictionaries, whose function is explicitly to define words with little analysis or discussion of cultural context, the task of general encyclopedias is providing an overview of human and natural facts from a particular cultural perspective. They must include information about music, and the variety of approaches they take to defining the word or providing a general conceptualization is greater than that of the dictionaries. In the case of some it seems that music, being one of the basic domains of human culture that may be taken for granted, need not be defined.

For example, *La grande encyclopédie Larousse* (Paris, 1975) gives one sentence: 'Language des sons qui permet au musicien de s'exprimer' ('language of sounds which permits the musician to express himself'), and then moves on to an account of music history. *Brockhaus Enzyklopädie* (Wiesbaden, 1971) defines music simply as 'die Tonkunst' (a synonym for 'Musik' connoting art music, or music specifically as an art) and then moves on to historical and theoretical specifics. The Dutch *Grote Winkler Prins encyclopedie* (Amsterdam,

1971) introduces its article on music by saying, simply: 'Kunstvorm die berust op het ordenen van klankfenomenen' ('art form based on the ordering of sound phenomena').

Preparing the reader for a wide view but not explicitly defining, *The New Encyclopedia Britannica* (Chicago, 1974) offers in its *Micropedia*, under the article 'Music, Art of': 'expression in musical form, from the most simple to the most sophisticated, in any musical medium'. Its counterpart, the article titled 'Music, Art of' in the *Macropedia*, begins: 'Both the simple folk song and the complex electronic composition belong to the same activity, music'. Neither article begins with an explicit definition, assuming that readers know what music is, but both circumscribe, provide boundaries, and in doing so emphasize the breadth and intercultural nature of the subject. In characterizing this wide domain of culture, the *Macropedia* goes on immediately to point out that both extremes 'are humanly engineered, both are conceptual and auditory, and these factors have been present in music of all styles and in all periods of history, Eastern and Western'.

The human-specific character of music is also part of the explicit definition in the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia* (translated from the third edition, New York, 1974): 'An art form that reflects reality and affects man through sensible and specially organized sound sequences consisting chiefly of tones (sounds of definite pitch). Music is a specific variant of the sound made by people'.

A sampling of authoritative dictionaries and general encyclopedias in Western nations shows substantial agreement within the élite literate culture of these societies. There may be disagreement on the need for explicit definition, but all these works maintain that music involves sounds and their combination, that it is both art and science – involving both talent and creativity as well as knowledge – and that its principal manifestation is composing music (with rational principles), rather than other activities and events that belong to the domain of music.

4. European musical authorities of the past.

Formal definitions provide boundaries and encyclopedic commentary seeks out the essential, but in the case of music, at least, one must also consider a third kind of 'definition', the kind that determines the essential qualities of music from its most ideal manifestations. To illustrate: musicians in Western culture – particularly theorists and composers – have frequently been motivated to define music. In particular, theorists and composers from the 18th to the 20th centuries provide statements that give important insights into personal as well as societal attitudes and norms. They extend from the rational to the highly romantic, with the 20th century providing successors to both lines of thought. In each case, composers naturally direct the reader's thought to what they regard as the ideal of music-making.

A few examples must suffice as substitute for a comprehensive anthology. Thus, Johann Mattheson (1739), anticipating the *OED*, stresses the dual role of music as art and science devoted to the successful combination of sounds for the sake of God's honour and the support of all virtues: 'Musik ist eine Wissenschaft und Kunst, geschickte und angenehme Klänge klüglich zu stellen, richtig aneinander zu fügen und lieblich herauszubringen, damit durch ihren Wohllaut Gottes Ehre und alle Tugenden befördert werden'. Similarly, F.W. Marburg (1750, p.2): 'Das Wort Musik bezeichnet die Wissenschaft oder die Kunst der Töne' ('the word "music" designates the science or the art of tones'). Theorists two centuries later are more abstract and require intuitive understanding, as Eduard Hanslick's famous description, 'tönend bewegte Form' ('form moved through sound': 1854,

p.58), contrasts with Ernst Kurth's: 'Musik ist emporgeschleuderte Austrahlung weitaus mächtigerer Urvorgänge, deren Kräfte im Unhörbaren kreisen' ('music is merely the erupted radiations of far more powerful fundamental processes whose energies revolve in the inaudible': 1920, p.13). The composer Hans Pfitzner gives a statement also articulated by certain Amerindians: 'Musik ist das Abbild der Ansicht der Welt' ('music is the reflection of a world view': 1926, p.196). Two giants among composers of the 20th century naturally contrast: Arnold Schoenberg, 'Music is at its lowest stage simply imitation of nature. But soon it becomes imitation of nature in a broader sense, not just imitation of the surface of nature but also of its inner essence' (1922, p.14); Igor Stravinsky: 'Music is essentially unable to "express" anything, whether it be feeling, attitude, psychic state, a phenomenon of nature, etc. "Expression" has never been an intrinsic trait of music' (1935–6).

5. Looking to the vernacular and to behaviour.

If the study of published authorities in the field of definition provides at least some agreement on the nature and attributes of music, less unanimity is provided by other approaches to determining the definition and essence of music. One such approach, the definition of music by the ordinary, non-literary and perhaps even non-literate member of society, would be carried out by the study of terminology in everyday usage. A second derives definition and conceptualization from observation and analysis of behaviour. The difference between relying on formal definitions and these approaches derived from vernacular considerations may be illustrated by the automatic response of most Western Europeans to the statement, 'I am a musician', which may most commonly be, 'you are? what do you play?', suggesting that, in thinking of music, most people do not consider composing, contemplating or even singing as the primary musical activity, but instrumental performance. Similarly, a particular sonic structure – Islamic religious chant, for example – may be regarded as 'music' in one society but not in another. And indeed, in a given society, a sound – 'concrete' music will serve as examples – may or may not be musical, depending on the social context in which it is presented.

The issue of definition is complicated further by the fact that each society uses its culture to structure and classify the world in its own way, based on its view of nature, the supernatural, the environment, society. It ought to be possible to define music in an interculturally valid way, but the fact that definers inevitably speak with the language and from the cultural viewpoint of their own societies is a major obstacle. Only a few societies have a word whose meaning corresponds roughly to the English 'music'; and it is questionable whether the concept of music in the breadth it enjoys in Western cultures is present in the cognitive maps of all cultures. Nevertheless, musicologists generally regard music as a cultural universal.

Music

II. The concept in a variety of cultures

The variety of conceptions of music held by different societies, European and non-European, may be illustrated by a few selected examples providing some broad generalizations. These are presented with significant caveats: in no culture is there unanimity of thought or opinion on fundamental issues such as the nature of music. For any tendency that is broadly identified as a characteristic of a culture one can readily find others, less significant, that contrast and contradict. While it is helpful to compare cultures with the use of strong, unified characterizations, it is also important to bear in mind the rich

complexity of contradictory ideas, conceptions and verbal and artistic expressions in each.

Music

III. The concept in scholarship

Having surveyed definitions of the word and concept of music in a variety of cultures, we now enquire into the particular approaches to music maintained in the field of musicology – broadly defined – and into musicology's contribution to it. The question to be discussed is whether musicologists have developed, in their practice, definitions and conceptualizations of music that are unique to their profession, or whether they deal with issues that are ordinarily not addressed. Music dictionaries and encyclopedias, standard music histories and journals provide information on these topics.

Music is the principal subject of the work at hand, the revised edition of *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and of its predecessors. If the successive editions of this dictionary can be taken as reflections of the conception of music held by music scholars in the English-speaking world and in Western Europe, then it appears that musicology takes a broad view of the concept of music, one whose breadth was increased through its history as concentration on Western art music was gradually complemented by attention to American music, to folk music, to the music of non-Western societies, to popular music and to a variety of approaches to music – sociological and anthropological, physical and psychological, in addition to the traditionally central historical, theoretical, biographical, analytical and interpretative. Indeed, looking at the literature of musicology over the past century, one sees a trend of increasing inclusiveness, perhaps even a kind of gluttony, in which all conceivable kinds of sound from the most central (such as Beethoven) to the most peripheral (elevated speech, sounds of whales, birdsong, industrial noise, background sounds for mass-media advertising etc.) are all appropriate subjects for musicological study.

While Western music scholarship has *de facto* looked at everything (if not with equal emphasis) that could conceivably be regarded as music, musicologists have also, in their work and in their explicit statements, used certain basic assumptions about the nature of music, the 'shape' of the music concept and the character of the world of music.

1. Definitions of the word and concept.
2. Some central characteristics.
3. Music among the arts.
4. Music among the domains of culture.
5. The function of music.
6. Classification.
7. Music as a universal phenomenon.
8. The world of music or musics.

Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.

1. Definitions of the word and concept.

Verbal definitions written by and explicitly for musicologists are greatly varied, and discussions leave the question open, as indicated for example by a number of late 20th-century works devoted to fundamental issues in music scholarship such as the question of music's identity – the dialogue in *Was ist Musik?* by Carl Dahlhaus and Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht (1985), *What is Music?* edited by Philip Alperson (1987), *Contemplating Music* by Joseph Kerman (1985) and

Rethinking Music edited by Nicholas Cook and Mark Everist (1999). Such works hardly provide definitive definitions and the question is rarely broached in papers at major conferences.

A study of the definitions of music in music dictionaries provides a clear contrast to those of language dictionaries, which generally agree and are obviously based on the values of Western art music. Some music dictionaries avoid the term entirely, on the assumption that no definition is needed, or perhaps because none would be totally satisfactory. Others provide detailed attempts to state the quintessence of music, or the character of music in its ideal form. When pressed to commit themselves, musicologists provide a bewildering set of definitions and, even more, of views that suggest what in music is essential and important. The following excerpts illustrate:

A major Italian reference work, *Enciclopedia della musica* (ed. Claudio Sartori and Riccardo Allorto, Milan, 1963–4), simply says, 'l'arte dei suoni' ('the art of sounds'), which is followed by a short explanation.

The most widely used English-language reference book in the USA, Willi Apel's *Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, MA, 2/1969), has an entry under 'music' devoted entirely to a discussion of the etymology of the term, and of classification of music in ancient and early medieval eras, but without a definition to which the author himself subscribes.

The most widely used German reference work, *Riemann Musik Lexikon*. (12th edn, *Sachteil*, Mainz 1967) provides in the first part of the article 'Musik' a very carefully circumscribed definition and characterization by Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht:

Musik ist – im Geltungsbereich dieses Wortes: im Abendland – die Künstlerische Gestaltung des Klingenden, das als Natur- und Emotionslaut die Welt und die Seele im Reich des Hörens in begriffsloser Konkretheit bedeutet, und das als Kunst in solchem Bedeuten vergeistigt 'zur Sprache' gelangt kraft einer durch Wissenschaft (Theorie) reflektierten und geordneten, daher auch in sich selbst sinnvollen und sinnstiftenden Materialität. Denn das Element der M[usik], der Ton, ist einerseits (vormusikalisch) Sinnträger als hörbares In-Erscheinung-Treten der Innerlichkeit eines Erzeugers, andererseits (innermusikalisch) Sinnträger als Nutzniesser einer Gesetzgebung (Tonordnung), die den Ton dem spezifisch musikalischen Gestalten, Bedeuten und Verstehen verfügbar macht und die dabei zugleich, in dem sie die Naturgegebenheit des Klingenden Rechnung trägt, Naturgesetzlichkeit ins Spiel bringt.

'Music is – in the area in which the concept is relevant, Western culture – the artistic formation of those sounds that represent the world and the spirit in the form of a voice of nature and emotion in the realm of hearing, concretely conceived, and which achieves significance as an art, becoming both meaningful and meaning-creating material through reflected and ordered cognition and theory. For the basic element of music, the tone, is on the one hand the bearer (pre-musically) of meaning as reification of the essence of creation, while on the other hand it is (intra-musically) the vehicle of meaning as the beneficiary of the canon (tonal order). These lend to the unit of music, tone, its specifically cultural forms, meanings and conceptions and at the same time, as a natural phenomenon, it remains accountable to the laws of nature.'

Ingmar Bengtsson, in *Sohlmanns musiklexikon* (Stockholm, 1948–52), begins a medium-length general article, 'Musik', with emphasis on the relationship of the concept of music with dance and movement and with speech in many cultures,

and continues: How the concept of music is delineated and defined at different times and in different parts of the world depends mostly upon which criteria one applies, that is upon the norms the conditions for which must be met before something is considered music in contrast to 'non-music', or 'no-longer music', or 'good' or 'correct [acceptable]' music in contrast to 'bad'. These criteria and norms have varied enormously, while at the same time they have seldom been consistently or even distinctly formulated.

In the Russian music encyclopedia *Muzikal'naya entsiklopediya* (Moscow, 1973–82), the editor himself, Yuri Keldish, provides an article under 'Music':

A form of art that reflects reality and has an effect on the listener through the intellectual response and sound combinations. ... By expressing mental images and emotions in aural form, music can be identified as a form of human communication and as an influence on the psychological state of mind. This influence is possible because of the physical and biological harmony of the musical sensitivity of human beings (as many other living beings) and human psychology, especially emotions, and of sound as a stimulus and signal for activity. In some ways, there is an analogy between music and human speech, especially speech intonation, where the intrapersonal feelings and emotional attitudes towards the outer world are expressed by alterations of pitch and by other characteristic expressive vocal sounds. This analogy makes it possible to identify the nature of music according to intonation.

Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart (1st edn, ix, Kassel, 1961) provides a major article on 'Musik' whose first part deals with its psychological and acoustic properties. The second part, concerned with definitions, by Heinrich Hüschen, begins:

Die Musik ist diejenige unter den Kunstdisziplinen, deren Material aus Tönen besteht. Von dem in der Natur vorkommenden Tonmaterial, gelangt in der Musik nur ein verhältnismässig geringer Teil zur Verwendung. Die aus der unendlichen Zahl von Naturtönen ausgewählte endliche Zahl von musikalischen Tönen wird durch bestimmte Rationalisierungsprozesse zu bestimmten Tonsystemen zusammengeschlossen. 'Music, among the artistic disciplines, is the one whose material consists of tones. Of the raw material available in nature, only a small proportion is actually used in music. The finite number of tones selected for musical use from the infinity available in nature is organized into specific tone systems through defined rational processes.'

A further section, devoted to the question of definition, points out the many historical attempts to define music but concludes quickly: Gleichwohl gibt es bis zur Gegenwart keine vollkommene und letztgültige Definition der Musik und also keine Patentlösung für die Frage, was die Musik in ihrem Wesens- und Seinsgrund nach sei. Vielmehr lassen alle Begriffsbestimmungen, wie sie im Musikschritum vorkommen, immer nur eine ganz bestimmte Seite des Gesamtphänomens in den Vordergrund treten. 'For all that, there is to the present time no complete and definitive definition of music, and thus no absolute solution to the question of what music is, in its essence. Rather, the various definitions of the concept that appear in literature always emphasize a particular aspect of the total phenomenon.'

While largely agreeing that music is an art combining sounds, these definitions suggest a variety of opinions. Sartori regards arts that consist of sound as intrinsically music, avoiding, for example, the dilemma posed by arts involving speech. Bengtsson and Hüschen imply that a variety of non-congruent definitions from different periods and cultures may all be equally valid, while Eggebrecht maintains that music, in the sense that he wishes to present it, is a

Western phenomenon; or, perhaps more correctly, that the definition he presents refers only to music in Western culture and, indeed, to art music – which, the argument reversed, means that for his purposes the only true or proper music is Western art music. Implying a basis in nature, Eggebrecht's unicultural approach contrasts with that of A.J. Ellis and his successors who became ethnomusicologists, and for whom music in its cultural variation was explicitly not a natural phenomenon. Keldish implies an intercultural view informed by psychology and biology. Throughout, the definitions are narrower than the cultural usage of music would require, indicating perhaps that the musicologist's shape of the music concept includes a centre of which each definer is certain, a quintessence, along with fluid and arguable boundaries.

[Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.](#)

2. Some central characteristics.

From the time when musicology was set forth as a formal discipline by Guido Adler (1885), musicologists have taken a broad view of music. Adler's article specifies the inclusion of various strata of music, all cultures and periods. Since Adler, musicologists have introduced hierarchies and made decisions as to what musics are in fact worthy of study, but they have not shrunk from these broad boundaries. Some definitions have been unreasonably broad. Thus, Paul Henry Lang defined musicology as the science that 'unites in its domains all the sciences which deal with the production, appearance, and application of the physical phenomenon called sound' (Harap, 1938), suggesting that the analysis of all sound, including speech, is the field's purview and thus, by extension, capable of being understood as music.

The question of boundaries has been addressed by ethnomusicologists. Along lines related to Lang's, John Blacking (1973, p.12) defined music as 'humanly organized sound', in a statement perhaps not intended seriously as definition but widely used and influential. It is important to note the implication that music must be organized, is principally 'sound', is human-specific. Whether Blacking intended all human-made sounds to be included is unclear, but he does not address the point that his definition also applies to speech. In contrast to the emphasis on sound, Alan P. Merriam (1964, pp.32–3) proposed a model for the understanding of music that separates three sectors, sound, behaviour and concept – equally components of music which affect each other constantly – but avoids the idea that music is principally sound. Among many scholars, George Herzog, in the title of an article, asked the serious question, 'Do Animals have Music?' (1941) and replied tentatively in the affirmative; the present dictionary includes an entry [Animal music](#). And ethnomusicologists have included analytical consideration of whale and porpoise sounds among the papers at their conventions. Furthermore, musicologists have participated (with linguists, psychologists and physiologists) in the study of sounds produced in early childhood, sounds that could be considered to be either pre-linguistic or pre-musical.

If musicologists have in important respects used broad definitions of music and have sought to expand its boundaries, they have sometimes also been concerned to narrow these boundaries, at least in determining what music may be worthy of musicological concern. When Kenneth Levy asserted that 'there are, at bottom, just two tests for the worthiness of a musicological undertaking ... (1) that it be concerned with first-class music; and (2) that it be concerned with a first-class problem' (quoted in Kerman, 1985, p.45), he avoided suggesting other possible defining criteria such as the excellence of the system of ideas that leads to the music or the high quality of the social context of its performance.

One may define music as an art, that is, an activity whose practice requires special knowledge and ability, analogous to painting, sculpture, literary and verbal art; as a form of communication in which all humans participate, analogous to language or speech; and as a set a of distinct physiological processes. Its status as an art requires that its aesthetic aspects be considered among its essentials and that therefore music be seen as a system whose components have varying degrees of beauty or value. The rhetoric of musicology is filled with explicit and implied comparisons, with statements setting off master composers from others, concerning the search for 'masterworks', valuing the concepts of genius and talent and distinguishing the true art from the functional. The musicological concept of music is dominated by a contradiction. On the one hand, musicologists have brought to the world of performers and listeners a vast quantity of previously unknown music and in the course of this search have given their attention to much music considered inferior or irrelevant by others. On the other hand, they have found it necessary to justify their work by claims of hitherto unexpected aesthetic value in the music with which they deal. In the musicological profession there is an opposition between the tenet that musicologists study all music (or even all sound) and the insistence that musical works, performances or even entire systems or cultures do not have equal value.

[Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.](#)

3. Music among the arts.

Contemplation of music as a unified concept leads to the consideration of creativity in music in comparison to other arts. Among professional musicians and music-lovers, musical creation is customarily divided into composition and performance, with improvisation perhaps an intermediate stage. But in musical scholarship, far more attention has been given to composition than to the others, and the notion of music as a group of finished works dominates; this has been noted already in the examination of language-dictionary definitions. The importance of innovation in content (e.g. the nature of themes) but even more in style (e.g. the abstract style characteristics or 'rules' by which one composes) is essential in modern Western culture. (For an extreme statement of the position: one must not only compose something not previously heard, but also something in a style not previously known.) Performance, though appreciated and rewarded, is not as respected as composition, and members of Western society do not think of music as a large conglomeration of performances. The world's greatest musicians are composers far more often than performers. Improvisation in art music has generally been regarded more as a craft than as an art.

It is true that all public or social activities may be interpreted as 'cultural productions' and are in a sense performances that are interpreted by their 'audiences'. But in the conceptions of many societies, the visual arts and literature differ from music in the significance and nature, and perhaps even in the presence, of their performance component. In the case of dance, performance plays a much greater role, and while set pieces, choreographies, are important, the amount of creative work in the contribution of the dancer is substantial. And, to be sure, in their relationship to choreographers, performing dancers are more distinguished than is the case in the musical analogue.

Music has been one of the 'arts' in Western and musicological conception for millennia, from before the development of the term suggesting the quintessence of the Muses' domain to the modern terminology in dictionary definitions and educational curricula. Yet there may be obstacles to the complete inclusion of music in the realm of art, and differences in the degree and nature of artistic

quality between music and other recognized arts, literature and visual arts. Two should be identified:

(a) Music is an art, but, in a number of the world's cultures, not all music is equally 'art'. We speak of 'art music' or *Kunstmusik*, fashioned by composers who are artists, but do not admit popular songs or the songs of tribal societies into the same circle. One may maintain that literary scholars make the same kind of distinction between, say, a novel of Dostoyevsky and popular romance, but the term 'art' is not especially applied to the former, and both are 'novels'. In music, however, all symphonies would be equally, though not equally good, works of 'art'. The boundaries within music are different from those in other arts.

(b) More serious, intellectually, is the lack of parallel between music and literature in the relationships between the source materials and the art works. In literature, the source is language. Not all uses of language are works of art, but the literary artist selects from everyday speech and fashions artistic products. Language has the function of providing material for both art and everyday speech. It is tempting to argue that the basic 'vocabulary' of a music – pitches, rhythms, harmonies – is used to create both vernacular music (popular and folk music and perhaps improvisations), paralleling everyday speech, and works of art music (paralleling literary works). But the distinction between vernacular and art music, even where culturally recognized, is of a totally different order from the difference between everyday speech and literature. In musicological discourse, music is sometimes referred to as a 'language', and musical works have been analysed by semioticians as if they were the analogue of speech rather than of literary art.

The questions in the musicological conception then remain: is all music art; is some of it art and some something else, presently undefined; or should music as a whole be viewed as a system of communication analogous to language? what are the musical analogues to Saussure's distinction between 'parole' and 'language'? Such issues have much to do with the ways in which the musicological conceptions of 'music' have developed.

[Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.](#)

4. Music among the domains of culture.

The world's societies have greatly differing conceptions of music and its place in life and culture, assigning it broad or narrow scope, placing it high or low among the domains, some associating it mainly with dance and drama, others with speech, or with the arts as a whole, or again with religion and ceremonial, or yet with undesirable activities such as drinking and trance-like behaviour. The way in which musicologists in Western culture view the relationship of music to other cultural domains is a counterpart to these associations.

In certain segments of Western culture and its history, music has been regarded as dangerous and to be avoided, and musicians have been considered inferior and the object of discrimination. Music has been relegated to foreigners and to members of minorities, including, in much of European music history, Jews; and in American history, successively to Germans, Italians, Jews and African Americans. And thus, too, in European academic life, music has been the last of the arts to be taken seriously. At the same time, music has been the field that is considered most esoteric, about which only specialists can have discourse and make judgments. The concept of musicality has played a greater role than have its equivalents in other arts. On the other hand, music has sometimes been considered the pinnacle of human accomplishment. Hermann Hesse's *Glasperlenspiel* shows the composer to be a kind of superman, and

Hildesheimer greets Mozart as 'perhaps the greatest genius in recorded human history'. Music is alternately the vile work of villains and the expression of greatest cultural heroism.

Musicologists have naturally emphasized the latter, trying to associate music in each culture or period they study with the most desirable and developed of its cultural domains. And so it is not surprising that scholars of Renaissance music have given special attention to the relationship of music to visual arts, and that for 19th-century music, the closest domain is literature. For the 20th century, musicologists have been prone to see music in its relationship to the social sciences, and for the Middle Ages, to theology. Students of non-Western music have most frequently looked at music in its relationships to language and to social organization.

Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.

5. The function of music.

An important approach of musicology to the conceptualization of music is the study of the function of music in culture. Musicologists have not often been explicitly concerned with the question of function in the basic conceptualization of music. A traditional view separates art music, often presumed to be essentially 'l'art pour l'art', from functional music that included folksongs (narratives, or life-cycle rituals etc.), popular music for entertainment, 'vernacular' music such as marches and dance music and congregational church music such as hymns. The distinction between 'art' and other musics has come under attack and is in any event often difficult to apply. The question of function also plays an important role in the significance of the distinction between secular and sacred music, often used by musicologists as a touchstone.

In a universalist sense, the question has been approached by ethnomusicologists, whose conclusions extend from the enumeration of uses of music in one society or all of the world's cultures, to attempts to see music as having only one unique function, or a cluster of related ones. It has thus been argued (for summary see Nettl, 1983) that, whatever the many uses of music in the world's societies, all cultures use music to integrate and unify a society and to draw boundaries among societies and their subdivisions, which may include subcultures, age groups and socio-economic classes. As the world's cultures have become globalized and countries, cities, and even neighbourhoods increasingly heterogeneous, music as a kind of weapon for confronting the cultural 'other' becomes more significant.

Amerindian pow-wows, for example, are explicitly designed to permit intertribal communication as well as impressing non-Indians with the power and vitality of Amerindian cultures. 19th-century Czech nationalists used the excellence of Czech art music and its roots in folk traditions – founding a national opera theatre and developing traditional nationalist motifs as emotional tropes to stimulate an audience – much more than physical force as a weapon in the struggle for cultural revitalization. In Nazi Germany, the exclusion of foreign as well as 'Jewish' and 'degenerate' music (*entartete Musik*) served to unify society and confront the 'other'. Similar techniques were used to accomplish political and social goals in communist societies, and the use of choruses and military bands as important weapons in the colonial enterprises from the 16th century to the 20th is certainly a related process. The close association of music with society, and its role in the interactions of ethnic groups and nations, may be a survival of the function of pre-musical sounds in early human times in which social groups may have impressed (and frightened?) each other with the use of powerful organized sound. Music appears, universally, to be used for

communicating with the supernatural world, also a kind of 'other'. The fact that all human societies use music in the course of religious worship, from a shamanic trance to concert-like anthem-singing, suggests a second, related single main function of music applicable to all cultures.

On the other hand, ten principal functions of music have been itemized, from the individualistic 'aesthetic enjoyment' and 'emotional expression' to the communal 'contribution to the integration of society' and 'validation of social institutions and religious rituals' (Merriam, 1964, pp.219–27). Ethnomusicologists in general take for granted that whatever universals exist in the sphere of function; each society has a unique configuration of musical functions and uses.

[Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.](#)

6. Classification.

Statements by musicologists defining music often move quickly to an accounting of types of music, and classifications subdividing music seem often to be part of basic musicological definitions and conceptualizations. Far too numerous for an accounting here, they are of interest in a fundamental consideration of the concept of music because they indicate the importance of hierarchical classifications in Western culture and because they are often based on abstract categories that artificially distinguish human musical activities. They are concerned less with the division of the musical repertory into stylistic groups than with the division of the musical process into categories of thought and cultural function.

A brief sampling: the division of music into natural, human and sonic kinds of harmony by Boethius, already mentioned, was the starting-point for a large number of classifications in European culture. Others include the division into theoretical and practical music, introduced by Aristoxenus about 300 bce and reintroduced about 1500. Isidore of Seville (c559–636) included *musica harmonica* (vocal music), *musica ex flatu* (music of wind instruments) and *musica rhythmica ex pulsibus digitorum* (music produced by striking, e.g. percussion and plucked strings). In the 14th century, Theodoricus de Campo used the categories of *musica mundana* and *humana*, like those of Boethius, adding *musica vocalis* (animal sounds) and *artificialis* (music as we know it), which was again subdivided into vocal music with a section of rhythmic declamation, and instrumental music (with subdivisions of strings, wind and percussion). Music scholarship during the Renaissance made use of these groupings; in contrast, musicologists in the 20th century divided music by period of composition, by culture and subculture and by social function – separating sacred from secular, folk music from art music, vernacular from serious music.

The classifications of music in other cultures are complex, often following social and ceremonial functions, and from the 20th century onwards, often taking into account intercultural differences. In India, for example, emphasis is placed on distinction between art and folk music, between North and South Indian traditions and between Indian and Western music (the music of other cultures often being regarded as of little account). In the Islamic Middle East, as already suggested, classes of music reflect the degrees of social acceptability.

In the late 20th century, the parallel or contrastive role of the sexes in the world's musical cultures, and contributions of women, long neglected in scholarship, came to receive substantial attention. Contrary to widespread beliefs promulgated in the past, there is no evidence to suggest that either men or women are innately more 'musical'. In most societies, however, a substantial difference in the nature of men's and women's participation in music as

performers, composers and audience, in actual music-making and in the realms of musical behaviour and ideas, is maintained (Koskoff, 1989). In many societies the distinctions are so pronounced that the terms 'women's music' and 'men's music' are appropriate.

Taxonomies of major components of the world of music are also of interest in general considerations of musical conceptualization: for example, instrument classifications. The traditional Western classification by orchestral instrument groups (which indicate functions of instruments in a particular musical style) and the India-derived system of Hornbostel and Sachs (1914), based on instruments as museum artefacts, inform importantly about Western attitudes towards music. The same may be said of a traditional Chinese classification system, by raw material, which is dominated by the number eight; and of instrument classifications developed in other societies (see Kartomi, 1990).

[Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.](#)

7. Music as a universal phenomenon.

Whether music is human-specific or whether other species have music has been an issue for musicologists; and so also is the question whether the works of certain 20th-century composers may be included on equal terms with music based on common practice (see, for example, Blume, 1960). But that music is found in all human societies, that it is a cultural universal, seems never to have been seriously opposed among musicologists. Ethnomusicologists, in particular, regard music as a human universal and have argued widely about its universal characteristics. Among these are the ubiquity of singing and the virtual ubiquity of instruments; the widespread use of tones with consistent pitch (partially justifying the definition, 'the art of combining tones'), of tone systems using from five to seven tones, of duple and triple metres, the universal use of something that (quoting Wachsmann, 1971, p.384) seems 'to me to resemble the phenomena which I am in the habit of calling music' in religious contexts.

If one were, however, to make a comprehensive census of all human cultures or culture-units, one would probably find exceptions to all characteristics proposed as universals. Instead, then, it seems reasonable to speak of statistical universals, which are present virtually everywhere, with the exception of two. The first is abstract: if there is a definition of music agreeable to the readers of this work, and if all cultures 'have' music, then all cultures must *ipso facto* partake of this definition. In other words, if we are to accept that all cultures do have music, then all the world's music(s) must minimally conform to that definition. Second, more practically, all societies, including those that use a term like 'music' or seem to have a unified conception of it, and those that do not, have a type or kind of stylized vocal expression distinguished from ordinary speech. Most commonly it is something readily called or associated with singing, but 'chanting', elevated speech, stylized utterances consisting of vocables, screaming, howling, weeping or keening may all be included. Possibly that is as far as one can go in projecting a humanity totally unified in having a music.

But if all societies have music, is music a property of all human individuals, or – like language – of all normally developed humans? Psychologists have long assumed that there is such a thing as musicality, possessed by individuals to varying degrees, and in Western societies it is common to distinguish between 'musical' and 'unmusical' persons. At the same time, it is widely assumed that all normal humans have the capacity of participating in some sense – performing, understanding, perceiving if not performing or composing – in a complex of related activities labelled as 'musicking' (Small, 1998). Someone

unable to engage in 'musicking' (which in itself probably cannot be measured) is marked as not quite normal. In English, the way to characterize a totally unmusical person is with the term 'tone deaf', which suggests absence of sensitivity to pitch distinctions, indicating again the primacy of the melodic aspects of music to the Western conception of music. The suggestion (for example by Gardner, 1999) that musical processes in the nervous system can be distinguished from others – for example, that there is such a thing as 'musical intelligence' in contrast to and alongside others – is relevant to these considerations.

Scientists contemplating music theoretically and experimentally from psychological and physiological viewpoints have overwhelmingly limited themselves to the Western conception of music and to human subjects in Western societies. The beliefs resulting from the studies that have been carried out should be tested in other musical cultures, a procedure that would inevitably collide with the intercultural variety in the definitions of conceptions of music and the difficulty of finding any universals of music. Nevertheless, the question of musicality as part of the equipment of the normal human, broached by John Blacking in *How Musical is Man?*, is answered by the suggestion that humans are basically musical, that music is a human universal, and that there is sufficient unity to justify thinking of all musics as part of a single system.

[Music, §III: The concept in scholarship.](#)

8. The world of music or musics.

The language dictionaries, general encyclopedias and music dictionaries appear to agree that there is such a thing as music, and that (at least by implication) it is found in all cultures. Despite the fact that few cultures actually have a term that encompasses everything that is included in the English 'music', and the absence of traits that can be identified as cultural universals, and further, despite the absence of studies that test the presence of musicality-proving characteristics on an intercultural basis, musicologists generally believe that they are justified in speaking of 'music' as a unitary concept, basically human-specific.

If this were so, one would assume that music has a single origin, was invented once by humans and then perhaps gradually diffused and thus changed, each culture adapting traits to its own needs. Indeed, one issue in the musicological profession concerns its view of the world of music: is the world of music a single world, and are we justified in saying that humans 'have' 'music', or does the world of music instead consist of musics, each an individual, internally consistent system, somewhat like a language? Linguists have no difficulty speaking of both 'language' and 'languages', and maintaining the distinction between these concepts; musicians are more likely to think of music at large as 'a language'.

The suggestion that music, to be a unitary concept, must have a single origin leads us to consider briefly the question of musical origins. The 19th and early 20th centuries produced several theories, often loosely associated with prominent individuals: music originated as the human version of animal mating cries (Darwin, 1871); as the stylization of elevated or emotional speech (a view widely attributed to Wagner); as rhythmic accompaniment to group labour (Bücher, 1896); as a derivative of long-distance vocal communication (Stumpf, 1911); as a human invention for addressing the supernatural (Nadel, 1930). Sachs (1943) distinguished two kinds of origin – from speech (logogenic) and from emotional expression (pathogenic), and since some cultures appear to have participated in only one of these, one would expect that Sachs believed

that music had at least two separate origins. The later idea that music comes about because of specific social needs in different societies on different routes of multilateral cultural evolution suggests that different societies might have individually 'invented' music on separate occasions. This might be the reason for the enormous stylistic variety in the world's music, and for the virtual absence of true universals, but it would not explain the significance of certain statistical universals, those found in a great many, though not absolutely all, musics. Yet again, separate origins might account for the absence of universal conceptions of and terms for music. Whether the human nervous system has built into it a kind of musicality somewhat like the imprinting of potential for linguistic competence is very much open to investigation. After several decades of neglect (borne no doubt of frustration with the inevitably speculative nature of the enterprise), scholarly interest in the origins of music was revived in the 1990s (see Wallin and others, 2000). Biologists, psychologists and semioticians have inclined to the Darwinian view of music as an adaptation involving fitness to mate, and representing essential qualities such as energy, flexibility and innovativeness. The discovery and analysis of sounds produced by certain animal species in which ordinary communicative sounds and mating calls and 'songs' carry a distinction paralleling that of speech and song suggests that music may have originated simultaneously with language or possibly before.

The publication of significant musicological works during the second half of the 20th century questioning the boundaries of music and discussing the nature of the world of music indicates the degree to which fundamental questions about the definition, character, shape and conceptualization of music are constantly being debated, and the way in which the positions held towards these questions are constantly shifting. Thus, one may argue whether the sounds of an orchestra tuning up are music; or John Cage's work, *4'33"*, in which no sound is heard; or the sounds produced by computer programs, any more than the 'singing' of birds.

In developing a definition and conceptualization of music, it is difficult to choose among the approaches mentioned. The purpose of this article is, indeed, to show that, in its conception of music, the world is a pastiche of diversity, and thus the author is obliged to avoid commitment to a single position. There is little doubt that each reader of this work believes firmly in the existence of music and subscribes to a specific conception of it, yet one ventures to assert that there is none who can imagine life without it.

Music

BIBLIOGRAPHY

StrunkSR

J. Walther: *Musicalisches Lexicon* (Leipzig, 1732/R)

J. Mattheson: *Der vollkommene Capellmeister* (Hamburg, 1739/R)

F.W. Marpurg: *Der critische Musicus an der Spree erster Band* (Berlin, 1750/R)

E. Hanslick: *Vom Musikalisch-Schönen* (Leipzig, 1854 12/1918)

C. Darwin: *The Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (London, 1871)

G. Adler: 'Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft', *VMw*, i (1885), 5–20

K. Bücher: *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Leipzig, 1896)

C. Stumpf: *Die Anfänge der Musik* (Leipzig, 1911)

E.M. von Hornbostel and C. Sachs: 'Systematik der Musikinstrumente', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, xlii (1914), 553–90; Eng. trans. in *GSJ*, xiv (1961), 3–29; repr. in *Ethnomusicology: an Introduction*, ed. H. Myers (London,

- 1922), 444–61
- E. Kurth:** *Die romantische Harmonik und ihre Krise in Wagners Tristan* (Berne, 1920)
- A. Schoenberg:** *Harmonielehre* (Vienna, 1922; Eng. trans., 1978)
- H. Pfitzner:** *Gesammelte Schriften*, ii (Augsburg, 1926)
- S. Nadel:** 'The Origins of Music', *MQ*, xvi (1930), 531–46
- I. Stravinsky:** *Chroniques de ma vie* (Paris, 1935–6; Eng. trans., 1936, as *An Autobiography*)
- L. Harap:** 'Some Hellenic Ideas on Music and Character', *MQ*, xxiv (1938), 153–68
- G. Herzog:** 'Do Animals have Music?', *BAMS*, v (1941), 3–4
- C. Sachs:** *The Rise of Music in the Ancient World, East and West* (New York, 1943)
- F. Blume:** *Was ist Musik?* (Kassel, 1960)
- A.P. Merriam:** *The Anthropology of Music* (Evanston, IL, 1964)
- D. Ames and A. King:** *Glossary of Hausa Music and its Social Contexts* (Evanston, IL, 1971)
- K. Wachsmann:** 'Universal Perspectives in Music', *EthM*, xv (1971), 381–4
- J. Blacking:** *How Musical is Man?* (London and Seattle, 1973)
- J.H. Nketia:** *The Music of Africa* (New York, 1974)
- H. Zemp:** 'Are'are Classification of Musical Types and Instruments', *EthM*, xxii (1978), 37–67
- C. Keil:** *Tiv Song* (Chicago, 1979)
- W.K. Powers:** 'Oglala Song Terminology', *Selected Reports in Ethnomusicology*, iii/2 (1980), 23–42
- B. Nettl:** *The Study of Ethnomusicology* (Urbana, IL, 1983)
- S. Kishibe:** *The Traditional Music of Japan* (Tokyo, 1984)
- C. Dahlhaus and H.H. Eggebrecht:** *Was ist Musik?* (Wilhelmshaven, 1985)
- J. Kerman:** *Contemplating Music* (Cambridge, MA, 1985)
- M. Liang:** *Music of the Billion* (New York, 1985)
- L.I. al-Faruqi:** 'Music, Musicians, and Muslim Law', *AsM*, xvii/1 (1985–6), 3–36
- P. Alperson, ed.:** *What is Music?* (University Park, PA, 1987)
- A. Seeger:** *Why Suyá Sing* (Cambridge, 1987)
- E. Koskoff, ed.:** *Women and Music in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (Urbana, IL, 1989)
- B. Nettl:** *Blackfoot Musical Thought: Comparative Perspectives* (Kent, OH, 1989)
- M. Kartomi:** *On Concepts and Classification of Musical Instruments* (Chicago, 1990)
- L. Rowell:** *Music and Musical Thought in Early India* (Chicago, 1992)
- S.D. Crafts, D. Cavicchi and C. Keil:** *My Music* (Hanover, NH, 1993)
- C. Small:** *Musicking: the Meanings of Performing and Listening* (Hanover, NH, 1998)
- N. Cook and M. Everist, eds.:** *Rethinking Music* (Oxford, 1999)
- H. Gardner:** *Intelligence Reframed: Multiple Intelligences for the 21st Century* (New York, 1999)
- N. Wallin, B. Merker and S. Brown, eds.:** *The Origins of Music* (Cambridge, MA, 2000)