

In Time: Discursive Arcs, Intertextual Dialogics, Metatextual Intrigues

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Early and recent articles about the value of historical studies to the work of comparative musicology and ethnomusicology resonate variously with their current counterparts from the (American) musicological discourse. I will link parts of six of the former with three of the latter, forming three sets of comparative linkages. I'll end with a quick look at my own interest in Bielawski's (1985) contribution, on time in music.

What History Can Do For Music

The first set of three articles stands as an overview both of general issues relating to historical study in music scholarship and of actual instances of such scholarship. Seeger (1940) and Quereshi (1995) form an interesting symmetry--almost one of parentheses around Nettl (1958)--in that they embody the earliest and the latest of the words examined here, and that from within the same discourse (American musicology, with Seeger addressing historians and Quereshi her fellow musicologists about the importance of the historian's work to music studies). They parenthesize Nettl in that his is the voice of the newer discourse of Ethnomusicology.

Seeger's call for (both historico- and comparative) musicologists to join methodological forces with historians focused on "folk music" as the most promising entry point of four possible. The other three--primitive, fine art, and popular--he implicitly problematized in arguing folk music's case: it is collective more than personal; not elitist or hierarchical, like fine art; relatively unchanging; oral, thus unmediated by the "censor" of "sophistication;" least esoteric, least abstract, and generally closest to the historian's subject (320-21). He observed that the relatively new techniques of sight and sound recording had freed both historians and historico-musicologists from the narrow imperatives of writing and written (and notated) sources; he suggested that both had yet to catch up to the wealth of film and recordings by then generated, and that past text-oriented methodologies had yet to be overhauled to fit the new media's products. He declared (but didn't impose) his bias toward music as an art of greater general benefit and import than (yet one presently dominated by) language. His closing paragraphs argued for greater and more balanced integration of the musical and linguistic universes, both in individual scholarship and its cultural environment (all presumably Western).

Fifty-five years later, Quereshi introduced a JAMS issue devoted to just the sort of scholarship Seeger advocated, presenting its history-anthropology orientation as "recent." She nodded to ethnomusicology (332-33) and anthropology (334-35) as having realized much of Seeger's vision as sketched above (she doesn't mention him), and--while asserting historical discourse to be still narrowly confined to texts--she cited recent work on Gregorian chant as more oriented to performance issues. The JAMS authors further evinced, she said, a command of

historiographical and anthropological issues and methods that demonstrably improved music scholarship, even began to redeem it from the flaw of Western hegemony (into a "truly cosmopolitan musicology," 342).

Nettl's survey of historically oriented ethnomusicological work declared such orientation to be so pervasive as to invite systematization. He began that project by dividing musical-historical questions into those of origin and change; he pointed out the research problems arising from inquiry into those, and the various explanations proffered (evolutionary, age-area connection, racial essentialism, cultural diffusion and clustering) and methodological approaches taken (geographical, statistical). His survey functioned as a corrective of problematic and an argument for promising approaches to history taken by ethnomusicologists up to his time.

While it is true that Seeger wrote about ideas some 55 years before Quereshi called them new, she certainly can't be accused of ignorance of ethnomusicological contributions (her exemplary sources--Merriam and Blacking--fill in the time gap following Seeger and Nettl), nor its close ties to current musicology (last paragraph, 332). Most interesting in the juxtaposition of these three is the continuity of discourse they display without referring to it overtly (indeed, one could stress their mutual disjuncture, as many have). Seeger was a musicologist pleading for both intra- and inter-disciplinary integration; Nettl presented attempts at such integration from one side of the field (comparative/ethno-), Quereshi from the other (historico-). The time lag between the three suggests something about the very process--historical--under discussion. Why has it unfolded as it has--dividedly--in this one discourse? I ask only to demonstrate the question begged, not to answer it (yet).

What Music Can Do For History

Seeger's general suggestion that history can benefit from musicology as much as musicology from history (323) was corroborated by Merriam (1967). Merriam's selection of case studies served to argue for the value of music studies as a tool--in common with, as well as distinct from, other discourses--that can help reconstruct cultural history (85-86). The oral-traditional narratives of song (87-88) and change or stasis in material design and use of musical instruments (89-93) are both areas that have shed light on the histories of specific cultures (such as the Marghi of Nigeria) and their music. Music studies can likewise inform speculative theories about historical processes (social evolutionary, origins, migration patterns and culture clusters, 93-106). Because of two traits--the mathematical divisions instruments and music systems impose on sound (108-14), and a taproot in a culture's unconscious that makes music resistant to change over time (107)--musicology is a particularly good tool for historical reconstruction.

Agawu holds Merriam to the historical rigor the latter advocates. By including Merriam among those whose work contributed to an incomplete and distorted view of African music (395), Agawu indirectly takes him to task in a survey of three different instances of shoddy historicism in African music studies. Rhythm, Agawu argues, is so deeply embedded in the movement, language, and gesture of the African bodies and cultures making it that to isolate and reify it is simply poor scholarship. Concordantly, Rice's (1987) additions to Merriam's (1987) model call the latter to task for a behavioral/cognitive tunnel vision of music-making that is starved of its

proper historical, social, and even larger psychological dimensions and balance.

As in the first set examined, these texts comprise a whole not immediately obvious in the collection of its parts. Merriam's clear grasp (1967) of the grounding effect of *competent* historical work makes blanket characterizations and dismissals such as Agawu's and Rice's seem perversely reactive and uncharitable, a hunt for a straw man. Yet in fact their views have substance--as much substance as the models they attack. The substance of all three participants in these dialogues is that of a binding assent to the importance of historical accuracy, and to the significance of music and culture to each other--and to the power and appropriateness of Western academic discourse to effect, even redirect, the dialogue thereabout. Agawu's and Rice's reservations and criticisms read like inevitable dynamics of *human* discourse, thus suggest, if anything, a health in what is called hegemony--in its openness to corrective undermining--that suggests further the possibility of its own natural or catastrophic death, or mutation, in the wake of such subliminally invited (since inevitable?) attacks, whether they have come from those enculturated (Rice) or acculturated (Agawu) to the Western discourse.

What Historians Do With Music/History

Nettl's (1986) musings over ethnomusicology's own historical context--that is, the mindset of its first practitioners--begs questions A. Seeger (1991) and Tomlinson (1995) address. Nettl's discussion of the Berlin-school pioneers asserts the specifics of a grossly Western Eurocentric (indeed, Germanic/Eastern European) orientation to classical musicology (more than professional concertizing) and to the hard and soft sciences. Nettl's exposition of this background affirms Agawu's critique of an ideology of difference (of "the other"), and confirms Merriam's and Nettl's own earlier critiques of social Darwinism; it also points out the problems of notational transcriptions, diffusionist anthropology, and exoticism in Western academia's first treatments of non-Western music. Seeger's study illustrates how a (relative) abstention from imposition of such Western biases can move toward a view of others that respects their common humanity (neither unduly exalting nor debasing it) while glimpsing a very different expression of it (in this case, a use of song as intertribal communication and intra-tribal historicizing). Tomlinson's reflection on some century-spanning, deep-foundational particulars (through Rousseau to Derrida) of the nature of Western language and linguistics leads elegantly into his own look at another American culture's use of song, a disentanglement and rearrangement of song/music, song/speech, and song/sight that probes far and carefully into a non-Western matter--a pictocentric universe parallel to the Western logocentric/phonocentric one¹--while anchored as conscientiously in its own Western intellectual tradition and tongue (the moral: we *can* have our cake and eat it too, and we needn't throw out the Western baby with the Western bathwater, whether, again, we are Westerners [Tomlinson] or not [Agawu]). Also again, we see tendencies of self-correction toward universal inclusion occurring in the discourse, even when its "dialoguers" aren't referring directly to, or even aware of (eg., A. Seeger and Tomlinson, in relation to each other and the subjects of Nettl's surveys) each others' work.

What Histories Can Do For History

Treitler's (1989) cautions against confounding biological with historical development/imperative quite effectively speak to the snares to which Westerners from both ethnomusicological and musicological camps have fallen. Yet his very attention to such caution begs the question "to what extent is the experience of time biologically (thus not culturally) based?" Why *do* we organisms of consciousness read into the past the narratives we do, and *name* them as we do (as "nominalists"); or, alternatively, why do we *enact* the particular patterns we do (as "realists")? We know our experience of time is part of both our biology and the rest of the physical universe (time is perceived as slow or fast, as slower or faster by different creatures' metabolism, and indeed *does* "speed" and "slow" within the context of motion (stopping at the speed of light). The spectrum of human consciousness may well include a biological hardwire (or, more accurately, a hard quantum probability) in both the experience and the interpretation of time that Treitler examines²--but Bielawski (1985) reminds us that it is a continuum with a complex layering of such hardwires, encompassing cross-cultural characters such as mystics and shamans, who, no less systematically than rationalists, topographize their *different* relationships to both history and present.³

I look to Bielawski's model as one that has much to offer the quandaries and resolutions surveyed above. His, or one like it--a Western one, as long as "Western" is still the discursive *lingua franca*, yet one in accord with the West's own perennial and deep mystical dimensions as well as its more peculiarly (and superficially) scientific, rationalistic, specialistic ones--may yield the most promise for the West in general, its music and culture historians in particular, both to fully realize its own potential on its own historical terms, and to level the discursive playing field for its non-Western neighbors so that they may do the same.

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Notes

1. This is an interesting reversal of a widespread view (one Quereshi evokes in her footnote 7 [333]) of the West as dominated by visual rather than aural reality, and of non-West as the opposite.
2. See Sansonese (1994: 274, 299) and Goswami (1993) for two hard-scientific non-Western acculturated voices that explain cognizance of time in terms of microbiology and quantum physics.
3. Bielawski's "temporal zones" define his "successive order of time." They run from shortest to longest, so (1) visible light, (2) audible sounds, (3) psychological present, (4) compositions and performances, (5) ecological time, (6) sociological time and shallow history, and (7) full history and tradition. He writes: "The first two zones are not perceived as time but as light or sound, though from the physical point of view they are temporal/frequencies of light waves and acoustic waves. The next four temporal zones are experienced as time. The last zone is conceived only in tradition and history."

These zones don't allude to "altered states" of mind directly, but zones 1, 2, and 3 could contain them. His chart's main contribution is simply its message that more than one experience and representation of time/history can and does exist. It is also a reminder of ethnomusicology's grounding in a *continuum* between hard and soft sciences, and an update of that grounding.

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