

Reflections on the 1963 Symposium

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In the spring of 1963 under the sponsorship of the University of Washington Center for Asian Arts, a short symposium was held for the purpose of discussing and exchanging ideas on the then current state of field work in ethnomusicology. I had only the previous fall been hired as an assistant professor in the music department. My senior colleague and mentor, Dr. Shigeo Kishibe from Tokyo University was already there at the University of Washington as a one-year visiting professor.

I had known Dr. Kishibe for some time. While still a graduate student at UCLA, I had been successful in arranging a visiting professorship for him at UCLA replacing Mantle Hood while Hood was doing research in Java. Kishibe had been very helpful to me as I prepared to embark on my research in Japan. And, when I arrived in Japan, he was an invaluable guide and support. So when I was hired at the University of Washington in the fall of 1962, it was a delightful coincidence that Kishibe was already there as a visiting professor.

It was certainly Kishibe's idea to hold this symposium and fortunately Millard Rogers, then director of the Center for Asian Arts, agreed to sponsor it. The major emphasis of the Center for Asian Arts was of course, Asia.¹ However, what

¹ The original proposal to the Ford Foundation had been for establishing a Center for Japanese Studies. At Ford's suggestion it was enlarged to encompass all of Asia. Ford also made it a condition that the University of Washington create a permanent position for an ethnomusicologist, the position I was subsequently invited to fill.

Kishibe and I proposed was an important symposium for the field of ethnomusicology and considerably broader than the study of music in Asia alone. What we planned was a meeting of several of the established ethnomusicologists in the US at that time to talk about their views of the discipline, primarily focusing on fieldwork.

Together, Kishibe and I worked out a list of who was to be invited, although I no longer have any clear recollection of the details of these discussions. I think that it was largely Kishibe's



Robert Garfias and Shigeo Kishibe

plan and to me it seemed sound. I made many suggestions, but I recall that we agreed completely on the list of invitees and discussants. There was a preponderance of UCLA people, but also the inclusion of important others not connected to UCLA, like Nick England from Columbia University, David McAllester from Wesleyan University, Harry Powers from the University of

Pennsylvania, and Alan Merriam from Northwestern University. Also giving papers were Mantle Hood from UCLA, William P. Malm from the University of Michigan, Kishibe, and myself. In addition, a number of discussants were also invited. These included, Charles Seeger from UCLA, Jose Maceda from the University of the Philippines, Willem Adriaansz then from the University of Illinois, and Max Harrell and David Morton, both from UCLA. In retrospect it seems odd that Bruno Nettl's name is missing from the group. I can only think now that Bruno was at that time only just getting established at Wayne State University, although now clearly he would have been a logical and important addition.

The memory of the symposium is still quite vivid to me and it comes as something of a shock

to realize how long ago this was. However in re-reading the papers and each of the discussions following each paper, it becomes very evident that ethnomusicology has changed considerably. There are very distinct assumptions made about fieldwork. In the larger historical sense, one might think of this group as the second generation of ethnomusicologists. The first generation, E. M. Hornbostel, Carl Stumpf, Jaap Kunst, Curt Sachs, were all trained in very different disciplines; law, art history, physics, mathematics, there being no formal avenue for the study of ethnomusicology at that time. This second generation attending the Seattle symposium was largely—with the notable exception of Alan Merriam, Dave McAllester, and Kishibe—trained specifically in music. Merriam, however, had been a professional musician. Seeger, Hood, Malm, England and I were all initially composers. Powers was an opera singer and musicologist, and Maceda and Adriaansz were trained as concert pianists. Hood, Malm, Merriam and I all had some background in jazz, theirs was in dance bands playing written arrangements, while my experience had been more as an improvising musician. So all in all, there were a lot of practicing musicians in the group and consequently performing music as a step to analysis and documentation was very much an assumed part of the preparation for ethnomusicology. In fact, entrance to the ethnomusicology program at UCLA required a very strict and strong background in Western music to which study in ethnomusicology was an addition. But also one of the radically new elements that set the UCLA program apart was that in the spirit of participant observation, it was expected that learning performance techniques first hand was a vital tool in carrying out our research.

Much of the discussion following the papers hinged on the question of what ethnomusicology is or should be. During this period, and at the symposium, Alan Merriam repeatedly states that to conduct an analytical study of the music of a culture in and of itself was really musicology and that an ethnomusicologist is interested music in the larger cultural context. He was later to make this something of a crusade and it becomes an important point in his book, *The Anthropology of*

Music (1964). This is taken up in discussion with Hood and Powers following Powers' paper. Powers here states quite clearly that he does not consider what he did in India to be ethnomusicology and here Merriam agrees heartily that he doesn't think it was either.

I do remember that it was around this time that Harry (Powers) would often say that I (Robert Garfias) was an ethnomusicologist but that he was a musicologist (Western) studying Indian Music. I recall however, that a few short years later when I read a paper on the process of change in music, Harry came up to me after my presentation and said, "I am an ethnomusicologist. I don't know what you are!" I found this very amusing. Harry's position had evolved evidently. We can only wonder if Alan Merriam's position would have changed at all over the years as well. But because his life was cut tragically short we shall never know.

I have always agreed with John Blacking and Alan Lomax, that it is not possible to remove something from its cultural context. That studying the structure of a music in its context, seeing the sound as a symbol in the culture, is no less anthropology than the study of any other aspect of a culture. In fact, those scholars that Merriam accuses of practicing Western musicology and not ethnomusicology had all each spent years in the culture of their studies, learning the language and the manner in which the music functions in that culture, something that they might not have found necessary had they been behaving as purely Western musicologists. In retrospect, through all the discussions Merriam seems to be insisting that individuals who analyze the structure of any music are by definition not ethnomusicologists.

During the 1960s and 70s, this argument went on to take on some aspects of a turf war with Merriam and Hood taking opposing sides. However, when we look at what most ethnomusicologists do today it would seem that this is no longer an even valid question, even though for some years following its publication, Merriam's book continued to fuel the idea that there might be two approaches to ethnomusicology. Today, I find myself asking, have we indeed taken the "music" out of ethnomusicology? Is an ethnomusicologist some

one who studies the music of a culture but avoids the music? John Blacking who said that he agreed with everything Merriam had said in *The Anthropology of Music*, added that however, he regretted that he “felt there was not enough attention to the musical side, to music as a symbol system.” I fear something has gone quite amiss. It has been made quite clear that the tools of Western musicology are inadequate to study all of the music of the world. I think most Western musicologists have conceded this and have avoided our turf. But it would seem that ethnomusicologists have as well. I strongly believe that the structure of a music is a unique aspect of a culture and is a vitally important tool in understanding the patterns of creation, diffusion and assimilation that occur in any culture and like the structure of language are important elements for study in and of themselves. I do not say that all ethnomusicologists should now turn their attention to the structure of music, but some must and there is much yet that remains to be understood. I also re-affirm that I see it as impossible to undertake a study of the music with understanding as much as possible the cultural context.

I must try to be careful about not taking too god-like a point of view in re-thinking about these proceedings, when only two of its original presenters are still living. However, I remember being struck at the discussion following Merriam’s paper in which he stated that his goal was to seek out the average African society and see how music functioned for the average individual in that culture. To me, it was precisely the musically exceptional and unusual culture that I wanted to study. Nevertheless, I don’t think this makes it more musicology and less anthropology. If one were interested in polyandry or offshore banking, it would be logical to go to a culture where these practices existed.

Contrary to the position taken by Merriam, a number of individuals, and most notably, Charles Seeger, took the position that we should strive to get to a point at which the “ethno” could be removed from ethnomusicology. Musicology should be the study of all music. In the fall of 1963 at the annual meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology held at Wesleyan University, the

SEM board of directors received a message from the American Musicological Society inviting the Society of Ethnomusicology to join with them. We were shocked, surprised, and pleased and discussed the possibility. Charlie Seeger, who was just then past president of SEM, said, “But it is they who should join us!”, emphasizing that we were the broader more all-encompassing discipline. Years later in 1989 and shortly before his death, John Blacking was interviewed by Keith Howard and during the course of his comments says that he believes that soon we might be able to take the ethno out of ethnomusicology and have one musicology enriched by ethnomusicology.

A very different topic, perhaps initiated by a question of Merriam’s, opens a new discussion after Kishibe’s paper. In fact, rather surprisingly, Kishibe cuts short his presentation on T’ang tonal systems to introduce a totally separate topic; he says inspired by a question posed previously by Merriam, “What is the validity of what we study since we cannot know everything or all the possible variants?” Kishibe plays a recording of Japanese art music, a Kiyomoto composition and explains first that even his full understanding of the deeper meaning of the piece is incomplete and that that of his senior colleague, Machida Kasho must have been fuller because he was born in the Meiji era, closer to the period when this composition was created. He followed this by saying that he does not believe that a Westerner can ever fully understand a Japanese composition like this.

This opened a lively discussion. Although I do not think such concerns are much aired any more, I do remember that when I was in Japan in the late 1950s this would often come up. There was a sense of the seventh veil, that as you got closer and closer you would reach a point where as a foreigner you were told that you could not understand something Japanese, just as they, Japanese, could never understand completely something that was western. I would then ask about the Tokyo String Quartet. They certainly seem to understand European music. The usual answer was that those who were so deeply trained in Western music are no longer really Japanese. During the discussion after Kishibe’s paper, Harry

Powers states that he was quite disturbed by Kishibe's statement and that he had met a Japanese composer in Paris who really knew western music. (I think it must have been Toshiro Mayuzumi or perhaps Yoritsune Matsudaira). Kishibe's response was that these people were no longer truly Japanese because of their immersion in western culture.

Aside from the possible issue of national cultural pride that might play a role in the question of how one hears music as different from how another hears it, there remains a question about how thoroughly we can or need to understand the subjective aspects of hearing music. Merriam's rhetorical question is a good one. We cannot grasp it all so what is it we are studying? Just as no two individuals hear the same music the same way, nor does each of us hear music the same way at different times in our lives. Malm said that the object of our study lies in the music itself and that the rest is for anthropologists and psychologists. But certainly how people hear music in the cultural context in which it has been developed should be of interest to us.

The Japanese born pianist Uchida Mitsuko is able to extract profound meaning from the music of Schubert and Beethoven without having lived in those times when the music was composed, but then none of us has. Perhaps as the distance in time increases we are more freely able to interpret the music of times removed from us. I recall that Yehudi Menuhin once said that as a child, he was raised on Beethoven and that is was the bread and butter of all classical musicians, but that now (then in 1973) we had to turn to the musicologists to understand Beethoven because the distance from Beethoven's time had increased so much. But clearly, even our incomplete comprehension of music from a different time or a different culture than our own can still be profound.

McAllester's comment at the end of his paper on how much a debt of thanks we owe to those who have taught us something of their traditions is profound. As the years pass, I am increasingly struck by the depth of the debt we all owe to those from whom we learned. Even knowing that we could not possibly grasp it all nor come close to their own understanding, skill and knowledge they

spent generous hours teaching us a little of what they knew because they wanted to share the tradition with others. I long ago ceased to think of these people as informants but rather as friends and teachers with whom we shared a common goal of shared understanding, however limited that might have been. I am glad that McAllester mentions this and I want to underscore it once again here.

On a number of topics there was considerable discussion of a nature that transcended the immediate focus of any single paper. One of these was the problem of standardization; conservatory teaching instead of the old guru-kula, teacher-to-pupil method and the resulting problem of the gradual loss of improvisation and spontaneity. Hood talks about the inability of the young conservatory trained Javanese musicians to improvise new versions of a composition after having been taught to memorize fixed ones. The ability to improvise would be expected of any professional Javanese musician. He claims that the reason lies in the teaching method and that the teacher is not clear as to the method of improvisation. He also states that the conservatory students are starting the process too late. They go first to primary school and enter the conservatory after that and thus never have the opportunity to grasp the principles of improvisation. In my own research in Burma in the 70s, much the same was happening. The graduates of the new music conservatories after graduation then joined the *pwe* theater bands and then the real apprenticeship began. In the theater they would learn which pieces would go with which actions on stage.

In China, Korea and to some degree even in Japan, the conservatory method has taken over. In Chinese music today very little teaching or learning occurs outside the conservatory system. In Korea today there are no more individuals who improvise kayagum *sanjo*; however, as late as the mid 1960s there were several musicians who still improvised their versions of *sanjo*. Today some modern Korean theorists explain away the disappearance of improvisation by saying that the old improvisational style was a transitional period leading up the perfection of the present day two or three fixed versions, each attributed to the

individual who originally improvised it. Although in Japan it has been a very long time since anything like improvisation was in vogue, there has been a gradual stultification of performance as musicians increasingly rely on notation. Traditional notation has long been in use in Japan, but only as a memory aid. It was never used in actual performance. As Japan became more westernized, traditional musicians were sensitive to the criticism that they were illiterate musicians performing only by rote. Now, for example, koto players almost invariably play from traditional Japanese notation on a little stand in front of them. It might seem that whether a player plays from memory or from written notation is of no consequence. However, the ultimate goal of any performance anywhere is to create a sense of immediacy and spontaneity in that performance even when the music is known and has been heard many times before. Notation is an aid to performance but not necessary beyond the learning stage and in fact hinders spontaneity.

In Turkey, as in Iran, the last great improvisers are gone or play no more.² Standardized conservatory training has quite replaced all. In India, we now have good clear recordings by new singers of the old *thumri* genre, but none seem to match the refined elegance of the old singers like Abdul Karim Khan and Begum Akhtar, in spite of the fact that the teaching methods for Indian music on the surface do not appear to have changed. All over Asia and the Middle East, we have a generation of musicians with excellent technical skills, many conservatory trained, but who no longer have the depth of understanding produced by the older direct teaching method. Daniel Neuman (2002) has said that as the recording techniques for Indian Music have vastly improved, the quality of the new performances do not match the old ones.

During the discussion on improvisation and standardization, Alan Merriam, speaking in defense of the conservatory systems, states that at the Berkeley College of Music, young people are

² At this time of this writing, 2012, the last Turkish master musicians, Necdet Yasar and Niyazi Sayin are still alive but are no longer performing.

being taught jazz in a conservatory environment but that they have not lost improvisation. In retrospect, that was perhaps still true in the 1960s. Ten or 15 years later, there were many young musicians who could no longer improvise even though they played with great technical skill, many who could flawlessly play all the Charlie Parker and Miles Davis Bop standards and even the highly technical Lee Konitz or Lennie Tristano lines. Jazz is not dead and it has evolved, but the ability to improvise new variations on whatever was being played is no longer the bread and butter of young jazz musicians as it was in the 40s and 50s when I was playing jazz. There are still some very important improvisers in jazz, but there are many more who pride themselves on their ability to memorize and play other musicians' recorded improvisations. What would Alan say, I wonder. I doubt however, that he would have argued like some modern Korean musicologists, that old jazz improvisation was only a stage leading up to a more refined "memorized" jazz style. Perhaps all of this movement away from the spontaneous is the result of modern lifestyles becoming further and further removed from the period when the music was first created as well as the easy access to and dependence on recordings.

Throughout the papers and the following discussions, there is often a reference to complexity in music, to complex cultures as opposed to simpler ones, and even the word "civilized" occurs. It is hard to imagine this type of delineation taking place today. Merriam states that he abhors the term "civilized," but understands Powers' use of it. Today the term is rarely if ever used by scholars, even outside ethnomusicology.

I think it was in reference to David McAllester's success in attempting to do both anthropology and music analysis in his Navajo work that someone comments that it was easier for him because of the simplicity of the music he was studying. McAllester responds saying that he was often quite challenged by the complexity of the music. Understanding the context brings out complexities in what might have initially seemed simple. I now regret that the topic was dropped there and not continued.

The topic of simple and complex music did

come up in many of the papers and following discussions but all did not agree on how to describe it. It is clear that in societies where there are specialists who are given the freedom or responsibility to create complex music, complex music will result. During the symposium discussion we seemed to get bogged down with the question of high civilizations and simpler ones, but the principle is simple. Stratified societies with specialized roles as for musicians, develop out of economic flexibility. One individual must catch enough fish for two so that one can devote himself to inventing a better weir.

Later Nick England, in discussing the problems of attempting to document a ritual whose essence would be affected by the presence of outside observers, states that in high or complex cultures, such documentation is easier to carry out because the participants are able to recreate the performance at some level of abstraction free of the original context. But England also says that, while he was able to document the music from these rituals in a kind of rehearsal context, he admits that these recordings were failures in that they did not have the same musical intensity or character that they did when performed *in situ*. I would still hold that being able to study a music that can be abstracted outside of its ritual or ceremonial context is no less anthropological or ethnomusicological than studying one that cannot be abstracted from its context. If it is what happens in the ritual that one wishes to study, then that can only be done in that context, but studying it out of the ritual context is still within the larger context of the culture.

An interesting but uncompleted discussion comes up after England presentation. England plays an example of Bushman music to illustrate his talk. Jose Maceda asks him about the rhythm: was it slightly irregular? England answers, no, it was "straight." Maceda attempts to insist that he hears an irregularity, but that is more or less brushed away as the discussion moves on. I remember however that on another occasion, when Maceda was talking to me about the two beat Titdu pattern of the Maguindanao, he showed how it was slightly yet deliberately staggered; the second beat was longer than the first.

A few years later when Nick England asked me to participate in the panel devoted to the transcription of a particular Hukwe song, I became fascinated by the staggered rhythm pattern that I had not noted at the time of the 1963 conference. I did a mathematical analysis of the rhythm and there was a distinct staggering and the time between beat 5 and 6 were an average of a 20th of a second longer than between all the other beats. Maceda had spotted at the time and the rest of us, including England, had missed it.

One other important point must be made about much of the work carried out in ethnomusicology during this period. Most if not all of these individuals were doing research on musics that had previously not been studied systematically. In most cases, the research was undertaken with almost no previous literature to draw from and usually with few recordings to help prepare one for the research. Also, they were all working on the music as music in depth in areas where very little previous knowledge existed. This was already at that time a long step forward from the first generation of ethnomusicologists' emphasis on music scales. Objective measuring of intervals in the lab proved to be of little use in understanding how the music was structured. The myriad ways that humans had found to make music interesting and challenging for themselves was appearing to be limitless and without universals and few common practices. Each of this second generation of ethnomusicologists was working alone in *terra incognita*.

Given that the 1963 symposium represents the overwhelmingly largest proportion of practicing ethnomusicologists in the US at that time, the fact that most were working specifically on music structures, underlines the de facto nature of ethnomusicology at that time. No one at the symposium stated that anthropology was not important to our study, although Merriam frequently implies that without anthropology we are not really practicing ethnomusicology. Parenthetically he boasts that he could prepare and train anyone in anthropology in six months. Malm and others say that one could not prepare a person in music in such a short time.

During the discussions a rough coalescence

had just began to grow around the idea that some musics might require anthropology for successful study and others might not. At this point Seeger—I can seem him throwing up his hands—argues that we cannot allow this kind of scholarly anarchy to take over the field, one kind of ethnomusicology for one music and a different one for another. He proceeds to suggest, and on this I felt there was general consensus, that all ethnomusicologists need training in music and anthropology. Then Seeger prophesizes that perhaps in 10 years we will somewhere have a program in ethnomusicology that combines anthropology, linguistics and music. Malm asks if this isn't already going on at UCLA.

Hood then responds by saying that because of intra departmental politics this might prove to be very difficult to accomplish at UCLA. I must confess that even today, I am not sure why he said that. From the time I entered the graduate program at UCLA, Mantle Hood always expressed delight and some pride in telling others that I had a degree in anthropology, and yet he would not permit me nor any of the other

graduates to take a course in anthropology nor permit us even to attend a lecture there if he knew of it. In our graduate seminars we would regularly have linguists and even physicists but to my best knowledge never an anthropologist.

Ironically, given Seeger's prediction, it was four or five years later and not ten that I restructured the graduate program in ethnomusicology at the University of Washington to include components, in anthropology, linguistics and musicology in addition to ethnomusicology. I fear this has over the years faded from the UW program and I do not know if it was ever attempted again anywhere else, but then of course, the field has changed greatly and we are for better or worse, no longer so much concerned about how much music or anthropology an ethnomusicologist needs to know.

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