WHAT SHOULD MUSICOLOGY BE?

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THE RECENT BOOK *Musicology*, written by Harrison, Palisca, and Hood, contains a valuable summary of the development and state of musical scholarship in the United States. The authors acquaint us with our tradition, make known our achievements, expose our failings, and come to grips with important problems of method and purpose. It has been apparent for some time that musicology would not easily take root in this country. The discipline has been expanding, but hardly flourishing, making its way, but winning few friends. At the 8th Congress of the International Musicological Society, which met at Columbia University in 1961, our success in the eyes of the world made it all too clear that we lacked recognition at home.

With the objectivity naturally possessed by an outsider, Harrison examines our dilemma with great discernment. He is appalled at our inability to secure publication both for monographs and for scholarly editions, and points to our resultant failure to communicate with one another and with any larger public. He also finds that we have erred in neglecting the less pretentious varieties of music such as jazz and folk music, and indeed in neglecting the history of American music in general. Most of all have we overlooked the larger social connections of music. We must broaden our concern, he counsels, and turn from style, taken as an autonomous phenomenon, to man and culture. Musicology will then, we may hopefully expect, be more meaningful to both the world of scholarship at large and the general public.

As Harrison realizes, this view is quite consonant with that of the ethnomusicologist, and it is not at all surprising to find it in the foreground of Mantle Hood's discussion. The history of this field tends to emphasize the same duality of approach, the Germans concentrating upon specifically musical description and the Americans more upon culture and the role of music in society. But style and structure must not only be supplemented

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by study of the culture, Hood maintains, they need also to be accompanied by the actual performance of whatever music we undertake to investigate. Certainly this will broaden our conception of stylistic analysis, which has too often been restricted to a description of scalar systems and of those features of music that were most amenable to notation.

Again in agreement with Harrison's view, Alan Merriam sees in the wider social and cultural significance of music the key that will release musicology from its isolation and make it meaningful to the general community of scholars. His book *The Anthropology of Music,* which is unfortunately full of jargon such as "culture history" and "music sound" that paradoxically makes it unclear and somewhat offensive to outsiders, is otherwise an interesting attempt to explore all the varied anthropological aspects of musicology. The ideal he holds up, however, is once more a combination of the social with the specifically musical approach.

The same desire to encompass the two major traditions in ethnomusicology also underlies Bruno Nettl's conception of the field, and in his book *Theory and Method in Ethnomusicology,* he proceeds systematically through the various phases of research, from the collection and analysis of data to the final questions of social meaning. To an ingenious organizational scheme he adds a fine grasp of each division of the subject. The first chapter presents an excellent summary of the history and changing definitions of ethnomusicology; and the pedagogical value of the work is increased by an appended series of exercises that illustrate every stage of the discussion.

It is from an attitude in some sense "ethnomusicological", then, that new perspectives for musicology as a whole would seem to arise. Even the apparently conventional introductory manual by Lincoln Spiess, entitled *Historical Musicology,* gives evidence of the same influence, particularly in short added sections that touch, however inadequately, on the linguistic problems of Chinese, Japanese, and Slavic musicology. This is essentially a bibliographic work, but it again contains useful lists of problems for the student which may well suggest different kinds of research that would not otherwise occur to him.

More generally, the divergent attitudes we find within ethnomusicology—those of the anthropologist and the musician, of the cultural investigator and the stylistic one—have their counterpart within musicology in the distinction between the general

and the specifically musical historian, between the cultural approach and the positivist or analytic one. But ethnomusicology does more than merely sharpen our understanding of this duality: it makes possible a world view of music in both its stylistic constitution and its human significance, and thus helps us to come to any particular investigation, such as that of European art music, not only with the added insight produced by the comparative study of any phenomenon, but with the widest possible conception of what music is as a whole. The ways in which this will affect the work of the historian of Western music are subtle, but far-reaching. His evaluation and understanding of every manifestation he studies will be changed. But there will be concrete benefits as well as intangible ones, when matters of the diffusion of musical instruments are involved, for example, or of the impact of distant cultural areas, or of the interaction of folk music and cultivated music, of vocal and instrumental styles, of notation and performance practice.

Our task, then, is to broaden our vision, and especially, to pursue specific problems that are informed with larger issues. We must study music in the context of the whole of society and culture and of all mankind. In contrast, however, Palisca argues for a more specific conception of musicology, and maintains that acoustics, physiology, and psychology should be excluded; our concern is really with music as a humanistic manifestation, and not with physics or the psychological laboratory. The natural sciences are in any event too difficult and technical to be learned by the musicologist; they call for special laboratories and equipment; and it is a fact, as Palisca points out, that our musicological journals simply do not include articles on such supposed branches of the discipline. Thus the original American acceptance of the grandiose German plan for musicology, which can be seen in Glen Haydon's *Introduction to Musicology*, has given way to increasing specialization and a dangerous centrifugal tendency. The restricted range of most of our scholarly studies sharply contradicts the ideal of a cultural and world perspective, and it is to just such a perspective that physical and biological science will be found most relevant.

Other suggestions have been made from time to time, with the intention of bettering the fate of American musicology. Of these the most popular recipe for success is that musicologists undertake to prove their value by showing performers how to

realize musical embellishments properly. Such a humble role would of course neatly support the frequent criticism that our musicology is too positivistic, too occupied with the collection of data and the determination of detail. On the other hand, more concern with musical significance, with social factors, with basic conceptions of music, and with larger patterns of stylistic change would certainly secure our subject more respect and attention. There would be help to performers in this too, for a deeper understanding of each composition and its place in history would seem at least as valuable as a knowledge of correct ornamentation.

But any course that may be advocated by theoretical considerations must depend for its implementation upon capable and talented students. Yet we cannot expect to attract undergraduates to a field neither they nor their teachers have any knowledge of, especially if its values and achievements are in fact not worth their attention. If musicology cannot enhance musical experience and understanding, it can hardly call for notice either from musicians or from scholars, but only from those of routine intelligence and little imagination, and we should not be surprised if students of superior mentality seem to wander into the field more by accident than design, or in default of any other pursuit more appropriate for them. We also must not overlook the obvious fact that musicology is an unusually demanding discipline for an American, for education in language and foreign cultures is pitifully small in this country, and even when a student possesses a high degree of musicality he often must spend a discouraging amount of time and energy in mastery of adjunct studies in language and general history.

Our major complaint must then be addressed, as it so often turns out, to earlier education, and even more correctly, to the whole temper and attitude of the society in which this education has its place. As a pragmatic culture, we are willing heirs to the English outlook that makes music an ornament of life, somewhat like food and wine, and we have traditionally regarded it, in a still more negative light, as a distraction and a thief of time. When we concern ourselves with history at all, it is with political and economic history—with values that seem important because they make sense to us in the present. In particular, the average American is peculiarly unable to grasp music as a cultural-historical expression in the way in which

he understands painting and literature. As a result, while these latter arts take on a certain measure of significance and dignity, musical works are essentially gross stimuli without specific stylistic quality. In the response to music, historical awareness is absent, and the listener takes the indulgence of his feelings as the sole source of meaning. Musical understanding similarly consists of a circumscribed tracing-out of repetition or sonata-form, or of harmonic and polyphonic structure, all under the head of "appreciation" or "analysis". Even the college curriculum in music is made up almost exclusively of courses in "music literature" and "theory". "Musicianship" is accompanied by "ear-training," and followed by elementary harmony, intermediate harmony, advanced harmony, chromatic harmony, and keyboard harmony, and for those with strength to continue, by elementary counterpoint, advanced counterpoint, double counterpoint, free counterpoint, orchestration, form, and so on. It is as though the undergraduate student in French or German, for example, were to devote his academic career solely to language mechanics, taking spelling as a freshman, elementary grammar and dictation as a sophomore, and then intermediate grammar, advanced grammar, and composition as an upper classman. But a non-humanistic attitude is not far removed from an anti-humanistic one, and the "liberal arts" music student will naturally find no fault with the juke-box popularization of Mozart or the whistled subway versions of Beethoven's late quartets. Indeed the desecration of musical works is often the product of good will and a democratic philosophy, although a mistaken notion of the accessibility of art provides the true basis.

We can make natural science part of musicology or exclude it. We can undertake interpretive studies or confine ourselves to the cataloguing of facts. We can produce more and more editions of music and even secure a wider influence through the medium of newspapers and record companies, or radio and television. Whatever course we adopt will be of relatively little effect on the ultimate place of musicology in the United States; it will not in itself provide respect or jobs or an audience for musicologists, nor will it make possible the publication and sale of serious books on music. Even the enlightened revision of the curricula of primary and secondary schools and of colleges, and the encouragement of actual playing and singing will not make us experience music as a significant expression of culture in the

face of public attitudes and educational ideals that are deaf or hostile to musical values. The underlying social determinants of the place of music and musicology resist change with a discouraging stubbornness; we can guess only that music and musicology have a common fate, and that a simple increase in the amount of musical activity will be of no avail if it is not accompanied by a deepened understanding and a new respect. Our wisest course, for reasons of strategy as well as the advancement of knowledge, is to keep our discipline as wide and diversified as possible. But what musicology should be is less important than what American culture should be if musicology is to exist.

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