

Toward a Committed Musicology

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Musicology can no longer be taught as it was only thirty years ago; at least it should not be. In the first place, the domain of the discipline, until now relatively limited, has been enlarged, thanks principally to the development of musical psychology, anthropology, and sociology. And, even if the purely historical point of view continues to predominate, the contemporary period tends more and more to be included in courses of study. In many European universities this change has taken place under the influence of student participation and has let in a breath of fresh air, thus narrowing the gap between abstract knowledge and concrete reality. (Is not the "aleatory" aspect of early music better understood thanks to the practice of some of today's young musicians?)

The emergence of ethnomusicology represents an even greater enlargement, but in this case the evolution has been so slow that it seems discouraging. Universities generally assign, at most, secondary status to this discipline, which continues to lean more toward ethnology than toward musicology, not only for methodological reasons but also because of the very attitude of musicologists who are trained in a historical approach. It seems senseless that today a university can train musicologists who have practically no knowledge of non-Western music. Moreover, no successful attempt has been made at congresses and symposia to bring musicology and ethnomusicology closer together, and it is not without surprise that I learn from recent forecasts about musicology in the year 2000, that no fundamental changes in this outlook are anticipated. Traditional musicology has everything to gain from a deeper association with this young discipline, whose method is less entrenched but more dynamic. Does musicology itself not also recognize oral tradition? Making frequent allusion to popular trends which exercise an influence over learned culture, musicology makes of them a sort of *deus ex machina* which avoids other explanations and furnishes hypotheses which, in the end, cannot be verified.

In the second place, musicology is reaching a point where it might well rethink its methodology. Certainly, this method has proven its worth for bibliographies or catalogues, deciphering notational systems, or editing texts. It has only had to follow the models offered by history and philology. Can it be said, then, that musicology uses a method suitable only for the specific subject matter of music in order to arrive at the meaning of the art? Has it succeeded in establishing a system of symbols which shows us what it is that makes music different from the other modes of artistic or literary expression? The analytic methods used until now have been greatly over-extended. They were too narrowly applicable, i.e., to a repertoire of the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Here, too, the development of contemporary music and the study of non-European music have made the inadequacy and overly

scholastic character of these methods obvious. Today, another distinct influence emerges from linguistics and structuralism. One must, of course, not consider this last to be a panacea and thereby reject all prior achievements. However, music can be considered a language, and it is fitting to study it as such, with the means which are proper to it. For more than twenty years, disciplines such as social anthropology, sociology, and psychology have shown a vitality and methodological imagination which might induce musicologists to reexamine their customary approaches to their subject. One would like to see them develop a more active avant-garde which, without renouncing what is good, would jar the field out of its apathy and suggest directional priorities. Do the hesitations and digressions which the young field of musical sociology has experienced not also arise from the uncertain position of a humanistic science which has not adequately defined its objectives? The imbalance which exists between the accumulation of documents and editions and the classification of sources on the one hand, and significant ideas on the other, continues to increase. Thus the discipline still suffers from an ideological bankruptcy.

There remains to be discussed briefly the organization of research in musicology, as well as the role of institutions which could aid it. Some progress has been made at the informational level, RILM being the best example. There is also the recently established International Center for Works in Progress, which one hopes will come to play a dynamic role. Another desideratum is greater effectiveness and better coordination in the area of university theses, at every level. Too often these seem to be assigned to students only in order to permit them to demonstrate their research ability. If solely academic, this exercise is done in vain. Students must realize very early that their efforts are of use to musicology. This is why, in suggesting research themes which sometimes depend on the stringing-together or collecting of data, their professors incur a serious responsibility. How many months are wasted in writing monographs destined to gather dust on university shelves as soon as they are finished, without any of their results having been published! Between rigid structure and individualism, there are many avenues which should permit musicologists the world over to work toward the same end. One could, for instance, follow the example of the scientists who initiated the International Geophysical Year and organize a certain number of seminars on the same subject in different countries during the course of a year. Without attempting to challenge the autonomy of the universities, this process would stimulate a spirit of competition on the part of teachers and students; at the same time it could lead to comparative studies and publications.

For advanced researchers there are the traditional congresses of the International Musicological Society. Before World War II these were of considerable interest. But as the number of participants has grown, the effectiveness of these congresses has diminished, until they now resemble industrial fairs more than they do scientific meetings. It should be possible to

change their format to one of symposia, full-day study groups, or seminars. This idea has proven its worth in the United States and in Eastern European countries, in Wegberg as well as in Paris (C.N.R.S.): a limited subject, a small number of participants from different countries, and free discussions, from which the essential points are later published. At their next congress, the members of the International Musicological Society will have a chance to say whether they favor a greater development of activities in this direction.

It is not by chance that these thoughts—very short, considering the seriousness of the subject, and a bit pessimistic—are addressed to young American musicologists, who represent, in overwhelming proportions, the future of musicology. To the prodigious expansion which this discipline has experienced in their country one hopes to see added a more concentrated striving toward well-defined objectives, toward an interdisciplinary enlargement of methods, and toward a more committed mode of thought.

(Translated from the French by Léonic Rosenstiel)