

Musicology and the Composer

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In preparing for this article, I thought it would be good to start with definitions of musicology. To my surprise, my desk dictionary did not list the word, and so I read the definition in *Grove's Dictionary*, which I found magnificently vague: "**MUSICOLOGY.** This term has occurred more and more frequently of recent years in English books, periodicals and articles. It is used to express the scientific study of music in the widest sense. In France and America the word has been in current use for some considerable time . . ." etc., etc.¹ Under "Method" *Grove's* says, "It is still sometimes questioned whether the term musicology really corresponds to the idea it is meant to express or whether it has merely come into use for the convenience of having a single word for 'musical science.'"² As Busoni used to say, "One knows what one means, doesn't one?"

But in my search to find out what I was writing about, I did come across Adler's table from his *Methode der Musikgeschichte*, and I saw that it included the general teaching of music; the teaching of harmony and counterpoint; the teaching of composition; the teaching of orchestration; methods of teaching singing and instrumental playing; the laws of the compositions of each epoch, as they are conceived and taught by the theorists of each period and as they appear in the practice of the arts. The "systematic" section mentions the tabulation of the chief laws applicable to the various branches of music and their investigation and justification in harmony, rhythm, and melody. Contributory sciences include general history, chronology, diplomacy, literature and languages, biography, acoustics, physiology, psychology, grammar, metrics, aesthetics, etc.

After due deliberation I concluded that I have been a musicologist all my life but did not know it. However, it also seems that with such an all-inclusive table of subjects and sub-subjects, hardly anyone can escape being a musicologist in one field or another. So, if I am asked what effect musicology has had on me as a composer, I find that, in self-defense and while groping for an answer, I reverse the question and ask, "How has composition affected musicology?" But after coming up for air, I find that I am somewhat prejudiced!

My first contacts with musicology were when I heard lectures by Adolf Sandberger, read his *Life and Works of Peter Cornelius*, and used some of his Bavarian *Denkmäler*. So far, well and good. But Sandberger fancied himself a composer, and when I heard one of his orchestral works, *Overture to a Drama*, in Munich around 1913, I was astonished that anybody could make an orchestra sound as horrible as he did. I then realized that only a very learned man could know exactly what to leave out in order to make the end result hopelessly dreary and dismal.

But to be fair, I must say that in some of his greener fields of research, Sandberger probably did have an influence on me. He was Curator of the Music Department of the State Library in Munich, and I used that library a lot; I also used his *Denkmäler* quite a bit, and other *Denkmäler* as well. I could not escape his Lassus research and was almost moved to tears when I saw that he had written a study of Chabrier's *Gwendoline*, a study which I have avoided reading to this very day.

But now back to Adler's list. Having participated in the General Teaching of Music since I was fifteen years old, I suppose that this subject did have an influence on me as a composer. I have been involved ever since in such various activities as the teaching of harmony, counterpoint, composition, and orchestration, and methods of teaching singing and instrumental playing; and I am sure that as a composer I must have been influenced by this whole business.

Having been drafted from time to time to teach history of music, survey, and theory courses, and having been a practitioner in the arts, I imagine again that these activities probably had a considerable influence on me as a composer. As part of the job I had to investigate and justify many interesting laws of harmony, rhythm, and melody, although I am afraid I was not very systematic about it (I probably realized that if I became too systematic I would not do much composing). Here again I was influenced by musicology and kept certain areas at arm's length, so that they would not infringe on the marvelous world of composition. I must admit, however, that the teaching of compositional systems and of orchestration had quite an influence on me as a composer, because it taught me to differentiate between that which is teachable and that which is not, the latter being, perhaps, much the more important to the composer.

Under the other headings I have listed above, no one who has been called upon to teach general history can escape without getting some vague knowledge of it, and chronology is very handy if you want to put things in the right order. The latter field, I am sure, influenced my composing, because I have long since given up the idea of beginning at the very beginning of anything and carrying it through to the very end.

Diplomacy is, of course, what one needs in order to get along with any of one's colleagues in any of the aforementioned fields, and with an administration. I like libraries and have often used them but offer, as an important innovation that will help composers and perhaps others, a new cataloguing system. I suggest one that will bring the user in the shortest possible time from card catalogue to book, score, or record. Arrows and maps might be useful.

My research in acoustics has helped me very much as a composer because I am of the old-fashioned school that likes a little sound with its music, and so physiology too has always interested me. My studies indicate that unless the general level of rock and roll is reduced, we will have a generation with a severely damaged hearing capacity. This affects me as a composer, for what

is the use of writing certain kinds of music, if people have become so deaf that they cannot hear them?

Psychology, another of the contributing sciences in Adler's systematic section, has definitely been of use to me as a composer, but only in the applied psychology department. Without it, how could one communicate, endure, and be endured by one's students and colleagues over the years?

The direct influence of any of these fields has hit me hardest when it has come from a composer turned musicologist, that is to say, a composer writing about any one of these subjects. I think of Berlioz, Richard Wagner, Robert Schumann, Liszt, Busoni, Weingartner, the Strauss-Hofmannsthal letters, Abbé Vogler, Zarlino, Debussy, Carl Maria von Weber, Reichardt, and many others. But I have also been influenced by noncomposing musicologists, or by musicologists who have no practical knowledge of music at all. I think here of Thayer's *Beethoven*, a magnificent biography; Jacques Barzun's *Berlioz*; *Scriabin*, by Faubion Bower, a pianist turned writer; Schopenhauer's attempts to describe music; and St. Foix's Mozart biography.

Some musicological efforts have had no influence on me at all. I think of the musicologists' musicologists, who will come up with some special studies, such as "The History of the Violin Bow from Horse to Hindemith," or "The Significance of the Note G in the Works of Johann Sebastian Bach," or perhaps "Musical Figures and Other Figures that Figured in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde*." These, I think, are more for the specialist.

I hope that this tribute to an emerging field, already populated with many activists who are making their scholarship sound, will be accepted for what it is: words without song.

NOTES

¹ *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, 5th ed., ed. Eric Blom, vol. 5 (London: St. Martin's Press, 1954), pp. 1020–21.

² *Ibid.*, p. 1021.