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ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

DISCUSSION AND DEFINITION OF THE FIELD

Alan P. Merriam

In a recent article, "The New American Archaeology," Joseph R. Caldwell has pointed out the shift in interests of American archaeology which, he feels, are bringing new kinds of understanding to the field (Caldwell, 1959). Thus he speaks of the earlier archaeology which was preoccupied with "the description of archaeological sites and . . . of prehistoric cultures. . . .The emphasis was on archaeological data as things in themselves rather than on the values offered by different ways of looking at them. Moreover, it was considered, in practice, as important to excavate a site meticulously and to record every scrap of evidence which might conceivably bear on any future problem as it was to have a reason for excavating the site in the first place" (p. 303). However, "the new archaeology in America is tending to be more concerned with culture process and less concerned with the descriptive content of prehistoric cultures. . . .Where formerly we were concerned with the identification of things and of cultures . . . we have added an interest in the identification of culture processes and situations" (p. 304).

It may seem strange that a paper which proposes to discuss and define the field of ethnomusicology should begin with a quotation concerning American archaeology, and yet the analogy between the old and the new archaeology and the old and the new comparative musicology or ethnomusicology presents such striking parallels that it is indeed apropos. More than this, what has happened in archaeology, and is happening in ethnomusicology, is but a reflection of what happens in almost every field of scientific endeavor as the discipline grows, defines its terms more sharply, and begins, eventually, to develop away from the more specific to the broader and more general. What has been quoted for archaeology, then, could almost be re-quoted for ethnomusicology, and this is evident in the increased concern in our field for an understanding of methods, history, and especially what we should study and why.

Our awareness of the history of ethnomusicology as a discipline has shown us a changing emphasis on what is considered to be our "proper" field of study, and, it is clear that like archaeology, we have been moving steadily toward a consideration of broader and broader problems, not so much of definition of music styles as of an understanding of music as a human phenomenon. In this we have perhaps not yet come so far as archaeology, but the movement of our interests is inevitably in this direction. Thus we come to a point at which it seems wise to discuss and attempt to define the field of our concern once again, and in broader terms than has characterized most such discussion in the past.

Without going into the details of the history of ethnomusicology, which has been the subject of study elsewhere (Nettl, 1956; Kunst, 1955), it seems fair to say that earlier studies were marked by an emphasis upon the analysis of melodic and pitch phenomena, including the study of scales, intervals and tonal systems; such investigations dealt also with theories of the origin of music which were thought to be observable in the music of contemporary so-called "primitive" peoples. The emphasis on the study of the structure of music is, of course, perfectly understandable; to bring order out of a mass of data, taxonomy must be established. I should like to add here that this does not imply that early workers in the field ignored problems other

than structure; a glance at Hornbostel's bibliography, for example, (Anon, 1954), makes clear the wide range of his thinking over many problems of music other than the purely structural. Nor is it suggested that our taxonomies are complete; while we have developed to the point of constructing music areas based on musical characteristics (Nettl, 1954; Merriam, 1959), our knowledge of the specific ways in which the elements of music are put together remains far from complete. But the fact remains that the major emphasis in the work of earlier students of ethnomusicology was oriented toward analysis of the structure of the particular musics they studied.

With the slow emergence of what Nettl has called the American school (Nettl, 1956:28), the emphasis upon music structure as such was joined by a new emphasis upon the relationship of music to culture, and this was pointed up by the quick acceptance of Kunst's recommendation in 1955 (Kunst, 1955: 9) that the old discipline of comparative musicology be rechristened "ethnomusicology," thus stressing the fact that music does not exist by and of itself but is a part of the totality of human behavior.

What has happened in the field of ethnomusicology is an increasing awareness of the fact that there is more to the study of music than the description and analysis of its form, and here again reference may be made to the quotations concerning archaeology which opened this discussion. While this broader view has always been the case to a certain degree, ethnomusicology is today being more and more led by cultural anthropology, or ethnology, a relationship stressed by Hornbostel, among others, as early as 1905 (Hornbostel, 1905:86). What Bascom has said for folklore applies equally to music, and we can substitute one word for the other in reading his remark that "(Music) is studied in anthropology because it is a part of culture. It is a part of man's learned traditions and customs, a part of his social heritage. It can be analyzed in the same way as other customs and traditions, in terms of form and function, or of interrelations with other aspects of culture. It presents the same problems of growth and change, and is subject to the same processes of diffusion, invention, acceptance or rejection, and integration. It can be used, like other aspects of culture, for studies of these processes or those of acculturation, patterning, the relation between culture and the environment, or between culture and personality" (Bascom, 1953:286).

As the earlier formulations of the field stressed units of structural analysis, definitions of its scope tended to define it as geographically and formally descriptive in character, and this point of view has persisted, in varying degree, to the present. Thus Gilman, in 1909, stressed the idea that the study of exotic music comprised primitive and Oriental forms (1909), while Bingham added the music of the Dalmatian peasants (1914). And this point of view has carried through into contemporary definitions which stress the study of all music except that in the Western tradition: thus, the "primary aim [of ethnomusicology is] the comparative study of all the characteristics, normal or otherwise, of non-European [music]" (Schneider, 1957:1); or "the science that deals with the music of peoples outside of Western civilization" (Nettl, 1956:1). But if, indeed, the field of ethnomusicology has developed toward an understanding of the fact that the study of music does not consist solely in analysis of form, then definitions which stress a type of music to be studied can no longer serve the field.

That this has become more and more clearly recognized is indicated by a number of articles in this Journal which stress properly the broader view toward the study of music. Willard Rhodes indicated this, although still tending to speak of the kinds of music which properly fall into the field including that of "the Near East, the Far East, Indonesia, Africa, North

American Indians and European folk music," as well as "popular music and dance" (Rhodes, 1956:3-4). Later, Kolinski objected to the definition of ethnomusicology as "the science of non-European music," and noted admirably that "it is not so much the difference in the geographical areas under analysis as the difference in the general approach which distinguishes ethnomusicology from ordinary musicology" (Kolinski, 1957:1-2), although he did not go on to define the field. Mantle Hood took his definition from the Journal of the American Musicology Society, with the insertion of the prefix "ethno" in suggesting that "[Ethno] musicology is a field of knowledge, having as its object the investigation of the art of music as a physical, psychological, aesthetic, and cultural phenomenon. The [ethno] musicologist is a research scholar, and he aims primarily at knowledge about music" (Hood, 1957:2). There can be little quarrel with such a definition, save perhaps that it is borrowed from a sister organization as Hood points out. And finally, Chase has indicated that "The present emphasis . . . is on the musical study of contemporary man, to whatever society he may belong, whether primitive or complex, Eastern or Western" (Chase, 1958:7).

It is considerations such as these, then, which lead me to a proposal of a definition of ethnomusicology, not as the study of extra-European music, but as "the study of music in culture." In other words I believe that music can be studied not only from the standpoint of musicians and humanists, but from that of social scientists as well, and that, further, it is at the moment from the field of cultural anthropology that our primary stimulation is coming for the study of music as a universal aspect of man's activities. To define ethnomusicology in this way is in no way to deny its primary connections with the aesthetic and the humanistic, but it is to say that our basic understanding of the music of any people depends upon our understanding of that people's culture, the place music plays in it, and the way in which its role is played. It is through this sort of understanding that we can approach on a firm foundation our further understanding of what structure is and how music achieves whatever aesthetic ends are sought.

This can perhaps be further clarified by attempting to point out the kind of work an ethnomusicologist does, both in the laboratory and in the field situation. It seems to me that any project in ethnomusicology can be conceived to fall into three major parts of which some may be stressed over others: 1) the actual gathering of materials in the field; 2) transcription and analysis; 3) the application of results obtained to relevant problems. I should like to discuss, principally, the first and third of these.

Let us assume for the moment that the extremely important questions of the formulation of the problem to be studied, hypotheses concerning it, theoretical orientation, study of historic material available, and the like, have been solved, and that the researcher is in the field and ready to pursue his study; there are, first, two directions his research can take.

Thus, his study can be either extensive or intensive, depending upon the results desired. In the extensive study, the student is interested in sampling a broad variety of cultures which will lead to generalization about a widely distributed socio-music area; this is primarily a taxonomic approach which leads eventually to the establishment of music areas. On the other hand, in the intensive study, the student restricts himself to a single locale and focuses his attention upon the study in depth of the music he finds there, not only as a musical, but also a social, cultural, psychological, and aesthetic phenomenon. Here fall at least six areas of inquiry to which he will turn his attention.

The first of these concerns the musical material culture, or more specifically phrased, the study of musical instruments and other implements by

means of which the music system is carried out. This involves, of course, the various kinds of instruments, ordered in terms of a recognized taxonomy based on division into idiophones, membranophones, aerophones, and chordophones, as well as the study of principles of construction, materials employed, methods and techniques of performance, musical ranges, tones produced, and theoretical scales. In addition there are included here the important questions of the presence or absence of special treatment of musical instruments, problems of ownership, and the economics of instrument construction.

A second category comprises the study of song texts, which may be approached from a number of directions. Obviously, we deal here with text-melody relationships, but the texts themselves can reveal much about the culture of which they are a part. Thus we may study the text itself in terms of literary behavior, linguistic usage, and the presence or absence of permissiveness in regard to language behavior in song. On the other hand, study may be directed toward what the text reflects, that is, the prevailing "ethos" of the culture on the level of a kind of national character generalization, or toward the value systems, in terms both of ideal and real behavior, as expressed in song. Finally, texts reveal history of the group, underlying motivations which are often not otherwise expressed, and deep-seated values and convictions.

The third element of study comprises the categories of music, envisaged by the investigator for convenience, but much more important, by the people themselves as various separable types of songs. It is in this connection, of course, and by this means, that the investigator orders his recording program, arranged to record an adequate sample of all types of music, both in controlled and in actual performance situations.

The role and status of the musician in the society of which he is a part forms the fourth point of interest for the ethnomusicologist. Here he must deal with the problem of professionalism and its ramifications, as well as the problems of the level from which the musician is drawn, the factors which shape his becoming a musician, his attitudes toward the rest of the society and their attitudes toward him, and the ownership of music, whether by the musician or by others. It may be suggested that this is the point at which tests of musical ability enter; it remains to devise such a test which is truly cross-cultural in character, but once established, it should give us a great deal of information about the abilities of musicians and the cultural expectations of his abilities. Are all persons in the society considered to be potentially equal in ability, or are some recognized as superior to others either in latent or manifest abilities, and how does this correlate with a truly cross-cultural test of musical ability?

A fifth area of study concerns the functions of music in relation to other aspects of culture. Here is included the synchronic study of music as a kind of human behavior related to other behaviors including the religious, the dramatic, relationships to dance, social control, enculturation and education, economics, political structure, and other aspects. Thus the investigator is forced to move through the total culture in search of music relationships, and in a very real sense, he finds that music reflects the culture of which it is a part, in much the same way as has been pointed out by Boas in his folklore studies (Boas, 1909-10).

Finally, we study music as a creative cultural activity, including such problems as the sources of musical materials, the standards of excellence in performance, the psychology of music, and the processes of creation. Is music conceived to be an affective activity or is it functional, and what is its relationship to other activities in the fields of graphic and plastic arts,

oral literature, dance and drama, all of which in our culture we consider to be aesthetic manifestations? Here, too, falls the problem of cultural variation as expressed in individual renditions of songs, which leads to possibilities of understanding internal change; further bearing on this question is obtained from the study of acceptance and rejection of innovations in music in terms of what the culture will allow when presented new elements from outside.

These, then, are some of the kinds of things an ethnomusicologist looks for in the field phase of his study; that there are others is obvious, but in general outline, the intensive investigation leads the student into all aspects of culture in search of the deep-seated attitudes and beliefs about music, as well as its functions and its modus operandi.

The second, or laboratory, phase of ethnomusicological investigation need not concern us here; in this phase the investigator turns to the transcription and structural analysis of the materials he has recorded in the field, and this is, of course, basic in establishing the taxonomy essential to his study.

The third part of his research concerns the application of results obtained to relevant problems, and here a number of questions arise. If we accept the outline of field study given above, then it is clear that ethnomusicology is in no way restricted to the study of particular geographic areas, or supposed kinds of societies, but rather, is applicable to any body of music in any society. If our field can be defined as "the study of music in culture," then it is as applicable to the study of jazz or art music forms in our own society as it is to a non-literate group. It is here that I am in perfect accord with Kolinski when he points out that it is not geographical areas which are important to us, but rather that it is a general approach which we seek; viewed in these terms, ethnomusicology is not a category in which is studied certain kinds of music, but rather a method of study which searches for certain goals in certain ways and which is applicable to any of the varied musical systems of the world.

Let us illustrate this further by using as an example a paper by Herskovits entitled "Freudian Mechanisms in Primitive Negro Psychology" (Herskovits, 1934). In this paper, Herskovits proposes "to indicate certain aspects of the psychology of primitive Negro cultural behavior which may be better understood when some of the broader simpler concepts of psychoanalysis are applied to their interpretation" (p. 76). Taking the concepts of repression and compensation, he points out a number of examples of these mechanisms in Negro cultures, and emphasizes that "there exists both a recognition of the nature of the neuroses as induced by repression, and of the therapeutic value of bringing a repressed thought into the open" (p. 77). His vehicle for the discussion rests partly upon an analysis of song and dance. Thus, he notes:

In Dahomey, the institution of the avogan, the dance in the marketplace, is . . . recognized by the natives as affording release for suppressed emotions. At stated periods the people of each of the quarters of the city of Abomey have in turn their opportunity to stage such a dance. Crowds come to see the display and to watch the dancing, but most of all, to listen to the songs and to laugh at the ridicule to which are held those who have offended members of the quarter giving the dance. Names are ordinarily not mentioned, for then fighting may result. In any event, the African relishes innuendo and circumlocution too well to be satisfied with bald, direct statement. However, everyone who is present already knows to whom reference is being made. Thus the song might be:

Woman, thy soul is misshapen.
In haste was it made, in haste.
So fleshless a face speaks, telling
Thy soul was formed without care.
The Ancestral clay for thy making
Was moulded in haste, in haste.
A thing of no beauty art thou,
Thy face unsuited to be a face,
Thy feet unsuited for feet. (p. 77-8)

Such release is also given to co-wives who sing songs against each other.

The *lobi singi* of the Negroes of the coastal region of Dutch Guiana, especially of Paramaribo, and a very similar phenomenon, is discussed at some length by Herskovits in the same article, as is the institution of *fiofio* in the same area, and he notes, "What has been shown is that among the . . . Negroes, both in Africa and the New World, patterned types of psychic purges are recognized as valid; what is important for a psychoanalytic approach to the understanding of these social data is the fact that, in every case, the native explanation of the particular type of behaviour, though ordinarily couched in terms of the supernatural, can be restated in terms of the unconscious" (p. 82-3).

How, then, shall we classify this article, of which a brief resume has been given here? Surely, it is psychological in that it deals with Freudian mechanisms; it is anthropological since it is concerned with cultural behavior; but just as surely, it is also ethnomusicological in that it emphasizes the role of music in psychological behavior within cultures. What is important to us is not the fact that it was written by a scholar who would never call himself an ethnomusicologist, but that it represents one facet of the approach to the study of music, used in this case simply as an example, which clearly falls within the scope of that which we would call "ethnomusicological."

We return, then, to the point that ethnomusicology does not deal with geographic areas of research or with certain supposed "types" of people, but that it is clearly a method, an approach, to the study of music in culture. If this be true, however, it is equally clear that method does not operate in a vacuum, and that there must always be a consideration not only of problem, but of the theoretical framework along the lines of which an approach to the problem will be carried out. It has been noted, rightly, that "the relation between research design and theoretical terms of reference in shaping ethnographic studies" is of the utmost importance, and that "techniques are essentially no more than ways of implementing the testing of hypotheses, and that there is no hypothesis which does not arise from a body of theory and concept" (Herskovits, 1954:3,5). It is perhaps at this point that we are least clear in the field of ethnomusicology; our work has proceeded without much clearcut definition of what we are trying to achieve or how we are to achieve it. It is for this reason that I have defined ethnomusicology as the "study of music in culture," and that I believe our objectives are to a considerable extent coincident with those of cultural anthropology. Our interests, I believe, should be directed toward the broader understanding of music, not simply as a structural form, not in terms of particular areas or peoples, and not as an isolate, but as a creative human phenomenon which functions as part of culture. In thus defining the field I have tried to make it as clear as I can that I by no means exclude the purely historic, the purely structural, the purely aesthetic from equal consideration with the ethnological. The point is that the clear understanding of the historic, structural and

aesthetic is intimately connected with an understanding of the cultural background in which these aspects operate.

There is one further implication involved in this view, and this concerns the problem of whether the ethnomusicologist must, then, spend time in the field gathering his materials at first hand. I believe that this is necessary if the studies are to be truly ethnomusicological in their import. The analysis of music for the sake of its structure is a necessary and important step in the processing of ethnomusicological materials gathered in the field, but it is only the beginning. The day of the "armchair ethnomusicologist" who sits in the laboratory and analyzes the music that others have recorded—already passed to a considerable extent in anthropology—is fast passing in our discipline. I do not deny the contribution of such a specialist in the past, nor in the future, but his role is becoming progressively smaller, and rightly so, for method and theory are inseparable in the gathering of data, and the descriptive phase of our study in which we treat simply structural facts is giving way before the broader interpretations. We are beginning to realize that all facts are not equally important, that facts in themselves are primarily understandable in context, and that the formation of the research design must be followed through by a single investigator who gathers his materials in the field, analyzes them himself, and applies the results to the problems he sought to investigate. While the study of music as a structural form and as an historic phenomenon is of high, and basic importance, in my own view it holds this position primarily as it leads to the study of the broader questions of music in culture.

NOTES

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