

Ethnomusicological Bridges within and between Six Empires, 1912-14

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Abstract: *This paper reviews bridge-building activities carried out under such headings as musical ethnography, musical folklore, comparative musicology, social and cultural anthropology in the years immediately preceding the outbreak of the First World War. The aim is to highlight ways of defining and approaching problems that were transmitted to the scholars of subsequent generations who identified themselves as ethnomusicologists. While historians of ethnomusicology are rightly concerned with development of the professional standards we now expect our own and our students' work to meet, we must also take note of the impressive diversity of the projects undertaken in so many parts of the world by people who were building and crossing bridges in many directions and connecting research to the other areas of life.*

Key words: *history of ethnomusicology, World War One, European empires, music cognition.*

Half a century has passed since I was privileged to become Bruno Nettl's student in the late summer of 1964, beginning what remains one of the most enriching and sustaining relationships of my life. Bruno transmitted to me his interest in the history of ethnomusicology as it relates to other histories, and as a teacher and writer I have tried to convince my students and readers that musical research requires a continual engagement with the work of earlier generations. This is no small task in the academic economy of the United States, where scholars can make themselves more marketable by adopting whatever fashionable stance is thought to have consigned the outlooks of our predecessors to a chronicle of outmoded paradigms. I like to think that European scholars of music are generally less inclined than my compatriots to ignore their own history.

The verbal noun in the theme of ESEM 30, *crossing*, implies others that are commonly used with bridges: *designing, financing, building, controlling the traffic on, maintaining, repairing, and replacing*, all of which are also relevant to the bridges needed for transgenerational transmission. Adelaida Reyes opened the initial session with a well-formulated triad of judgments concerning proposals for bridges: are they feasible? necessary? desirable?¹ These bridge metaphors give us a lot to work with in thinking about how we relate to the early history, or "pre-history," of ethnomusicology, which is a history of individuals who succeeded in bridging multiple interests and responsibilities, and a history of how bridges were or were not built, crossed or not crossed, maintained or not, and on occasion burned. The metaphors can direct our attention to decisions and actions of individuals in their dealings with institutions and organizations as well as with other individuals. Important bridges are built in stages, through collaborative effort, which is also crucial if they are to be maintained.

In reflecting on intergenerational transmission among scholars, we could easily push the bridge metaphors too hard, suggestive though they may be. Reviewing projects undertaken by some of our predecessors in the years surrounding the outbreak of the First World War, we find issues and challenges that are still very much with us.² Problems are transmitted across generations along with whatever means of addressing them may have been developed, and the problems often prove more enduring than the measures taken to address them. One of these is the need to build and maintain bridges among different areas of cultural production, including but not limited to those centered on music-making and musical scholarship. Each major change in the naming practices of music scholars creates a need for new bridges.

Scholars working within one set of norms can easily fail to recognize how their work could benefit from techniques developed in a different branch of scholarship. Constantin Brăiloiu, addressing the relationship between musicology and ethnomusicology at the 1958 congress of the International Musicological Society, emphasized this point in arguing that, if musicologists would learn to work with oral sources and ethnomusicologists to work with written sources, both communities would be able to pursue their stated aims with greater competence: “the bridges built at last and the fortresses destroyed, it would be as well for each person to look after his own garden” (Brăiloiu 1984 [1958], 100).³ More than half a century later, musical practices are too often classified as “written” or “unwritten,” even at a time when writing takes so many forms, as Ignazio Macchiarella noted (via Blacking) at ESEM 30.

Not the least of Brăiloiu’s many services to twentieth-century musical scholarship was his breadth of vision in imagining more productive exchanges among music historians, musical folklorists, music theorists, comparative musicologists, and ethnomusicologists. An obligation to continually engage that set of issues, and to insist on facing realities ignored by one or another guild of scholars, was transmitted by Brăiloiu and others of his and earlier generations to future practitioners of what in 1958 was beginning to be called ethnomusicology. Comparative musicologists were among the first music scholars to recognize the need for research on perception and cognition, topics that continue to be neglected in the training of too many music theorists, music historians, and ethnomusicologists.

Most of the kinds of work we engage in as ethnomusicologists were actively pursued before August 1914, in the six European empires that would soon be at war: Ottoman, Russian, Austro-Hungarian, German, French, and British. Of the disciplines that would converge in the 1950s to form ethnomusicology, comparative musicology was centered in the phonogram archives of two imperial capitals, Vienna and Berlin. Musical ethnography, by that name, was pursued most vigorously in the Russian empire--largely by scholars who were in some sense outsiders: Ukrainians, Jews, the former revolutionary Yevgeniya Linyova (1853-1919), who had translated writings of Marx and Engels into Russian before making early recordings of polyphonic singing.⁴ The study of musical folklore was cultivated in all six empires, often by scholars who were not altogether loyal to their rulers.⁵ While research on the music of peasants was commonly associated with programs of musical nationalism, several leading scholars of musical folklore (including Béla Bartók, Komitas Vardapet, and Klyment Kvitka) did not confine their research to their own “nation” or language group. The need for continual attention to changing relationships

among fields of study and activity, and among the populations involved in those studies and activities, is the main lesson I would like to see transmitted to us from the experience of the scholars mentioned in this short essay. Mark Slobin (1982, 6) has written of Kvitka's "decided bias toward the study of the interrelatedness of ethnic folk musics," making him a prophet of the view Bruno Nettl (in his Blacking Memorial Lecture) describes as more widely held at a later stage in the development of ethnomusicology. It is a view that may have come more easily to scholars engaged in musical ethnography than to those who identified their field as comparative musicology or musical folklore: an ethnographer can hardly avoid encountering signs of interrelatedness.

Reviewing what some of the proto-ethnomusicologists were doing a century ago, we can identify bridges of several types that remain significant in our field, including those that researchers cross as they involve themselves in other areas of music such as composition, performance, education, criticism, music history, music theory, and musical aesthetics. The Armenian composer-singer-scholar Komitas Vardapet (1869-1935) succeeded brilliantly in bridging his interests in research, composition, and performance (until 1915, when he was hospitalized for the rest of his life). Two Central European scholars who completed their Habilitation in the years preceding the war—Otakar Zich (in Prague, 1911) and Adolf Chybiński (in Lviv, 1912)—devoted substantial energies to musical folklore while also working on major topics in aesthetics and music history. In the Russian empire, prominent researchers affiliated with the Musical-Ethnographic Commission, established in 1901 as an affiliate of the Imperial Society of Lovers of Natural History, Anthropology, and Ethnography, were also active in founding and directing "people's conservatories" (*narodniye konservatorii*); I am thinking here of the important theorist Boleslav Yavorsky (1877-1942) as well as of Linyova, who in 1913 completed a decade of fieldwork in the Caucasus, Ukraine, Serbia, and Slovakia, supported by the Musical-Ethnographic Commission.

Musical ethnography can be carried out as one part of a bridge-building project by members of a minority population that finds itself treated by the majority as *other*. The Baron Horace Gintzburg Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Expedition sponsored three consecutive summers of fieldwork in the Pale of Settlement, starting with the districts of Volhynia and Podolia in July, 1912. Of the three initial participants, S. Ansky (1863-1920), Joel Engel (1868-1927), and Solomon Yudovin, Ansky had been a founder of the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Commission two decades earlier. Engel subscribed to the basic aim of the Musical-Ethnographic Commission, which in the words of the historian James Loeffler (2010, 70) pursued "a dual mission of 'scientific research' and public education"—a duality neatly conveyed by the term *ethnographic concert*. Engel had attempted to preserve the "national character" (*narodnyi skald*) of the Jewish melodies he arranged for such concerts (69-70) before the ethnographic expedition made him keenly aware of how far removed he was from the world of those whose music he recorded. Loeffler, in his book *The Most Musical Nation: Jews and Culture in the Late Russian Empire*, summarizes the agenda shared by Ansky and Engel with several collaborators: "Jewish music offered a unifying bridge that spanned the otherwise divisive political, religious, and social fissures of early twentieth-century Russian Jewry. . . . By the time of World War I, this musical bridge had begun to crack under the weight of external pressures and the renewed political and aesthetic debates inside the Jewish world" (2010, 214).

The term “ethnographic concert” may serve to remind us that the work of musical folklorists and ethnographers was often motivated by desires to collect materials for use in education and public performances. The need for critical reflection on how the results of research are to be made available, and on how research techniques are shaped by intended uses, is another concern transmitted to subsequent generations by the proto-ethnomusicologists active in the years before the First World War. Linyova argued forcefully that musical ethnography could not be limited to collection, as it required “great attention to the social conditions under which the folk-song takes birth, to the psychological moment at which it arises, and to the way in which it continues to live in the memory of following generations” (Lineff 1912, 187): an ambitious agenda requiring collaborative efforts across several generations. Indispensable guidance with respect to research method was eventually provided by the questionnaire included in Kvitka’s dissertation of 1924, *Professional’ni narodni spivtsi i muzykanty na Ukrayni: prohrama dlya doslidu yikh diyal’nosti ta pobutu* (Professional folk singers and instrumentalists in Ukraine: A program for the study of their activity and everyday life).

Turning from musical ethnography to music cognition: In Britain, Charles S. Myers (1873-1946) thought it desirable for researchers interested in human mental capacities to carry equipment and techniques of physiological and psychological testing to sites of anthropological fieldwork. In 1912 his chapter on “Music” appeared in the fourth volume of the *Reports of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to Torres Straits*, which Myers had joined in 1898; his chapter on “Hearing” had been published in the second volume (1901), and in 1913 he published an essay on “The beginnings of music,” as a follow-up to his earlier overview of “The ethnological study of music” (1907). Myers and three of his colleagues on the Torres Straits expedition are the subjects of Ben Shephard’s *Headhunters: The Search for a Science of the Mind* (2014). Myers continued that search for the rest of his life, as a founding member of the British Psychological Society, and as the person who more than anyone else established experimental psychology as an academic discipline at Cambridge. In 1913 he set up a laboratory in which Ludwig Wittgenstein as well as Myers himself carried out experiments on perception of rhythm.⁶ During the war Myers became prominent for his work with soldiers suffering from what was called “shell shock,” a term that some have attributed to Myers (Shephard 2014, 153). Myers was more a man who took new initiatives than one whose projects were shaped by existing organizations, as those of the participants in the Jewish Historical-Ethnographic Expedition had been.

If the bridge between musical research and studies of cognition, which Myers was one of the first to construct and cross, fell into disrepair for a time, it is now experiencing substantial traffic in both directions, which we can expect to intensify. Cognitive ethnomusicology should not be thought of as a specialized field of research whose findings are relevant mainly to other workers in that field. Despite his encounters with Wittgenstein, Myers probably never imagined crossing a bridge from his studies of cognition to a concern with the more philosophical topic of *musical thinking*, as developed most notably by Czech and Slovak scholars like Otakar Hostinský and his student Zich and Zich’s student Jozef Kresánek. On the whole, collectors of folk music were slow to recognize that folk musicians think musically; Bartók, for instance, regarded peasant music-making as spontaneous, natural, unconstrained by thought. Conceptions of human musicality that

deny one or another population any capacity for musical thinking are no longer acceptable in the second decade of the twenty-first century, though we have much to learn about ways of creating, storing, transmitting, and altering musical knowledge.

One of the many reasons I am grateful to have been engaged in ethnomusicology for half a century is that we have now reached a moment when young scholars can undertake thoroughly researched histories of our field's past accomplishments—such as Brice Gérard's dissertation on French ethnomusicology from 1929 to 1961 (Gérard 2015) and his analyses of field notes by Schaeffner and Rouget (Gérard 2009 and 2011). Such histories will rightly detail the development of the professional standards we now expect our own and our students' work to meet. I see a potentially productive tension between desires to endow our field with a coherent history of professional development and attention to the impressive diversity of the projects undertaken in so many parts of the world by people who were building and crossing bridges in many directions -- connecting research centered on written or on oral sources, to be sure, but also connecting research to the other areas of our life.

Endnotes

¹"Not feasible" was the verdict pronounced by the German-born scholar and librarian Oscar Sonneck on the various proposals associated with Dvořák's widely discussed article of 1895, which had urged US composers to seek inspiration in music of "all the races that are commingled in this great country" (Dvořák 1895, 433). Speaking on April 11, 1913, to the Schola Cantorum of New York City, Sonneck argued that the musical systems of American Indians and the songs of American Negroes were "ethnomusically too different from our inherited European system" to allow for any meaningful interchange in musical life (Sonneck 1916, 135, 140-41).

²I began thinking about what people engaged in some of the projects that eventually converged to become ethnomusicology were doing in these years while reading Florian Illies's book *1913: Das Sommer des Jahrhunderts* (2012).

³"Mais les ponts enfin jetés et les forteresses démantelées, il sera bon que chacun, avant comme après, prenne soin de son jardin" (Brăiloiu 1958, 29).

⁴Whereas Sonneck required only the adverb *ethnomusically* (see endnote 1), one consequence of the engagement of Russian, Ukrainian, and Polish scholars with musical ethnography appears to have been a need for such terms as *ethno-musicology* and *ethnomusicologist* as well as the adjective *ethno-musical* (see Stęszewski 1992 and Lukaniuk 2010). Only with the work of André Schaeffner does the term *ethnologie musicale* become important in French musical scholarship. As precedents Schaeffner (1956, 26) mentioned Amintore Galli's *Etnografia musicale* (Milan, 1898), and Julien Tiersot's *Notes d'ethnographie musicale* (1905), which reprints articles he published in *Le Ménestrel* on performances he experienced at the Exposition universelle of 1900.

⁵Srdan Atanasovski's paper at ESEM 30 is an excellent case study of a common motivation for collection and diffusion of folksongs.

⁶Wittgenstein's involvement with Myers's laboratory is discussed in McGuinness 1988, 125-28.

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