

Conclusion: Transmission and Transformation of Music Sound, Knowledge, Practice, and Identity across Generations

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Authors of the articles in this volume talk about a diversity of themes and issues as related to its main topic of transmission and transformation of music sound, knowledge, practice, and identity across generations. The case studies are regionally and culturally centered on China, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Slovakia, with the exception of the first two chapters that cross multiple geographic and cultural areas from around the globe, while the writers come from these same first four places, in addition to Holland and the US.

The authors tend to be particularly interested in a historical and political context of music transmission and transformation on the one hand, and the role of individuals in this same regard on the other. Some of the articles address the topic of intergenerational transmission as it intersects with intercultural and cross-geographic transmission – in other words, they talk about crossing of cultural bridges at the intersection of time and place (Nettl, Blum, Nowak, Poděbradský, Dahlig-Turek, Mačko-Gieszcz). Furthermore, several of them reveal how transmission processes can function as modes of resistance (Kouwenhoven, Lin, and Rees, Poděbradský, and Mačko-Gieszcz). Finally, all of the authors exhibit a nuanced concern with the need for multidimensional cultural perspective that takes into account social complexity and contradiction. In this concluding chapter, I identify the main themes and concerns of the texts in this publication, and talk about the significance of particular scholarly contributions on this matter.

The authors of the first two articles, Bruno Nettl, and Stephen Blum, address the history of ethnomusicological study of music, and in this way emphasize the transmission and transformation of various disciplinary approaches through time. Nettl discusses in this respect the transformation of the discipline, as it passed through three different historical stages that he characterizes with the following metaphors: “center,” “islands,” and “bridges.” Nettl observes in this manner the transformation of ethnomusicological discipline from the one preoccupied with cultural difference, to the one that is unearthing similarities and connections between cultures. Through the method of storytelling about several individuals and their life and scholarly trajectories, Nettl also advocates for the bridging of differences and looking beyond the binary oppositions between social groups, various music disciplines, scientific and applied approaches, emic and etic perspectives, between particulars and universals, culture and individual, and the fixed notions of West and non-West, art and folk, and composition and improvisation. While Nettl is on the one hand primarily concerned with the change of ethnomusicology through time and its transformation from “islands” to “bridges,” Blum, on the other, advocates for “a continual engagement with the work of earlier generations,” and argues on this point that “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.” Following this premise, Blum identifies three “bridge-building” disciplinary activities: music ethnography, music cognition, and music folklore, and illuminates multiple cross-cultural and cross-

disciplinary scholarly efforts of several music researchers from the beginning of the 20th century.

Institutional and state-supported versus non-institutional, and Western versus local and traditional forms and types of transmission are analyzed and compared by the authors of the articles about Chinese musicians (Frank Kouwenhoven, Lin Chen and Helen Rees), and Romani musicians in Slovakia (Nuska). With reference to the former, Kouwenhoven, Lin, and Rees describe several case studies of individual musicians existing within and without Chinese music institutions, and place them in the context of historical, political, and economic changes in China, and the Westernization and modernization of Chinese society. Authors argue that local and traditional repertory, aesthetics, playing techniques, and methods of transmission were marginalized within the Chinese educational music institutions in the second half of the 20th century at the expense of the adoption of Western methods and approaches to music and music transmission. At the same time, they scrutinize the counter-currents that exist in this regard, ranging from individual resistances and revivalist trends to current institutional reforms. Moreover, they reveal how continuing and revived traditionalist and grassroots approaches are often invigorated by new cultural forms, ideas and sensibilities.

In the chapter about Romani music transmission in Slovakia, Peter Nuska uses a Western institutional model of music transmission as a backdrop for his analysis of indigenous Romani methods of music transmission that are, as Nuska argues, crucial for the understanding of Romani music style and aesthetics. Moreover, Nuska identifies the material and economic basis of Romani music and their methods of music transmission, which in his view stems from the aim of Romani musicians to earn money and maximize their profits.

The next two articles by Tomasz Nowak and Oldřich Poděbradský both deal with borderline individual musicians and their role in the transmission and transformation of music and identity. Poděbradský focuses on the musician Eduard Hones from the Šumava region of the southeastern part of the Czech Republic. In it, he discusses how local Šumava music tradition underwent multiple historical, political, and cultural changes that affected the area and its culture during the 20th century and up until today. In addition, Poděbradský discusses not only musical transmission, but also the continuation and transformation of borderland Šumava identity through time, and its existence in geographical, social, cultural, and musical in-betweenness.

In his case-study of Bartek Obročta, a 19th century musician from the Polish borderland region of Podhale, Nowak analyses an intellectual change in the perception of this individual musician, who himself served as a bridge between different times and places. In Nowak's account, perception of Obročta's role and image by mostly Polish intellectuals and researchers changed in time from underappreciation to mythologization. On this intellectual and ideological journey, it also oscillated between contrasting perspectives on Obročta as a conservative versus an innovative musician, and on his repertory as homogeneous versus heterogeneous. Nowak's study itself offers a further step in this direction, which aims toward demythologization of Obročta on the one hand and provides a more complex and multidimensional perspective of this historical music figure on the other.

In the last two chapters, Ewa Dahlig-Turek and Kaja Maćko-Gieszczyńska write about two kinds of recent music transmission and transformation processes in Poland, which

result in the reconstruction and reimagination of past village music instruments and practices. Both of them are concerned with a “multidimensional” approach and perspective and therefore present their case studies of particular cultural phenomena as complex social networks that in their music transmission efforts establish social bridges across time, space, and culture. In her study of Polish knee-fiddles, Dahlig-Turek outlines the “multidimensional bridging” of two different projects that aimed toward a reconstruction of a forgotten traditional instrument and its repertory and playing techniques. Maćko-Gieszc examines Polish “countryside” singing workshops in urban settings, as they generate real and imagined intergenerational, cross-cultural (rural-urban, cross-class), and interpersonal connections. Moreover, she delineates different types of meanings and motivations behind a diverse variety of “countryside” singing workshops that span from more ideological and political to more pragmatic ones.

The authors in this volume bring together many intriguing ideas and approaches to the study of transmission and transformation of music sound, knowledge, practice, and identity across generations. Their common strength is to provide detailed and introspective insights into complex and sometimes contradictory processes of music transmission, and too often question preestablished notions about these processes. The editors of this volume are certain this will be a valuable contribution to the field of ethnomusicological study of music transmission.