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GLOBAL MUSICOLOGY

Abstract: How do we think globally as musicologists? Recent attempts to write global histories of music raise various issues about how we should relate as scholars in a global community, and questions whether as scholars we truly understand the nature of music given the new a global perspective. Thinking globally is a key challenge. There is a strong possibility that we may fail, but taking up the challenge is like to spur our discipline forward in unexpected ways.

Key words: global musicology, *New Sound International Journal of Music*, ‘periphery vision’, glimpses of alterity, difference-in-relation

As *New Sound International Journal of Music* celebrates its silver jubilee, I’d like to reflect on its mission over the last twenty-five years: NSIJM is a journal located in Serbia with an international vision founded on musicological collaboration and exchange. The journal aspires to be both local and global – or ‘glocal’ – but its locality is markedly decentered, particularised in Serbia, giving voice to a region often marginalized in mainstream musicology. From this location, its international scope is twofold: first, it seeks to make its locality heard in the global polyphony of musicology; and second, it aims to make connections and forge collaborations with other places across the globe. Because of the unusual – some might even say ‘limited’ – *situ*-ation, NSIJM offers a model of what a global musicology might be in the 21st century. Indeed, its local ‘limits’ may be its most valued global asset. I hope this will become clear as I reflect upon the need for a global musicology.

That the world is now global is obvious; how we should be global is less clear. Recently, I’ve been reflecting on the notion of a global musicology. When

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I was asked to contribute to the 50th issue of this journal, I had just taken over the reins of the International Musicological Society (IMS) as its President for the next five years. In a sense, the Society is the dialectical image of NSIJM. Whereas the journal is local with a global vision, the IMS is global with a local vision. Whereas the 90 year history of the IMS starts from the center and embraces the periphery, the 25 year history of NSIJM starts from the periphery to address the center. We meet somewhere in the middle of our dialectical mirroring, in the relationship between the global and the local; and it is precisely this *relationship* that is the issue for a global musicology.

This is not a purely academic issue since as a journal and a society we are both institutions. We are not just an arena for the study of *global musicology*; we are a living manifestation of it. We represent its members, its networks, its resources, its history in the making. Like NSIJM, the mission of IMS is international collaboration. Its history is entangled in the questions posed by musicology across the world. As a society, we should embody a *global musicology* both in the sense that we represent a counterpoint of histories and a diversity of music and disciplines. As such, we express both the glorious ideals of a global musicology and the reality of all the methodological and political problems that such a vision entails.

What are these ideals?

1. A global musicology is inclusive, embracing the musicology of every tribe, tongue and nation in all its multi-faceted brilliance across the globe.

2. A global musicology is methodological indiscriminate. It aspires to be an open space where all musicological approaches and topics belong.

3. A global musicology requires a society. It needs to be collaborative, facilitating a network of scholars connected by mutual interests.

But we all know that this is not how the world works. The world has been (and, sadly, still is) predominately blind and deaf to these all-inclusive ideals. We cannot just believe in these abstractions as if they are real. If we embody a global musicology in some way, then we are entangled in its concrete problems and the history of its failures – problems that have to be critiqued, worked through and work out, with solutions that do not simply paralyse us with fear but lead to an abundance of generative ideas.

But how do we do this? In short, by looking at each other and seeing how we live out our ‘glocal’ visions from different perspectives. So when I look at NSIJM, I see potential solutions to problems we face in nurturing a global musicology.

There are two problems I want to highlight. The first one is methodological.

Five years ago, Reinhardt Strohm, with the support of the International Balzan Foundation, initiated a project that is relevant to this discussion –

Towards a Global History of Music. The project started with a basic problem. It was premised on a divide between historical musicology and ethnomusicology. To put it bluntly, historical musicology, in its preoccupation with European music, does not attend to the world: its history is geographically circumscribed. Ethnomusicology, on the other hand, in tending to the ethnography of the world has neglected history: its global coverage lacks historical depth. Of course, this binary opposition is a cardboard description of a situation that is more nuanced and peppered with admirable exceptions. Nonetheless, it outlines a reality that has rendered the study of music ineffective, spawning exclusive methodologies and approaches that are caught up in ideological and political assumptions and unconscious biases.

In other words, musicology is broken. If a global musicology aims to be methodologically indiscriminate, then it will house the brokenness of musicology, a problem that points to major epistemological and ontological inadequacies behind its methods. These inadequacies are not just evident between the incongruence of historical musicology and ethnomusicology, but are also evident in music theory and analysis, the psychology of music, sound studies ... and so on. Let me illuminate the problem by looking askance at music theory today. Music theory should be responsible for all music, and yet, in its obsession with technique, it has not asked the ontological questions necessary to determine what music is. Music theory fails as music theory because it defines music as that which its techniques are suited, and so misses out most music in the world. It has no basis – no ontology – for the study of music. But is this not the same problem for most forms of musicology? Have we asked the basic ontological question: *what is music?* Let me be provocative: can it be the case that musicology does not know what music is? Or, at least, we need to ask whether it limits what music is because what it defines as music is determined by its tools?

The divisions within musicology mostly derive from the luxury of being at the centre: we luxuriate in schisms because there is plenty of musicology to spoil and divide, and then export. But the irony of such an abundance is that there more you divide the more narrow the definition of music becomes. On the other hand, when you are on the margins, there isn't such a luxury for musicology to play with. However, if I may borrow biblical phrase, there is a 'poverty of spirit' that results in a blessing: having less means including more in your definition of what musicology – and what music – is. You are forced to draw on all the resources of the region. One result of this 'limitation' is a journal that is methodologically indiscriminate. If you browse through the issues of NSIJM over the last twenty-five years you will see a full spectrum of disciplines covering a vast range of music. There is no divide between ethnomusicology and historical musicology. All who reflect upon music is included, whether the issue

is aesthetic, archival, historical, practical, theoretical, iconographic, ethnographic, compositional... etc. What I particularly admire about the name of the journal is that 'musicology' is not included in the title. The journal is not about disciplinary boundaries. Instead it names to objects of research – music and sounds. As a result, what music is is not defined by the discipline. I believe that it is often the case that one can see better from the margins: a 'periphery vision' as it were, catches glimpses of alterity, estranges the status quo, and so recalibrates or redefines musicology. NSIJM is beacon of such a vision.

So the first problem is 'What is music?'. The second problem is similar: 'What is world?'

This question is one of representation. Or, rather, of its impossibility. Picture the globe. How do you represent the world? You can't. Because the only legitimate centre of our globe is at its core which is both inaccessible and uninhabitable. No one is at the centre. We all live on a curved surface where there is no still-point from which we can be position-less or claim to have some kind of equidistant neutrality. How do you formulate a musicology that is unrepresentable? Each position on the globe gives a different viewpoint, a different story, a different standard, different interests, and different canons. And how many positions are there in the world? An infinite number. Having no position is equivalent to having infinite positions. So not only is there no position from which to grasp the totality, the totality itself is ungraspable in its infinity.

The world of musicology is not only unrepresentable by its sheer size and diversity, it is also unrepresentable because of globalisation itself. A global musicology is a history that is constantly on the move, a history of encounters and entanglements, of hybridity and transculturality. How can we fix that which is fluid? If I were Kant, I would say that a global musicology is both mathematically sublime and dynamically sublime! It is a project that is overwhelming in terms of size and force; there is too much volume and too much change. This is why my favourite word in Strohm's title for his project *Towards a Global History of Music* is 'towards'. Because he knows that he is never going to arrive at one. And this is perhaps the word that should preface any attempt at a global musicology. It will always be work in progress, always incomplete. Global musicology is an impossible task.

And yet, we have to pursue this impossibly asymptotic vision. We are caught in a dilemma: we cannot represent the world and yet we have to represent the world because the world is constantly being represented: it is a contested space that we must engage in or else it will be represented for us. Today, we face a world unable to cope with the world and its global history – a reality, perhaps, that makes our seemingly niche enterprise timely and urgent.

NSIJM offers a potential strategy to tackle the question ‘what is world?’. If there is no position from which to even answer this question, then the only answer is that we need to be in relation. We need to drop the model of the academic as the lone ranger, and adopt a collective model founded on what I would call a ‘difference-in-relation’. This can only happen if a society of people from across the globe gather together for the purpose of looking to the interest of its other members. And this ‘positionless’ task can only be accomplished if different positions connect. But there is something special about positions that are on the margins: a position of difference encourages connections not so much with the centre as with the ‘others’ on the periphery. If you browse through the pages of NSIJM you will see a network that connects with Scandinavia (issue 25) or Brazil (issue 17) or Turkey or South Africa (issue 27). And I just picked these out at random. There are many such relationships being forged. It is not that these network will become a new centre, rather these relationships strengthen a process of decentering, to create a bigger world that is not defined by the ‘middle’.

In conclusion – and here is a shocking thought – academia is really about love. I know that this sounds banal and sentimental, yet, this is the language we use to describe ourselves. Why do we have colleges? – because we want to be collegial. Why do we call colleagues fellows? – because we want to be in fellowship. Why is IMS a society? – because we are committed to each other. Why is NSIJM a journal dedicated to the music and scholarship of its particular location with an international vision to collaborate? – because it believes in friendship: its borders do not provide an occasion to claim centrality or represent universality, but an occasion to go beyond borders, and begin a network that is both positioned and without position. It is not the love of music, but the love of the scholar as *Other* that might just begin to provide a glimpse into the possible representation of a global musicology. If we can model a difference-in-relation – then we might be able to move away from the abstraction of our ideals, and live out in concrete ways such a global vision. As I reflect on NSIJM, I see precisely this vision being lived out over the next twenty-five years!

Summary

Musicology is global. Or, at least, it should be, given that there are musicologists around the globe. But in practice, musicology is structured around dominant centres and is methodologically divided. This paper explores what a global musicology might look like and how we might facilitate a process of change.