

WORLD MUSIC OR REGIONALITY? A FUNDAMENTAL QUESTION FOR MUSIC HISTORIOGRAPHY

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Abstract: The term “world music” is still relatively new. It came into use around the end of the twentieth century and denotes a new musical genre, one which links European-American pop music to folk and non-European music cultures. It can be seen in a larger context as a phenomenon of postmodernism in that the challenge to the strict laws and boundaries of modernism allowed for a connection between regionality and global meaning to be established. Music in the German-speaking world had previously been strictly divided into the categories of “entertainment music” (*U-Musik*) and “serious music” (*E-Musik*), the latter functioning as art-religion in the framework of modernism and thus adhering to its principles. Once these principles of modernism became more uncertain, this rigorous divide began to dissolve. For example, the “serious music” broadcast consisting of classical music, previously a staple of public radio, gradually disappeared as an institution from radio programming. A colourful mixture of various low-key, popular music was combined with shorter classical pieces, so that the phenomenon known as “crossover”, a familiar term in popular music since the middle of the twentieth century, then spread to the realm of classical music. This situation differs fundamentally from the circumstances that once dominated the public consciousness from the nineteenth century well into the twentieth century and that indeed remain influential in certain parts of the population to this day. Historical-critical musicology must adapt to this transformed state of consciousness. Doing so will allow for a number of promising perspectives to unfold.

Keywords: music historiography; world music; *U-Musik*; *E-Musik*; systematic approaches.

The term *world music* is still relatively new. It came into use around the end of the twentieth century and denotes a new musical genre, one that links European-American pop music to folk and non-European music cultures. In a larger context, it can be seen as a phenomenon of postmodernism – that postmodernism’s challenge to the strict laws and boundaries of modernism allowing for a connection between regionality and global meaning to be established. Music, in the German-speaking world, had previously been strictly divided into the categories of *entertainment music* (*U-Musik*), and *serious music* (*E-Musik*), the latter functioning as art-religion in the framework of modernism, thus adhering to its principles. Once these principles of modernism became more uncertain, this rigorous division began to dissolve. For example, the *serious music* broadcast consisting of classical music, previously a staple of public radio, as an institution has gradually disappeared from radio programming. A colourful mixture of various low-key, popular music forms was combined with shorter

classical pieces, so that the phenomenon known as *crossover*, a term familiar in popular music since the middle of the twentieth century, spread to the realm of classical music. This situation differs fundamentally from the circumstances that, from the nineteenth century well into the twentieth century, dominated the public perception and that indeed remains influential in certain parts of the population to this day.

World music finds its terminological equivalent in world literature (Naumann, 2004, 494-496), which in writing indicates the particular class of art that *E-Musik* claims to embody.¹ When Johann Wolfgang von Goethe coined the term, it was not in the quantitative sense, describing the actual geographic reach of the work, but rather in the qualitative sense – in terms of its intellectual significance for all of humanity. Ever since the beginnings of the romantic perception of music, this concept of universality was contained in to an emphatic definition of music, exemplified in particular by the romantic Beethoven image. This definition was connected with the idea of a progressive bourgeoisie, which was seen as intellectually and morally superior to the aristocracy and other parts of the population. It led all the way to an ideology purportedly routed in science, which claimed that advanced music was proof of the highest stage of development in human evolution and could serve in the evaluation of political and even general human existence. From the glorious heights of such intellectual superiority, everything else is looked down upon as an inferior and contemptible. The superior and knowledgeable of the population, however, are also virtually obligated to serve as the brilliant leaders of the dull masses, commanding them, and if necessary deciding what is good for them. Considering these circumstances, it is not difficult to imagine how the condemnation and elimination of those who resisted would follow. Is it really surprising that it came to an actual world war of national cultures, where in musicology, the significance of each national music was at stake? This is not a fantasy, but rather it describes an essential attribute of German-language music literature in the past 200 years. The megalomaniac idea, “am deutschen Wesen soll die Welt genesen”, is rooted in the supposed supremacy and hegemony of German music (Loos, 1994). The fact that such perceptions, even 70 years after the Second World War and the Holocaust, have not completely disappeared but in fact still give rise to many disputes is one that should be seriously considered.

From this perspective, regionality becomes equated with the worst type of intellectual limitation. A bit of scientific reflection and self-critical insight is needed to overcome this prejudice and to correctly assess the value of regional historiography in our field. Although many consortiums dedicated to the

¹ The term *world music* is used only rarely in this sense, for instance in the contemporary discussion of Skandinavianism and internationalism by Heinrich W. Schwab (1992, 197-212).

research of the music history of individual regions have brought about noticeable results in the form of studies and memorial editions, this research remains only marginally relevant for the field. Despite considerable efforts of individual researchers toward a professionalisation beyond the commitment to local history, a scientific-theoretical foundation and systematisation is long overdue. A characteristic primary focus of the discipline is rather the establishment of a nationwide presence or the determination of the – notice the choice of words – “validity” or “worth” of music (laws and commandments demand “validity”, but to what extent does art require it?).

Music history traditionally operates within a national scope. It can be mentioned only briefly here that this has to do with the function of musicology as a subject newly institutionalised on the university level at the end of the nineteenth century in connection with the formation of the German-state, which in turn was built upon an intellectual foundation that was supposed to embody the concept of a *Kulturnation*. In comparison with other nations, it is notable that in Germany, music was placed on the same level as literature: Goethe and Beethoven were equally respected as guiding models. National identity was defined essentially through music; in this capacity the word “validity” gained its normative definition.

The fact that the “heil’ge deutsche Kunst” in this context was not free from chauvinistic influence, at least since Richard Wagner, is the bitter truth which every non-biased observer studying Central and East European music history on the basis of German-language literature must encounter. The cultural pride of the nineteenth century, though occasionally still well-intentioned, increasingly turned into outright colonial hegemonic thinking that served the racist idea of evolution as well as the dialectical philosophy of truth. The impact of this development can be found in musicological literature to this day.

In the aftermath of the Second World War, Central European music history as a field of research was the subject of a particularly intense cultural war. The various economic systems of the hostile blocs showed signs of irreconcilable differences. After the oppressive border realignments and displacements of entire populations through forced-resettlement and expulsion, the previous brutal Germanisation encountered an equally intolerant Slavisation. In accordance with its doctrine, the Communist State denied the existence of any German past – at least any legitimate one – in all territories belonging to it with the exception of the GDR. This was met with chauvinistic claims for a return of “German soil”.

Of course, clear criteria for defining national identity and the right to territory are not yet established, not even with regard to such a politically urgent question as the acquisition of German citizenship. Two separate principles govern the debate over the legitimacy of citizenship: the *ius sanguinis* and the *ius soli*, the ancestry

principle and the birthplace principle. The driving force of this debate is none other than the question of whether the human condition should be determined by inheritance or socialisation. A scientific, that is to say, a universally valid and testable answer to this question is not possible. Neither the absolutisation of genetic factors, in regard to which the debate over the national state was solved with the seductive formula “blood and soil”, nor the social science principle of the absolute role of environment, popular in the 1970s but later refuted by twin research, are possible to prove.

The relevance of this discussion for regional music research is made clear by the frequently asked question: To which particular region does a composer belong? Is this decided by his birth place or by where he worked and lived? Does being born in Moscow make Hans Pfitzner a part of Russian music history? Was Johannes Brahms entirely Viennese after having lived there for only ten years, as Carl Dahlhaus once suggested? What does it mean if Hans-Joachim Moser establishes that, “nineteenth century Hannoverian opera directors (...) were almost all of foreign (stammesfremd, op. H. L.) descent?” (Moser, 1957, 125) At the same time, we must reconsider whether person-oriented research really deserves the same status in regional music historiography as the one held in emphatic music historiography.

Although such questions seem more theoretical in regions that have remained relatively stable throughout history, such as Bavaria or Slovenia (despite the necessary internal differentiation), they take on great importance in regions with mixed or changing populations and frequent realignment of political borders or affiliations; culture is thus essential to identity formation in these situations. To this day, the societal function of culture continues to underscore the idea of the nation state as a culture-nation. Musicology’s establishment as an university subject is an example of the far reach of the resulting societal norms.

A notable phenomenon of every historical narrative of times past is that, as a rule, the relationships between regions are assumed to be finished entities and are accepted without debate. Usually this has to do with politically defined regions with a long history. Since the idea that these entities mostly define themselves culturally is widely accepted, the prospect of a different regional alignment along cultural lines is never felt. This is probably a result of specific interests being suppressed, whether consciously or unconsciously. The idea of German music is based on the Greater German claim to nationality, which for a long time – until the *Anschluss* of 1938 – remained politically virulent, despite the success of the Lesser German Solution. In the history of the male choral societies, one can see this tendency clearly.

If one recognises the consequences of letting premises go unquestioned, it is necessary to find an alternative approach in order to avoid false conclusions. Analysing the problem is simple: Any definitions based on cultural issues in

regions, derived from political or phylogenetic histories, are irrelevant. The solution is also simple and just requires consideration of the fundamental principle: Regional entities must be recognised and defined as what they are. A model from music historiography can be found in the labelling of epochs. A long and detailed discussion took place within the field about how designations founded in art history, such as *Baroque*, could be replaced with terms from music history, such as *Figured Bass Era*, *Era of Monody*, or *Concertato Era*. In the same way, the spread of musical traditions should be examined under consideration of regional aspects and defined by the way they connect. This idea becomes particularly important in the context of the special historical circumstances of Central and Eastern Europe. Considering some of the grave accusations that have been made throughout history and the ethnic mixtures in these areas, it is not surprising that the idea of defining nations through the culture of particular settlements can lead to horrible contortions. This becomes clear in every international project where responsibility to a particular region is of concern.

The regional-historical model is contingent on a decisive departure from the focus on famous composers, since a part of their significance is due to their function as social role models, especially in terms of nationality. The nineteenth century saw developments toward an outright obligation for every European nation to produce a national composer whose place of birth and workplace could be presented as memorials and whose name would decorate the national conservatory. Usually there is at least one other composer who has to compete with him for recognition of the superiority. This results in a portrayal of competing societal tendencies – for there is no society that is as homogeneous as the standards of the civic nation ideal would call for. In the nineteenth century, two fundamentally controversial tendencies were competing, namely the modernism and Christianity. It is not hard to think of multiple instances where composers have been paired and treated as opposites, a phenomenon that traces back to this controversy: Robert Schumann and Franz Liszt, Richard Wagner and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy, Johannes Brahms and Anton Bruckner, Frederic Delius and Edvard Elgar, Modest Mussorgsky and Peter Tschaikovsky (*Novatur* and *Westler*), Alexander Skrjabin and Sergej Rachmaninow, Bedřich Smetana and Antonín Dvořák, Béla Bartók and Zoltán Kodály. And yet it is not always easy to recognise whether these pairings reflect the composers' original, personal positions, or whether the classification as opposites is a phenomenon of their reception. Even the most scrupulous look into the personality of a composer cannot lead to from-his-music drawn conclusions about his religion or ideologies. This is because musical works originate in societal circumstances for which they are designed and tailored to. In these circumstances the opposition between modernism and Christianity plays again an important role.

In contrast, regional music historiography leads to questions about an appropriate reference point, and about the term *culture-region* (*Kulturregion*). The term is already established in the field of social science and has long been the subject of extensive debates. Beginning with the work of Heiner Treinen about symbolic locality (*symbolische Ortsbezogenheit*, after Walter, 1981) but no later than the publication of the two volume collection *Region und Sozialisation* (Treinen, 1965a, 73-97; Treinen, 1965b, 254-297), a return of the regional (Lindner, 1994b) in (West) German social research was evident. As Detlev Ipsen (1994, 232-254, cf. Lindner, 1994a, 169-190) noted, this return clearly has a political component. Class differences, or social stratification, seem to have become secondary and, on an international level, the East-West-polarisation has dissolved. Conflicts in the recent past have increasingly been due to ethnic disputes between the groups whose regional origins seem to be a central component of their identity and of their action-orientation (also called *culture standard* [Thomas and Breitenbach, 1991] in the psychology of intercultural action). (Boehnke, Hefler and Merkens, 1996, 160-176) Culture, as in the sum of skills, knowledge, and experience, must be newly attained by each generation in order to facilitate group-specific action and understanding. This very broad understanding (cf. Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Bausinger, 1980, 57-69; Kaschuba, 1995, 11-3; Wimmer, 1996, 401-425) cannot be narrowed down by relying on specific definitions – for example, by using the loaded comparison between culture and civilisation. The situation is similar in this regard to the modern concept of *identity* (Bausinger, 1982; Grohs, Schwerdtfeger and Strohm, 1980), a term which is often used in the disciplines of both history and the social sciences, although in each case the substance of the concept certainly may be understood differently. For instance, the term must reflect not only on the ideas of *homeland* and *foreign* with reference to particular regions (Greverus, 1979; Schuhladen, 1990, 15-18), but also on key terms of literature studies. In musicology, the heavily loaded term *art* is avoided by using the term *culture*.

Research into the culture of geographical areas, which has its origins in ethnology (Wiegmann, 1984, 1-12) and is connected to large projects such as the *Atlas of German folklore* (for the parts relevant to this discussion see Cox, 1984, 29-41), has developed further (Cox, 1993, 7-14; Schenk, 1994, 335-352) and established its own field of research by incorporating social science methods and findings from the field of cultural anthropology (Greverus, 1987). This needs to be further developed, although the general term *culture-region* should be differentiated. The following points must be exactly articulated from the perspective of all the various scientific standpoints: 1. What is to be understood by each under the central idea of a culture-region; 2. What forces are responsible for the emergence and coherence of a culture region (relationships between states play a role here just as much as a particular regional consciousness does);

3. How is its structure conditioned (centralised/decentralised, formal/informal etc.); 4. How individual results (images, connections, processes) gained through particular methods can be integrated and combined into one coherent result; 5. Where is the point that the question posed reaches its limit; for instance, to the point where an “occidental” dimension can be recognised. The possibility that isolated culture regions may not be definable based on specific musical criteria must be consciously figured into the problem.

The methods of music historiography have been further developed. They are increasingly geared toward structural history and seek to correlate the histories of composition, institutions, and ideas. First and foremost it is the socio-historical approaches that interpret, to a certain degree, the historical depth of current social science studies, and thus build a bridge between the disciplines. Cultural-comparative empirical social research has experienced an unexpected upswing, especially with regard to transformation research after the downfall of the socialist political systems in Europe. Regional issues at first missed out on this surge; only in recent years an increased interest in this area has been noticed. Two symposia recently took place on this subject in Ljubljana, namely in September of 2015 *Between Universal and Local: From Modernism to Postmodernism*, and in April of 2016 *Musical Migrations: Crossroads of European Musical Diversity*.

If music historiography is to escape ideological influences, it is necessary to develop these systematic approaches further. Such a development can only result from the evaluation of situations that can be documented as the music-scene of a particular locality. The music that is actually performed is, independent of intellectual history, the true basis that shapes the musical profile of individual localities. It is also important, from the beginning, to recognise a cultural diversity that cannot be seen as independent of the social structure of each locality. This profile may seem relatively homogeneous in small villages, revolving around churches and dance halls, but each city in Central Europe also boasts of a multitude of diverse districts, which are each shaped by their own particular economic, lingual, or religious characteristics. It must be assumed that there is a large variety of trends, each continuously in the processes of distinction from each other and cooperation with each other. With an expansion of horizons, the body of source materials to be systematically evaluated will grow. The main challenge is sorting all of the data that are being made available or already accessible, so that they can be evaluated.² This task could open a new field of digital humanities that would be greatly appreciated; the one which could develop the appropriate data banks and evaluation programs. For a long time, the field of musicology has been able to utilise the unique data bank RISM; in Leipzig, we have already tested a few

² Besides the current statistics of the German Music Council, statistical surveys in music historiography are not currently popular. Relevant past studies are quite old. Cf. Chrysander, 1867; Thielecke, 1921; Müller, 1937.

preliminary studies in regional music research under the label *Musica migrans*. Though this is not at all to suggest that statistics alone can provide answers to scientific questions, nonetheless it must be recognised that these methods can, with wise planning, be used to clearly systematise, order, expand, and evaluate the basis of sources for historical research. New sources are necessary for the advancement of historical science. Historical musicology still has a large field of research to look forward to, one which now consists only of regions.

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