

**ESEM – Why it Began****Jeremy Montagu**

Many of us can remember the meeting here nearly twenty years ago, when John Blacking started the European Seminar for Ethnomusicology.

But we all seem to have forgotten why he did it and how he organised it.

It was to be a Seminar, not a conference. He thought that there were enough conferences around, conferences with crowded programmes, double even triple sessions, short papers strictly limited in length and with no time for discussion. He thought that we needed something different, a Seminar, where there might be one paper for a morning, even for a whole day, with ample time to discuss it. Conferences could be left to SEM, ICTM, the various national organisations. ESEM would instead be a seminar. We all **know** what a seminar is.

He thought that it should be European. He knew, as we all do, that there are differences of thought, differences of training, different attitudes of mind, between Europe and America, neither one better or worse than the other, but different. He felt the need for a Seminar where all would be European, or European-trained, or at least working enough in Europe to have acquired the European attitudes.

He thought that it should be for Ethnomusicologists, a peer group of established colleagues, all professionals, all beyond the stages of their training, all experienced, all working in the field of ethnomusicology. Students would be welcome to attend the seminars but not to be full members nor to present papers. This they could do at their own institutions, at chapter conferences, at national conferences. There they could learn the techniques of presenting papers, of timing their examples as well as their text, allowing sufficient time for the inevitable snafus of technical equipment failing to function, learning to speak to the audience, not to the screen, and to do so audibly, and all the other techniques of professional presentation that we have all had to learn. This was not to be the purpose of ESEM. It was not to be an opportunity for our students to acquire experience. This we could help them to do at

home. At our Seminars, they and we equally could acquire knowledge.

Finally, John believed that we were all mature enough that we were able to listen. We were not among those who always needed to speak. We were professionals who knew that it was worth attending a Seminar for the sake of what we could learn from it – we might even be willing to admit to ourselves that some people knew more than we did and therefore that it was worth coming whether we were on the speakers' list or not. The 'I must give a paper' brigade could be left to the conferences with their double sessions that only half of us can hear, their long days with crowded programmes which allow no time to think, and their lack of time for discussion so that not even the speaker has the opportunity to learn from the experience of colleagues.

ESEM was to be different. That was John's purpose. That was why he began it and that was why we joined it with him.

Jeremy Montagu, Oxford

Where, when, and if I gave this at an ESEM Seminar, or whether it was or was not published in their newsletter, I have no idea, but it was a necessary reminder.

© Jeremy Montagu 2017