

What Is Ethnomusicology?**Jeremy Montagu**

It is as much an attitude of mind as a subject – it is a way of looking at music and at musicology. Ethnomusicology is not a good name – ethno and ethnic are already debased terms. Ethnic clothes, ethnic jewellery are fakes, or at best tourist kitsch; Chinese food is Chinese, Indian food is Indian, but ethnic food is processed rubbish. Now people are beginning to object to being called ethnic. How about you? I have been researching Catalan instruments and I am an ethnomusicologist, or if not an ethnomusicologist, an ethno-organologist – thus in my study, you are ethno! Are you happy with that?

The original name was *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*. *Musikwissenschaft* is musicology, of course, so that it was a form of musicology. *Vergleichende* means comparative, so that it was not intended to be a study just of the music itself, but the music in relation to other aspects.

Related to what? It is unfashionable nowadays to relate a music that we study to other music, but I am convinced that it's unavoidable. Maybe I don't relate an Indian rag to a Bach fugue, but I'm sure when I hear an interval, I think is this a 3rd (or a 5th or whatever) and then what sort of third, just, pythagorean, equal-tempered, sharper or flatter than any of those, and so on. We can't help doing that – this is how our ears work unless we have perfect pitch and take every pitch as an absolute entity, independent of its neighbours. Equally, when I hear a new music I start to think how it resembles or differs from other musics I know. When I meet a new instrument, I start to relate it, and its sound and its details, to other instruments I know and I compare it with other instruments of the same type. So *vergleichende* does automatically mean comparative, at least to some extent, even though eventually I study every music and every instrument on its own terms.

As well as to some extent comparing, one is also looking beyond the music itself. If one only studies the music, this is musicology, not ethnomusicology. One can produce a musicological study of Catalan music, or Papuan New Guinea music, just as easily as one can of Beethoven or de Falla. With ethnomusicology we are studying the music within its cultural context – this is why John Blacking was able to run an ethnomusicological school within what was officially the Department of Social Anthropology. In this way we can reverse the previous example. One can produce an ethnomusicological study of de Falla or Beethoven as

easily as one can of Papuan New Guinea or Catalan music.

So why am I spending time on what may seem to be a series of generalities, or even platitudes? I wrote this note on the journey here, before I had heard any of this year's papers or seen the programme. I have felt in previous years that there has been a tendency towards musicology, rather than ethnomusicology. That there is insufficient knowledge and awareness of other musics, even when they have close and important connexions with local music. For example, last spring Josefina Roma provided a three-day series of talks on Arabic music by three very eminent Arab musicologists, but although no other music is as important to the study of Iberian music as that of the Arabs who lived here for so many centuries, I saw very few familiar faces. A great opportunity, one that is unlikely to recur, was lost.

This problem is not unique to ESEM – one meets it everywhere. People specialise and, as a result, their interests, I would say, get narrower and narrower – they might say become more sharply focussed. We found this in London back in the 1960s and 70s with the Ethnomusicology Panel of the Royal Anthropological Institute. People would come to hear a paper on the music of their own special area but very few came to every meeting, so in the end we had to abandon them.

If we are to be ethnomusicologists it is essential to open our ears to the music of areas other than our own, especially to those which have influenced ours. It is essential to be aware of the cultural contexts of our music, and by that I do not mean just whether it is dance music or ritual music, or even whether the singer or the player is the oldest red-haired musician with sixteen children in the town.

There is far more than that, for we are concerned with the entire cultural context of the region and with its history going as far back as can be discovered. Just what was the music of the Visigoths like, and to what extent can we see its influence in the music that we hear around us today? If we cannot return to *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*, perhaps we should think in terms of global musicology, for we have to perceive the global context of the music of the whole globe.

A paper given at an European Seminar in Ethnomusicology, probably in Barcelona, in 2005.