

The Divorce of Organology from Ethnomusicology**Jeremy Montagu**

Ethno-organology began in the early seventeenth century with publications such as Praetorius's *De Organographia* of 1619. This was mainly concerned with the instruments of his own time, but in part it was devoted also to biblical instruments, as they had been misinterpreted from the tenth century onwards, also to the instruments of antiquity from the less probable sources, and, what is important to us here today, to those of exotic lands. This part is usually ignored by the early-music enthusiasts who seize on the illustrations of the early seventeenth-century instruments for their reconstructions, print them on posters and T-shirts, and so on. A century earlier Sebastian Virdung (*Musica Getutscht*) had illustrated the folk instruments of his own place and time, but this was mainly to decry them for the horrible and vulgar noises that they made. Praetorius, on the other hand, illustrated the exotica seriously even though he nearly always attributed them to the wrong peoples. What is more, his engraver portrayed them with such accuracy that many can be identified today. With those that he got wrong, such as the Javanese gamelan, the error can often be traced back to the source from which he copied them, in that case Lodewijkz's *D'Eerste Boek* of around 1597, chronicling the first Dutch expedition to that area – even so Praetorius got the area wrong, saying that they were American.

Most of his illustrations must have been engraved from objects in the early *Kunstkabinetten* which were amassed by princely houses all over Europe and which today form the bases of many of our public museums. To take another example of the many in Praetorius, there is a drum in the original Tradescant collection which formed the basis of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford in the mid-1600s, a similar example of which is drawn so precisely by Praetorius's illustrator that Klaus Wachsmann was able to compare the one with other in an article in *Galpin Society Journal* 23 (1970).

These *Kunstkabinetten* reflected the general fascination with the exotic which arose from the early explorations of the world beyond Europe. Many of course are lost to us today, swept away by revolutions and warfare or just from lack of interest. To take a parallel example of similar losses of the instruments from our own culture, Henry VIII of England's vast collection was very carefully inventoried, but not one of those hundreds of instruments can be traced today. Where are they all? I suspect that there are the remains of many such collections

of instruments, both from our culture and from foreign places, hidden away in cellars and storage. In particular, I suspect that many may still be hidden in royal palaces, almost certainly unknown to their owners, and probably in monasteries, especially perhaps in Spain and Portugal, for much must have come back as souvenirs from the early days of the conquest of the Americas. As I said, a few lurk in the depths of our museums. I found a couple of early Brazilian side-blown wooden trumpets in the museum in Copenhagen and surely there must be many more from the early days of exploration as well as from more recent times, for we Europeans are inveterate souvenir-hunters. How else did our ethnographic museums acquire the earlier parts of their contents? Certainly several museums in Britain have material from the Cook explorations of the eighteenth century, and every European museum has nineteenth-century material brought and sent back by missionaries and other travellers.

This was the main thrust of the collections of earlier periods. Not as objects to study or to appreciate as examples of the art and culture of fellow-humans, but to show the primitive works of the savages who had not the benefit of our religions and our culture.

This, too, was how anthropology began. The early eighteenth century English poet, Alexander Pope, said ‘The proper study of Mankind is Man’, and the members of the early learned societies from which the various specialist academies and societies such as those for anthropology derived, regarded the study of ‘primitive’ peoples of their own times as a means of understanding their own, and our own, early history. The way to understand the Stone Age peoples of Europe, whose previous existence was beginning to be recognised in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, was to study those peoples who were then still in the Stone or other early ages of development. In the views of that time, expressed by an English writer of the late seventeenth century, Thomas Hobbes: for mankind in a state of nature there were ‘No arts, no letters, no society, and ...the life of man [was] solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short’. It was considered, as a result, that any art or music (as we would term them today) were merely savage daubs and primitive noise, and beneath the attention of any civilised person. What was interesting were the objects which they produced and used: boats, buildings, clothes, domestic objects and tools, including musical instruments, for these were doubtless analogous to those of our own remote ancestors.

There were exceptions. Praetorius was not alone in illustrating the instruments of other peoples along with our own. Marin Mersenne in his *Harmonie Universelle* of 1636 shows a

few exotic instruments, including a Thai mouthorgan with a detailed drawing of the free reed. But pre-eminent in this respect was Filippo Bonanni who, in his *Gabinetto Armonico*, published in Rome in 1723, showed many exotic instruments and, more important, showed a great number of the folk instruments of his native Italy. It would not be unreasonable to hail him as the first ethnomusicologist, or certainly as the first ethno-organologist.

When ethnomusicology began as a formal discipline in the late nineteenth century, with people like Stumpf, Lachmann, Hornbostel, Sachs, and Kunst, organology was a central part, but it was still imbued with the thesis that this was how we could understand the cultural development of humanity – this was the essence of the *Kulturkreis* concept, epitomised for organologists in Curt Sachs's *Geist und Werden der Musikinstrumenten* in 1928. However, we should not forget that Hornbostel and Sachs had already published their classification system fifteen years earlier, in which all instruments were treated as equals, wherever and whenever they had originated.

The importance of organology, as it had been in the eighteenth century with Bonanni, continued into the mid-twentieth century in America with people like Boas, Densmore, Merriam, and Lomax. That it survived there so long was partly due to the influence of Curt Sachs, who had emigrated to New York, just as Kunst was influential in Amsterdam, but a major part was the centrality of ethnography in anthropological studies and, as a result, the importance of museum collections and their use.

A proportion of these collections already existed, as outlined previously, and although much derived from deliberate collecting expeditions by the anthropologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, far more was brought back as loot by invading armies and punitive expeditions. Such loot was the source of the British magnificent collections of material from Burma, and from the Benin Punitive Expedition, and the superb Indian material from the conquests of the Moghul Empire by Clive and others which is never seen (it has been hidden away in the storerooms of the Victoria and Albert Museum ever since the old India Museum was abolished), and similar material spread over much of Europe deriving from the destruction of the Summer Palace in Peking. More was brought or sent home as interesting objects by colonial officers, some of it at the request of museum curators such as Henry Balfour of Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum, but much just as souvenirs. Even more, as I've said, came from missionaries as examples of the primitive artefacts of the pagan savages whom they had struggled to convert. There was so much of the last that the Vatican

published one of the major journals of anthropology, the *Annali Lateranensis*, which once upon a time published many articles concerning instruments, and where, in the Vatican, there is a little-known museum of such material.

Certainly in England (you must forgive me that I know the English collections better than many elsewhere) many quite small museums have collections of exotic instruments brought or sent back by missionaries and others. A prime example is Marischal College in Aberdeen, for many such people came from Scotland. Another was in Halifax, where Edge-Partington had a brother working and collecting in Oceania – many of Hans Fischer's examples in *Schalgeräte in Ozeanien* came from Edge-Partington's three magnificent volumes of drawings and descriptions. Today that collection has vanished – Halifax was no longer interested in such material, and Halifax is not alone. There are many other museums with major ethnographic collections which today are never seen or are represented solely by one or two objects made of the more intrinsically valuable materials. A prime sample of this is the very few Indian objects displayed by the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Another is the British Museum, whose Ethnographic Department had for some decades its own building behind the Royal Academy in Piccadilly, but which now once again has one small room in the main building in Bloomsbury, and as a result shows very little of the many thousands of instruments and other objects in its collection. Another is the tendency to display the instruments, or often only those parts of instruments, which are regarded as art objects. A common example of that is the great spirit flutes of New Guinea, instruments more than two metres long. The stoppers that close their distal ends are often beautifully carved, like so many other objects from that huge island, and there are museums which display the stoppers alone, either for lack of interest in the flutes themselves (of which they are an essential though minor part), or for lack of space, or, more probably (certainly in the case of the Metropolitan Museum in New York), because they did not bother to collect the whole instrument but only that part which could be classified as an art object.

Once upon a time (this is the traditional beginning of the children's tale of times long, long, ago), the anthropological and ethnographic literature contained many articles about musical instruments. We all know these journals, *Ethnos*, *Annali Lateranensis*, *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, *Ethnologisches Archiv für Ethnologie*, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* (now *The ICTM Yearbook*), *Ethnomusicology*, and many others. Today few, if any, of these include such articles, though

just as I was writing this, the latest issue of the ICTM's *Yearbook* arrived with five articles on instruments, the first time for many years. Once upon a time, many of the societies which publish such journals had papers at their meetings which discussed and described musical instruments. Today few if any such meetings include such papers.

What has brought about these changes?

For one thing, the focus of anthropology altered. When that began in the late nineteenth century, the anthropologists were often amateurs, they were district officers, missionaries, and so forth by profession, but they were interested in the material culture of the peoples around them. As anthropology became more professional and university-based, that interest dwindled, encouraged by a decrease in the idea of missionaries and by the emancipation of many countries that had been colonies and, as a result, the abolition of the concept of district officers and such positions. Social anthropology took over and material culture became almost a dirty word. The main interests lay in how the society was constructed, who could marry whom, who could inherit from whom, and in the tribal and societal structure.

There was, in Britain certainly, a loss of interest in exotic music as a whole. In fact, the British had been less interested in such music and its instruments than those in some other countries. To take just one example, when I first visited the store of the University Museum in Leiden I saw shelf upon shelf of drums from their half of New Guinea, now West Irian. Visiting the parallel store of the British Museum in London, I saw shelf upon shelf of spears and shields from our half of that same island, now Papua New Guinea. The Dutch were interested in the tools for music among other things, whereas the British were interested in the tools for warfare.

When I was Secretary of the Ethnomusicology Panel of the Royal Anthropological Institute in London back in the 1960s and early 70s, I wrote to every university department of anthropology in the country offering to organise an introduction to local musics for the benefit of students who were about to go on fieldwork and who would therefore be surrounded by such musics. Not one department even replied. When the Institute produced a publicity film about all the work that its members were doing in far-flung parts of the world, the background music to that film was taken from what sounded like standard muzak stock, the sort of music that one heard in restaurants, cafés, and so on. Not one single note was heard from any of the cultures seen in the film, not even when music or dance was shown on screen. I resigned my Fellowship of the Royal Anthropological Institute (I have since again

become a Fellow with the resurrection of the Ethnomusicology Committee).

Much the same thing happened in ethnomusicology. I suspect that six factors influenced this. The first was the fact that many ethnomusicology departments were offshoots from anthropology departments, rather than from the music departments. The second was the avoidance of material culture. The third was a fear of our own original title. A fourth was the increase in fieldwork in depth, visiting just one culture again and again. The fifth was a lack of money. And the sixth was a contempt for museums.

Being offshoots from anthropology departments meant that many students had no previous contact with music or instruments other than whatever they may have played themselves or what they listened to on the ancestors of the Walkman. Few had any background in serious musical study of any sort, and certainly not in organology.

The avoidance of material culture was influenced by the same aversion to that subject which had infected anthropology, and therefore the emphasis was on the music, the tunes, rather than on the instruments that made them, and far more on song than on instrumental music. At the same time, because the anthropologists were focussed on the sociology of the peoples being studied, therefore the emphasis of ethnomusicology was on the sociology of music, who could make music, of which gender, to whom, and when, on what occasions, and why, and often on the words of song and their meaning within the culture. This is why there have been many publications of vocal music, and even more of the texts of songs, and discussion of their meanings and importance within the culture, without a note of music attached.

With the memory and avoidance of our old name, *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*, when one is dealing with the instruments of any one people or place, one is, if one has any background in organology, inevitably struck by similarities with, and differences from, the instruments of other peoples. That opens the door to the danger of comparison. And we must remember that we are no longer Comparative Musicologists – we must be Ethnomusicologists and Social musicologists. Incidentally, I have been arguing against our modern title for some years, for ethnic, today, has pejorative overtones. We have all suffered badly prepared meals in ethnic restaurants; we have all seen market stalls cluttered with ethnic jewellery or other cheap stuff; many of our children have dressed in badly made ethnic clothes. Ethnic today usually means cheap, nasty, and usually fake. So why do we call ourselves ethnomusicologists? Apart from anything else, we are all *ἔθνη*. And, as I've said,

inevitably we do all compare. So why not return to our origins and reclaim Comparative Musicology?

With fieldwork, when one studies any one people in depth, living with them and visiting them repeatedly over the years, the organology, perhaps interesting enough initially, becomes part of the wall-paper. What our professor, our department back home, requires is plenty of field recordings of merchantable quality that can be published on CDs to redound to the fame of the department. They also require lengthy transcriptions of the music, and here the Kodály and Bartók influence was strong. Their transcriptions were published on five-line staves which gave a wholly false impression of the intervals employed, for few people bothered to try to auralise the conventions described in the introduction or the footnotes. Nowadays, thanks to all the new toys we have to play with, they are more often published as totally meaningless graphs or print-outs from electronic machinery that does at least avoid the labour of transcription.

And when there is no money for travel to and for living in far distant places, ethnomusicology becomes endomusicology, the study of local musics, whether it's in the local pubs, jazz bands, immigrant communities (which is a more valid example of ethnomusicology even if they live in your own city), or any other music that is not part of the remit of the mainstream music faculty. And because these musicians often use the instruments from the music store in your own town, there's no inducement to an interest in organology.

I'm not sure which ethnomusicology department first encouraged foreigners to study with them, and to pursue the study, while there, of their own music back home. Was it UCLA? Was it John Blacking in Belfast? Incidentally, Blacking converted a Social Anthropology Department into a centre for ethnomusicology, the best in Britain, with a strong emphasis on instruments which he employed me to teach and to visit them annually, and he sometimes sent me a student to study concentratedly with me and my own collection. Whichever it was, the end result was again endomusicology, Nigerians learning how to study Nigerian music in Belfast, and others learning to study their own cultures at UCLA and elsewhere. Sure, they were using the methods and approaches of ethnomusicology, but we Europeans can do that with the music of Bach and Mozart. I believe that it is impossible to stand back and see one's own music with the eye of an outsider, to regard it dispassionately, whatever methods and approaches one may use. I met an example of this once when Mary Douglas at the Royal Anthropological Institute spoke on my own Jewish customs and traditions, on kashrut and

other aspects of Jewish life. Gwen and I kept wanting to say “but it’s not like that, that’s not why we do it”, and yet one could see that this was the result of an anthropologist seeing an exotic culture and approaching it anthropologically, and that in those terms everything she said was valid.

So with Ibo music, so with Ewe music, so with the studies of many of those whom I taught in Belfast. And so, also, with the many studies we have seen in the pages of *Ethnomusicology* of students trotting down the road to their local jazz club and whatever. We can see why. All it costs is a bus fare and a few drinks, very different from what it costs to travel to and set up in Tonga for a year, especially if you have to support a wife or husband and kids at home. This, for one, is a problem for which we have no cure.

When museums became toy centres for entertaining the kiddies, letting them dress up as Roman soldiers and so on, instead of solidly based research institutions for the preservation and propagation of knowledge, then they and their contents became down-graded. Unless they are regarded as centres for ethnological, and ethnomusicological, study, organology becomes one of many forgotten elements of their collections. Even when they introduce the kiddies to exotic musical instruments, it is not by letting them hear the original music and encouraging them to respect it, it’s by letting them play with a few rattles, xylophones, and drums, usually all mixed up from different cultures.

Here I believe that World Music has had a pernicious influence. Almost all that I have heard has been at the lowest common denominator, making it as easy as possible for the listener. We, in the Bate Collection, have been as guilty as any, encouraging the children to come and play the gamelan, one of the easiest of all ensembles to play at a basic level. At least, though, we have always taught them to play a piece of Central Javanese music, rather than some version of Frère Jacques. The trouble is that the influence of this World Music, toy music, approach is lasting. Many students think that they have had a course in ethnomusicology when all that they have had is a year of world music. If they then want to approach ethnomusicology on a graduate level, they find things so different that often they back away, or else they find a pseudo-ethnomusicology department which is in fact only teaching a rather higher level of world music.

What can we do about any of this? Why, which was what I was initially asked to talk about, is there so little organological material in the ethnomusicological literature? Well, much of it is our fault. I was talked in to joining the Society for Ethnomusicology by Fritz

Kuttner (a somewhat eccentric Sinologist working in the 1960s and 70s) when, because he'd asked me why was I not a member, I said that it was because the standard, even then, of the papers it published was mostly so low. "So join and send them better papers", he said. I joined, but I only published one paper there (John Burton's and my classification system for instruments, a system that I found cumbersome to use and eventually abandoned partly because of Laurence Picken's strictures on it in the Postscript of his *Folk Musical Instruments of Turkey* and partly because I decided that it was better to use, and try to improve, a system that people **will** use, the Hornbostel & Sachs, as one student of mine has done in Catalan and Castilian translation, and has Mimo now done on the basis of a paper of mine given at an ESEM Seminar, rather than one that they won't). I've mainly published in the organological literature, especially the *Galpin Society Journal*, and in books, with only conference papers appearing in ethnomusicological sources. Nor am I the only one of whom this is true. Certainly I can take some of the credit for the *Galpin Society Journal* becoming a place to publish ethno-organological material – I was for five years their Secretary and I am now their President –, but that, too, is in some respects a matter for blame in the context of this seminar, because when we publish in the *Galpin Journal* we fail to publish in *Ethnomusicology*, *ICTM Yearbook* and other such journals (my only article in *ICTM*, on 'The Forked Shawm', was the result of a conference on Arabic music they organised). I did, in my recent *Timpani & Percussion* book include a good deal of ethno-organological material (slightly, I think to Yale's annoyance), and there has been far more in my later books.

I spoke of a divorce when I began. Can we rescind that divorce and revive the marriage of ethnomusicology and organology? We can try. The remedy is in our own hands. We can send organological articles to the ethnomusicological journals. Will they publish them? Without trying, we can't tell, but one thing is sure, what we don't send them they can't publish.

I would like to end on a cheerful note, and every fortunate marriage produces children. One today is musical archaeology, or as it might be better styled, archaeo-organology. While most of my papers in that area have been on European instruments, there've been a couple on conch trumpets worldwide. More recently the results of conferences that have grown out of the ICTM's Study Group for Music Archaeology have been far more wide-ranging. Recent publications from Germany of *Musik-Archäologie* (of which there have been four volumes so far) in the *Orient-Archäologie* series, published by Marie Leidorf GmbH in Rahden, Westfalia, and edited by Ellen Hickmann and Ricardo Eichmann, have covered the whole

world. Certainly a majority of the articles have been in our own cultural area, but this is not surprising for European and Near Eastern archaeology have a long head-start, going back to where I began here, with seventeenth-century work on biblical and Roman and Greek material, but the rest of the world is catching up fast, and at least in that area organology is becoming a fully-accepted part of archaeology.

People like Vincent Megaw have been plugging away for twenty or thirty years with general articles, but for far longer archaeologists have been reporting their finds of musical instruments in the archaeological literature, as well as in places like the *Galpin Journal*. We can hope that publications like those of *Musik-Archäologie* will have enough influence to stop archaeologists from calling *auloi* flutes – I complained once at the British Museum’s habit of referring to all *auletes* as flute-players, and the (unofficial) response I received was to be grateful that the objects had labels on them at all, never mind that they weren’t accurate! Even the general public is seeing some archaeo-organological material. Discoveries like the instruments from the tomb of the Bronze Age Marquis Yi in China stirred a good deal of interest, and there have been worldwide exhibitions of the bell chimes and other instruments, as well as deposits in several museums of copies of the bells. More recently, some Chinese neolithic end-blown flutes made the front cover of *Nature*, a major scientific journal. Anything as old as that of course draws useful attention, even if we have to put up with spurious claims of things being the oldest known.

If archaeology can do it, then with more encouragement from us and from our colleagues, so perhaps can ethnomusicology.

A paper given at an ethnomusicology conference in Venice.

© Jeremy Montagu, 2017.