

ICTM Study Group on Iconography of the Performing Arts

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Images of musical instruments and music-making have been used in research of music history since the time of the Renaissance painters and antiquarians who were trying to understand and revive music of classical antiquity. And yet, it was only in the 1970s that music iconography significantly advanced as a discipline in its methodology and application in music scholarship. One reason for such a late development was the technical difficulty of working with images. When we look back in time, it is easy to find among writings of the eighteenth-century music historians references about their desire and need to study images. But without finding aids for the control of images and easy access to them in published reproductions, it was hard, if not impossible, to do their meaningful comparative research, not to mention the prohibitive expense if authors wanted to include them with their published articles.

Ernst Ludwig Gerber listed in the appendix to his *Neues historisch-biographisches Lexikon der Tonkünstler* over six hundred portraits of musicians meant to supplement the biographical entries presented on the preceding pages of the lexicon (Gerber 1812–1814). But what good was this list to his readers when he was unable to reproduce individual portraits? In 1906, the German musicologist Hugo Leichtentritt (1874–1951) published an article asking in its title “Was lehren uns die Bildwerke des 14.–17. Jahrhunderts über die Instrumentalmusik ihrer Zeit?” (What do paintings from the 14th to 17th centuries teach us about the instrumental music of their time?) (Leichtentritt 1906). His narrative about pictures is accompanied with no reproductions, and we wonder today if there is anything that Leichtentritt’s readers could have learned from described pictures that they were not able to see along with the text.

The situation regarding accessibility of music-related visual material started changing in a forceful way when American musicologist Barry S. Brook (1918–1997) initiated in 1971 the Répertoire International d’Iconographie Musicale (RIIdIM). The goal of RIIdIM—established under the auspices of the International Musicological Society (IMS); the International Association of Music Libraries, Archives and Information Centres (IAML);

and the Comité international pour les musées et collections d’instruments et de musique (CIMCIM)—was to provide complete and easy bibliographic insight into the vast resources of music iconography around the world. This initiative was part of his grand vision to

bring together documentation [for music research] via an international network of data banks, operated by computers in conjunction with ultra-microforms, video screens, and advanced audio systems, all transmitted by satellite. [This knowledge base] would encompass recorded sound, printed and manuscript music, literature about music, musical iconography, materials for music education, and would be concerned with art music, folk music, and popular music in all genres and media, in all periods and countries. (Brook 1978)

Brook understood that although visual sources cannot supply information about music itself, they do provide an invaluable account about music-making as a social activity and its music experience among certain groups, including extinct traditions. As people visually represented their activities and expressed their beliefs since the earliest times, the range of themes and contexts in which images can document music activities of the past is endlessly broad. They provide clues about the morphology of musical instruments and their dissemination; performance practice and instrumental playing techniques; contexts of performance, including performance space, audience, and reception; combination of performing forces, in particular repertoires or social functions; biographical information on musicians and their likenesses; social, commercial, and intellectual history of music; as well as, the role of music in associated performing arts such as dance and music theatre. As dance is a kinetic art, visual sources rarely provide information about succession of movements, but they can inform about a single dance position; physical expression of the dancer; dancer’s portrayal; props used and costume worn during the performance; and location, context, audience, and symbolism of dance performance.

The 1970s was an extremely important period for the development of the research of iconographic sources. Along with the initiation of the cataloguing of images

made under the auspices of the RIdIM and its host institution, the Research Center for Music Iconography (RCMI) of the City University of New York Graduate Center, Brook organized in New York eight conferences on music iconography.¹ He was convinced that without a scholarly interpretation of images, it would be impossible to produce viable cataloguing entries; and in return, without well-organized and exhaustive catalogues, scholars cannot have easy access to these sources. These conferences were relatively small, but every year they brought together the key scholars working with visual sources in music history. This was the place where the discipline started taking its shape through discussions on methodological issues. Also, during the 1970s, some ground-breaking monographs on music iconography came out within only a few years of each other, thereby establishing the discipline in a number of European countries (Kos 1972; Kuret 1973; Seebass 1973; Geiser 1974; Hammerstein 1974; Mirimonde 1974, 1975–1977; Leppert 1977; Chailley 1978).

In the early 1980s, Brook's engagement with the research of visual sources for music history gradually declined, and the Research Center for Music Iconography stopped organizing RIdIM's conferences after 1980. The only two of RIdIM's conferences organized during the 1980s were held in Mainz in 1982 and Paris in 1987.

From 1985 to 2001

To eliminate the void that came about by not having regular scholarly meetings, Tilman Seebass—helped by Erich Stockmann and Dieter Christensen—established in 1985 the ICTM Study Group on Music Iconography (of Traditional Music) with a mission to advance the research of visual sources relevant for music history, performance practice, musical life, and organology. The first vice chair of the group was Tsuge Gen'ichi 柘植 元一 from Japan, and its secretary was Onno Mensink from the Netherlands, who organized the group's first symposium in 1986 at the Gemeentemuseum in The Hague. For a short time at the very beginning, the group had in its name the qualifier marking its focus on “traditional music.” Already with first symposium of the new study group, Seebass broadened the circle of scholars from the earlier RIdIM's network, bringing into the loop ethnomusicologists and also attracting younger scholars that were succeeding the generation of RIdIM's founders.

During the 1990s and early 2000s, Seebass was the key person organizing the research network in music iconography.



Figure 1. Tilman Seebass and Nicoletta Guidobaldi. Ravenna, 2006 (photo courtesy of Nicoletta Guidobaldi).

ography. In many ways the ICTM study group under his leadership was the key catalyst and medium that facilitated advancements in the research of music iconography. Seebass received his doctorate in 1970 from the Universität Basel with a thesis about the Utrecht Psalter (Seebass 1973). After graduation, he undertook ethnomusicological fieldwork on Athos (Greece), in Indonesia (Bali and Lombok), and in Tyrol, which gave him insights into research methodology of both historical musicology and ethnomusicology. In the field of music iconography, he has written on topics concerning Greek antiquity, medieval music instruments and illustrations of music theory, representations of Italian folk music in paintings by Léopold Robert, iconography of dance, and symbolism in paintings by Titian and Giorgione. Discussions of methodology of iconographic research are inherent in all these studies, as well as in his important general articles on music iconography written for *The New Grove* (Seebass 2001) and for *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart* (Seebass 1997). From 1977 through 1993, he was professor at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina (USA), and from 1993 until his retirement in 2007, professor and head of the musicological department at the Universität Innsbruck (figure 1). After leaving ICTM in the mid-2000s, he shifted his interests to the International Musicological Society (IMS), which elected him vice president (2002–2007) and subsequently president (2007–2012).

During Seebass's leadership, the Study Group on Music Iconography held the following symposia:

1. Methods in musical iconography. The Hague, the Netherlands, 10–13 June 1986;
2. North-Mediterranean folk music in the visual arts. Orta San Giulio, Italy, 24–29 May 1988;
3. The spirit of Greek music in the visual arts of antiquity. Thessaloniki, Greece, 21–25 May 1990;

¹ Programmes and abstracts of the most important conferences on music iconography, beginning in 1973, are available at <http://www.musiciconography.org/conferences/> (accessed 12 Apr 2020).

4. Music in the visual arts of Central Asia before 1700. Bukhara, Uzbekistan, 24–29 September 1990;
5. Image and reality in the presentation of musical processions, 1660–1775. Bad Köstritz, Germany, 5–9 August 1993;
6. Music images and the Bible. Jerusalem and Ramat Gan, Israel, 29 December 1994 – 3 January 1995;
7. Myth and reality in dance pictures. Innsbruck, Austria, 13–18 June 1995;
8. Music and dance in pictures of popular and courtly feasts (Southern Europe, 1500–1750). Sedano (Burgos), Spain, 15–20 May 1996;
9. Music and images of music in the Mediterranean world, 300 BC – AD 300. Dion and Thessaloniki, Greece, 15–20 September 1998;
10. L'iconografia musicale: Mito e storia. Bologna, Italy, 10 March 2001.

The need for the accessibility of images and their scholarly control, which gave birth to RIdIM, also influenced the early discussions in the study group's symposia. Seebass invited the art historian Leendert D. Couprie (b. 1938) of the Universiteit Leiden to The Hague symposium. Couprie was on the team of Henri van der Vaal (1910–1972), who since the 1950s was developing ICONCLASS, a classification system designed for iconography represented in Western art. In his report about the symposium, Laurence Libin mentioned that one evening of the symposium was devoted to discussion of iconographic documentation, and computer application and software for indexing (Libin 1986).

The discussions concerning cataloguing were a continuation of Seebass's earlier interest to refine the RIdIM cataloguing system. When Barry Brook and his team developed RIdIM's first cataloguing system in the early 1970s, the advising experts were predominantly interested in Western painting, sculpture, and applied arts. The early cataloguing practice soon demonstrated that traditional arts and artistic media, which provided information about traditional musics from around the world, were not adequately considered in these discussions. Therefore, at the 1979 RCMI/RIdIM conference in New York, Seebass led a roundtable session dedicated to the representation of music in the visual arts of non-Western cultures (Kopp 1979). About ten days later, he sent a letter to Timothy Rice, the chair of the programme committee that year for the meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology, which was planned for Montréal (10–14 October 1979). Seebass wrote to Rice:

I made some suggestions, how to improve the system, and Barry Brook and I think now that it is time to get a wider circle of ethnomusicologists involved and discuss the problem. We wonder if the SEM would be ready to schedule a seminar or round table dealing with this topic at the Montreal congress. (Seebass 1979a)

And indeed, in his paper “The RIdIM card and musical iconography of nonwestern cultures” (Seebass 1979b), Seebass demonstrated his suggestions for changes in RIdIM cataloguing. Concurrently, Brook introduced these changes at the IAML meeting in Salzburg. Obviously, the implementation of Seebass's suggestions into the RIdIM cataloguing rules in 1979 was not the end of his interest in these issues, and he continued the development of the cataloguing methods in order to accommodate different aspects of representations appearing in traditional visual arts and non-Western art. At the end of the report about the study group's meeting in The Hague, Seebass added a note saying that

during the meeting, Prof. Couprie (Leiden), Dr. [Magda] Kyrova and Dr. [Onno] Mensink agreed to develop a system of description for images with musical content, on a world-wide basis. They will choose 100 sample pictures and describe them according to both the RIdIM and the revised ICONCLASS system. First drafts of the descriptions are to be sent to the steering committee of the Study Group and other interested scholars for critique and suggestions in late Spring 1987. (Libin 1986)

This report was discussed in the study group's meeting at the 1987 ICTM World Conference in Berlin. In the discussion chaired by Seebass, Couprie, Terence Ford, Monika Holl, Kyrova, and Gunji Sumi 郡司 すみ were participants. Eventually, ICONCLASS was rejected because it dealt with historical subjects in Western art without sufficient references to music and musical instruments around the world. The study group here provided in the most direct way, the intellectual space for a discussion about methods for indexing visual sources relevant for studies of music and supported activities of RIdIM.

Being on the crossroad between history studies, art history, sociology, anthropology, ethno/musicology, dance studies, archaeology, classical philology, and many other disciplines, methodological principles of iconographic research cannot be merely transferred from any of these disciplines, but rather, they have to be developed on their own, always in a relation to the investigated subject, the medium of the work, and the cultural context in which the object had been produced. As each study group's symposium moved from one geographic area to another, the general themes of the symposia changed according to the local iconographic material. In Orta San Giulio, the focus was dedicated to Mediterranean folk music; in Thessaloniki, to Greek antiquity; in Bukhara, to Central Asian art from before 1700; in Innsbruck, to issues of realism in representations. The first meeting in 1986 was dedicated generally to methods in musical iconography. Later on, with thematic and geographic shifts, each symposium shed light on an application of different research methods that came out from the studied material. This approach significantly strengthened

the discipline, often bringing into the network music scholars who were otherwise not working with visual sources. The study group has on occasions also collaborated with other ICTM study groups. The 1994–1995 symposium in Jerusalem and Ramat Gan—examining biblical topics concerning artefacts from Israel, Syria, Asia Minor, Mesopotamia, and Egypt—was organized together with the Study Group on Music Archaeology; and the 1995 symposium in Innsbruck—examining images of dance—with the subgroup on dance iconography of the Study Group on Ethnochoreology.

In his 1995 report about the study group's activities, Seebass said: "What surprised me at the meetings of Jerusalem and Innsbruck was, that there still seems to be undiminished need for methodological guidance" (Seebass 1995). However, the same report indicates that participation in the study group's symposia was by invitations that were sent to "those colleagues of whom we assume on the basis of their publications that they are interested, and particularly those who have not been at our recent meetings" (*ibid.*). Inviting to symposia specialists on specific topics who otherwise were not working with iconographic sources may have been a reason for the constant need to return to methodological discussion, but this practice also provided an opportunity to further refine the methodology with each new topic. Participation in the symposia by invitation ensured learned discussions, but at the same time created a sense of study group's exclusivity, excluding younger people and scholars from outside of Europe who might not be studying the topic of the conference. To compensate for closing the participation at the symposia to invited guests, the study group organized at world conferences in Berlin (1987), Schladming (1989), Madrid (IMS, 1992), and Nitra (1997) open sessions in which presentations were limited to five minutes, each discussing one or two images.

Throughout this period, the study group has never produced symposia proceedings. Only selected papers were individually published in *Imago Musicae: International Yearbook of Musical Iconography*, which Barry Brook, at the time president of RIdIM, had founded in 1984 as the "official organ of the International Repertory of Musical Iconography," and appointed Seebass as its editor. With the founding of the Study Group on Music Iconography, ICTM also became nominally involved with RIdIM and from 1987 through 1992 had three liaison officers representing the Council (Tilman Seebass, Erich Stockmann, and Tsuge Gen'ichi). From 1990 through 2005, the masthead of *Imago Musicae* indicated that the yearbook was published under the joint auspices of RIdIM and ICTM. The three ICTM liaison officers also served for a period of time on the journal's editorial board.

Although Seebass did not officially step down from the leadership of the study group until the world conference in Sheffield (2005), the study group became dormant after the 2001 symposium in Bologna. In an email of 15 April 2005, Seebass notified study-group members and ICTM members with iconographic interests that he was stepping down as the chair and "unless a successor is found ... we will terminate the STG. Despite several attempts I have not been able to find a successor myself, so please communicate among each other and with me on this matter." Seebass left the ICTM soon afterwards, and in 2006 established a new Study Group for Music Iconography operating within the framework of the International Musicological Society.

From 2012 to the present

Without Tilman Seebass's successor, the study group was dormant through the 2000s, until Svanibor Pettan, at that time a vice president of ICTM, suggested during the 2009 world conference in Durban that I take its leadership and revive its symposia. By that time, the old network of scholars has disintegrated, and it was necessary to restart the organization from the ground up. My immediate thought was that the group should become more global regarding its topics, symposia locations, and the involvement of participants. Except for meetings in Bukhara in 1990 and Jerusalem in 1994–1995, the old study group held all its meetings in Europe, and its focus concerned mainly music represented in the Western art. The first decision in that direction was to change the name to Study Group on Iconography of the Performing Arts, as many Asian traditions perceive music in a symbiosis with dance and theatre. Also, dance and traditional music theatre prominently feature in research subjects from the entire network of the ICTM. The Executive Board approved this change of name at its meeting in St. John's, Canada, in the summer of 2011. Such a global mission of the group in many ways influences the choice of topics for the symposia. It is always beneficial to focus the discussion on a specific and precisely defined topic. But then, many scholars working on unrelated subjects and in different geographic regions are excluded from participation. Therefore, it is important to balance the symposium's framework to accommodate a wide spectrum of participants and, at the same time, provide common discussion points. The other challenge for this study group is attracting art history scholars who normally do not belong to the ethno/musicological network. The presence of such heterogeneity of expertise and research methodology is critically important for the advancement of the discipline, but it is generally difficult to achieve. Since the study group's revival, seven symposia have been organized:



Figure 2. Participants of the study group's 11th symposium. Yungang Grottoes near Datong, Shanxi Province, October 2012 (photo courtesy of Zdravko Blažeković).

11. Images of music making and cultural exchanges between the East and the West. China Conservatory of Music, Beijing, 26–31 October 2012;
12. Neoclassical reverberations of discovering antiquity. Istituto per i Beni Musicali in Piemonte and Archivio di Stato di Torino, Turin, Italy, 6–9 October 2014;
13. Decoration of performance space: Meaning and ideology. Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 16–20 May 2016;
14. Images of music-making and its trans-cultural exchanges. Xi'an Conservatory of Music, Xi'an, China, 27–31 October 2016;
15. Iberian music crossroads through the ages: Music-making in its transcultural exchange. Societat Catalana de Musicologia and Institut d'Estudios Catalans, Barcelona, 17–19 October 2018;
16. Music in popular theater and ritual. Universidad de la Republica Uruguay, Salto, 23–26 October 2019;
17. Objects and images of music in public and private art museums. Centro de Estudos de Sociologia e Estética Musical (CESEM), Universidade NOVA de Lisboa, Lisbon and Alpiarça, because of COVID-19 postponed to 7–9 October 2021.

The first symposium, held at the China Conservatory of Music 中国音乐学院, is particularly important because it significantly advanced the discipline in China (Blažeković 2013). The central forces in the

organization of the symposium were Li Mei 李玫 of the Music Research Institute at the Chinese National Academy of Arts and Liu Yong 刘勇, professor at the China Conservatory of Music. This was the first conference in China exclusively dedicated to the research of visual sources for music (figure 2). As a consequence, the Research Group for Music Iconography 音乐图像学分会 was founded in 2013 within the Society for Chinese Music History 中国音乐史学会 (Li Peijian and Dong Xin 2014).

The Chinese Research Group used to organize its conferences biennially, but now does so annually, and it publishes proceedings (Li Rongyou 2013, 2016). Four years after the first symposium in Beijing, the study group returned for its second meeting in China, held jointly with the Chinese Research Group. Chinese scholarship is generally more descriptive than interpretive, sources are rarely presented in their historical context, and access to Western literature on the methodology of research is limited. The study of visual sources for music in China now has a very prosperous future, but because of linguistic difficulties, the conference of the Chinese Research Group hosted exclusively local scholars, which was not beneficial to the exchange of ideas and research methods. This still makes the organization of joint meetings attracting scholars from Europe and North America a necessity.



Figure 3. Participants of the study group's 15th symposium. Palau de la Música Catalana in Barcelona, October 2018 (photo courtesy of Zdravko Blažeković).

The symposium in Turin (2014) focussed on the eighteenth-century advances in archaeology—particularly the discoveries of Herculaneum (1738), Pompeii (1748), and Stabiae (1749)—and their reflections on research and representation of classical antiquity in Italy, which not only overwhelmed the European travellers at the time, who were on their Grand Tours with its history, beauty, and monuments, but for several centuries also served as the key mediator of the knowledge about ancient Greek culture and arts. The symposium in Venice (2016) put light on theatrical architecture, addressing the dynamics occurring between the performance, the spectators, and the theatrical space. The symposium in Barcelona (2018) looked into globalization attempts initiated from the Iberian Peninsula. Home of Spanish, Catalan, Portuguese, Basque, and Galician peoples, the peninsula has been both conquered by powers coming from elsewhere and, by generating its own forces, exploring and conquering regions and cultures from South America and the Caribbean to the Philippines, India, Malacca, and Macao (figure 3). Proceedings with selected papers presented at the symposia of the study group, held since 2012, have been published in *Music in Art: The International Journal for Music Iconography* (Blažeković 2013, 2015, 2017).

Conclusion

The influence that the study group exercised on the research of visual sources for music history and traditions since its founding is significant. When it was formed in 1986, research on music iconography was sporadic, mainly focussed on representations of music-making in Western art and depictions of instruments. During the first period of the study group, under the leadership of Tilman Seebass (1985–2001), its network of scholars advanced the research methodology and broadened the scope of the research to sources for folk-music practices, dance traditions, depictions discovered in archaeological excavations, and music of the Mediterranean antiquity. Now in its second period, the goal is to advance the research of sources in Asia and Latin America that were not included in the network until the most recent times. Each geographic area has different kinds of visual sources and artistic media, and the study group's symposia make possible the development of the specific methodological practices they require. Concerning past efforts, through the activities of its study group concerned with the study of visual sources, ICTM must get credit for providing a stable and continuous scholarly context for the advancement of the discipline and its methodologies, and creating an intellectual space in which scholars have an opportunity to test and develop their ideas.

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