

Erich Stockmann: ICTM President, 1982–1997

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Erich Stockmann and his wife, Doris, became involved with the IFMC in the 1950s. Erich was present at the IFMC Conferences in Oslo (1955) and Copenhagen (1957) (figure 1, from Vargyas Lajos Archivum). Erich and Doris lived in East Berlin, German Democratic Republic, and due to the policies of the GDR government, Erich and Doris could not travel to the West at the same time. One of them had to remain in the GDR. This was, of course, an obstacle to participation in Council events. Many times, Doris had to support Erich by staying home.

Erich was working at the Humboldt University in East Berlin. Due to his refusal to become a member of the Communist Party, he faced a lot of difficulties at the university. In 1966, he lost his job for a number of years and had to suffer endless bureaucratic harassments. Only in 1983 did he become a professor at the GDR Academy of Sciences, and he was the only professor at the Academy that didn't belong to the Communist Party. Most likely, the fact that he became ICTM president in 1982 played a role in his appointment as professor. He also became vice president of the GDR Music Council and, after 1989, also vice president of the united German Music Council. This was a very important role, since the German Federal Republic had no ministry of culture, and all government subsidies for music activities (operas, orchestras, etc.) were distributed by the Music Council.

In 1962, Erich formed the IFMC Study Group on Folk Musical Instruments (figure 2). This was an effort to consolidate his project *Handbook of European Folk Musical Instruments* that he had started with Ernst Emsheimer in Stockholm, Sweden. The study group published the papers from their meetings in the series *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis*, with Erich and Ernst Emsheimer as editors. The series was published by the Music Museum in Stockholm, where Emsheimer was director. This study group is still active and is one of the oldest in ICTM.

Here I will make a little detour to explain the special relationship between Erich and other ethnomusicolo-

gists from Eastern Europe and Swedish colleagues during the Cold War. It was comparably easy for scholars from Eastern Europe to get permission to travel to Sweden, since Sweden was a neutral country, a strong opponent to the Vietnam War, and also gave a significant amount of aid to Cuba. It was also easy to travel between Stockholm and East Berlin. A daily train ran between the cities. One embarked the train in the late afternoon, slept in a wagon with beds, and arrived the next morning in the other city. Furthermore, Erich and Ernst Emsheimer had similar experiences. Ernst was from Leningrad and worked at the Soviet Academy of Sciences in the 1930s. In 1936, he was tipped off by a friend that he was on Stalin's death list. He had connections in Sweden and managed to escape to Sweden with his family. Ethnomusicologist Jan Ling, professor at Gothenburg University, was a student of Ernst's and met Erich in the 1960s through Ernst. Jan wrote his PhD dissertation on the Swedish folk instrument *nyckelharpa* (keyed fiddle), and Erich and I were evaluators. Jan later became the chair of the Sweden–Soviet Union Friendship Association, a tactical move that further facilitated the visits of scholars from behind the Iron Curtain. I succeeded Ernst Emsheimer as director of the Music Museum in Stockholm, and thus the publication of *Studia Instrumentorum Musicae Popularis* by the museum could continue.

In 1963, Erich became a member of the IFMC Executive Board, replacing Arnold A. Bake who had died. In the same year, he became chair of the new Planning Committee, later re-named Steering Committee, which was to propose new rules for the Council, among its various tasks. In 1965, Erich also became chair of the Committee on Comparative and Historical Ethnomusicology, with three sub-groups: Historical Research on African Music, the Systematization of Folk Songs, and Research into Historical Sources (European Folk Music). The last group later became the Study Group on Historical Sources, with Doris Stockmann as chair. In 1975, Erich became vice president of IFMC and, in 1980, co-editor of the *Yearbook*. He also served as co-ordinator of study groups.



Figure 1. Lajos Vargyas and Erich Stockmann. Berlin, 1957
(photo courtesy of Vargyas Lajos Archívum, licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0).

On 6 July 1982, Erich was appointed president by the Executive Board after the death of Poul Rovsing Olsen four days earlier. Erich was fifty-six years old. At the 1983 conference, he was elected president by the General Assembly. The first problem he had to deal with was the aggressive opposition, mainly from East European members, to the change of name of the Council from International Folk Music Council to International Council for Traditional Music at the 1981 conference in Seoul, South Korea. He dealt with this in his usual gentle and non-aggressive way. In his speech to the General Assembly, he defended the change of name and concluded that:

In the world of music, our new name is leading to a better understanding of our goals, capabilities, and potential functions. We find the ICTM surrounded by new expectations and tasks that constitute a challenge for the whole membership and particularly for the Executive Board. Our place among the international music organisations in the UNESCO family is being redefined. The rôle of the ICTM in a variety of UNESCO-related projects is now under discussion, and the ICTM must rise to these new tasks. (*BICTM* 63, Oct 1983:11)

Poul Rovsing Olsen stated in Korea at the 26th Conference: "The International Council for Traditional Music is an open-minded, non-dogmatic organization." Let us keep it that way. (*ibid.*:12)

When he became president in 1982, Erich asked me to arrange the 1985 conference in Stockholm. He also told me that he planned to have the 1987 conference in East Berlin and also the 1989 conference in Eastern Europe or nearby. One reason for this was that it would help him contain criticism from the East European colleagues regarding the change of the Council's name and prevent them from leaving the Council for the European Seminar in Ethnomusicology which had been founded in 1981 by John Blacking.

The 1987 conference hosted by Erich in East Berlin was a big success. More papers were presented than in any previous conference. Inspired by the possibilities opened up by *glasnost*, many members from East Europe were able to attend. A lot of young ethnomusicologists also attended the conference. The influential East European member Oskár Elschek and his wife, Alica, arrived from Bratislava driving their old Volkswagen, which would not had been possible a few years earlier. Oskár and Olive Lewin from Jamaica were elected vice presidents. Claudie Marcel-Dubois resigned as vice president and was elected the first honorary member of ICTM. It was decided that ICTM should have only two vice presidents, not three or more as was the rule before this conference. All these decisions display Erich's talent for tactical thinking.



Figure 2. Erich Stockmann (first from the right) at the 6th symposium of the Study Group on Musical Instruments. Kazimierz Dolny, 1977 (photo courtesy of Julijan Strajnar).

In the *Bulletin*, the report from the 1987 conference starts:

The 29th Conference of the ICTM, held from 30 July to 6 August, 1987, in Berlin (GDR), attracted 240 registered participants from forty countries. In a departure from long established policy, the Programme Committee under Professor Erich Stockmann scheduled 90 papers in addition to audio-visual presentations and other events, which increased the opportunities for the growing number of working groups within the Council to present their results to the general membership. The ICTM Study Groups on Ethnochoreology, on Iconography, on Music and Gender, and on Computer Aided Research took advantage and organized their own conference sessions.

Conspicuous and most welcome was the active participation of younger and young members in all aspects of the conference, and their contribution to the overcoming of language and other barriers. (*BICTM* 71, Oct 1987:3)

During the years 1984–1991 many colloquia, symposia, and rostra took place.¹ Erich organized colloquia and

other meetings in Wiepersdorf Castle, outside Berlin. New national committees and study groups were formed. It was a period of intense ICTM activity, propelled by Erich and Secretary General Dieter Christensen.

In 1992, Erich was elected to the Executive Committee of International Music Council in a bid from the IMC to prevent ICTM from leaving the IMC. Erich diplomatically accepted the post, but ICTM still left IMC and went on with efforts to establish direct relations with UNESCO.

In 1993, Erich organized another successful conference in Berlin. From 1994 and onwards, Erich's

Such events would be undertaken in collaboration with host countries and the IMC. The 6th Asian Music Rostrum was held in Pyongyang, Democratic Republic of North Korea, 13–15 October 1983, and ICTM organized its first such symposium there, "Traditional music in Asian countries: Its inheritance and development." A lengthy report on the event appeared in *BICTM* 65 (Oct 1984:9–13). Another symposium was planned for the next rostrum to be held in Ulan Bator, Mongolia, in 1985 (*BIFMC* 66, Apr 1985:5), but the Executive Board later withdrew ICTM's name from the event because of lack of communication (*BIFMC* 67, Oct 1985:15). Although ICTM was willing to organize future symposia at rostra, these do not appear to have eventuated.

¹ At its 1983 General Assembly in Stockholm, the International Music Council charged ICTM with organizing scholarly symposia in conjunction with IMC's radio/television rostra.

health slowly deteriorated, and he became less active. However, he still participated in many ICTM events. He announced in 1995 that he was going to resign as president in 1997. When the 1997 conference took place in Nitra, Slovakia, Erich could not attend due to illness. Secretary General Dieter Christensen was also ill and could not attend the General Assembly. Thus, as one of two vice presidents, I had to compose the president's report and present it to the General Assembly. A lot had been achieved, and the report was quite long. At the end of my report I said:

I want to conclude by thanking Erich Stockmann for all the hard work he has put in for the ICTM over the years. I could go on at length enumerating crucial events and instances where Erich has held the rudder in firm hands and steered the Council away from threatening shoals. I will, however, not do this since I know that most of you are very aware of the great importance of Erich Stockmann to the ICTM. He has a moral status that we all should envy. All these years he has with a good measure of diplomatic skill managed to be faithful to truly democratic ideals and internationalism with STASI agents, and I'm sure also CIA agents, snooping around the corner. Even if he now steps down as president of the Council, we hope that he will still take part in our activities for many years to come. I suggest that we give Erich a standing ovation. [Acclamation]. (*BITCM* 91, Oct 1997:15)

Erich finished his term as president on 27 July 1997, when Anthony Seeger was elected president. Erich's fifteen-year term was the longest of any Council president. He died in 2003 at the age of 77.

Reference cited

Vargyas Lajos Archivum. <https://www.vargyaslajos.hu/picts/gal1/index.html> (accessed 12 Jun 2021).