

Meditating on Ideology in the History of IFMC/ICTM

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Most scholarly organizations, particularly those concerned with the arts and humanities, do not officially subscribe to a stated ideology outside their loyalty to scholarly principles. They may occasionally state their concerns with such ideals as fairness, human equality, or freedom of thought concerning their research, but one rarely finds them extolling, in their official descriptions of themselves, an ideology governing their activities. In the programmes of their conventions, and even more, in their publications, which are, after all, the face they present to the world, one can sometimes find evidence of attitudes that suggest the liberal, or the conservative, or concern with the aesthetic, or the ethical, or the national. For organizations such as the ICTM, which are concerned with an international—supranational—phenomenon such as music, and which consist of members from virtually all of the world's nations, a stated or implied ideology is even harder to identify. They rarely answer the question, “what kind of people are we?” Given these caveats, and attempting to respond with appropriate modesty to an invitation to write on this subject, I wish here to meditate briefly on the basis of my own experiences of the ICTM and its predecessor, the IFMC, and of a sampling of volumes of its *Yearbook* and the predecessor *Journal*.

The history of ICTM—beginning just after World War II—has been affected substantially by many developments in the world—political issues such as the “Cold War,” by major but more localized events such as the partitions of the Indian subcontinent, the Vietnam war, and the gradual decolonization; by increased contact among peoples, the result of everything from jet travel to the Internet; by crises such as climate change; by a growing sense, in the world's educated populations, of a degree of cultural egalitarianism. But in an international organization of scholars and artists, taking specific positions can be difficult. Still, early on, one senses the beginnings of what later came to be known as “applied ethnomusicology,” the desire for IFMC to help the world's musicians.

The early period

IFMC began European—its first meeting in Basel, 1948, was populated by European scholars, and this early period may be characterized by a need to find its place, in part by defining itself and its subject matter. Even early on, a friendly intellectual conflict seemed to emerge between domination by one of two perspectives. One was concern with “folk” music as an essentially European concept, suggested by the election to the presidency of Ralph Vaughan Williams, a great composer who was very concerned with maintaining and then using authentic British folk music in the art music tradition, and by intellectual leadership by traditionalist scholars such as Walter Wiora, who quickly became influential in IFMC matters, and in whose career discussion of “authenticity” played a major role. The second perspective was maintained by (then still European) scholars who wished to include other geographic areas, illustrated in vol. 1 of the *Journal of the IFMC* by articles by Arnold Bake on India and Jaap Kunst on Indonesia. Interestingly, scholars from Eastern Europe began early on to play major roles at meetings and in the Council's international communication with “national committees,” but this type of participation then declined for a time. Looking forward, it did not take long for the view that we were concerned with all music of the world's cultures to dominate, something that caused the concept of “folk” to become problematic quite early in the Council's history. Questions arose (often by implication): Was it a concept really appropriate to all of the world, or was it something European scholars were imposing on cultures elsewhere? Should we look at the world's musics as units, each of which has “folk” and “art” musics and other categories that were recognized in Europe, or should we see each culture as having its own musical taxonomy? I think eventually the second of these has won out, in the management of ICTM and in the world of ethnomusicology at large; but perhaps not absolutely.

In the first few years of IFMC history, it's easy to sense the development of both directions—folk music versus



Figure 1. Hotel Moskva, the venue of the 1962 IFMC conference, in Gottwaldov, Czechoslovakia. The sign welcomes IFMC members in English, Russian, French, German, and Czech (photo from ICTM Archive).

world music. The 1950 meeting in USA, and the 1954 meeting in Brazil, with programmes emphasizing musics of both areas respectively, indicate the interest of the central group of Europeans to widen the horizon. Scholars from a wide variety of nations participated, and I believe the central group of Western Europeans were eager to welcome others, thus accepting a greater variety of concepts and approaches to scholarship, and exhibiting an ideology of breadth and tolerance. At the same time, during the first years, there was much discussion about its central aims. In vol. 2 of the *Journal*, Maud Karpeles (1950) refers to three principal objects: assisting in the study and (emphatically) in the practice of folk music, furthering comparative study, and promoting friendship among nations. And in vol. 7, which contains proceedings of the meeting in São Paulo, we find a definition of folk music formulated by Karpeles (1955) which was to become for some time at least informally the guide for the IFMC, along with a resolution adopting a definition (IFMC 1955), which was—interestingly—passed by a vote of eight to one, with three abstentions. Significantly, these twelve votes represented not individuals but countries, reminding that the organization was originally composed of several constituencies—individuals, members grouped by countries, national committees, and representatives of governments. Gradually it was to become, in its fundamental nature, essentially an organization of individuals.

Yet the question of defining was not easily resolved. Looking ahead a few years, to my short term as editor of the *Yearbook* (1974–1976), I was uncomfortable with

the lack of agreement on what properly belonged in its purview and proposed to editorialize on a definition in my first issue. President Klaus Wachsmann wisely dissuaded me, saying something like “this would only raise a storm of argument and unpleasantness. The way we have been managing this organization is by letting all members live with their own definitions.” And looking back, it was an issue for scholars early in the twentieth century, as illustrated by the hundreds of conceptions cited in Julian von Pulikowski’s (1933) classic book.

The late 1960s

The period beginning around 1968 was one of significant change in the governance, location, and publication programme of the IFMC. I am not sure whether the following observations reflect conscious intent, but it seems to me that increasingly there is some conflict between contents of *Journal* and *Yearbook* resulting from the desire to publish papers presented at the previous conference; the need to provide representation of the musics of different parts of the world, and by scholars from different areas; and selection of what seems to the editor as the most significant research, selecting the best articles, whatever source and subject. This diversity of approaches continues, though it was eventually mitigated by the reduction of conferences to every other year.

Statements purporting to represent the view of the organization and that can be interpreted as ideological were published in the first volume of the *Yearbook*, by the new editor, Alexander Ringer and by General Secretary

Karpeles (1969), in whose very comprehensive essay I note the following observations: The Council is still concerned with “folk music” as something one needs to define, contrasting it with other kinds of music, particularly popular music, against which it must be defended. The Council sees (saw) itself as a scholarly organization, but the criteria of “pure” scholarship for presentation and publication are mitigated by the importance of giving voice to many nations and cultures, and the participation of the various national committees. In 1968 there were ten of these—five in Eastern Europe, those being deemed particularly important as a way for individuals in these nations to participate, given certain political handicaps. But in this period, I have the feeling that getting people everywhere to participate was more important than assessing the nature and attitudes of this participation. Throughout Maud Karpeles’s 1969 report one notes the continued emphasis on encouraging the practice of folk music and dance, on the use of folk music in education, and on collecting and preserving (without interpretation) as principal activities of scholars.

1968 saw a major development in the character of IFMC—the definitive move from an almost exclusively European centre. Moving the secretariat to USA was considered (eventually it went to Canada); and the journal was for a long period edited in USA. I don’t know whether the following applies to the organization as a whole, but the newly established *Yearbook* clearly became something like a general scholarly journal, and as far as I can tell, the Council was at that point becoming—even more than previously—taken over by academics.

I perceive something of a turning point in the early 1980s, centring on the conference of 1981 in Seoul, the first to take place in East Asia, and *Yearbook* no. 15 (1983) whose contents are explicitly centered on East Asian musics, with guest editors Hahn Man-young and Tokumaru Yoshihiko. The notion that this is an organization dealing with “folk” music in some sense, avoiding classical traditions, is gone. And indeed, no one seemed to talk about the classification of music along those lines, having perhaps recognized that each culture has its own taxonomy of music, more or (often) less comparable to the European.

From the 1980s on

This period may be characterized ideologically by the concept of expansion in various senses, significantly by its name change from “folk” to “traditional” in 1981. In an international organization of scholars in the arts and humanities, questions involving nationalism or regionalism may arise: Given that each society has its own music and its own system of ideas about music, does this mean that there is not one musicology or ethno-

musicology, but many? Is it fair to continue maintaining that ethnomusicology began in Vienna, or Berlin or Amsterdam, or New York—and then gradually moved into the rest of the world where scholars began to work in ways derived from these origins? Or should we consider that each musical culture develops its own ethnomusicology? I don’t believe that the ICTM grappled with this issue explicitly. Vol. 15 of the *Yearbook*, from this first 1981 meeting in East Asia, sheds a bit of light. Eight essays are by East Asian authors of whom three carried out their graduate studies in the USA and Canada, and the rest were trained in Japan or Korea. For one thing, this issue presents ethnomusicology not as a field in which one studies a music strange to one’s own background; scholars wrote about their own music. And evaluation of some of these articles might require criteria different from those typically held by outsiders but, rather, they seem parallel to research done by European scholars on European music.

Examining the *Yearbook* in the late 1980s reveals two characteristics—results, I believe, of very gradual change—that relate issues of ideology. Vol. 20 (1988), celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the IFMC/ICTM, contains several articles that examine its history. By this point, the *Yearbook*, if not the ICTM itself, has changed its focus to the field of ethnomusicology as a whole. An article by Christensen (1988) suggests that one abiding theme of discussion was the relationship of the Council as an organization to its American membership and to its rival, SEM. Perhaps like other international organizations, some in the leadership of ICTM feared that moving its main offices and its editorial apparatus to the USA at a time when this nation was perhaps at its zenith of political power, and obviously on the verge of immense changes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, would wreak changes that could result in the total de-emphasis of aspects of its original ideology—emphasis on “folk music,” an essentially humanistic approach, and encouragement of an amateur class of scholars and performers. Instead, there would be a more social-science oriented direction, evidence of the kind of competitive academic existence characteristic of American academia, and a lot more of “theory.” ICTM might be swallowed by its American “national committee”, which in fact was the SEM. (A good many who feared these results were themselves Americans.) In the end, ICTM did, for a period, become more of an American-centered institution, although no one actually set out to make it so.

By this time, conferences being held biennially, alternate issues of the *Yearbook* reflected the emphases of a conference and providing venue or general contents or special topics such as dance. But the relationship of conference and *Yearbook* declined otherwise as well. Thus vol. 21 (1989) is introduced by in the editor’s

preface with the statement, “the essays in this volume were selected to reflect a larger range of interests and concerns than ... the biennial conference volumes usually permit” (Christensen 1989:ix). Three or four of the articles set out to make theoretical statements of broad significance, and those articles examining specific musical cultures or repertoires do so by looking at them through a methodological lens—the refugee experience, issues of identity, revivals, and one way an ethnomusicologist might look at Western art music. Although we are still presented largely with shortened (or expanded) versions of conference presentations, this is very different from the kinds of work offered in earlier volumes. Thus, *Journal* vol. 10 (1958), giving contents of the Copenhagen conference of 1957, exhibits traditional approaches to melodic and modal analysis applied to eight European and three Asian, African, and Native American repertoires.

Now this kind of change reflects, of course, things that happened in world music research generally. But ICTM could have followed other alternatives: for example, moving from the type of content provided in vol. 10, descriptive study of repertoires, to something like the analytical approaches recently developed by Michael Tenzer (Tenzer and Roeder 2011) and others. Instead, it did move to a perspective in which an anthropological approaches hold sway, where all repertoires—folk, classical, popular and more—are included, and instead of showing how a generally accepted approach to analysis can illuminate the music of any people, the processes of history and culture change in one society can lead to a general theoretical understanding about the way music works in the world, and how these processes can be explicated.

By way of conclusion

As an international organization, I believe ICTM did not—I recapitulate—take formal positions in regard to political and social developments in the world; certainly not in its programme of scholarly publication. There do seem to be exceptions: the concern with refugees and poverty (vol. 45), the attitude of inclusiveness; the desire to expand the number of peoples and kinds of music with which we are concerned; and the question of whether to permit Kurt Waldheim, president of Austria but with a shady past in the Nazi era, to address the 1989 meeting. Adding areas in the world by locating conferences in new places where the conventional Western European wisdom would have had it, there was no music scholarship: starting with North America in 1950 and Brazil a few years later and moving eventually to nations, largely in Asia, that have long traditions of music scholarship and of collecting traditional music,

but in which ethnomusicology as specifically practised in the West was a relatively new development. Devoting issues of the *Journal/Yearbook* to “new” areas may be seen as an expression of ideology. One such issue to be noted is *Yearbook* 22 (1990), resulting in part from a conference in Austria which contains a number of articles by scholars from the Soviet Union who had been especially invited to the conference and by others, including Barbara Krader (1990) about Soviet scholarship. I interpret this as a gesture of welcome to a world area that had been neglected by ICTM, and perhaps as a kind of anticipation of major changes about to occur in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Much more recently, the need for scholars—though not necessarily their organizations—to take positions in political and social issues became more prominent in ICTM publications (e.g. Harrison 2013; Rice 2014).

Vol. 22 (1990) tries to expand the concepts under purview of the ICTM by taking account of different—Soviet—approaches to terminology (Krader 1990). Expansion is evident also, for example in vol. 32 (2000), devoted in part to the programme of the 1999 conference in Hiroshima. There is hardly anything about music that anyone could label as “folk.” Most articles are about art music traditions, and one is explicitly a biography of a Korean scholar of the 15th century. There is much about modernity, motion, government control; and about the issue of research as a national or a multi-cultural activity.

Finally, do these remarks about aspects of our history indicate identifiable ideologies, to which we have subscribed? I suggest three—that over the years we have been egalitarian, expansionist, but also conservative:

1. I believe that as an organization, particularly as exhibited in our major publication, we have been guided by concerns with an egalitarian approach to the world’s musics, seeing ethnomusicology—as does the profession as a whole—as egalitarian in its essence (see Myers 1992:17);
2. We have had concern—to various degree—with the concept of authenticity, that is, with the study and preservation of music that truly represents its culture (however this may be determined). And we have been guided—a conservative view of all proper research—by a search for truth as determined by evidence. We have been non-judgmental in our approach to music and to the world’s cultures, occasionally perhaps turning a blind eye to events that ought to have roused our disapproval. We have had some concern with the notion of doing people—musicians, mainly—some good;
3. Perhaps most clearly, we have been expansionist—adding, to our original European core, scholars and conference venues from the nations of the world, adding musics from everywhere, going far beyond what the word “tradition” conventionally means, making room in the *Yearbook* for work on

literally all types of music and surely beyond the word “folk” that was our original *raison d’être*.

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