

Klaus Wachsmann: IFMC President, 1973–1977

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Klaus P. Wachsmann (1907–1984; [figure 1](#))¹ was a founding member of the IFMC and played an important role in its transformation from a largely European organization to a more international one associated with the field of ethnomusicology.² At the 1947 International Conference on Folk Song and Folk Dance in London, Wachsmann spoke in favour of the establishment of the IFMC, and was appointed as a member of the initial, provisional Executive Board. He was re-elected to the Board at the first conference in 1948, and continued in this capacity until elected as vice president in 1970, and then as president in 1973. He was also a member of the important Advisory Committee in London, 1959–1967. During his time of service with the Council, he was identified as representing first Uganda, then the UK, and then the US, the result of his varied professional career. He was a quiet and modest person, with a dry wit and a diplomatic approach to people and organizations.

Wachsmann's life epitomized developments in twentieth-century musicology, the military conflicts in Europe, and colonialism (see De Vale 1985). He studied musicology at the University of Berlin with Friedrich Blume and Arnold Schering, and comparative musicology with Erich von Hornbostel and Curt Sachs (1930–1932). Even though he was raised a Lutheran (and later became an Episcopalian), his Jewish background meant that he could not continue his studies in Germany in 1933. He moved to Switzerland and completed his training with a dissertation on pre-Gregorian chant at the University of Fribourg. Returning to Germany after Fribourg, Wachsmann and his future wife, Eva Buttenburg, fled Germany for the UK in 1936, where he completed

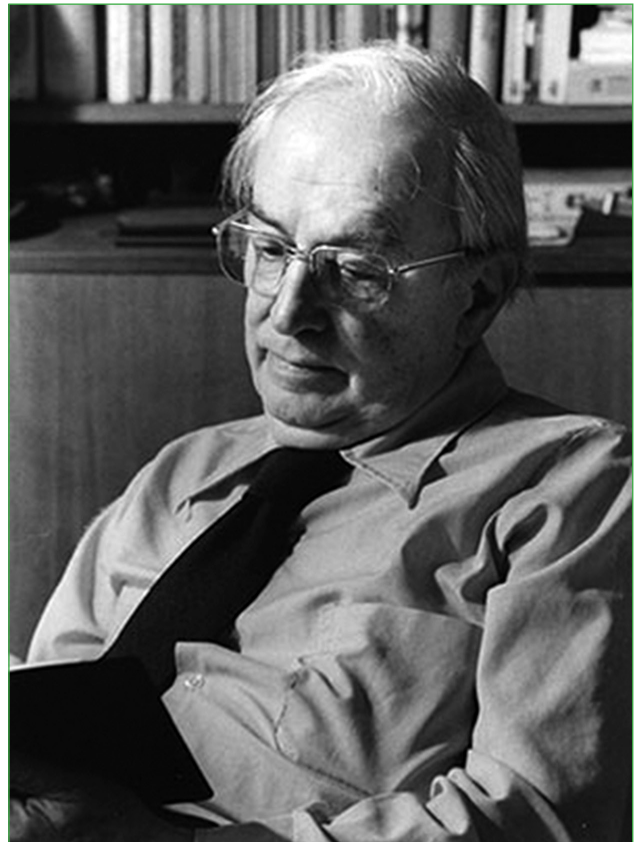


Figure 1. Klaus Wachsmann, unknown date (photo courtesy of Erika Wachsmann).

training in Bantu languages and linguistics. They then moved to Uganda in 1937, where they lived for twenty years. He began working in the Educational Office of the Protestant Missions in Uganda and then became a curator at the Uganda Museum in Kampala in 1948–1957. It was in 1949–1954 that he travelled throughout the country, making audio recordings. From 1963 to 1968, he was exposed to new ideas about ethnomusicology from Mantle Hood and the faculty and students at the Institute of Ethnomusicology at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) in the US, before moving to Northwestern University and in 1975 retiring to the UK. He served as president of the Society for

- 1 Figure 1 was supplied by Erika Wachsmann, Klaus Wachsmann's cousin and a professional photographer.
- 2 The author is indebted to several published sources on Wachsmann by De Vale (1985), Morgan (2001), and Seeger and Wade (1977), and to some vivid and insightful reflections on how he was able to preside over a change in Council while minimizing conflicts among its members provided by Ricardo D. Trimillos (2020). I visited Wachsmann in the early 1970s when my grandfather, Charles Seeger, stayed with him in Evanston, Illinois. This was before my involvement in the Council, and our enjoyable discussions never touched on the IFMC. I only joined the Council in 1981, after his presidency.



Figure 2. Klaus Wachsmann at the time he was IFMC president, with Charles Seeger and Anthony Seeger at the Society for Ethnomusicology annual meeting. Philadelphia, 1976 (photo by William Malm, courtesy of the Society for Ethnomusicology).

Ethnomusicology from 1967 to 1969, and in 1973 he became president of the IFMC (figure 2).

This biography is relevant to his service to the IFMC because Wachsmann was very experienced and sensitive to many of the issues the organization was facing. He had been a refugee, a historical musicologist, a music educator, a museum curator and collector, and a university professor with experience in five countries on three continents. He was trained in comparative musicology but participated in the shaping of ethnomusicology in the USA. Ricardo Trimillos suggests that Wachsmann's experiences as a German Jew driven out by the Nazi regime put him in a "neutral" position for other European nationals whose countries had been victimized by the Nazi expansion of World War II. Although of German background and quite willing to speak German, he carried none of the Third Reich baggage to complicate relationships with other Europeans (Trimillos 2020).

Trimillos writes that Wachsmann was an effective leader during the Cold War period in which European colleagues were politically and geographically divided by Soviet and Western political tensions, as well as theoretical differences. Because of his long association with the Council, he was trusted by the senior members. During the four years of his presidency of the IFMC, many of the challenges were infrastructural. As an international and UNESCO-associated organization, the

IFMC during the Cold War years walked a fine political line between the putatively democratic "West" and the putatively socialist Soviet bloc. Trimillos suggests that the public perception of Wachsmann as British (or at least European) gave Wachsmann's voice more credibility than if he had been American or perceived to be American. He also had a consensual leadership style:

During the meetings Wachsmann chaired, he listened intently to each intervention, waited for other participants to give responses, and on occasion toward the end of a discussion—or as a signal that he was bringing discussion to a close—would offer a penetrating query or observation. He always worked for consensus, rather than taking a vote in the American way. If there seemed to be no consensus in the offing (there were occasional vociferous exchanges!) he would give his signature quiet smile, shrug, and say "right—we can come back to this later." Following this public protocol, Klaus would then engage in a number of informal consultations with different "factions" to fashion compromise, so by the next formal meeting a consensus was usually in place. (Trimillos 2020)

This kind of consensus-building was an important process for the IFMC and later the ICTM, as the Council included people of many backgrounds, and constantly confronted sensitive diplomatic and political issues.

Not enough attention has been given to the use of language in the IFMC/ICTM Executive Board meetings. Trimillos provides an important insight to

the significance of Wachsmann's fluency in English and German during his time in the Council:

Wachsmann's ability and willingness to speak German as well as English was an important part of his effectiveness. Not all German Jews in the post-War period were willing to speak German, even if it were a *lingua franca*. Most of the Eastern European colleagues came from the German intellectual tradition and German, rather than English or Russian, was one of the languages most of them had in common. Oftentimes Board discussions, both formal and informal, were partly in German, which for some Eastern European colleagues was a more comfortable conversational language. German was often the default language for earnest discussions, especially those regarding infrastructure and the international logistics of the organization. (Trimillos 2020)

Wachsmann's installation as the president of the IFMC, succeeding Willard Rhodes was reported laconically in the October 1973 *Bulletin*:

Professor Wachsmann, in taking the chair, remarked phlegmatically: "I understand this position is for two years". As a member since the beginning of the organisation's activities he expressed himself well aware of its difficulties but equally confident in its abilities. The meeting then adjourned. (*BIFMC* 43, Oct 1973:11).

The Council faced a number of challenges during his term, including a deficit budget, a delayed ballot mailing, and a changing intellectual climate. The report on the 1975 IFMC conference in Regensburg includes a statement on the form and aims of work within the IFMC presented by several members of the Council. It states that the increasing emphasis on music in its context requires greater attention of researchers to issues of ethics (*BIFMC* 48, Apr 1976:10–11). In a president's message to the IFMC, Wachsmann applauded the contributions of study groups to the Council (Wachsmann 1976).

During Wachsmann's four-year tenure, changes were made to the IFMC Rules; the Council held its first meeting in the Pacific region, in Honolulu, Hawai'i; and Wachsmann gave a memorial tribute to Maud Karpeles, a central figure in the IFMC until her death at the age of ninety in 1976. Wachsmann's diplomacy, collaborative style, linguistic skills, and sense of humour helped to keep the IFMC functioning, even as it continued to change.

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