

Willard Rhodes: IFMC President, 1967–1973

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Willard Rhodes (1901–1992; figures 1–2) had many talents and a very broad experience with many kinds of music. He was a pianist, music educator, opera conductor, and impresario; an intrepid field researcher who recorded US Native Americans, as well as in Africa and India; and founder of the graduate programme in ethnomusicology at Columbia University in New York City, USA. Important for his term as IFMC president was his experience creating organizations together with others, among them the American Opera Company in New York City and, especially, the Society for Ethnomusicology, of which he was elected the first president at its founding meeting in 1956 (McAllester 1993:255). His address at that meeting, “On the subject of ethnomusicology” (Rhodes 1956), is notable for his insistence on the inclusion of popular music and dance as important subjects of study in the new field.

Rhodes’s broad interests in music and dance probably led to his involvement in the IFMC. In a brief obituary, Dieter Christensen characterized his presidency as follows:

He had assumed the presidency of the Council at its perhaps most difficult period. The moves of ICTM headquarters from London to Copenhagen and from there to Canada fell into Willard Rhodes’ aegis, as did the Edinburgh Conference with its hot post-1968 turmoils in which Willard Rhodes, white bearded and with his burgundy coat, stood like a rock. The strength of his personality calmed the Council, as for so many years it had steadied all those he had touched. (Christensen 1992:xiii).

Correspondence in the ICTM Archive at the National Library of Australia reveals how close the IFMC was to going out of business in 1966.¹ In a letter to Rhodes, Maud Karpeles reported that the Advisory Committee had indicated that if the IFMC appeared to have less than 1,500 pounds for 1967, it would probably

¹ I am very grateful to Stephen Wild and Kim Woo for sending scans of letters to me from the ICTM Archive at the National Library of Australia, and to Maureen Russell at the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archives for sending me the Rhodes Collection Finding Aid and enabling me to access the massive (ten boxes) of now digitized documentation of Willard Rhodes’s field recordings.

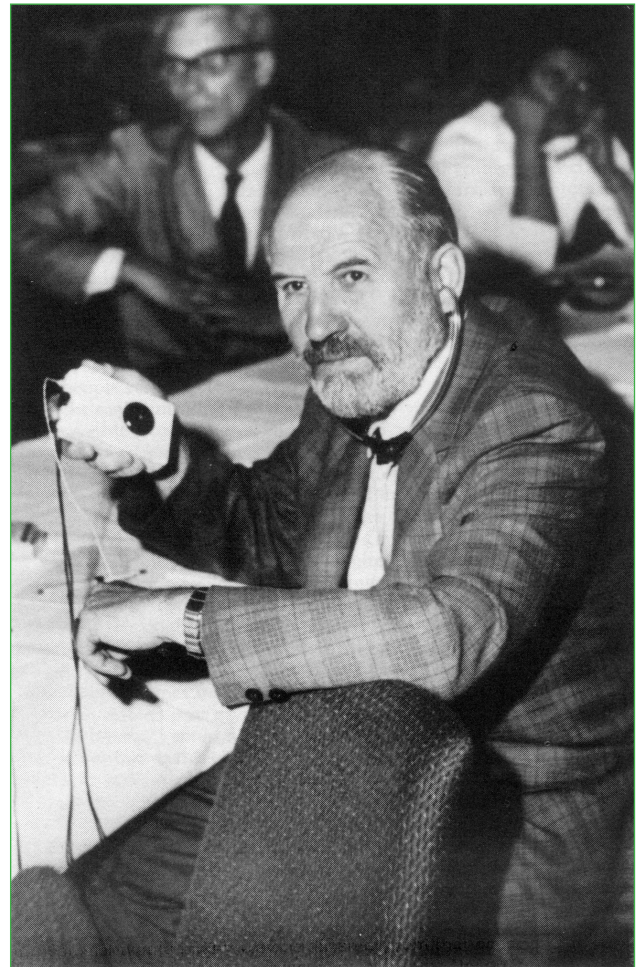


Figure 1. Willard Rhodes at the 15th IFMC World Conference in Gottwaldov, Czechoslovakia, 18 July 1962 (photo courtesy of Joy Rhodes Cooper; as published in Christensen 1992:xiii).

recommend to the Executive Board that the IFMC be dissolved (Karpeles 1966). Membership was declining, and there were insufficient funds for publication and conferences. Shortly before her letter, Rhodes had written to the Advisory Committee from a hotel in India: “It is plainly evident that we must extricate ourselves from the embarrassing financial situation in which we find ourselves.” He suggested applying to foundations in the USA and the UK, and recommended



Figure 2. Executive Board at the General Assembly at world conference: John Blacking, Erich Stockmann (vice president), Charles Haywood, Claudie Marcel-Dubois (vice president), Willard Rhodes (vice president), Klaus Wachsmann (president), Graham George (secretary general), Tjot George (executive assistant). Honolulu, 1977 (photo courtesy of Barbara B. Smith).

that the Beatles should be “touched” for a sizeable contribution. “We must act on the firm belief that the Council will survive the present crisis. I REFUSE TO BELIEVE OTHERWISE” (Rhodes 1966; upper case in the original). He insisted that there should be a conference in Edinburgh in 1969. That conference seems to have reinvigorated the organization. Rhodes described the lively debates to which Christensen refers above, but in a positive sense: “It was heartening to learn of the serious interest and deep concern of our younger members” (Rhodes 1969).

By the end of Rhodes’s presidency, IFMC membership had risen to 1,025 from 420 in July 1967. Grants had been obtained from organizations in the UK, Denmark, Canada, and the USA. Both members and non-members had made significant donations to the Council. The shifts of the headquarters from London to Copenhagen and then to Canada were challenging, but completed. The *Journal of the IFMC* was renamed *Yearbook of the IFMC* and instituted new publication policies under the editorship of Alexander Ringer at the University of Illinois, USA. Rhodes was repeatedly thanked for his contributions to the IFMC and given a standing ovation when he stepped down from the presidency on 30 July 1973 and turned the responsibility over to Klaus Wachsmann.

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