

Jaap Kunst: IFMC President, 1959–1960

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Jaap Kunst (12 August 1891 – 7 December 1960) was a Dutch (ethno)musicologist who became involved in the work of the International Folk Music Council (IFMC) right from its start. He was member of its Executive Board (1949–1958) and president for the last sixteen months of his life.

From 1919 to 1934, Kunst lived in Indonesia (Dutch East Indies), and during that time he recorded and published important works on music and dance in several parts of Indonesia. For a larger group of music researchers, his name is connected to the 1950 publication *Musicologica: A Study of the Nature of Ethnomusicology, Its Problems, Methods and Representative Personalities* (reprinted in Kunst 1994:88–146). It was the first time that the field of study was described in a major publication as “ethno-musicology,” later spelled as ethnomusicology.

Hence, when the IFMC was established, Jaap Kunst (figure 1) was already well-known to people interested in music and dance worldwide. Kunst was co-opted as member of the Executive Board at its meeting of September 1948 (EB minutes, 3rd meeting, 19 Sep 1948:§27) and re-elected in June 1954 (ibid.:14th meeting, 1–2 June 1954:§149). During the period 1947–1963, the IFMC was mainly run by its (honorary) secretary, Maud Karpeles. She was assisted by the members of the Board and the Vice Presidents Marius Barbeau (1958–1969), Antoine-Elysée Cherbuliez (1948–1964), Poul Lorenzen (1947–1951), Albert Marinus (1947–1962), and Ole Mørk Sandvik (1954–1968). Kunst attended most of the EB meetings (figure 2), like several other Board members who were generally on the EB for a long time, such as Arnold Adriaan Bake, Douglas Kennedy, Claudie Marcel-Dubois, and Klaus Wachsmann. The first IFMC president, Vaughan Williams, had been a purely ceremonial president, and he never attended a meeting of the Executive Board.

The work of the Board during the first decade of the IFMC was very much in line with the interests of Kunst, for example: (1) publishing anthologies of international folk songs, a catalogue of recorded folk music,

and a manual for collectors of folk music; (2) organizing conferences, radio broadcasting, and festivals; and (3) taking serious attention of the musics of the world, also outside Europe and the US. The 1959 third and “much enlarged” edition of *Musicologica* (first edition published as Kunst 1950) shows this interest. It was published under the auspices of the International Folk Music Council and, in his preface to this edition, Kunst (1959a:vii) wrote that he owed “many thanks to many people, in the first place to Miss Maud Karpeles, hon. secr. of the Intern. Folk Music Council.”

Wang (2018:72) explains how important the 1953 IFMC conference was for the Japanese ethnomusicologists Masu and Kurosawa: their presentation of Taiwanese music “caught the attention of Arnold Bake, André Schaeffner, Jaap Kunst, Paul Collier and others.”

After first IFMC president Vaughan Williams suddenly died on 26 August 1958, the IFMC General Assembly elected Kunst as its second president at its meeting in Sinaia, Romania, on 15 August 1959. Jaap Kunst had apologized for not being able to attend this meeting (*BIFMC* 14, Oct 1959:5). One year later, he apologized again for not being able to attend the General Assembly in Vienna on 26 July 1960, and he sent the membership a letter explaining why he could not be present:

Dear friends and colleagues,

Needless to tell you how deeply I regret not to be among you at this moment. But in life, we are not quite master of our doings, although sometimes we may have that feeling. Not long after you had done me the honour of choosing me as your president, I had to undergo a serious operation that bereft me of my voice. From that operation I still have not quite recovered and so I had to abstain from attending our congress. In my thoughts, however, I am with you and send you all good wishes for a very successful conference. (*BIFMC* 18, Sep 1960:5)

On 16 May 1959 Kunst and his wife, Katy, left the Netherlands for a private journey to Australia, that also included lectures at universities and museums. Unfortunately, this journey had to be interrupted because Jaap Kunst, who had always been healthy,

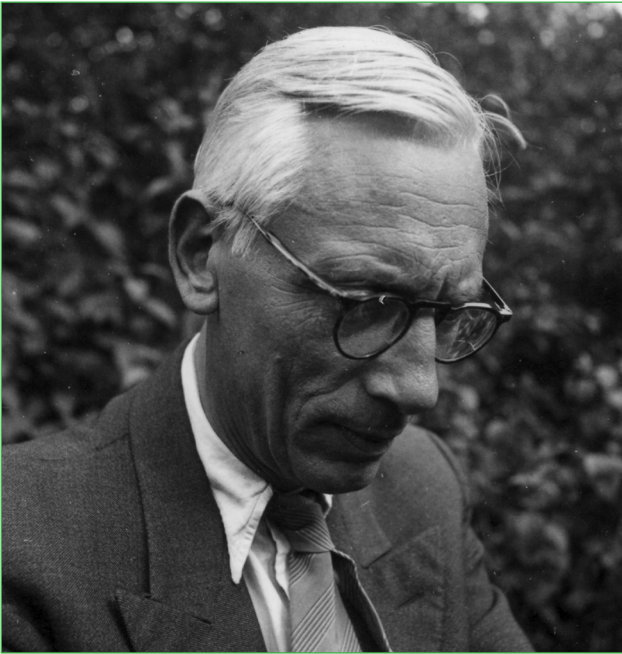


Figure 1. Jaap Kunst, presumably in Amsterdam, around 1950 (photo courtesy of Clara Brinkgreve).

fell seriously ill (Kunst 1959b:94–95; 1960:*naschrift*; Proosdij-ten Have and Roon 1992:12). His friend and fellow Board member, Arnold Bake, mentioned that Kunst expected to reach the age of ninety, and that he thought he still had about ten years left for his work in the field of ethnomusicology (Bake 1961:334).

Things went differently. Soon after his election as president in July 1959, it became clear to Kunst that he was seriously ill, and he offered his resignation to the Board in November 1959. However,

the Secretary, at the wish of members of the Board expressed by correspondence, had urged Dr. Kunst to remain as President at any rate until after the meeting of the 1960 General Assembly. Dr. Kunst had agreed to do so and had offered to retire at the time that it best suited the Council. (EB minutes, 23rd meeting, 23–24 July 1960:§263)

The “serious operation” in 1959 mentioned in the letter to the General Assembly meeting in Vienna on 26 July 1960 had been necessary because Kunst suffered from throat cancer; he died a few months after writing this letter. At its 25th meeting in Quebec, Canada, 27–28 August 1961, the Board expressed its deep sorrow over the death of Kunst and added: “As a great scholar, an indefatigable worker and a most lovable man, his loss will be felt by all who knew him, both personally and through his work” (*BIFMC* 20, Jan 1962:9).

In his memorial message, Bake (1961:328, 331) also wrote about Kunst: “He had great luck, namely in having a wife who shared his love and enthusiasm and who, from the moment of their marriage in 1921 until the end of his life, did everything to make his work pos-

sible.” See also the book by Kunst’s granddaughter, Clara Brinkgreve (2009:131–210), for the important role played by Kunst’s wife, Katy Kunst-van Wely, in the ethnomusicological work of Jaap Kunst. Kunst himself quoted from Irene Sachs’s letter to him, when describing the tremendous support of his wife for his work: “Katy, whom Heaven must have created on special order for you.” He also expressed his gratitude for the official recognition of his scientific work by being elected member of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) in May 1958, president of the IFMC in August 1959, and honorary president of the Society for Ethnomusicology in December 1959 (Kunst 1960:*naschrift*).

More information on aspects of Jaap Kunst’s professional life may, for instance, be found in publications by Marjolijn van Roon (1993, 1995a, 1995b), Ernst L. Heins (2013), and Wim van Zanten (2014).¹

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¹ Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible for me to consult the Jaap Kunst collection in the archives of the University of Amsterdam Library in May–July 2020. I had to rely on the mentioned publications and the ICTM Archive in Canberra.



Figure 2. Erik Dal (?), Arnold Adriaan Bake and his wife Cornelia, Matts Arnberg, Katy and Jaap Kunst, P. Rajaratnam (?), in front of Cecil Sharp House. London 1952 (photo courtesy of Clara Brinkgreve).

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