Multicultural Musicology for Monolingual Academics?

Originally posted on blog *Desiring Progress*, on 22 April 2015, at https://ianpace.wordpress.com/2015/04/22/musicological-observations-3-multicultural-musicology-for-monolingual-academics/

The following is an expanded and more detailed version of a post submitted to the electronic discussion list of the American Musicological Society (AMS-L) as part of a thread about the decline of linguistic skills amongst students and musicologists, which grew out of an initial post about the removal of German from instruction in many French schools.

I believe passionately that we should consider whether the growth of certain areas of musicology have helped to accelerate a decline in foreign language skills amongst both students and musicologists. In particular, this applies to those various areas associated with increasing ‘diversity’ within the field of study. To even contemplate this possibility is sure to be controversial, but this should not deter serious consideration of the issues at stake.

To begin with, consider popular and film music studies: even a cursory glance at a cross-section of published English-language research in these areas shows a scarcity of any references to non-English scholarship or writing of any type. I have done a mini-study of two journals to consider these questions: first the *Journal of Popular Music Studies*, looking at all issues from March 2010 to March 2014. These include a total of 181 articles, including editorials and book reviews. Almost all of these have lists of ‘works cited’. Of these, just 12 showed regular use of foreign language sources – 6 of them in a special June 2013 issue devoted to German popular music [1]. Otherwise, one article cited a Peruvian musical anthology in Spanish; one Michael Jackson article referenced one article in Spanish; another Jackson article referenced one article in French [2]. Another article referenced one book in Portuguese, though the ethnographic nature of the article implies full fluency in this language [3]. Then one article references in Spanish two books, one article and one LP booklet (alongside, in English, 14 books or theses, and 15 articles or book chapters) [4]; another refers to a Dutch-Javanese dictionary; and another to two texts in French and one Toraja-Indonesian dictionary [5]. In total this amounts to just 18 articles employing any foreign-language sources at all (the extent to which articles in this journal rely upon journalistic and internet sources is also notable).

Whilst Anglophone popular music is the focus of the overwhelming majority of articles (and this fact itself deserves more critical scrutiny), many of these make wider claims relating to philosophy, aesthetics, sociology, gender and much more, but still from the limited perspective available through monolingual reading. Furthermore, whilst many claims are made for the global significance of this music, this is hardly testable without access to some of the languages of the music’s global listeners. A small few articles involve ethnographic work requiring language skills, but these are mostly accounted for above.

I also scrutinised the journal *Music, Sound and the Moving Image* over the same period, looking at issues from Spring 2010 to Spring 2014. This time I considered
only the full articles, not the book reviews which are briefer and involve fewer references. There were 44 articles here. The proportion employing foreign language sources was significantly enhanced by a special issue (Vol. 4, No. 2 (2010)) dedicated to Spanish cinema, in which most contributors were from Spanish-speaking countries and naturally referenced plenty of Spanish sources. This accounted for 9 articles [6]; otherwise there was one article citing two theses in Norwegian (one of these in a little detail) [7], another referencing three Spanish sources [8], another some French sources (but not Arabic ones, rather ironically considering this was an article dealing with colonialism and orientalism) [9], whilst another was a translation of a 1937 Spanish article [10] (I am not counting an article which cites one French source which has clearly only been accessed through a secondary source in English [11]). So a total of 13 with any foreign-language references; the proportion would have been more like that for the Journal of Popular Music Studies without the Spanish issue.

Something of the same phenomenon can be found in parts of the fields of New Musicology and Critical Musicology, even when this work entails broad (and frequently stereotypical) characterisations of European cultures, as has been pointed out wittily by Tim Carter in a review of Susan McClary’s 2000 book Conventional Wisdom [12]. Looking through the references in Conventional Wisdom itself, I find just two not in English, one to a testo from Stradella’s La Susanna, as used by McClary herself in a music-theatre piece [13] the other text to a Petrarch sonnet given with translation [14]. McClary’s earlier book Feminine Endings had four non-English sources: a reference to Monteverdi’s foreword to the Madrigali guerrieri ed amorosi [15] and to Bellerofonte Castaldi’s Primo Mazzetto di fiori musicalmente colti dal giardino Bellerofonteo (1623) [16], Joachim Burmeister’s Musica poetica (1606) [17], and Arturo Graf’s “Una cortigiana fra mille’, in Attraverso il cinquecento (Turin: Chiantore, 1926) [18].

Lawrence Kramer’s Music as Cultural Practice 1800-1900 (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990) makes just four brief references to German texts (Hanslick’s Vom Musikalisch-Schönen (1854), Kant’s Kritik der Urteilskraft (1790), Schiller’s Über naive und sentimentalische Dichtung (1795), and poems of Goethe [19], for all of which English translations are also available) but never engages with any scholarly literature not either written or translated into English, nor a vast range of primary sources which have never been translated (for example, much of the writings, correspondence and diary of Schumann, of which only small sub-sections have been translated, or for that matter the literature of Jean-Paul). Kramer’s 1995 Classical Music and Postmodern Knowledge contains one place in which the French original of a passage from Derrida is placed alongside a reference to the translation, a single reference to a passage from the second volume of Heinrich Schenker’s Das Meisterwerk in der Musik (at that time not yet available in English translation), one article in French by Guy Rosolato, and a juxtaposition of a few lines of Celan and Derrida in the original languages [20]. Kramer’s 2002 Musical Meaning: Toward a Critical History is a little better, with one translation and one modified one from short passages of Wagner, one reference to Schiller’s Über Matthissons Gedichte, another to Adolph Bernhard Marx’s Ludwig van Beethoven: Leben und Schaffen (1859), two to short passages from Heinrich Heine, and a modified translation of a passage Goethe’s Wilhelm Meister, a couple of references to Brecht in German, and one to a contemporary article by Horst Weber on Schoenberg [21], but this is in the context of over 95% references to English language sources. In none of
these books is there almost any evidence of grappling with modern non-English scholarship on the many subjects addressed therein.

Of the 16 essays contained in the 1993 volume edited by Ruth Solie, *Musicology and Difference: Gender and Sexuality in Music*, four of these (by Leo Treitler, Gretchen A. Wheelock, Nancy B. Reich and Suzanne G. Cusick [22]) make regular reference to non-English texts, three others (by Ellen Koskoff, Carolyn Abbate and Lawrence Kramer [23]) very briefly to one or two texts, the other nine to none at all. Linguistic ‘difference’, and all that can be gained in terms of perceptions of difference by studying the work of scholars in other languages, is clearly not a major priority here. Another collection supposedly celebrating ‘difference’, the 2000 volume edited by Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh, *Western Music and Its Others*, contains 11 articles and an extended introduction. Of these, those by Jann Pasler, Philip Bohlman and Martin Stokes regularly engage with foreign texts [24], Richard Middleton deals in some degree of detail with Joseph Riepel’s *Grundregeln zur Tonordnung insgemein* (1755) [25], and Claudia Gorbman includes a few French references; the six articles making up the other half of the book only reference English-language sources; all others belong within its own ‘Others’. [26]

Tia DeNora’s 2003 *After Adorno: Rethinking Music Sociology* quite incredibly only lists English translations of Adorno in its bibliography [27]. The other foreign texts cited in the bibliography are Joël-Marie Fauquet and Antonine Hennion’s 2002 *La grandeur de Bach*, Hennion’s 1992 *La passion musicale* [28] (alongside various texts of Hennion in English), and two Italian texts by Anna Lisa Tota [29]. However, these references are deceptive. Fauquet and Hennion is simply listed as a text which considers ‘the material and linguistic cultures that come to frame musical texts, that help to draw out particular meanings’ [30], and Hennion’s one cited text only in French is cited as an example of ‘a range of theorists who highlight the importance of theorising action as inhabiting and taking shape within a cultural matrix’ [31] Tota’s 1997 study is merely listed as an example of ethnographic studies [32], and the other not cited at all (unlike a text of Tota in English which is given very slightly more detailed engagement [33]). But this should not be surprising, as DeNora is also the author of *Beethoven and the Construction of Genius*, a potentially interesting subject which is thoroughly marred by the lack of any sustained engagement with German-language primary sources [34], even despite the fact that there is no real engagement with the music either [35]!

Certainly some of these scholars are able to read other languages (as demonstrated in McClary’s work on the Italian madrigal, for example [36]). But many of the very broad arguments presented in this work are, in my view, untenable and unscholarly when the frame of reference is so narrow. The New Musicology has enabled musicologists to dispense sweeping pronouncements on whole swathes of music without any obligation to familiarise themselves with the existing range of scholarship – in multiple languages – first. I could argue more harshly that this whole field of musicology very often amounts to an assertion of Anglo-American superiority and hegemony behind a smokescreen of rhetoric of diversity; this may be somewhat hyperbolic, but not without some truth.

Some fields featuring practice-as-research or practitioners writing scholarship exhibit similar issues. For example, I note that none of the four chapters relating to the Twentieth Century in *The Cambridge History of Musical Performance* [37] (to which
I am also a contributor, but on the Nineteenth Century [38]) reference any non-English language texts at all, an option which would have been unacceptable for any chapters dealing with earlier periods.

I find it hard to avoid the conclusion that these fields of musicology have gained their popularity in part because it appears to be possible to produce work in them without language skills. This consideration might also be borne in mind with the growing fashionability of ‘ethnomusicology at home’ [39], often freeing its protagonists from the considerable linguistic skills required to do extended fieldwork in other musical cultures. All of these things are fruitful fields of endeavour for those who want to be productive without putting in the same amount of work as those in some other more traditional fields of study.

Furthermore, in some of the above cases, it is more than a little ironic when some fields eager to brandish their supposedly multicultural credentials end up contributing to a narrow monolingualism. It would not be inapt, in light of the above, to question the real agenda behind some varieties of musicological thought involving easy dismissals of many things ‘European’.

The historian Richard Evans, in his published series of lectures *Cosmopolitan Islanders*, draws attention to the remarkable range of historians from the UK and US who have produced pioneering and penetrating work on the history of many places beyond the English-speaking world, in sharp contrast to a large number of their European counterparts, some of who treat attempts by Anglophone historians to trespass upon their countries with great suspicion [40]. Yet Evans feels that with the decline of language teaching, as well as other pressures (specifically in the UK) to do with requiring many students and academics to finish projects in a short period of time, this era is coming to an end, and he notes that the majority of his own PhD students are from outside of the English-speaking world.

There are still a significant (if dwindling) number of Anglophone academics researching music from a multilingual perspective. It would be tragic if these were allowed to dwindle to near-oblivion in the name of a narrow populist Anglocentric ideology dressed up as something ‘global’.


9. Kathryn Lachman, ‘Music and the Gendering of Colonial Space in Karin Albou’s Le chant des mariées’, *Music, Sound and the Moving Image*, Vol. 7, Issue 1 (Spring 2013), pp. 1-17. Linguistic limitations to the study of orientalism are not new, however; as has been pointed out by various commentators, Said focused entirely on British and French orientalists, and neglected many German and Hungarian figures (from nations which did not have a foreign empire encompassing the ‘orient’ during the periods in question), such as Joseph Freiherr von Hammer-Purgstall (1774-1856), Johann Gottfried Eichhorn (1752-1827), Friedrich August Wolf (1759-1824), Gustav Weil (1808-89), Gustav Leberecht Flugel (1802-70), the Schlegel brothers, Franz Bopp (1791-1867), Christian Martin Frähn (1782-1851), Ignaz Goldziher (1850-1921) or Joseph Schacht (1902-1969). On, the other hand, Said made too much of Arthur de


14. Ibid. p. 122. The citation and translation are ‘i miei gravi sospir non vano in rime, il mio duro martir vince ogni stile’ (my deep sighs will not submit to rhyme, my harsh martyrdom defeats all styles) (Petrarch, ‘Mia benigna fortuna’, *Rime sparse* 332).

16. Ibid. pp. 177-178 n. 7.
17. Ibid. p. 179 n. 15.
18. Ibid. p. 180 n. 23.
23. Ellen Koskoff, ‘Miriam Sings Her Song: The Self and the Other in Anthropological Discourse’, ibid. pp. 149-163; Carolyn Abbate, ‘Opera; or, the Envoicing of Women’, ibid. pp. 225-258; Lawrence Kramer, ‘Carnaval, Cross-Dressing, and the Woman in the Mirror’ ibid. pp. 305-325. Koskoff’s article draws upon ethnographic work amongst a Hasidic Jewish community in Brooklyn such as clearly betokens wider linguistic skills in Hebrew and Yiddish, but only uses a few non-English texts. Abbate (p. 232 n. 14) references a few articles on cinema in French, though these may only have been accessed via a secondary source in English; also (p. 238 n. 26) Sarah Kofman’s *Quatre Romans analytiques* (Paris: Éditions Galilée, 1973), and (p. 243 n. 34) an essay from Christian Metz’s *Essais sémiotiques* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1977). Kramer simply cites one Goethe text in German (p. 308 n. 6).


30. DeNora, After Adorno, p. 27.

31. Ibid. p. 126.

32. Ibid. p. 91.

33. Ibid. pp. 75.

(‘Beethoven and Musical Economics’ (PhD. dissertation: University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. 1987). Wurzbach is used for a description of Schönfeld (p. 167) and for compiling a list of Viennese patrons (pp. 21-23). Hanslick’s history gets one paragraph’s serious attention (pp. 37-38), whilst two sentences are translated from Schönfeld (p. 40), a few other phrases elsewhere (pp. 42, 106, 154) and he is alluded to briefly in several other places (pp. 43, 46, 87-89, 102, 113, 116, 167-8, 195 n. 13, 196); another citation comes from a translation of H.C. Robbins Landon (Beethoven: A Documentary Study (New York: Macmillan, 1970)) (p. 87). Else Radant Landon is thanked for providing information on the Schönfeld families (p. 204 n. 9) and it is possible most of this information may have come from this source.


39. This is a field with its own ‘canon’ of works, often treated almost like scripture by members of this sub-culture. Time and space do not permit for a detailed examination of this here, but I intend to embark upon such a thing in some format in the future.


41. Ibid. pp. 189-234.