

## A Profile for American Musicology

“What is the purpose of humanistic scholarship? What, in fact, does the humanist scholar do?” These sanguine editorial questions introduce and define the scope of the Princeton “Studies of Humanistic Scholarship in America”—fourteen books-in-progress appraising the condition of the various humanistic disciplines in this country. “The aim of these volumes is to present a critical account of American humanistic scholarship in recent decades. They have been commissioned by the Council of the Humanities, Whitney J. Oates, Chairman, of Princeton University and were made possible by a grant from the Ford Foundation.”<sup>1</sup> Certain of the books may be thought to glut certain of the fields, but the one on musicology fills a void; the joint study by Frank L. Harrison, Mantle Hood, and Claude Palisca has been welcomed and very rightly praised as a milestone in the history of the discipline. There have been few deeply considered statements about American musicology—distressingly few, I should say, in recent years. The general unselfconsciousness of American musicology perhaps reflects its newness as a field of study; much more discussion of aims and principles and premises is needed, as well as of actual working methods. Starting discussion is the first great virtue of the *Musicology* volume, to which I am gratefully paying a small tribute in the form of the present address.

“What is the purpose of humanistic scholarship? What, in fact, does the humanist scholar do?” The *Musicology* volume answers the second of these questions far

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better than the first. The field has been defined in very comprehensive ways, as Professor Palisca points out, but when all is said and done, “the musicologist is first and foremost a historian.” What serves this particular variety of historian as a goal or as a goad, Palisca never makes very clear; perhaps that is tacitly contained in the term “history,” or perhaps musicologists themselves are not so very clear about it. As for Dr. Harrison, he frankly set himself the job not of just answering questions, but of casting around and nudging us a little in one particular direction. That direction is toward a “social aim.” Without such an ideal, Harrison remarks in a terrifying aside, musicology seems merely “to create and protect a reserve for specialized and uncommunicative scholarship”; instead the aim should be the understanding of man: “enlarging man’s knowledge of himself by widening the bounds of historical writing and so throwing light on Western man’s cultural and intellectual development.” According to this concept, musicology should first “contribute to the understanding and re-creation of music by a close analysis of the composer’s musical thought and style in the light of the technical and aesthetic principles of his day”; but although this may be the first task, the ultimate goal becomes “the study of men in society insofar as they express themselves through the medium of music. . . . Looked at in this way, it is the function of all musicology to be in fact ethnomusicology, that is, to take its range of research to include material that is termed ‘sociological.’”<sup>2</sup> With this view, reasonably enough, Professor Hood’s essay on ethnomusicology finds itself in cordial agreement.

After making various necessary allowances, and noting sadly the substitution of the word “function” for the word “purpose,” we shall probably assent to this general formulation. The more thoughtful American musicologists are doing studies which they gingerly fit into one corner or another of the cultural and intellectual history of Western man. The less thoughtful ones are collecting all kinds of information in the vague expectation that someone—someone else—will find it useful in the same great undertaking. This view of musicology is neither surprising nor novel. Before it hardens into orthodoxy—I might say, before the milestone becomes a millstone—I should like to suggest another possible view or orientation.

It treats the same material and uses the same terms. However, works of art are not studied as a means of furthering “the study of men in society.” The terms are just turned around. Men in society are studied as a means of furthering the comprehension of works of art. This may be described as a critical orientation, to differentiate it from the sociological orientation. It is of course no more novel or surprising than the other.

In this conception of musicology, history and sociology are not valued as ends, but as means. Even style analysis, which often gets the place of honor (or at least lip service) in discussions of musicology, is pursued not for general evidence about an era, but for contextual evidence about the artistic individuality of a particular

piece. Each of the things we do—paleography, transcription, repertory studies, archival work, biography, bibliography, sociology, *Aufführungspraxis*, schools and influences, theory, style analysis, individual analysis—each of these things, which some scholar somewhere treats as an end in itself, is treated as a step on a ladder. Hopefully the top step affords a platform of insight into individual works of art—into Josquin's *Missa Pange lingua*, Monteverdi's *Liquide perle*, Beethoven's op. 95, Stravinsky's *Oedipus rex*. These works cannot be understood in isolation, only in a context. The infinitely laborious and infinitely diverting ascent of the musicologist should provide this context.

The insight that I am referring to, critical insight, has never been easy to define, and it has always been as urgent as it is problematic. Urgent, because criticism is the way of looking at art that tries to take into account the meaning it conveys, the pleasure it initiates, and the value it assumes, for us today. Criticism deals with pieces of music and men listening, with fact and feeling, with the life of the past in the present, with the composer's private image in the public mirror of an audience. At worst criticism is one man's impressionism—like bad art—and at best it is an uneasy dialectic. Allen Tate says that criticism is a perpetual impossibility and a perpetual necessity; and he adds stonily that in this it resembles all our other ultimate pursuits.

Now the serious study of criticism is barely mentioned by Palisca or Harrison, even in their more speculative passages. Whether or not this depresses us, it will not much surprise us, for in musical parlance criticism always seems to refer only to daily newspaper writing, a field that has the reputation of an intellectual jungle, in spite of recent efforts by some musicological missionaries. However, the lacuna *will* surprise and may depress the non-musical reader of the book, such as, for example, the experienced academic person with no knowledge of the musical situation (the type is common enough). It will surprise him particularly if he has just read the companion book on *Art and Archeology*, our closest neighbor discipline. Starting out flatly with the proposition that "the [art] historian must be a critic as well . . . since fundamental values in the work of art are inaccessible to historical method," the essay on Western art history goes on to devote an entire chapter to "The Historian as Critic." To quote:

As long as the work of art is studied as a historical document it differs from the archival document only in form, not in kind. The art historian should be interested in the difference in kind, which is immanent in the capacity of art to awaken in us complex responses that are at once intellectual, emotional, and physical, so that he needs, in addition to the tools of other historians, principles and methods specifically designed to deal with this unique mode of experience.

According to the writer,

The philosophy of art history of the last generation could be called anti-philosophical; it taught nonintervention, not only in the sense of avoiding value judgments, but in the sense of minimizing the factor of creativity in historical scholarship. . . . I look on criticism not as an additional technique to be adopted by historians but as a challenge that forces us to re-examine the fundamental philosophical principles by which we operate.<sup>3</sup>

The writer of this is, of course, no outside activist but (like most of the Princeton Studies authors) a member of the younger academic establishment—a Harvard professor, authority on Michelangelo, sometime editor of the *Art Bulletin*, and a veteran of several formidable art-historical institutes.

The lacuna will very greatly surprise the non-musical academic reader if he is a professor of English. In English departments of American universities, criticism has been living alongside of historical scholarship for twenty-five years. Two volumes of “Studies of Humanistic Scholarship” are needed, one on *English Literature* and one on *Modern American Criticism*. In the 1920s, the field was committed to philology and literary history as firmly as music is now committed to similar pursuits; how the change came about is a long story—too long for the present occasion—and an instructive one. Although the “New Criticism” has been forcefully attacked for its excesses, these excesses seem to have diluted with time, and in any case were never shown to be more absurd than those of some so-called scientific research. Dozens of Ph.D. theses in literary criticism, as well as in literary history, are processed in a perfectly responsible scholarly fashion every year. The undergraduate curriculum of the department at the University of California at Berkeley builds on a basic junior course in “Methods and Materials of Literary Criticism.” The catalog description reads: “Explication and evaluation of literary texts and study of the various principles of literary judgment.”

The lacuna would also surprise a classicist. The oldest of the humanistic disciplines is on that account the most open to the charge of pettifoggery—and from time to time this charge is made with positively Dionysiac vehemence. At the present time, a revisionist quarterly magazine called *Arion* is attacking root and branch the alleged Byzantinism of conventional classical studies, and pleading by polemic and by example for a critical approach to Greek and Latin literature. Along with learned critical essays and translations, *Arion* indulges in such alarming exploits as the defense of Nietzsche against Wilamowitz, and the silent exposure of noted classicists by the device of selective quotation. It is notable, again, that the impetus comes from within the academy. The magazine, published by the Uni-

versity of Texas Press, includes on its last page a discreet listing of the faculty in classics at Texas, from which it draws its editors.

But there is probably no need to continue rehearsing all this fairly familiar academic lore. In the humanistic disciplines, criticism is a feature, or a fixture, or at least an issue. It should become an issue in musical studies. Until this comes about, our confident cries of maturity among the other liberal arts will fall on somewhat skeptical ears.

Criticism does not exist yet on the American music-academic scene, but something does exist which may feel rather like it: theory and analysis. Theory, says Professor Palisca with some understatement, “is a field that needs definition almost as badly as that of musicology itself.”<sup>4</sup> The shadowy, fluid state of the field; its problematic relation to analysis; the sporadic nature of the published material; the small number of practitioners—these features, which are only to be expected in a new field, certainly make it hard to get hold of and discuss with confidence. However, I think we realize that those practitioners, if they ever paid the least attention to traditional musicology, might fairly claim achievements ranking in rigor and importance with those of the historians. One can also discern the typical stages of academic infiltration: the key appointments, the prestige courses, the doctoral degrees, and the establishment of a *Journal of Music Theory*. One can also remark that in general, theory and analysis—like the various processes of traditional musicology—are still being treated as ends rather than as steps on the ladder to criticism. Like musicology, analysis seems too occupied with its own inner techniques, too fascinated by its own “logic,” and too sorely tempted by its own private pedantries, to confront the work of art in its proper aesthetic terms. Theory and analysis are not equivalent to criticism, then, but they are pursuing techniques of vital importance to criticism. They represent a force and a positive one in the academic climate of music, and tactful efforts should be made (on both sides, let us sincerely hope) to arrange a rapprochement with musicology. In point of fact, this is just what is happening at a number of leading universities.

The lack of due consideration of theory and analysis in the *Musicology* book has been noted by Lewis Lockwood in a discerning (and doubly diplomatic) review published in *Perspectives of New Music*.<sup>5</sup> The authors class theory and analysis apart from musicology, and so they are classed in the schools; but as Professor Lockwood suggests, these subjects could certainly fall under the ample canopy of *Musikwissenschaft* as defined by the Germans. We need to stress the breadth of musical studies. The intimation that theorists and analysts might be called musicologists, however, strikes me as both touchy and a little specious; better abandon the word “musicology” altogether—who ever heard of “artology” or “literology”? No wonder we are getting mixed up with the social sciences. The book ought to have been entitled *Musical Scholarship*, within which broad study ethno-

musicology, historical scholarship, theory, analysis, and even criticism should all have found a place.

In the end, though, whether theory is subsumed under musicology, or musicology under cultural history, or ethnomusicology under anthropology, are more questions of tactics than of substance. I could cheerfully argue, with Northrop Frye, for a general field theory of criticism in which historical criticism, analytic criticism, sociological criticism, and so on, would figure as subtypes. What does seem to me of substance is that we come around to recognizing the critical orientation as legitimate and fruitful—at the *very least*—in serious musical studies. It is my strong suspicion that the main incentive that brought most musicologists to musicology, and most theorists and analysts to their fields, was something close to the critical urge—not the scientific fervor for research, nor a curiosity about Western man and his history and sociology, nor an abstract speculative bent, but a passion for Bach or Josquin or Beethoven or Stravinsky. Certainly we continue to listen to this music, and play it, and get sustenance from it, and try to pass on that sustenance in our daily undergraduate teaching. Yet our scholarly writing is of a kind that can make even a friendly outside examiner like Frank Harrison speak (not once but several times) about “musicology that has lost touch with music.” For reasons of time and timidity, I pass over the trivia that occupy good minds while Beethoven’s sketches remain unanalyzed (the Germans are only *transcribing* them) and spurious works lurk scandalously in the Josquin canon. Suffice it to say that the gap between music and musicology is neither fortunate for public relations nor in the least necessary. There should be more work on the great masters (among the 1800-odd members of the American Musicological Society, one is hard pressed to name more than two Handel experts, one Monteverdi expert, one Mozart man. We probably harbor more Wagnerians than any organization west of Seventh Avenue—but so far as I am aware, no professed Wagner specialist). And given the critical orientation, work on all other music, however obscure and unstudied, would automatically be brought toward a sphere of general relevance. Even minutiae could be read with pleasure and profit if they could be shown to be making a minute contribution to our essential musical experience.

A parallel situation exists on the level of the students. In the contemporary American scene there is little to motivate them initially in the direction of “pure” scholarship. What brings young men and women to musicology is an original commitment to music as aesthetic experience. Does this become desiccated, somewhere in the graduate curriculum, and can we, their teachers, maintain an altogether clear conscience in this matter? Again and again one sees the best students veer toward analysis, which promises real involvement with musical essences. Again and again one sees them taken aback by the analysts’ narrow intellectual structure. Then one sees them drag their feet on historical dissertations which, be it admitted, are sometimes merely laborious rather than intellectually or musically

challenging. What they want—I am still talking about the best students—is a discipline that will allow them to work, with rigor and intelligence, close to the music that moves them. Failing this, they can turn into very half-hearted scholars.

Dr. Harrison has urged us all to be sociologists—but I must not lay at his door this little sociological speculation about musicologists and their students. I may be completely wrong about it, in which case I apologize to the Society for wasting its time. But if I am right, the situation is not a healthy one. Far better if our scholarly interests were bound in with our musical interests. Far better if our original musical passions were sublimated, rather than repressed, in our research.

It may be objected that a lack of commitment to scholarship in the abstract on the part of Americans or some Americans is no reason for musicology to change, to swerve from the true objective path which the German scholars stamped out generations ago, and have been marching on so powerfully ever since. I am afraid, though, that until American musicology catches something of the resonance of the American personality, it will remain an echo of the great German tradition—and I should not be too sanguine about recent signs of international recognition, welcome and deserved as these may be. That tradition was not dictated by objective truths of nature, it arose out of a certain national current of thought at a certain point in its history. Other European nations, in spite of all temptations—proximity, propaganda, immigration—developed styles of scholarship appreciably different from the German. Presumably we too should be echoing our own current and our own time.

None of this must be taken as chauvinism. The thanks we owe to German musicologists and German-trained musicologists are too obvious, the debt too great and too deep-rooted and (at least in my case) too affectionate. All the same, our identity as scholars depends on growth away from an older alien tradition into something recognizably our own. European observers have a very simple recipe for national integrity: study your own American music, they say, as we have built our musicology around *Stamm* and *Liederbuch*, Risorgimento opera and Elizabethan madrigal, Bulgar folk song, and the like. The critically inclined scholar has a very simple answer: unfortunately, American music has not been interesting enough, artistically, to merit from us that commitment. Even so experienced a visitor as Harrison fails to see the extent to which the American mind dwells in the present, and how little in the past; and the critical attitude is exactly that which takes the past up *into the present*, rather than admiring it as an antiquity. The student of Beethoven feels concerned with the present because the music is (as we say) “alive”; the student of Marenzio or Louis Couperin is concerned with music that can be brought to life; but Francis Hopkinson or Lowell Mason or Theodore Chanler—surely they would defy all efforts at resuscitation. Man, they are dead. About jazz, Harrison has a real point, but such an extremely complex one that I ask leave to pass over it in the present discussion. It does not appear to me that a characteristi-

cally American musicology can be built on native repertory. It can be built only with a native point of view.<sup>6</sup>

Characteristic or not, the recent growth of musicology in this country has been headlong, in terms of the numbers of scholars and students, opportunities, facilities, recognition, support, and all the other rituals which foreshadow coming-of-age. In the years since World War II, the membership of this Society has more than tripled, and Helen Hewitt's dissertation index has nearly quadrupled itself in length. The postwar generation is now coming strongly into prominence—writing the articles, running the seminars, editing our journal, speaking to and for the Society—as the relatively small group of older scholars is thinned by time and retirement. Harrison, Hood, and Palisca all made their scholarly careers in the postwar period. We really must not ask the prewar German scholars or American scholars to guide us any more. They do not ask to guide or to restrain us.

Someone has spoken about the growth of American musicology from infancy to adolescence; the metaphor is irresistible. Yet as many readers have noticed with a twinge, only Mantle Hood's essay on ethnomusicology conveys the sense of horizon, excitement, experimentation, and just plain kicking around that one associates with even the most docile adolescents. Has historical musicology somehow skipped this phase? I hope instead we are still in infancy. The critical profile envisaged here for American musicology would supply some of this excitement. It would neither replace nor slight our traditional scholarly pursuits, but would on the contrary depend upon them and thereby strengthen their rationale. It would follow a template familiar to the humanistic disciplines in this country and would, I believe, match our temperament as well as smooth the accommodation which must come to theory and analysis. I even believe that such a profile would bring musicologists closer to the celebrated "composer's point of view," and help fill the even more celebrated gap between the scholar and the general public.<sup>7</sup>

In conclusion, though, let me not unduly stress psychological, political, and sociological considerations above philosophical ones. Most of all I believe James Ackerman, the author of the essay on Western art history, when he recalls that a work of art differs in kind from an archival document. That difference makes it art, and that difference ought to dictate our response to it. The term "art object" has always seemed to me offensive; works of art are not things, they are human acts, and while it may be appropriate to study things by means of some -ology or other, human acts make a further demand. They demand sympathy, in the etymological sense of the word, and they demand judgment. The very nature of our chosen material, then, calls for the critical stance if that material is to be granted its full dignity. Critical judgments are no more easily made than moral judgments; doubtless they can be more easily avoided, but it does not seem to me in the last analysis more moral to avoid them. Habitually to treat music as something less than art is to dehumanize music, and even to dehumanize ourselves. "I look on



criticism,” writes Professor Ackerman, “not as an additional technique to be adopted by historians but as a challenge that forces us to re-examine the fundamental philosophical principles by which we operate.”

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1. Frank L. Harrison, Mantle Hood, and Claude V. Palisca, *Musicology* (Humanistic Scholarship in America: The Princeton Studies, Richard Schlatter, ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), iv.
2. *Ibid.*, 6; 8; 74; 19; 80.
3. James S. Ackerman and Rhys Carpenter, *Art and Archeology* (Humanistic Scholarship in America: The Princeton Studies, Richard Schlatter, ed.; Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1963), 131; 131; 142; 243.
4. Claude V. Palisca, “American Scholarship in Western Music,” in Harrison, Hood, and Palisca, *Musicology*, 110.
5. Lewis Lockwood, Review of *Musicology*, in *Perspectives of New Music* 3 (1964): 119–27.
6. [This paragraph requires comment. In 1964 I was right, I think, to wish to distance American musicology from German musicology, and to acknowledge ambivalence about this wish in some way. But past those moves, the argument takes one wrong turn after another, probably under the pressure of that ambivalence. After accepting that a critically oriented musicology can take its impetus from a national repertory, I denied that such a repertory exists in America, injected jazz into the argument only to withdraw it at once, and finally implied that the critical impulse itself is peculiarly American. This made and makes no sense.]
7. See the exchange between Charles Rosen and myself in *Perspectives of New Music* 1 (1962): 80–88, and 2 (1963): 151–60.