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MUSIC ANALYSIS IN THE 21ST CENTURY ETHNOMUSICOLOGY: MERGING IDEAS OF „WESTERN“ AND „EAST EUROPEAN“ ETHNOMUSICOLOGICAL TRADITIONS

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Abstract:

According to a widespread narrative, one of the most important differences between ethnomusicological research in the post-socialist countries and in the world's dominant English-language ethnomusicological tradition is the 'musical text'-oriented character of the former and the 'cultural context'-oriented character of the latter. Although this statement is not entirely true, it should be stated that in "Eastern European" scholarly traditions music analysis has always been regarded as a valuable part of methodology and has brought notable achievements in this field. At the beginning of the 21st century, the development of "Western" ethnomusicology has led to a new interest in music analysis, and several publications had appeared that advocate music analysis as an ethnomusicological tool and show new perspectives in this domain.

The aim of this paper is to discuss the possible directions for the development of music analysis in 21st century ethnomusicology. The most important question under scrutiny is how to connect the topical ideas of the contemporary "Western" ethnomusicological tradition, including reflexive and dialogical ethnomusicology, with the music-analytical methods elaborated by the "Eastern European" ethnomusicologies.

Keywords: *ethnomusicological theory, methodology, scholarly traditions, music analysis, musical texts.*

This article brings together three topical questions of the today's ethnomusicology. The first two are interrelated: they are the methodological renewal of 21st century ethnomusicology and the possibilities for the integration of the ethnomusicological traditions of Eastern and Western Europe. The former of these two questions is certainly broader than the latter, however the integration of the scholarly traditions is one of the essential components of the methodological renewal's process. These questions will be discussed in relation to a very important, but still controversial, field of ethnomusicology – that of the analysis of traditional music, which is the third and the major topic of my article.

It should be noticed that the formulation of one of the above-mentioned topics is slightly problematic. The expression "Eastern and Western European ethnomusicology" is conventional but not exact. In this context, the East and West are not so much geographical notions as historical and political ones. Actually, we are speaking here about two scholarly traditions of European (and world) ethnomusicology, the division of which was mainly caused by the so-called "iron curtain", which made normal communication between the scholars on either side of it impossible, and the ideological pressures of the political powers. Thus, in this article, the term "Eastern European ethnomusicology" designates the scholarly traditions of the former socialist countries, irrespective of their actual geographical situation.

It should also be noted that the ethnomusicological traditions of the former socialist countries are not completely uniform; they have their own local features and therefore can be called "small"

ethnomusicologies¹, to differentiate them from the, let us say, “big” English-language ethnomusicology that dominates the field worldwide. For the purposes of better “author visibility”, it should be also added that my own experience with “Eastern European ethnomusicology” is mostly connected with the Russian-language and Estonian ethnomusicological traditions. The notion “West” also needs a bit of explanation. It seems that in the context of the present discussion there is no sense in considering “Western European ethnomusicology” as something very different from the English-language ethnomusicology as a whole, since both are closely interrelated and generally share the same system of values and methodology.

The question of music analysis as an ethnomusicological tool is directly connected with the problem of the two scholarly traditions in Europe. According to a widespread academic narrative, one of the most important differences between ethnomusicological research in the post-socialist countries and in “Western” ethnomusicology is the “musical text”-oriented character of the former tradition and the “cultural context”-oriented character of the latter. This statement, though broadly correct, is, however, rather schematic.

In fact, in the “Eastern European” ethnomusicologies music analysis was always regarded as a valuable part of the methodology, and these scholarly traditions have made remarkable achievements in this field. However, “Eastern European” music analysis was always quite “context-sensitive” (to use John Blacking’s term). This attitude expresses itself very clearly in the genre-based approach to music analysis, which is characteristic of Russian-language ethnomusicology (as an example, let us mention such essential publications as Zinaida Evald’s article from 1934 “Social rethinking of the harvest songs of Belorussian Polesye” [2], or the book by Izaly Zemtsovsky “The melodics of calendar songs” from 1975 [3]). Good examples of “context-sensitive analysis” can also be found in Estonian ethnomusicological writings, where the musical structures are often analysed in connection with the verse structure and the specific features of the language [4, 5, 6].

On the other hand, although since the mid-20th century the anthropological approach has clearly prevailed in Western ethnomusicology, one cannot say that music analysis is completely absent there. According to another well-known narrative, Western ethnomusicology is divided into two movements conditionally named “anthropological” and “musicological” [7: xvii]. The first of these is usually associated with Alan P. Merriam’s ideas about “music in culture” and “music as culture”, and the second with Mantle Hood’s idea of “bi-musicality”. One of the goals of the latter approach is precisely the analysis of the sound outcome of the music-making process. In fact, even Merriam’s triad “concept-behaviour-sound” includes the level of sound (and consequently that of the musical text) as an equally important research object. In this article, I would like to show that *the analysis of sound phenomena is no less anthropological than that of the levels of concept and behaviour*.

For a long time in the Western scholarly tradition, however, music analysis was, as Jonathan Stock put it in 2008, “that ever-present yet apparently much mistrusted ethnomusicological tool” [8: 188]. In the same book, Henry Stobart even writes that music analysis has become “an anathema for many ethnomusicologists” [9: 17]. What is the reason for such criticism? Stock explains that the detractors of music analysis criticise it “as drawing on the values of the external scholar to the exclusion of those of the cultural insider” [8: 189]. There is also a prejudice among ethnomusicologists that music analysis is a formal descriptive procedure which neglects the cultural context of music.

Since the beginning of the 21st century, however, the development of “Western” ethnomusicology has led to a renewed interest in music analysis as a research method. The publications of Kofi Agawu (2003) [10], Michael Tenzer (2006) [11], Jonathan Stock (2008) [8] advocate music analysis as an ethnomusicological tool and show new perspectives in this domain. Thus, Stock rejects the criticism of music analysis as “intellectually unsatisfactory”, and names it

¹ Danka Lajić-Mihajlović uses the term “‘small’ ethnomusicologies” and argues that these scholarly traditions „function locally and dominantly in local languages, and as result are marginalized across the broader academic scale” [1: 81]

among the promising directions for the disciplinary renewal of ethnomusicology. He points to the similarities between music analysis and other ethnographic research: both are based on personal experience and close observation, and both present their results in their own words “with reference to the ideas and assumptions of particular fields of intellectual enquiry” [8: 190]. Michael Tenzer, in his introduction to the book *Analytical Studies in World Music*, emphasizes “the experiential value of analysis” [11: 7]. According to him, “analysis ... is a worthy exercise because it brings us to a more intensive relationship with the particularities of sound” [11: 7-8]; the question is “how we interpret and present our perceptions and decisions“ [11: 8]. The collection of essays, edited by Tenzer, includes some fine examples of music analytical investigations based on context-sensitive music analysis, which is combined with anthropological methods.

It is not my intention to explain here why and how such situations have emerged in both Eastern and Western European ethnomusicology. This would be an interesting topic, but this article has another goal. I would like here to discuss the essence and the advantages of music analysis as a method of ethnomusicological research and to consider how we might make this method even more fruitful, enriching it with anthropological aspects and approaches and thus merging the achievements of the Western and Eastern European ethnomusicological traditions.

Music analysis is an analysis of *musical texts*, and therefore I begin by considering the musical texts of folklore. What they are? And what kind of information can they provide to ethnomusicologists? These questions are thoroughly discussed in the brilliant essay by Izaly Zemtsovsky “The Apology of Text” (2002) [12], which strongly influenced my following argument.

According to the widest definition, a text is a sign sequence. As applied to music it means every musical performance, *every sonic realization of the ideal musical model*. In ethnomusicological research, however, we deal mostly with recorded performances. Thus, for us the musical texts are usually recordings of music on the various material storage media, in other words, all kinds of sound recordings and notations. However, the musical texts of folklore are not only material or sound objects. They are very valuable *documents*, which, being the *representations of the actual musical events*, provide a lot of musical and anthropological information. The musical texts, properly analysed, give us evidence with regard to different aspects of music, music-making and music culture:

1. The musical texts are documents of *traditional and individual musical thinking*, since they reflect the cognitive processes experienced by the music makers. I think that the cognitive processes of the music makers (and also the listeners) should be considered as the most important *anthropological* aspect of the research.
2. The musical texts are also documents of *musical behaviour*, especially with relation to the specifically musical choices which musicians make during performance – such as variation, improvisation, and musical interaction.
3. The musical texts are *historical documents*, which provide information about both the time of the recording and the period in which the piece of music was created.
4. In the case of the notations made by other researchers, the musical texts are also documents of the *music perception* and of the *theoretical ideas* typical of the time when the notations were made.

The musical texts are not static objects, as they might appear at first glance. The musical texts always have some kind of continuance, sometimes a noteworthy one, and through this they reflect *the processual aspects of music making*. This allows us to make judgements about the processes of the formation of the musical composition, the processes of variation, improvisation, etc. Although the musical text registers only one realization of the ideal musical model (one variant of the traditional tune or piece), the inherent multiplicity of the textual realizations of the model gives the ethnomusicologist a big advantage over the analyst who examines the invariable texts of written music, because by *comparing many performances of the same piece* we can better understand the rules of musical composition, the hierarchy of the structural elements and the processes of musical

thinking. To use this advantage fruitfully, the ethnomusicologist should consider the *musical texts as living and meaningful documents*. Of course, in ethnomusicological literature superficial descriptive analyses can also be found; but this is the problem of the individual analysts, not that of music analysis as a method.

When speaking about musical texts as research objects, we should also keep in mind that, as Zemtsovsky emphasizes in the above-mentioned essay, the real subject and goal of music analysis is not the musical text itself but what lies behind it. Behind the texts we can find their cultural context, the people who created these texts and the people for whom these texts were created. Recalling Abrahams' famous statement about the "shift of emphasis from the *lore* to the *folk*", Zemtsovsky underlines that we should try to find and to understand "the *folk* not apart from the cultural texts belonging to it, but in these texts themselves in the process of their analysis" [12: 2].

As I have already noted, *music analysis does not exclude the anthropological approach and anthropological values*. On the contrary, it is a very effective way to answer some anthropological questions in those situations where other methods are not sufficient or do not work. However, it seems to me that there are more possibilities of merging the music analytical and anthropological approaches. I think that this should be a reciprocal process, which we might describe as the "anthropologization" of music analysis and the "musicologization" of anthropology, so to speak. These processes can manifest themselves in the different aspects of ethnomusicological research.

Firstly, this concerns the research questions. We should use more actively the *possibilities to find answers to the anthropological questions through music analysis and to find anthropological explanations for the results of music analysis* – in other words, to understand the music through the culture and the culture through the music. Actually, such research questions are by no means new in ethnomusicology. As an example, I have already mentioned the genre-based musical analysis typical of Eastern European ethnomusicological tradition. Since the musical genres are classified in this tradition according to their extramusical functions, such an analysis reveals the relations between extramusical and musical phenomena, between context and text. The extramusical contextual factors which might be studied as being related to the musical structures also include the different kinds of social groups, gender, ethnic groups, etc. The biggest problem here, in my opinion, is the equal competence of the researcher in both music analysis and anthropological research.

Secondly, it should be realized that the *information obtained through music analysis has direct anthropological value* not only because music analysis can serve anthropology, but also because it provides *unique information about an utterly human kind of cognitive activity – musical thinking*. In speaking about this phenomenon, we should make a clear distinction between *musical thinking* and *thinking about music*. The musical anthropologists mostly investigate the latter, which corresponds to the Merriam's "conceptualization about music". The information about this level can be revealed using anthropological methods such as conversations with the musicians, the local traditional terminology and other forms of verbal behaviour. The notion of *musical thinking* is broader – it includes the conceptualization about music as its conscious verbalized part, but it especially emphasises the *specific non-verbal and partly unconscious cognitive processes which operate with the sound images*. In this case the best opportunities are provided by the analysis of the musical texts.

Properly conducted, music analysis makes it possible to see the system behind the particular musical texts and to find the deep structures that underlie them. Such an approach allows us to investigate the musical cognitive processes, because the *texts' deep structures may also be the models of musical thinking* of the music-makers. The issue of musical thinking is very important in the "Eastern European" ethnomusicological tradition, which has also developed its own relevant methods of music analysis, among which the most valuable, in my opinion, is the so-called *structural-typological analysis*. It seems to me that even today there is still no sufficient understanding that *questions of musical thinking are, by their nature, very anthropological*. John

Blacking said very beautifully that music is a “humanly organized sound”. I think that it would be a great challenge – *anthropological* challenge – to understand how humans organize sound and why.

Thirdly, we should make more active use of the possibilities of *combining the music-analytical and anthropological methods* in our research. Among the anthropological methods which can be fruitfully combined with music analysis there are all kinds of observation and participant observation, dialogic and feed-back methods, field experiments, the use of more informative methods of recording, etc.

It would take too long here to go into all these methodological possibilities in detail. Therefore, I would prefer briefly to discuss one more important aspect of the anthropologization of music analysis, namely an *interpretational approach to music analysis*. In anthropological research, a self-reflexive attitude on the part of the researcher is now quite popular. *Music analysis should also be self-reflexive*. As Zemtsovsky pointed out in his article “A Model for Reintegrated Musicology” (2009), „being representatives of this or that ethnic tradition, we all are *ethnophores*” [13: 99] and have our own ethnic musical thinking (or, as Zemtsovsky names it, *ethnohearing*). In this respect, there is no difference between the researcher and the people studied. *Bi-musicality* is very helpful, but our native musical language always prevails.

The music analyst should always remember that *analysis is a dialogue of different ethnohearings*, and that the results are always to some extent subjective and interpretative. We should also be aware that the *results of analysis depend on the method of analysis* and on our whole conceptual framework. This does not mean, however, that music analysis is an inadequate research method. If we accept and even welcome the subjectivity and interpretative character of anthropological research, why should we not accept the same with regard to music analysis? The methods of music analysis can be more or less empirical, and the results can be, respectively, more or less objective. However, when choosing or inventing an analytical procedure, the researcher always proceeds from his/her own perception of the music under examination.

The music analysis is a kind of music interpretation, and therefore *the process of music analysis is creative, like any other kind of music interpretation*. It requires from the researcher, amongst other abilities, a musical talent. As Zemtsovsky put it in one of the above-mentioned articles, “Folkloristics [i.e. ethnomusicology] should be not less creative than the object that it studies” [12: 6].

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