Ideas of Culture and the Challenge of Music

It would seem natural that anthropologists who are students of culture would be deeply involved with the arts, but anthropologists think of culture within a specialized frame of reference that stands in ironic distinction to widely held ideas that identify culture with art. To be sure, the artistic artifacts of ancient civilizations are a significant focus of archaeological interest, as are any artifacts that seem to be expressions of the mentality of living groups that anthropologists study. By and large, however, in anthropological thought the arts are derivative of other factors of human life that relate directly to evolutionary adaptation and survival. From such a perspective, culture is based on patterns of interaction with the material world, and art is a reflection and affirmation of that level of culture, not even necessarily self-conscious. It is not surprising that in anthropology, the least considered art is the least material one: music.

To many people in the world, music is a universal language. Some have even speculated that music might offer a way to communicate with aliens from beyond the stars. To anthropologists, however, music is something that separates people as much as it connects them, indeed even connects some people in order to exclude others. The idea that different people have different tastes in music inspires no debate, perhaps because the issue seems of little importance. People can really hate other people's music, but I do not remember the last time anyone fought a war over music. Nor do I know anyone who would argue that we all need to listen to the same music, except maybe on certain special occasions involving sports or patriotism, and then the issue is once again about who we are or are not. For social scientists, especially anthropologists, issues involving different musical preferences are codes for parochial perceptions. Until just recently, Western anthropologists worked mainly in places where, in Western perception, the local music was denigrated in equal measure with the particular locals under investigation. And of course, even with the invention of media that can take sounds from one place to another, the music of those other people has generally been a big stumbling block on the path toward empathy.

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Non-Western music: how are anthropologists to talk about it? Whenever an anthropologist stayed in the field long enough to learn to appreciate the music there, the overwhelming fact about the music remained how odd it sounded to European ears. As social scientists, anthropologists have held to two rudimentary ideas about music. First, any particular type of music itself is less important than the various ways people in different cultures deal with it. Second, musical taste is entirely relative because it is a product of culture: music is culturally organized and culturally meaningful sound. Thus, the fact that some people can completely fail to appreciate noise that others find musical, and vice versa, is a good example of cultural relativity, but not much more. Music is significant as an aspect of culture, but music is difficult to talk about and anyway, music is something like a residue of more fundamental cultural concerns.

Clear enough, one might say, but such ideas are qualified by the ambiguities of culture, in particular the differences between social scientific discussions of culture as a way of life and the more common use of the concept to indicate refined and enlightened development in arts and letters. This division of thought remains as influential today as ever: in a multicultural world where people of diverse heritages mingle, anthropologists have been champions of toleration and have maintained their focus on social customs and group life. Many anthropologists would proudly claim credit for their discipline's role in advancing the idea of cultural relativity, an image of the world as a pluralistic and continuously changing place where all points of view are relative and somehow complementary, where lots of little lower-case truths provide cumulative complexity, a variety of alternatives and thus a presumption of choice. And we should note that asserting the relativity of human experience ironically certifies anthropology's main mission of comprehending the human species — its origins, nature and diversity — into a unified picture. Apparent differences are really variations of a theme, and nuanced cultural portraits reveal the hidden complementarities that can connect cultures. The intellectual agent of anthropological relativism is the sophisticated significance that has accrued to the concept of "culture" as an alchemical term used to straddle the old philosophical problem of the One and the Many.

"Culture" is an amazingly plastic concept, ever ready for further articulation, something somewhat ineffable that characterizes a distinct group of people and is passed down from generation to generation as a medium for growth

and adaptation. The root "ethno" in ethnography and ethnology denotes a folk or a nation or a people united by culture. But whether cultivated from the inside or imposed from the outside, cultural identity is an elusive vision that always degenerates into a muddle at its boundaries. Cultural anthropologists work at these boundaries, germinating their theories out of the muddles. Anthropological writings about culture typically stand as testimony to overcoming boundaries through the face-to-face encounters and relationships between an anthropologist and "other" people who are "different" from the anthropologist. Nevertheless, the anthropologist seeks and finds evidence of a shared humanity. Wherever they are, human beings have to get food, organize their communities, raise children, deal with death, and so on, handling all the imperatives of life amid all the institutional permutations and solutions that their ecology and history and imaginations can produce. In this cultural laboratory, our common humanity is elevated to truth in various theoretical systems of classification and comparison of cultural responses to basic human needs. Ultimately, though, when everything has become comparable and the hidden complementarities are explained, the last thing to be understood is that which is thought to be farthest from the necessities of life: art. Indeed, in mainstream Western intellectual traditions the notion of pure aesthetic judgment is defined negatively, that is, by the absence of interest based on need. Thus within the anthropological agenda, art is normally seen as an expressive and derivative element of culture, something that enhances structures and functions that are already there, and therefore something about as far as possible from real significance. With its emphasis on the physical factors of life, anthropology seems an infertile field for comparative aesthetics.

In the centers of Western civilization, a narrower concept of "culture" dominates intellectual exchange, in which culture occupies its own territory within society instead of permeating the whole. Culture is seen as a refinement of human experience, approaching the spiritual, representing people's identity in an essential way that is separate from what they have to do to survive. Culture in this sense is often associated and appropriated by people of means and power, those seemingly least affected by life's bodily struggles because they are above the nitty gritty and the hoi polloi. They and those who interpret culture for them have not completely forgotten the allusion of culture to ethos, but there are distinctions: real art occupies the elevated realm of "high" culture; other creative expressions that celebrate "low" culture or "popular" culture are understood as "folk" art, folklore

or crafts. Along with the associations of social class, the distinction is poignantly indicated in that the higher art normally has to be subsidized, while the lower forms support themselves with more immediate forms of participation or give and take. What message could anthropology contribute in such an incongruous climate? Committed to demonstrating what alien peoples have in common by rationalizing their differences into larger systems, anthropology would seem forced into a posture critical of such divisive discourse. Nonetheless, from anthropology's early years, when Western world dominance was being articulated in every way, anthropology did not challenge this competing model of culture, and the discipline has had little to contribute directly to the broader issues pertaining to art.

And so what would anthropology have to do with music? Answering that question is something of a minor project that reflects the character of anthropology's intellectual mission. Because music is the least material of the arts, people can more easily get an idea of other arts that can exist in some sort of physical form: much sculpture and decorative arts can be carried from place to place; poetry, drama and literature can be written; architecture and some paintings and sculpture can be portrayed in drawings or somewhat adequately described in prose. Until recently, however, music could not be heard outside an actual performance context. And in the highly critical world of music appreciation and music scholarship, where even today people are still holding on to belief in a Western canon and defending its accustomed place in Western education, anthropology has had little impact. Perhaps art is the last bastion of parochialism that anthropology could not surmount; perhaps anthropologists have not tried very hard.

Nevertheless, since anthropology's territory is the whole species for the last few million years, then music-making, while not thought particularly important except as an evolutionary marker, is certainly grist for the mill. Thus there is a slightly obscure discipline, "ethnomusicology," that joins anthropology and musicology. Since anthropology's early years, however, the root "ethno" and the word "ethnic" have had a privative connotation, designating people by what they are not, which was that they are not Western, reserving the more restricted concept of high culture for the West and signalling the application of the broader and lower concept of culture elsewhere. Ethnomusicology conforms to that outdated heritage. Ethnomusicology is usually seen not as the study of music in culture but

as the study of music in "other" cultures. The territory comprises any music that is not in the canon of European classical music, a difference that in practice separates Western "art" music from non-Western music as well as folkloric music and popular music.

Accepting this division in fields of study has had broad consequences with regard to the very conception of music per se, reflected in the existence of very different epistemologies, that is, different ideas about methods of studying music and about what constitutes understanding of music. One can infer that originally such a division separated a type of music — Western — that was to be criticized or appreciated from "other" types of music that required "understanding" validated by objectivity instead of judgment. Today, this latter type of understanding of "other" musical idioms is based on the explanation of the cultural meaning of the music. Indeed, ethnomusicology itself can be defined by the anthropological proposition that musical idioms should be understood in context and that musical meaning is culturally determined. But this central demonstration of ethnomusicology did not happen overnight. A century ago, the matter was not even much of an issue. A few idealists might have viewed music as a universal language, capable of creating bridges across cultural boundaries. For the most part, separating Western art music from other musics merely reflected the way of world, in which almost everything about the former was elevated and refined — the patrons, the presumed aesthetic effects, the discourse, the performance skills, the expensive elite venues. The "ethno" in ethnomusicology affirmed a scholarly division of labor that continues to relegate ethnomusicology to a marginal position (if any position at all) in music schools. As scholars, ethnomusicologists remain members of the elite culture of universities and museums. But even today, ethnomusicology is seen as separate from historical musicology or music history, also similarly defined in department guides as the study of music in its wider cultural and social contexts, as if the mainstream historians deal with genuine music and the ethnomusicologists deal with curiosities. Even today, there are some reactionary musicologists who are naively capable of attending a lecture by an ethnomusicologist and blithely asking, "What does your talk tell us about music?"

One of the problems with the prefix "ethno" is that it is almost by definition in opposition to the pluralistic and multicultural world that is emerging. The very name of the discipline links it to an inherent and invalid negation that alienates

anything non-Western in many subtle ways. In today's world, the existence of such a division is grating in some cases, absurd in others, and quite frequently an embarrassment. The word ethnomusicology also seems to link the field to colonialism and to anthropology's role in that historical time as well as to contemporary neocolonialism and racism. Admittedly, it is a bit risky to use colonialism as an emblem of racism and exploitation: the colonial period was a time when the larger historical movement of humanity toward a multicultural world took major steps forward. Nonetheless, I think most people today would agree that the idea of defining a subdiscipline as the study of non-Western anything is politically loaded. The prefix "ethno" certainly is a stumbling block that has real impact on just about anybody who is tuned into the kind of soundscape our modern world provides.

There are many complicated and ambiguous reasons why ethnomusicology is studied in music schools instead of anthropology departments. Anthropology departments do not generally teach courses on the music of Africa or India or Indonesia or Native America or any of the places where anthropologists might think of as their province for social scientific work. Of course, until recently, such courses were not part of any music curriculum either. Just over a century ago, when one could only hear music where it was performed, only a few early travelers had written descriptions of musical events in various parts of the world, and most of these descriptions had not been culled from archives for general scholarly consumption. With a few exceptions, it was well into the twentieth century before scholars could get samples of non-Western music to listen to, apart from folk music. By the same token, non-Western music was also inaccessible to the paradigms and terminology anthropologists used. Also, in the not-so-distant past anthropology was not yet promoting relativism but was more concerned with understanding cultural evolution and where different societies should be placed on an evolutionary scale. Non-Western music was therefore something for which they sought material examples for museums, to be exhibited alongside prehistoric bones and stones. It is not clear whether those in the vanguard of European colonialism actually disliked indigenous music. I have not read an account of a District Commissioner dancing or doing anything at local festivals except watching. In films set in the colonial era, when we see isolated Westerners made desperate by local music, the music mainly serves a symbol of an ubiquitous and overwhelming presence of the "other" culture; more significant, perhaps, is the

implication that music can fittingly represent the "otherness" of a culture and thereby become a symbol of a realm beyond the limits of understanding. Let us not yet talk about missionaries who have been such a convenient target for concerned intellectuals; everyone is implicated in history.

Nonetheless, while closed-minded people burned sculptures deemed to be pagan idols, a few of the more open-minded who gathered idols to take home must also have gathered musical instruments as if they were accumulating power objects. I once visited the back rooms of the Musée de l'Homme in Paris: uncountable musical instruments were piled to the ceiling, like bones in a Capuchin crypt. I suppose the scene is the same in the storerooms of other museums of former colonial nations. Indeed, musical instruments are still displayed as art and artifacts in contemporary exhibitions, for example, such as one just a few years ago at the Smithsonian Institution's Museum of African Art, where despite contemporary technology, one could not press a button to hear a recording of any displayed instrument.

But why were these instruments carefully collected and shipped and catalogued at all? Perhaps curators and collectors hoped that African or Native American music could here or there contribute an intriguing motif for refinement in European art music, as other folk traditions had already done. One can assume that the collectors, whether anthropologists or not, had other priorities besides music, but at least they had a regard for cultural acquisitiveness. After all, the same elites who patronized and sponsored European museums also patronized orchestral music in concert halls. As seems always the case everywhere, at the centers of power, where the highest artistic expression is achieved, things tend to get a bit stuffy. Folk traditions from the periphery, from the provinces or colonies, or revived from the past, are tapped to provide creative inspiration for the development of sophisticated styles at the center. At the center the folk traditions are both stylized and refined with technical innovation, becoming distinctive and often classical. When the classical tradition becomes too mannered or academic, new ideas from the periphery again infuse the high art of the center and help it reach a further elaboration of style. Those instrumental artifacts in the museums are testimony to some very tentative musical excursions in the vanguard of this process that never came to much.

During the colonial period, the most serious engagement with non-Western music was probably occurring in Christian missions. In the face of varying

degrees of contestation, a trend gradually emerged toward the translations of more and more sections of the liturgy into the vernacular. The anthropological subfield of linguistics benefited greatly from the challenges of translating the Bible and from the philosophical subfield of hermeneutics, which featured discussions of the limitations and complexities of translating sacred texts. Hand in hand with these undertakings, missions often took the lead in educational and literacy efforts to cultivate leadership and devotion, with two musical consequences. The first was the gradual adoption and adaptation of indigenous music into the liturgy. Second, several products of the local schools became knowledgeable about Western music and were able to contribute to the adaptation of hymns and other works as well as compose significant works on their own for use in local services. If conservative souls were concerned about the effect of indigenous styles within the musical traditions of sectarian worship, indigenous composers for their part worried about preserving what they understood as the defining elements of their traditional styles. All the people involved in these processes made some sort of peace with hermeneutic issues and had hands-on learning experiences at the meeting of musical worlds.

Given the linkage between missions and education, the local academic presence of local music has often reflected the legacy of such composers, whose social and intellectual inclinations were more toward musicology than anthropology. Moreover, their cross-cultural efforts at the edges of Christendom found an occasional audience or forum among their colleagues in music schools where their compositional idioms conformed to recognized genres. Whatever the extent that ethnomusicologists see themselves as positioned between musicology and anthropology, the logical extension of initial encounters with non-Western music was toward musicology. It was unquestioned that musical notation could provide a more adequate representation of the music than a descriptive text. The problems the early ethnomusicologists faced had much to do with responding to the challenges of non-Western music in musical terms, and they saw themselves as working toward the development of music theory, finding ways to enhance their own community of scholars by hammering out a common language. Like anthropologists, they assumed a fundamental universalism, and they sought the conceptions and principles that could encompass additional musical diversity and thus sophisticate comparative musicology.

Far removed from the religious needs of new non-Western congregations, scholars of music theory found a lot of ready-made data in any available non-Western music, which contained all kinds of unfamiliar ways of structuring sound. The people who created those musical structures had already made their contribution and were of only circumstantial interest: they could fill in circumstantial details about the music, such as how they designed and made the instruments that produced the sounds. Anthropologists could help in this latter area, the study of musical instruments, by collecting them, though judging from the piles of unused ones in the museums, mainly for others to analyze. Up to now, a weird fetishism seems to have attached itself to musical instruments from far-off places, and people get excited about ones that are older than others or were associated with non-Christian religious rituals. Such estimation resembles the way commodity value is determined for the plastic arts. As for the music itself, nascent ethnomusicology was so specialized — so musical — that anthropologists observing musical events were either intimidated or disinclined. The retrospective consensus among ethnomusicologists is that anthropologists felt they lacked the training or techniques or skills to work on music. Given the nature of the beast at that time, the anthropologists were right. Ethnomusicology belonged in music schools where people did musical analysis. Anthropologists were peripheral characters who worked in other buildings on campus or in the museums.

By mid-century in Europe and America, the situation began to change, and non-Western music served as a different type of artifact for a different theoretical purpose. Many anthropologists were still attached to museums and still helping to plan displays about material culture in less developed societies, but evolutionary paradigms gradually gave ground in intercultural encounters between trained anthropological researchers who were only indirectly related to colonial agendas of social administration or religious conversion. Many social scientists who viewed Western chauvinism as a curable disease argued strongly about the relativity of cultural practices, including, by extension, cultural judgments. Musical life also came under the anthropologist's lens, perhaps as something derivative or peripheral to what a social situation was really about, but certainly something there. From this invigorated social scientific perspective emerged a potential anthropology of music. Music-making is a type of behavior, and people interested in music can study the institutionalization of music-making in that light: the recruitment and training of musicians, performance styles, performance venues

like festivals and celebrations, religious and political roles of music, song texts, composition, patronage, ecological and instrumental resources, and so on. Information about music was considered complementary to the information about more significant institutions in the economic and political realms. There was a general conviction in social and cultural anthropology that any valid observation was data that could eventually be plugged into a systematic network of information, a permanent store of knowledge that could be codified and correlated in myriad ways. Ethnographers everywhere accepted the idea that their work was relevant to this grand project. Musical activity was an hors d'oeuvre on the smorgasbord at which they feasted.

It is somewhat strange, though, that in the anthropological record, there are many descriptions of events that contain little or no reference to the music that we know was a part of the scene. And indeed, music was very often there. Western observers felt that abdicating aesthetic issues was justified: unlike Western music which exists in its own bounded world, non-Western music often appears attached to other activities and thus somehow related to institutional functions. The basic assumption has always been that music makes whatever is happening more itself, no small feat when one thinks about it; nonetheless, one can understand whatever is happening perfectly well without needing that extra bit of intensity for one's descriptive palette. Reading ethnographies, you might even think that people in the non-Western world rarely make music. It is an ironic and shocking contrast, no doubt intentional at the time, that Colin Turnbull's classic 1961 book on the people formerly known as pygmies, *The Forest People*, begins with a strange survey of previous cultural portraits, which he assesses with regard to the degree the authors note the continual singing, dancing and music-making that dominated his own perception of the people. Turnbull was skeptical of anyone who did not deal with music. Anthropology would be a far different discipline than it is today if it had been immersed in the same questions about art that have concerned its elite patrons in their own cultural reflections. Missing in the early images of non-Western music was a sense that the music as an art presented evidence of high cultural development. Indeed, there seemed to be no interest in the questions of why music seems so important to so many people, why music refers to so many things beyond itself, or how music could become so highly developed in so many materially impoverished societies. The non-Western world is full of such places where music has been elevated by intensive intellectual and creative energy to

levels of sophistication that challenged almost every other image of these societies in the Western agenda.

Mid-twentieth century social scientists were likely to reply with kneejerk relativism, maintaining the significance of context over expression. Aesthetic matters, if they are to be addressed at all, should be framed and classified by ethnographic knowledge of the surrounding cultural context, and knowing the symbolic associations and social significance of any art is the key to understanding it. The idea of a common humanity inspired the modern notion of cultural relativity, but it was generally thought that such affinities could not be reliably extended into the ambiguous realm of artistic sympathy. But then again, getting too involved in ethnographic details pretty much precludes any sense of artistic depth — just the opposite, in effect: all that cerebral mediation can be alienating and dull. The whole matter has always been a real conundrum. In mid-century, it was possible for a leading anthropologist like Robert Redfield to be self-consciously heretical in commenting on the possibility of transcending cultural boundaries at a museum exhibition, by suggesting that Westerners cultivate the immediacy of direct encounters with non-Western art and by arguing against the discipline's inclination toward studied contextual explanations.

Professionally, anthropologists collect information about the social location and social role of art, but it takes a long time. Until recently, anthropologists stayed so long in the field that they really believed that they knew, truly and deeply, the people they studied. That deep knowledge, paradoxically, established their credibility through the systematic intricacy of their writings more than through the replicability of their observations. After all, there are not a lot of anthropologists, and they are spread out. When they have achieved that depth, typically alone in their mission, has it not been their great temptation to believe that they, at least, had transcended the complex and different cultural configurations that their work objectified? Thus tempted, some would become possessive of their empathy and hold it up as a bulwark of authority against anyone else, especially some of their colleagues who worked in the same place. But would not the larger spirits among them hope that others could also achieve it, to move beyond an ideal of respectful relations between strangers toward a true community of humankind? Back in the museums through most of the century, paleontologists were convinced that humankind is a single species, and they were on the track of a single ancestor. The human sentiments through which people

could actually recognize themselves in "others" might also allow the possibility of an unmediated appreciation of art.

In the museums, nobody can play the instruments well enough to command a public performance venue, and the instruments have remained on shelves, except for those of exquisite manufacture that can be displayed among the plastic arts. Interest in non-Western art was stimulated by the expanding contacts of the age of imperialism, but that interest had deeper precedents, starting from the Renaissance fascination with the pagan world and the Enlightenment projection of the ideal of natural law and the noble savage. Manifestations of both alienation and quest, these conceptions existed in counterpoint to the dominant history of control and consolidation. As noted, the museums that display the evidence of paleontology and archaeology also participated in collecting evidence of achievements in the realm of culture, and artifacts verifiably collected on location partake of this projected value. Within a notion of cultural evolution, non-Western cultural achievements could be compared, unfavorably, to those of the Western world. However, from another well-grounded Western perspective, in which the way of the world is the corruptor of the human spirit, the value of these artifacts actually increases with their distance from the Western centers of power. It is spurious to compare wood carvings to a Michaelangelo sculpture or musical instruments to a Stradivarius violin. In a polarized world of "us" and "others," distance from the Western centers implies closeness to the opposite centers. Documentation of the non-Western artifacts thus has carried the burden of demonstrating the roles of the objects in native life, particularly how much and for how long the objects have played those roles in the institutions of their locales. For anthropological purposes, as comparative criteria moved further toward issues of cultural integrity, the denotation of authenticity has defined the commodity value of any given object.

On its own terms, anthropology came to advocate a contextual approach that did not go as far as the approach evident in other types of modern art criticism, such as, for example, attempting to view a Renaissance painting or a Greek temple with reference to the creative period's cultural milieu as an interpretive tool. An existential or phenomenological approach could offer a potential pathway toward culturally informed experience and a perspective on the participatory nature of the art's aesthetic mediation. Instead, concerns of tradition and authenticity led to aesthetic perspectives based on form and style and to explanations of mediation

based on cognition and knowledge. In promoting this limited type of cultural relativism, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists abdicated broad aesthetic issues of perception and feeling. In the mid-twentieth century, probably influenced by Western concert-hall performance models, ethnomusicologists accepted a narrow Western definition of aesthetic values, evidenced as judgments on matters of beauty and feelings about art objects. From a musicological perspective, the task was to study and analyze abstracted forms that were or could be removed from their original creative context. Many ethnomusicologists would have asserted that aesthetics concerns are inaccessible to comparative research and even irrelevant to art that explicitly serves a social purpose in cultures without traditions of artistic criticism similar to those in the West. It would be another generation before scholars would look at a performance context with the idea that the aesthetics of music could be tied to how the music achieved its effectiveness in social situations. Now, for example, we appreciate how rhythms can be used to establish and coordinate distinctive patterns of interaction among participants in a musical context, and as such, musical structures and performance dynamics can be interpreted as significant contributors to cultural style and social cohesion. Even well into the 1960s, however, as the colonial period was formally ending and anthropologists were focusing on the transformation of traditional societies, ethnomusicologists pursued their musicological mission in harmonious concert with an increasingly out-of-date anthropological vision that valued precolonial traditions for exemplary cultural integrity. For example, there were scholarly articles taking the position that non-Western popular music played by non-Western musicians using Western instruments in dancehall settings was derivative and not within the scope of the discipline; in contrast to the music of indigenous historical traditions, the popular music lacked depth, symbolic complexity and cultural inspiration. Even though the local people liked it and gravitated toward the intermingled forms, scholars were unprepared to deal with the music and tried to ignore it.

But at least anthropology had entered the game for real. As the discipline has increased its presence in the Western intellectual environment, many ethnomusicologists have moved toward the anthropological side of their disciplinary axis. In a pattern that continues to remain compelling, the contributions of mid-century anthropology to the study of non-Western music have been made not so much by people with degrees in anthropology as by

musicologists and musicians who are influenced by anthropology. Anthropology has always had its share of seekers, but those who have advanced the field of ethnomusicology are basically people who love music. Perhaps the process was a luxury in the twilight of the colonial era, but more and more people have been documenting the stunning variety of musical traditions in the world, and thus has the cumulative record acquired weight. The legacy of the seekers has changed almost every aspect of ethnomusicology except for its usual location in music departments, and despite what some musicologists would prefer, anthropological perspectives have assumed intellectual dominance in the field. Functionalism, structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, symbolic anthropology, and so on: all have their influence.

The answer to the question of what all of these perspectives have to do with music is that the key to understanding a non-Western musical tradition is to approach it not just as different music but as something that is different from music. To be theoretically sound in that context, insight should be grounded in methodologies of the human sciences that give access to social meaning in musical situations. Most important, perhaps, ethnomusicologists have adopted the anthropological method of participant-observation, and they have spent lots of time with music-makers in other cultures. A musical apprenticeship often provides the framework for their intercultural relationships, a role that often prompts their teachers to offer a more detailed and intimate understanding than could ever have been available from a consistently analytical or objectifying approach. As participants in the musical traditions, disciples of their performance masters, ethnomusicologists gain evidence for a refined understanding of tradition's movement from generation to generation. Early models of non-Western art were based on a rather static image of tradition. These models presumed a stability in style that attributed superiority to earlier forms which preceded cross-cultural contact as definitive, hence the concern with artifacts and their authentication. One correlated idea was that artistic forms were passed down from generation to generation, and performers mainly had to learn or master the idiom of the tradition. As Western apprentices have become involved with living artists and more aware of local critical contexts, they have gained insight into the challenges that various artforms pose to aspiring practitioners, challenges that link the personal and the aesthetic realms and reflect considerably the art's current location in the social environment, including the mind-boggling vicissitudes

inherent in the possibility, explicitly accepted by their teachers, that a Westerner can be trained to be a vehicle for the tradition.

Anthropological interests have thus led ethnomusicology further into the study of music as human behavior and into uncharted territory in cross-cultural relationships. Suspended in an uneasy limbo remained the fundamental issue of the difference between anthropology's wide conception of culture and musicology's elitist conception. Although many scholars continue to address theoretical concerns about music as structured sound, the main influence of anthropologically informed studies of music has been to undermine the musicological approach. An effort to ground music in a cultural context does not merely reflect a social scientific inclination to the abandonment of musicological analysis, nor does it merely reflect the belief that issues of musical meaning should be addressed with regard to the references and associations of indigenous people. More than that, the case has been argued persuasively that it is not possible to understand a piece of non-Western music from a score or a recording. Efforts to isolate or abstract so-called musical elements analytically have tended to yield not just one-sided or limited descriptions but rather can often lead to actual mistakes in perception and analysis.

In Africa, for example, the types of musical decisions that musicians make are generally based on the situational or symbolic dimensions of the musical performance. Quite apart from such obvious factors as the relationship of music to language, as both speech and oral art, what a musician plays is generally determined by the specific people who are at a performance, why they are there, what they are doing at a given moment, and even what may be happening in the general society beyond the context of the particular gathering. The dynamics of the performance also reflect the dynamics and pacing of the ongoing event the music enhances. Although African musical performances can often be characterized as improvisational, the improvisation generally has a social or situational reference that may be more important than any reference to generative musical structures. Therefore, without an orientation grounded in a performance's social dimensions, matters as diverse as choice of repertoire or choice of improvisational motif cannot be understood. Both theoretically and practically, Western composers and music theorists interested in cultivating African influences may find this state of affairs frustrating, as most efforts to abstract African musical structures are generally superficial by definition.

For example, at a dance gathering in an African society, what might sound like a complex rhythmic elaboration may rather be a proverbial praise-name articulated on an instrument in recognition of a particular person's lineage, or perhaps represent an invocation for a particular deity or ancestor. What might seem to be creative inspiration in changing a rhythmic or melodic line might turn out to be a musical allusion to another dance, inserted as a joke, as an experiment, or because of confusion. The types of dances played and their stylistic variations may vary from situation to situation as a reflection of the composition of the assembly. Particular pieces or even inserted motifs might reflect mythic or historical allusions, or they might reflect the presence of a particular dancer. Such widely varying contextual elements are the kinds of things many African musicians think about and focus on while making musical decisions, and what they are doing musically cannot be inferred from the musical elements that would be evident from an audio recording or a score. As a result, in-depth studies of African musical idioms must be more ethnographic than musicological in perspective. Some people still venture purely musicological analyses out of allegiance to the old presumed canon asserting the priority of musicology in ethnomusicology's interdisciplinary disposition; later, perhaps, someone who knows more about the social and cultural context of the performance, or who knows the musical repertoire in greater detail, will provide data to demonstrate that the first scholar overinterpreted the musical elements with the aid of an active and hopeful imagination. Occasionally, of course, misinterpretations can serve a useful purpose when transported to other realms of creativity, but they do so as an ironic victim of the relativism they were projected to overcome.

As might be expected, culturally informed approaches to music derive the greater part of their significance in cultural terms more than in musical terms. The most obvious consequence is simply increased respect for non-Western people and cultures. As I noted, music can be the focus of tremendous intellectual and artistic creativity in societies that have been demeaned by various standards — as materially impoverished, as technologically underdeveloped, as historically vulnerable to exploitation and oppression. Whatever music's weight in theories about social structure, people value music: they frequently have a surprising ability to appreciate a foreign musical idiom, and even if they cannot easily appreciate it, they still give it respect as a higher order of achievement. Music, like other arts, does help people establish connections with other people they do

not know; as such, music traverses cultural boundaries and plays a role in overcoming prejudice and negative images. Although there is an inherent friction between an unmediated experience and a culturally informed experience of art, there are many cases where the two perspectives work in concert, where people like an unfamiliar music to begin with and like it even more when they understand the creativity involved.

A place where I spent many years, in northern Ghana among the Dagbamba people, exemplifies this point well. The Dagbamba generally were not interested in adapting to the institutions of their British colonizers, many of whom in turn considered the Dagbamba stubborn and backward; the Dagbamba remain somewhat vulnerable to domination by the national government and by economic interests from the more developed southern regions of Ghana. Their musical institutions, however, offer a key to understanding the depth of their cultural life and the validity of any claim they might make for a well-lit place on the world stage. Their music is anchored in epic songs that convey episodes in the history of a six-hundred-year-old dynasty of chiefs, one of the oldest continuous father-to-son dynasties in the world, and perhaps the oldest. Apart from having a performance context reminiscent of pre-classical Greece, the epic history informs other Dagbamba musical idioms which branch out into drumming and singing that bestow proverbial praise-names onto chiefs. These names are applied to descended members of various chiefs' lineages, whether or not the people still have any claim to chieftaincy. The musicians know the family lines of people in their communities, and with the help of musicians, everyone in Dagbamba society can trace his or her ancestry to some point on a chieftaincy line. In effect, music is what lets people know that they are one family. More than that, the rhythms of the proverbial praise-names are used as the foundations of wonderful drum ensemble pieces for social dancing. More than that again, this dancing is done by individuals at events like weddings, funerals and festivals; people dance to the names of past chiefs and publicly demonstrate their relationship to the dynasty and to other members of their lineage segment. This incredible degree of historical consciousness is thus more than a focus for thought: historical knowledge, instead of being learned cognitively or represented through various symbols, is brought down to the level of social interaction, where people embody their personal relationship to history by dancing in musical contexts while others in their community are looking at them. I know of nothing really comparable in the

Western world, but many societies in other parts of the world — Africa, Asia, the Middle East, the Americas, Oceania, Australia — do amazing things within their musical traditions. In all these places, anthropologically informed ethnomusicologists have debunked racial, cultural and historical stereotypes at the same time as they have enriched people's understanding of the creative and intellectual potentials of human beings, and both these aspects of their work have contributed to discourse on the world's crucial concerns.

It has taken some time, but gradually the documentation and description of cultural achievements in the world's musical traditions have become an impressive body of knowledge, all the more impressive because it only represents a fragment of those traditions. Ethnomusicologists have returned the favor to anthropologists and have demonstrated many ways in which the study of music can yield insight into social and cultural issues, insight that is profoundly humanistic and fundamentally humanizing. This level of awareness about musical meaning relies on possibilities and sensitivities of musical appreciation that formerly seemed unattainable or unproductive. Looking back at the class consciousness and cultural chauvinism of the colonial era, we might wonder how people could not be self-conscious of the seemingly transparent way they used their own music to support their sense of their identity and their ideas of what was best about themselves. We might also wonder why it has been so difficult for members of the intellectual elite, especially those who should know how important music is, to recognize that music could present a similarly elevated view of other societies and apply alternate standards to counteract the imagery of derogatory views. Certainly, too, scholars have not been quick to see the opportunities for fresh and innovative perspectives on a host of big issues about artistic style, about stylistic boundaries, about creative anxiety, about influence and change, about craftsmanship and artistry, about distance and meaning and usefulness and so on. Every idea in art history and criticism ever debated by classicists or archaeologists or philosophers or historians could have been put to a new and intriguing measure with every "other" tradition studied. Today, these opportunities remain only partially explored.

With a few exceptions, it is only recently that ethnomusicologists have truly looked as much at the people who are the world's music-makers as at the merely sonic character of the world's music. For those people, music has served as a positive force to strengthen identity, revealing processes of cultural resistance and

potential redemption. In courtly contexts of the colonized, we see reaction and the codification of classical idioms. In less organized places where people have been thrown together from diverse backgrounds, musical activity has been one of the means with which subgroups consolidate their sense of themselves, giving themselves coherence in their relations with other groups similarly defined; the evolution of their musical idioms has been an added means to develop and display a broader or more generalized sense of their combined identity. Examples of this kind of musical contribution are easily found in such cultural processes as the coming together of African cultural groups from the earliest days of the African Diaspora, the Zionist formulation of non-Western elements of Jewish heritage to counter assimilationist trends in nineteenth century Europe, or the continuous creation of new oppositional youth idioms as earlier idioms are appropriated and commercialized by mass culture. Such processes can be extremely complex.

The insights that reward people who think of music primarily in cultural terms are simply not available to those who think mainly in musicological terms; indeed, the latter group is often victimized by a narrow conception of music that practically precludes their understanding the breadth of the artistic conception of many non-Western idioms. The fact that music points to so many things beyond itself is another way of saying that musical contexts pull many things together, and sometimes it is only in musical contexts that certain parts of society come into relationship or that certain social relationships become visible. Thus, beyond the big identity issues of group cohesion and community boundaries, of authenticity and traditional change, of inclusiveness and exclusiveness, or of dominance and resistance, music is also important just because musical contexts are places that people invest with meaning. Many institutional and personal players struggle to realize various benefits around musical performances, where there are stories upon stories of poignance and significance involving money, love, values, work, status, persuasion, visibility, artistic growth. Isn't it odd that many social scientists still consider music to be derivative of culture when so many people, including Westerners, devise their musical events to bring to unique display that which they feel can represent their culture at its best — and by extension represent what they deem to be best about themselves? It is this territory of cultural imagery and self-portraiture that ethnomusicology is particularly qualified to explore.

In the final quarter of the century, the old ideals about music's capacity to transcend boundaries have reappeared in multicultural settings around the world,

and quite a few old perspectives have been inverted. Although a number of prescient musical ethnographies have cleared the ground for a new understanding of older issues, it is mainly the increased movement of people from continent to continent that has challenged the relativist model of discrete musical traditions. Again, too, it is musicians who have taken the lead in exploring and combining diverse musics. To them, there is nothing strange in getting together with musicians from other cultures and expecting to make satisfying music, and it is legitimate to blend samples of sounds or actual musical pieces into their work to add texture or allusion. But to a conservative practitioner of a culturally identified tradition, or to an ethnomusicologist who has elaborated that musician's repertoire, the way that these other musicians use the indigenous music can seem everything from naive to ruinous. Proponents of multiculturalism could maintain that even when music from one part of the world is appropriated based on misperception, the resulting music can still quite adequately serve different expressive purposes in its new context. This kind of transformation has occurred frequently in the history of music, and it is even more prevalent now.

On the other hand, this process is more commercialized than ever before, and non-Western musicians are acutely attentive to potential ways to make their music a commodity. In some cases, their patrons are abandoning indigenous music for imported products of mass media. The younger musicians are caught in multiple ironies. They believe in the intrinsic genius of their local tradition and in its capacity to extend its beneficial effects into the world. They believe that they need to modernize their music to help it attract interest at home and cross cultural boundaries into larger markets abroad, but they are afraid of losing their music's special qualities. They are either dependent upon or willing to trust foreign producers or collaborators who often lack adequate understanding of the deeper structures of the local tradition. They and their patrons become starstruck by the relative wealth or presumed success of local musicians who have worked abroad, or who one way or another gain access to mass media, and they do not learn enough from the generation of more aged musicians who know more about the traditional substance of the idiom. At the extremes, we see musicians in the vanguard of the new age who are ready to hear diverse musics in any combination as beautiful, contrasted with venerable musicians from local traditions who see modernization in all its aspects as a threat that will attenuate the most culturally distinctive and valuable aspects of their style.

In this confusing situation, the cultural perspective that has characterized anthropology as an avatar of a multicultural world also ironically appears to be aligned with forces of conservatism and reaction. From some vantage points, globalization seems an irrevocable process that aims to minimize the importance of culture to the role of adding local color in a small, small world. In today's centers of power, the technical-scientific, financial, corporate, and political elites of the world's nations have already defined a conception of the world in which everything is getting hooked up, in which privative issues of otherness, like notions of Western and non-Western, are irrelevant to the new realities that are being established. Culture has become an enigmatic obstacle to this process: when things do not go as intended, the reason usually has something to do with local culture. In a contrasting view, culture's most important function is to link generations as a tool for survival; the loss of cultural perspective is linked to anomie, frustration and a loss of historical perspective and values that could reflect a long-range multigenerational view. Some people who resist the new world order are ethnic chauvinists or religious radicals; others allege the shallowness of mass media and assert the richness of local knowledge and its expressive forms. Thus has culture itself become the focus of debate and contestation. With regard to music, the convenient and facile division of cultural territory among musicologists and anthropologists has simply become outdated. There are now many more players involved in interpreting cultural meaning, and now we see more clearly how important music is for people's ideas of themselves. For many people, more than ever, music represents their own cultural distinctiveness and their claim to a place in a multicultural world where issues of ethnicity, race, transnationalism, pluralism and nationalism highlight culture's meaning in multiple ways. Those whose experience of modernization and whose cross-cultural interactions anthropologists would normally study have themselves brought music into the mix.

What happens to the traditional musical idioms and artists? On the international scene, they are still subsidized, particularly by Western museums and universities. Collectors of non-Western plastic arts are running out of traditional pieces to collect, and they are gradually becoming open to the qualities of modern non-Western art that incorporates different cultural elements in refreshing and intriguing ways. When such art is exhibited, though, the entertainment at the opening is likely to be supplied by an ensemble of traditional musicians and not by

a pop band from the promoted region. The new art, like the new music, is fun, but the traditional or older arts still have cachet. On the local scene, the record shows that the traditional musicians of many societies have previously exercised strong influence because of their broad knowledge of social concerns and important social events. They are often among the most conservative in their societies because of their links to older patterns of patronage and reciprocity. As they watch the increasing commodification of their social world reach into the realm of music, they are concerned that the changing scene is incompatible with the dedication and spiritual generosity their art has demanded of them. They are comfortable asserting moral authority because the see themselves as the ones who know what is best in their culture. Despite the ambivalence with which people in some societies view musicians, or possibly as an aspect of that ambivalence, musicians are a kind of elite group resembling intellectuals. They are the ones who know their culture and have a role in events — ritual, ceremonial, communal, festive — that are most significant for maintaining cultural identity and continuity.

These indigenous intellectuals stand in an intrinsic conflict with other groups who would also claim that same cultural knowledge or preservative function in a modernized world: first, those from their own societies who have become intellectuals in universities and other educational institutions, and second, decision-makers in their government who are concerned with matters of national identity and wish to control the role of traditional culture within it. In societies where older systems of authority are being replaced, people are status-conscious, and literacy is a definite marker of status; it can be difficult for educated people to humble themselves before their illiterate elders. Nonetheless, the educated people and bureaucrats communicate first with foreign commercial and academic interests, and they can present themselves as insiders, even though they often may not have access to the cultural knowledge of the local elders. Meanwhile, musicians playing in popular idioms have accepted the commercial nature of the system; they are searching their culture for roots they can connect with their own musical mission. And in the powerful centers of international mass media, musicians and culture brokers are ever alert for new ideas and new sounds to energize their music or musical products.

All this contestation about cultural knowledge and authority has shifted one connotation of culture as a heritage toward culture as a specific inheritance from a group's forebears. This idea has informed ethnic perspectives for a long time, but

the contestation has expanded this aspect of cultural meaning toward a sense of culture as actual property which people have or do not have. "Culture," that plastic concept of ambiguous reference, is frequently discussed as if it were an objectifiable entity. Cultural interlopers are sometimes accused of stealing culture. People who work with outsiders or share information about customs are sometimes accused of selling their culture. In formerly colonized nations particularly, new intellectual and administrative elites maintain that the non-literate musicians are naive cultural stewards and need protection against outsiders who are capable of exploiting them. Many local musicians in turn believe that the new elites have no claim on their knowledge and are interfering with their relationships. When cultural influence and cultural transmission imply theft and appropriation, one logical conclusion is the application of legalistic perspectives on intellectual property and copyright, shifting the realm of discourse to the authority of the literate. But how is ownership of culture determined? Is culture — and by extension, identity — something that can be stolen? Could a traditional musician hold a copyright on a piece of music that has been passed down from generation to generation? If not, who holds the copyright and who collects the royalties? Does a Western musician or scholar do the right thing or set a bad precedent in making payment to an organization and thereby validating its representation of indigenous musicians as a class? How explicit could an ownership definition become? Could it apply to a rhythm, a chant or a dance style? Add courts, position papers and various commissions to other efforts to define a position of authority over cultural processes. All these efforts are increasingly congruent with contemporary processes of commodification and metaphors of value.

What is amazing is that music, which time and again has been considered superficial, should bring to a unique resolution and display so many variations of the idea of culture, so many cultural problems that have no clear solution, so many relationships that are otherwise unacknowledged. Probably the underlying questions are not supposed to be answered but are raised only to challenge and engage people to respond, to enter a world of players and participants. Even in its most formal venues, music exists in a realm of play. In that realm, discourse is peripheral and tends to be transparently motivated and personal. The ultimate benefit of studying music in context has been understanding the value of musical contexts in themselves over any intrinsic value in the music itself. Music's main

value reflects music's impermanence: it accrues mainly to the experience of those who are involved and doing things in musical contexts and only to a lesser extent, if at all, to anything that can be taken away. Music has always been something of a mystery, somehow beyond words, something beyond rational understanding, or, conversely, something that indicates the limitations of understanding. Modern philosophers and theologians discuss divinity in such a manner, by talking around the idea, focusing on effects and manifestations but not attempting to understand their subject in itself. In the same vein, music may partake of qualities considered to be spiritual, but in a secular world, music provides a comparable forum for discourse about things that have no substance but only effects and manifestations.

These effects and manifestations have nourished the cultural perspective that anthropology has championed, and it is now clearly the musicologists who occupy a more bounded world of culturally relative insight. Still, among even the most up-to-date scholars — those who note the multifaceted and relative complexity of the contemporary world and who proclaim its defining characteristic to be irony — most have difficulty accepting and working with ironic concepts as the focal points of their knowledge. When knowledge is ironic, then who is to say who knows what? But what one knows about music is not the main issue. The academic study of music started when intellectuals were peers or adjuncts to the elite, but the cultural influence of the Western elite is fading. Certainly, people from everywhere are moving through the world more than ever before, and there is no shortage of people capable of challenging anyone else's statements about music. More important, though, our ideas about culture have changed. Our understanding of music has reached the point where we recognize that musical performances are momentary events and that music's cultural meaning lies within its potential to transform the people who participate in or attend or are involved in musical events. This meaning is not to be abstracted into knowledge but rather recreated and experienced anew. If every aspect of musical meaning seems changed, this one has not changed. Is it possible that intellectuals can grasp this further irony about the abiding nature of impermanence? Could they take the measure of music as a model for their work, striving not to promote an idea of truth but to create a vehicle for participation and transformation?

— John M. Chernoff