

PERFORMING ETHNOMUSICOLOGY: BENEFITS, METHODS AND PROBLEMS RELATED TO EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING IN ENSEMBLES FROM OTHER CULTURAL TRADITIONS

INTERPRETAREA MUZICII FOLCLORICE: BENEFICIILE, METODELE ȘI PROBLEMELE LEGATE DE ÎNVĂȚAREA EXPERIMENTALĂ ÎN ANSAMBLURI CU ALTE TRADIȚII CULTURALE

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This paper examines ways the performance of music enhances learning and helps students develop multiple musical abilities and sensitivities. Ideas about social significance in musical events, the embodiment of experience, sensory ratios, and practical methods for teaching about people and music from other cultural backgrounds are presented. Two active ensembles at the University of Wyoming provide examples of the benefits, methods, and problems related to teaching and performing music from distant and unfamiliar places. The problems related to performing ethnomusicology are far outweighed by the benefits. Students participating in world music ensembles understand the arbitrary nature of applying cultural evolutionary values to music making. Their own musicianship is enhanced and they actively participate in multicultural learning.

Keywords: performing ethnomusicology, experimental learning, cultural traditions, musical events, practical methods of teaching, world music ensembles, cultural evolutionary values, multicultural learning, musicianship.

Prezenta lucrare analizează căile prin care interpretarea muzicii înlesnește procesul de învățare și ajută studenții să-și dezvolte multiple abilități și percepții muzicale. Autorul prezentei idei, legate de semnificația socială a evenimentelor muzicale, menționează un șir de experiențe, corelații senzoriale și metode practice de predare a materiei ce ține de oameni și muzica din alte tradiții culturale. Două ansambluri de la Universitatea din Wyoming ne oferă exemple de beneficii obținute, de metode și probleme legate de predarea și interpretarea muzicii din îndepărtate și necunoscute locuri. Dificultățile ce apar în procesul interpretării muzicii altor popoare sunt mult mai puțin semnificative decât beneficiile. Studenții care participă în formații muzicale internaționale conștientizează esența arbitrară a folosirii valorilor culturale evolutive în procesul de creare a muzicii. Muzicalitatea lor sporește, iar ei participă mai activ la procese de învățare multiculturală.

Cuvinte-cheie: interpretarea muzicii altor popoare, învățarea experimentală, tradiții culturale, evenimente muzicale, metode practice de predare, ansambluri muzicale internaționale, valori culturale evolutive, învățare multiculturală, muzicalitate.

This paper will look at ways the performance of music enhances learning and helps students develop multiple musical abilities and sensitivities. I will present ideas about social significance in musical events, the embodiment of experience, sensory ratios, and practical methods for teaching about people and music from other cultural backgrounds. Two active ensembles at my home institution, the University of Wyoming, provide examples of the benefits, methods, and problems related to teaching and performing music from distant and unfamiliar places. It is important to emphasize multicultural experiences for students at the University of Wyoming who often come from small isolated communities and are fluent in only one language. While music students in Chișinău live in a rich multilingual environment and interact with others from very different cultural backgrounds, they also can benefit from enhanced musicianship and greater understanding of other cultural systems gained through music performance.

Societal values related to strong leadership, unified movement, valorization of teachers and other highly valued figures, and the enactment of beliefs about the history of „our music“ can be seen in ensembles and practices at the University of Wyoming and in musical teaching institutions in Chișinău. The most apparent example of this in Wyoming is the very popular marching band with its strong emphasis on military style sound and unified movement and appearance under the leadership of a single person with a large baton, and frequent performances with nationalistic themes. Folklore en-

sembles in Moldovan institutions serve to enrich the musical environment by enacting forms of music understood to be specifically local. As students participate in these ensembles they embody values along with the sensations of producing sound and performing for various audiences. Cultural values are also performed in both places by symphony orchestras, wind and percussion ensembles, chamber music ensembles, soloists in examinations and recitals, and jazz groups.

Acts of music making are intrinsically social, filled with potential for negotiating social meaning and identity. Even within the confines of a conservatory of music, defining the essence of „music“ or „musicality“ implies social meanings, and the formal rules are „negotiated, invoked, and appealed to in various social contexts“ [1, p. 178-179]. Musical performances constitute an imaginative and indexical conversation and are related to the construction of identity and social life [2, p. 22-23]. Musical activity can be a powerful sign of identity because it is largely unmediated by symbolic language [3, p. 250]. Musical performance may share an ideal of communicative discourse with language, but semiotic processes limit symbolic meaning while favoring imaginative and indexical responses [3, p. 228].

Recognizing that education is cultural transmission that cannot be equated only with formal classroom teaching, students of music can be placed in situations where they constantly practice appropriate actions and interact effectively on another cultural system's terms. Multicultural learning is a normal human experience as even within their own families students are faced with „sub-cultures“ or „micro-cultures“ that can vary greatly and require differing responses. Humans are capable of „culture-switching“ like „code-switching“ in language without abandoning their own cultural identity. Institutions for teaching music can give students opportunities to practice skills and develop knowledge within widely varying cultural systems and expect them to acquire cross-cultural literacy for negotiating processes and dynamic change as a part of their education.

Challenging Cultural Evolutionist Ideals

British anthropologist John Blacking presented a thoughtful and wide ranging definition of music as „humanly organized sound“ [4, p. 10]. Music students are often overwhelmed with cultural evolutionist thinking that valorizes music in Moscow, Vienna, or New York as the pinnacle of human musical evolutionary processes — the idea that „Our music is the best.“ While each person may value his or her own musical system as the most satisfying and applicable, the assumption that other musical systems are primitive or not as intrinsically good cannot be institutionalized if students are to begin to understand other culturally engrained musical responses to environment and myriad aspects of human life. Any assumption of cultural superiority limits possibilities for expanded or comprehensive musicianship.

Citing demonstrated human capacities for developing proficiency in multiple musical systems, ethnomusicologist Mantle Hood first developed the concept of world music performance-study groups at the University of California at Los Angeles in the 1950s [5, p. 3]. Since the concept of stage performance is not part of music making in many places around the world, a study group allows students to experience what it feels like to recreate music from other cultural traditions without the requirements of stage performance. Keeping the music making in a study group also helps to address the problem of time limitations for developing performance skills in an academic setting bounded by semesters. World music study groups have developed into performance groups in many places in the United States and Western Europe. Ethnomusicology teachers and the leaders of these ensembles seek to present and valorize alternative musical systems and approaches to creativity and to create a reasonably authentic aesthetic experience for the performers and the audience.

The Wyoming Gamelan Chandra Wyoga and the Sikuris de Wyoming are active world music performance-study groups based at the University of Wyoming in Laramie. The gamelan rehearses and performs music from Bali, Indonesia under the teaching and direction of I Made Lasmawan, an

Indonesian gamelan master living in the nearby state of Colorado. The sikuri ensemble rehearses and performs large group panflute music from the South American altiplano of Peru and Bolivia, and maintains close ties with ensembles in Puno, Peru and El Alto, Bolivia. Members of both ensembles must learn to play Balinese or Peruvian instruments in unfamiliar community oriented styles, and perform in full costume with appropriate ceremonies and actions to accompany the music. The ensembles use instruments created and shipped from Bali, Peru, and Bolivia, that must be meticulously maintained in the high altitude dry conditions of Laramie.

Embodiment of Experience

Anthropologists have documented and explored concepts concerning the ways that humans are affected by sensory perceptions and actions. Csordas emphasizes perception and practice in the embodiment of individual experience [6, p. 7], which encourages an active participatory environment for understanding ways musicians can experimentally comprehend how people live and create music in other cultural settings. Drawing on the thinking of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, he establishes the human physical body as the subject of culture [6, p. 5]. The body both projects itself on the world around, and is socially informed for processing change through prior experience and sensing.

Katheryn Geurts rejects the thinking behind approaches in neurology, biology, physiology, and psychology that assume that all humans possess identical sensory capacities and that cultural differences are inconsequential. „Sensing“ is profoundly embedded in the foundations, cultural identity, and ways of living in a particular society [7, p. 3]. In her book „Culture and the Senses,“ she focuses her study on Anlo-Ewe-speaking people of West Africa, seeking to show how differently their sensory model privileges kinesthesia and sound. Her first chapter proposes adding *balance* as a sixth sense, with its base in the cochlea or macula of the inner ear. Anlo-Ewe people consider balance in every sense to be an essential part of being human, giving it priority greater than among people with Euro-American cultural backgrounds. Geurts argues that sensory order is one of the most basic parts of „making ourselves human“ [7, p. 5]. The sensory order of a group forms the basis of the sensibilities of individuals who have grown up in that cultural setting. „Sensory orders vary based on cultural tradition“ [7, p. 17] and reflect the differing sensoriums of each cultural group. Sensoriums encode moral values learned at an early age through childhood socialization processes, and shape notions of identity and sense of self as well as understanding and experiences of health and illness.

Steven Feld wrote about music making among the Kaluli people living in the Bosavi forest of Papua New Guinea for whom *dulugu ganalan*, or „lift-up-over sounding,“ the richly layered natural sounds of the forest, is a metaphor for egalitarian features of society and the model for Kaluli music making [8, p. 77]. As in nature, unison or discrete sounds do not appear and egalitarian features of the society are reflected in the structure of the extensively overlapping and alternating humanly produced sounds [8, p. 83]. In contrast with western based choirs, marching bands, drum and bugle corps, and even symphony orchestras and symphonic bands, no Kaluli sounds are performed unison, and drumming which may appear disorganized or inaccurate is actually reflective of environment and societal values [8, p. 82]. Christian pastors recognize Kaluli melodic singing abilities and their beautiful voices, but complain that they can never sing together to create rhythmic unison [8, p. 94]. Sound images created through singing are much more evocative for Kaluli than visual ones because of the prominence of sound over sight for negotiating their dense rainforest environment. Bird sounds in particular embody Kaluli identification with the forest and feelings about death and abandonment.

Benefits of Performing Ethnomusicology

Student engagement in music making has been enhanced by active participation in both the Wyoming Gamelan Chandra Wyoga and the Sikuris de Wyoming. Students and community members often enjoy the community-based aspects of the music in which no one person is a soloist or „virtuoso.“

This offers an alternative to the highly individualistic model traditionally taught in American and Moldovan music schools.

This is most easily demonstrated in the basic arrangement of pipes for playing large group Peruvian style panflute music. Each person has only half of the notes of a diatonic scale, *do-mi-sol-si-re-fa* on one set of pipes and the corresponding *si-re-fa-la-do-mi-sol* on the other set. No single person can be called on to play a melody alone, but must have at least one other player to have a complete set of notes. This hocketing style is enhanced by the richness of parallel thirds, fourths, fifths, and octaves according to the specific style.

Similarly, it is impossible to create the compelling rhythmic drive of Balinese gamelan music with a single player. At least eight players are necessary to create the fullness of sound represented by the gong cycle, low melodic instruments, flashy ornamentation, and rich „detuned“ nature of most gamelan music. Players depend fully on the capability and dedication to perfection of other members.

Participation in gamelan or sikuri ensembles is rewarding for people who want to play music but are not enamored by the promised rewards of solo playing valorized in music schools in Wyoming and Moldova. They are able to be part of a special group in an institutional setting at the University of Wyoming, and enjoy the complexity and camaraderie of music making without the pressure to be a soloist that is common for players of instruments like violin, flute, cello, piano, or nai. Students playing music outside of the commonly accepted cultural practices of schools of music, are able to construct imagined selves and imagined worlds beyond their immediate surroundings.

Problems

The expense of purchasing and shipping instruments from a faraway place limits creation of musical ensembles. In Wyoming, the instruments for the Balinese gamelan were purchased with money from a special fund in the Department of Music. A faculty member who wished to use the same amount of money to purchase a single expensive violin challenged the expenditure for making and shipping the entire ensemble of instruments from Bali, Indonesia. The committee overseeing the fund eventually agreed to the broader educational value of the gamelan instruments.

Vocal forms are the most inexpensive option for creating world music ensembles. While teachers must be careful not to simply use western style arrangements for choir, methods for teaching Bulgarian polyphonic forms and Mbuti hocketing styles have been developed. The set of panpipes used by the Sikuris de Wyoming were relatively inexpensive, and could even be reproduced using copper or plastic pipe available locally.

It is difficult to develop performance level proficiency in any style of music within the limited time and resources of most educational institutions. The high level of dedication required from a faculty member often means having to teach or coordinate these ensembles without pay and at a considerable personal cost of time, money, and energy. Additionally, members must volunteer large amounts of time to rehearse, listen to recordings, and plan for performances.

Issues of authenticity and even permission to perform on certain instruments are common. The Wyoming ensembles are closely related to musicians from Bali, Peru, and Bolivia and enjoy the praise and approval of people making similar music there. However, in many places faculty who are keen to promote performance of types of music outside of the norm must face opposition from people claiming some kind of ethnic sovereignty over making „their“ music. In Wyoming, I never will perform on Native American flute because I respect the Arapahoe, Shoshone, and Blackfoot tribal requirement for permission from an elder.

Conclusion

The problems related to performing ethnomusicology are far outweighed by the benefits. Students participating in world music ensembles understand the arbitrary nature of applying cultural evolution-

ary values to music making. They are allowed to experience and embody music making that represents cultural settings and processes that will enhance their intrinsic understanding and ability to learn and adapt to new situations with people from distant places, and augment their musical capabilities.

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