

The East, the West, and the In-Between in Music

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The East, the West, and the In-Between in Music

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Introduction: Of Foreign Lands and Peoples

David Vondráček

1. National music and beyond

In November 2018, the musicological conference *The East/the West/the In-Between* took place at the LMU Munich, organised in cooperation with the Czech Academy of Sciences. Young academics were called upon to present their research on the Self and the Other in music, especially in East/West constellations. Music is not only capable of reflecting social realities, but also promotes the imagination of belonging through shared knowledge and identification. Adopting a confrontational perspective that focuses on the borders, fractures and the seemingly incompatible means admittedly playing with fire. For whoever asks about cultural difference, is likely to get cultural difference as an answer.

Although national music remains a point of departure – as has long been the case in historical musicology – in many contributions of this edited volume, here it is discussed in regard to transnational aspects. The character of ‘the national’ has often led to misunderstandings. Especially in the younger European national states, it has unwaveringly held the status of an emancipatory category, bringing the promise of (national) self-determination. On the other hand, especially after the achievement of sovereignty, there is a danger that the enemy within is increasingly sought, as Wolfgang Welsch long-sightedly warned.¹ In this case, nationally determined fantasies of homogeneity become not only excluding but also repressive forces. For this reason, supposedly universal categories such as the nation, which are believed to be among the constants of European thought, should always be questioned so as not to overlook specific colourings that they assume in different concrete contexts.² One might add that only a thin line separates emancipating and discriminating concepts.

1 Cf. Wolfgang Welsch, “Transkulturalität. Die veränderte Verfassung heutiger Kulturen”, in: *Sichtweisen. Die Vielheit in der Einheit*, ed. by Freimut Duve, Weimar 1994, pp. 83–122, here p. 91.

2 Cf. Wolfgang Bergsdorf, *Herrschaft und Sprache. Studie zur politischen Terminologie der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, Pfullingen 1983, pp. 53–58.

Another source of misunderstanding could be ‘the transnational’. With the interest in transnational aspects we do not aim to replace the study of the national Self in music, but instead to complement it. It is well known that the idea of German culture has been developed and sharpened in contrast to the French, and similarly, the Czech in contrast to the German, etc., so that (national) cultures can only be thought of in the plural. Historically, representatives of nations have maintained contact and observed each other in transnational spaces.³ In this sense, the so-called western art music would be transnational: the interdependencies from which it has emerged are inscribed in it – otherwise it would probably be inconceivable. Ultimately, the foreign is not necessarily excluded, rather music in particular has an astonishing ability to absorb and to ‘domesticate’ the foreign in the most diverse forms and shades. The ongoing debates about which place the foreign should best occupy appear to be part and parcel of the search for one’s own.

In some cases involving the artistic display of national specificities, their meaning is first fulfilled in the transnational space, or, to put it another way: one’s view *on* the others virtually relies on the view *of* the others. However, it would be misleading to regard the actors in the cultural field as determined by nationality. Rather, it is necessary to place national interests within a set of different motivations and weigh their significance. In the following example, nationality serves as a means to an end, albeit in a playful way.

In 1926, the journalist Kasimir Edschmid described such a scene, evidently amused: “Indeed, there are still people in Nice who live off the English, as did their grandfathers before them. They are constantly on the move with their violins, playing *God Save the King* no matter the place, which renders every Englishman helpless. These scoundrels lurk around the hotels on the Mediterranean coast. When the English smoke their Dunhills behind closed doors in the afternoons, they begin playing. The English, who are not inclined to show themselves but who are obliged to honour this song, throw them money out the windows onto the streets. The violinists then play jazz” – while

3 ‘There is, after all, an almost clear consensus on the following matters: the outlines of a transnational history can be determined by a more precise investigation of interdependencies and networks. For this, thinking in nation-state containers would have to be overcome. The cause of social change is not to be found solely, and perhaps not even primarily, in the dynamics of intra-societal processes and structures, but rather in the interactions of many societies that move within a transnational or even global frame of reference’; Frank Hadler and Matthias Middell, “Transnationalisierung in Ostmitteleuropa bis zum Ende des Ersten Weltkriegs”, in: *Handbuch einer transnationalen Geschichte Ostmitteleuropas, Band I Von der Mitte des 19. Jahrhunderts bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. by idd., Göttingen 2017, pp. 13–36, here p. 22. [Translations from German by Julin Lee.]

the English tourists, having demonstrated their patriotism, indulge themselves once again in their siesta.⁴

Now, in historical musicology, the works, music-making situations and social circumstances are usually more complex than those described in the anecdote, which so beautifully preserves the Aristotelian unities of place, time and action. Aesthetic positions and economic interests, which here so vividly emerge, or rather diverge, are in most cases more intricately interwoven. To make matters worse, geographical distance/proximity corresponds less than ever with the experience of familiarity. Presently, travelling to foreign countries is no longer a prerequisite for someone to occupy a position ‘between cultures’. In our playlists the domestic and the foreign lie juxtaposed only a click away from each other. This raises the legitimate question of whether a categorical Other still exists. The confrontation and interaction with the Other, I would like to argue, have not disappeared, but have shifted to micro levels of everyday life, where they are difficult for researchers to access and demand higher degrees of differentiation.

Accordingly, some experts call for a scholarly normalisation of transnational constellations.⁵ This would require a heightened sensitivity for cultural differences, interdependencies and differentiations, which is, at least according to my observations, not yet among the core competencies of musicologists.⁶ On the one hand, Carl Dahlhaus’s opinion on the confrontation between the Self and Other especially in 19th century opera is reasonable:

What is decisive is not the degree to which an exoticism proves to be “authentic”, but rather the function it fulfils as a legitimate deviation from an aesthetic-compositional norm of European music in the context of an opera or symphonic poem. It is less the original context from which it originates than the artificial one into which it is inserted that should be the object of analysis, an analysis that proceeds historiographically, hence pursuing [...] the aesthetic and compositional-historical significance of the phenomenon, instead of getting lost in applied ethnography, which is capable of nothing more than identifying various degrees of distortion of the cited structures or styles. Musical exoticism is, expressed in a formulaic way, primarily a concept of function, not

4 Wolfgang Kaschuba, *Einführung in die Europäische Ethnologie*, 4th edition, München 2012 [1st ed. 1999], p. 175.

5 Cf. Sabine Hess, “Transnationalisierung und die Demystifizierung des Lokalen”, in: *Ethnizität und Migration. Einführung in Wissenschaft und Arbeitsfelder*, ed. by Brigitta Schmidt-Lauber, Berlin 2007, pp. 179–193, p. 185.

6 Cf. also Timothy D. Taylor, *Beyond Exoticism. Western Music and the World*, Durham and London 2007, p. 2: ‘[...] globalization as a long-term process has received more attention from ethnomusicologists than from musicologists, though there is no reason why this should be so, since composers of classical music are also subjects in social, cultural, and historical processes.’

of substance. [...] Both exoticism and folklorism subsist on style quotations inserted into a polyphonic texture regulated by artistic principles, but also on an aesthetic fiction [...].⁷

Dahlhaus's 'concept of function' can certainly be attributed to his interest in a structural history (*Strukturgeschichte*) which appears particularly close to structuralism here. On the other hand, it is obvious that the possibilities of generating knowledge this way quickly reach their limits. Three strategies can prove useful in escaping the methodological impasse and thus gaining access to new aspects. The first is to become aware of one's own preconceptions, the second is to think of an In-Between that emerges as a third space – an idea that Dahlhaus does not come up with, since he perceives only 'distortion' ('*Verfälschung*') – and the third is to dissolve the synchronic 'structuralist' perspective in favour of a processual diachronic one, i.e. not to accept things as they are presented, but to ask how they have developed historically.

It can be argued that the pursuit of understanding the Other (in the sense of *Fremdverstehen* in German) is contradictory in itself: as soon as I have understood something, it can no longer really be an unfamiliar Other to me. In the academic field, the greatest gain resulting from understanding the Other lies elsewhere, namely in the increased awareness of one's own preconceptions.

2. Recalcitrant Eastern Europe

The research on music that was sometimes deemed marginal or peripheral helps to sound out and expand the boundaries of the musicological canon anew. This may well be understood as an undertaking with emancipatory dimensions, since in doing so we allow ourselves to bring power structures to the fore. In this context, one might think of Edward W. Said, who highlighted the role of the West's imperialistic gaze in 'inventing' oriental strangers. In this respect, Said's Orientalism is as much an 'Occidentalism' as the sociologist Csaba Dupcsik has noted.⁸ Those in power often positioned their imperialistic gaze as being rational, universally valid, objectively true and the like. As Paul Gilroy clearly summarised: 'Universality, reason and progress, modernity and enlightenment: these glorious ideas were once the sturdy cornerstones of an all-conquering Occidental mentality.'⁹

7 Carl Dahlhaus, *Die Musik des 19. Jahrhunderts* (= Neues Handbuch der Musikwissenschaft 6), Wiesbaden and Laaber 1980, p. 252 and 255.

8 Csaba Dupcsik, "The West, the East, and the Border-Lining", in: *Social Science in Eastern Europe. Newsletter, Special Edition* (2001), pp. 31–39, p. 32.

9 Paul Gilroy, *Against Race. Imagining Political Culture beyond the Color Line*, Cambridge 2000, p. 68.

Some of the above irritations cannot be resolved, but they can be made aware of, if one considers the situation of Central and Eastern Europe. The countries on both sides of an imaginary line from Tallinn to Thessaloniki, including Russia, have traditions of art music which are not understood as coming from the outside; rather, the co-shaping of these traditions is claimed as a matter of course. Central and Eastern European composers assert their right to deal with the same compositional problems as their French, German or Italian counterparts. At the same time, they are confronted with the diametrically opposed expectation that their music should tell something specific about the region. Whether this music is perceived as part of or excluded from the Western canon ultimately depends on the observer, and several answers are possible. In any detailed analysis, the findings would certainly vary depending on the piece of music. Moreover, the changing historical conditions should not be overlooked. It must be noted that the repertoire from Central/Eastern Europe is subjected to heightened, and partially divergent expectations, which puts it in a quandary from which there is hardly any escape, since the expectations can hardly ever be met.

Csaba Dupcsik referred to Eastern Europe as “the West’s East”, one part of a broader West’, which should not be misunderstood as flattering.¹⁰ As Dupcsik points out, this figure of thought caused many problems, even when it remained unspoken: ‘paradoxically, nowadays this makes easier the pejorative connotations’ in comparison to an idealised West.¹¹ This corresponds roughly with the aspect of Said’s Orientalism, which Benedikt Köhler paraphrases as follows: ‘In that the Orient is brought closer to the West, the intensity of the construction and generalization of differences increases’.¹² If a geographic area inhabited by millions is labelled with just a few catchwords, almost inevitably an inaccurate description results from it. A utopic idealisation is built up, compared to which reality turns out to resemble neither the Self nor the Other enough.

One of the central innovations of Said’s theory is questioning the idea of cultural otherness as a given.¹³ Returning to Dahlhaus’s example of operatic exoticism, one can ponder the following: when a compositional engagement with foreign musical material has taken place and when audiences have listened to it for decades, then it should be expected that at some point there will be no more talk of foreignness. That this does not happen, however, makes it clear that just as there are strategies of incorporation/appropriation/assimilation, there are also strategies of ‘othering’

10 Dupcsik, “The West, the East, and the Border-Lining”, p. 33.

11 Ibid. p. 34.

12 Benedikt Köhler, “Edward W. Said’s postkolonialer Kosmopolitismus”, in: *Postkoloniale Soziologie. Empirische Befunde, theoretische Anschlüsse, politische Interventionen* (= Postcolonial Studies 2), ed. by Julia Reuter and Paula-Irene Villa, Bielefeld 2010, pp. 194–212, p. 201.

13 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 199.

or perpetuation/reinforcement of foreignness, such as in the avoidance of a rule-conforming contrapuntal treatment. The recognition of foreign elements is thus by no means bound only to the characteristics of the thing itself but is the result of a processual construction of the foreign.¹⁴

The example of Eastern Europe is not an easy one in this respect. Perhaps for this very reason it can help to sharpen the above-mentioned capability of differentiation also with regard to the study of other regions, wherever the question of the Self and the Other is involved.

3. The contributions in this book

The present collection of texts is unique (not only) in the German research landscape so far. Its focus is on the 20th century, since the concept of East-West division was especially dominant during the Cold War, but some contributions also go beyond that. It turned out that the scope of meaning of the East and the West in cultural terms is by no means fixed, but has to be renegotiated each time. Because of this broad spectrum, I would like to elucidate the connections that run through our book.

The chapters *(De-)Constructing the Enemy [...]* by Moritz Kelber and *German Music in the Japanese Press [...]* by Minari Bochmann have in common the large geopolitical scope, admittedly in very different historical constellations: the early modern period in one case and the Second World War in the other. The fact that the West appears (for once) as the Other allows some familiar repertoire to be regarded in a new light.

Nikola Komatović brings his findings on *Octatonic Ambiguities* to light by employing music-analytical means (just as Hartmut Schick does later in the volume). In Komatović's contribution, the music of César Franck is central, while in the following by Emma Kavanagh it is that of Camille Saint-Saëns. With its focus on the operatic genre, her contribution 'Du paradis rêvé' is linked to *Love Thy Enemy as Thyself?* by Sebastian Bolz on Alexander Zemlinsky. Although both Saint-Saëns' *La Princesse Jaune* and Zemlinsky's *Sarema* remain lesser-known works by the respective composers, they stand out noticeably from the familiar ways of dealing with the foreign and exotic in opera.

In *The 'Other' in Czech Music*, Lenka Křupková offers a historiographical overview of the preoccupation with the foreign in Czech music in its heyday from the

¹⁴ Only in exceptional cases can 'the processual' be adequately grasped through a 'structuralist' way by studying the score; rather, it is much more important to study the historical development and circumstances.

end of the 19th century up to Janáček. The following authors focus on individuals and their works, which certainly cannot be omitted in this context: Leoš Janáček (*as Seen by German Critics*) by Miloš Zapletal and Béla Bartók by Hartmut Schick (*Folklorism, Symmetry and Tritone*). Like Minari Bochmann, Miloš Zapletal deals with music journalism and its narratives in their relation to political camps. Finally, Dániel Nagy's *The Cults of Composers [...]*, like Schick's contribution, is about Bartók. The study of the cult of personality, as Nagy describes it, also allows for more general conclusions to be drawn beyond Bartók's case.

Another focus is the music of the former Yugoslavia. Since the idea of being between the political blocs was omnipresent in the Yugoslavian period, a critical review seems timely. While in *Contemporary Musicology in a Neither/Nor State* Bojana Radovanović develops a theoretical approach to situate the avant-garde in Serbia or rather Serbia in the avant-garde, Miloš Bralović follows with case studies from the years immediately following the Second World War in *Negating the West, Going East*.

While indirectly expressed in the other contributions, the interdisciplinary claim of this volume is most evident in the contributions of Ana Djordjević on *Music in War Films [...]* and Olga Stojanović Fréchette on *Popular Music in Intercultural Language Teaching*. Stojanović elucidates how music can be used to approach sociocultural phenomena.

Finally, Claire McGinn's 'Vanilla and Chilli' in *Lithuanian Minimalism* opens up new perspectives by tracing the relatively recent efforts to overcome both East/West clichés and clichés of the Baltics in music.

Especially with regard to different methodological approaches, a broad panorama is offered here. As wide as the spectrum is, this collection is in no way exhaustive, neither is it meant to be prescriptive. I regret very much that no Polish, Russian or Croatian voices have been included, which I do not consider to be outside the topic. The selection of contributors was partly based on the networks established at the conference *Young Musicology Prague* in September 2016. In addition, three authors have already contributed to the Special Volume 1 of this publication series, providing a welcome continuity.¹⁵

It is the first volume of the *Münchner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte* since 2003 to appear entirely in English.¹⁶ This is not to be understood as a decision against German as an academic language – at most a temporary one – but rather as a pragmatic choice to address readers that otherwise would not be

15 *(Zu-)Hören interdisziplinär* (= Münchner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte Sonderband 1), ed. by Magdalena Zorn and Ursula Lenker, München 2018.

16 After Marie Louise Göllner, *Essays on Music and Poetry in the Late Middle Ages* (= Münchner Veröffentlichungen zur Musikgeschichte 61), Tutzing 2003.

reached. It should not be concealed that this posed particular challenges for those involved during the preparations for printing. Thus, I sincerely thank Julin Lee for assisting with the linguistic editing of the texts.

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