



Entrevista / Entrevista / Interview

Susanne Ziegler. *It is my hope that ethnomusicology will gain broader acceptance by musicologists*

by *El oído pensante*

Susanne Ziegler received her Ph.D. in musicology/ethnomusicology and Slavic languages at Cologne University, with a doctoral thesis on *Folk songs in West Macedonia*. From 1983 to 1988 she was assistant professor at the Institute for Comparative Musicology of the Free University in Berlin. She also lectured at various German universities: in Mainz, Heidelberg, Frankfurt, Potsdam, Free University Berlin, and University of Arts, Berlin. From 1990-1992 she conducted research in a project of the German Research Foundation devoted to the historical roots of Georgian Polyphony. From 1993-2012 she held a position at the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv, today part of the Ethnological Museum, State Museums of Berlin, Prussian Heritage Foundation; she was responsible for historical music collections. She conducted fieldwork in Macedonia, Yugoslavia, Turkey and Georgia and published numerous scientific articles. Her book *Die Wachsylinder des Berliner Phonogramm-Archivs [The Wax Cylinder Collections of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv]* of 2006 is regarded as one of the most important contributions to the history of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv. She is also editor/co-editor of the CD series *Berliner Phonogramm-Archiv – Historical Sound Documents* which until now comprises 7 CDs with wax cylinder recordings from Japan, Peru, Brazil, Argentina, Palau, and Southeast Europe. The last two were awarded the Bruno Nettl Prize of the Society for Ethnomusicology in November 2012. Since 2000 she has been chairperson of the ICTM (International Council for Traditional Music) Study Group “Historical Sources of Traditional Music” and editor of the book *Historical Sources and Source Criticism* of 2010. One of her next projects, funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG), is the online presentation of the recordings of prisoners, made in German Prison Camps during WW1; the recordings are preserved in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv and in the Lautarchiv of Humboldt University in Berlin.



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OP. Which are the most fascinating aspects of your work with wax cylinders?

Susanne Ziegler: At the end of the Second World War the wax cylinder collections of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv were reportedly lost, so it was really a great surprise when they were returned to the Ethnological Museum in 1991. When I began my work in the Phonogramm-Archiv in 1993, it was my task to identify the cylinders (more than 30,000) and to compare these holdings with the pre-war inventories. It was fascinating to see these mythical wax cylinders and to hold them in my hands, but it was even more exciting to listen to them. Today we can listen to music that was transcribed by ethnomusicologists years and years ago. Even if the sound quality is not the best, it is the touch of history that is immanent in the sound. I still remember first listening to a cylinder of the Abraham Hopi collection (1906) on a restored Edison GEM phonograph in 1997. History seems so close to us now, because we can listen to the voices of the collectors and to music which was recorded, transcribed and analyzed a hundred years ago, yet whose sound has been silent for many years.

OP. To what extent is the collector's perspective present in the recordings?

SZ. Our documents tell us that the collector was not totally free to record what he thought should be recorded. Felix von Luschan and Erich M. von Hornbostel's recommendations of 1904 clearly specify what should be recorded (Luschan 1904). However, not all collectors followed the recommendations strictly, but decided for themselves what should be recorded. For instance, the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv was not interested in recordings of language, yet several collectors recorded examples of different languages; today these sound recordings are among those most valuable for linguists. Moreover, the situation in the field often required a change of plans and adjustment to local conditions. The collectors' perspective reflects more or less the actual scientific, and mostly German, history at that time. On the other hand, the individual collector's perspective is possibly more evident in his correspondence and writings than in the recordings.

OP. Do they reveal more of the collector's perspective than on the sound expressions they hold?

SZ. All cylinder recordings are connected with the time at which they were recorded; in my opinion, only a few recordings clearly reveal a specific perspective that differs from the mainstream politics. Therefore, the sound expressions themselves are more eloquent. However, the sound expressions can be interpreted in different ways and from different perspectives.

OP. Besides the factual message they bear, what can recordings made with war prisoners tell us?

SZ. They can possibly tell us about the prisoners' situation in the prison camps, although seldom *expressis verbis*, but more or less concealed in the choice of specific songs or texts. The recordings also can tell us about the person's longing for home and love, and national pride. From the accompanying photographs we can learn about the recording situation, and we can clearly see that the singers were under pressure when they were recorded. This is also true for most of the field recordings, due to the technical limitations of the phonograph.

OP. Can we gain any information about the ethics of the collector and analyst?

SZ. Rarely. Information about ethics is not immanent in the recordings, but can be found in diaries or correspondence. We have to understand the recordings by considering the time of their existence. It may be a mistake to suggest that the collector or analyst had the same ideas about ethics as we have today. And I suggest that like today, as in former times, collectors and analysts who came from different countries and different background had different views on ethics.

OP. From your point of view, who was the most influential musicologist of the *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*?

SZ. Without doubt, Erich M. von Hornbostel. When reading Hornbostel's articles and letters, one can find ideas and thoughts, which were innovative and shed new light on established musicological theories. It was the irony of fate that Hornbostel died before his contemporaries acknowledged and accepted them. I think that some ideas and understanding of music cultures of the world expressed by later colleagues do in fact go back to Hornbostel. In addition, Hornbostel was not only an ethnomusicologist, but much more: he was interested in technology, in the natural sciences, in ethnology, in linguistics, and psychology etc.; he was in all an example of the typical well-educated, broad-minded scientist of the early 20th century. Yet many of his ideas became accepted and widespread only later, first in America and later in Europe; furthermore, some were not even associated with his name, but with his colleagues' names.

OP. Do you think that his epistemological, theoretical or methodological approaches are still present in the Berlin Phonogramm-Archive work?

SZ: Due to the development of ethnomusicology after 1945, the approaches of the first German ethnomusicologists were often regarded as colonialist, racist and outdated; but doubtlessly, today these approaches are no longer applied in the Phonogramm-Archiv. Theoretical and methodological approaches have changed, and new views, experiences, and theories have gained worldwide recognition. However, Hornbostel's approach to the music of the world from an interdisciplinary point of view, his curiosity and his comprehensive understanding are still necessary and still present today.

OP: In which activities do you find Hornbostel's approach?

SZ: We can find his approach to interdisciplinary studies in the cooperation with scholars from other disciplines like historians, linguists, archaeologists, psychologists, etc. Another very important activity is to increase cooperation with similar institutions. In former times there were only a few institutions like the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv, mostly in Europe, for example the Phonogrammarchiv in Vienna which was closely related to Berlin. But today it is important to establish cooperation with partners outside Europe, and especially with those countries where the wax cylinders were recorded. This is new and was not on the agenda at Hornbostel's time.

OP: Which proposals of the *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* are still useful?

SZ: Comparative studies prevailed for many years, but after 1960 they came to be regarded as outdated. The favoured topics were detailed studies of one region, one genre, one instrument, etc. Now the time has come to compare again, but on a higher level.

OP: And which approaches should definitively be abandoned?

SZ: Evolutionary and racist theories about the origin and dependence of music cultures as well as the standpoint that Western music culture is the highest achievement of mankind should be abandoned. Another point that should be dismissed is that the world's music cultures can be understood by analysis of the music alone and against the background of classical music theory only. Today exchange and discussion with other disciplines are regarded as equally important.

OP: Have the recently emerged ethnomusicological theories provided new approaches to the study of wax cylinders?

SZ: The theory of ethnomusicology as cultural anthropology has been acknowledged since the late 1990s, when we were discussing the edition (re-edition) of the wax cylinder collections. Since then scholars who were involved in our publications have contributed substantial new approaches to the study of wax cylinders. This is evident in the different volumes of our CD-publication series *Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv – Historical Sound Documents*, sometimes more, sometimes less, depending on the author and his/her scientific background.

OP: Is it possible to differentiate between a European perspective on the study of wax cylinders and an American one?

SZ: In following the tradition of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv the European perspective is closely related to the study of the music itself, whereas the American view deals less with music and more with performance, the recording situation, the person who has been recorded, etc. In this respect it is interesting to note that most wax cylinder collections in America are collections of their own country that are more or less familiar to the archivist or researcher, while the wax cylinder collections in Berlin stem mostly from areas outside Europe, which are studied from an outsider's perspective.

OP: What about West and East Europe? Do you find any differences?

SZ: East European ethnomusicological tradition is still more traditional than the West European one, which has been open to new impulses from the USA after 1950. This is also connected with the fact that folk music still plays a more important role in Eastern than in Western Europe, in theory as well as in practice. One example is the CD with wax cylinder recordings from Lithuania, published by colleagues in Lithuania. Transcribing melodies and texts is their first concern.

OP: Does something like a “German musicology/ethnomusicology” exist nowadays?

SZ: For ethnomusicology, my answer is: unfortunately, it does not. Ethnomusicologists working at German universities or other institutions have a different understanding of the subject. This is also evident in the use of different designations, ethnomusicology as systematic musicology, as cultural anthropology, ethnology or cultural musicology. There is no common understanding what ethnomusicology should be and no common platform and obviously no interest in a broader discussion.

OP. How do you imagine the future of ethnomusicology in Germany?

SZ. It is difficult to envisage the future of ethnomusicology. However, it is my hope that ethnomusicology will gain broader acceptance by musicologists in Germany, and that it will be taught in all German universities together with historical musicology. In public life the acceptance is already there: music from all over the world is present in concerts, clubs, broadcasting, theatre performances, etc. Yet specialists in ethnomusicology are greatly needed, not simply musicians playing a non-classical musical instrument. In my opinion it is very important for every ethnomusicologist to have an idea of how ethnomusicology/comparative music started in Berlin more than one hundred years ago.

Bibliografía

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Cómo citar / Como citar / How to cite

Ziegler, Susanne. 2013. "It is my hope that ethnomusicology will gain broader acceptance by musicologists". Interview by *El oído pensante*. *El oído pensante* 1 (1). <http://ppct.caicyt.gov.ar/index.php/oidopensante> [accessed: DATE].