



Entrevista / Entrevista / Interview

## **Anthony Seeger. *On Epistemology and Applied Ethnomusicology in a Postcolonial World***

by Maurice Mengel (Universität zu Köln, Deutschland)\*

Anthony Seeger has a somewhat unusual biography for an ethnomusicologist. He studied anthropology rather than ethnomusicology; for seven years he taught in Brazil, the country where he did his fieldwork; he worked for long periods of his career in archives and other “memory institutions” as well as in the record industry. Perhaps more importantly, through his work outside academia he advocated for anthropological and ethnomusicological issues and, by reflecting on topics that arose through his many different jobs, he also brought concerns from these adjacent fields back into academic discourse.

Seeger received a B.A. in social relations from Harvard University, an M.A. in social sciences from the University of Chicago, and, in 1974, a Ph.D. in anthropology from the same institution. From 1975 to 1982 he worked as a researcher and professor at the Department of Anthropology at the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro, and subsequently directed the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University until 1988, while also teaching as a professor in the anthropology department there. From 1988 to 2000, he served as the Director of Smithsonian Folkways Recordings in Washington, and after leaving that post he became a Distinguished Professor of Ethnomusicology at the University of California at Los Angeles and Director of the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive. He retired from UCLA in 2012 and is now a research associate at the Smithsonian Institution.

Anthony Seeger began his fieldwork with the Kĩsêdjê, known at the time of his research as the Suyá Indians, in northern Mato Grosso (Brazil), in 1970, and has since spent many months with them on return trips. He is the author of the ethnographies *Why Suyá Sing* (1987, 2004) and *Nature and Society: The Suyá Indians of Central Brazil* (1981), as well as numerous articles reflecting on the moral, legal and ethical issues he encountered while directing archives and working in the record industry. Seeger has also edited or co-edited several books

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on other topics (including Seeger and Chaudhuri 2004 and Chaudhuri and Seeger 2011).

Extremely active in professional institutions and scholarly societies, Seeger has served as Secretary General and President of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), President of Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM), founding Chair of the Research Archive Section of the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives (IASA), and sat on many advisory boards of archives and professional organizations related to music.

Seeger has received many prizes, honors and awards. In 2010, I witnessed how IASA surprised him with their Award of Recognition for his contributions in the field of “advocacy for the cause of audiovisual archives, communities and music”. Born into a musical family, with a musicologist grandfather and uncles Pete Seeger and Mike Seeger and aunt Peggy Seeger all renowned professional musicians, Seeger learned to play the violin and 5-string banjo as a child, and in public lectures, he frequently asks his audiences to sing, for reasons he may have learned from the *Suyá* or from his own family.

## 1. On Epistemology

**Maurice Mengel:** *El oído pensante* is a new journal with an emphasis on theoretical, methodological and epistemological topics. This stance is unusual for ethnomusicology today. In fact, the three words –which not coincidentally all have a Greek etymology and are rarely defined in music research– seem to have a bad reputation among some ethnomusicologists, and not without reason. Do you consider “being philosophical” to be unpopular in today’s ethnomusicology, and if so, why? How relevant is generalization in ethnomusicology today, in comparison to other areas you know well, such as cultural anthropology or social theory?

**Anthony Seeger:** This is a large question and deserves a complicated philosophical answer, which I won’t give you directly. Instead I will begin with a parable of the banana called music. I first developed this idea in Brazil with a banana from the breakfast buffet (Seeger 2003); I have used it many times since. Take a banana and put it on a cutting board. Hold it with one hand and take a sharp knife in the other. Now, think about the many ways you could cut that banana. You could cut it vertically across the hard stem at one end and get a dry, hard, fibrous chunk, or horizontally across the very edge and get a sliver of flexible skin, or diagonally into the fruit and get an elongated oval surrounded by a hard edge of skin, or cut vertically down into it for a circular cross-section. Depending on the angle of the knife, what you see will look very, very different.

Let's call that banana "music" and the angle of your cut your "theoretical approach". You decide on the angle before the knife makes contact with the banana. In Portuguese we used the word "recorte teórico" ("theoretical cut") to describe a theoretical approach to a given subject, and that is precisely what we have taken with our banana called music. You could also call it the "recorte filosófico", ("philosophical cut"), since theory is always also based on and contributing to some kind of philosophical issue. We tend to select specific philosophical approaches because we have specific theoretical, philosophical or practical questions we want to address. I consider theory to be a kind of conversation with dead predecessors, living colleagues, and (we hope) future readers who will engage with our writing after we are dead.

Many different disciplines study musical phenomena. Neuroscience, evolutionary biology, psychology, history, anthropology, sociology, and cultural studies are just a few of them. Ethnomusicology is just one among many disciplines focused on music. Each discipline is seeking not simply to "understand" music, but to also participate in a discipline-based conversation about general issues through the study of music. Take the example of neuroscience, where recent technological developments have allowed specialists to investigate the impact of musical sounds on the brain in ways previously not possible. These studies speak to different issues from those of sociology or anthropology, though their results may be useful in the long term.

I have written on a lot of anthropological subjects other than music and taught in anthropology departments for fifteen years (at the Museu Nacional in Brazil and Indiana University in the USA). The conversation I was engaged in was with writings by Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Claude Lévi-Strauss and others about the relationships between systems of ideas (cosmology), systems of relations (social organization), and music. I have written also about kinship and social organization, about aromas and systems of classification, about time and space, indigenous land rights, and other subjects that were specifically anthropological in approach. My question about music was about the nature of the relationship between cosmology, social organization, and music in non-capitalist societies. It seemed to me that Alan Merriam, Mantle Hood, and others were claiming that there was a relationship between music and society or culture, but they did not specifically demonstrate where that relationship could be discovered in the *sounds of the music* and in its *performance*. In several articles (especially Seeger 1979 and 1980) and in *Why Suyá Sing* (1987, 2004) I tried to demonstrate that the structures of sounds and timbres of singing were directly related to important parameters of social organization and cosmology (dualism, age, gender, space, time, etc.) and in fact helped to establish several of those parameters. While I felt this argument was important for ethnomusicology, which is why I published one of those articles in the journal *Ethnomusicology*, I also thought it was important for anthropology. I never thought it was the only important question to ask about music, however, and I certainly don't think so today.

Now let's return to our banana. Laying there on the cutting board in pieces, it looks fragmented and incomplete. And it is. By calling the banana music, we have created a false concreteness in our object –it appears to have clear yellow boundaries. But if you leave a banana in a room for a few days and then return, the smell of the over-ripe banana will be everywhere. The banana is thus not confined to its apparent boundaries. Neither is music. There is another problem with our banana: no matter how we cut it, we don't know that bananas come in large bunches, or how they reproduce –we cannot see its history or its future. Those who would define music as the sounds of performance –what can be recorded and transcribed– are similarly using a misplaced concreteness in their definition, as Alan Merriam and I have both suggested.

Many scholars today spend a great deal of their professional careers defending their own view of the subject (their slice of the banana) and criticizing those of others. Rather than arguing about which is right, I think we should be reading widely (looking at all of the slices), and seeing what we can learn (or may be unable to learn) from the different perspectives. Bruno Nettl has repeatedly written histories of ethnomusicology without being judgmental about approaches (for example Nettl 2005), which sets his work apart from that of many other more “partisan” authors.

Sometimes a new technology, not a philosophy or emerging discipline, encourages new approaches to music. One such technology was audio recording at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, without which comparative musicology and ethnomusicology would not have developed as they did. More recently, advances in brain scanning allow us to learn more about how sounds are processed in the brain. Advances in animal behavior studies allow us to see human music as part of a much larger spectrum of animal “musicking”. The possibilities of digitization and easier dissemination of audiovisual materials have similarly transformed audiovisual archiving and made it into one of the most technologically advanced and innovative parts of ethnomusicological work today.

I began our conversation with a banana to make the following points: there are many ways to approach music. Different disciplines will approach it differently according to the terms of their own internal debates and will reveal different aspects of it. We need to be cautious about how we delimit what we study, and we should be tolerant of and interested in each other's results.

**MM.** Admittedly, I asked a very broad first question and it is good that you answered it only partly. You seem to say that the questions we ask –let alone the theories we build– necessarily have a standpoint and a perspective, and that there are always other possible perspectives. You relate this plurality of perspectives to how we view the work of others and how we as scholars organize our work. In this light, can you say a bit more about the position of philosophy and theory today in ethnomusicology?

**AS.** Not many ethnomusicologists today are approaching music from an overtly

philosophical perspective, with footnotes and references to ancient and contemporary philosophers. There are some excellent works by music theorists that many of us read, however, such as Lewis Rowell (1983). There have been some excellent reflections on methodology, however, some of them in the book *Shadows in the Field* (Barz and Cooley 2008). Of course we cannot think or do any research without some set of ideas that orient us in how to go about it. And remember, Lévi-Strauss long ago pointed out that Australian philosophers use a “logic of the concrete” that Europeans don’t recognize as philosophy, but can be shown to be such. What is in fact philosophical may not look like that to all viewers.

My grandfather, Charles Seeger (1886-1979), was probably the most overtly “philosophical” of the early ethnomusicologists, and perhaps of any of them up to the present (Charles Seeger 1977 and 1994). He read widely in philosophical texts and was deeply interested in issues of value and human communication. Charles Seeger’s philosophical approaches to ethnomusicology appear to have had relatively little impact on the field, though he is frequently cited. This is partly because his prose is difficult to read (Charles complained people tried to read him too quickly –he said it took him a long time to think and write, and people should take just as long to read him). While most graduate students have to read something by him in their history courses, very few of them engage overtly with the questions he addresses (I did suggest a way to use them in one article–Seeger 2006).

**MM.** I have tried not to imply a specific understanding of philosophy in my questions. In your responses thus far, you have referred to at least three different “philosophies”: a discourse that refers back to ancient Greece, “the logic of the concrete”, and “a set of ideas that orient us in how to go about [our research]”. Perhaps this last concept is better described as methodology or an aspect of epistemology. Which philosophy is important for ethnomusicology?

**AS.** I referred to the Greeks because Aristotelian categories and some of Plato have had a profound effect on research in the social sciences and music. They are not ancient history except as documents –some of the ideas are with us still. I raised the “logic of the concrete” because I think it is important not to call what we do “philosophical” and not recognize that what other people do may be philosophy and science also. It has taken us a long time to get beyond the dichotomy of “our” science versus “their” magic and “our” music versus “their” shrieks and cries. Finally, the various epistemologies of approaches to music are worth discussing, but with respect for the objectives of the study and the epistemologies of the peoples researched. Other things have a profound effect on our research objectives, too. These include the accepted epistemologies of a given discipline, the reward systems (employment, salary level, grants, publication) for certain research, the almost guild-like department structures of our universities, and the hubris of certain researchers and their disciples.

**MM.** Do you think there is a feeling within ethnomusicology that all too often philosophy leads to complicated texts that no one wants to read?

**AS.** It is certainly true that most ethnomusicologists can't figure out what to make of Charles Seeger's more philosophical works. But I think he did us all a great service by trying to create a "road map" of the study music (see especially the fold-out chart in C. Seeger 1977). He lays out a huge field of things that shape the compositional and musicological processes and tries to organize the parts. The chart is a map, perhaps, but it doesn't show you where to drive or how to use it (And I think it is missing a few "continents" or major areas of significance for music, for example power, gender, and other emerging and important perspectives on the subject). In some of the other chapters of his two books, Charles takes parts of his diagram and deals with some very interesting specific issues. But most students can't figure out what to do with the systematic laying out of the musicological process.

I think it is very healthy to examine the philosophical bases that lie beneath the questions we ask about music, and I applaud the intentions of *El oído pensante*. One of the dangers in focusing on philosophical issues is that the discussion remains at a level of abstraction that appears to be difficult to apply to music –as in Charles Seeger's work. Another danger is ethnocentrism –European categories and concerns may not be the best way to understand what people with different histories, languages, and priorities do with music. A third is perfectionism –to think that if we cannot truly know something, it's not worth the effort to try for imperfect understanding. Clifford Geertz once remarked in a seminar I took at the University of Chicago that even though doctors know that perfectly sterile operating rooms are impossible to achieve, they don't therefore operate in sewers. Similarly, even though our approaches are inevitably flawed, and the difficulty of what we are trying to do may appear be overwhelming, that doesn't mean we shouldn't undertake it or that we should be unwilling to consider our biases openly. I tend to agree with Geertz on this. We need to be conscious of our own biases and epistemologies, but we should not because of them decide not to make the effort to do research and write.

Just as we find the work of colonial-era scholars and travellers to have been lamentably racist, sexist, and blind to many of the things that were right in front of their eyes, so I expect that similar shortcomings in my own work will be decried at some time in the future. (For all I know, the criticisms may be already formulated). But in spite of their shortcomings, I am glad our predecessors made the effort to travel and to write; even flawed research is not in vain if interesting data and descriptions remain. I'm not sure there is a progress of knowledge, but there certainly is a richness of data that seems to be useful. The results of my research have directly benefited the Suyá/Kisêdjê in a land claim; they now have copies of all my field recordings and use them in video projects; and the collections I made may be useful to future researchers with different questions.



**MM.** In *Why Suyá Sing* you argue for a musical anthropology in contrast to Merriam's anthropology of music. One might say that you updated Merriam's anthropological approach. In the meantime, many ethnomusicologists have accepted at least the general idea that ethnomusicologists should study music anthropologically, if not the exact approach you suggested in *Why Suyá Sing*.

Given this situation, do you still see the necessity for more anthropological research, or do we perhaps have rather too much of it today? Did we throw out the baby with the bathwater when we left "old-fashioned" musical analysis behind? Or is my question, with its implication of the duality of music or anthropology, hopelessly passé?

**AS.** I do think your question is a bit passé (the angle of your knife is different from mine), but it does reflect a frustration I share with you when I read a lot of ethnomusicological publications. There is remarkably little analysis of sound in many of them. This is distressing to me. I think the best ethnomusicology illuminates our understanding of sound, of social life, and of their interaction in a way that helps us to better understand both of them. I don't think that "old-fashioned musical analysis" is necessarily a virtue, however. Those analyses often described only a few sonic features, and did not really go into the social construction of either the sound or the meanings which are an integral part of their production and appreciation.

It can be difficult to combine anthropology and the study of sounds. I have been a great admirer of Alan Merriam's *The Anthropology of Music* (1964) since I read it for the first time. But I felt that his study of the Flathead Indians (Merriam 1967) was a bit of a disappointment in the way it separated the analysis of the sounds from the analysis of other aspects of Flathead society. Even Merriam, it seemed to me, was unable to draw anthropology and sonic analysis together. In one of my earliest articles (Seeger 1980) I said that a problem with ethnomusicology was precisely the division between anthropology and musicology, even though that was what the field was created to overcome, and I wanted to address it directly. In that article I described the congruence between the structure of Suyá/Kĩsêdjê cosmology, social organization, and song structure. I thought I was, in fact, bringing an analysis of sound and an analysis of society together. A few other scholars have done so, but far fewer than I expected would do so in the ensuing decades.

The structure and prose of *Why Suyá Sing* make a similar argument. I began with a distant overview of the community and its music through a particular ceremony, and then moved toward a central chapter devoted to the detailed analysis of a single song. This was meant to be like zooming in with a microscope. I moved from that one song to describing similar structures and other examples, and from that to a discussion of aesthetics. In subsequent chapters I zoomed back out to the conclusion of the ceremony and the generalizations about why Suyá sing. One of the things I wanted to accomplish in the book was to demonstrate that the analysis of the sounds of a particular song actually helped to

understand the nature of the structuring of social life and the cosmos, but the argument could only be made by combining ethnographic description with the analysis of speech and of a single song. Ethnographies are the presentation in narrative time of things that are happening at the same time; this makes for a complex and interesting genre, possibly related to the novel of the self.

Well before I started my own research, I wrote a paper for a graduate course on field methods in which I argued that Dante's *Divine Comedy* was the model for most classic ethnographies (just as it is for many novels of the self). Like Dante, the ethnomusicologist is washed up on an unfamiliar shore and after considerable difficulties finds an "informant" or "research associate" (in Dante's case, Virgil) who has a partial knowledge but a willingness to help him or her. The researcher then goes through hell, toils through months of purgatory doing tedious research, and then meets a better research associate (Dante's Beatrice) who can introduce him or her to "the truth". After a blinding vision of the ultimate truth, the ethnographer, like Dante, returns home and writes a book. I thought I had experienced hell and purgatory but not the vision of the whole until my wife pointed out that my dissertation (the core of which became *Nature and Society in Central Brazil*) was precisely the kind of integrated cosmology that Dante had written. Who knows, perhaps reading Dante influenced my research and my writing just as much as my anthropological training (The professor gave me a very low grade for the paper –his idea of methodology was a little different than mine!).

I know *Why Suyá Sing* has been criticized for not having enough musical transcriptions, but I did that on purpose –I wanted people who did not read music to get something out of the book. I believe all transcriptions are analytic tools rather than descriptive ones; they are best used to make a point, as I did in chapter 5. If people wish to confirm or contest my analyses, the pieces I described and analyzed are included on the CD that accompanies the book. In addition, all of my field recordings are available in a publicly accessible audiovisual archive at Indiana University (at the request of the Kĩsêdjê they are not made available on the internet) and I hope people will use them to reanalyze the sounds and critique my work. It did not seem necessary for the point I was making in this particular book to include more than a few transcriptions. In contrast, Dale Olsen used a lot of transcriptions in his excellent ethnography on the music of the Warao, in Venezuela, and uses them to good effect (Olsen 1996) –but for different purposes.

**MM:** You said elsewhere (Stock 2006: 236) that you wrote *Why Suyá Sing* primarily for anthropologists, but that the book was mostly read by ethnomusicologists. Many ethnomusicologists seem to ask themselves why ethnomusicology has to import ideas –and especially theory and methodology– from other disciplines, –like cultural anthropology. Is it possible to export ideas back to cultural anthropology and other fields? Should we try at all? And is cultural anthropology still a principal source of methodological approaches for ethnomusicology, or do you see other fields in this role more recently?



**AS.** I wrote *Why Suyá Sing* for anthropologists. That is why the subtitle is *A Musical Anthropology of an Amazonian People*. My distinction between a musical anthropology and anthropology of music was to a certain extent a play on words. But the point I wanted to make was that important methods and theories did not necessarily need to flow from anthropology to the study of music, as Alan Merriam proposed. Instead I argued that musical performance could in fact teach anthropologists something important about society as a whole. Many aspects of musical performances are the same from performance to performance (structure) but something is usually different (improvisation, or agency). This was particularly appropriate at a time when anthropology was questioning the rigidity of social structure and examining the way social life was created and re-created by actors in something that could be very similar to jazz or classical music. It seemed to me that the combination of structure and improvisation found in much music and dance could help anthropologists think about social action and society. Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens were making some of the same points about social behavior (Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979) about the same time, but thinking about musical performance as an example of “structuring” and “agency” might have helped them.

**MM.** In this interview, we keep coming back to units such as ethnomusicology and cultural anthropology, which are sometimes referred to as academic disciplines. Apparently, we use these units to structure our thoughts and perhaps also to organize how different scholars work together. What is your opinion on academic disciplines?

**AS.** I am skeptical about the usefulness of academic disciplines and critical of university departments and the compartmentalization of knowledge. Most departments were established to address a particular question at a particular historical moment in a particular place, and almost all of them focus on old questions. They are very useful for university administration, but not for research and understanding. In order to look at new questions, universities, faculty and students have to spend a great deal of effort and money to overcome the barriers that we ourselves have created. Most of us work in an environment hampered by disciplinary and almost guild-like strictures. I once suggested that universities should ring a big bell every five years and all the faculty would then find a new group of collaborators to work with on a new problem –not very practical perhaps, but possibly more efficient than the system we have.

That said, there is a growing body of literature in what we might call the field of ethnomusicology. When I first started to study ethnomusicology I was able to read almost everything written in English in less than a year. When I recently served on the Alan Merriam Prize Committee for the Society for Ethnomusicology, we had to select the best English-language monograph in ethnomusicology among 43 submissions published in a two-year period. That is a huge output, and included only those in English that were submitted for the prize! But even so, it would be a very bad idea to think that all of the

interesting approaches to music are contained within the literature of what is called ethnomusicology. A lot of it is appearing in the publications of other fields. I am very concerned that most of us are only reading a small part of that literature. My students tend to be ignorant of publications about musical traditions in parts of the world that they are not themselves studying, which I find quite troubling. It is very important for scholars of the music of Latin America to read the results of research done in other parts of the world.

**MM.** How has your life experience influenced your perspective on ethnomusicology? If I remember your other interviews correctly, it was no accident that your formal training came from outside of ethnomusicology. On a related note, I wonder if you think of your last job as a professor at UCLA as an activity, which changed you, something which trained the trainer so to say. Did it change your view of ethnomusicology or anthropology?

**AS.** I was born into a musical family and was encouraged to make my own music from as early as I can remember, to explore it as a performer and a student. I was born in Greenwich Village, in Manhattan, New York City. I peddled my tricycle around Washington Square, and was introduced to Lead Belly and Woody Guthrie at a young age. My parents liked to sing unaccompanied songs together in beautiful harmony –ranging from traditional songs to 1930s popular music and musicals. My first 78 rpm record player came with an assortment of recordings including a little European classical music and a lot of American folk music. My uncle Pete Seeger was a well known singer of folk music and labor organizing songs. My uncle Mike Seeger was a founding member of The New Lost City Ramblers and an admirer and performer of old-time rural music in the United States. My aunt Peggy Seeger was a singer of folk songs, a topical song writer, and for decades performed with Ewan McColl in England. They all recorded for the independent label Folkways Records and often gave me one of their recent LP records at Christmas. I went to a progressive elementary school where my parents taught and I wrote my first “ethnomusicology” research paper on the music of India when I was about 12, using a Folkways LP for material. When I was 14 I wrote another paper based on Folkways Records’ boxed set of music south of the Sahara with notes by Alan Merriam. I got high compliments from my teachers on each of the papers, which set me up to write more in the future. I took lessons in recorder, violin, banjo, and guitar and began to perform for audiences at school and summer camp when I was quite young –I had a list of 120 songs I could play on the banjo and sing at the age of 14.

I also went to an unusual residential high school in Vermont. About 150 adolescent boys and girls lived and worked on this farm school on a remote hilltop in the countryside. We were not allowed to have any music playback machines –no radios, record players, or tape recorders. If we wanted music, we had to make it ourselves or listen to it in one of the three listening rooms on campus. I sang in the chorus and played the banjo a lot, and I took music history and elementary music theory courses there as well. I spent the summers

working at my family's summer camp for children, leading them in singing children's songs and calling square dances. As a consequence I had a lot of performance skills but missed out completely on changes in popular music during my teenage years. By the time I got to college, my musical interests were pretty fixed. I am a terrible person to ask something about American popular music; I still don't listen to much of it –though I have been known to play some with a group of professors at my wife's college.

I did my undergraduate college studies at Harvard University, from which both my grandfather Charles and father had graduated, 60 and 30 years earlier. Charles thought Harvard's music department was very conservative. He told my father, "don't let Tony near the music department, they'll ruin him!" So I wasn't encouraged to take courses in music. I found the social sciences to be more interesting anyway. I thought they were asking more interesting questions. But remember, most of the best-known ethnomusicologists in the United States in the 1960s had received their degrees in anthropology and were teaching in anthropology departments. Willard Rhodes, David McAllester, and Bruno Nettl (three of the four founders of the Society for Ethnomusicology along with Charles Seeger) as well as George Herzog all received their degrees in Anthropology. Bruno held a joint appointment in music and anthropology. Younger scholars like Charles Keil, Steven Feld, Charlotte Frisbie, and many others also took degrees in Anthropology and taught in Anthropology departments. The major exception to this pattern was the Institute of Ethnomusicology at UCLA, established by Mantle Hood. Mantle emphasized performance and the analysis of sound, and graduates of his program started ethnomusicology programs all over the country, often in music departments. After the UCLA institute closed, the ethnomusicology program there was incorporated into the music department. Today UCLA has the only free-standing department of ethnomusicology (not part of another department) in the USA. Anthropology departments also began to lose interest in the anthropology of the arts and were happy to leave the hiring of ethnomusicologists to their universities' departments of music.

I taught in Anthropology departments for fifteen years. I usually taught the central anthropological history and theory classes, a course on South American Indian social organization and cosmology, and an occasional course on ethnomusicology. I left academic life to become the first curator of the Folkways Collection and to found Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, but eventually I wanted to get back to teaching and research, which I enjoy. Because so many of my books, articles, and media productions were about music, most of the requests to apply for jobs came from ethnomusicology programs, rather than anthropology departments. In 1999 I was asked if I would be interested in working in the ethnomusicology department at UCLA.

I accepted the offer to teach at UCLA with some trepidation. I had been out of the university setting for 12 years. But it was a generous offer that came just after our younger daughter had gone off to college and I could conceivably divide my time between my home and my job in another state. I decided to commute from my home near Washington, DC, where my wife had a teaching job, to Los Angeles, where I rented a small apartment near

campus. They hired me because I was an anthropologically trained ethnomusicologist, something they lacked on their faculty. It was a major change to move from teaching mainly anthropology to teaching only ethnomusicology courses. Also, I had not taught for so long that I had to rethink my methodology and objectives. I spent a very challenging and enjoyable 12 years teaching and working at UCLA, as well as serving as the Secretary General of the ICTM and, for a while, the director of the UCLA Ethnomusicology Archive, but I don't think it changed my approach to music that much. When I look at what I wrote before 2000 and what I am writing now, I don't see a major shift of approach or epistemology.

## 2. Global Ethnomusicology and Regional Research Traditions

**MM.** We sometimes talk –myself included– as if ethnomusicology were a single homogenous and world-wide field, although we all know that ethnomusicology is quite different in different parts of the world. How is ethnomusicology organized differently in the United States and in Latin America and what are the effects of these differences?

**AS.** Ethnomusicology is not a single homogeneous field, even in the United States. It certainly isn't homogenous internationally. Even the name is not accepted in some places, especially when the meaning of the word is thought to be “ethnic music” rather than a methodology for studying musical traditions as part of social life. I consider ethnomusicology to be an approach to the study of music. Since it is a specific approach, it needs to be distinguished from its subject matter. That is why you will not find the word “ethnomusicology” in the name or mission statement of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM). Many members are ethnomusicologists, but many other members would not use that word to describe themselves or what they do.

The name “ethnomusicology” is important because in many places it is a counterweight to a strong tradition of historical studies of sound within a national tradition. In the United States, “musicology” meant the study of the music of Europe and the United States in a given historical period. In India, musicology tends to mean the study of Indian classical music. In China, musicology has also traditionally been the historical study of Chinese traditions. Ethnomusicology as a word stands for a discipline that is fundamentally transnational and includes all genres of music everywhere. Mantle Hood's program at the University of Maryland Baltimore County once used the slogan “the study of music anywhere, anytime”. That's a pretty radical idea. For the USA, India, and China, among others, ethnomusicology offers a really different approach to studying music. While the field is certainly heavily influenced by a number of European and American writers and journals, the focus and energy of ethnomusicology in different parts of the world can be quite different.

National policies, local academic and funding opportunities, and history have certainly shaped the direction of the studies of music everywhere. I have seen a tremendous growth in the number of people attending conferences and doing research on musical traditions in Brazil, for example. When I worked in Brazil in the late 1970s, there were perhaps five ethnomusicologists in the entire country; today the Brazilian Association for Ethnomusicology (ABET) has over 150 members, holds crowded national meetings every two years, and has a number of chapters that meet separately. What I hope is that we will all be reading one another and learning from one another and thus improving and diversifying our approaches to sound and society around the world.

In many countries, people who call themselves ethnomusicologists often study their own national traditions, as Raul Romero (2001) has discussed in an angry but thoughtful article. I highly recommend it, especially to Latin American readers who may have felt similar frustrations.

Ethnomusicology is located in different departments in different countries. In Brazil, for example, many ethnomusicologists are members of departments of anthropology, and their questions are often anthropological. The specific institutional location of ethnomusicology appears to depend a great deal on how resistant music departments and programs are to studying anything outside the European canon of concert music. If the musicologists do not encourage the study of other genres, that study appears in the social sciences –as it did in the United States. If musicologists welcome ethnomusicology in their conferences, journals, and hiring practices, then ethnomusicology may not develop a separate institutional identity. For a long time, Argentinean scholars prided themselves on having one professional organization that included both disciplines. I hope, however, that studies of music will also be a subject of interest in the meetings of anthropologists, social scientists, historians, and neuroscientists –to name just a few. The Brazilian Anthropological Association (ABA) has had some very interesting sessions on music and dance, and a fascinating meeting on the politics of research organized by Samuel Araujo (for an important position paper see Araujo Junior 2006). Scholars studying music outside the European canon read some of the same journals and meet regularly at conferences in Brazil, Argentina, the “Southern Cone” meetings, and at international meetings of IASPM, ICTM, and other organizations, but their perspectives on the field can be quite different from those in other places.

**MM.** In this postcolonial world, economic and academic power are not distributed equally, and –at least occasionally– these inequalities follow lines established in the colonial period. What is the position, challenge and perhaps the chance of “other” ethnomusicologies, such as Latin American ethnomusicology, in this context?

**AS.** I agree, economic and academic power have not been and still are not distributed equally around the world or within any country or region. But that unequal distribution has

been shifting over time. European scholars established comparative musicology and dominated the field in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, but devastating wars and expansion of U.S. academic institutions resulted in a situation today where there are relatively few ethnomusicology positions and programs in Europe outside of the U.K and Ireland. The United States may have shaped the field and started one of its most important journals (*Ethnomusicology*), but there are influential programs and journals in many other countries today. Today PhD programs in ethnomusicological approaches to music are expanding in Australia, Brazil, China, Ireland, Mexico, and elsewhere. You can learn about some of these through the *Yearbook for Traditional Music* and the world conferences of the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM).

I believe that international organizations can be important actors. The International Council for Traditional Music (then called International Folk Music Council) was established in 1948 partly to overcome the political separation that opened up between countries during the postwar period. An NGO affiliated with UNESCO, the ICTM made a great effort to involve participants from many countries in its governance, conferences, and publications. The ICTM has also held its biannual world conferences in different parts of the world and encouraged the formation of study groups with international memberships. Looking at attendance at ICTM conferences, it is clear that the People's Republic of China and Brazil (among others) are investing a great deal of money to enable their scholars to participate actively in international conferences as well as to host them, and to establish and expand programs in the field at their universities.

I am also encouraged by the proliferation of online journals like this one that are much less expensive to produce and distribute than printed journals, the increasing number of (ethno) musicological organizations and conferences around the world, and the growing number of people studying music. Now we need a really good professional-level translation program to help us learn what everyone else is saying, even when we cannot read their original language. That will truly internationalize the study of music. People should not have to publish in English to reach international audiences. But even with a translation program I suspect more Latin American scholars would read Latin American scholarship than Chinese scholarship because the issues discussed, the materials used to illustrate them, and the epistemologies will have a particular resonance. When you research the music of your own country or region, your work resonates with the work of other national scholars and can have a particular force in a given local conjuncture that it won't have for scholars living and working elsewhere. There will probably continue to be many local "conversations" and professional organizations, and there will still be a need for debates on regional issues. Overcoming our heritage of colonialism and academic hegemony will require a lot of work on all of our parts. It isn't easy, but it is being attempted in many places around the world today.



### 3. Applied Ethnomusicology and Cultural Politics

**MM.** You seem to be one of those ethnomusicologists who rarely use the word “politics”, but whose work has often or perhaps always been political. Some examples: your research helped the *Suyá* to secure rights to their ancestral lands; when you directed the Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University you emphasized the responsibility of archives in a post-colonial world, even at a time when repatriation was still uncharted waters for most ethnomusicology archives; and as director of Smithsonian Folkways you set up a system to ensure that musicians actually receive a share of record sales, even in those cases where the musicians (or their heirs) could not easily be located. Given these activities, was it always important for you that your work should have a political dimension, or was it sometimes an unexpected by product of your academic interests?

**AS.** I have always felt that scholarship should be applied for the benefit of people. The purpose of knowledge is not simply to produce more knowledge. Knowledge should be used in ways that are ethically appropriate and beneficial at the very least to the people we study. I also think that your thinking improves if you test your ideas in “real life” actions –it can improve your theorizing.

Many members of the Seeger family have been social activists. This is a family tradition that dates back generations into the 18th century. This does not mean that every Seeger is a radical, but it certainly was part of a family tradition to engage in political activity. When I was a very young child I learned that music itself is political. My extended family suffered during the anti-Communist scare of the 1950s because of their outspoken political views and activities: my grandfather Charles Seeger had to take early retirement because his passport was confiscated; my uncle Pete Seeger was investigated by the House Un-American Activities Committee and was blacklisted; my uncle Charles Seeger was not able to find a job in astronomy in the United States and had to move to Leiden in the Netherlands to work; and a lot of my parents’ friends were under suspicion of subversion as well. One of the reasons I am an ethnomusicologist is that there has never been a question of my mind that music was part of social and political life –and so is its study. Politics are indeed ingrained in my research and discussed in some of my publications.

In spite of this, I think it is important to separate my research from the use of the knowledge I gained through my research. My research project with the *Suyá* *Kisêdjê* itself was not inherently political. It was musical and sociological. I did not design it as a project that would specifically benefit the community I was working with, but rather one that would contribute to discussions with other scholars living and dead. I did not collect data because I thought it would help a future land claims case; I collected it because I thought it would help me understand the social, cultural, and musical processes of the *Kisêdjê*. Non-Indians are always trying to teach the Indians something –how to change their religion, how to improve their crops, how to raise cattle, how to educate their children. I didn’t want to teach them

anything. I presumed as a point of departure that they knew what they were doing, and I wanted to learn from them, not to teach them. And they appreciated it. One night a woman came over to where my wife and I were lying in our hammocks, sat down, and said “do you know why we like you? We like you because you don’t tell us what to do. Whites are always telling us to do this or that. You don’t”. That was one of the nicest compliments of our approach I ever received. Of course, when they have asked for help, I have always done my best to give it.

In addition to my own penchant toward social activism, I learned a great deal during the nearly ten years I lived in Brazil about the possible engagement of scholars in civil society and political events. I arrived in Brazil as a graduate student with a plan to do research on the *Kisêdjê* in 1970 –one of the darkest periods of the military dictatorship. I taught in the Graduate Program in Social Anthropology of the Museu Nacional in Rio de Janeiro from 1975-1982, when generals still held the power and civil society sought to wrest it back. When you are a foreigner working in a country in which you have been residing for only a few years, political activism requires a fair amount of humility and sensitivity. I was careful to consult my Brazilian colleagues before agreeing to serve on deliberative bodies or to engage in activities that could be construed as overtly political. I had some very good friends who gave me very sensible advice even in the difficult times of the military dictatorship. The advantage of being an activist in indigenous rights issues in Brazil in the 1970s (I was elected President of the *Comissão Pro-Índio* of Rio de Janeiro in 1978) was that their right to the use of their traditional lands was guaranteed in the Brazilian Constitution. Therefore we were not calling for the implementation a foreign concept of indigenous rights in Brazil, but rather arguing for enforcing the rights guaranteed by the Brazilian Constitution itself. Why I was elected President, what we tried to do, and the importance of the Brazilian Anthropological Association in the defense of indigenous rights is a large subject, and would have to be the subject of a different interview.

**MM:** Research by ethnomusicologists on political topics is perhaps more accepted today that it was when you began your career; at the same time, politics have also become more difficult to discuss in the classroom. In a recent interview, you said you no longer use the “serious joke” to introduce yourself in classes as:

one of those people your senators warned you about: an agnostic professor whose family members were active in the Communist Party, was raised in Greenwich Village, went to “red diaper baby” schools, and believes that the way things are is not necessarily the way they should be. (Armstrong 2012)

How do you see the relationship of politics to ethnomusicology in the last few decades? Should ethnomusicologists in the U.S. still discuss politics with their students today, and if so, how?

**AS.** Political paranoia and repression in the United States is worse at some times than at others. Many political conservatives in the United States today are convinced that universities are bastions of liberalism and that professors seek to brainwash their students and turn them into clones of themselves. As far as I can tell there is little concrete evidence of this, but that perception is one of the reasons I stopped joking about being “one of the professors your senators warned you about” in my lectures –too many people could take it seriously out of context. I was the only one in my department who ever assigned undergraduates any reading by Karl Marx, but I certainly did not endeavor to indoctrinate any of my students politically. I did train them to consider ethical and political issues, to think about the practical application of their research, and I did teach about applied ethnomusicology. But I decided that in the current political climate, and with the proliferation of cellphones in the classroom and the development of YouTube, it was too easy for a joke to be used as evidence of something that I was completely opposed to: the use of the classroom to shape the political ideas of its students. I like debate; I am strongly opposed to purposeful indoctrination, and consider it unethical in a professor because of the power dynamics in the classroom. I do encourage my students to think for themselves and to become perceptive, responsible, and active citizen ethnomusicologists; nothing more (actually, that’s a lot!). They learn their politics from their engagement with the society at large.

Universities in the United States have long been marginalized from political life. In this they differ fundamentally from what I have experienced in Latin America. This marginalization probably has a number of causes. Opposition to government policies and to religion-based morality has frequently been viewed with suspicion and sometimes with sanctions, dismissals, and witch-hunts in society at large and at universities.

One of the most pernicious side effects of political repression in academic life is the warping of intellectual work and research. I majored in the social sciences as an undergraduate at Harvard, one of the most prestigious universities in the United States. In the program established by Talcott Parsons and staffed by an extremely eminent group of professors I read many books by Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Georg Simmel, the Chicago School of Sociology. But we were never assigned any reading by Karl Marx (or Lenin, Trotsky, etc.). As I understand it, Harvard resisted some of the worst excesses of the 1950s attacks on its faculty, but it certainly became a very conservative place in its reading. In Brazil, under the anti-communist military dictatorship, everyone read Marx. But I was told that faculty sometimes turned their books spine to the wall so that spies could not easily browse their libraries when they had large parties.

**MM.** In many parts of the world, inequality is growing while funding for research is cut. Is it still worthwhile to fund ethnomusicology research and expensive institutions such as museums and archives? In today’s world, is the money for documenting musical traditions and researching music still well spent, or has ethnomusicology (and music research in

general) become a selfish pursuit? Are archives and museums –many of them old and respectable institutions– still useful?

**AS.** Let me separate this into two questions –firstly, is it still worthwhile to fund ethnomusicology research? And, secondly, is it still worthwhile to fund archives, museums, and libraries? My answers to the two are different, and my response to the second one leads into the next topic I know you want to cover.

Firstly, music and the performing arts more generally move people deeply; entertainment is a major part of the global economy; the performing arts are often used as resources in political, religious, and other social struggles and conflicts; and performers are threatened and dying around the world almost every day. The understanding of these processes is important today and therefore some kinds of research into music are certainly fully justified. Why? I have always thought that if we understand ourselves and other people better, we will be better able to avoid violence in our interactions. Even if that doesn't always work, I would argue that some research should be funded. That said, the world needs more than just researchers of performing arts –it needs activists, producers, creators, dreamers, inspired performers and knowledgeable audiences. But I do believe research contributes to understanding and social life.

Secondly, museums, archives, and libraries can be critically important institutions for individuals and communities. They can be bastions of free education and access to knowledge. One of the tragedies of the way national and local governments are reacting to budgetary difficulties is that many of them have been cutting hours and limiting access to the very things people use to educate themselves and establish who they have been, are, and might become. In the United States, public libraries are the place where homeless people can use computers to find resources and jobs, children from homes without study space can do their homework, parents can freely access advertisement free videos for their children, and all people can learn about their history, about current events, and dream about the future. Yet library hours have been reduced almost everywhere in the United States while other services are not touched. Museums struggle to keep their doors open to the public and increasingly require expensive payments. Archives have their staff cut and are less able to respond to public queries.

If you want people to change and educate themselves, the budgets of these institutions should at least be doubled in hard times rather than reduced. Libraries should be open longer hours. Archives and museums should receive additional funds to hire underemployed but qualified people to help catalogue and preserve their collections. In the United States, one of the traditional ways poor immigrants became successful was through the use of public libraries or private libraries made available to workers. Andrew Carnegie is a good example of an immigrant who not only made use of libraries when young but later funded the construction of public libraries towns and cities in many parts of the world.

Karl Marx, in his scathing critique of the revolution of 1848, *The 18<sup>th</sup> Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, makes an important observation about the use of the past in moments of social transformation. He writes:

Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly encountered, given and transmitted from the past. The tradition of all dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living. And just when they seem engaged in revolutionizing themselves and things, in creating something that has never yet existed, precisely in such periods of revolutionary crisis they anxiously conjure up the spirits of the past to their service and borrow from them names, battle cries and costumes in order to present the new scene of world history in this time-honoured disguise and this borrowed language (Marx 1963: 15).

It would take an entire book to discuss all of the ideas in this passage, but here is the one I found most important when I re-read this passage in 1989 order to teach a class when I was also serving as director of the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music: when people are in the midst of radical social change they often look to the past and use elements of it to accomplish that change. Marx was very critical of this process in his book. It seemed to me that what Marx described was true, but that the moral value he gave to it was not necessarily true. The past can be a very fertile and fruitful resource for creating a new future that escapes some of the parameters of the present –the use of the past does not always lead to a failure to change.

There were two important implications of this insight. First, that people do not always need or desire the past. It only becomes important to them at certain times. When they are in the process of transforming themselves, they may want it and find a use for it. Second, that archives and museums can have an important role to play in providing materials from that past to people who are ready and want to use them. Since decades or maybe even centuries may pass before the materials will be desired and used, archives, museums, and libraries have a huge responsibility for the survival and usability of their collections. This is another reason it is important not to cut the budgets of archives, museums, and libraries, but to ensure that their collections are carefully collected, well documented, lovingly preserved, and migrated to usable formats for the time they may become tools for self-determination and a creative future.

#### 4. Archives, Applied Ethnomusicology and Teaching

**MM.** You have spent a considerable part of your career in different ethnomusicology archives, reforming them in different ways. During this time sound archives have undergone significant changes: in particular, digitization (not only of recordings, but also of catalogues, access to archives per email and the web, etc.) and the unexpected technological and social revolution we call the Internet. Do you think these new technologies have significantly changed the role of ethnomusicology archives? Will archives once again take a center stage

in the digital era or are they doomed to remain the dinosaurs of bygone age (as you implied in Seeger 1986)?

**AS.** In that 1986 article I suggested that there was an overwhelming image of archives and their collections as being a musty, tainted, and useless heritage of a colonial past that was unnecessary in an age when scholars did their own field research. My conclusion, however, was quite the opposite. I also suggested that, contrary to the professional aspirations of most scholars today, we may be best remembered in the long run for the recordings we have made and preserved rather than for our belabored theories (Seeger 1986: 267). I then made ten suggestions to collectors, depositors, archives, universities, granting agencies and professional organizations that I think are about as valid today as they were a quarter-century ago. I consider that article to be still relevant today, but the possibilities have changed.

A few years ago I found myself getting tired of the repeated use of some of the same ideas in ethnomusicology over the decades. I found myself wishing I were working in one of the fields where technological innovations were leading to their rapid transformation and the emergence of new areas of investigation and practical action –for example, in studies of DNA that have led to the release of wrongly convicted prisoners. Then I realized there was one part of ethnomusicology that had been transformed by technology, and where practical applications, previously impossible, were now occurring. This was the famously “boring” area of audiovisual archiving. The Internet was transforming the relationships between archives and communities and the kinds of things communities could do with their traditional knowledge (discussed in Seeger 2004-2005).

Technology has changed a lot since I became director the Archives of Traditional Music in 1982. Reel-to-reel tape was then the accepted preservation medium. But changes were already coming swiftly then, and they were obviously important for ethnomusicological research and audiovisual archives. The Internet has allowed archives (and museums and libraries) to increase access to their collections to a degree unimaginable in 1982. A vast amount of material is available online from institutions and much more has been posted by amateurs on YouTube and social media sites. There is a huge curiosity about and taste for the past, as is evident from the millions of visitors to the University of California at Santa Barbara website of early Edison wax cylinder recordings (which are available in their entirety without charge at <http://cylinders.library.ucsb.edu/>).

Archives, museums, and library special collections (as distinct from their published books and journals) face both ethical and financial challenges in making their unique materials available. Not everything in an archive or collection was intended to be made available to the whole world. Unpublished recordings are different from published materials, which through their publication were clearly intended to be public. Codes of ethics as well as international agreements like the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People require archives and museums to consider carefully what parts of their



collections should be made available to whom. And they rarely have enough money to suitably digitize their entire collections; instead they live with the vinegary smell of tape deterioration and the horror of the complete loss of signal on videotapes, peeling acetate discs, and no-longer-playable technologies. The rapid obsolescence of recording equipment today poses a severe threat to our ability to play back today's recordings a few decades from now.

Two words of caution about the Internet are worth interjecting at this point. The first is that by virtue of the file formats used and the way information is accessed and exchanged, sound on the Internet often becomes separated from information about it. A great deal of material is available on the web, but sound files tend to circulate without the metadata and descriptive materials or cross references to books and articles that would allow people to make use of them in the future. An audio file by itself, without the information of what it contains, who is speaking or performing, and the time and place of that recording, will be far less useful in the future. Hearing the voice of your ancestor can be a powerful experience and those words a useful tool for the future, but if you can't tell who is speaking or when it was spoken, a lot of the power and usefulness disappears. The second is that for-profit companies dominate a lot of the Internet, and there is no reason to believe they will necessarily be concerned about preservation and migration issues in the future, especially as they consolidate or transform into new entities. Several U.S. record companies famously discarded their master discs and tapes when they needed space. They saw no need for them or any obligation to save them for some cultural purpose. Some were retrieved from the dumpsters by concerned employees or collectors and saved, but many others were lost. Just because something is digitized and on the Internet does not mean it will last. It needs to be placed in a professionally-run archival storage medium. And even then we can only hope for the best.

My advice to readers of this interview is that if you have written something you want to preserve, print it out on acid-free paper using a laser printer and file it somewhere safe. It will last much longer than the software you are using on your computer and probably longer than any existing operating system. If you have multimedia projects, it would make sense to print out hard copies of the various elements and store them too. A number of really nice projects I worked on at Smithsonian Folkways recordings are today unplayable on any contemporary systems.

**MM:** Of course, ethnomusicology is being applied in many areas today, and not just in archives, museums, and the record industry. Considering applied ethnomusicology as a whole, would you say that there is an epistemological relevance for applied research? Which theoretical and methodological challenges do you see in applied ethnomusicology in the future?

**AS:** The word "applied ethnomusicologist" bothers me and a number of our colleagues

because we apply ethnomusicology all the time –every time we design a syllabus or teach a class we are applying ethnomusicology. But the word is usually used to mean work outside the university setting. Anthropologists and sociologists in the USA now label this “public anthropology”. But the “applied ethnomusicology” label has been used by both the Society for Ethnomusicology and the ICTM, and I guess it is here to stay.

I have written a bit about this. In my Charles Seeger Lecture at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 2005, I suggested that several histories of ethnomusicology specifically and purposefully ignored the work of some of the most important applied ethnomusicologists of the past century (Seeger 2006; see also Sheehy 1992).

I found that my grandfather Charles made some of the most incisive remarks about applied musicology. In a 1939 presentation, whose publication was delayed due to World War II, he wrote

Surely the proper guide for large-scale [governmental] music undertakings must be musicology. The question now must be asked, is musicology ready to undertake the task that awaits it [...] The answer must be negative. We have been too busy recovering our past to discover our present (C. Seeger 1944 [1939]: 14-15).

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, one can trace a line of applied folklore and ethnomusicology up to the present. While its practitioners often did not train students or found departments that would immortalize them, a lot of people did what I would call applied ethnomusicology. The situation today is that we have more university trained scholars interested in working outside academia, and applying their knowledge through practice. I think this is good. I believe that theories can be tested in practice, and think that scholars and practitioners should be communicating constantly and revising both the theories of ethnomusicology and the practices of applied ethnomusicology. This will require some changes in the way departments and programs are structured, and in the careers of applied ethnomusicologists, but I think such changes would be very helpful. I also think it is very important for applied ethnomusicologists to publish their thoughts and the results of their projects so their contributions become part of the published conversations in our discipline. This is happening now, I am happy to say. Some very interesting applied ethnomusicology is being undertaken in Brazil and other parts of Latin America, and some very thoughtful publications are resulting from it. It is not enough to do a project –it is important to tell others what you were trying to do, what worked, what didn’t work, what you might do differently another time. That is the only way we will make headway in applied ethnomusicology.

**MM.** One could argue that teaching is also a form of applied ethnomusicology since there is at least the chance that something “trickles down” –in other words, that students take something home which is useful outside the self-reproducing academic system. What

are the things we as ethnomusicologists, or musical anthropologists, should be teaching our students for their lives outside academia?

**AS.** Most professors today are not in a good position to teach about applied ethnomusicology outside the university because they have spent their entire careers inside a university. There are exceptions of course, especially in Latin America, but students will need to find resources beyond those offered by most of their professors: internships, mentors, encounters at conferences, and self-directed reading. University programs can add the contributions (and shortcomings) of applied ethnomusicologists to their histories of the field; they can fund travel to meetings; and they can fund visiting positions so that applied ethnomusicologists can take a week or a month off to rest, reflect, and interact with students and colleagues. I had a wonderful “University Professorship” at Cornell University that paid me to spend a week or two each year for six years at the University. I was given full use of the libraries and an opportunity to talk with students and give a couple of lectures. And I was given a wonderful isolated apartment where I could listen to music, play the banjo, and write –a nice change from memos and meetings at the Smithsonian.

**MM.** In 2012 you retired from UCLA. What are your plans for the future?

**AS.** I retired from UCLA largely because my wife, Judy Seeger, has been teaching at a college in Annapolis, Maryland, for over twenty years and we were tired of my transcontinental commute to Los Angeles. We decided it was time for me to move back home permanently. I am still advising a few graduate students at UCLA, most of whom are in the writing phase of their dissertations, and regularly return to UCLA for their dissertation defenses. I am not, however, planning to teach at UCLA. Instead, I am currently a Research Associate at the Center for Folklife programs and Cultural Heritage at the Smithsonian Institution. In spring semester 2013 I have been teaching a graduate seminar at the University of Pennsylvania on music ownership and am trying to finish a book on the subject. I have been giving a lot of lectures, attending conferences, working on some publications, playing the banjo, and giving some thought as to what I would like to do next. It might be interesting to do something I have never tried before, but at my age one never knows how long one has to discover what that might be and do it. When my grandfather, Charles Seeger, died at the age of 92 he left an unfinished article that he was writing for the Library of Congress in his typewriter, and Bruno Nettl continues to contribute actively to the field. I aspire to do something like that, health permitting. There are moments, however, when I think I might prefer to sit in my small cabin in the mountains of Vermont with a large pile of firewood and a good wood stove and play the banjo, think, and write what I please. We’ll see which one wins out.

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## Biography / Biografía / Biografia

Maurice Mengel is a doctoral candidate at Universität zu Köln. From 2004-2010 he worked in the Ethnomusicological Department of the Ethnological Museum in Berlin, also known as the Berlin Phonogram Archive. In this capacity, he worked on several digital library projects. He is currently finishing his dissertation with Lars C. Koch on a history of ideas about the Institut de Etnografie și Folclor 'Constantin Brăiloiu' in Bucharest. Apart from the history of ethnomusicology (inside and outside Romania), he is interested in the methodology of ethnomusicology, semiotics, and music and politics.

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