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George Herzog: A Contemporary Look at His Work and Ideas

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Looking back on the work and ideas of scholars of earlier times is a delicate task. Each generation of scholars works earnestly within an historical context, drawing on ideas that they have determined help them best understand the complex world of human beings. While we may attempt to judge the past fairly by taking this historical context into account, we can benefit most from the work of our academic ancestors by placing their sense of their own work clearly in contrast to our sense of the field today.

With these thoughts in mind I embark on an analysis of the ideas of George Herzog. I began looking into Herzog's correspondence between the years of 1927 and 1936 in the Indiana University

Archives of Traditional Music, hoping to find letters that Herzog might have sent from the field during his field research trip to Liberia in 1930. My goal was to explore Herzog's relationship with a Liberian named Charles George Blooah, who had served as the informant for research undertaken by Herzog and several of his colleagues in the late twenties and thirties. Unfortunately, I found few letters in the Herzog collection directly involving Blooah. What I did find were letters sent back and forth between Herzog and many of his contemporaries in the fields of anthropology and the study of primitive music. These letters reveal much about the ways Herzog was thinking about his work. With this information in view, I then explored the public presentation of Herzog's ideas as evidenced in newspaper articles and publications from around this same period.

I have woven these various threads, or voices, together, juxtaposing ideas and issues from numerous sources and from various times (1927-1952) to construct an analysis of Herzog's ideas about his own work from this one period of his career, guided by my own biases as a late-twentieth-century ethnomusicologist. Of interest are issues such as Herzog's sense of the definition of the field, the ideas of primitive music as a study object, relationships between informant and researcher, authority, and representation. The result is a characterization of Herzog's ideas that is multi-dimensional; some of his ideas seem outdated, as we may expect, while at other times, his work predicts the shape of ethnomusicology to come in sometimes surprising ways. Comparing

his ideas with my own sense of the field today has helped me to gain a better sense of where we have been and where we are going as a discipline.

A "SPECIALIST IN MUSIC"

Herzog's studies of folk and primitive music began in Budapest, where he came into contact with the folk song research methods of Bartok and Kodaly. Moving on to Berlin in the early 1920s, Herzog studied under comparative musicologist Eric von Hornbostel. Hornbostel's methods, like those of Herzog's first teachers in Budapest, involved detailed transcriptional techniques and sound analysis. These methods, along with the wide, sweeping vision which undergirded Hornbostel's comparative approach, would continue to influence Herzog throughout his career. Herzog then came to the United States to study with Franz Boas at Columbia University, bringing a part of the Berlin Archives with him. At Columbia, Herzog was trained in Boasian theories and methods, which included the concept of diffusion and the method of extensive fieldwork.

In much of his work, Herzog drew upon theoretical and methodological elements of both of his mentors, combining Hornbostel's decontextualized sound analysis and comparative perspective with Boas' emphasis on fieldwork and diffusion. From an historical perspective, Herzog can be viewed as a link between two significant historical eras and schools of thought in ethnomusicological scholarship.

Just as Herzog combined extant methods and ideas in his training and later research, he also seemed to want to identify himself as a cross-disciplinary scholar. Yet, he believed that the study of primitive music must become a unified field. Herzog published *Research in Primitive and Folk Music of the United States* in 1936 partially as an attempt to define what he considered a field in need of unity both in terms of theory and method:

Considering the amount of undirected effort and the lack of cooperation between the various interests involved--anthropological, historical, musical, etc.,--it has seemed that a general study of the field, such as is here

attempted, might facilitate future efforts (Herzog 1936a:ii).

Ethnomusicologists have seemingly always concerned themselves with defining and aligning the field in relation to other disciplines in the academy. Herzog often wrote of the importance of interdisciplinary cooperation and, at various points in his career, aligned the study of primitive music with different related disciplines. An example:

As for the proper position of this orphan discipline, it is just as important for the study of primitive music to retain its close connection with the field of Anthropology, as to stimulate the interest of the historical musicologist (1990 [1942]: 208).

The Forward of *Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States* shows Herzog clearly attempting to orient the discipline, as he asserts that the study of primitive and folk music concerns students of culture, anthropologists, comparative musicologists, psychologists, and musicians, as well as the lay public (1936a:i). Still later in his career, while at Indiana, Herzog stated in a newspaper article that research in primitive and folk music connects anthropology, folklore, and musicology (Hafner 1949:1), which reflects to some extent the way the idea of ethnomusicology has been constructed at Indiana University. Evidently, Herzog's notion of his field's relationship to the other fields in the academy evolved and was transformed over time.

Herzog's work naturally reflects the fact that he lived in very different times from our own. Explicitly comparative work was the rule, not the exception, as it is today, and evolutionary ideas were still very much in vogue. As demonstrated in a job offer mailed to Herzog from the University of Illinois in 1929, courses in "general cultural evolution" (Hiller 1929:1) were standard. The musical and anthropological worlds were understood in broad terms on broad scales: trends across time (evolution) and across space (diffusion).

Herzog wrote regularly on the subject of "Indian" (Native American) music, and his

research tended to locate commonalities between the tribes that enabled him to write in terms of broad generalities. Along with other students of Boas (such as Clark Wissler and Alfred Kroeber), and some of his ethnomusicological contemporaries (such as Helen Roberts), Herzog sought to establish native North American culture areas based on intensive, localized fieldwork. This was, as Anthony Seeger describes, a systematic attempt to "permit generalizations over a larger area, geographic or cultural, than the individually described 'tribe' or community" (1922b:98). However, in contrast to much earlier comparative work which focused on comparing musical *systems* of whole peoples, Herzog and his colleagues traced the diffusion of specific *styles* across geographical space. Stephen Blum writes:

Herzog followed Boas in rejecting the assumption that a "tribal style" must be "an integrated accumulation of songs endowed with the same features." To Herzog, the most evident distinctions were those, not of "tribal styles" but of "different categories of songs in use at the same locality" (Herzog 1934c: 412-13 in Blum 1991:22).

This approach bears more resemblance to the work of late 20th-century ethnomusicologists than does, for example, the comparative musicology of Hornbostel. In fact, Herzog's publications at times demonstrate a move in the direction of the localized orientation of much ethnomusicological work of our times. Just three years after the aforementioned letter to Boulton, Herzog wrote that "Every so-called primitive group has distinctive music" (1936a:5). That same year, Herzog published an enormously detailed, contextually-grounded study of Jabo proverbs (1936b). And as early as 1934, he wrote "we shall probably find at least a hundred distinct musical styles on the [African] continent" (1934c:13). On this point, we can see Herzog moving away from his first mentor Hornbostel, who in 1928 wrote that the work of African music scholars would involve the "natural process of 'differentiating a unity'" (Hornbostel 1928:39 in Blum 1991:29).

Another issue of great concern to Herzog

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and to many during this period was that distinctive, primitive music were dying out. This notion fueled Herzog's concern with archives and preservation, evident in a 1949 newspaper article about the establishment of what is today the Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music: "...there is the desire to preserve the music, much of which cannot be duplicated any longer" (Hafner 1949:1). In *Research in Primitive and Folk Music in the United States*, Herzog stated that interest in preservation was "perhaps stronger in the United States of America than anywhere else" because "our folk music proper is on the point of dying out, just as we are about to realize its significance" (1936a:i). In fact, one of Herzog's prime motivations for writing this book when he did was that he saw the material disappearing rapidly (1936a:ii). He was particularly concerned that "[s]amples from the music of many Native American tribes have not been taken as yet, and ought to be, before it is too late." The urgency of this situation led Herzog to suggest his never-realized plan of having a limited number of turntables constantly revolving at various fieldsites in North America. Herzog was by no means alone in his concern for and interest in disappearing primitive culture. Herzog's correspondence with *Harper's Magazine* in 1928

suggests that "primitive music" was "a present day fad" (letter from *Harper's*: 1928). Herzog acknowledged in a return letter to *Harper's* that "[g]eneral interest is growing," although he was concerned that a 1928 *Harper's* article had misrepresented his field of study. Herzog the scientist came though in his comment that the views expressed in this article "have been found by recent controlled study to be inadequate" (Herzog 1928:1). Again, his notion of the study of primitive music included the idea that only trained music specialists, utilizing scientific methods such as "controlled study," should be engaged in the serious and urgent task of collecting and analyzing this rapidly disappearing material.

PRIMITIVE MUSIC AS STUDY OBJECT

The sources I explored also shed light on the ways scholars defined the notion of "primitive music" during the first half of this century. This notion had historical roots in the cultural evolutionary thought of late 19th-century scholars. Enlightenment and post-enlightenment academics believed that peoples of the non-industrialized world represented earlier stages in social and cultural evolution. From the vantage point of the pinnacle of human cultural evolution--the industrialized West--these scholars compared primitive music to their own art music traditions. Primitive and folk musics were often described as more instrumentally linked to specific functions, more purely emotional, and resulting from simpler thought processes, than the music of the industrialized West. As Nettl observes,

At one time, there was a tendency to recognize only two classes, Western art music in the one and everything else in the other. Soon, recognition of the fact that Asian cultures had a stratification of music not unlike that of Europe led to a tripartite model, primitive, art, and folk music. Those cultures with an art music, that is, a kind of music performed by professionals who were highly trained and had the technical and speculative conceptualizations

of music we call music theory, were also said to have, in other strata of society or in a different tradition, a folk music. The cultures with no such art music were thought to be "primitive" and thus to have "primitive" music (Nettl 1983:305).

Additionally, many scholars ascribed aspects of music sound itself to the primitive realm. Nettl writes that Wilhelm Wundt, for example, asserted that "primitive peoples have monophonic singing and use intervals rather like those of nineteenth-century Western music" (Nettl 1983:36).

In the writings of Herzog, we see some characteristics of music sound identified as "common to most if not all primitive music":

the strongly descending trend of melody, the avoidance of metrical regularity in rhythm for which our classical music has a predilection, the comparative flexibility of intonation which is connected with the dearth of musical instruments with fixed tones, the absence of music writing, of analytic theory and an awareness of units of musical construction (tones, intervals, phrases and the like), and the fact that melody is not used for emphasizing or illustrating the dramatic, emotional, or pictorial content of the song text... (1990 [1942]:205).

These were the musical tendencies of those culture groups whom Herzog later identified, in a request for a sabbatical, as "backward peoples" (Herzog 1956:2). It is important to note that this list of characteristics obviously was constructed from the perspective of, or more clearly, in contrast to, the most common properties of Western art music. These characteristics then served to justify dividing up the world into, basically, two halves--the civilized (where, again, the "folk" also resided) and the primitive.

Despite the vast differences separating peoples of primitive distinction, they were identified as a singular entity. It made perfect sense, then, for Herzog to discuss, in one short article ("Speech-Melody and Primitive Music"), the

relationships between speech and melody among the Jabo of West Africa, the Chewa of Southeastern Africa, and the Navajo (Herzog 1934). Similarly, Herzog thought that Boulton was overstepping the bounds of an empirically sound category of thought by suggesting that there may be as many general styles of music as culture areas in the U.S. (Herzog 1933:1). Herzog preferred to think and write in more general terms; for instance, he suggested that there was far more "material" in the U.S. than in Europe for "studies in primitive music," due to the large population of indigenous primitive Americans (1936a:ii). Writing to Jaap Kunst in 1929, Herzog, discussing "the study of Primitive and Oriental Music," wrote that "the nature of our study seems to be such that it does not permit too much specialization" (Herzog 1929a:1).

Titles of academic courses and lectures also reflected an emphasis on primitive music as a singular category. Writing to anthropologist Manuel Andrade in 1932, Herzog discussed "giving a course on Primitive Music" (Herzog 1932:1), while in a letter to Gustave Reese of the American Musicological Society, Herzog expressed his intention to give a paper entitled "Primitive Music" at the 1935 AMS meeting (Herzog 1935:1). Likewise, Herzog's 1929 letter to Alfred Frankenstein confirms the idea of primitive music as a scientific field of study, and of his continued deference to his first mentor: "The chief authority on the subject of primitive music is the German scientist von Hornbostel" (1929b:1).

Throughout the earlier years of Herzog's work in the U.S., the human category of "primitive" seemed to be used unquestioningly by Herzog and his colleagues. However, in materials from later in his career, I found shreds of evidence which may suggest that Herzog was gradually becoming aware of the limitations of this broad category. In 1956, Herzog wrote to the Dean of Indiana University College of Arts and Sciences requesting a leave for a sabbatical in order "to write a general book in the field of Comparative Musicology, or as it now tends to be called in this country, 'Ethno-Musicology.'" In a paragraph justifying his credentials for writing such a book, Herzog wrote:

...I should be ready to take on the task. Actually, I had a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1935-36, for the purpose of writing a book specifically on Primitive Music with its social or cultural background. I did not succeed in completing the book, perhaps because I was too much preoccupied with the vastness and the variety of the material, of its connections with other cultural phenomena (Herzog 1956:1).

Clearly Herzog still believed in the idea of primitive music to the extent that he was again planning to base a book on the subject. Yet, we see above his admission that, perhaps, the subject of primitive music was too large and unmanageable for a single monograph. Almost despite himself and his intentions, this comment reveals a reflexive sense of his struggle with the ambiguous concept of primitive.

However, there was no ambiguity in the way that the term was employed in the popular press during the same latter part of Herzog's career. Much like our term 'world music' today, 'primitive music' was a term in popular usage, and was, as the *Harper's* letter above suggests, perhaps even trendy during the thirties and forties. Looking at news clippings from Herzog's period here at Indiana University sheds light on the role that the popular press played in disseminating Herzog's notion of primitive music to the general public. The *Indiana Daily Student* commented on the arrival of Herzog's recording collection (the beginnings of the Archives of Traditional Music) with the headline, "I.U. Receives Music of Primitive People" (Anonymous 1-7-49). This article fails to specify further what peoples were represented by the collection, suggesting that during this era, the notion of uncivilized peoples as a singular whole was in the popular consciousness, and that the term 'primitive people' was in common usage. That same year a review of a Herzog lecture about African music was published. Under the subheadings "African Music Flexible" and "Simple Structure Too," the article paraphrased Herzog extensively:

Prof. Herzog pointed out a feature of

African music as being exceedingly plastic in form. As an example of the flexibility of the music, he played two responsorial songs from French Equatorial Africa. These songs had a somewhat primitive charm. . . . Another feature of African music, Prof. Herzog told the members of the club, is the comparative simplicity of structure, with a certain touch of sophistication in rhythm (Anonymous, 5-3-49).

It would certainly be unfair to judge Herzog's comments above out of context in the truncated form of a brief newspaper article. Yet, it is valuable to consider this example of how Herzog's ideas about African music were being communicated to the general public: Africans are portrayed as being simpler and more flexible musically, and, if one reads more closely, charmingly primitive and slightly sophisticated rhythmically. In these ways, the notion of 'Africans' as a whole, communicated through the voice of an "expert" (Herzog in this case), and mediated through the voice of a journalist, constructed a public image of Africa as primitive,

an image that to a great extent remains with us today.

In no way do I intend to denigrate Herzog by discussing his construction of 'primitive music.' Rather, I find it revealing to unpack this one scholar's notion of what was a commonly-accepted term based on a commonly-accepted notion of a category of people during the first part of this century. Scholars of each era devise ways of categorically dividing up the world as we grope toward understanding. And, each of these categories brings along with it inherent biases, the popular term of today--'World music'--being no exception. The voices of scholars and of the press share in the construction of our ideas about the study of music at any given point in history. Analyzing these voices helps shed light on where the field of ethnomusicology has been, which certainly helps us better understand where we are today.

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