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Learning the Scholar's Craft: Crossing into a Discipline

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I came to diplomatic history when the methods and knowledge base of my home discipline, musicology, were not quite sufficient to answer the questions I needed to ask. I am still a musicologist. But my engagement with diplomatic history, and with history more broadly, has been formative for my work. I believe, too, that musicology has insights to offer diplomatic history as well.

After a wide-ranging undergraduate education in the arts and sciences at the University of Pennsylvania, including a memorable course in women's literary history with Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, I spent a year as a *Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst* (DAAD) Scholar at the University of Hamburg. Reading widely in the German literature in musicology, I encountered value judgments about music that were framed as truths, and I had the time and leisure to wonder about them. Particularly strange, but seemingly everywhere, were accounts that pointed to listener-friendly music as unworthy of intellectual attention and even morally hazardous. Béla Bartók, a composer whose music I loved, was praised for his modernism, but had supposedly "made concessions" when he wrote music that pleased the listening public.¹ Eventually I would find that these criticisms made little sense as critiques of the musical works themselves; one needed knowledge of a broader political context to understand them. For the time being, I held them as unanswered questions.

Throughout that year, 1991-1992, I also spent a lot of time traveling by train through what had recently been East Germany, talking with the people I met in youth hostels and listening to all sorts of music there. I had picked up German in college because the Berlin Wall fell, and I was curious to know more. My conversations with other young people were fascinating and sobering. They talked about the end of their world: they were sure that the capitalists were coming to pry up and sell the cobblestones from their roads, and they felt certain that the state subsidies that supported a robust and distinctive program of music education and performance were about to disappear. In retrospect, I see that my year abroad—with its vivid conversations and strange academic experiences—set me up well for the career that followed.

So, I arrived in grad school preoccupied with questions about how people and institutions value music—but questions that were not explicable on musical terms alone. It was a good time to join the disciplinary conversation. Musicology did not undergo precisely the same "cultural turn" as history did, for histories and analysis of artworks and performances had been the bread and butter of the field. We did see a parallel opening of the field to approaches from feminist studies, critical theory, and the study of non-European musics and literatures, which seemed to demand approaches that included social history. And we did have parallel debates about our disciplinary purpose. The struggle over whether music should best be understood through close inspection of its artistic effects, or through broader humanistic analysis, was comparable in intensity to the struggle over the "cultural turn" in history. Amid arguments over which approach was better, some aimed to do both tasks, creating a scholarship that both accounted for the sound and style of music and understood the music within

¹ Hermann Scherchen, "Die gegenwärtige Situation der modernen Musik," *Melos* 16:10 (October 1949): 258-259.

social histories and political contexts. (Scholarship indebted to social-history approaches was dubbed the “New Musicology” by its detractors—but its characteristic methods were the traditional tools of musicology and history, including close reading and archival research. This was not new.)²

At the University of California, Berkeley, two faculty members in particular helped set my course; so did a fantastic cohort of graduate students within and outside musicology. My doctoral advisor, Richard Taruskin, led several influential courses, including a seminar on “Music and Nationalism.” The dangers of nationalism had long been recognized in the discipline of history, but many writers about music were still framing nationalism as a positive creative resource for artists. Taruskin trenchantly contrasted “yay” nationalism with “boo” nationalism to highlight the incoherence of such claims.³ Our seminar read broadly in political and social history as well as in music and worked toward ways of thinking about music and nationalism, each of us wrestling with a different body of music from a different place.

Another mentor, Wye J. Allanbrook, came at the problem of music’s relation to context from a complementary angle. A gifted analyst of music, she made plain the ways in which even instrumental music—with no words at all—conveyed social meanings.⁴ Allanbrook’s own field of study was the eighteenth-century Viennese classics, works by Mozart and Haydn and their contemporaries: but her method of interpreting music was formative for a generation who wanted to understand a broad range of musics. Allanbrook argued against analytical methods that pointed to “deep” formal structures—instead, she noticed that the play of referential signifiers on the surface of the music created both meaning and enjoyment. Many of the dissertations, books, and articles that came out of the generation mentored by Allanbrook and Taruskin reflected these preoccupations, trying to account for music’s social and political effects without neglecting its artistic effects.⁵

This grounding enabled me to return to those value judgments that had puzzled me. My first book, *Music Divided: Bartók’s Legacy in Cold War Europe*, grew out of a dissertation that aimed to understand how the value judgments made about music in the late 1940s and early 1950s were shaped by Cold War political pressures on both sides of the Iron Curtain. My discoveries in Hungarian archives during the golden years when they were easiest (but not easy) to access were exciting, and these experiences solidified my commitment to primary-source research. Comparative work in U.S. and German archives then allowed me to show how artists and critics in each place reacted to others elsewhere, creating a sustained transnational argument about how music should sound that was shaped by pressure from nation-states as well as by musicians’ professional organizations. This work demonstrated that critics, composers, and listeners attributed political meanings to specific

² For a recent account of music’s social roles that makes reference to the debates of the 1990s, see Eric Drott, “Music in the Work of Social Reproduction,” *Cultural Politics* 15:2 (July 2019): 162-183.

³ Richard Taruskin, “Introduction,” *repercussions* 5:1-2 (1996): 5-20; and Taruskin, “Nationalism,” in *Oxford Music Online* (2001).

⁴ Allanbrook’s lectures were edited and published after her death by Richard Taruskin and Mary Ann Smart as *The Secular Commedia: Comic Mimesis in Late Eighteenth-Century Music* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2014).

⁵ Among many others, see Gregory Dubinsky, “Krenek’s Conversions: Austrian Nationalism, Political Catholicism, and Twelve-Tone Composition,” *repercussions* 5:1-2 (1996): 242-315; Nalini Ghuman, *Resonances of the Raj: India in the English Musical Imagination, 1897-1947* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); Beth E. Levy, *Frontier Figures: American Music and the Mythology of the American West* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012); Nathaniel G. Lew, *Tonic to the Nation: Making English Music in the Festival of Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2016); Klára Móczár, *Jewish Identities: Nationalism, Racism, and Utopianism in Twentieth-Century Music* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Peter J. Schmelz, *Such Freedom, If Only Musical: Unofficial Soviet Music During the Thaw* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); David E. Schneider, *Bartók, Hungary, and the Renewal of Tradition: Case Studies in the Intersection of Modernity and Nationality* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Leslie A. Sprout, *The Musical Legacy of Wartime France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); Steve Swayne, *Orpheus in Manhattan: William Schuman and the Shaping of America’s Musical Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); and my own *Music Divided: Bartók’s Legacy in Cold War Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

musical styles, and that these meanings remained linked to the styles even when the initial political impulse fell away. I developed the dissertation in an interdisciplinary humanities space, the Doreen B. Townsend Center for the Humanities at Berkeley, and I wrote the book while I was a postdoc at Princeton's Society of Fellows in the Liberal Arts. Explaining musicological work to humanists outside musicology and remaining in conversation with them was a formative experience and remains a highly valued part of my work today.

During research for the first book in the National Archives in College Park, I came across a rich trove of State Department documents that would eventually form the basis for my second book, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (2015), and its companion database.⁶ Understanding music diplomacy requires taking seriously all the political and social factors around that performance, like an embassy's desire to make contact with a particular group of people; a local concert organizer's desire to attract a money-making act; the covert and overt aims of the State Department, the CIA, and other agencies; and more. But it also requires attention to the specifics of music as an art form: the choice of what styles of music to send and the connotations of those styles remained a key element. Participation in music is a shared experience, often memorable and intense, that builds particular kinds of relationships: these relationships might feel reciprocal or unequal, and they might bind people together or drive them apart depending on the nuances of interaction during rehearsal or performance.

The widespread belief that music stood apart from politics only enhanced music's political utility; even so, music's work is not fully reducible to politics. My conclusions differed from those of Penny Von Eschen and Frances Stonor Saunders, who had come before me, in part because I was working from a different disciplinary perspective. As a musicologist, I did not see music as a surprising "cover" for political agents' actions, as there had always been multiple layers of activity and meaning around a given performance, many of them political.⁷ It seemed worthwhile to understand the broad effects of using music in diplomacy: not only political effects at the scale of nation-states' interventions and propaganda, but also outcomes of music diplomacy that shaped social, political, or artistic practices at individual, local and regional scales. Indeed, relying on disciplinary knowledge about the particular kinds of human connection that music can build, Mark Katz, a musicologist at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, led the State Department's recent hip-hop diplomacy initiative.⁸

Over the past 20 years, transdisciplinary work exploring music and politics has become a larger part of music studies. The Cold War and Music Study Group of the American Musicological Society (AMS), begun in the early 2000s with perhaps a dozen members, has grown to 250 or so; and it has expanded its focus from an initial preoccupation with Europe and North America to global studies in Cold War history. The AMS also now has a robust Global Music History Study Group, as does the International Musicological Society (IMS): their recent meetings have described music's role in colonialism and the ways in which the mediation of music through print, radio, television, and film affected not only the artistic practices, but also economic developments and social affiliations.⁹ These conversations are also happening in the German Studies Association; the Society for Ethnomusicology; and sometimes at SHAFR.

⁶ Fosler-Lussier, *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015); the Database of Cultural Presentations, co-authored with Eric Fosler-Lussier, is accessible at <https://musicdiplomacy.org/database.html>.

⁷ Penny Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); Frances Stonor Saunders, *The Cultural Cold War: The CIA and the World of Arts and Letters* (New York: The New Press, 1999). For examples of music diplomacy that stretch back for centuries, see the essays in Rebekah Ahrendt, Damien Mahiet, and Mark Ferraguto, eds., *Music and Diplomacy from the Early Modern Era to the Present* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

⁸ See H-Diplo Roundtable XXII-5 on Katz, *Build: The Power of Hip Hop Diplomacy in a Divided World*, 28 September 2020, <https://hdiplo.org/to/RT22-5>

⁹ See, for example, Olivia Bloechl and Melinda Latour, "Music in the Early Colonial World," in Iain Fenlon and Richard Wistreich, eds., *The Cambridge History of Sixteenth-Century Music* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 128-175; Maria Ryan, "The influence of Melody upon man in the wild state of nature": Enslaved Parishioners, Anglican Violence, and Racialized Listening in a Jamaica Parish," *Journal of the Society for American Music* 15 (2021): 268-286; and Gabriel Solis, "Transpacific Excursions," in Victoria

A persistent thread throughout my working life has been exploration of how political and social forces are lived out by individuals and communities. My most recent book, *Music on the Move*, came out of a course I developed to serve International Studies majors and general-education students. Accessible to non-musicians, the book introduces concepts related to migration and mediation, including diaspora, assimilation, modernization, propaganda, copyright, globalization, and localization.¹⁰ One could, of course, teach all these concepts without reference to music. Students do sign up for the class because they love music, but music is more than just the hook that gets them in the door. Learning to listen to many kinds of music and to understand the particulars of artists' choices and practices gives them a kind of humanistic knowledge that helps them connect empathetically to experiences like migration or intercultural encounter. When students learn about artists who create stylistically mixed musics to express complex immigrant identities or who adopt music from elsewhere to make a political point, they learn to assess human situations they will meet in their own lives, where people engage in meaning-making using many kinds of tools, including the arts. Artistic expression and artists' stories help us grasp the ways in which large-scale events are manifest in individual experiences and in community decisions.¹¹

When Thomas Alan Schwartz argued in 2007 that the cultural turn was a “detour,” he noted that what attracted him to diplomatic history was “explicit engagement with such profound political and moral questions as war and peace, and what it is that the United States should seek to represent, strive for, and accomplish in the world.”¹² As I have shown in *Music on the Move*, those questions about ethics, representation, and achievement turn up all the time in the arts. The study of music as performance and as politics resonates not only with histories of ephemera and everyday life, but also with some kinds of intellectual and literary history, where ideas, sensibilities, or particular ways of being in the world are understood to matter. From where I stand, it is not the case that power and statecraft form the fundamental story, and that music decorates the surface of that story. I might recall here Allanbrook's thinking: the surface is where the action happens, and it is where the meaning is made. Music, too, is the stuff of history.

Danielle Fosler-Lussier is Professor of Music at the Ohio State University. Her interests include global mobility, the politics of music, and women's roles in building institutions, as well as how we teach and learn the history of music. Her most recent book, *Music on the Move*, won the American Musicological Society's Teaching Award. It has embedded media and interactive digital maps, and thanks to a grant from TOME (Toward an Open Monograph Ecosystem) and the Ohio State University Libraries, it is freely available online at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/m613n040s>. Her 2015 book *Music in America's Cold War Diplomacy* is accompanied by an online database of U.S. cultural presentations from the 1950s to the 1980s (<https://musicdiplomacy.org/database.html>). Her take on music and nationalism will appear as a chapter entitled “Politics: Music, Nation-States, and the ‘Small World’ in the Long Twentieth Century” in William Cheng and Danielle Fosler-Lussier, eds., *Cultural History of Western Music in the Modern Era* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming). She currently serves as Vice President of the American Musicological Society.

Lindsay Levine and Philip V. Bohlman, eds., *This Thing Called Music: Essays in Honor of Bruno Nettl* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 354-365.

¹⁰ Fosler-Lussier, *Music on the Move* (University of Michigan Press, 2020), open access at <https://www.fulcrum.org/concern/monographs/m613n040s>.

¹¹ See Ana María Ochoa Gautier, “Sonic Transculturation, Epistemologies of Purification, and the Aural Public Sphere in Latin America,” *Social Identities* 12 (2006), 803-825; and Ryan Thomas Skinner, “Artists, Music Piracy, and the Crisis of Political Subjectivity in Contemporary Mali,” *Anthropological Quarterly* 85:3 (2012): 723-754.

¹² Thomas Alan Schwartz, Book Review: “Explaining the Cultural Turn—Or Detour?” *Diplomatic History* 31:1 (2007): 146.