



ZUZANA JURKOVÁ ET AL.

# PRAGUE SOUNDSCAPES

KAROLINUM PRESS



## Prague Soundscapes

Zuzana Jurková et al.

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# CHAPTER 1 LISTENING TO THE MUSIC OF A CITY





# LISTENING TO THE MUSIC OF A CITY

Zuzana Jurková

*Prague Soundscapes* is about the music in Prague through the ears of ethnomusicologists. As my student Petra once said, “When someone has been through ethnomusicological schooling, he never listens to music the same way as before.” This apparently banal truth (after all, every experience we have changes further ones) is particularly valid in the case of music: we perceive it so intimately, and are so used to approaching through the categories of “like” vs. “don’t like” that we experience a change in approach as an attack on our personal integrity. However, this is exactly how ethnomusicology works: whether or not you like certain music is not the main issue. You have to understand *why* it is the way it is. For an ethnomusicologist, listening means trying to understand.

From our point of view, ethnomusicology is more or less synonymous with musical anthropology. We thus seek the answer to that *WHY* in human society – in its behavior, values, and relationships. However, as is often the case in science, there is no universal theory, or even a universal concept clarifying what exactly music is. From the ethnomusicological perspective, it is not only sound, but also – and in fact primarily – the people who produce and listen to it and the way in which they do so, that is fundamental. It is the world around sound. The musical world.

Imagining this is not always entirely simple. In order to clarify our perspective, we begin this book with theoretical considerations. In the second part of the first chapter, we then describe the process of writing this book. Each of the following six chapters is connected to a single anthropological phenomenon which we are convinced is related to the shape of music. And in fact, these connections are the main theme of our book.

A bonus awaits attentive and empathetic readers: it often happens (and it has also repeatedly happened to us) that when we understand why music sounds exactly the way it does, we like it. It becomes our music.



## FOR THOSE WHO DO NOT WANT TO WASTE TIME ON THEORY

We imagined music in Prague as a set of musical worlds (for which the word *soundscapes* is sometimes used): worlds of people who perform and listen to a certain type of music; worlds whose boundaries are, however, vague. In addition to having unclear boundaries, these worlds are permeated from various sides by global factors both those of a technical and economic character and those of thoughts and images. And so the Prague soundscape is full of streams of individuals, all of which are constantly merging and influencing one another, the sounds they produce, and meanings with which they connect those sounds.

## FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT AFRAID OF THEORY

Our topic originally appeared to be simply arranged along three axes: people (who listen) – music (which they listen to) – and place (where they listen). It looked as though we wanted to describe a three-dimensional reality – certainly not an easy task, but at least an understandable and transparent one. Besides, concepts for this reality exist that may help us, at least a bit.

The key concept, in the English-language literature (and also in several Czech texts), is called *soundscape*. It combines the word *sound* with the morpheme *-scape*, which refers most directly to the word *landscape*. However, it carries connotations not of solidity associated with mountains and meadows that form a landscape, but rather, of a process of creation or formation. For that matter, Kay Kaufman Shelemay, speaking about her idea of *soundscape* (which is similar to ours and about which we will speak a little later), refers to seascape, *which provides a more flexible analogy to music's ability both to stay in place and to move in the world today, to absorb changes in its content and performance styles, and to continue to accrue new layers of meanings.*<sup>1</sup>

The word *soundscape* was first popularized in the 1970s in the work of the Canadian composer and sound ecologist Raymond Murray Schafer and his colleagues. In their concept, a soundscape is comprised of the sound characteristics of a concrete environment, some sort of sound parallel to a landscape, including the sounds of cars, bells, footsteps and birds singing... Schafer and his team considered this sound landscape, the sound environment, both as a research topic (being primarily interested in people's perceptions of it) and also as a special sort of artistic work. In this approach, they were not far from John Cage, who is discussed in the third chapter.

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1 Shelemay 2006: XXXIV.

In 2000, the word *soundscape* was used by the Harvard ethnomusicologist Kay Kaufman Shelemay in the title of her book. While the form of the term itself was inspired by the cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai,<sup>2</sup> in the content Shelemay followed up on the well-known three-part analytical model of the classic ethnomusicologist Alan Merriam (1964). In it, Merriam, a trained anthropologist (and passionate musician) suggested how to research music from the anthropological perspective – as a product of human activity. What we are accustomed to calling “music itself” (and what Merriam calls “sound phenomenon”) is a product of human behavior – the movement of fingers on strings, the vibration of vocal chords – and also of the interaction of the audience when it spontaneously joins the performing group e.g. by clapping in rhythm. The review of an operatic performance that the critic writes for an influential newspaper also belongs here: this “verbal behavior” can cause the soprano, Madam X., whose vibrato was criticized by the reviewer, not to sing the main role next time.

Verbal behavior also belongs in this category, whether in the form of a written review of an operatic performance or oral disagreement with the playing of a local cymbalom band at a wedding. All of this influences the sound of music now or in the future.

The above-mentioned types of human behavior, however, are not accidental; on the contrary, they are deeply rooted in human ideas, values and concepts – be they about music or, more broadly, about the world in general. The ancient Indians, convinced of the spiritual effects of sound, tried with all their might to avoid mistakes during the performance of ritual chanting. Therefore, they created the first known musical notations and established one social stratum especially for the performance of these sacred texts. And thus it is still possible to listen to their ancient (sometimes very complicated) melodies today. Musicians in a punk band, convinced of the rottenness of the majority society, express their revulsion, their rebellion, their negation in various ways: with simple crudeness against the cultivated and complicated classics, with amateurism available to everyone against specialization (including musical), and by wearing rumpled and even torn pants, socks and jackets with unfriendly and prickly-looking decorations against refined, fancy clothing.

As far as people are concerned, Merriam’s model, like the cultural and social anthropology of the time, assumed a relatively simple world of more or less isolated, homogeneous, and, moreover, static groups.<sup>3</sup> It is exactly because of this unrealistic view that Shelemay emphasizes that dynamic similarity to the *seascape* which makes it possible to grasp changes in the sound world and in

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2 His concept of -scapes appears in the book *Modernity at Large*, 1996.

3 Regarding terminology, the English-language literature most often uses the term “community.”



How can we listen to the music of the whole city? Prague from the Petřín Hill lookout tower

the world of people. We use the expression “musical world” as a synonym for soundscape for such an idea of music in the most various contexts.<sup>4</sup>

Both concepts clearly differentiate in their musical ties; while Schafer’s concept binds sounds to a place, Shelemay connects them primarily to people – to those who produce music as well as those who listen to and appreciate it. The latter concept is understandably closer to us as musical anthropologists. We also agree with Merriam’s and/or Shelemay’s understanding of music: following the ethnomusicological tradition (and perhaps somewhat limited by a tradition of historical musicology), we understand music as an intentional human creation. Concretely: we would not unequivocally agree with the classical musicological assertion that music is (only) a sound structure which bears esthetic information. We know that phenomena we would designate as music have (and, as is apparent in the music of Prague, not only in rather exotic cultures) various meanings in different cultures and in many cases it would not occur to the “users” of these phenomena to ask if the music is “lovely.” Nevertheless, we constantly oscillated between Blacking’s thesis that music is “humanly organized sound” (which we understood as “*intentionally* humanly organized sound”), and a newer concept, highly popularized by Christopher Small, that music is actually human activity,<sup>5</sup> which is not too far from Merriam’s understanding.

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4 It is beyond scope of this text to deal with different meanings and variants of the term “musical world” in the texts of other authors; we have just tried to find a meaningful equivalent to “soundscape.” These include Becker’s (1982) *Art Worlds*, or “musical worlds” (or “musical pathways” used in the same sense) by Ruth Finnegan (1989).

5 Small 1998: 2.

Thus, decisive for us is the intentionality which connects sound to people. The idea of Schafer and his followers that the sound of passing trams, random footsteps and slamming doors could be perceived as art or music is alien to us, not only because we are not such limited traditionalists, but also because it is closer to the anthropological point of view of understanding music as an intentional human creation than as a product of place.

But what can we do if the concept of music, its most crucial intention, becomes unintentionality, thus the unintentionality of the resulting sound shape, and, on the contrary, the intentional connection to the random sounds of a place? That was exactly the case of a special type of concert – a “sound-specific performance” (as the organizers called it) – in the Bubeneč sewage disposal plant, which we will discuss later, and other Prague musical events. One dimension of our three-dimensional research reality – the dimension of music – gradually became foggy.

Moreover, inside the unclearly bounded phenomenon called music, there are, as we knew from our own research and that of other ethnomusicologists, very permeable borders of categories called genre or style. And, thus, what is called a mantra in two different places sounds completely different in each. Or the music sounds similar, but it means something different to those who play it and those who listen to it. Jazz could be an example: so full of meaning for the Czech youth at the very beginning of World War II (as Škvorecký writes about it), meaning so far from that of the Afro-American fathers of jazz a half century earlier. This is exactly the accruing of new layers mentioned by Shelemay.

**The fogginess**, related at first to the concept of music and its categories, is also applicable to the second axis of our interest: people. Like Merriam, thinking about the rather simple reality of isolated homogeneous societies, the world was viewed in the same way by many sociologists and cultural anthropologists.<sup>6</sup> When they became interested in groups of people who differed from others (usually in an urban environment), groups that they began to call subcultures, they realized that their common element was often musical style. Sometimes musical style directly generates such groups,<sup>7</sup> sometimes it strikingly indicates them,<sup>8</sup> and sometimes this process is a two-way street. Punk subculture is usually mentioned as an especially famous example. Our experience – be it from the musical style itself (and thus, from the sound of the

6 This homogeneous approach began to change, especially in the 1990s.

7 Turino 2008: 187 mentions the example of the American contra-dance movement, when a community is created around the musical activity itself. In her extensive article about community (2011), Shelemay convinces us that music plays a basic role in forming communities of different types. (pp. 367–370).

8 For example, various features of hip-hop specifically belonged to certain age groups of Afro-American urban ghettos at the time of its origin.



The smallest musical world  
is the individual



music) or from the people we met – revealed a world less “homogenized” and less clearly segmented. The majority of today’s teenagers would most likely say that they belong MORE OR LESS (and this is meant literally: sometimes more and sometimes less, sometimes only fleetingly) to one subculture or another.<sup>9</sup>

Some of today’s philosophers and sociologists agree. While in traditional societies people had, according to Anthony Giddens, a relatively fixed majority of social roles and ways to fulfil them (and thus possibilities for their own self-creation were limited), for our “late modernity” an overwhelming offer of possibilities is significant, and everyone can always chose an answer to the question, “Who am I and how shall I behave?”<sup>10</sup> The picture of homogeneous subcultures crumbles. This approach is taken to the extreme by Mark Slobin,<sup>11</sup> according to whom everyone is a unique musical culture. Most ethnomusicologists would rather, however, identify with Kay Shelemay, who says, *We do not*

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9 And some would, on the contrary, emphasize that they are not connected to one or another style and subculture, which is, however, actually the sign of another distinctive group.

10 Giddens 1991: 70.

11 Slobin 1993: IX.

study a disembodied concept called “culture” or a place called “field,” but rather a stream of individuals.<sup>12</sup> We thus perceive a human world metaphorically as a mass of individuals carried by the same stream. Some are closer to the center of the stream; some are more on the side; some get out and climb on the bank. Sometimes the stream splits or, on the contrary, merges with another one. We can apply the thesis of Zygmunt Bauman about liquid modernity,<sup>13</sup> including that of musical worlds. Or we can use the idea of the universe with galaxies, orbits, and individual planets. The closer we look, the more detailed are the worlds which open to us, until we reach the world of each human individual.

For the understanding of such **individual worlds**, Timothy Rice offers a model which is similarly three-dimensional to the one we thought about at the beginning. Its axes are, however, different: time, place and metaphor.<sup>14</sup> On the axis of time, chronological as well as historical (how a musical composition flows, in which “objective” time its performance is set), is interwoven with the phenomenological, experiential one (how I perceive it – most likely in a different way from the first time, etc.). On the axis of place, Rice leaves an idea of a concrete, “natural,” physical place (*we and our subjects increasingly dwell not in a single place but in many places along a locational dimension of some sort*<sup>15</sup>) and accepts the idea that it is a social construct in which a social event is set into the most varied coordinates. (Where, in my personal history, did that happen?). Here Rice comes close to the socio-geographic method of mental maps which some researchers use to try to understand how people perceive their environment.<sup>16</sup> How would Prague look on the mental map of a techno fan and, on the other hand, of a singer of Gregorian chant?

The third dimension is *metaphor*. Rice uses this term to mean ...*the fundamental nature of music expressed in metaphors in the form “A is B” that is, “music is x.”*<sup>17</sup> This is not a rhetorical figure, but a way of thinking: metaphors as special forms of images emphasize some details while suppressing others and, in doing so, express the structure of our thinking. When we say that good news is “music to my ears” we reveal substantial values which we attribute to music. (The clever reader certainly realized that this axis of Rice’s is almost identical with the deepest layer of Merriam’s model.)

Although Rice discusses music as a personal experience and the musical world of an individual, as an ethnomusicologist he does not ignore the in-

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12 Shelemay 1997: 201.

13 Bauman 2000.

14 Rice 2003.

15 Rice 2003: 160.

16 For example, Shobe and Banis 2010.

17 Rice 2003: 163.

disputably collective nature of music. He suggests closer understanding of individual musical worlds because of our better understanding of the character of musical collectivity – and also human collectivity: how close are the listeners of the same operatic performance in their experiencing of the music and how close are those of a rock concert or participants in a Hare Krishna procession? Equally? Unequally? Why?

We still have not addressed the third axis: **place**. It is possible to think about the local anchoring of music in several principal directions. The most striking and loudest one comes from the idea of massive territorialization,<sup>18</sup> the phenomenon torn off from one concrete physical place as an accompanying feature of modernity. All of us are daily witnesses to this: not only the omnipresence of Coca Cola and Shell gas stations, but also souvenirs from Greece made in Indonesia... Arjun Appadurai adds further consequences of modernity to this, especially the influence of imagination in our lives (and possibilities of realizing this imagination to a large degree)<sup>19</sup>, and tension between the global and the local. The cocktail mixed from these ingredients makes every place specific.

For investigation of this specificity, Appadurai offers five dimensions of “global cultural flows”. They are not meant as different types of influences which form today’s reality. Appadurai speaks about *deeply perspectival constructs*.<sup>20</sup> They are building stones of what he calls “imagined worlds,” thus worlds which are established by historically constituted ideas of people and groups around the whole world.

The five dimensions are (a) *ethnoscapes* (by this Appadurai means...*persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers...*); (b) *technoscapes* (...*the global configuration... of technology and the fact that technology... now moves at high speeds across various kinds of previously impervious boundaries...*); (c) *financescapes* (... *the disposition of global capital that is now a more mysterious, rapid, and difficult landscape to follow than ever before...*)<sup>21</sup> These three dimensions are connected in an unforeseeable way or – regarding many other influences – even separated.

Both of the other -scapes are closely connected to the world of the imagination: (d) *mediascapes* (... *the distribution of electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information (newspapers, magazines, television stations, and film-production studios... and the images of the world created by these media... while... they provide... large and complex repertoires of images, narratives, and ethnoscapes to*

18 Concept elaborated by Appadurai 1996, also discussed by Rice 2003.

19 In doing so, he follows Anderson 1983 and his concept of “imagined communities”, i.e. communities created on the basis of imagination, not physical closeness.

20 Appadurai 1996: 33.

21 Appadurai 1996: 33.

viewers throughout the world, in which the world of commodities and the world of news and politics are profoundly mixed); (e) ideoscapes are related to the ideologies of states and the counter-ideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it... These ideoscapes are composed of elements of the Enlightenment worldview, which consists of a chain of ideas, terms, and images, including freedom, welfare, rights, sovereignty, representation, and the master term **democracy**...<sup>22</sup>

Appadurai's conception suited us for two reasons. The first was a certain convergence of points of view: we also saw technology (in the chapter on electronic dance music), commerce (in the chapter on commodification) and migration (in the chapter on identity) as important contemporary social phenomena which are strikingly expressed in music.

In addition, Appadurai's conception of a deep perspectival construct also suits freer application because it corresponds to the "metaphoric" nature of music, as it is called by Rice<sup>23</sup>. In other words, it is possible to look at music and also at phenomena that influence it from different perspectives. We used it in the introduction of different theoretical views, different schools.

We do not, however, want to give up the idea of local anchoring of music. (Here Appadurai's idea of tension between the local and the global, which characterizes different places, suits us well. For us, it means the possibility of looking for the specific character of Prague musical worlds.) Our initial decision to understand music not only as sound, but also as a social phenomenon, i.e. the sounds and people who produce and accept them, is substantial. In this case, we are primarily interested in how the people of our Prague musical worlds are connected to a concrete place, including the meanings they attribute to it. At the same time, we are convinced of the non-randomness of the location of a musical event: the shape of the space where music sounds is not random – musicians and listeners have chosen it and, moreover, physical boundaries co-form the event; the environment of the event is not random (as is shown in our "Walk along the Royal Road"); and, finally, the broad stage of Prague is certainly not random. This non-randomness, however, is formed by influences of different dimensions (historical, social, economic...) – and also our perspectives. We certainly do not present the Prague musical world in its constantly changing plasticity: we did not, in fact, intend to do so. Hopefully we have grasped some of its moments and perspectives.

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22 Appadurai 1996: 35–36.

23 Rice 2003.



# WRITING ABOUT THE MUSIC OF A CITY, SPECIFICALLY PRAGUE

Zuzana Jurková

For years I have been teaching a musical anthropology seminar at the Faculty of Humanities. In it the students learn how to research music as a social activity rather than as a “sound object.” Because the faculty is located in Prague – and it is necessary to have “material” at hand – the majority of the research takes place in this city. Some like ethnomusicology so much that they continue with a bachelor’s thesis, master’s study in anthropology focusing on ethnomusicology, and sometimes even a doctorate. Thus we have assembled a lot of material about what is going on with music in Prague and also various ways of looking at it. At the same time, a sort of free platform<sup>24</sup> was formed at which we discussed various questions of ethnomusicology for years, where we invited guests<sup>25</sup> and where we organized various events,<sup>26</sup> so necessary for the acquisition of experience of broad horizons – because the ethnomusicologist must see that the music he listens to and understandably (!) considers to be the best is not the only right one. The fact that classmates like a completely different kind (or, even worse, only a slightly different kind) is not necessarily an expression of snobism, ignorance or contemptible unmanliness. He must experience what Timothy Rice formulates in the following minimalist way: Music is X. That music is something different for everybody.

In 2009 or 2010 we decided that our “thesaurus” was sufficient for sharing. We wanted to share both the exciting amount of material and the various musics and surrounding “worlds” and also the exciting variety of views on it. From earlier experience we knew that writing “collectively” has its numerous

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24 Recently formalized as the Institute for Ethnomusicology of the Faculty of Humanities, Charles University.

25 Our long-term lecturer is Adelaida Reyes (USA); Speranta Radulescu (Romania), Victor Stoichita (France) and Irén Kertész-Wilkinson (UK) have repeatedly lectured here. Particularly legendary was a series of lectures by Bruno Nettl (2010). Since I do not keep a systematic database/chronicle of guests, I have likely forgotten someone.

26 Students were directly involved in the organization of several international conferences: Romani Music at the Turn of the Millennium (2003), Music and Minorities (2008), round-table Theory and Method in Urban Ethnomusicology (2011), international doctorate seminar (2011), International Summer School with students of the University of Pittsburg (2012).



At an ethnomusicology seminar

and sharp crags.<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, however, we wanted to preserve the distinctiveness of individual perspectives. Therefore – and also inspired by many ethnomusicological texts which use so-called interspectivity or intersubjectivity<sup>28</sup> – we decided to combine two basic genres in the text of the book.

The first of these are like snapshots. In them, the authors attempt to transmit the experience of a musical event. And because the experience is always very subjective, we allow the personal voices of those who participated in the events to be heard. (Sometimes the personal history of learning the described musical world surfaces which, in our opinion, can help draw the reader in and also enlighten the personal perspective through which the author sees the world. We are aware that sometimes the very different tones of the texts can be confusing but we think that the transfer of the feeling of teamwork, in which the experience of the individuals is not lost, is worth a bit of effort in reading.) The snapshots, however, are not only verbalized emotion or mechanical description: in them, we try to capture those aspects of the event that we consider to be relevant for the perspective from which we present the event. At the same time, we begin with the presumption that the reader is not at home in the described world (in anthropological terminology, he is not an “insider”). Therefore, the description can sometimes seem very naïve, like some sort of

27 As a team, we wrote *Roads of Romani Music* in 2004 and, in 2008, texts and catalogue for the *Musika Etnika* exhibition for the National Museum.

28 A method using as many perspectives as possible. It is also proclaimed in the textbook which we use for our ethnomusicological seminar: Stone Sunstein – Chiseri-Strater, 2007.

school writing assignment. However, we have experienced that at least some world is completely unknown to everyone, and thus we needed and valued such “basic” description. A similar genre, however, is used in the majority of ethnographic or anthropological works. It enables us to look at the event through the eyes of an outsider and, at the same time, the author chooses the facts which s/he considers important from the overwhelming number of facts overall. For the best mediation of the event, we also add photographs. However, not all research sites were appropriate for taking pictures and not all the authors are good photographers, which is why the pictures vary in quality and quantity.

The second genre, presented for the most part in boxes distinguished by color, is “theoretical lenses”. These most often communicate theoretical concepts through which we look at a musical event. It is self-evident that what happens can be viewed from various angles. Applied to research, this means the possibility of using different theories. The suitability of using a concrete theory, however, is proven by its explanatory power. We have thus chosen from an arsenal of available ethnomusicological or anthropological theories those which, in our opinion, illuminated these phenomena well. In some cases – e.g. in Lomax’s case, used in connection with opera – we didn’t want to avoid the presentation of a theory which already, in current ethnomusicological discourse, is rather deep beyond the horizon, but in its time it was very important. In the interest of a homogeneous style it was I who wrote all of the theoretical texts. Those which relate to the research of other authors, however, were collaborative efforts. The entire text was also discussed with all of the authors.

Aside from the fact that we structured the text into the two above-mentioned genres, we further stratified them so that the more detailed information, for example about musicians, is set off in small lettering and completely marginal comments appear in the form of footnotes along with references to the literature or other sources. We thus wanted to achieve the possibility of reading the book – perhaps repeatedly – on various levels: first, e.g., as fleeting familiarization with everything one can hear in Prague, then with an interest in understanding the ethnomusicological perspective, later with attention to accessible details. In our opinion, the division of the text also simplifies orientation – where to look for which type of information. Basic instructions concerning this paragraph to the reader are as follows: do not be afraid to skip over the small lettering to theoretical texts for explanations if you are not interested in the details.

## **WRITING ABOUT THE PRAGUE SOUNDSCAPE(S)**

As is apparent from the introductory text, Prague and its soundscapes do not yet appear in clear contours, as a clearly profiled model. So our writing is also

more of an examination of the topic; it is similar to the groping of blind men trying to know and describe an elephant.<sup>29</sup> The topics we use to introduce Prague – the elephant – definitely do not represent systematic categories, because we are unable to provide such profound systematicity.

At the same time, it is not a random (“aleatoric”) choice of topics (although even such a choice would show something substantial). We set a few criteria. As mentioned above, our intention is to show music in Prague through the eyes and ears of an ethnomusicologist. That is why we tried, on the one hand, to capture events which take place here more frequently, and, at the same time, those in which, at least from our perspective, musical language and a musical event are very explicable through the cultural values of the community. The third criterion was a certain diversity regarding the presented styles as well as the discussed topics in order to show Prague as multidimensional as possible. However, it is clear from the following pages that none of the topics are isolated, just as no music – whether we think about its language or an event – is untouched by what is happening around it in contemporary Prague. This is exactly the interlocking that ascertained that we, groping blind men, are touching the same elephant. And with enough patience, the contours will appear more and more clearly.

Besides a certain representativeness, appropriateness (homogeneity of musical style and its cultural context) and diversity, we targeted one more goal. In addition to Prague musical events themselves, we also intend to introduce ethnomusicology – a discipline which aims to understand people through music and music through people. Individual topics provided the occasion to introduce various theoretical concepts which are, in the history of (musical) anthropology, of different degrees of importance, but, in our opinion, relevant for the given soundscape.

We step into the Prague soundscape as anthropology and ethnomusicology used to do, that is to say, by focusing on “those others.” However, this is not because we consider the worlds of minorities and foreigners more interesting or important than the others. But here it is possible to observe several basic phenomena that will also be important for the other chapters. As for the material concerning Romani/Gypsy music, it is clear that the musical “world” arises through some sort of negotiation between musicians and listeners (whom Lévi-Strauss calls the “silent performers”). And here it is also apparent how musical language reflects those “negotiated” cultural values.

In the second part of the chapter, we focus on recent migrants. We concentrate on the fact that their musical production is a manifestation of their attempts to join the new environment. And because belonging is an important

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29 This metaphor is used by Bruno Nettl in one of his books, Nettl, 2012: XIV.



component of personality, we come close to the term “identity,” that is, to the deep question of what music can express about who we are.

The next three chapters are interconnected. The first of them deals with **music in relation to social stratification and the specialization connected to it**. If Prague tries to (re)present<sup>30</sup> itself by means of music (and mainly at the beginning of our research we were surprised at how little takes place in comparison to other metropolises),<sup>31</sup> then it is through art music. The simplest explanation seems to be the emphasis on the presentation of Prague as primarily a historical city. The ideal intersection of this representativeness of art music and the emphasis on nationhood, which is always so present in the Prague space, can be, for example, a performance of the opera *Rusalka* by Antonín Dvořák (the very same Dvořák who – at least in the Czech imagination – conquered the New World, and a recording of his symphony even reached the moon, a fact which the Czech media enjoy repeating) in the National Theater on National Avenue in the very center of the city at the most prestigious address. Here, one can view the musical style of the opera genre through Lomax’s *cantometrics* method: it almost perfectly corresponds to the characteristics of a stratified and specialized society used in this method. Although today *cantometrics* is considered mainly as a sort of historical curiosity,<sup>32</sup> it would be a pity to disregard it, especially in connection to a topic that refers so much to history.

An accompanying feature of social stratification is usually **specialization**. While, until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this specialization in art music was manifested mainly in the sphere of interpretation, starting about 1920, the specialization also extends to the area of reception of art. “Modern” or “contemporary” art music becomes – because of its still unaccepted concepts – the preserve of specialists. The central figure in the introduction of these new concepts was John Cage. A beautiful illustration of the use of Cage’s “new” approach to music, new sounds and emphasis on the specificity of place can be the “site-specific performance” of *The Lucid Dreams of Mr. William Heerlein Lindley* in the former sewage treatment plant in Bubeneč. The fact that there were only a few dozen attendees confirms the “special character” of such an event.

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30 By this formulation I mean partly to point out the titles of events in Prague (Prague Spring, Prague Autumn, Music of the Prague Castle...) and also official events such as anniversary celebrations, where classical music is not exclusive, but it does dominate. Thirdly, there are events designated for not particularly interested tourists, that is, a sort of musical souvenir of Prague. We will discuss these in the chapter on musical commodification.

31 In the past years we have hardly ever come across the use of musical symbols as positive metaphors for non-musical reality, which is very common, for example, in Vienna. Only recently there appeared, e.g., the ad for Czech Airlines: “The Czech Republic, a Symphony of the Senses.”

32 Lomax’s philosophical starting point corresponded to inter-war comparative approaches, which compared cultural phenomena with only little regard to context.

The second topic, the topic of **music and rebellion**, is closely connected to the previous one through Turner's theory of *communitas* as a mode of social existence, complementary to a common stratified society. The theory of *communitas* can very easily be applied to the most famous phenomenon in the history of Czech musical rebellion, the group *The Plastic People of the Universe*. In the texts of the speaker of the group, Ivan "Magor" Jirous, can be found the concept of the **underground** as its own *special world existing apart from established society with a different internal charge, a different esthetic and consequently also a different ethic*.<sup>33</sup> Esthetics understandably corresponds to a peculiar musical language; ethics, among others, with social humiliation and a certain local exclusion which can even be seen in today's punk events at the Modrá Vopice Club or on Parukářka hill.

One everlasting question is related to musical rebellion: How rebellious is music if it maintains features of a rebellious musical style, but fills stadiums with listeners – members of the very system against which the music protests (and here and there even with its representatives)? When (thanks to the functioning system) it fills the bank accounts of its performers? Quietly and from a very official and non-rebellious place – the New Scene of the National Theater – Tom Stoppard answers this question with his play *Rock 'n' Roll* – a play which is, among other things, about the *Plastic People of the Universe*, a play in which the *Plastics* play "live", not only in Prague performances, but also in premieres abroad.

It is this last question which introduces the next chapter, which discusses the **commodification of music**, that is, the process by which music becomes primarily a product intended for earning money. We begin the chapter with Petr Zelenka's entertaining (and mildly frightening) film "Mňága: Happy End." This opens the key topics of the chapter: the influence of money (financial corporations are seen not only in the film but also in reality) both on the inhabitants of that world and on the shape of the music. The functioning of such a world is possible because of the new life philosophy of man (and also the understanding of music) as well as specific mechanisms connected with the dissemination of music. Part of it was described in the 1930s and 1940s by Theodor Adorno and, a half century later, the musicians of the KLF band made fun of them. Our snapshots confirm that these mechanisms are resistant to all ridicule – at least temporarily.

The variable which forms the basis of the sixth chapter is technology, specifically electronically generated sound, which substantially changed the shape

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33 Jirous 2008: 7.

of music in many ways. Out of all of the forms of electronic music, we choose two genres of **electronic dance music (EDM)**, freetekno and psytrance. In them, we show two forms of an attempt to escape from the commercial reality described in the preceding chapter and to establish a non-commercial, non-anonymous, “free” world. A world created in closest symbiosis with technology – a sort of musical realization of Appadurai’s *technoscape*. In connection with this attempt to escape, and also as a bridge to the following chapter, we acquaint the reader with Judith Becker’s book *Deep Listeners*, which is a very complex and unconventional way of dealing with the relationships between music, emotion and trance.

It would be possible to discuss the connection between **music** and **spirituality**, which is the subject of the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter, from many angles. We open this chapter with a *harinam*, the procession of devotees of Hare Krishna through Prague. This event (by way of an unexpected link through techno music in a videoclip about the Prague Krishnas) connects this chapter to the preceding one. In addition, we take note of several phenomena in the *harinam* which are otherwise unusual in the Czech environment: the objectivistic understanding of the effect of music, the public presentation of spirituality, and the like.

Using the musical occasions of the autumn St. Wenceslas Festival, we show the dichotomy of “specialization” vs. generality (laity) which in today’s Christian context to a certain extent overlaps with the concept of “music as art” vs. “music as spiritual practice.” The activity around a gospel workshop opens up another dichotomy connected with the performance of music, that is, (in the words of Thomas Turino) the participants vs. presentation model. The way of performing music reveals the prevalent reasons why music actually sounds the way it does. In addition, here – mainly at a closing concert – a very evident snowballing of meanings or a relabeling of the musical genre. And along with this change in meaning for musicians and the public, the shape also changes. The eternal musical metamorphosis.

Although we did not create a sufficiently systematic theoretical model for the description of Prague musical worlds and the musical world of Prague, a few basic features emerged through the exposition of topics chosen on the basis of various criteria. The first of these is the blurring of various borders (in the concept of music, in style/genre, in the concept of musical sound...). This is a consequence of the merging of individual worlds or influences that cross the worlds, which is an unavoidable situation in a city – a dense and dynamic environment. It also justifies our concept of Prague as, to a certain extent, an integrated whole which we view from various perspectives.

A second significant finding is that new “worlds” arise through the attempt of the inhabitants to separate themselves – whether as a supporter of “new” music, which uses the language of concrete sounds thus far unused; as an ag-

gressively shouting punk rebel protesting against the system; as a dancer at a techno party, escaping from the world of commerce, anonymity and limits to his own autonomous world created in symbiosis with technology; or as a participant in a Krishna procession trying, with the singing of mantras, to extricate himself from this ephemeral world... From this perspective, musical events of the new immigrants are the picture of a dynamic process in which its actors are looking for the shape of their own world. All of this corresponds well to the findings of a number of ethnomusicologists that music strengthens group identity by fostering internal values as well as separating them from their surroundings.

We have already published some of the texts in this book in various versions. Most were in the faculty journal *Lidé města/Urban People*: the introductory theoretical text *Listening to the Voices of a City* (Jurková 2012a), *Myth of Romani Music* (Jurková 2010), *The Makropulos Case as a semiotic experience* (Jurková-Jonssonová 2010) and *Harinam in the Prague streets* (Jurková-Sedlová 2011). Zita Skořepová Honzlová's texts in this book are also closely connected with her article in *Urban People* (Skořepová Honzlová 2012). Passages from the theoretical text about identity are part of my chapter in a book about national identity in Czech music (Jurková 2012b), and part of the texts about the lucid dreams of Mr. William Heerlein Lindley and John Cage were published in the *Journal of Urban Culture Research* (Jurková 2012c).

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From the preceding text, it is clear that environment at the Faculty of Humanities of Charles University and its long-term financial support were of essential importance for the origin of this book.

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Not only the English version of this book, but also many of the original Czech versions of the text as well quite a few of our ethnomusicological activities would not have come into being without the selfless and patient work of Valerie Levy. We are eternally grateful to her for this.

## CHAPTER 2 MUSIC AND IDENTITY





# MUSIC AND IDENTITY

Zuzana Jurková

In addition to music, the subject of this chapter is *identity* – a word which some would rather exclude from discussion because of its equivocality, almost amorphousness, while for others it is a key term in the social sciences. What deserves greater attention than to ascertain (or at least to attempt to ascertain) who we actually are?

Although, we sometimes waver between two positions, this time we will try to defend the second one. Before we go into a more detailed discussion of our understanding of identity, we would like to anticipate two of its basic features which influenced the shape of this chapter. The first is that identity binds a person to “his” group (while “his” has various meanings according to the dimensions of identity). The German historian and religious studies scholar Jan Assmann connects identity with so-called *connective structure*: “It establishes connections and commitments in two dimensions: social and temporal. It binds a person to his neighbor through a symbolic world of meaning which creates a shared space of experience, expectation and behavior whose connecting and obligatory power contributes to the development of understanding and intimacy... and, by that, establishes belonging or identity, which enables the individual to speak of ‘us.’”<sup>1</sup>

The question of the connection of an individual to a group is crucial for ethnomusicologists – otherwise we would be able to speak only of musical preferences or activities of individuals (similarly, historical musicology until recently dealt mainly with the so-called great white men). However, we are convinced that individuals are connected (let us call it connective structure) to the “shared space of experience... and intimacy” with which they identify themselves.

The second basic feature of identity is the fact that concurrently with how it both *connects* – “us who are talking to each other” and also *separates* – “us” from “those others,” those we do not understand. The dividing line is what we perceive as “other.” And in fact, the question of what we perceive as distinctive

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1 Assmann 2001: 20.

(the color of hair? eyes? religion? history?) provides important information about ourselves.<sup>2</sup>

As it will be apparent later, we do not accept Thomas Turino's<sup>3</sup> concept of identity uncritically, but will mention it here. Turino differentiates between the terms *self* and *identity*. *Self* is composed "of an entire quantity of *habits* (tendencies to repeat behavior, thinking or reactions under similar circumstances)." In contrast to *self*, *identity* includes "a partial and changeable choice of habits and characteristics that we use for our own representation (shaped) both for oneself as well as for others and also those aspects which are perceived as characteristic of ourselves or others." And thus for Turino – as for us – the basis of identity is the aspiration to show who we are to those around us and to recognize those who do not belong to us.

The first part of this chapter, "The myth of Romani music in contemporary Prague," is primarily an example of which aspects non-Roma consider representative of Roma – those closest and oldest "others" – and how "Romaniness" moved and moves into the hands of Roma.

In the second part, which arises from Zita's long-term research on the musical activities of foreigners in Prague, we wish to understand what the musical representation of various migrants says about their "negotiation" of their own identity with those around them.

## WHAT IS IDENTITY ACTUALLY ABOUT?

In the past decade many researchers in the social sciences and the humanities agree with Rogers Brubaker that **identity** is a term which is *too ambivalent, too torn between a "hard" and a "soft" meaning, essentialist connotation and constructivist qualifier for it to be conveniently able to serve demands for social analysis*.<sup>4</sup> Let us briefly look at its developmental stages so that we can then try to find a shape which could be useful for the understanding of some Prague musical events.<sup>5</sup>

Credit for the popularity of the question of identity goes to the psychoanalyst Erik H. Erikson, for whom personal identity is the inner and deep "core" of the human personality, a core which evolves, but whose basis is feeling... *enabling the individual to experience his own I as something that defines continuity*

2 The book "Ethnic Groups and Boundaries," edited by Fredrik Barth (1998) is the classic text on this subject.

3 Turino 2008: 101–102.

4 Brubaker 2004: 29.

5 I am grateful to Zita Skořepová Honzlová for many materials on the topic of identity.

and identity and to act accordingly.<sup>6</sup> After Erikson, the term identity switches over to the realm of the social sciences: it asserts itself in the theory of referential groups (Merton), in social constructivism (Berger and Luckmann), among the interactionists (mainly Erving Goffman) and in social anthropology. There – understandably – a strong accent on the collective side of identity is found which necessarily has to do with the dynamics that form identity by means of inter-human relations. Because – according to Jenkins – the basis of humanity is relationships and interactions, meetings with other people are therefore the fundamentals for shaping identities: According to Berger and Luckmann, identity is always the result of *the dialectics of the relation of the individual and society*<sup>7</sup> and in regard to the constant socialization of man, his identity is constantly renewing and changing.

What Erikson and others after him drew attention to is worth recalling: that the “problem of identity” is a problem of the (post-) modern world. Judith Howard,<sup>8</sup> for example, presumes that identity, based earlier rather on ascribed statuses than achieved ones<sup>9</sup>, does not present the individual with possibility of choice and thus of both frustration and lack of clarity which are connected with choice. In other words: the more we ask about identity, the more complex and complicated the answer is.

Similarly, although based on other data, authors from the field of intercultural psychology see a change of identity: real “subcultures” appear only in connection with industrialization, so there is mutual influence and acculturation among them.<sup>10</sup> Their members, exposed to manifestations and values of various subcultures, must take a position or choose from among them: they become active agents. At this moment, **identity as a dynamic process**, which is the result of individual consideration, evaluation and behavior, appears. The above-mentioned Erving Goffman with his famous text *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* often appears in connection with this term.<sup>11</sup> In it, the author

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6 Erikson 2002: 41.

7 Berger, Luckmann 1999: 171.

8 Howard 2000.

9 The American anthropologist R. Linton began to use the term “status” for man’s position in the social system. He differentiates between statuses which are ascribed, more or less unchanged (sex, age...) and achieved (education...).

10 In agreement with Herskowitz (1936) I define it thus: “Acculturation comprehends those phenomena which result when groups of individuals having different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact with subsequent changes in the original culture pattern on either or both groups.”

11 It is as if the Czech translation of the title *We All Play Theater* considered Goffman’s critics right to state that he presents people as cynical and superficial. Let us emphasize that Goffman’s metaphor is sociological, not psychological and Goffman does not understand “play acting” as some sort of pretending something that is not, but as choosing from one’s

presents a dramatic metaphor of society in which the individual plays the role of self-presentation for others, who are his audience, and with whom the image of his role is negotiated. At the same time each is, however, also a member of the audience, who evaluate and thus influence others' performance of their roles. It is self-evident that the "role of an actor" and the "role of the audience" refer not only to the behavior of the individual, but basically determine the behavior of the entire collective.

This concept of identity, with its emphasis on immediate change and also on the agreement of the "players" and "audience" is narrowly connected with questions of "ascribed" and "achieved/appropriated" music, which Speranta Radulescu discusses in her article about Romani music. She claims that *identification, attribution and assumption of the ethnic attribution of musics are only local and temporary...* which, however, does not mean that *they are less worthy of our attention for that reason*.<sup>12</sup> How is the **relationship between music and identity** considered from the ethnomusicological perspective?

Apart from the fact that music is considered an important means of the integration of man with himself on the individual level,<sup>13</sup> it is also – as a social activity *par excellence* – ideal for expressing collective identity.<sup>14</sup> As ethnomusicologists<sup>15</sup> often prove, sometimes it even serves as a foundation for this collective identity; in any case, it is an important "agent."

Furthermore: if we use the vocabulary of the interactionists, including Goffman, identity is relational and situational: it depends on the relationship with whom and when we claim a given element. (If we looked through the semiotic optic of Peirce and Turino – as mentioned in the next chapter – the same would be expressed by an *interpretant* which determines the relationship between the sign and the object. This also closely copies the above-mentioned assertion of Speranta Radulescu.) From the available arsenal of musical styles, ways of interpretation, etc., I choose the ones that I wish to represent myself

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own "repertoire of roles": the role of the mother of a small child, the role of a certain professional position, the role of a customer, etc.

12 Radulescu 2003: 84.

13 Turino 2008: 3 ff. presents several arguments about the integrative role of art. One comes from the anthropologist Bateson (1972) and his ideas of perceptions of the world on various levels, further from the concept of *flow* by the psychologist Csikszentmihaly about the extra-rational experiences during the pursuit of art, mainly music. The third circle of arguments is connected with the philosopher and semiotician G.S. Peirce. Turino sees the basis of personal integration in "semantic snowballing": the same musical activity style evokes various reactions on various occasions and has various meanings to the listener. At the same time, however, previous meanings are not quite lost, and thus during the repeated emergence of the composition, the listener connects various historical levels of personality.

14 *Music and dance are key to identity formation because they are often public presentations of the deepest feelings and qualities that make a group unique.* Turino 2008.

15 E.g., Turino 2008, Shelemay 2001.

and about which I am convinced that the others – the “audience of my identity performance” – accept as my calling card. If that happens, it connects me with those who have the same calling cards and it differentiates me from the others. However the connection will be valid only for here and now (or at least temporarily).

It is not surprising that Erik Erikson (1902–1994) – the illegitimate child of a Jewish mother in pre-war Germany, refugee in Denmark and later in the USA – highlighted the question of identity. The experiences related of many migrants and the literature proclaim repeatedly how closely man is tied to that “shared space of experience and intimacy” and how essentially deracination weighs down on them. With a change of environment – not only territorial, but mainly social – it is necessary to a certain degree to create a new identity for oneself: for a new “audience” and with new ways which are understandable to the environment. A basic element of the newly created identity is also the relationship to its previous home as well as to its current location.<sup>16</sup>

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16 Adelaide Reyes (1999) deals with this problem using the example of Vietnamese refugees in the United States.



# THE MYTH OF ROMANI MUSIC IN CONTEMPORARY PRAGUE

Zuzana Jurková

## I. MYTH

It should be clear that this text is about Romani music that is played in Prague today. First, however, I would like to explain how I understand the word “myth.” Here it has two – almost contradictory – meanings. The first one is its most common/colloquial use: something unreal, opposing reality (whatever we understand by “reality”), some sort of chimera, and thus, in connection with Romani music, what non-Roma naively and erroneously imagine by the term “Romani music.” It would be possible to present many examples. Here is a striking one from a recent ethnomusicological conference: Speranta Radulescu asked two Romani musicians to listen to two pieces of music by two famous non-Romani composers intended as explicit “representations” of Romani music: Ravel’s *Rhapsody Tzigane* and the introductory section of Enescu’s *Impressions*. Neither one perceived them at all as “Gypsy.”<sup>17</sup> And in fact, this text partially deals with non-Romani concepts of Romani music.

At the same time, however, we use the term “myth” the way Bronislaw Malinowski (1884–1942) used it. According to Malinowski, myths are a kind of “charter for today”. “These stories create an integral part of culture..., dominate and rule many cultural features, create the dogmatic (primitive) backbone of civilization.”<sup>18</sup> As we shall see, the more or less dogmatic concept of what Romani music is has co-created and continues to co-create its shape.

## II. THE MYTH OF MUSIC

In 1923, Leoš Janáček (1854–1928) composed his first string quartet, the “*Kreutzer Sonata*.” Although originally (based on sketches of the composition worked on starting in 1909) he wrote a composition for violin and piano, eventually he

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<sup>17</sup> Radulescu 2009.

<sup>18</sup> From the lecture “Myth in Primitive Psychology”, 1925, cited by Bowie 278.

wrote it for a classical quartet. This quartet of strings – two violins, viola and cello – was used by composers for more than one hundred years as a “diarist” ensemble, to which it was possible to entrust the most intimate thoughts. In addition, the next Janáček string quartet, one of his last compositions, was called “Intimate Letters” (originally “Love Letters”) and it was the most emotional declaration of the old composer to his last love, Kamila Stösslová. Indeed, it is not possible to imagine a more appropriate interpreter for a most personal message: the homogenous instrumental combination evokes the impression of uninterrupted intimacy; string instruments capable of reacting to the player’s slightest impulse seem perfectly ideal for the expression of those most subtle emotions. Janáček subscribed to this concept. He used the classical instrumental make-up and also the common four-movement form. However, he handled the individual movements his own way – not only as far as tempo is concerned, but in his entire musical language: his work with musical motifs,<sup>19</sup> harmony and generally work with color,<sup>20</sup> and primarily a maximum of expression. Each tone sounded as if it expressed the most varied shades of joy or sadness, despair or resignation. As Milan Kundera writes precisely (and expressively): *for Janáček only tone that is an expression, that is an emotion, has a right to exist.*<sup>21</sup>

Janáček’s string quartet, the “*Kreutzer Sonata*,” was already the third link in the chain – a chain which very clearly encompasses a change in the concept of music during the last century and a half.

At its beginning, in 1803, Ludwig van Beethoven (1770–1827) the last classical composer with an inclination toward Romanticism, composed the “*Kreutzer Sonata*” for violin and piano. The composition is famous for its technical demands; however, despite the fact that Beethoven’s musical language was no longer symmetrical in the Classicist style, like the music of his predecessors, only rarely today would this sonata be called unusually emotional or even passionate.

The second link in the chain is the eponymous novella by Leo Tolstoy (1829–1910). One of the basic themes here is passion, against which the narrator of the book argues for his life story in which passion, at first pretended, then let out like a genie from a bottle and nourished by music, ruins lives. At the end of the book, the main character is emotionally (understand erotically) aroused by Beethoven’s composition, during which she plays the piano accompaniment

19 Janáček uses some themes of the Beethoven sonata to work with them in his own distinct way, almost as with living beings.

20 In the fourth movement there is, for example, a passage which is markedly reminiscent of the last scene of Katya Kabanova, the solo aria of Katya and the backstage chorus.

21 Kundera: 2004: 26.