Rethinking the Orality-Literacy Paradigm in Musicology

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The literacy-orality problematic, which has been debated from Plato to Postman, has focused on how the visuality of the literary medium affects the aurality of the oral medium. Recent research by John Miles Foley has addressed the particular advantages in using the most modern technology of the Internet to simulate and explore the oldest technology of orality, thereby calling into question our continued reliance on textually based media in orality research when electronic media provide a more effective vehicle for scholarly investigations into oral forms.[1] But how does this discussion relate specifically to the act of music-making? Is there an interface between a musical orality and a musical literacy? Musicologists have treated the question of the musical dimension of orality in such works as Yoshiko Tokumaru and Osamu Yamaguti's *The Oral and the Literate in Music* (1986), Stephen Erdely's research on the musical dimension of Bosnian epics (1995), Bruno Nettl's collection of cross cultural research on the topic of improvisation (1998), Karl Reichl's compilation of music research in a wide-ranging number of oral epic traditions (2000), and Paul Austerlitz's work on the "consciousness" of jazz (2005), but less attention has been given to the link between the visual technology of notation and its effect on the oral-aural processing of music.[2]

Scholars of medieval music have been at the forefront in addressing the connection between oral performance and the emergence of notation. Leo Treitler's work during the latter half of the twentieth century that considered the visual-aural link in medieval music was groundbreaking, culminating in the recent collection of seventeen of his foundational essays on medieval chant (Treitler 2003). Seminal works by Susan Boynton (2003), Kenneth Levy (1998), Peter Jeffery (1992), and other medievalists have also contributed considerably to the discussion of orality and literacy in the music of the Middle Ages. In addition, Anna Maria Busse Berger's recent book, *Medieval Music and the Art of Memory* (2005), highlights the change in performance practice and composition with changes in medieval notation practices (250-51). Busse Berger asks why musicologists have been slow to address the role of memory and notation in music, and then follows with a thorough and thought-provoking analysis of the interaction

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[1] This pioneering approach to the study of orality through Internet technology is explained in Foley 2002, 2004, 2005, and 2008. See further The Pathways Project, which consists of a forthcoming book, *Pathways of the Mind: Oral Tradition and the Internet*, and a website (http://pathwaysproject.org).

[2] While Ter Ellingson's research (1992a, b) brilliantly addresses the topics of notation and transcription, he primarily deals with the issues as they affect ethnomusicological research and not so much the act of music-making.

between literate and oral modes of communication as they functioned in medieval music, questioning previous assumptions about the performance practice and musical theory of the period.

Particularly interesting from the point of view of the emerging role of visual notation in oral-aural performance practice are her conclusions about the ramifications of the rhythmic dimension of notation in the isorhythmic motets. She explains (idem):

> Rhythmic notation led to a new way of composition. It led to what Jack Goody would call "visual perception of musical phenomena" . . . just as writing led to word games and crossword puzzles, notation led to notational games . . . . Thus mensural notation ultimately resulted in what we would consider a modern artwork, a composition where the composer would determine the pitch and rhythm of every part, where he would develop a sense of ownership.

Busse Berger's conclusions about the implications regarding visual notation on a musical performance tradition are significant because she pinpoints a change in performance practice and musical cognition that has continued to affect some of the basic conceptions we currently hold about music notation in Western European Art Music (WEAM) and the concept of "authorship"—ideas that are in many ways unique to the West. Her research highlights a shift in the representational aspect of decoding medieval notation whose earliest "prescriptive" features, using Charles Seeger's concept about music writing (1958), became increasingly more complex as visual documents, adding a visual component to musical performance. If, as Marshall McLuhan claims, a new medium typically does not displace or replace another as much as it complicates its operation (2003:xv), then what has been the significance of visual notation for the oral-aural aspects of music performance?

This paper poses questions regarding the implications of mainstream orality-literacy research on musicological perspectives, and the relevance of musicological research for orality-literacy studies. First, why has musical scholarship been ignored in the mainstream of orality-literacy studies? The two major schools of thought in orality studies offer two different springboards for discussion where musicology might have both contributed to and benefited from interdisciplinary exchanges. Second, what have been the casualties of lost connections with the academic mainstream discussions on orality and literacy? Finally, what are the possible unique contributions of musicological research to the overarching questions of the orality-literacy problematic, particularly in the electronic world? Issues raised in Birkerts' book, *The Gutenberg Elegies: The Fate of Reading in the Electronic Age* (2006), exemplify the kinds of questions musicologists could be discussing with mainstream academia about the challenges we face regarding our multiple literacies—musical as well as literary.

Why Has Music Scholarship Been Ignored in Mainstream Orality-Literacy Studies?

Medieval music scholars have responded to the works of scholars like Albert Lord, Walter Ong, Ruth Finnegan, Mary Carruthers, and Goody; and their journeys into interdisciplinarity have not only encouraged musicologically driven analyses but have given

fresh focus to their fields. But why has the research of historical musicologists been ignored by scholars in orality-literacy studies? Even within an area of research where music scholarship might profitably have contributed to the academic discussion, the perspective of music scholars is often not sought. It appears that most scholars outside the field of music are reluctant to engage in interdisciplinary research that entails musicological analysis of any kind.

Nettl gives a clue to this reluctance by explaining why scholars outside the field of musicology (in this case, anthropology) tend to distance themselves from any kind of research that deals with music sound (2005:221):

> The typical American anthropologist has been much more inclined to deal with visual and verbal art than with music . . . This curious omission of music . . . may illustrate something . . . about the way Western urban society conceives of music. It is an art treated rather like science; only the professional can understand it properly . . . the academic musical establishment has made the lay public feel that without understanding the technicalities of musical construction, without knowledge of notation and theory, one cannot properly comprehend or deal with music.

Nettl's comment reveals two basic assumptions: first, the study of music is only possible by the trained specialist; and second, music may be studied separately from the other humanities. Certainly the evolution of the Western academy reinforces both those notions. Although one may try to justify the alienation of music as a necessity in researching the disciplinary peculiarities of WEAM, there is another possible approach: collaborative research would allow specialists from different disciplinary backgrounds to work cooperatively on topics of mutual interest that require their respective areas of expertise. Collaboration is common in the social and natural sciences, and could be a possibility in humanistic research as well.

The second assumption that music is "excisable" from the rest of humanistic expression problematizes the study of oral performance, since music is often the vehicle for oral performance. In addition, in virtually every other musical culture outside of WEAM, music is not easily separable from other forms of humanistic expression. I would like to explore some of the reasons for the perceived separation of music from the other humanities and music's invisibility in anthropological and humanistic research. The current approach to the study of music emerges from a problematic perspective, rooted in a conceptualization of sound that is based primarily on a model whose notation-oriented, literacy-based foundation has not been sufficiently examined.

The notation-centrism of WEAM parallels the development of literacy in Western Europe and its concomitant text-centrism in some strikingly parallel ways. Although there are many areas of potential collaboration between musicology and other humanistic disciplines, I have chosen the orality-literacy debate as a springboard because it illustrates clearly how musicological research can continue to benefit from as well as contribute to the academic mainstream. In order to avoid a premature leap into the next phase of musical discovery without due consideration of what was left behind,[3] I begin by reviewing the orality-literacy debate that

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[3] I am reminded of Susan McClary's comment about musicology when feminist inquiry was threatened with being considered passé: "It almost seems that musicology managed miraculously to pass from pre- to post-feminism without ever having to change—or even examine—its ways" (1991:5).

has influenced research in a wide variety of fields and the questions that have been and continue to be relevant to the field of musicology.

The Birth of Orality Research

The collaboration of Milman Parry and Albert Lord in their groundbreaking work on oral epic song in Yugoslavia opened up the fertile field of "orality" for scholars in classics, medieval studies, English, cultural and social anthropology, psychology, and education (Lord 1960/2000). Parry and Lord demonstrate that almost every distinctive feature of Homeric poetry is due to the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition. After demonstrating the need to shed some of the preconceptions that have been ingrained in our literate minds, Parry and Lord support their thesis by studying modern Yugoslavian epic singing. Since its publication in 1960, *The Singer of Tales* has engendered vigorous debates in many fields, ultimately raising questions that challenge the foundations of many areas of academic research. The issues raised about the alleged orality of Homer are still being debated today (Thomas 1999:4), and the discussions about orality and literacy have spilled over into literary and cultural studies in particular (Ong 2006:153-77; Finnegan 1977/1992:170-271).

Although the very title *The Singer of Tales* implies music,[4] discussions of music by music specialists have been curiously omitted from the mainstream literature. Instead, issues of orality, memory, and literacy have often been treated without the benefit of a musicological perspective.[5] Some of the issues that have plagued the study of orality would be of interest in musicological research.

The Two Approaches to the Study of Literacy and Orality

Looking at the bibliography of Walter Ong's classic, *Orality and Literacy*, published originally in 1982, one notices a dramatic increase in publications about the orality-literacy problematic since 1962. An excellent review of the implications of Parry and Lord's research and the articles that followed is given by Eric Havelock (1991:11-23). In addition, Rosalind Thomas evaluates the research on orality and literacy, concluding that there are two major trends in the research (Thomas 1999:15-16).[6] The first trend demonstrates the broad psychological and cultural implications of literacy, arguing that writing and literacy are forces for logical and scientific thought, bureaucracy, and the modern state. The second trend features detailed,

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[4] Béla Bartók's masterful musical transcriptions of many examples from the Parry-Lord collection provide an important visual documentation to the sound recordings in the archive, allowing researchers to see as well as hear the complexities of the vocal tradition (1934; Bartók and Lord 1951). Bartók's work also contributed to further research on singing in the South Slavic tradition. See Stephen Erdely 1995, 2000 and Foley 2004 for examples of some of the subsequent scholarship on musicological issues in South Slavic epic singing.

[5] Foley 2004 is a significant exception to the omission of musicological discussions in mainstream orality research.

[6] For additional information about these two models, see Foley 2002:66-69.

culturally specific studies of the manifestations of literacy in a given society, often rejecting the wider claims made by scholars who represent the first trend. Brian Street goes a step further by referring to scholars of the first school as reflecting an "autonomous model" in which literacy is seen as a catalyst for societal change, a kind of technological determinism; and the second school as an "ideological model" in which the habits associated with literacy are determined by the ideology and cultural peculiarities of each society (1995:19-65). Clearly, both Thomas and Street espouse the second model, and, with the exception of the work by authors like Olson (1994) and Ong (2006), many other recent trends seem to support the second, ideological model.

The Ideological Model

One of the exemplary studies of the orality-literacy problematic according to the ideological model is Carruthers' *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (2008). This book explores the roles of memory, orality, and literacy in medieval Europe, demonstrating that the implications of orality and literacy are culturally determined and historically shaped. Carruthers begins her study by comparing the current view of creativity in contemporary Western society with the medieval European view (1):

> When we think of our highest creative power, we think invariably of the imagination. "Great imagination, profound intuition" . . . is our highest accolade for intellectual achievement. . . . Ancient and medieval people reserved their awe for memory. Their greatest geniuses they describe as people of superior memories, they boast unashamedly of their prowess in that faculty, and they regard it as a mark of superior moral character as well as intellect.

She discusses the vital importance of a good memory in medieval Europe by explaining that it is a thoroughly catalogued and indexed library of texts and reading that implied a "concentrated, thoughtful meditation [in order to] memorize, ruminate, and make one's reading one's own" (148). She goes on to explain the complexity of *memoria* in the following passage (153):

> *Memoria* unites written with oral transmission, eye with ear, and helps to account for the highly "mixed" oral-literate nature of medieval culture that many historians of the subject have remarked. Yet is it clear that the later Middle Ages, from the twelfth century onward, was a far more "bookish" culture than the earlier medieval centuries had been. *Memoria* was adapted to that change, without—as a set of practices—losing its central place in medieval ethical life.

Carruthers also stresses the difference in perception regarding the accuracy of the transmission of information. While in our modern society we consider written documentation to be the legal and ideological preference over oral memory, medieval Europe held a different view. M. T. Clanchy echoes this view about accuracy and memory in his study of England in the medieval world, adding the notion that distrust was associated with the writing process (1991:193):

> Writing anything down externalized it and—in that process—changed it and falsified it to some
> extent . . . . Writing was untrustworthy in itself, and furthermore its use implied distrust, if not
> chicanery, on the part of the writer. An honest person held to his word and did not demand written
> proof.

A major point in Clanchy's book is that the acceptance of literacy in England was a complex process in which people had to be persuaded of its value. In addition, the association of literacy with clerical power further complicated the process of developing literacy among the masses. The movement away from biblical literacy toward vernacular literacy in England was the key impetus for its development and acceptance. The shift from memory to written record "might alternatively be described as a shift from sacred script to practical literacy. . . . Practical business was the foundation of this new literacy" (333). This shift also prepared the way for the next technological move toward print culture.

In both Carruthers' and Clanchy's works, we see that the mentalities of the people studied actually changed over the centuries. By carefully studying and documenting the changing relationships between oral and literate processes, both authors underscore the complexity of the transformation. Literacy was not something introduced as a catalyst that immediately affected the literate capabilities of the culture in question. Both authors also challenge views about literacy and memory by demonstrating how differently orality and literacy were conceived of in the medieval period, involving a major shift in the ideologies of these cultures.

My most pressing question regarding this research is the following: why has there not been more discussion of musicological information with regard to orality, literacy, and memory throughout Western music history and in mainstream academic research? Both Carruthers and Clanchy intimate that contemporary text-centrism has negatively affected the ability to understand the greater reliance on orality and memory in the Middle Ages. Might notation-centrism in WEAM also similarly impede our understanding of musical orality throughout music history? One of the reasons for the lack of collaboration among scholars both within and outside of musicology who have areas of mutual interest stems in part from notation-centrism in WEAM, which has become an obstacle for the non-musicologist and an issue of territoriality for the musicologist.

Ignoring Musicological Contributions

Many scholars have done significant work on the question of orality and literacy in the music of the Middle Ages, but I will focus on two who have published books on this topic. One of the first scholars to address the orality-literacy paradigm in music scholarship is Leo Treitler. Although Carruthers' interactions with musicologists have not been infrequent, one wonders why there are so few references to musicological studies in the latest edition of her book. I do not want to place blame solely on Carruthers for musicological omissions; instead, I would like to suggest that the reluctance to address musicological topics may be due to the issues raised by Nettl. Since much of Treitler's research on orality in medieval music was originally published from the mid-1970s through the early 1990s, Carruthers would theoretically have had access to his work. While Treitler's latest book is cited in the 2008 edition of her book, none of his

research was mentioned in the earlier 1990 edition. Trietler's investigation of the complex relationship between orality and musical literacy in medieval music offers insights into cognitive processes that are particularly relevant to Carruthers' discussion about the workings of memory. Most of her book is devoted to models for memory, and yet she rarely mentions music either as an *aide-mémoire* or as part of the process of memory and visuality that she otherwise treats with great care and detail.[7]

Anna Maria Busse Berger's publication on memory in medieval music also makes a particularly strong case for showing how complex the interaction was between oral and written modalities in medieval music, lending support to Carruthers' arguments. Despite findings that support many of Carruthers' contentions about *ars memoria*, Busse Berger's work is mentioned only in a footnote in the 2008 revision of *The Book of Memory* (406-07). This is an interesting fact given that Carruthers made a point in the newest edition of having minimized the place of rote memorization in her previous edition, and a more prolonged discussion of Busse Berger's work on the construction of the memorial archive using tonaries (2005:45-84) might have contributed to Carruthers' expansion of her treatment of this area of memory (2008:xii-xiii). Could it be that because of our specialization as musicologists, we have, as Nettl implies, frightened off other scholars working in areas of related interest to the point that they don't even consider the possibility of collaborating or consulting with a musicologist?

In addition to the kind of culture-specific studies like the work by Carruthers, there are other instances of areas where musicological information might have been used and was not. For example, Ruth Finnegan, in *Oral Poetry,* recognizes that most oral poetry is in fact musically performed but makes the following disclaimer (1992:xii):

> I draw attention in particular to the absence of musicological analysis. This is a specialism which I
> am not competent to treat, and I have in any case chosen to concentrate on the literary aspects of
> oral poetry and its social context. Readers should be aware of this limitation; a full account of
> many instances of oral poetry would have to include musicological analysis.

Although no single scholar can expect to have expertise in a multiplicity of disciplines, one wonders why Finnegan did not consult with a musicologist in her research, given the importance she places on music as part of oral performance. The implicit assumption that music can be excised from the rest of humanistic and social science research problematizes the study of oral performance, resulting in a gulf between music and other disciplines that is ultimately detrimental to all scholarship in this area of research. But one should not simply criticize Finnegan for her disclaimer. As Nettl suggests, music scholars have implicitly helped to create a situation that has been less than encouraging to scholars outside the field of music.

Finnegan actually hints at the root of this problem in another book by observing that: "music as an art form is more than notated text, and . . . concentrating on written aspects to the almost complete exclusion of the very real oral elements gives a misleading account of music" (1988:123, 126). Her criticism of notation-centrism is certainly valid, reflecting a concern about undue emphasis on notation that has already been expressed by musicologists and

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[7] For the references to music, see 20-21, 133-34, 406-07.

ethnomusicologists alike (cf. Ellingson 1992b). The problem with notation-centrism and ignoring the role of musical literacy in research and in performance practice, then, cuts both ways. It excludes non-musicologists from participating in discussions that would be of potential benefit to all, and it obscures the oral-aural elements that are always present in all musics by focusing so exclusively on notation.

The Autonomous Model

In addition to the way musicological research could contribute to many of the studies epitomizing the "ideological" model, in which the historical and humanistic detail could be amplified by musicological research, the study of music (and the study of notation in particular) also has potential for making significant contributions to research using the "autonomous" model of research on orality. Critics of the autonomous model focus on the generalizations that the model makes about literacy and orality that are not grounded sufficiently in the kinds of research presented by "ideological" scholars like Clanchy, Carruthers, and Finnegan. While I agree that scholars who epitomize the autonomous model can tend to oversimplify their theses, I have found some potent, provocative ideas that are particularly relevant to the study of musical literacy and its implications for the study of music cross culturally.

For example, McLuhan's views about the complications in moving from an oral-aural to a visual-literate perspective have profound consequences for the study of music (2002:93):

> The more fundamental reason for imperfect recall is that with print there is more complete separation of the visual sense from the audile-tactile. This involves the modern reader in total translation of sight into sound as he looks at the page. Recall of material read by the eye then is confused by the effort to recall it both visually and auditorially.

Are the aural skills of musicians who do not use notation fundamentally different from the skills of the musically literate musician in WEAM? The question of the nature of aurality in musics outside of WEAM is implied in Ong's *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. In this classic work, Ong takes a panoramic view of the orality-literacy problematic that includes insights that help us evaluate the role of notation in Western musical literacy. As he remarks (2006:7),

> language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all of the many thousands of languages—possibly tens of thousands—spoken in the course of human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written at all. Of the some 3,000 languages spoken that exist today only some 78 have a literature . . . . Even now hundreds of languages in active use are never written at all. . . . The basic orality of language is permanent.

The orality of language is further eclipsed by the overwhelming orality of music. While some musics have some form of prescriptive notation, WEAM has the most widespread and well-developed notational literacy of any musical culture. Nettl explains that (2005:74-75):

> Western urban society has a special view of music . . . . We think of a piece of music as existing in its truest form on a piece of paper. The academics among us can hardly conceive of discussing music without knowledge of a single, authoritative, visible version . . . . Given that in all societies music is created and transmitted—entirely or to a large degree—aurally, the culture of Western classical music seems to represent a serious departure from the norm. But departure or not, this central characteristic of Western academic musical culture has had a major impact on ethnomusicology. Concerned with a study of music that lives largely in oral tradition, ethnomusicologists have spent a great deal of their energy finding ways of reducing it to visual form.

Has a fixation with notation—and the almost instinctive ethnomusicological urge to transcribe that goes along with it—"blinded" us to its hegemony? Ellingson has addressed this issue at length in his discussions of transcription and notation (1992a, b), and several historical musicologists have also raised the issue of notation-centrism as well (Barrett 1997:55-56; Rankin 1987). Could this be the root of the problem in minimizing musics that are oral-aurally transmitted within a Western academic curriculum? Clanchy and Carruthers have demonstrated how concepts of literacy have changed over the centuries, showing us how deeply our contemporary ideas about memory, oral delivery, literacy, and creativity are rooted in a fundamentally different paradigm than they were in the Middle Ages. The same kind of historical study analyzing the changes in perception with regard to musical literacy over time would be instructive. If, as Goody suggests, the visual, spatial frame provided by writing allows for the study of grammar and logic in language (1993:186), how has the visual dimension of music sound affected music theory, composition, and performance practice in all periods, particularly in the present day?

The unspoken problem is that all scholarship is notation/writing-centered, with most of its most enduring cultural work in the literate media. The Parry/Lord research first unsettled the academic community by putting oral tradition at the forefront, but it was only through the literate media that they were able to make their point.[8] However, the hazards of trying to notate the musical aspects of an oral-aural tradition often lead the researcher into a epistemological quagmire because, as Ellingson states, "the very knowledge and concepts that open the door to our being able to understand music also open onto pathways towards misunderstanding it" (1992b:141). That misunderstanding arises in part from the fact that we fail to see the implications of using visual notation for the aurality of music.

Despite the ironies of discussing orality through the technology of literacy, the point remains that we must become aware of our notation-centrism for two reasons: to understand fully the relationship between musical cognition and performance practice in WEAM and to be able to research other musical systems that are not notation-centered. Ong, Clanchy, Carruthers, McLuhan, Goody, Foley, and many others have issued a call to examine literate biases in

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[8] Foley has demonstrated how the use of the electronic media can actually ameliorate the problems associated with using literary-based technology to document and discuss the technology of orality. See "The Ideology of the Text" in the Pathways Project (http://www.pathwaysproject.org/pathways/show/Ideology_of_the_Text).

mainstream academic inquiry. Awareness of the orality of music has been raised by medievalists in historical musicology and by ethnomusicologists, who have taken an ideological approach to the topic. But the kinds of broader questions about orality and literacy that form the basis of the autonomous school have not been substantively addressed.

For example, the historical development of musical notation in WEAM is a unique phenomenon in world music. However, the complex theoretical traditions and performance practices emerging from WEAM notation dominate the way all musics are taught in Western music departments, regardless of their similarities to or differences from WEAM.[9] Since the majority of the world's musics are oral-aural, we are simply not equipped to deal with them in any serious way if we rely solely on a notation-centered paradigm. Ong points out our text-centrism in language, which gives us something to contemplate in our parallel musical universe. Trying to force the study of various genres of musics from around the world into a musical model created by the notation-oriented culture of WEAM is like Ong's description of trying to describe orality by framing it solely in terms of literacy (2006:12-13):

> Thinking of oral tradition or a heritage of oral performance, genres and styles as "oral literature" is rather like thinking of horses as automobiles without wheels . . . . No matter how accurate and thorough such apophatic description, automobile-driving readers who have never seen a horse and who hear only of "wheelless automobiles" would be sure to come away with a strange concept of a horse. The same is true of those who deal in terms of "oral literature," that is, "oral writing." You cannot without serious and disabling distortion describe a primary phenomenon by starting with a subsequent secondary phenomenon and paring away the differences. Indeed, starting backwards in this way—putting the car before the horse—you can never become aware of the real difference at all.

The Casualties of Ignoring Connections with Mainstream Orality-Literacy Studies

Ong's view that our written, text-centered view of linguistic expression has seriously compromised our ability to contemplate the oral dimension of language is analogous to my view that our notation-centered outlook regarding music is problematic for two reasons. First, notation-centrism affects one's ability to fully appreciate and understand musical cognition and performance practice in WEAM. As Clanchy puts it, "literacy is unique among technologies in penetrating and structuring the intellect itself, which makes it hard for scholars, whose own skills are shaped by literacy, to reconstruct the mental changes that it brings about" (1991:185). If literacy impedes our ability to reconstruct the cognitive changes it engenders, then musical notation might similarly affect music scholars and practitioners, obstructing our ability to fully comprehend the musical orality that underlies all musical traditions.

Second, the fact that the study of musical orality has been neglected in Western musicological scholarship (Nettl 1998:4) only compounds the problem of studying other musical

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[9] While long ago Seeger warned us about the incongruity of using Western notation for the study of musics that do not use such notation (1958:186-87), we continue to disregard his concerns.

traditions that are even more unabashedly oral-aural and do not rely on notation in any substantial way. If a Western, notation-oriented perspective is used to evaluate all other musics—most of which do not rely on notation to the extent that WEAM does—then Ong's "wheelless automobile" becomes the standard for describing the vast majority of musical traditions. While a notation-centric theory and history is appropriate for WEAM in most instances (even though oral-aural components continue to be minimized), notation-centrism can be highly misleading and misrepresentative with regard to almost every other kind of music.

The Oral-Aural Aspects Underlying Notation

Even within musical traditions that use notation, a notation-centric view of musical performance frequently distorts an understanding of the culture in question. One example is the teaching of Japanese music. While Japanese *koto* music does utilize notation, it functions differently from notation in the West. Andreas Lehmann and his coauthors discuss the nature of this pedagogy, quoting from Patricia Campbell's evaluation of her research in Japan (Lehmann et al. 2007:188):

> The philosophical foundations behind traditional Japanese culture characterize music as being inexplicable in words . . . . Japanese culture also places great importance on young people showing respect for their elders, and this is clearly reflected in the demonstration-imitation processes of music lessons . . . . This premium placed on observation and emulation also dictates the absence of printed notation of music in lessons. Melodic and rhythmic content is transmitted from teacher to student aurally, either through exact demonstration on an instrument or through vocalized mnemonic syllables. "Because notation detracts from the observation of correct performance position, reading and writing are not permitted during instruction. In the music lesson the students' eye absorbs the subtleties of performance etiquette and execution while his or her ear attends to the sound."

Consequently, if we were to place undue emphasis on the notation used in learning the Japanese *koto*, we would overlook the primacy of the underlying oral-aural tradition that is the foundation of the educational process.

In the course of questioning notation-centeredness in cultures that are less reliant on notation, the significance of the oral-aural tradition within WEAM also begins to emerge. For example, when Isaac Stern made his historic trip to China in 1978, he discovered that the Chinese interpreted Western notation in a limited way because they had been closed off from the performance tradition of Western music for over a decade (1980). In particular, he noted the lack of expression in the musicians who had been trained during the Cultural Revolution; he later learned that all of Western culture had been banned during this period, resulting in limited exposure to Western music performance. The oral-aural element had been lost, and the musicians were seriously compromised because they lacked the appropriate training in learning to interpret the notation.

Because nuanced expression in performance is not fully describable, let alone notable, demonstration is always at the heart of musical skill, and Stern's trip provided a kind of demonstration that had been lacking for over a decade in China. It was not simply that he could now instruct these students through the spoken word; not only was there a language barrier, but simple verbal explanations would not have sufficed. Instead, he performed for and with the many students and teachers who were present during his tour of China. Hence, even though notation is central to WEAM and its theory, Stern's experience demonstrates the insufficiency of relying solely on notation. The inability of Chinese musicians to play from Western notation without the necessary oral-aural instruction during the Cultural Revolution underscores the problems implied by relying exclusively on a visual format to communicate musically.

As Jacques Derrida has questioned our perceptions regarding the differences between spoken and written language by challenging the way we have ignored the play of difference between them (1997:35), the same problem seems to manifest itself in musical orality and musical literacy: it is the play of their differences that makes musical communication possible in WEAM. Susan Boynton underscores the point that notation implied a complex relationship between orality and early forms of music writing as follows (2003:155):

> Oral and written traditions coexisted in a relationship more complex than can be expressed by a polarity opposing orality to literacy. A remarkable diversity of notational methods appears not only in different manuscripts produced at the same time, but within the same book and even on the same page, reflecting the various needs and purposes of singers in their roles as cantors, scribes, and teachers.

As notation eventually took on a life of its own with the development of *Ars nova* notation, the way in which aural and visual information was dialectically processed became minimized by the art of writing the notation, and the notation itself became symbolically the repository of musical knowledge. This shift is significant because it has since affected the way we privilege the visuality of notation and minimize the role of oral-aural processes in performance. Consequently, because of the way notation has infiltrated our musical thought processes, it is difficult for music scholars and practitioners, whose skills are shaped by notation, to comprehend the cognitive changes that notation engenders.

Future Possibilities

Despite the hidden casualties of notation-centrism in WEAM, I would like to make clear that notation itself is not the issue; rather, the crux of the problem is notation-centrism without a clear recognition and understanding of the way visual notation influences and affects the aurality of musical performance. A thorough examination of the notation-oriented way of viewing WEAM can provide a springboard not only for understanding unexplored areas of musical literacy as related to performance within WEAM, but also for re-examining overlooked music cultures taught within music departments.

From the perspective of the ideological school, expanding musicological research that investigates the relationship between notation and musical practice in particular historical and cultural circumstances would be highly beneficial. Ideologically oriented research, such as the many excellent studies done by medieval musicologists, provide period-specific views regarding the characteristics of the play of cognitive differences. Musicological research according to the autonomous school, on the other hand, would take a more diachronic view of changes in musical cognition with the development of the visual dimensions of musical literacy. Employing both ideological and autonomous perspectives would allow for the consideration of cultural and period specificity as well as the recognition of changes in the impact of visuality and literacy on musical cognition.

In addition, the role of notation in modern performance practice is itself an unexamined area with potential for a discussion of general issues in literacy and orality studies in the media-world of the twenty-first century. Given that the orality-literacy debate continues to challenge the academy in the electronic world, musicologists may profitably contribute to the discussion. For example, in *The Gutenberg Elegies*, Sven Birkerts poses questions about the way the changing electronic technologies are negatively affecting our sensorial and cognitive abilities with regard to the act of reading (2006:15):

> What is the place of reading, and of the reading sensibility, in our culture as it has become? . . . . In my lifetime I have witnessed and participated in what amounts to a massive shift, a wholesale transformation of what I think of as the age-old ways of being. The primary human relations—to space, time, nature, and to other people—have been subjected to a warping pressure.

Have these drastic changes in reading—from looking at symbols on a page to a signal on a screen—affected musical literacy and performance in WEAM? How have the electronic media affected the visual as well as oral-aural dimensions of music education and transmission in the twenty-first century? In 1999 Aaron Williamon conducted a study in which audience members were asked to comment on certain performances by a musician playing from memory and other performances by the same musician using notation. The results from that study point to enhanced communication as a possible advantage of performing from memory (1999:92). Although the results are tentative, Williamon suggests that Western audiences still hold to the ideal that memorized music is the standard by which musicianship is evaluated. If this is true, then it might be argued that even with a highly developed musical literacy, traditional musical performance in WEAM continues to maintain some degree of pre-modern standards of orality.

However, the digital age has already affected the performance of music in profound ways. Paul Auslander poses the following question (2008:xii):

> What, for example, is one to make of the Nashville Opera's providing a commentary track similar to the ones on DVD editions of movies to be listened to on an iPod as one watched its 2006 production of Gounod's *Roméo et Juliette*? Partisans of traditional live performance (or of opera, for that matter) have good reason to be scandalized. I am neither scandalized nor surprised: this kind of development simply seems inevitable, given the current cultural standing of live performance and the continued domination of mediatized forms.

As our current world is experiencing a new wave of mediatization that further complicates the human sensorium, even as McLuhan predicted, a careful study of the original mediatizing of music through the use of visual notation is critical in establishing a foundation for understanding the new levels of oral, aural, and visual complexity in the current world of music, particularly in the art and popular musics of the West. Since many musical cultures outside of WEAM have not yet experienced this level of media complexity, however, it is important for music scholars to grasp all the issues involved with sensorial perception in music. In this way they will be in a better position to treat historically and currently the study of other musical cultures whose oral-literate paradigms are based upon fundamentally different ideological principles than those of the West. By expanding not only the musicological purview to include cultures outside of the Western tradition but also the disciplinary perspectives used in examining those cultures, the field of musicology may well be able to provide substantive insights into the study of orality and literacy in mainstream academia from the parallel universe of music.

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