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# Philip V. Bohlman. Knowing, Performing, and Believing in Ethnomusicology

by Bernd Brabec de Mori (Institute of Ethnomusicology, University of Music and Performing Arts Graz)*

Philip V. Bohlman was born and raised in Boscobel, Wisconsin, a rural farming community in the American Midwest, where he spent his youth as a church musician. After studies in genetics and piano performance at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, he took master's (1980) and Ph.D. (1984) degrees in ethnomusicology at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, with a dissertation on the music culture of European immigrants to Israel under the supervision of Bruno Nettl. He held teaching positions at several universities before assuming the first professorship in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago, where he has remained throughout his career. In addition to his teaching in ethnomusicology, he remains an active performing musician, touring and recording with his cabaret troupe, the New Budapest Orpheum Society, and with his wife, the pianist Christine Wilkie Bohlman. As a performer he has received the Noah Greenberg Award for Historical Performance from the American Musicological Society and the Donald Tovey Prize from Oxford University.

Bohlman currently serves as Mary Werkman Distinguished Service Professor of Music and Humanities at the University of Chicago. He is *Honorarprofessor* at the Hochschule für Musik, Theater und Medien Hannover, and during 2013-14 he was Senior Fellow at the Mandel School of Advanced Studies at the Hebrew University and Franz Rosenzweig Visiting Professor at the University of Kassel. He researches widely across music and religion, especially Jewish music and the sacred musical practices held in common by different religions in Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia. Among his most recent books are *Revival and Reconciliation: Sacred Music in the Making of European Modernity* (Scarecrow 2013), *Wie könnten wir des Herrn Lied singen in fremdem Lande? Jüdische Musik zwischen Aschkenas und Moderne* (LIT Verlag 2015), and *Jazz Worlds /*

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*World Jazz* (co-edited with Goffredo Plastino; University of Chicago Press 2015). His most recent CD with the New Budapest Orpheum Society, *As Dreams Fall Apart: The Golden Age of Jewish Stage and Film Music, 1925-1955* (Cedille Records), was released in 2014.

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On 17-21 June 2014, sociologist Martin Winter and Bernd Brabec de Mori organized an interdisciplinary conference in Graz, Austria, called *Auditive Wissenskulturen – Das Wissen klanglicher Praxis* (i.e. “auditory epistemic cultures – knowledge in musical praxis”)[1]. Philip Bohlman, together with Karin Knorr Cetina, was invited as a keynote speaker, and both kindly accepted. Philip’s keynote was entitled *Auditives Wissen im Moment der Ekstase* (“Auditory knowledge in the moment of ecstasy”). The main goal of the conference was to find out whether there is a mode of knowing contained in the auditory domain and, if so, which terminology can we use academically to analyze this knowledge[2]. We took the opportunity of sacrificing the noon break on June 20th to record the dialogue that follows. Although we spoke in English, at many points Philip spontaneously used German expressions. I decided to let them stand in the text and provide approximate English translations in parentheses.

## Knowing in Ethnomusicology

**Bernd Brabec de Mori:** We are meeting here at a conference that takes up, among other things, the objective to bring together sociology and ethnomusicology. Sociology is sometimes heavy on theory, while ethnomusicology seems to rely on examples of musical practice in certain points in time and space. So do you think that, from the ethnomusicological point of view, do we need such conferences, do we have to learn new theories from other disciplines or develop our own, as suggested by Timothy Rice (2010), or is ethnomusicology as it stands well enough theoretically equipped?

**Philip V. Bohlman:** Let me start with answering the first part of the question. I think that conferences like this are ideally suited for ethnomusicology, because ethnomusicologists very much welcome those who come from other fields, they welcome their theories, they borrow from their theories, they adapt their theories, they are open to their theories. I think this is quite simple to answer, but in the larger question of the need for theory –I probably think a bit differently from Tim Rice, in part because I originally studied in the natural sciences. I was a geneticist, and I worked in a laboratory, and results from this work were published with teams. What we used as theory, as scientific method, is much closer to the idea of what Professor Knorr Cetina studies in terms of a larger theory for the field. It is a question of how do we take evidence as being tested and understand what it produces, what is the line of progress –a long question not necessarily to being treated in this context, so let me come back to the question of ethnomusicology and its use of and the way it generates theory: I think very much historically in the distinction we make very often between ethnomusicology as a field and as a discipline. Is it identifiable that ethnomusicologists do these things? –“They have these theories, that is how one can understand them by looking at their theories”– that would be the field approach, the sort of idea that Charles Seeger raises, of a unitary field, the idea that we all do these things. Charles Seeger was, of course, a very good case of somebody who believed in generating rigorous theories.

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[1] Please note that the German term *Wissenskulturen* is not directly translatable to English. It builds on Knorr Cetina’s concept of “epistemic cultures” (German translations of her work likewise use *Wissenskulturen*). However, the German term is less restricted to epistemic, that is, scientific, or rectified and equipped, knowledge, but rather allows for professional cultures and maybe other systems to be included as well. For the original introduction of the term see Karin Knorr Cetina (1999).

[2] Results form the conference will soon be published in German; an extended English version is also planned.

The disciplinary approach at least seems to differ from this, because any group of ethnomusicologists (and I think one can speak certainly here in Graz about this –one would likewise speak about it in Chicago or in other places), for example, did their Ph.D.s in traditional historical musicology, others who did them in anthropology, like Tony Seeger who did his Ph.D. at my university in cultural anthropology. This is actually quite unusual, I have also students who work in divinity school, or in what we call area studies, like South Asian studies, and Middle East studies, for example, or coming from sociology. Therefore, as a discipline, or rather as a set of disciplines, we have always accepted these disciplinary distinctions and embraced them. We have a publication series at the University of Chicago Press which is now close to 90 volumes and dates back to 1990 –the first two volumes were written by an Africanist, Wolfgang Bender (1991), and by Christopher Waterman (1990), who is an anthropologist. It was a very deliberate move to call the series *Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology*. We have literary theorists writing in it, and anthropologists, we have a book on Gregorian chants as oral tradition. So this is in essence the dilemma you are arguing for here. If we start at this conference to ask larger questions about the nature of knowing and how we apply that in theoretical ways –are we really beginning to talk to each other, can we talk to each other?

There are probably many ways to answer your original question, whether as ethnomusicologists we can learn something from all of this –but my answer here is yes, with an exclamation mark!– one reason for an ethnomusicologist to be here is simply to sit and to listen and learn, which is a very good thing.

One might then ask the other side –and I think that this lies very much at the heart of Tim Rice’s reason for wanting theory to be so central to the identity of ethnomusicology. So if you and I take away a lot from sociology, popular music studies, cultural studies, the many different disciplines that we find here in Graz –do scholars in those fields take away something from us? This seems to be the central concern that Tim Rice has. Are our theories meaningful in such a way that sociologists say: “I need to read ethnomusicology, I need to take the theories of ethnomusicology and apply them to the phenomena I study, things that maybe seemingly have nothing to do with music!”.

**BBdM:** This is a very good question indeed, and let me illustrate it with an observation I made at some of the more interdisciplinary conferences I attended, just a personal impression I had: it seems that the main task of ethnomusicologist, and likewise anthropologists, while discussing with historians, sociologists, or people from any other discipline, is to respond in this or in a similar way to any theory exposed: “What you say is very interesting, *but*: where I did fieldwork, for example, in Southeast Asia, you will find evidence that this is treated there in a completely different manner”. This also relates to the topic of relativism and universalism, of course, but besides, this attitude may be somehow disturbing for researchers not familiar with the multitude of human expressions and behavior rather than understanding it as a sort of common knowledge within anthropological circles. But could such disturbance be also fruitful and provide to other scholars something to learn from ethnomusicologists?

**PVB:** This may be very much the case, also in the way the issue you raise is connected to comparativism, or the comparative method –the relation of the comparative method to specialized knowledge. If you work in the Amazon lowlands, can you talk about jazz? If you study folk music, can you talk about art music? If you work in the Steiermark[3], is some of the knowledge you consider part of your *Wissenskultur* [i.e., epistemic culture] relevant for somebody who works in Southeast Asia? The easiest way to answer this –and I do not take these as rhetorical questions– is to say, “of course, this is what ethnomusicologists have always done”. On one hand, we have some forms of specialized knowledge, but on the other hand, we think in very comparative terms. We generate sets of metaphors that we use to transform evidence and data into ways of talking and thinking about music. At the same time there has been this long history of criticism of relativism and on the very possibility of doing something like comparative research. In the 1950s, when the field of ethnomusicology took its name from Jaap Kunst, there were discussions about abandoning at least some of the approaches from comparative musicology, the term was *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*, and work more in specific areas. Alan Merriam brought back tapes –from Africa– (he talks about this in the first newsletter of *Ethnomusicology*) and describes how he numerated them, how long they are, at which speed, so they could be compared, for example, with Klaus Wachsmann’s work on organology and instruments. They were looking for data –and what would be understood as a kind of *Wahrheit* [truth], in the data themselves. I would say that ethnomusicology both as a field and as a set of disciplines as well has moved away from this. Our *Wissen und musikalisches Denken* [our knowledge and our means of thinking musically] still works in a broadly comparative way, although I think in a much more scientific way, in the sense of the social sciences, about how music takes us into different meanings.

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[3] Steiermark is a province in southern Austria, with Graz being its capital town.

**BBdM:** Talking about *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*, which came from Germany, and ethnomusicology, which emerged in the United States; as you are traveling very much across the Atlantic Ocean, do you think that today something is left in these very different approaches on this and the other side?

**PVB:** It depends where one is talking about this, but yes, there is a considerable difference between institutional organizations within specific nations and the way in which ethnomusicology is understood. I would say that in North America and in the United Kingdom, in the English-speaking area in a certain way, it is simply the presence, I can formulate that very pointedly, of anthropology. We consider it as a sister discipline, we work in and have colleagues in anthropology, we use the methods of anthropology. For example, fieldwork is built into the curriculum, you spend at least one year in the field for your doctoral studies, and you come back and write it up. My experience is that in Austria and Germany, anthropology is not so central, or considered indispensable. That said, one of the things I really appreciate about European approaches is that they retain some of the traditional methodology, historical approaches, for example. As one who did and continues to do much folk music research –let me take the case of Austria while considering that in the States, folk music is studied by folklorists and relatively rarely by ethnomusicologists– what I have learned from *Volksmusikforschung* [folk music research] in the German-speaking areas is enormous. And it is helpful what our colleagues in Poland, Hungary, or southeastern Europe are doing, because they are coming from the tradition where folk music is considered important; they understand it in relation to ethnomusicology in a multitude of ways. How folk music research and ethnomusicology are organized in Poland differs from Croatia, for example, or certainly from Slovenia, where you have an increasingly American approach mainly due to Svanibor Pettan's influence, who studied in North America.

**BBdM:** I agree very much to this observation, because as someone who studied in Austria, I come, as almost all ethnomusicologists here, from musicology, and its curriculum is still very much focused on historical and some other aspects of musicology, while anthropology is a mere footnote for students. So this is North America and Europe –and there is an old cliché that is supposed to be overcome within the academic environment, that ethnomusicologists originate from these regions, *go to* Africa, Indonesia, or wherever else, study people and their music there, and *come back* in order to synthesize what they found.

This may have changed dramatically, so what is your view on the contributions of scholars from, say, Malaysia, Ghana, Brazil?

**PVB:** I take a very positive notice of this, and Brazil is a good example, where you have a very rich tradition of ethnomusicologists who are both educated in Brazil and elsewhere, from where they go back and build up programs of various kinds there. They emphasize the cultivation of exchange, of sharing ideas instead of the colonial way of imposing them. At the University of Chicago we recently hosted Samuel Araújo as a guest professor, and he certainly did not do the traditional area-study style of teaching "Music in Brazil" but instead drew from his social and political work in Rio de Janeiro. This is paradigmatic for the way we are working with the younger generation: I have been involved in some programs to train students in India. However, it is interesting, in response to your question, that university structures in India do not allow you to set up an institute of ethnomusicology. Music departments in this sense do not exist; even anthropology takes on a very different set of meanings in the institutional structure of India. So what takes us back to the topic of *Wissenskulturen* is the question. How can we create networks of exchange while making sure that we foster exchange rather than a process of *Aneignung* [appropriation] that it has been for such a long time? It is much more complicated than one may think to achieve this. There is language, for example –it is a big advantage to speak English– and this also is not a rhetorical question but a great concern to me when it comes to talking about ethnomusicology in global terms. When I was President of the SEM, I made the initiatives that we start translation programs –in order to make, for example, Spanish, Arabic, and other bodies of knowledge more globally available, because this is absolutely critical[4].

**BBdM:** And it leads to my next point, because now we were talking about specialists, professionals in ethnomusicology or related disciplines from different countries. And then there are indigenous people. Yesterday, with some colleagues, we discussed the possibility of bringing indigenous people from Taiwan, Canada, and the Peruvian Amazon to the upcoming ICTM conference in Kazakhstan. We concluded that it is impossible, simply because the indigenous people from Taiwan and Peru do not speak English, nor Russian or the local Kazakh language and would not be able to speak to almost anyone. At the same time, I am co-editing a book[5] for which Tony Seeger was so kind to provide a foreword, which treats the book in a very positive way –however, he critically remarks that also in this book there is still no contribution by an indigenous person to be found, which is true, of course. I simply could not find anybody who could do this accordingly (without appearing like the "quota Indian") at this point, nor could I find anybody who would actually really wish to do so. So this is the point: How do you think that such "first voices" may speak in a scholarly context without giving the impression of a "quota person?"

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[4] The result of this initiative is the series of translations to be edited by Richard K. Wolf for the Society for Ethnomusicology, which launched its first call for papers in 2014. At the same time a parallel initiative was formed at the University of Vienna; the online journal *Translingual Discourse in Ethnomusicology* will be edited by Regine Allgayer-Kaufmann and Gerd Grupe.

[5] Brabec de Mori, Bernd; Matthias Lewy, and Miguel A. García (in press).

**PVB:** This is absolutely critical in my opinion, but only when we create the situations in which we can hear these voices and understand these voices. It is not enough to, in a certain sense, bring them in order that they represent something and thus give us the impression that we have accomplished something. This reminds of the great world's fairs where they brought whole villages and put them out on stage so that visitors could watch people from Java being Javanese.

**BBdM:** I think this in *not* what we want.

**PVB:** This is not what we want. I think there has been one indigenous tradition where this has been relatively successful. So we may be able to learn from this, I am speaking of the North American Native American and First Nations people. Interestingly enough, this is, if you will, coeval with –it has the same history as– ethnomusicology, with Alice Fletcher doing some of the first recordings in the oldest corpus we have in North America, from 1889, of what we would call non-European music, among Passamaquoddy people. And then we have, an interesting comparison, the recordings made in 1893 at the Columbian Exposition of the world's fair in Chicago, where 103 recordings were made of what we today would call music. But already in the earliest field recordings by Alice Fletcher, Francis Densmore, and others (even Hornbostel came in the beginning of the 20th century to Chicago in order to record indigenous voices, but I'll say that the following was not Hornbostel's intent), which were published by the predecessors of the Smithsonian Institution, we can find the intentions of making these voices heard. And then in the 1950s, we have the work of David McAllester and others who also were trying to do so, most importantly with long sections of myths. We finally come to what Beverley Diamond and others achieve in Canada by trying to find ways of making whole indigenous ways of knowing available. The point here is less to say that this should be done but rather to ask, What can we learn from that? In order, say, that indigenous people from Brazil can make their voices not only heard but also understood? How can we learn with them about music rather than what can we learn from them about music? Within the larger question of ethnomusicological theory, I see that in these concerns we do work together in a sort of common project.

## Becoming an Ethnomusicologist

**BBdM:** Maybe this is a certain aspect of ethnomusicology that distinguishes it (maybe even from anthropology), that there is much of a participatory approach used in the field as well as in the discipline, there is a lot of participation and collaboration out there. But let me now lead to another path in our talk that you already laid out at the beginning: you mentioned that you were trained in genetics. Well, people on the street would say, “oh yes, with genetics you’ll have a bright future and good jobs” which is definitely different with music, music studies, and also musical practice. So what drove you to forsake a career in natural sciences in favor of your musical and musicological life?

**PVB:** I grew up in a very small village in a rural area in Wisconsin. Among other things, I was the town musician there: I played in two different churches (this is a very religious area), and I played horn in the local wind ensemble, in the chorus, I was also a pianist, but I thought of this as my *Alltag* [everyday life]. Although I did not come from a musical family, my father was a pharmacist, but my mother was an artist, a painter, so I grew up with a high respect for the arts in my whole family, also for music. Two of us in the family, also my sister, became involved with music –she is a school music teacher. Anyway, already before university I worked in a laboratory, and then started to study in natural sciences. However, unlike in Austria, for example, at American universities you can study many subjects at the same time, so I came across the opportunity to participate in an audition for a piano course with a professor, and as I enjoyed playing the piano, I did that and was actually awarded a place in a studio. It had never occurred to me before, but this was the moment when I realized that I could do something with that. So I made my first degree, a bachelor in piano performance, and later on, I continued to study the piano seriously, I started my doctoral studies in piano. This is when I heard that a professor named Bruno Nettl was to teach a course on folk music, and people liked it, so I should take it, you know? And thus the world opened, in a very simple way (we have also to consider this, when talking about a unified field of ethnomusicology, that people come into it by very different ways and from different places, which is not so common among sociologists, for example, and certainly not among geneticists).

So in that course with Bruno Nettl –he always wanted us to do fieldwork– I wondered if I could collect music, folk songs, from these farmers who dwelled in the same rural area I came from. Nettl responded that “this is what you should do,” and for me, making music with these people became my “anti-Western-music” experience, because until then, I was told that “real music” was Beethoven, Mozart, and Bach. That was the start, that’s why I sit here with you today, talking about ethnomusicology.

**BBdM:** It seems that you were confronted with the field by Bruno Nettl –this is funny in a way, because my own story is similar: I studied in Salzburg, here in Graz, and in Vienna, and was very much into popular music studies, music sociology, and a bit of music psychology. A friend suggested to enroll in a project of field research along the Slovenian border, he said that I’d get my course credits and it was fun at the same time. My decision was actually a "why not?", so I went, and the project was led by Gerlinde Haid[6] and Ursula Hemetek. Gerlinde and I ended up forming one of the teams to go into the hills searching for music. She was so kind with me and such a great field researcher, she kindled the flame, and I knew in that moment for the first time why I had studied so many years of musicology. What is similar with your story is, first, the influence of a charismatic researcher, and second, that it was not planned. I think that many people who work now in ethnomusicology did not plan to do so; actually there are not many places where you can really study a full curriculum in ethnomusicology.

**PVB:** Gerlinde was a dear friend of mine and I learned from her a lot. I once went with her to Bad Aussee (where she came from), that's where my work with Konrad Mautner started. It was Gerlinde who made me recognize that this is a Jewish guy from Bukowina who spends his summers here, and, why is he creating this canon of Styrian folk songs here? But in order to come back to the issue you raised, at my university we review all applicants for doctoral studies together, music theory, historical musicology, composition. And most of those who apply for ethnomusicology have never done it before! It is amazing. We usually have to speculate a bit, when somebody proposes to do fieldwork in Iran, and we know it won't be easy –but there is always this important process of discovery. Often, in an interview, the candidate proposes to do this or that project and we answer that "we think that you should do something entirely different". However, whether people come into studying ethnomusicology by accident or by decision likewise leads to an expansion of the field, so I think that this leads back to your initial question, because I do think that there is much to be learned through studying ethnomusicology, even if you end up doing other things (with or without music).

We see those places, internationally, where ethnomusicology studies are expanded, for example in North America. It is almost unbelievable for many to see that at the music department at the University of Chicago there are fourteen professors, and four of them in ethnomusicology, they represent over a quarter of the department –this can be dreamed of, more positions at one department than in the whole of Berlin with its various universities.

In order to circle back to our primary issue, I think it is critically important to make ethnomusicology indispensable. Here in Graz I can see this real institute with research projects that is very present, but also the struggle that takes place in Germany. I teach in Kassel at the moment with wonderful colleagues, but they lack any possibility to build up ethnomusicology, so one way is to bring in somebody like me as a guest professor in Jewish studies, that is, "through the back door," so that I can teach popular music studies and Jewish music studies as ethnomusicology. I sense that it is crucially important to do this as much as possible, worldwide.

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[6] As expressed in the main text, I do not only owe a lot to Gerlinde Haid, I also felt a very dear friendship with her –what sometimes happens after doing good field research together. Gerlinde surprisingly passed away in 2012. We both hold her image high in our memory.

So is ethnomusicology actually a field where we teach, instead of doing exclusively research? And my answer is yes: it's the moment when I understand myself as an ethnomusicologist most clearly, I think, when I'm teaching.

## Performing in Ethnomusicology

**BBdM:** This is one crossing in ethnomusicology –between research and teaching– but maybe also somehow typical for our discipline is the integration of musical performance into research (and vice versa). As you are very experienced in both, could you tell of your ways to achieve this?

**PVB:** Yes, and I am glad that you asked this question. As we know from Mantle Hood's bimusicality, and much earlier, the relation between performance and research is something we accept as one of our specific ways of thinking musically. Let me tell you a little bit of what I do as a performer, which is an important part also in its contribution back to my research. I have a group called the New Budapest Orpheum Society, which bases itself on the first Jewish cabaret in Vienna, from the 1880s to 1918, when it closed at the end of World War I, because so many members were in the service of the army. It was fairly important –even Robert Stolz did some performances with this ensemble– so we take it as a kind of a model, for example the multiculturalism of the old monarchy in Vienna, but also the music that thrives in a place like Vienna. They referred to Budapest, because it was the Exotic East, in some ways. And we perform music, much of which has been part of my researches. So, for example, we take street songs (so-called *Flugblattlieder*) from the end of the 19th century and part of the 20th century that we can find in the censors' files in Vienna. We are very fortunate to have them, pieces of music that had then to be registered and a copy had to be saved, and which now form part of our repertoire. We then do arrangements of them. There's an argument often made in Central Europe, that so much was destroyed that we cannot possibly experience what had happened previously (and with that people try to find a way of distancing oneself from the guilt of the Holocaust). Now what we do makes exactly the opposite case, making that material live again, a case of revival and reconciliation. This is highly political, and part of my research; I am a political scholar. In 1993 I wrote an article called "Musicology as an Political Act" (Bohlman 1993). My work on music and racism is political, too, also my work on music and religion, as we do not intend to recover Jewish, or Catholic tradition but it is about religious understanding, finding ways of reconciliation. So this starts with research and finds its way through performance into a political present. How do Viennese *Flugblattlieder* sound when performed on Broadway? –You see that we are actors, agents in the historical process by being ethnomusicologists and by understanding ourselves as politically engaged scholars.

**BBdM:** Oh yes, and I think that by doing ethnomusicology, and also anthropology, one cannot escape from the political dimension. By doing historically relevant research on Jewish music in the German-speaking region this is very clear, but likewise for the topics we were touching upon before about different countries and especially the “first voices”. Commonly we work with people, and we are therefore ever confronted with our position among them. So I agree with you to take the political dimension and put it up front, without ever trying to pretend being unpolitical. However, in your case, how do you deal with the merging of the political and religious dimensions in both your research and performances?

**PVB:** Well, although I am doing Jewish music studies, I am not Jewish myself, while most scholars in this field are almost entirely Jewish. I engage with religious topics very powerfully, and I take religion very seriously, but I do not work on religion that is my own.

## Believing in Ethnomusicology

**BBdM:** This relates also to one of the main discussion points at our conference here: when doing music research, one may find, for example, dancing tunes that are exclusively used for dancing, or music played for entertainment only. However, it is very likely when dealing with music in any part of the world, that one is confronted with religions, with cosmologies, with ritual or magical practice, where music most often plays some particular, crucial role. This practice is commonly attributed to religious systems, or systems of belief, that are usually differentiated from systems of knowledge. We were discussing if there is any possibility to talk about auditory knowledge, knowing in sound. Maybe such knowledge is mostly implicit and therefore very well suited for religious secrets or ecstatic experience. But is it possible to make this mode of knowing explicit and talk about it as *knowledge*, or is it something different?

**PVB:** There are two questions you separated by “or.” First, I think it is something different, but I also think that, before the “or,” that it can be made explicit. Let me give a concrete example: one of the great discussions about reflection and studies in the ethnomusicology of Islam is the question about whether we can talk about sacred music of Islam as “music” at all. The term *musica*, or *mūsīqī* is a loanword from Greek and usually used for instrumental music outside the sacred domain. So you talk about *quirá’ah* recitation or the *adhán*, call for prayer, as a special kind of speech, rather. On the other hand, it is treated as the revealed word of God, and one believes that it is –Muslims believe that it is, I believe that it is. So what can we make explicit about that? One aspect that can be made explicit is actually the question of mode, or *maqām*. So there is a mode of knowing about it among Quranic reciters: not only do they use certain *maqamat*, they know why they do, they know why it fits to a certain *surah*, then, where modulation takes place, in other words, part of their knowing is Revealed Word of God concentrated in an explicit knowledge of music. By the way, the *maqām* system is also used in Israel for reciting the Torah [Pentateuch, or Five Books of Moses] in a very specific cycle (they know exactly which *maqām* to use with which moment in the Torah cycle). No one could say that the word of God and *maqām* are two different things pasted together, but I would argue quite the contrary: it is a way of understanding that the implicit and the explicit live together, that they occupy the same space inside a potential *Wissenskultur*. We often tend to think of the implicit and the explicit as a sort of *Gegensatzpaar* [pair of contrary or opposed things], but often they are more like two sides of the same coin.

**BBdM:** So you suggest that we analyze music technically in order to understand what happens to the performers or the audience in terms of religious experience?

**PVB:** Religion seems to provide a place to do this. The idea of *Glaube* [belief] already appears with Helmholtz: while attempting to be systematic, he still holds this notion of belief –a great part of the music I work with finds its ways back into religions, and I have never found myself able to distance myself, conceptually or otherwise– I mean I have even written about religion in Eurovision Song Contest[7], how often terms like “I believe” or “hallelujah” are used, and what is its meaning? Also how Islam in present in Eurovision songs, because it has to be in certain ways internalized. If there are participants from Azerbaijan, Turkey, or Albania who announce themselves as Muslim, they’re out, Europe doesn’t want this. But there are very powerful uses of religion for musical reasons, and not to make a sort of case for Islam. In Turkey, or Albania, big Muslim populations know these problems for centuries. Bosnia and Herzegovina is in its position because of its struggle with religion, a very good example where this implementation of music and religion takes place. This is not to make a case for religion, but rather to answer your question: what is explicit about it? You study ritual, shamanism, and spirits, what is explicit about it and what is implicit? What is a way of knowing, and what is a way of believing? In English-speaking music research there is much interest in this, there are study groups working on Christian Music, Jewish music, on Islam, trying, as ethnomusicologists, to understand.

**BBdM:** Europeans seem to be more sceptical here, generally. They may be frightened about religion. If you say here that you believe in God, as a scholar, you might get some strange reactions. Anyway, I think that as ethnomusicologists we are even in a privileged situation here. In many rituals, in shamanism, but also in religious services in churches, or mosques, performers, and attendees of the ritual ascribe a certain presence of *something* into this musical performance. We can actually ban the music that is used for calling to God, or spirits, on tape or flash-disc recordings. So I do not know if the spirits exist in a visual, or physical sense, but there is evidence in my recording that they exist in a musical sense. Now, people interact with spirits musically, and they do get a response, and systems, like the animist cosmologies among Amerindian people, are sophisticated and logically constructed around this interaction. I am still unsure if in such cases we can speak of belief, people claim that they *know*, so shouldn't we rather understand it as a form of knowledge?

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[7] The Eurovision Song Contest is an annual international television show where mainstream pop musicians compete while representing their nations. The result is created by adding votes from the television audience to votes from juries nominated by each participating nation. The winning musicians’ nation will then host the upcoming contest. In 2014, Austrian transgender persona Conchita Wurst won the contest, an event that led to much disagreement in conservative circles Europe-wide, and which was immediately commented on by Philip Bohlman in an online blog (blog.oup.com/2014/05/eurovision-hope-for-europe/).

**PVB:** I think we have to consider if there are additional terms that we can use here besides knowledge and belief, so it again should not be viewed as a *Gegensatzpaar*. Of course there are questions of belief, for example, about the afterlife to where a Christian is supposed to go; so do I believe? My answer is, well, I don't know. But this is precisely what is at issue here. Take for example the Vedic chants. This is both oral and written tradition for three thousand years. Of course, I did not say this in my lecture the other night, but the belief here is that it has to be performed, without interruption, because in fact the universe collapses if there is a break. I always joke with my students when I talk about this: "we don't want to know whether this is true or not!" However, I had the privilege to spend some time with the *Brahmans* while they chant, which is very rare. It is very interesting to gain that experience, to gain that entrance. What they do, they perform –and we are talking about this in the 21st century– as if they know what they believe. Again we are confronted with a case where it is inseparable, is it *Wissen* or is it *Glaube* [knowledge or belief]? These are not the concerns of the *Brahmans*, the monks who are doing it, right?

**BBdM:** Yes, I experienced the same thing in the Amazon working with healers and sorcerers. They just *do* it. By performing, they experience it during a trance state and they get results. They are perfectly fine without asking the question whether the spirits exist, they *perform* them. But here I can locate also a specific uncertainty: what we call "knowledge" is per definition tied to what one could call an ordinary, or (whatever this may mean exactly) normal, everyday mode of perception and cognition. Modes of altered perception and cognition are considered exceptional and are somewhat put aside (this is of course because of many "Hippie" or "New Age" tales going around, with which no "serious" scholar wants to be associated), if not pathologized. Quite the contrary, in many societies such states are understood as revealing something, for example, the "real" world behind everyday perception (quite explicitly, for example, in the western Amazon). In your talk, you centered on the phenomenon of ecstasy in conjunction with music. We found out now, that the analysis of musical material can shed light on religious content (avoiding *knowledge* and *belief* for given reasons). I would like to know a bit more about your approach to this kind of phenomena. Gilbert Rouget defined "ecstasy" as some inwardly-oriented process, in juxtaposition to what he calls "trance," which is much more spectacular, often manifest in theatrical states of possession, and so on (Rouget 1985). Do you share this definition, or which is your own?

**PVB:** I agree with Rouget that there are differences between phenomena we associate with trance and those we associate with ecstasy. For me, the primary difference is the one between individual and community, that is, the transformation of the individual resulting from trance, and the ways in which ecstasy unleashes processes that one shares with others. And it is precisely this difference that leads me to speak about ecstasy as *Wissenskultur*, in which the sharing of knowledge and its potential commonality –in religion, belief, music-making– is heightened.

**BBdM:** Ethnography among many groups suggests that music is somehow essential to triggering and/or guiding, as I prefer to call them, such special states of perception and cognition. In the 1960s, Neher spoke about "auditory driving", say, that certain rhythmic features, specifically a high tempo of pulsation (something like a staggering 700 bpm) would directly influence brain rhythms that can be made visible via EEG (Neher 1961). Although this was easily falsified, many people still adhere to hypotheses of more complex, but likewise direct influence of music on the brain –which would imply that performing or hearing a certain kind of music is more likely to trigger such states (in all humans?) than other music. Rouget, on the other hand, suggests that Neher was wrong and that music more indirectly "socializes" trance states. Today, most scholars try to find a position somewhere in between. Do you have the impression that certain music is more likely to lead into ecstasy or trance, and if yes, what is your suggestion how this could work?

**PVB:** In this comparison, we need to be a bit careful about the differences between apples and oranges. Music is crucial for those who enter trance states and for those for whom ecstasy leads to heightened sociality. The question, for me at least, is not whether it is "more likely" or "less likely" to lead to trance or ecstasy, but rather that it apparently seems inseparable from both. Once again, the critical role of music in such phenomena is what leads me to claim it as critical to the common experiences of knowing –and believing– in *Wissenskultur*.

**BBdM:** And now we are in the position that these people who practice such rituals experience "something religious" during this process. I had an intense discussion with Dimitri Karadimas[8], an anthropologist specializing in northwestern Amazonian studies, who says that, to put it briefly, many myths and cosmological concepts of Amazonian people are derived from anthropomorphism, implying that perception and cognition as commonly regarded "normal" or "healthy" in Western societies is a universal thing and should be regarded a baseline of judgment, as the only state in which we can do science –but I take another approach, because the people in question base their cosmology and mythology on experiences obtained through trance-like processes usually connected to religious experience and belief. Maybe it came to this debate because I analyze the music (which is always "present"), while Dimitri analyzes myths (which are always "past" or "remote"). The point where I want to lead to, again: I think it is a bit "pre-postcolonial" to conceive that "we", through science, possess the key to *knowledge*, while "they" do religious things. At the conference, Professor Wolfgang Gratzer suggested to use the Wittgensteinian term *Gewissheit* [certainty, in the sense of knowing] in order to bridge this gap. Do you think that using this (or another) term can help us to avoid the colonial hue hidden in this issue of *knowledge* versus, if you allow this criticism, *to act if one knew what one believes*? Or rather, to make that clear first, you probably won't agree with me that there is a "hidden colonial hue", because I am sure you would not take a colonial standpoint?

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[8] The debate is published by Ernst Halbmayer (2012).

**PVB:** Colonial hues are hard to miss, not least because they are rarely hidden or subtle, as hues may be. It goes without saying that there is a certain colonialist view of science that abstracts knowledge and packages it together with notions such as truth and certainty, in the sense of *Gewissheit,* thereby creating a language that emphasizes an abstract gap between knowledge and belief. All too often, this gap also represents the colonialist distance between self and other, those who *can* know and those who *do* believe. I do not think –or believe– that this gap is inevitable, and it surely is not when we consider the ways in which *Religionswissenschaftler* [historians of religion] or theologians locate believe and thought together in larger cosmologies. To come to your question directly, I'd say that it is more important to expose the colonial hues in our theory and methods so that we can be critical of ourselves in meaningful ways, and among these is the need to move beyond the dangerous binary that we think and they believe. An optimist, I see this as one of the forms of recognition that ethnomusicology brings to other fields, that is, to theory as we were discussing it an hour or so ago.

**BBdM:** Anyway, it seems that we are confined here to our limits in analyzing music as one approach to tackle these questions. There may be something in the musical structure and performance that we can make explicit and which provides evidence of certain processes happening. However, it seems, that effects, like for example people being healed through ritual performance (musical or not) are well beyond us to confirm or explain.

**PVB:** During one of the pilgrimages to Mariazell[9] I joined, still in the 1990s, a big pilgrimage, there was an ORF[10] film team documenting the pilgrimage. When they heard that there was an ethnomusicologist around, even from America, they did an interview with me and asked me some things. One interviewer said, with a little twinkle in his eye, "You know, that these people do the pilgrimage because they wanted to be healed". The reporter continued, "this can't possibly be true. Nobody is healed!", and I said, "Look at these people: there are people in their eighties who have been walking for four days. They feel healthy! If they were asked to walk for four days, say, from Vienna to Linz, they could never do it. But four days, up the mountains, to Mariazell –they are healthier than they have ever been!"– By *doing* it.

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[9] Mariazell is a place with a *Wallfahrtskirche*, a church visited by Catholic pilgrims from throughout East, Central and Southeastern Europe, located in the mountainous north of the province Steiermark.
[10] Austrian Radio and Television.

**BBdM:** We are approaching now the end of time (referring to this interview rather than to the cosmos… I hope that the Vedic chanters still go on performing), so let me connect here with my final remark and ask for your opinion. I feel that this topic of religious or magical experience and knowing is one good answer for the question you asked before –"Are our theories meaningful to other scholars, so that they feel that they need to read, or study ethnomusicology?" But if our theories could be meaningful for, say, researchers from religious studies, ritual studies, medical anthropology, sociology of belief, and even sociology of knowledge, I actually have the impression that they are fairly unaware of their need to read our papers. How do you think we could achieve awareness? We do publish, but how can we publish and speak so that these scholars can –now referring to ourselves– "hear and understand these voices?"

**PVB:** It is surely the case that ethnomusicologists do not always sufficiently and creatively develop the media and the forms of communication with which we might bring the forms of our own *Wissenskulturen* to others, both in academia and beyond in the public sphere. We're not alone in this failure, but we have a greater responsibility, precisely because we are so indebted to those from whom we learn. I have long advocated for other ways to make our voices heard, and with our voices, those of the people we study. The challenge is great, but we can also point to some paradigm shifts in the past several decades. The ethnographic monograph has become part of the standard musicological and anthropological literature; the availability of sound recordings and DVDs has become many times greater; and perhaps most important of all, the means whereby ethnomusicologists digitize sound, dance, print, and ethnographic collections *together with our colleagues throughout the world* to assist in exchange and repatriation transforms the very publics with whom we communicate. The potential for ethnomusicology to contribute to knowledge –shared knowledge, to which access is unlimited– has never been greater and has never been more important to what we do.

**BBdM:** Thank you very much, Phil, this sounds very optimistic and suits well for concluding our dialogue. However, is there something you would like to add which you would consider a good ending for the story we create here?

**PVB:** Yes, I would like to say that I think it is very important that we speak here together about this. I keep coming back to your original question, because I think whether we have a unitary field, or big theories or not, we have a sense of collegiality, we have a sense that as ethnomusicologists we actually work together and learn together. I do not say this just for reasons of friendship or even collegiality, but rather out of a deeper sense of what we know, and part of what we know is what we exchange back and forth. The idea of exchange is critical for what we do in our fieldwork. We don't *take*, we don't *record*. We do that, but we give things back. That is in a certain sense what we are *doing*, also here at this conference, and in this moment when you and I are talking about it.

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Bernd Brabec de Mori was born in Bregenz, Austria. After studying Musicology and History of Arts in Salzburg, Graz, and Vienna, he spent five years in the Ucayali Valley (Eastern

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