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- and advancing musicological research across the globe
- in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration.
Editorial: Stand Up! Musicology Goes Public

In this issue of *IMS Musicological Brainfood*, Zdravko Blažeković, Richard Taruskin, and Laura Tunbridge consider moving musicology from its ivory tower into the market square. Should we take a stand?

The Mission of Musicologists in Cultural Preservation

Zdravko Blažeković

Various forms of religious radicalism, extreme nationalism, ethnic expulsions, and ill-conceived policies of the political and military superpowers have led to armed conflicts and large-scale destruction of tangible and intangible heritage in recent years, making its preservation a critically urgent and important issue. Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia, Yemen, Myanmar, Mali, or Syria are only the most visible locations affected by destruction, calling upon us to assess tools that we need in our musicological toolbox for the preservation of the endangered music practices and monuments in peril. It is too easy for us to sit back in our well-funded institutions where scanners are working overtime making already well-protected musical sources globally available on the internet and indifferently observe destruction in distant places that are losing their heritage. Loss of culture in any of these places makes all of us culturally and spiritually poorer. We might think that the recent destruction of Palmyra is irrelevant to music historians, but could we really be certain that another walk along the Roman forum there wouldn’t give us a solution to some question that has not even been posed yet?

During the 2016 US presidential campaign, the candidate of the Libertarian Party, Gary Johnson, was asked in a television interview about his solutions for the Aleppo crisis. His answer was: “And what is Aleppo?” The US electorate was appalled at the time by his ignorance, but the question is do we all know what Aleppo is? Do we know how many music sources have been destroyed there and will never have a chance to be scanned and made available on the Internet? How many musicians displaced? How many music facilities ruined? How many music traditions interrupted? Aleppo used to be for centuries an important music center, and yet, in the current crisis, it is generally absent from our musical conversations.

Although the study of music is a diverse field, the outside world sees musicology as impenetrable and narrow. The blame for this is on us. We are too often unwilling to engage with the crises in the world. Too many Western music academics are only interested in publishing their books with large university presses and write articles only for highbrow academic journals that never leave university libraries. One outcome of this practice is that the political decision makers tend to ignore in their political programs the expertise that music scholars can provide in advising on the preservation of music culture. The Louvre’s director Jean-Luc Martinez never misses an opportunity to communicate in the media his vision about the significance of heritage and its preser-
ovation, or the role of museums in educating about history, preserving heritage, or opening a dialogue between political factors. He is not hesitant to express his political commitment and to embrace a role for his museum in political diplomacy. At the peak of tensions between the French and Moroccan governments in 2014, instigated by a colonialist comment of the French ambassador to the United Nations, Martinez—then the newly appointed Louvre director—pushed forward with the opening of an exhibition on medieval Morocco, which ensured a bilateral dialogue at a time when political channels were frozen. In November 2017 he presided over the opening of the Louvre Abu Dhabi which changed the museography of the Louvre itself, articulating great works of art in the collective visual imagination of billions of people with different cultural experiences. Building upon the success of Abu Dhabi, he is now pushing ahead with a collaboration with Iranian art institutions planned under a four-year agreement between the Louvre and the Iranian government that was signed in January 2016. During his mandate, the Louvre has more than doubled its archaeological digs, shared its expertise and funds excavating sites in Italy, Bulgaria, Romania, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan, and trained curators from Libya, Tunisia, China, and Bosnia. These digs will provide the context for exhibitions the Louvre will mount in the next years in Sudan, Bulgaria, and Uzbekistan. For him, a museum is not only a space for displaying collected objects, but a dynamic factor that can influence international political, social, and cultural dynamics.

Such advocacy gives Martinez an authoritative voice and makes him a natural conduit for the French government in its heritage diplomacy across the Middle East. It was none other than Martinez whom the former French president, François Hollande, commissioned to devise a plan to protect heritage in the areas of the Syrian conflict back in June 2015.

The former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Thomas Campbell, shaped his position in a similar way. In a 2017 interview he said, “I have been trying to develop an agenda that moves away from a Western museum as primarily an accumulator of objects and knowledge to one that positions it as part of a matrix of international peers.” And indeed, Campbell was one of the first museum directors to publicly condemn the destruction of cultural heritage in Syria and Iraq. He organized a meeting in Istanbul of the Metropolitan Museum staff with their colleagues from countries with endangered monuments, and created a portable kit to help them record endangered sites as they became safe to enter.

The international music societies and other music networks are far behind in such efforts. We are often better informed about music that is at risk in Syria and events aimed at its revival from newspapers and magazines like The Economist, The New York Times, or The Financial Times, than from our professional musicological journals. At conferences of our musicological societies we rarely have a chance to hear presentations by people from areas in crisis who have first-hand knowledge about the destruction and hardships in the preservation of sources and traditions. It is my opinion that music networks need to examine and adopt some models developed in the last years by the administrators of the leading museums, archeological centers, and art historians in preserving cultural heritage. Our preservation efforts should not concern only the heritage that is safely kept in the climate controlled rooms of our libraries and archives; incomparably more important is to take action when sources and traditions are in peril of being lost forever. With the expertise and authority of their members, our international music societies could initiate and shape the public debate around crisis points; advocate for these critical issues to national governments and the international community; organize public discussions involving policy makers; and disseminate these positions to the media. These networks should initiate opportunities to bring people together, bridge national divides, but also make an effort to reach beyond our own professional circles in explaining the issues with which we are concerned. Such actions are not only the correct thing to do, but in the time of new realities they are also our obligation and duty.

At a time when powerful political structures are arguing in favor of closing national borders and building walls, it is important to counterbal-
ancethembyembracinginternationalism.Some nationalists may argue that endangered cultures of Syria or Mali are not their cultures, but the situation on the ground does not support their national exclusivity. About 1.5 million Turkish and close to 700,000 Syrian nationals (2017) are living in Germany; the declining Italian population in Italy is being supplemented on a daily basis by immigrants from Afghanistan, Albania, Bosnia, Macedonia, Morocco, Pakistan, and Tunisia; Chinese students are learning at Italian conservatories how to sing bel canto in large numbers; Giacomo Puccini’s Turandot has been adopted in China as its national opera, and it is regularly performed in new opera theaters that are opening with astonishing frequency. In such internationalization of populations and cultures, the question of what is our heritage is not simple. An attack on a monument signifying the cultural, national, or religious identity of any ethnic group is an attack on our common diversity, and its destruction means deprivation for all of us. Therefore, regardless of where heritage has been created and who claims its ownership, in our global society we should all collectively feel responsible for its protection and preservation. Remaining silent about the destruction does not imply our neutrality in the conflict. Neutrality is a fantasy, because not taking a position on critical issues reflects support for the status quo.

By effectively channeling advocacy for heritage preservation and practice heritage diplomacy, international music societies would become institutionally stronger, would gain more authority, and potentially attract the support of governmental organizations and individual patrons. Models for such interventions exist and could be borrowed from art historians, art museums, and other organizations that have already adjusted their role and tools to the new times, and are not hesitant to initiate projects with social responsibility and potentially influential political dynamics. Initiating such advocacy, international music networks would create a space in which the intellectual and professional potential of their members would be an effective catalyst for influencing decision makers, and by extension move social interactions in a positive direction.

References
3 The colonialist comment which the French Ambassador to the United Nations, Gérard Araud, apparently made three years earlier, was reported to the media by the Spanish film producer Javier Bardem on February 17, 2014, during the launch in Paris of his documentary on the disputed Western Sahara, Hijos de las nubes, la última colonia. Araud allegedly said that Morocco is a “maîtresse avec laquelle on dort toutes les nuits, dont on n’est pas particulièrement amoureux mais qu’on doit défendre” (Morocco is a mistress who you sleep with every night, who you don’t particularly love but have to defend). “Coups de froid dans les relations franco-marocaines,” Le Monde (February 24, 2014). The exhibition Le Maroc médiéval: Un empire de l’Afrique à l’Espagne was on view at the Louvre in Paris from October 17, 2014, through January 19, 2015.
4 The exchange of exhibitions under the agreement between the Louvre and Iranian government started with the show of works from the Louvre’s collection at the National Museum of Iran in Tehran (The Louvre in Tehran, March 5–June 3, 2018). In exchange, an exhibition on the Persian Qajar dynasty (1786–1925) was mounted at the Louvre-Lens (The Rose Empire: Masterpieces of Persian Art from the 19th Century, March 28–July 23, 2018). The Louvre’s Islamic Art Department is sending an archaeological mission to visit sites for a new dig in Khorasan, on the ancient Silk Road in eastern Iran. Cf. Vincent Noce, “Second Time Lucky, Louvre Seals Iran Deal,” The Art Newspaper 27, no. 299 (2018): 21.
6 Ibid.
7 It is also only fair that the economies with significant immigration support the heritage preservation in countries where its taxpayers
have originated from. For example, in Germany there are about 4 million taxpayers with full or partial Turkish origin (which includes almost 1.5 million Turkish nationals), or in the United States there are about 11.7 million taxpayers with Mexican background.

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**Thoughts on Public Musicology**

*Public engagement is something academics increasingly are being encouraged to do by their institutions, bethey universities, conservatoires, museums, or scholarly societies. It’s probably a good thing to get people out of their ivory towers but is “public musicology” really that new or needed now more than before?*

**Richard Taruskin (RT).** I hope it’s true that scholars are being encouraged to work in public media. It used to work against academic promotion in the USA. My own colleagues and administration did encourage me, and I encouraged my colleagues and pupils, though with limited success. Opportunities are becoming scarcer in the newspapers, which are less hospitable to serious arts coverage than they were even two or three decades ago. Program notes and pre-concert talks are good outlets so long as they are free of interference from presenters who regard such things as advertising. Real public engagement means engaging with real public issues. The great thing about James Oestreich, who was my editor at the *New York Times*, was that he welcomed controversy (which I was always happy to provide), and so did his superiors at the paper. When I filled up the letters column with vituperation, which happened four times in the quarter century I was writing there, the paper was happy (and I got used to it, too).

**Laura Tunbridge (LT).** When the music appreciation movement took off at the start of the twentieth century, the impetus was toward educating the general public in the music they should learn to like, for social and cultural gains. I think most people would back away from those associations with improving one’s status now. That is doubtless the right attitude, but it has perhaps contributed to music’s diminishing position within schools and in public life more generally. (Western classical music is primarily what I’m referring to here but too often there is also an unwillingness to treat any kind of music as an intellectually and socially worthy subject for discussion and debate.) And it might explain the recent investment in public musicology. All of these things connect: for people to become interested in music, or to think that their children or grandchildren should, they need to be made curious—doors need to open, be that through controversies in newspapers or being introduced to new sounds by tantalizing Twitter feeds.

Technology makes it much easier to reach larger numbers of readers/listeners with short, punchy pieces. At the same time, those readers and listeners can more easily respond but letters pages are becoming less common means for challenging people than anonymous comments online. The oppor-
tunity for sustained debate seems to be diminished—what are the knock-on effects?

RT. Well, some debates I’ve been involved in seem never to end—Shostakovich, Klinghoffer, etc.—though maybe I’ve just been “lucky.” The problem with blogs is that, being unregulated, they contain so much empty irresponsible verbiage that that becomes what one expects to read there. (Anonymous posts are irresponsible by definition.) So I never encouraged my own pupils to air their opinions in such spaces. If you want to do more serious blogging work, you face the problem of attracting readers to a medium that has to be sought out. But if a blog is to be used to show what makes musicology (or musicologists) tick, it should show, above all, what responsible rhetoric looks like. Short and punchy, on the other hand, is OK, and not at all in conflict with responsible writing. I learned to be those things at the Times, and—don’t laugh—I carried it over to the big-form projects, even the Oxford History, which I consciously tried to make “read short” even though it was super-long. Letters pages are drying up, it seems. (Blogs and social media now perform that function.)

LT. What to do, though, if your chosen topic “unluckily” does not elicit the same degree of debate? If you judge a blog’s success by its click-rate then choosing something contentious works. Writing style, though, is something else: assuming you can attract readers and keeping them, as RT says and has shown in his own work, depends on writing in an engaging way. How to be responsible is more challenging because it depends on an agreement that all interlocutors are going to behave in the same way. Weighing in on a blog in a heavy-handed critical way can shut down discussion rather than foster it or, at least, tends to make everyone defensive.

There’s a particular risk that views of a composer or piece become common currency in journalism, programming, textbooks, and curricula, and are no longer debated. What strategies can stop that?

RT. Calling it out, to begin with, especially when the conventional wisdom had been based on spurious—cases in the case of Shostakovich and his “memoirs.” One has to be patient. It takes repeated explanation and repeated correction.

LT. Working with other musicians and organizations can also be helpful. This isn’t a one-way process. It can be frustrating when you are asked to contribute to a program booklet or festival study day and offer your insights but feel as if they bear no relationship to what then happens on stage. If dialogue is encouraged between musicologists and performers or programmers, though, there’s a chance research findings can be discussed and maybe even tried out.

What status should the “public musicologist” have within the academy? Is the notion that research should have “impact” (economic, political, cultural) outside of the immediate institution something musicology should embrace or rather be suspicious of?

RT. “Impact” as such is a neutral quality. It can serve good or evil. Encourage the good and stamp out the evil. (See above on patience.) Quantity is another neutral matter, accorded too much weight in job evaluations. So there is no simple answer to the question of status. Forgive me for mentioning a name, but the fact that Allan Ho (of Ho and Feofanov infamy) is a PhD-carrying musicologist makes his transgressions on the veracity Shostakovich’s “memoirs” worse than that of his pianist/lawyer partner Dmitry Feofanov. We scholars are judged by Ho’s misdeeds. But seeing the work of young PhDs in musicology, say, in the New York Times—Will Robin and Micaela Baranello most recently—can reflect credit on the profession. The thing to beware (and I’ve brought this up with some of them) is not to confine oneself to the line of least resistance in a newspaper, and the kind of thing unimaginative editors seek: namely, puff pieces. What musicologists do needs to be distinguishable from advocacy, or else musicologists have no raison d’être.

LT. I think another important thing to bear in mind is how impact is valued within a scholar’s workload, particularly for early career researchers. It’s not unusual to be distracted by presenting research on radio, vlogs, or even tele-
vision, as well as in print media, rather than producing the books and peer-reviewed journal articles that weigh in more heavily on CVs. It’s tremendously time-consuming to do all that stuff and there’s often little editorial control from the musicologist’s point of view. And there is a hierarchy of how activities are valued by institutions: reviewing CDs isn’t the same as being consultant for a new opera production, say, but then doing small tasks may lead to larger and more prestigious gigs. Particularly when starting out it’s hard to judge what’s worth doing; it also raises the question of whether everyone has to “go public” or whether every topic needs to have that aspect written into it.

Is there a risk of “dumbing down” what we do when undertaking public musicology? What practical advice would you give younger scholars engaging with the public?

LT. I’m less concerned about dumbing down than talking down to an audience. I’ve learned that you never know who is in an audience—always treat them with respect rather than patronizing them—and that it’s a continuum: it is as important to explain yourself clearly in a university lecture as it is to a pre-concert audience. So far as practical advice is concerned, less is almost always more with regard to information and verbiage. That needn’t mean you have to change the substance of the point you’re making. I only properly realized how long and multi-claused my sentences can be when I heard myself holding forth on the radio. Learning to cut back, in speech and also any kind of writing, I think has helped me be more engaging (at least I hope it has).

RT. I always took it as a productive challenge to say what I had to say in the Times or in a general interest magazine (or when lecturing to nonprofessional audiences) without using insider language. I never found it impossible. One of the best examples I can give is something I remember Will Crutchfield doing decades ago. He is now a conductor, but started out as the best young classical music reviewer I ever read, and in one old New York Times piece, he defined appoggiatura for his readers by writing “Think of the Beatles’ ‘YESterday’.” (I’m not sure that example would be as surefire now.) As a result of my New York Times experience I have become very intolerant of jargon and of “difficult” writing generally. I used to preach to my pupils till I’m sure I exasperated them that nothing is easier than to be difficult or more difficult than to be easy. Achieving that easiness is what makes you a real writer. A beloved parable from one of John Updike’s “Bech” books: the eponymous American writer, meeting what he called a Bulgarian “poetess,” asked her condescendingly whether her poems were difficult. “They are difficult,” she replied, “to write.” Yes!

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*Musicological Brainfood* is a fresh intermittent IMS dish—an “amuse-bouche”—that may delight or possibly perturb you. These pithy, informal paragraphs are cooked up by leading musicologists to advance, refresh, or reinvigorate different aspects of our field; and they are anything but bland. Remember, these are “provocations” with flavors designed to prod, needle, and pinch your brain. They are not meant to be representative, and they are surely not official or definitive. Enjoy!