

## The background and topic of the workshop\*

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It is not easy for me to comment on the workshop “Cognition of Early Polyphony”. I may be justified in interfering, but it would be wrong to suspect that I am doing so. Nevertheless, I am glad to take this opportunity to present my personal view on some central points.

Toward the end of my time as a student at the University of Vienna, the subdiscipline of “Comparative Musicology” was introduced alongside “Historical Musicology” (or simply “Musicology”). It was in this context that I came across a handout for a round table entitled “Origins of Western Polyphony” at the 8<sup>th</sup> conference of the International Musicological Society in New York in 1962. The paper was by Marius Schneider, an authority on so-called “early polyphony” at that time. When I started my research on the so-called “Parisian polyphony” of the 12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, it soon became clear to me that this music must be placed in a more convincing, broader context beyond the confines of western music by linking together music historical and ethnomusicological approaches.

My own historical project had begun with the book *Der Discantussatz im Magnus liber* (1969); it was only much later that I was able to achieve some kind of closure (*Von Leonin zu Perotin*, 2007). My search for a general explanation of the origin of polyphony forced me increasingly to incorporate literature studies (e.g. *Modalrhythmik als Antike-Rezeption*, 1972), church history (e.g. *Una voce*, 1990) and ethnomusicology (e.g. *Stimmgebung im europäischen Mittelalter*, 1994). This led me to develop the thesis that the origin of early forms of polyphony (especially parallel motion and drones) should be seen as an anthropological process comparable with the development of tools that (at least for the moment) cannot be dated with any precision, namely: the emergence of consciousness followed by a gradual increase in the rational usage of natural proto-musical elements (such as overtones, sound, vocalization, fusion and listening styles), which had been used earlier, but only unconsciously (e.g. *Die paraphonista oder Klangprinzip und Organum*, 1994; *Verklanglichung. Für eine Überwindung der Dichotomie Ein- und Mehrstimmigkeit*, 1998). My various obligations meant that I could only pursue these ideas in small steps (see Celestini/Kokorz ed., *Das sogenannte Organum*, 2011). But I eventually managed to move beyond my original goal (see Kokorz, *Klanganalyse und Mehrstimmigkeit*, 2001). I am of course aware that further contributions would be desirable.

The hindrances included taking over as head of the Institut für Musikwissenschaft at the University of Graz in 1971, which meant that I should cover the discipline of

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musicology as broadly as possible. After some further preparation (e.g. K. Candussi, *Ansätze und Perspektiven der Musikalitätsforschung*, Diplomarbeit 1984) and the establishment of an assistant professorship (1982) and a professorship (1997), I was able to establish Austria's first chair in systematic musicology alongside the existing chair in (historic) musicology. In this regard, I adhered to the terminology of Guido Adler, who had been influenced by his philosopher friend Alexius Meinong in Graz. Adler proposed his (methodological) subdivision of our discipline in 1885. In discussions about definitions of systematic and historic musicology (and their possible need for adaptation), I always favored differentiation according to a single content-based principle (rather than several pragmatic principles), namely the way in which questions are posed, focusing on changes (or lack of changes) with historical time, or more simply: the difference between a time-axis based approach (many changes) and a cross-sectional approach (no change, or change not in focus). This idea is comparable with the recent distinction between "Zeitraum" vs. "Zeitpunkt", which only works in the German language. In my opinion, we must always focus *first* on content (questions) and only after that on methods (to answer the questions), because the method(s) for a given question cannot be determined for all time, and their future development cannot be predicted. By the way: The Graz aesthetician Friedrich von Hausegger proposed an alternative to Adler's model that was oriented entirely toward content rather than method, in which language was compared with music because of their anthropological relationship in respect to origin and development. Modern linguistics and neuroscience could still learn from his approach.

The choice of topics for this workshop under the auspices of the European Science Foundation seemed to be consistent with my approach. The goal of "bringing together humanities and sciences" was, in fact, reflected by diverse appeals to "polyphony" in the presentations: historically, from *Schwebungsdiaphonie* to the Parisian polyphony of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, and beyond that to the music theory of the 16<sup>th</sup>; systematically, from questions of definition to the long-sought "historically informed listener" and beyond that to questions of neuropsychology. But under the circumstances I cannot conceal a general concern that is inspired by the often problematic relationship between a discipline and its specialization: While interdisciplinarity and intradisciplinarity are surely both absolutely necessary, there might also be a trade-off between them, and inequalities can emerge when a loss of one is compensated by a gain of the other. For that reason, I consider any institutional separation of historic and systematic musicology, such as has occurred in Graz since my retirement, to be counterproductive and wrong.

It follows that a seamless continuation of the questions discussed at the 1962 workshop in New York could hardly have been expected. That would only have been possible if the content of presentations had been somehow constrained. Another reason is language: the development of English as a *lingua franca* for all academic disciplines on all levels has led, in conjunction with economic and cultural globalization, to a kind of arrogant dogma. Many areas of cultural studies can be accused of failing to respond to this problem, perhaps for reasons of thoughtlessness or opportunism. The dominance of one language limits possibilities for expression, and constructive research contributions that are published in different languages are

increasingly ignored (cf. 1969, fn.20). Regarding this conference, the examples are immediately tangible: How often did misunderstandings and false conclusions arise from different concepts of “polyphony” and “science” that were not even recognized as such by conference participants and listeners? Europe is still characterized by different regions, languages, mindsets and so on. Cultural studies, and any sensible person, must be interested in understanding diversity – not in its loss (by leveling out). I am convinced that this is the case, and this is also my commentary on the intention to consider “implications for European cultural identity” and “understanding ‘foreign’ music“.