Editorial: Musicians at the Borders

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We've been here before. Musicians and musicologists, immigrants and refugees, waiting at the border, struggling to cross. Some will succeed, most will not. How, anyway, does one measure successful passage?

Looking back at the century of immigration and exile—when we were here before—there are reasons enough to claim modest success. The International Congress of Musicology, organized by the American Musicological Society on 11–18 September 1939 in New York City, provided the opportunity for scores of European musicologists, many of them German and Jewish, to flee fascism and build new lives and careers in the United States. The World Centre for Jewish Music in Palestine, organized by amateur musicians and music scholars in Jerusalem, lay the foundations for an international Jewish music culture in 1936, but failed to sustain it past 1940, not in small part because of the inability to secure entry visas.

The pressure on the borders made the acquisition of visas particularly difficult, but again there were some notable successes. The schools and departments of music at American universities invented positions called artists-in-residence in the late 1930s, which were then filled by exiled musicians, especially those from well-known European chamber ensembles, Rudolf Kolisch, for example, in the pioneering Pro Arte Quartet at the University of Wisconsin–Madison. A few musicologists and music scholars, too, received visas to support research and teaching in exile, for example, at the New School for Social Research in New York or at Black Mountain College in North Carolina. Estimates of the number of musicians escaping fascism and Nazism from the early 1930s until 1945 are cautiously placed at 1,500; similar estimates for music scholars reach approximately 150.

The estimates for the musicians and musicologists unable to cross the borders are much higher and much more difficult to verify. The voices of some who tried survive. Albert Schweitzer, for example, wrote to Gustave Reese on 25 July 1939 about the problems preventing many scholars from attending the 1939 International Congress of Musicology in New York City: "Mais, avec la situation en Europe il est difficile de faire des plans d'avance." Most of those unable to pass across the borders suffered tragedy, all too often the path to death. A very few musicologists, among them the Czech H. G. Adler, who survived the concentration camps at Terezín, Auschwitz, and Buchenwald, managed to chronicle the years waiting at the borders.

We've been here before. And we're here again. Staggering numbers of refugees and immigrants are waiting at borders worldwide. As their numbers grow, the attempts to deny passage multiply. Deprivation of the worst kind accompanies those who wait; death greets too many, too often. As we write in Spring 2016, borders

are increasingly and almost daily tightened, with the prospect that many borders in Europe will soon be closed.

As we write about musicians at the borders in the past and present, we embrace quite deliberately the subject position signified by our use of "we." By taking this subject position as twenty-first-century music scholars, we wish to recognize that the field we have inherited is only possible because of our musical and musicological ancestors who struggled to cross borders at a critical, foundational moment in the formation of our discipline. We study and perform the music representing the passage across those borders. Many of our teachers survived that passage. We are convinced that our musicology—the musicology that fills the pages of *Acta Musicologica*—must bear witness to the *longue durée* of borders that critically define an intellectual history we share with those who went before.

There is a subtle dialectic between border and crossing, which the advocates of closed borders as well as the apostles of a globalized, borderless world overlook. A border that cannot be crossed would not be a border. And without borders there wouldn't be any crossing. As Michel Foucault observed, borders and trespassing are not opposites like black and white or inside and outside. One is a condition of the other.

The myth of the foundation of Rome relates that the creation of a frontier and crossing it belong—tragically—together. Both actions, as in the Self and the Other that the border differentiates, determine each other in an indissoluble way. The action of drawing a border constitutes the order of a culture through the exclusion of that which consequently becomes the Other. Only in the moment of trespassing, however, does the border fulfill its task, which is not so much to separate as to demarcate the line of crossing.

A substantial element of this dialectic is the insight that the border between Self and Other is not a line running outside of us, but one inscribed in the very inner core of the Self. For this reason, the border participates in the ambiguities that characterize the relationship between Selfness and Otherness. Perhaps, the border is even the place where these ambiguities arise. The writer Lu Xun described the Great Wall of China as being "sublime and damned." According to Régis Debray, frontiers are at one and the same time fascinating and disgusting, they preclude violence and can justify it, they oppress and liberate. Like rivers, which often assume the function of frontiers, borders connect and separate at the same time.

The Italian composer Giacinto Scelsi lived in a house overlooking the Palatine Hill in Rome. It was there, he used to say, that an ideal border ran, distinguishing the Orient from the Occident. Scelsi suggested this image as a metaphor for his own music, in which the cultural and ideal border between East and West became a contact zone, a sort of third space as theorized by Homi Bhabha, where Self and Other meet in a process of negotiation and mutual reconceptualization.

Borders and borderlands fill our music histories and spread across the landscapes of our music ethnographies. Many of the earliest religious and poetic texts realized

through song and music chart the paths of civilizations pushing steadily at their borders. In the *Rg Veda*, the oldest of the Brahmanic Hindu hymn anthologies (ca. fourteenth to eleventh century BCE), but still practiced in oral tradition, songs of creation follow the settlement of South Asia by tribal peoples moving from Central and Western Asia. The very condition of being itself is enunciated by arrival at and crossing borders both ontological and epistemological. The first repertories of song that coalesced as epic—the Five Books of Moses, the *Odyssey*, the *Rāmāyana*, the *Bhagavad Gita*—narrated the lives of entire societies seeking passage across vast borders in order to secure better lives, to the security of nationhood. The convergence of narrative and song in epic during the European Middle Ages—*El Cid*, the *Kosovo Cycle*, *Orlando*—fixed the borders of Europe as zones between Self and Other. It was from these borders and beyond that the musical genres and repertories of modernity emerged, be they Johann Gottfried Herder's *Volkslieder* in the eighteenth century or the canonization of improvisatory modal practice across Asia in the twentieth century.

Acta Musicologica, as the journal of the International Musicological Society, must respond to and respect the subtle dialectic between border and crossing. For the IMS and in its journal, borders mark not only different cultural and scholarly traditions, but also disciplinary and subdisciplinary discourses. The task of an international journal with plural subdisciplinary areas is not to blur these borders, but to transform them into a discursive site in which differences become productive.

When musicians wait at the borderlands of the modern and postmodern worlds, they all-too-often occupy zones marked by danger, fragility, and even death. Music from the edge of empire or borne across the Middle Passage of Atlantic slave-trade may have yielded hybridity to musical globalization, but the cost in human terms was enormous. Too often, the borderlands became bloodlands, the condition of Jewish music in the twentieth-century Baltic to which Kevin C. Karnes turns in the pages of *Acta Musicologica* (84, no. 2 [2012]: 253–88). Also in the pages of *Acta* (87, no. 1 [2015]: 99–115), Dafni Tragaki resounds the *rebetiko* past of Greece to give voice to what she calls the monstrous politics of the fissures that form Europe's borderlands today.

Such articles by colleagues contributing to *Acta Musicologica* signal a hopeful move toward a musicology of borders. Such a musicology could reformulate the increasing centrality of marginal musics and marginalized peoples. It could engage directly with the forces—hegemonic, imperial, and neoliberal—that claim borders keep danger out by restricting the movement of immigrants and refugees across them. In the concerted voices of those contributing to *Acta* it could challenge music scholars to ensure that the borders of our discipline are inclusive and not exclusive. How, we ask in this editorial, can we use our research and teaching to open borders and enrich our ideas with exchange? We are committed to a concept for *Acta* that encourages border-crossing and expands the potential of musicology to be inclusive, both as a discipline and as a journal that furthers many rather than

few musical approaches to our basic humanity. Our intellectual history has already shown the ways in which such passage across the borders between Self and Other is critical to understanding who "we" are, collectively confronting the borders that would separate us from them.

We've been here before.