

## Editorial: Musicology at the Global Front Lines

Philip V. Bohlman and Federico Celestini

We've been here before, musicologists facing historical moments of global proportions. Such moments, the rise of European fascism in the 1930s, for instance, alter the lives of individual scholars, and they lead to responses across an entire field, such as those rerouting the history of the International Musicological Society (IMS).<sup>1</sup> These are the moments of conflict and violence, of the political and cultural realignments that divided the world into East and West in the twentieth century, and opened an even greater gap of inequality between North and South in the twenty-first century. The competition for scarce resources, the tragic journeys of refugees, the plight of those in want, all these define the global front lines, and each dramatically transforms global musical landscapes, past, present, and future.

As we write these lines in the spring of 2020, the global front lines are fracturing once again, breached as the COVID-19 pandemic leaves no one in the world unaffected. Once again, we find ourselves as musicologists confronting those front lines, increasingly confused and fearful of the new reality that they impose upon us, our students, and the lives of those for whom we write, perform, and secure a place for music in the world. At this moment, we no longer have a choice about which side of globalization we might prefer. There is no denying it or blaming it on others; there is no parsing music history between repertoires and musical practices with little connection to the new reality of our common lived-in world.

Whatever our relation to the musicology represented in *Acta Musicologica* and embodied by the membership of the IMS, we are fellow citizens in the world of which the new reality is a part. As we write, the dimensions of the global front lines we collectively confront as musicologists have already become starkly apparent. The universities at which we teach are shuttering their music departments, in many cases beyond the foreseeable future. Local concerts and entire professional seasons are canceled. The intimacy that intensifies the ways we teach music is being replaced by "remote learning," the tools for which are still wanting. We advise our students to reconceptualize theses and dissertations, and we wonder how even the most generously endowed research projects can continue.

---

1 See, for example, the essays in Baumann and Fabris, *The History of the IMS*.

For many colleagues the front lines of their musicological labors are precarious, if not dangerous. With funding of music education habitually limited, many teachers face only uncertainty about the way forward. For the ethnomusicologists and musicologists who prefaced their disciplinary methods with the imperative “applied,” the primary goal of which was to assist the disenfranchised and above all to “do something good with music,” the front lines rapidly proliferate, while the means aiding passage diminish. We know only too well the stories from our colleagues and students researching in the danger zones that open at the national and sectarian borders of the Middle East, or that exacerbate the ethnic and religious conflicts of Africa and South Asia. Such front lines were never far away, but at this moment they draw ever closer. How strikingly we sense their proximity for musicology when we witness the remarkable integrity and leadership of IMS President Daniel K. L. Chua, for whom all distance from the front lines in Hong Kong long ago disappeared.

As musicologists find themselves again at the global front lines, we are compelled to ask the question, How do we respond to a moment that is so troubled and fragile? The answers to that question may be many and varied, but we believe also that they will be most effective when they grow from the collective strength of the entire field of musicology. *Acta* has historically provided some of the best evidence for this collective strength, above all because it provides the historiographical record for the global presence of musicology. The struggles of European beginnings at a moment of ideological conflict run through the pages of early volumes,<sup>2</sup> just as the emergence of multiple musicologies in an increasingly globalized twenty-first century find their place in recent volumes. Contested moments, some long silenced, are chronicled with growing frequency in the most recent *Acta* numbers.<sup>3</sup>

As musicology’s collective voices gain in strength at the global front lines, it is also critical to take stock of the ways to consolidate their disciplinary strength. Reflecting on recent trends in the IMS and the disciplinary transformations that *Acta* documents and potentially mobilizes, we should like to draw attention to several of the strategies that musicologists are bringing to the global front lines:

*Critical Pedagogy:* In order to ensure that musicologists approach the front lines with the greatest possible collective strength, it is of enormous importance to re-inforce our common mission as teachers, and to do so with the tools and goals of critical pedagogy. Preparing the generations of our students and then of their students has always been central to our pedagogical endeavor, but with the present threat to institutions of higher learning, and the diminished respect for the value of knowledge in the arts and humanities in many places of the world, a critical turn toward pedagogy has never been more imperative.

---

2 Fauser, “Some Challenges for Musicological Internationalism.”

3 Cf., for example, the essays by Jennifer Iverson and Jeanna Kniazeva in the pages that follow.

*Innovative Musicology:* It is not enough for a university simply to be a center of professional training. Universities are places for criticism and challenge, in which all manifestations of human culture are questioned and pursued with traditional and innovative approaches, in unrestricted autonomy. Max Weber regarded the diversity of value spheres as a distinguishing characteristic of modernity. The only convincing answer to the reduction of this diversity and to the dominance of economic principles can be found through an engagement with art and science that leads to the conception of new lifeworlds, which in turn make apparent the contingency of current ones. Musicologists are engaged with and contribute to this mission through innovative musicology.

*Musicology Lives Matter:* Musicology's collective is the embodiment of many individual lives. Each scholar contributes a distinctive voice and provides crucial agency as the field encounters the front line. The IMS and *Acta* recognize the contributions of individual members, seeking new ways to nurture collective biography with new forums, among them the annual series, "Lives in Musicology."

*The Politics and Power of Publications:* It is critical to what we accomplish as scholarship that musicologists identify the ways in which politics and power intersect at the global front lines we encounter. Music plays an extremely significant role in the politics of culture, often determining the ways in which equality is exercised or undermined.<sup>4</sup> The expanding presence of political subjects in musicological scholarship is particularly evident in studies on the Cold War, as well as the instrumentalization of music in the rise of nationalism and populism in the twenty-first century.

*Plural Musicologies:* The IMS and *Acta* are concerned with the promotion of international cooperation among musicologists. Musicology incorporates many different areas and approaches, and is practiced in a diverse array of cultural regions across the whole world. There is no such thing as a global musicological discourse, but rather a variety of discourses and practices, which are articulated in numerous languages, methods, and traditions in regional and subdisciplinary cultures. We view this plurality as a virtue, and in *Acta* endeavor to encourage the dialogue between and among musicological methods, traditions, and discourses.

*Scholars at the Front Lines:* Central to the leitmotifs that we trace through this editorial is that musicologists themselves muster their disciplinary methods at the front lines in increasingly robust ways. These disciplinary methods rise from the urgent call for efficacy, and they coalesce around the distinctive collectives who forge new methods and develop new venues for the dissemination of action, among the most widespread being engaged musicology and applied ethnomusicology.

---

4 See, for example, Hemetek, Kölbl, and Sağlam, *Ethnomusicology Matters*.

When musicology reaches the front lines—as individuals, as a collective, as diverse disciplines, as a field with international dimensions—it possesses the power to confront historical moments such as that we now face with a heightened degree of unity. The collective whole swells as the musicologies unite, as they reach across subdisciplinary borders, as they seek ways to act with common purpose. We believe that such common purpose underlies what *Acta* makes possible for the IMS and for musicology globally. At historical moments of such magnitude *Acta* stands with the IMS and musicology as they actively become more than themselves at the global front lines.

## Reference List

- Baumann, Dorothea, and Dinko Fabris, eds. *The History of the IMS (1927–2017)*. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2017.
- Fausser, Annegret. “Some Challenges for Musicological Internationalism in the 1930s.” In *The History of the IMS (1927–2017)*, edited by Dorothea Baumann and Dinko Fabris, 20–24. Kassel: Bärenreiter, 2017.
- Hemetek, Ursula, Marko Kölbl, and Hande Sağlam, eds. *Ethnomusicology Matters: Influencing Social and Political Realities*. Vienna: Böhlau, 2019.