

Ethnomusicology: Its Role, Power and Significance in the Humanities

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EXCERPT

In this 40th LaFollette lecture, I start by addressing the fact that in the course of time, the music discipline became divided into four different academic sub-disciplines including: Music Theory and Composition, Historical Musicology, Ethnomusicology, and Electronic Music. I discuss the fact that it was in the 1950's CE, when many global scholars collaborated and were in total agreement that "ethnomusicology" will be used from then on, as a forum for a very effective academic approach for learning and understanding "the study of music in its social and cultural context". Since then, this interdisciplinary ethnomusicology discipline has been and continues to be studied through its role and power in the lives of people. This is done by looking at and studying as well as analyzing a number of humanistic elements that among others include linguistics, aesthetics, ethics, mental health, social organizations, etc., etc. The analytical examination of all those, definitely confirm the deep role, the power and significance the ethnomusicology sub-discipline plays in the humanities.

The LaFollette Lecture Series was established by the Wabash College Board of Trustees to honor Charles D. LaFollette, their longtime colleague on the Board. The lecture is given each year by a Wabash College Faculty member who is charged to address the relation of his or her special discipline to the humanities broadly conceived.

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The Charles D. LaFollette Lecture Series

Ethnomusicology: Its Role, Power and Significance in the Humanities

James K. Makubuya

Department of Music

Towards the end of the Fall semester of 2018, when Prof. Cheryl Hughes invited me to deliver this year's 40th LaFollette lecture, I took a great professional pleasure at the invitation. But I must admit upfront, that as soon as I accepted that great honor bestowed with the invitation, I also immediately realized that it came with a legion of challenges. After some concentrated thought, I decided to divide the legion of challenges in two different but related groupings. One of the groupings included fulfilling the goals and objectives that were set up when the LaFollette Lectureship series were established. Summarily put, by the challenges of that invitation, I was charged with a task of discussing the relation of my academic discipline – ethnomusicology – to the humanities. The second grouping of the legion of challenges which I will address today as well, is to share with my audience and readers – after the lecture presentation – the critical reflection of the extent to which the pursuance of my academic discipline – ethnomusicology – has not only developed me academically but has also expanded my appreciation of the global diversity of the humanistic elements.

Based on the title for this 40th LaFollette lecture which is “Ethnomusicology: Its Role, Power and Significance in the Humanities”, my approach to address the legion of challenges mentioned above, will be to discuss and provide illustrations as well as answers, in response to a set of questions. Since the two key terms for this 40th LaFollette lecture are “Humanities” and “Ethnomusicology,” the first set of questions I will address and answer with illustrations will be: What is the contextual definition for each of those two terms? The second set of questions I will address will be: What is the functional role of ethnomusicology? Then the third question I will address is: What are the powerful multidirectional elements of ethnomusicology? I will then finally conclude with the fourth set of questions to address: “What are the multidisciplinary contributions ethnomusicology has made and continues to make that subsequently confirm its significance in the humanities?”

I. The Contextual Definitions of the Two Key Terms in the Title

A. Humanities

Based on the many readings I looked at in preparation for this 40th LaFollette lecture, I found that there was a broadly general agreement that scholars use the term 'Humanities' to refer inclusively to a group of academic disciplines that focus on the study of aspects of human society and culture. As the picture in Figure 1 below and the summarily defined terms in it may illustrate, the academic disciplines with a focus on the study of the aspects of human society and culture include:

1. **Music** – a pattern of sounds produced by people singing or playing instruments;
2. **Philosophy** - a way of thinking about the world, the universe, and society;
3. **History** – that examines and analyzes a sequence of past events, and objectively determines the patterns of cause and effect that determine them.
4. **Religious studies** – an academic field devoted to research into religious beliefs, people's behaviors and institutions.
5. **Language** – a system of communication by either spoken or written words used by a particular community.
6. **Literature** – summarily described as works of art made up of written words like poetry and prose.
7. **Visual arts** – a discipline that focuses on the arts created primarily for visual perception, as drawings, graphics, paintings, sculpture, and the decorative arts.
8. **Performing arts** – forms of art in which people use their voices, body and objects to convey artistic expressions.

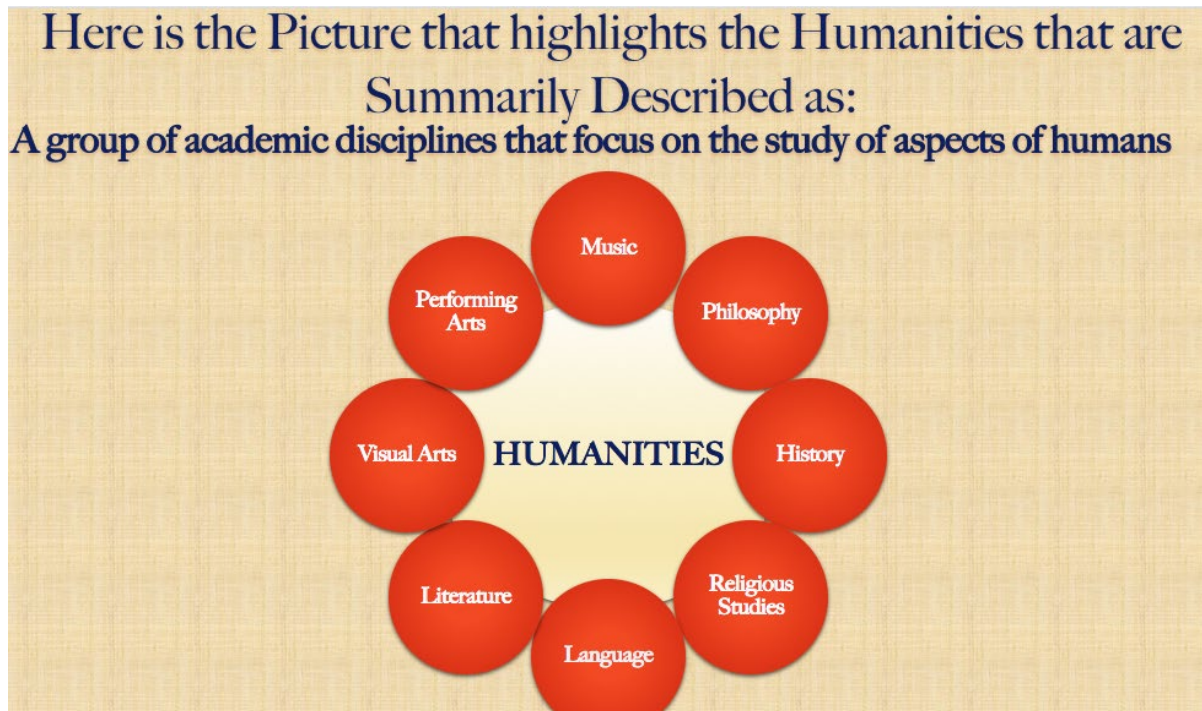


Figure 1. Academic Disciplines of the Humanities

B. Ethnomusicology

The second **key term** to be contextually defined for this 40th LaFollette lecture is **ethnomusicology**. But before I summarily discuss the definition of ethnomusicology, I would like to start by clarifying the fact that at the beginning of time, there was a big academic discipline called “music”. But over the course of time, that one big academic “music” discipline became divided and grouped into four academic sub-disciplines. That was not done for bad reasons, but for scholarly related reasons. As the picture in Figure 2 below may summarily illustrate, today, the four music discipline groupings include:

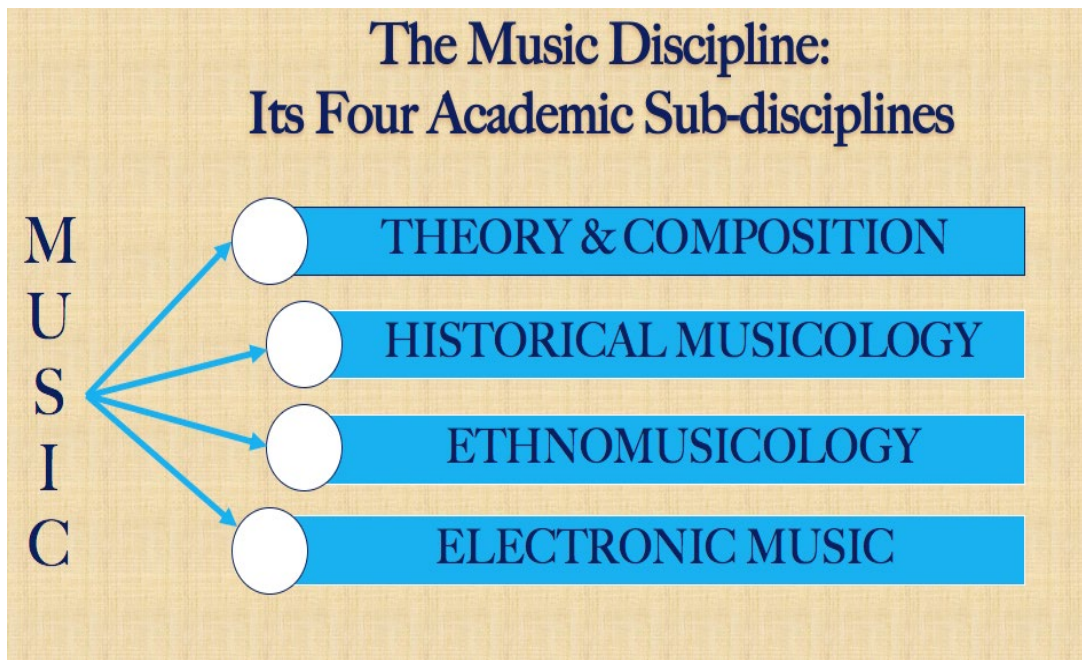


Figure 2. The Four Academic Music Sub-disciplines

- (i) **Music Theory and Composition** is a sub-discipline that focuses on (a) how music is put together, and (b) what makes it pleasant to the ear.
- (ii) **Historical Musicology** is a highly diverse sub-discipline of music that from a historical point of view, covers such elements as (a) composition, (b) performance, (c) reception and (d) criticism of music over time.
- (iii) **Ethnomusicology**, as will be discussed later, is a sub-discipline through which the study of music is done from the cultural and social aspects of the people who make and receive it.
- (iv) **Electronic Music** is the fourth subdiscipline which is summarily defined as music in which the sounds are (a) originated, (b) organized, and/or (c) altered by electronic devices.

This 40th LaFollette lecture, however, will address only one of those four sub-disciplines which is Ethnomusicology. But before I address the contextual definition of ethnomusicology, it is

important to acknowledge the fact that the recognition of ethnomusicology as a sub-discipline did not happen overnight. There is documented evidence that from around the beginning of the 19th century CE, a number of scholars from different parts of the world had long started to analyze various music types and styles in a way that was quite different from what had at the time been officialized, if you will. For example, Bronisław Malinowski, a Polish ethnographer, folklorist, and composer, regarded as one of the earliest European ethnomusicologists is documented to have started collecting Polish folk songs in 1839 CE.¹

Furthermore, during its early development, there were many scholars like Jaap Kunst that continued struggling with working on the appropriate definition or title that would concisely describe what we know today as “ethnomusicology” – an academic discipline the focus of which would be different from the other sub-disciplines. In addition, in his book, *The Study of Ethnomusicology* (1983), Bruno Nettl, for example, clearly elaborates on the fact that in its early development, many scholars went back and forth between giving it names that ranged from ‘comparative musicology’ to ‘non-Western music’, ‘music of tribal cultures’, and ‘the study of all music/s of the world’, etc., etc.²

Secondly, as it has already been articulated by Nettl, the fact is that what we refer to as ethnomusicology today,

had its antecedents in the 18th and early 19th centuries; it began to gather energy with the development of recording techniques in the late 19th century. Ethnomusicology used to be referred to then, as comparative musicology until about 1950 CE. It is around that time, when the term *ethnomusicology* was introduced simultaneously by Jaap Kunst, the Dutch scholar of Indonesian music and by several American scholars, including Richard Waterman and Alan Merriam (paraphrased from Nettl’s *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, pp. 3 - 15).

So, it was during the years of the 1950’s CE, when ethnomusicology started being embraced as an academic discipline by academic institutions. It was during that period, when several ‘ethnomusicology-related’ societies and periodicals were founded. Among the most notable ones were the Society for Ethnomusicology – SEM, and the International Council for Traditional Music – ICTM. From the time when both of these societies started, not only do they conduct regular conferences but have to the present day continued publishing journals with the focus on Ethnomusicology.

And guess what! As Figure 3 below may help to summarize the process and definition through which this sub-discipline went, after struggling for decades to find the appropriate name of the discipline – specifically for about 125 years starting in the 1830s CE – in the year 1955 CE, the term ‘ethnomusicology’ was finally officially recognized as the title for the third music sub-discipline.

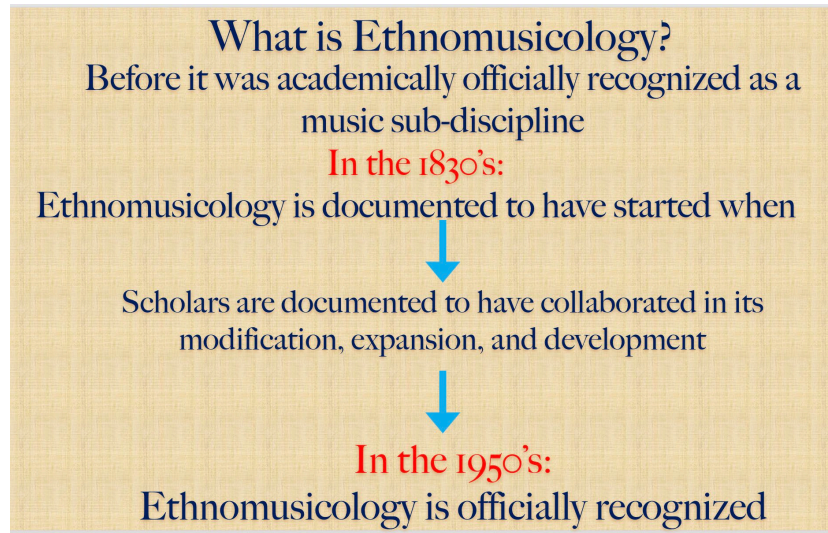


Figure 3. The Developmental Process of Ethnomusicology

So, from the period of 1955 CE, ethnomusicology is a term that has since been used to describe and define this sub-discipline as “the study of music in its social and cultural context.” That descriptive definition of this sub-discipline directly relates its role to the ‘humanities.’ Even more, as Figure 4 below will pictorially elaborate, together with what I will illustrate later in this paper, ethnomusicology is a very highly interdisciplinary discipline. It is the interdisciplinary nature of this sub-discipline that enables scholars to examine and understand it from the angles of (i) the sonic elements as an organized art form whose medium is sound as well as silence, and (ii) what the music means to the people, i.e. its practitioners and audiences. And as you can see below, Figure 4 summarily illustrates the definition of ethnomusicology and how it relates to the humanistic features.

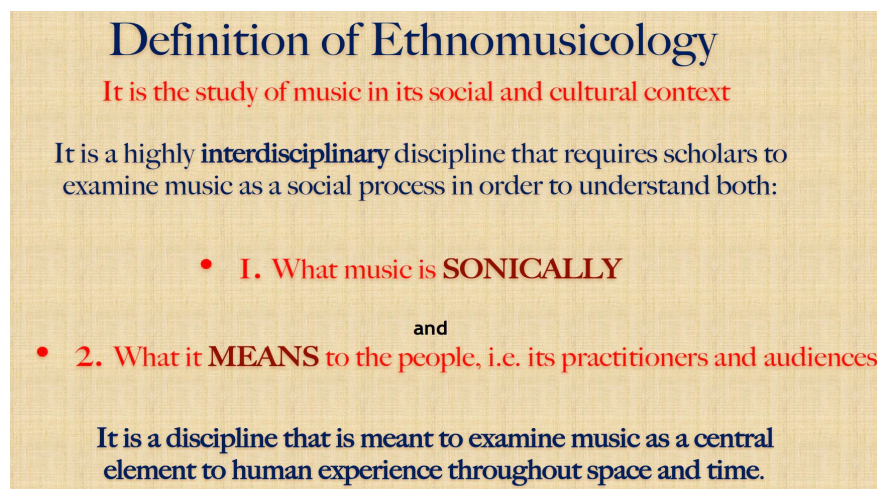


Figure 4. The Definition of Ethnomusicology

II. The Role of Ethnomusicology in the Humanities

In the course of time, ethnomusicology has become a respectful significant marker of ethnicity, cultures and nations. As a result of several biannual international conferences, members of the ethnomusicology society have collectively continued to identify the role of ethnomusicology. Summarily put, one way of understanding the role of ethnomusicology is to explore its profound relationships in a number of human areas pictorially reflected in Figure 5 below:

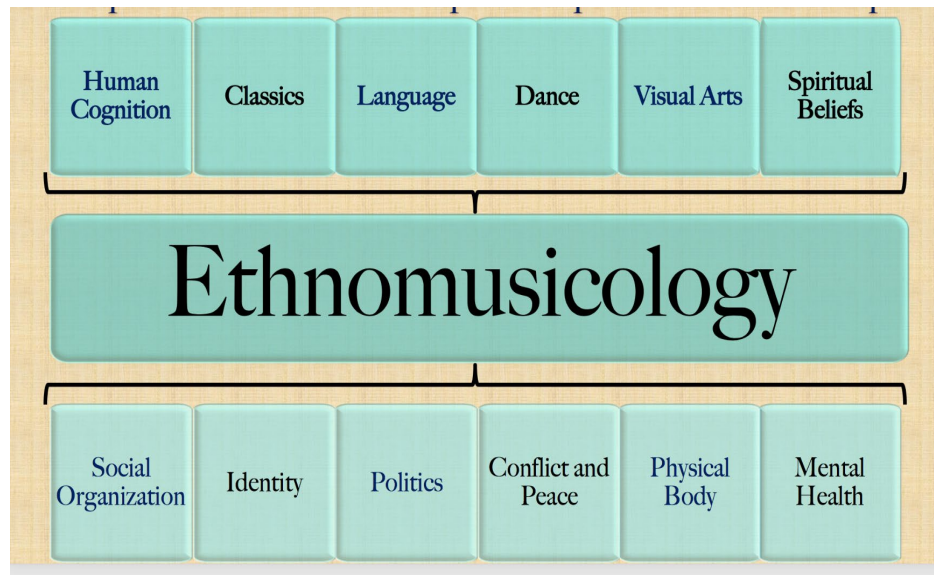


Figure 5. Ethnomusicology Relationship to Human Areas

As summarily highlighted in Figure 5 above, the human areas concisely defined and described below, include in random order:

1. **Human cognition** – the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and use of the human senses.
2. **Classics** – a term that refers to human works of the art of recognized and established values.
3. **Language** – the method of human communication – either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words.
4. **Dance** – a performing art form, consisting of purposefully selected sequences of human movement that has aesthetic and symbolic value/s.
5. **Visual arts** – the arts created primarily by humans for visual perception, e.g. drawings, graphics, etc.
6. **Spiritual beliefs** – the human sense/s of connection to something bigger than people themselves, which also typically involves a search for meaning in life.
7. **Social organization** – a phrase used to refer to a pattern of relationships between and among human individuals and social groups.
8. **Identity** – a term used to define who and what a person is.

9. **Politics** – a term that refers to human activities associated with the governance of a culture, a country or an area.

10. **Conflict and peace** – a process for identifying and analyzing violent and nonviolent behavior/s.

11. **Physical body** – a phrase used to refer to a collection of matter within a defined boundary and identified by the properties of the material.

Then last and by no means least,

12. **Mental health** – a phrase that refers to a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential.

But even more, in the course of time, scholars were in total agreement that to understand music in its social and cultural context, some of which have just been summarily mentioned above, one has to recognize a number of humanistic elements in ethnomusicology. In their different various writings that included articles and book chapters, Jaap Kunst, Mantle Hood, Nketia Kwabena, Bonnie Wade, and the list continues, elaborately illustrated the fact that since from its earliest days the ethnomusicology sub-discipline has been studied through its role in the lives of people, we need to look at and study music by analyzing a number of humanistic elements. As pictorially illustrated and displayed in Figure 6 below, those ‘humanistic’ elements include:



Figure 6. Humanistic Elements in Ethnomusicology

In addition to having them pictorially highlighted in Figure 6 above, here-to-follow is how each of those ‘humanistic’ elements in ethnomusicology is summarily and concisely defined:

1. Music elements

This is a phrase used to refer collectively to the elements the music producers use to put together musical excerpts like songs, instrumental pieces, etc. Such elements include the use of:

- (i) **melody** which is defined as a sequence of single pitches that are musically satisfying and recognized as a whole.
- (ii) **tuning system** – a phrase used to mean or to refer to the tones or pitches that are used when singing or playing an instrument that produces a musical piece.
- (iii) **rhythm** which refers to the pattern of regular or irregular pulses caused in a music excerpt.
- (iv) **expressions** that refers to the appropriate use of volume and/or speed in a music excerpt.
- (v) **texture** which refers to the interweaving of melodic and or rhythmic parts in a musical excerpt.
- (vi) **timbre**, a term used to describe or refer to the quality of a musical sound.
- (vii) **form**, an element used to refer to the structure and design of a music piece.

Then last but by no means least,

- (viii) **genre**, a term that refers to a standard category and overall character of a music work.

When you look at Figure 7 below, for example, you can see a pictorial image that serves as an illustration of the musical elements I have just summarily described above. Figure 7 below reflects the music elements of a traditional folk musical piece with the title *Bukunja* which is track number 14 on the *Taata Wange*³ {My Dad} CD (Makubuya, 1997).

Five Tone Scale: Culture of the Baganda

d r m s l l s m r d

Music Elements for the Song "Bukunja":

Melody	Pentatonic Tuning system
Rhythm	Expressions { Dynamics Tempo
Texture	Parts
Genres	Timbre
	Form

Endongo (bowl lyre) Ennanga (bow harp)

Figure 7. Pictorial and Audio CD Illustration of Music Elements

2. Language

Another humanistic element constantly examined in the ethnomusicology sub- is “**language.**” With regard to language, there are two sub-elements ethnomusicologists examine. One is **intonation** which means the

rise and fall of the voice in speaking; and the second one is **verbal rhythm**, a phrase used to refer to the rhythmic flow of the lyrics in speech (but also in folk music). When one listens for example to track #4: 'Talking drum' on the CD *Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom: Akan Music from Ghana*⁴ you can recognize the fact that, the intonation and verbal rhythm of the person speaking, are directly mimicked by the drum. This musical recording of the Akan people of Ghana was recorded to illustrate the fact that in their culture when drums are played, they follow a system referred to as onomatopoeia – a term used to describe the process of creating a word that phonetically imitates or resembles the sound being produced. Ethnomusicologists have discovered that both of those elements directly affect the melodic contour and rhythmic flow of the music that folk musicians perform. Since most of the music is used as a means of communication, as track #4 may clearly illustrate, the lyrics articulated either vocally or using musical instruments, reflect or replicate the accurate linguistic tonal pitches and rhythmic flow of the words of the respective languages.

3. Ethics

Then there is the **ethical** implication. In his book entitled *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, Bruno Nettl discusses the fact that throughout the critical developmental years of the 1950s and 1960s, ethnomusicologists shaped and legitimized the fledgling field. That was done by discussing the responsibilities of ethnomusicologists and the ethical implications of ethnomusicological study, articulations of ideology, and suggestions for practical methods of research and analysis. One of those suggestions was encourage the ethnomusicologists to put 'participant field research' responsibilities at the center of their holistic investigations of music in its cultural contexts. The ethnomusicologists were in total agreement that one of the most effective approaches for getting a holistic appreciation of a music culture is to travel to the culture, nation, or area of interest and conduct fieldwork while living among the people whose culture they are studying. Today, that is what many ethnomusicologists do because that opportunity directly exposes one not only to the musical sounds produced but also what the music is intended to mean ethically to the people, i.e. its practitioners and audiences.

4. Aesthetics

There is then the element referred to as **Aesthetics**. As you may recall, one other humanistic element in ethnomusicology I briefly mentioned above is **aesthetics**. As you probably know already, aesthetics is a term that is generally used to refer to a set of principles concerned with the nature and appreciation of beauty, in this case the visual objects. There is a very widely accepted global saying that "beauty is in the eyes of the beholder". My personal experience, especially in the multiple field research projects I have been conducting since I graduated from UCLA, is that "the principles of aesthetics vary from culture to culture." What some

humans may refer to as beautiful, others may just be silent about and make no comment. And also just for the record, as ethnomusicologists, we are advised that if one may not agree with what another culture may consider beautiful, out of respect, we should make no comment. To elaborate on this matter of cultural ‘aesthetics’, during my live 40th LaFollette lecture presentation, I shared with my audience three video clips that I took during three of my recent field research projects when I travelled to those three different cultures/countries. The three field research projects and related video clips gave the audience an opportunity to look at and listen to a number of ethnomusicology humanistic elements that I have discussed earlier. In addition, those three video clips gave people in the audience an opportunity to have their cultural take with regard to their respective personal judgements. In this paper, the kind of related video clip illustrations I played during the lecture presentation are in the form of three still picture images (from the video clips). When you look at them, you will clearly see how each of those cultures visibly express their respective aesthetics that are really different from each other in every sense. One of them, which is displayed in Figure 8 below, is a royal dance troupe I did field research on when I was in Laos, East Asia.



Figure 8. The Royal Dance Troupe of Luang Prabang, Laos, East Asia

The second image in Figure 9 below, highlights the Native American cultural aesthetic costumes worn by one of their dancers during their POW WOW events.



Figure 9. Native American Dance Costumes during the POW WOW Event

The third image in Figure 10 below, is still another illustration of the diversity visible in expressions of aesthetics. This one reflects the performance ensemble's selection not only of the musical and dance elements that are part of their Ugandan culture but also their choices of male and female costumes. This is also one of the many human cultural music and dance performance events I experienced when I was conducting field work in the East African nation of Uganda.



Figure 10. Folk Dance by the *Endere* Troupe in Uganda, East Africa

The other humanistic element in ethnomusicology is **cultural ethics** that include decency in costumes that are often respectively culture related.

5. Spiritual Beliefs

The element referred to as **spiritual beliefs** is another one. In the course of time, Ethnomusicology scholars have also found out that for a number of reasons, there are many people all over the world from culture to culture or from one society to the other, that make connections with non-human relationships. When people face issues that are difficult to resolve physically, they find a way of communicating their problems to those non-human connections, if you will. Differently put, those non-human connections are what I would refer to as either ‘spiritual beliefs’ or religions. In the course of time, we have found that there are various ways in which people make those connections. Summarily put, I totally agree with a number of ethnomusicology field researchers that found people making those ‘spiritual beliefs’ connections during such events as rites, rituals or even cultural ceremonies. As Shelemay put it in her book entitled *Soundscape: Exploring Music.....*(2001), “it is impossible to imagine rituals of worship without music” (Shelemay, K. K. p.155).⁵ Shelemay also went further to add that “to preserve the musical tradition that sustains belief, requires an institutional structure in which musicians are trained and regularly perform during the religious ritual” (Shelemay, pp. 178-9). Even more, many ethnomusicologists have found over and over that the music performed during worship settings or rituals conveys and empowers the participants during ritual experiences and provides support as well as confidence to them. Here-to-follow, for example, is Figure 11 that shows two images of different folk musical instruments from two different cultures. The displayed instruments are used by folk musicians to communicate with spirits, non-humans, and/or dead ancestors to seek for guidance or support.

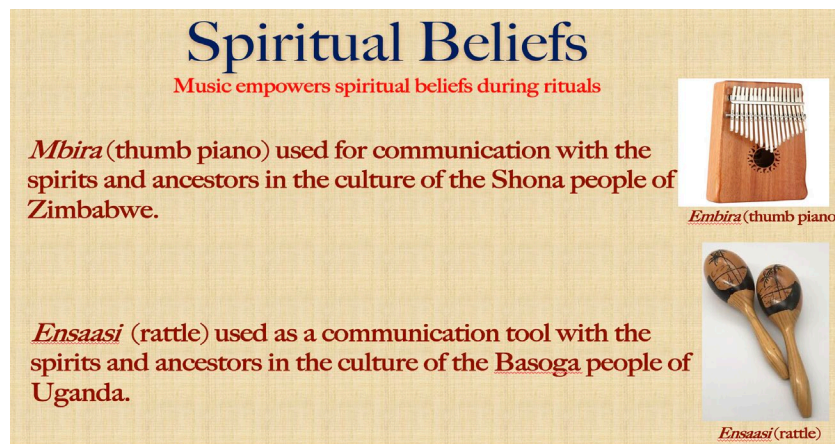


Figure 11. The *Mbira* (thumb piano) & *Nsaasi* (rattle) Instruments

According to the jacket notes on the *Shona Spirit, Mbira Masters from Zimbabwe*⁶, CD 2283 in the Lilly library, in the culture of the Shona people of Zimbabwe, one of the most important functions of the *mbira* (thumb piano) folk instrument is to work as a “telephone to communicate to the spirits.” The *mbira* is played so that it plays a powerful role of contacting both the deceased ancestors and even more ancient tribal guardians during the *mapira* (all-night) ceremonies.⁷ In the culture of the Shona people, there is a strong belief that when they play that *mbira* at the *vdazimu* (ceremonies), the music they perform on both (i) the *mbira* instrument together with (ii) the lyrics the *mbira* performers sing, directly communicate with the spirits. When the *mbira* is played at these *vadzimu* (ceremonies), the role it, i.e. the *mbira*, performs is to serve as the forum through which the *midzimu* (spirits of family ancestors), and *mhondoro/makombwe* (spirits of deceased chiefs, and very ancient ancestors, who are the most powerful guardian spirits of the Shona), can do two things: one is to provide guidance on family and community matters, and the second one is to exert power over weather and health. For example, in the song *Chirombo*, track #3 found on the *Shona Spirit, Mbira Masters from Zimbabwe*⁸ CD 2283, the performers are using the *mbira* to ask the spirits to bring rain during drought, stop rain during floods, and bring clouds when crops are damaged by the sun. In the culture of the Shona people, they use the *mbira* to chase away harmful spirits, and to heal both physical and mental illness. According to the Shona culture, the *mbira* has the power to process that ‘healing’ with or without a *n’anga* (a traditional diviner/herbalist). The *mbira* is also used for personal meditation, and personal prayers to the spirits. But even more, the *mbira* is often included in celebrations of all kinds. The latter include weddings, installation of new chiefs, and in modern times, government events such as international conferences.

Even more, in one of her articles entitled “Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments” 1989, Sue Carole

DeVale, an ethnomusicologist with the disciplinary focus in organology wrote:

Power and meaning are invested in musical instruments throughout the world. They are ascribed to musical instruments essential to the efficacy of rituals of all kinds, from those ensuring fertility to those of royal courts. In construction, the instruments range from the deceptively simple, such as a whittled bullroarer, to the extremely, complex such as a forged bronze gong. Power in musical instruments resides in the spirits believed to be embodied within them or working through them; it often emanates from their music, their very sound (DeVale, p. 94).⁹

This ethnomusicologist, Sue DeVale, wrote that paper to provide material for reflection on the essential spiritual role of musical instruments in the life of mankind. Secondly, her paper goes even further to explicate the ways in which musical instruments embody cultural concepts that are ultimately capable of manifesting the union of the human and spiritual worlds (p. 94).¹⁰ “The spiritual presence in musical instruments,” Sue DeVale continues, “arises from myriad religions that include forms of animism, ancestor worship, or theism as well as syncretic belief systems. Ethnomusicology scholars found a number of examples that can be offered to illustrate the range of spirits manifested in musical instruments. One of them is the fact that was documented to reveal that in Java, Bali and Indonesia, for example, the *gamelan* orchestras have traditionally been essential to religious rites. In Central Java, a gamelan is believed to have its own personal guardian spirit or spirit presence who resides in the largest hanging gong (*gong ageng*).¹¹

6. Cultural Ethics.

As the pictures in Figure 12 below may summarily illustrate, another humanistic element ethnomusicology works with is what I would refer to as ‘cultural ethics.’

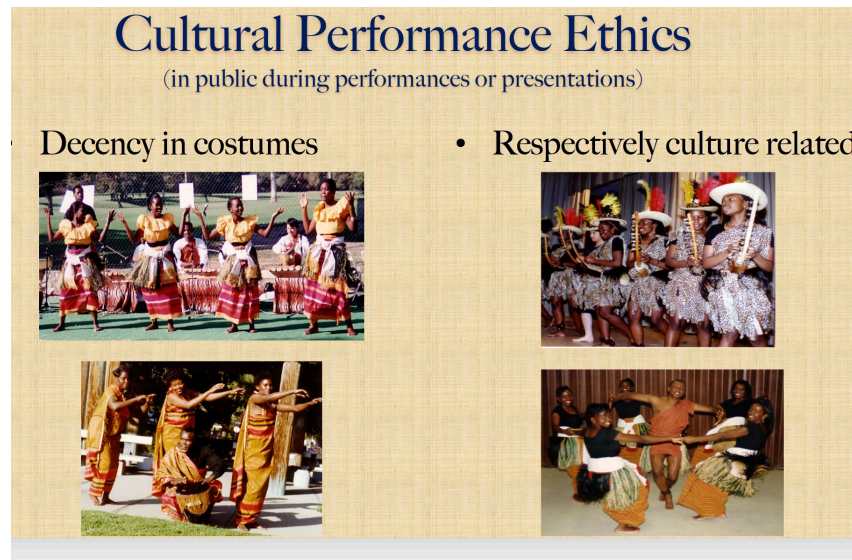


Figure 12. Cultural Performance Ethics in Public Presentations

Each of those four pictures is revealing folk music dances from different cultures. Ethnomusicology works

on making sure that the culture-related public presentations during performances are a combination of four elements including (i) accurate folk dance techniques, (ii) aesthetic appearances, as discussed earlier, (iii) decency in the way performers dress, as long as (iii) the costumes are respectively culture-related.

7. Architectural Designs of Musical Instruments

Although they are primarily thought of as sound production objects, musical instruments also have other humanistic roles – specifically roles of communication of the respective culture-related art. This section is intended to document and share the results of some of the extensive fieldwork projects I have so far conducted on musical instruments. The said fieldwork was prompted in part by the intense curiosity I developed in the course of time, with regard to the rationale (if any) behind the specific designs, shapes, construction materials, and cultural taboos connected with the many folk musical instruments I have come across. As the four pictures in Figure 13 below may reveal, I personally realized that “It must have been naïve on my part, to dismiss the idea that the complex designs on the instruments may have no substantial cultural significance.”



Figure 13. Depiction of Art and Architectural Designs on Folk Instruments

In the course of time, it became increasingly clearer to me that the designs and ornamentations on instruments are indeed used as elements of communication. Differently put, I became more and more convinced that there must be messages being communicated by the ornamentations and designs put on the instruments – especially since those designs and ornamentations had little, if anything, to do with the production of the musical sounds produced on the instruments. The other question that also constantly haunted me, if you will, was about the shapes in which the folk instruments are designed. Were the shapes of the folk instruments prompted by acoustical reasons or did they also have some other messages they were

intended to convey? Summarily put, at the bottom of all those queries was the central question in my mind – the question being: ‘what were or are those meanings (if any) that are intended to be communicated by both the artistic designs, ornamentations and shapes on the folk instruments?’

I then embarked on a journey of exploration with the hope of eventually finding humanistic clues and answers to those questions and subsequent meanings intended to be communicated by people through the folk instruments. In the process of traveling on this journey of enquiry, that is how I came across Sue DeVale’s article entitled “Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments.” In that article she discussed the fact that as an organologist, through the several research projects she conducted, she found out that “the meaning of a musical instrument may be signified externally in its design, construction and care” (p. 94).¹² Later in the article, she even went further to write that “in their meaning, musical instruments embody concepts that link the visual, aural, social and spiritual realms of culture, and aesthetic parallels may exist between instrument design and other arts (p. 100).¹³

8. Ecological Species

Bearing in mind that musical instruments constitute one of the main sources for making ‘musical sound/s’ in ‘music’, the ethnomusicologists found a very direct connection between musical sound and ecological species. This is one of the points mentioned earlier about the interdisciplinary nature of the ethnomusicology sub-discipline. This comes into play because when folk musical instruments are built, the makers use the available ecological species in their neighborhood. When I was doing fieldwork on the different bowl lyres in Uganda, I found out that the sound tables on them were not necessarily built using the same type of animal hides. But even more; my field research on the different log xylophones and different tube fiddles as well as drums also revealed to me that the type of ‘wood’ used for making any of those instruments depended on the wood types available in the location/s where the instrument makers live. This connects directly to the same answer I got from three of my field research informants. Summarily put, those three instrument builders clearly informed me that “when they want to build their instruments, they do not travel tens of miles to get the materials; they look around their environment, and then use the available materials” – be they animal and reptile skins or trees and shrubs. As Figure 14 below may show, some of the skins for making lyre musical instruments will vary not only from culture to culture, but also depending on the geographical location and the available ecological species where the makers of instruments live and build instruments from. Look for example at Figure 14 below:



Figure 14. Goat skin and Monitor Lizard Skin for Making Chordophones

9. Communication

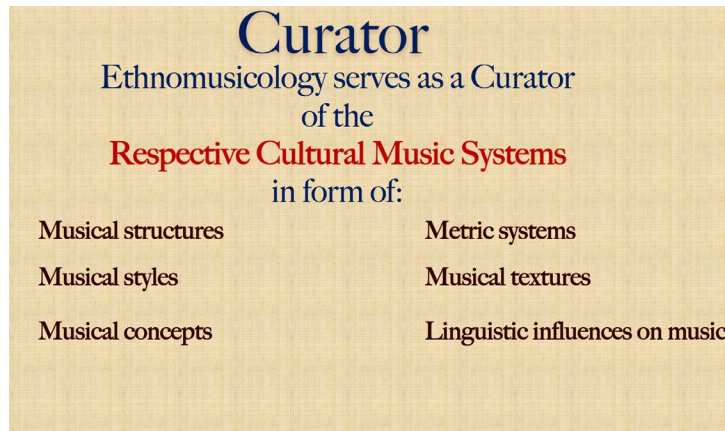
According to Robert McNamara, there was a time in history when ‘drum calls’ were used as invaluable communication devices in villages, camps and even on battlefields. Robert McNamara is a history writer and former magazine journalist. In his article, McNamara elaborates the fact that musicians were primarily noncombatants and did not carry weapons. But at times the buglers and drummers were involved in the action. Drum and ‘bugle calls’ were used on the battlefields to issue commands, though the sound of battle tended to make such communication difficult. “In a number of cases,” McNamara further illustrates that “bugle calls were musical signals that were used to announce scheduled and certain non-scheduled events on an Army installation.”

In addition to McNamara’s point mentioned above, it should also be clearly pointed out that in many countries and cultures, way before the ‘modern phones’ were introduced folk music was used to serve as a means of communication to communities in counties and villages. In the culture of the Baganda people geographically located in the south central region of Uganda, for example, people were using drum rhythms to constantly remind and make sure that the villagers perform their responsibilities as expected. Tens of years ago before “modern technology” and “phone communications’ were introduced, the Baganda, for used to playing the rhythm excerpt on the drum that reflected the vernacular language phrase “*ssaagala agalamidde*” which when translated means “make sure that you wake up to go and work on your jobs”. The other drum rhythm excerpt, again they constantly played on the drum was “*bulungi bwansi*” which when translated was intended to articulate the message “the cleaning of streets and wells” your responsibility;

make sure that clean you constantly clean the street near where you live. Another drum rhythm excerpt that was used in the neighboring villages was “*ggwanga, ggwanga mujje, ggwanga ggwanga mujje*”. Because every family was expected to have at least one drum in the house, that drum rhythm excerpt was played when there was for example an intruder or thief in the house. When translated the played drum rhythm excerpt meant, “there is an intruder, a thief, or a dangerous person in my house”. As soon as the neighbors would hear that drum excerpt, they were required or expected to pick up a club or spear and go where the drum sound was, to save and protect those who have been attacked”. Events were being communicated by means of the drum within a society or community in the case of insecurity, crimes, death, accidents, loots, etc. In such cases, the tragic events may be communicated by members of a community therein by way of drum beating. *Ggwanga mujje* (come to my/our rescue) is the content of this drum rhythm excerpt. As soon as this drum excerpt is heard, all members of the community have to be ready. In order to guarantee that help and support are provided, every family was asked to keep and have ready a drum including drumsticks – so that they can sound it to raise an alarm.

10. Reflections and Curators of Music Systems

Another powerful effect of ethnomusicology to the humanities is to serve as both a curator and a reflection of the cultural music systems. Traditionally, a curator is charged with a function of ensuring a safe preservation of the cultural heritage of an institution’s materials. The curator is also involved with the interpretation of the heritage material. To the majority of people, it is almost common knowledge that in all world folk cultures, when musical instruments are built, in the broadest sense they are primarily intended for the role of producing musical sounds. But for quite some time too, a number of folk music studies have surfaced revealing that in addition to the role of producing musical sounds, a number of folk instruments are also assigned other major functions in their respective cultures. In other words, several ethnomusicology scholars focusing on the study of folk instruments have discovered that the production of sound is only one of the many roles that are multi-functional and performed by instruments in folk societies. With a special focus on the folk musical instruments used by cultures in the East African nation of Uganda, therefore, this section examines and discusses the first two of those roles that are extra-musical performed by ethnomusicology in the respective cultures. As Figure 15 below may summarily project through the reference to folk instruments, ethnomusicology would specifically serve two extra-musical roles. The two include one of serving as ‘reflections’ and the other of ‘functioning’ as curators of the very music systems—like the tuning system and playing techniques of the musical cultures from which folk music and its respective instruments originate, to which they belong, and in which they are used.



**Figure 15. Curatorial Role of Ethnomusicology Performs in the Humanities
In the Way Folk Instruments Serve as Reflections of Cultural Music
Systems**

When discussing the ‘uses and functions’ of the ethnomusicology sub-discipline, in his book *The Study of Ethnomusicology* (2003), Nettl rightly implied that from the time of its inception, among other functions, ethnomusicology helped to establish the identities of folk music (2003: 253).¹⁴ And from the time ‘organology’ was established as a sub-branch of ethnomusicology, scholars have found it helpful to use it as a process through which they would easily establish the identities of folk instruments, thus making it one of the main functions of ‘organology’. It is important to point out and acknowledge that in the recent past, global cultures have witnessed a surge in international migratory movements and changes in cyber culture communications. Both of these changes have led to the current state or situation by which what people see or even hear may have little to do with where the viewers or listeners may be stationed. But in spite of this current scenario (caused by the so-called surge), it can still be argued from the organological point of view, that ethnomusicology has still not abandoned one of its major functions of establishing identities. Regardless of the media from which musical sounds on folk instruments may be heard or witnessed live on stage, they, i.e. folk instruments, are still very articulate in communicating that powerful message regarding the musical culture and/or geographical region they originate from or represent. Ethnomusicology has a powerful role for ensuring that folk instruments communicate that identity message through both the visual and audio elements. The audio element is detectable from the music style heard when instruments are being played and the visual element is highlighted by the shapes, designs and ornamentations put on the instruments when they are built.

In conclusion, with regard to the role, power and significance of ethnomusicology to the humanities, it has

been discussed and illustrated that through this music sub-discipline, there are multiple culture-related roles that ethnomusicology plays in people's lives. Secondly, that not only do the people in all the global cultures just naturally engage in those multiple multidisciplinary activities, but also that they culturally and automatically engage as well as get involved in those human-related activities. Those two points help to powerfully confirm the reason why 90% of ethnomusicology scholars were in total agreement in 1955, that the central definition of ethnomusicology is "the study of music in culture and study of music as culture." And since also the summarized definition of culture is the people's "way of life," all definitely confirm the deep role, the power and significance that the ethnomusicology sub-discipline plays in the humanities.

End Notes

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- ¹ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethnomusicology>. Beginnings and Early History.
- ² Nettl, Bruno. *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, Chapter 1, pp. 13-15. Urbana, University of Illinois Press.
- ³ Makubuya, James K. 1997. *Taata Wange* CD. Track 14. New York, NY. Infinite Studios.
- ⁴ *Rhythms of Life, Songs of Wisdom: Akan Music from Ghana*. Track #4. Recorded January 1, 1996. Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, 1996.
- ⁵ Shelemay, K. K. 2001. *Soundscapes. Exploring Music in a Changing World*. New York, NY. W.W. Norton & Co.
- ⁶ *Shona Spirit, Mbira Masters from Zimbabwe*. Track #3: Chirombo. CD 2283.
- ⁷ <https://mbira.org/what-is-mbira/mbira-music/the-role-of-mbira-in-shona-culture>.
- ⁸ *Shona Spirit, Mbira Masters from Zimbabwe*. Track #3: Chirombo. CD 2283.
- ⁹ DeVale, Sue Carole. Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments.
- ¹⁰ DeVale, Sue Carole. Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments.
- ¹¹ DeVale, Sue Carole. Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments. p. 95.
- ¹² DeVale, Sue Carole. Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments. p. 94.
- ¹³ DeVale, Sue Carole. Power and Meaning in Musical Instruments. p. 100.
- ¹⁴ Nettl, Bruno. *The Study of Ethnomusicology*, Chapter 2.

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