

# ANTHROPOLOGY OF MUSIC

Anthro 430 / Music 480 Spring 2006 1:30-3:50 Tu Music 212 Prof. Ellingson ([ellingsn@u...](mailto:ellingsn@u...))  
Class website: [http://faculty.washington.edu/ellingsn/Anthro\\_Music.html](http://faculty.washington.edu/ellingsn/Anthro_Music.html)

## Synopsis of Anthropological Theories 1: Pre-20th-Century Theories

*These brief synopses are to help you choose theoretical/methodological perspectives for use in your term paper. They should be supplemented by readings from the corresponding weekly bibliographies.*

### *Pre-19th Century*

#### ***Exploration and Colonialism (Historical period — NOT a school of anthropological theory!)***

**Main emphases:** European explorers' accounts (from late 15th c. onwards) of non-Western peoples and cultures provided basis for development of anthropology and ethnomusicology, and provided most ethnographic information until development of anthropological fieldwork in late 19th-early 20th c. (see **Fieldwork**, below). Recent historical and critical work in anthropology and cultural studies has stressed influence of colonialism, but earliest ethnographies were pre-colonial, seeking information as defensive response to invasions by Mongol and Turkish armies, reflecting European weakness rather than hegemonic power. Emphasis shifted during colonial era to European superiority, although early ethnographic writings treated some non-European cultures as potentially equal competitors, or even (as in pre-19th c. writings on China) as more advanced and/or powerful than Europe. Colonial emphasis on acquisition of knowledge, including cultural and musical knowledge, among other spoils of conquest.

**Main varieties:** Early ambassador-spies to Mongols (mid-13th c.) established dual ethnographic traditions of neutral, impersonal description of aspects of culture (kinship, social organization, subsistence, religion, etc.) in catalog format with use of “ethnographic present tense” to facilitate readers' predicting how “the enemy” might act (Plano Carpini), and tradition of presenting similar information as personalized sequential travel narrative (Rubruck). Imaginative travel/ethnographic accounts with fantasy presented as fact (e.g., Mandeville) often barely distinguishable from eyewitness ethnography; sometimes more sympathetic and open-minded as well. Traders, colonial/military officials and Christian missionaries projected images of foreign cultures through lenses of their particular interests, with considerable variation in accuracy/distortion. “Philosophical travelers” such as Nicolay (16th c. Turkey), Lery (16th c. Brazil), Lescarbot (17th c. Canada) (see **Renaissance**, below), and Chardin (17th c. Persia), 18th c. Jesuit missionaries in China, Volney in Egypt (see **Enlightenment**, below) related firsthand ethnographic description to contemporary theoretical interests; critical travelers (de las Casas, Stedman) and critics of travel literature (Green) began to develop critiques of European colonial practices.

**Musical applications:** Music appears in passing in early travel accounts as part of panorama of cultural differences or, sometimes, similarities; often used negatively, to imply native inferiority by suggesting they waste time on frivolous activities. Sometimes portrayed in highly positive experiential terms (Lery, Da Cruz); gradually given more detailed, systematic and “scientifically” neutral treatment, and assimilated to developing theories of sociocultural evolution (see **Enlightenment**, below) and **Harmonic Universalism** (see below). Colonial emphasis on acquisition of musical instruments, sometimes live musicians (brought back to Europe for public performances) and musical sound in the form of transcriptions in European musical notation.

**Criticisms:** Enlightenment proponents of the need for “Philosophical traveler” ethnographer/theorists criticized Eurocentric, unscientific and unsystematic nature of travel accounts, and called for more

rigorous approaches. 20th c. **Critical Anthropology** and Cultural Studies (see below) have developed extensive critiques of colonialist influences on ethnography.

***Renaissance Anthropology (Historical period — NOT a school of anthropological theory!)***

**Main emphases:** “Rebirth” of knowledge in Europe (late 15th-early 17th c.), theoretically conceived as return to classical emphasis on scholarship, intellectualism, and arts that characterized Greek and Roman civilization, but with practical stress on new discoveries, including geographical and ethnographic. Science as valid adjunct to, and enhancement of, religious knowledge, with Divine Law manifested in Natural Law. Ethnographic knowledge of newly “discovered” peoples assimilated both to Greco-Roman myth and imaginative geography with typologies of humanoid monsters, and to religiously-conceived Great Chain of Being, with all beings in their preordained hierarchical places. Centrality of European past led to assimilation and representation of foreign cultures in its terms, including Chinese “Pythagoreanism”, American Indian manifestations of devil-worship, Greek culture, etc. Theories of ethnographic observation by Nicolay and other ethnographer-theorists (Belon, Postel) linked to development of theories of scientific observation, imagination and experience (da Vinci, Galileo). Visual ethnography developed by Nicolay and others as a supplement, and sometimes a contrasting alternative, to verbal representations.

**Main varieties:** Nicolay’s ethnographic theory founded in understanding of humans as unique species. Cosmopolitan/humanistic ethnography (Nicolay, Lery) saw others as equal of Europeans, used ethnography as critique of European society. Montaigne, following Lery’s ethnography and ideas, developed early arguments for cultural relativism. By beginning of 17th c., emergence of concepts of a worldwide science of diversity of human ways of life (Lescarbot), conceived as salvage ethnography of cultures doomed to disappear under European dominance. Lescarbot develops theory of “noble savage” as a legal definition to provide a conceptual key to understanding social processes radically different from those known to Europeans.

**Musical applications:** Lery used “paradigm of permissibility” (Flaherty) to praise wonderful beauty of Brazilian Indian singing by framing narrative in context of denunciation of devil-worship. Sagard and others assimilated non-Western music to Western musical models by transcribing songs with multiple parts to supply “harmony” needed for their representation as “real” music. Lescarbot, Sagard, others used Lery’s Brazilian transcriptions to construct narratives of American Indian music in Canada by assimilation to a generalized paradigm case of the “Savage”; the other dominant ethnographic/musical paradigm case of the Renaissance and Enlightenment, similarly constructed, was the “Oriental”. Classicist emphases produced both pessimistic, degenerationist and optimistic interpretations of contemporary world; stimulated research and speculation on Greek and Roman musical theory and practice. Individual variability and quests for universal mastery of knowledge; wide-ranging scholars such as Athanasius Kircher interested in natural science, ethnography and music, explored ethnography of China and Egypt, Egyptian and Coptic music in relation to Greek musical theory, musical acoustics and physics, including tarantulum (possession) and musical cures conceived as physical process. Building on suggestions from Columbus and others, Lafitau treated American Indian culture, music and instruments as contemporary examples of ancient Greek and Egyptian counterparts.

**Criticisms:** Later scholars would critique orientation towards European classical past, speculative connections with contemporary peoples and cultures, and Christian religious orientation of Renaissance thought.

### ***Enlightenment Anthropology and the “Science of Man” (Historical period — NOT a school of anthropological theory!)***

**Main emphases:** Late 17th-18th c. emphasis on human perfectibility through increasing progress of rationality; led to theories of cultural evolution from hunting/gathering through agriculture, civilization (Rousseau, Montesquieu, Ferguson, others), conceived as hierarchy of ascending “progress”. “Mathesis” (Foucault), or reduction of knowledge to mathematical tabular forms. Secularization of knowledge, with Natural Law replacing, rather than supplementing, Divine Law. “Renaissance man” ideal of individual mastery of all knowledge replaced by encyclopedic ideal of universal knowledge through collaboration of many specialists.

**Main varieties:** Scottish Enlightenment philosophers used ethnographic material from travelers to develop theories of sociocultural evolution, with strong political/economic emphasis; French philosophers developed more diverse evolutionary theories (Montesquieu, Rousseau). Strengthening and systematization of interest in non-European cultures as living examples of universal human past, with development of “time-travel” theory in late 18th century (Degerando). Rousseau called for establishment of “Science of Man” to be built by work of “philosophical travelers” who would be both ethnographers and theorists; used ethnographic information to critique European civilization (later misidentified with Lescarbot’s “noble savage” concept by European supremacists) and to develop sociocultural evolution theory which he considered logical fiction rather than fact, due to impossibility of time-travel; challenged basis of Natural Law concept by suggesting human cultural differences resulted from cultural rather than natural causes. Volney, a “philosophical traveler” and philosopher, used his own ethnography as springboard for theories of degeneracy of cultures and inspirational theorizing on cultural, political and religious evolution and revolution. First anthropological society formed in France at end of 18th c.; attempt to develop precise research methodology (Degerando). Philological (linguistic) research led to Indo-European hypothesis (Jones) and birth of modern linguistics around the same time.

**Musical applications:** Natural science/mathematical emphases led to development of **Harmonic Universalism** (see below), and to explorations of mathematical basis of some non-Western music theories (Amiot, Jones, Villoteau). Linguistic research influenced many cross-cultural music theorists (Chabanon, Rousseau, Villoteau); Michel-Paul Guy de Chabanon proposed theory of music as a “natural and universal language”; Jones published theory of relationship of Indian, Persian and Greek musics before his publication of Indo-European language family hypothesis. Rousseau wrote music articles for French Encyclopedia and other works with emphasis on non-Western music as evidence and product of cultural variety rather than physical universal laws; developed critique of representations of non-European music that seemed to demonstrate “the goodness and beauty of our own laws”; published comparative transcriptions of world music to illustrate musical and cultural differences, encouraged Burney and others to pursue studies of “**National Music**” (see below). John Green attempted compilation and synthesis in 1740s of information on African music from various travelers; comparative musical ethnography further developed by **Universal History of Music** scholars (see below). First systematic musical ethnographies by “philosophical travelers” (Amiot, Jones, Villoteau) in late 18th c., with explicit rejection of superiority of European music.

**Criticisms:** Considerable debate among Enlightenment scholars themselves over theoretical differences. Heated argument between Rameau and Rousseau over **Harmonic Universalism** (see below) vs. cultural diversity. Later scholars would criticize speculative theorizing and inadequate ethnographic base of information; but these, along with sociocultural evolution and hierarchies of cultural “progress” would remain foundations of anthropological scholarship for another century. Critiques of relativist and sympathetic portrayals of non-Western cultures and peoples stimulated by early 19th c. resurgence of European ethnocentrism, slavery debate and development of scientific racism (see **Ethnology** and **Anthropology**, below).

**(Harmonic Universalism) (Theoretical trend in music — NOT a school of anthropological theory!)**

**Main emphases:** All music based on laws of nature, particularly on physical-acoustic principles of harmonic frequencies, assumed to provide the foundation for Western classical musical harmony. Musics can thus be evaluated according to a hierarchical model according to their relative degree of progress or evolution towards a Western-style harmony.

**Main varieties and Musical applications:** Mersenne (17th c.) attempted comprehensive mathematical calculation of all possible scale and harmonic intervals; used non-Western (American Indian) examples to prove the Western diatonic scale universal and founded on natural law. Rameau (18th c.) expanded theory to include newly-developed Western Baroque/Classical harmony; maintained that all melodies had an underlying harmonic basis, and used transcriptions/imitations of non-Western melodies to create harmonized music in Western style. Helmholtz (mid-19th c.) introduced sophisticated laboratory instrumentation and techniques of experimental physics for measurement of pitches and harmonic series of overtones. Anthropologist Alice Fletcher and musical theorist John Comfort Fillmore (late 19th c.) promoted theory of inherent harmony of American Indian music, and devised fieldwork methods to create and verify “correctness” of their harmonized transcriptions. Still a widely-held belief used as model for comparing musics outside of ethnomusicology.

**Criticisms:** Most world music shows no objective or measurable harmonic features; requires unprovable assumptions of latent or inherent harmony. Even Western music does not conform strictly to laws of physical harmonics. Engel (see **Science of National Music**, below) formulated concepts and arguments, strengthened by Ellis' more precise measurements (see **Comparative Musicology**, below), to show scales and music culturally variable, not physically universal.

**(Universal History of Music) (Theoretical trend in music — NOT a school of anthropological theory!)**

**Main emphases:** Early 18th-early 19th c. attempts to incorporate descriptions of non-Western music into music history studies primarily focused on Europe. Emphasis on musical “progress”, with non-European musics occupying lower stages in evolutionary hierarchy, often with a **Harmonic Universalist** emphasis (see above).

**Main varieties:** Early 18th c. histories by Bonnet and others incorporated limited ethnographic material. Major 18th c. work with most non-Western material, including unpublished work by Amiot, was produced by Jean-Benjamin de Laborde. Early 19th c. work by Stafford included nearly equal balance of European and non-European material. Some scholars worked within **National Music** paradigm (see below) derived from critique of representations of non-Western music and culture by Rousseau (see **Enlightenment** above).

**Criticisms:** See **Enlightenment** and **Harmonic Universalism**, above. Burney, leading music historian of late 18th-early 19th c., reflected early 19th c. resurgence of Eurocentrism in his critique of what he saw as overestimation by previous writers of the value of non-Western music.

## 19th Century

### **Ethnology**

**Main emphases:** Early 19th c. (1820s-60s) antiracist approach influenced by scholars' involvement with antislavery and native-protection movements; emphasis on proving unity of human species on scientific grounds (“monogenist” side of monogenist-polygenist debate), with or without acknowledgment of

ethical and political implications. Research encompassed physical, archaeological, cultural and philological (linguistic) anthropology, in ascending order of importance; great advances in late 18th-early 19th c. philological identification of language families seen as paradigmatic for identifying relationships between human races and “nations” (ethnic groups). Friendly to 18th-c. theories of social evolution and, later, to Darwinian evolutionism, as tending to show connection between different races and cultures. Armchair theorists collected, arranged and analyzed data from travel accounts to support theories and classifications of group relationships.

**Main varieties:** Some ethnologists maintained close ties with native-protection and antislavery groups, while others tried to give ethnology a more scholarly, less political identity. Prichard, the best-known scholar, invented a new discipline of “psychological” ethnology that was the first theoretical attempt to delineate the subfield later known as cultural anthropology. Some ethnologists led opposition to racism of British and American anthropologists (see **Anthropology**, below). After prolonged disputes with Anthropologists, Ethnology and Anthropology merged in 1870s.

**Musical applications:** See **Science of National Music**, below.

**Criticisms:** Anthropologists criticized Ethnologists' theory of unity of human species as a religious rather than a scientific doctrine; considered linguistic and cultural studies less important than physical; argued that Ethnologists' willingness to admit women to meetings would hinder freedom of scientific discussion.

## **Anthropology**

**Main emphases:** Mid-century (1840s-60s) reaction against ethnology viewed anthropology as a natural science, with stress on physical anthropology over other subfields. Saw racial differences as evidence of separate origins and/or species (“polygenist” side of monogenist-polygenist debate). Concerned with ordering separate races into hierarchies of inferiority and superiority. Same armchair methods as **Ethnology** (see above), but different theoretical premises led to polygenist/racist classifications of human relationships.

**Main varieties:** American anthropology (Morton, Nott, Gliddon, Jeffries) so strongly racist that moderate Europeans rejected it; similar extreme racism in British journal published and largely written by Burke; less strident but still strong racist orientation promoted by Anthropological Society, in opposition to Ethnological Society (see **Ethnology**, above). Opposition to Darwin's theories, seen as implying unity of human species (also see Social Darwinism under **Evolutionism**, below). Merged with Ethnological Society to form Anthropological Institute in 1870s.

**Musical applications:** No major applications except for Fetis in France; attempts by British anthropologists to elicit race/music theories from Chorley and others proved unsuccessful. Limited use of musical examples as evidence of mental inferiority, racial differences in organs of perception.

**Criticisms:** Besides critiques on ethical and political grounds, various researchers in physical anthropology disagreed on claimed significance of physical differences between races; these disagreements would be resolved only with 20th c. shift to genetic studies, recognition of difference between genotype (genetic material) and phenotype (physical appearance), and reconceptualization of genetic difference in terms of clinal gradients (statistical shading of distribution of genetic traits from one type into another over a given area) rather than fixed, stable “races” embodying a bundle of “pure” traits. Other critics viewed anthropology as a human or social rather than a natural science, and/or maintained that cultural and linguistic studies equally or more important for understanding human relationships and differences.

**(Science of National Music) (*Theoretical trend in music — NOT a school of anthropological theory!*)**

**Main emphases:** Musical outgrowth of Prichardian **Ethnology** (see above), founded on Rousseau's critique of representations, studying cross-cultural musical diversity to show its human unity. Inspired by work of Prichard and other ethnologists, and closely linked to ethnology/anthropology; provided musical research issues and methods for *Notes and Queries in Anthropology*. Emphasized multifaceted approach to different aspects of music, from physical (scales, rhythms) to cultural; and all varieties of music, from "tribal" to Western popular and classical, with attempts to relate them to one another. Same armchair research methods as other 19th c. schools, except for contact with traveling musicians, correspondence with and citation of "native" scholars, and museum studies of instruments.

**Main varieties:** Carl Engel, founder of the school and leading theorist, formulated concepts that allowed nonreductionist and nonassimilationist representation of musical differences (e.g., pentatonic rather than "defective" or "Scottish" scales); contrary to time-travel theories, saw non-European music as part of world musical future, rather than reflection of European past. Ellis, often taken as a founder of **Comparative Musicology** (see below), worked within Engel's National Music paradigm, and built on Engel's theories. Critique of representations of non-Western music further developed by Engel, Wead, Tagore, and, in context of early 20th c. introduction of phonograph recordings, by Gilman (see **Comparative Musicology**, below). Tagore produced most extensive 19th c. compendium of world ("National") musical ethnography. As late as 1920s, some scholars still continued to conceive their work in terms of National Music (e.g., Krehbiel).

**Criticisms:** Racist and evolutionist scholars disliked absence of hierarchical superiority of Western culture and music. Subsequently disappeared from the history of ethnomusicology.

**Evolutionism**

**Main emphases:** Constructing speculative evolutionary hierarchies of societies and cultures, from earliest and most "primitive" to latest and most "advanced". General scheme of evolutionary scale from savagery to barbarism to civilization adapted and elaborated from 18th c. Enlightenment theorists; most famous 19th c. elaboration by Lewis Henry Morgan. Viewed "culture" (first defined by Tylor) as unitary phenomenon (= "civilization") shared at higher or lower levels by all societies, rather than as separate and equal "cultures". Western/European civilization considered ultimate high point in evolution; provided scale against which all others were rated. Used "comparative method" of isolating parts of culture -- e.g., technology, weapons, kinship, religion, etc. -- and comparing against similar phenomena in other cultures to determine relationships. "Survivals" of earlier, formerly useful and adaptive culture traits that now seem irrational or useless, used to deduce earlier evolutionary stages. Assumed "psychic unity of mankind" as basis for belief that all peoples would pass through similar evolutionary stages.

**Main varieties:** Leading theorists emphasized many aspects that should be included in study of culture; but also individually emphasized particular aspects of culture ranging from kinship and social organization (Morgan, Bachofen, Maine) to religion (Tylor, Frazer). After archaeological discoveries in Europe in 1830s-40s produced the "Stone-Bronze-Iron Age" classification, culture evolution theory placed increasing reliance on comparisons of artifacts and material culture. "Social Darwinism" applied Darwin's biological concepts to cultures, assuming "survival of the fittest" justified political dominance and proved superiority of most highly evolved, i.e., Western, cultures. Classical Marxist Anthropology based on Morgan's theories; see **Marxist Anthropology** in Late 20th Century section below.

**Musical applications:** Various scholars wrote on the evolution (Parry) and origins (Rowbotham 1880) of music; the latter devised a three-age model for the evolution of musical instruments (Rowbotham 1881) patterned after the archaeological three-age model (stone, bronze, iron) that influenced evolutionary theory in cultural anthropology. The evolutionists' emphasis on "primitive culture" (Tylor) was reflected

in an emphasis on “primitive music” (Wallaschek). See also **Harmonic Universalism** above, **Comparative Musicology** below.

**Criticisms:** Armchair use of secondhand information unreliable; reconstruction of origins and evolutionary sequences speculative and unprovable; comparative method viewed cultures as fragmented pieces rather than unified wholes; similarity of phenomena might result from different causes in different culture contexts; evidence suggested some cultures were not evolving through the same stages as others; assumptions of superiority/inferiority led to abuses.

**(Comparative Musicology) (Theoretical trend in music — NOT a school of anthropological theory!)**

**Main emphases:** Hornbostel provides one of the most succinct formulations of the comparative method. His use of the “organic analogy” predates Radcliffe-Brown (see **Functionalism** and **Structural-functionalism** below) by over twenty years. Although Hornbostel expressed theoretical interest in an ultimate goal of comparison by use of “comparative method” (see **Evolutionism**, above), actual research by members of this school (Stumpf, Hornbostel, Abraham, others), strongly influenced by prolonged collaboration with Boas, consisted mainly of detailed ethnographic descriptions and analyses of music of particular cultures. Although H. likewise expressed methodological desirability of fieldwork and musical participant observation (see **Fieldwork**, below) or “bimusicality”, most actual research consisted of “armchair” study of recordings made by other fieldworkers, although some involved direct research with visiting performers. Influence of laboratory psychology and physics encouraged strong emphasis on quantification, laboratory instrumentation, precise description and measurement of scales, intervals; less attention to rhythm. Theoretical interest in psychology, performers' intentions and “apperceptions” introduced by cultural conditioning of Western scholars; but attention to cultural factors severely restricted by lack of direct field experience.

**Main varieties:** Ellis, building on Engel's work (see **Science of National Music**, above), demonstrated variable cultural logic of scales by measurement techniques and concepts still used in late 20th century. Beginning in 1890s, introduction of phonograph and other recording technologies brought increased accuracy and quantity of musical transcriptions, and theoretical debates on significance of recordings by scholars such as Hornbostel, Fillmore, and Gilman; latter developed theory of contrasting prescriptive and descriptive musical representations that would later be reformulated by, and credited to, Seeger. Stumpf, Hornbostel and Abraham (“Berlin School” of CM) founded recording archive and conducted systematic culture-by-culture descriptive/analytic studies. Their collaboration and interchange of ideas and students (Herzog) with Boas led to American anthropological tradition of ethnomusicology (see **Ethnographic Descriptivism**, below). European CM developed fieldwork tradition for European folksong studies, remained generally armchair-oriented to rest of world, many turning to new **Diffusionist** theories (see below), with some exceptions. Study of “Primitive Music” (Wallaschek, Nettl) began with evolutionist basis, gradually incorporated Boasian and Functionalist emphases. Kunst, associated with Hornbostel, produced large-scale fieldwork-based ethnographies of Indonesian music emphasizing indigenous musical concepts; his student, Mantle Hood, developed UCLA tradition of performance studies (see **Fieldwork**, below), and trained founders of most American ethnomusicology departments and programs.

**Criticisms:** Generally same as for **Evolutionism** and comparative method (see above) and for **Ethnographic Descriptivism** (see below). Musical emphasis on notes and scales omits other important acoustic features such as rhythm, and treatment of cultural issues limited or nonexistent.