

CONTEXTUALITY OF MUSICOLOGY

What, How, Why and Because

Department of Musicology, Faculty of Music,
University of Arts in Belgrade
MUSICOLOGICAL STUDIES: MONOGRPAHS

CONTEXTUALITY OF MUSICOLOGY – WHAT, HOW, WHY AND BECAUSE

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CONTENTS

Foreword	9
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I

What, How, Why and *Because*

Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman A View at One Point on a “Narcissistic” Musicological “Merry-Go-Round”	15
Jean-Marc Chauvel The Autonomy of Musicology	34
Tijana Popović Mladjenović Reflections on Re- <i>con</i> -naissance	54
Thomas Betzwieser The Limits of Uncovering Context(s): Intertextuality and Eighteenth Century <i>Metamelodrama</i>	64
Ana Stefanović Musicology in the Context of Narratological Studies	74
Nico Schüler Contextuality and Interdisciplinarity in Digital Music Research: History, Current Projects, and a Case Study	86

II

What, How, *Why* and **Because**

Pavel Kordík Monumentality as a Discrete Dimension of Difference – The Zone of Context(uality)	99
Milica Lazarević Questions of Musical Language: Wittgenstein’s Language Game and Musical-Language Game	110

Sanja Srećković	
Music in the Context of Cognitive Neuroscience	118
Anja Bunzel	
Understanding the World through Private Musical Culture: A Plea for Theme-Oriented Teaching	131
William Osmond	
The War of Words by Imbecils, Critics and Academics: Using Fine Arts Terminology to Describe the Musical <i>Modernité</i> in Claude Debussy	145
Kurt Ozment	
Multiplying the Contexts for Morton Feldman's Uses of Language	158
Predrag I. Kovačević	
Duet of Architecture and Music. <i>Stretto House</i> by Steven Holl as an 'Eho' for <i>Music for Strings, Percussion, and Celesta</i> by Béla Bartók	177
Radoš Mitrović	
Improvisation as a Form of Subversion: "Noologic Art" and Postfuturism	194

III

What, How, Why and Because

Noelle M. Heber	
Inspired by a Story: The Lutheran Narrative and the Sacred Music of J. S. Bach	205
Maria Borghesi	
Cultural Reception and Musicological Studies: The Case of J. S. Bach's Reception in Italy	219
Miloš Bralović	
The Entertainer and the Social Critic: Dušan Radić and his <i>Balada o mesecu litalici</i> (<i>Ballad of the Vagabond Moon</i>)	241
Marija Simonović	
The Music 'Image' of Miloje Milojević	256
Katarina Mitić	
Radio Music in the Game <i>Golf Club: Wasteland</i> . Old Media in a New Context – Radio Music as Part of the Narrative	272

Marija Maglov

Musicology in the Context of Media – Media in the Context
of Musicology 279

Ivana Perković, Radmila Milinković, Ivana Petković Lozo

Digital Music Collections in Serbian Libraries for New Music
Research Initiatives 293

IV*What, How, Why and Because***Nikola Komatović**

The Context(s) of Tonality/Tonalities 311

John Lam Chun-fai

Stravinsky à Delage: (An)Hemitonic Pentatonicism as *Japonisme* 319

Fabio Guilherme Poletto

When Different Cultural Contexts Resize a Popular Song:
A Study about *The Girl from Ipanema* 334

Ana Djordjević

Music Between Layers – Music of *Lepa sela lepo gore* in
The Context of Film Narrative 350

Nevena Stanić Kovačević

The *Boogie* Motif in Context:
Layers of Meaning in Vuk Kulenović's *Boogie* Piano Concerto 361

Monika Novaković

An Apple On The Moon: Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Telemusik* 373

Bojana Radovanović

Overlapping Paradigms:
Exploring the Notion of Performance from the
Viewpoints of Musicology and Performance Studies 382

Adriana Sabo

From Performance to the Performative:
A Few Notes on the Relationship Between Music and Gender 391

Contributors 403

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OVERLAPPING PARADIGMS: EXPLORING THE NOTION OF PERFORMANCE FROM THE VIEWPOINTS OF MUSICOLOGY AND PERFORMANCE STUDIES*

ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the notions of performance, or, more precise, the notion of studying performance in the fields of performance studies and musicology. Taking into account that different understandings of the apprehension of performance and performativity among musicologists and performance scholars indicate a different intellectual project altogether, I will strive to look into possible means of mutual understanding and seek to identify places for probable interdisciplinary collaboration of these two fields of study.

KEY WORDS: performance; musicology; performance studies; interdisciplinarity; production of meaning.

By appropriating the exclamation “Perform or else”¹ from the *Forbes* cover, John McKenzie started a new chapter in performance theory, which emerged from the field of performance studies. *Performance* is one of the ‘buzzwords’ of our time, and is prominent in describing the functionality of technological systems, politics, science, everyday life, workplace (and other kinds of) productivity, and art. That is why, by asking ourselves the question “what is the nature of the relationship between musicology and the notion of performance?” we are opening up a rather topical discussion.

* This research was done within the Institute of Musicology, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts, financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia (RS-200176).

¹ An exclamation which Biljana Leković, Adriana Sabo, Maša Spaić and myself were free to paraphrase as *Study the performance or else...* in a name of our panel “*Study the Performance or Else*”?: *Music(ology)–Performance – Performativity* (XIV International Conference of the Department of Musicology of the Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade, Belgrade, October 24–27, 2018).

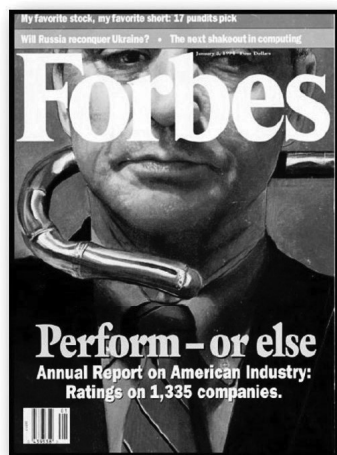


Figure 1. *Forbes* cover, January 3, 1994.

A glance at the history of the 20th century thought in the social sciences and humanities reveals that musicology, compared to the field of performance studies, was quite late – and quite hesitant – in choosing to ‘hop on the performance train.’ There are several reasons for that, some of which will be pointed out and examined in this paper. One of the leading influencers of noticeable changes in musicological thought at the turn of the millennia is certainly the field of performance studies, which emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in an Anglo-Saxon context.

As Alejandro L. Madrid indicated, the different understanding of notions of performance and performativity among musicologists and performance scholars implies a “different intellectual project altogether.”² Thus, taking into account the said changes in musicology, the questions being posed today are the following:

- What is the reach of the notion of performance?
- What is the status of performance in musicology?
- Is it possible to find ways of mutual understanding, influence or interdisciplinary collaboration between musicology and performance theory?

Musicology and Performance Studies as (inter)disciplines

Both musicology and performance studies enjoy a reputation as interdisciplinary fields of knowledge and expertise. With their main focus on music and performance respectively, the fundamental principles of their paradigms lie in

² Alejandro L. Madrid, “Why Music and Performance Studies? Why Now?: An Introduction to the Special Issue”, *Trans. Revista Transcultural de Música* 13 (2009), 1–8, 2.

the possibility of the correlation and cooperation of different disciplines. As a field primarily based within the social sciences and humanities, performance studies today encompasses studying the theory and practice of performance, not only in the performing arts (theater, music, opera, dance, poetry, and so on), but also in different forms of social behaviors in everyday life. Performance studies deals with a variety of rituals, everyday practices, public speaking and other forms of oral presentation, the performance of race, class, gender, ethnic or other identities, non-verbal communication, sports, political demonstrations, electronic civil disobedience, etc.³ The performance paradigm, thus, necessitates and relies on the collaboration of a plethora of disciplines in order to interpret its object of study.

Considering the interdisciplinary nature of musicology, the Serbian science of music frequently highlights the *model of interdisciplinary musicological interpretation and competence* brought about by Mirjana Veselinović-Hofman. To be specific, on many occasions, Veselinović-Hofman pointed out that musicology is, at its core, an interdisciplinary field of studies, and as such central to understanding this model as an instrument for research in the inter-relations of musicology and other disciplines is the weaving of an, in essence, musicological text. The author also believes that the ‘meta-musicological’ question of cooperation between musicology and other disciplines is more topical than merely a “registering of the networked disciplines” and “more-or-less positivistic efforts to define and explain them.”⁴ As with performance studies – which is also dependent on the object of the study and the context of examination – what becomes relevant are the modes in which the disciplines are intertwined.

Given that music is “the art of time”, that is, a series of sound events happening during the course of a certain timeframe, it would be a logical assumption that *performance* is one of the keywords for both musicology and performance studies. However, the fact that music *must be performed* in order to exist has not been reflected in that manner in musicological thought throughout history. Moreover, the predominant current in Western philosophy and the aesthetics of music deems possible the existence of music before and after the sound.⁵ This particular current aligns with the prevalent thought of the key importance of the composer (who can, in some cases, also be the only listener to a given musical work through inner hearing – which renders both performers

³ Cf. Aneta Stojnić, *Teorija izvođenja u digitalnoj umetnosti: ka novom političkom performansu* (Beograd: Fakultet za medije i komunikacije i Orion art, 2015), 13.

⁴ Мирјана Веселиновић-Хофман, *Пред музичким делом. Оіледи о међусобним пројекцијама естетике, поетике и стилстике музике XX века: једна музиколошка визура* (Београд: Завод за уџбенике, 2007), 47.

⁵ For more on this subject, see: Tijana Popović-Mladenović, *Muzičko pismo. Muzičko pismo i svest o muzičkom jeziku sa posebnim osvrtom na avangardnu muziku druge polovine XX veka* (Beograd: Fakultet muzičke umetnosti, 2015), chapter “Written text as a mode of music”.

and listeners, other than the composer themselves, useless), and perpetuates the favoritism of mind/thought/logos/philosophy over the ‘ephemeral’ nature of body/voice/speech/performance. Further in this paper I will delve into some peculiarities of the history of performance in musicology.

Performance Theory and Performance

According to John McKenzie and his study “Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance,” the present moment displays that the demand for performance has become a fairly common social phenomenon. “Today,” McKenzie writes, “as we navigate the crack of millennia, work, play, sex, and even resistance—it’s all performance to us”.⁶

With that in mind, McKenzie presents a challenge for himself – “to rehearse a general theory of performance.”⁷ The title of his book is taken not from a scholarly text, but from *Forbes*, a business magazine, and the incompleteness of its first part of the sentence invites a satisfactory ending, but, at the same time, leaves a space for different interpretations, depending on our point of view. In McKenzie’s own words “the play between stage and business crafts produces a stunning headshot and a punning headline.”⁸

Here, he discerns three types of performance: (1) organizational, (2) cultural, and (3) technological performance. Organizational performance, also understood as institutional performance, introduces the performative dimension to managerial strategies in contemporary companies; in this type of performance, the ending to the phrase could be – *Perform, or else: you’re fired!*⁹ Cultural performance is the basis for the appearance of performance studies, and it includes studying all of the manifestations of performance and performative behavior in culture.¹⁰ This mode of performance is “by no means” limited to scholars only; it is also evident that it is of great importance to social and artistic activism, and, in that case, the saying could be – *Perform, or else: you’ll be socially normalized.*¹¹ The third type, technological performance, came about in the USA, with the technological frenzy during the Cold War, and today it has peaked globally, in a world where we are all dependent on machines in all aspects of our lives.¹² So, *what* performs in technological performance?, McKenzie asks and immediately gives an answer – “Air fresheners, roofing insulation, bicycles, carpets and rugs, powerboats, wallcoverings, drain panels, cleansing towels, car-

⁶ John McKenzie, *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance* (London: Routledge, 2001), 3.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁰ Cf. Aneta Stojnić, *Teorija izvođenja...*, op. cit., 26.

¹¹ John McKenzie, *Perform or Else...*, op. cit., 9.

¹² Aneta Stojnić, *Teorija izvođenja...*, op. cit., 26.

stereo equipment, bakeware, aquarium filters, tires, fabric, window film, and so on and so forth, and, “the most profound enactments of technological performance” that are built by the computer, electronics, and telecommunication industries.¹³ The trends dictated by the industry of technology modify the original expression into the following: *Perform—or else: you’re outmoded, undereducated, in other words, you’re a dummy!* To these three performance paradigms, McKenzie adds two more – the performance of knowledge and the performance of power.

As I have already mentioned, performance studies emerged during the 1960s and 1970s. In 1966, Richard Schechner, one of the founders of Performance Studies, coined the term *the performance activities of man*, thus anticipating the announcement of a future interdiscursive collaboration with the anthropologist Victor Turner. The dialogue between anthropology and theater studies during the 1970s gave birth to a new discipline, one ready to delve into the interpretation of changes happening in the artistic and intellectual circles of the second half of the 20th century.

According to Schechner – and this is something McKenzie also heavily drew upon – the notion of performance goes beyond art, and becomes a social paradigm of a kind, encompassing areas like rituals, games, sport, popular ways of having fun, performance arts (theater, dance, and music) and everyday performances, as well as the performance of social, professional, gender, racial and class roles, and representations in media and on the internet.¹⁴

Leaning on McKenzie’s theorization, Aneta Stojnić predicts that the future and the efficiency of the field of Performance Studies will be directly correlated with its ability and readiness to “adequately answer to the new global phenomenon of the performative paradigm.”¹⁵ That being said, she agrees with McKenzie that it is vital to formulate a new theory of performance which will also encompass those performances that are not understood as liminal; a theory that would reconceptualize and redefine liminality as one of the crucial point of Performance Studies rather than abandoning it completely.¹⁶

As a result of the readiness for new challenges in thinking, theorizing and interpreting new forms of art and social behaviors, Performance Studies has been apt to answer the emerging questions that arose from the social, cultural, and artistic changes happening during the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, its interdisciplinary approach, together with the development of performance art, strongly influenced even the most traditionally inclined scientific and artistic disciplines during the decades which followed. The ensuing development of this *postdiscipline* will continue to tackle performance as a new paradigm of social

¹³ John McKenzie, *Perform or Else...*, op. cit., 11.

¹⁴ Miško Šuvaković, *Pojmovnik teorije umetnosti* (Beograd: Orion art, 2011), 532.

¹⁵ Aneta Stojnić, *Teorija izvođenja*, op. cit., 25.

¹⁶ Idem.

behavior, as well as performance in relation to digital technology and non-human performers.

So, how is this *imperative of performance* mirrored in musicology?

Musicology and Performance

In the words of Carolyn Abbate, “the history of classical music”, that is, musicology, “has been more a history of composers and compositions, and less a history of singers, instrumentalists, or the cultural contexts of performance”.¹⁷ Nicholas Cook said something similar – “Most so-called histories of music are really histories of composition, or even the compositional innovation.”¹⁸ That is not to say, as he immediately points out, that musicology was utterly uninterested in performance, a charge that is often attributed to scholars of music.¹⁹ It just means that musicology had a peculiar political program from its beginnings, which required a specific kind of musical object.

Considering the realm of historical musicology and its relationship with performance, it appears that there are numerous issues and a vast pool of modes of enquiry to investigate. Musical performance, from the historical perspective, can be studied from sources such as surviving musical instruments, iconographical material, literary sources, historical archives, practical and theoretical treatises, instruction books, musical manuscripts, recordings, and so on.²⁰ All of these can contain many information about historical practices, forms of notation and performance, particular matters of interpretation, as well as the “conditions and practices” of performance throughout history, such as the economic and professional conditions in which performers worked, patronage, teaching institutions, music and other forms of publishing, performance in private spheres, issues of gender and sexuality, and the relations between ‘popular’ and ‘artistic’ music.²¹ Likewise, Colin Lawson explored performing through history, coming to the conclusion that “[t]oday’s overwhelming authority of the score, demanding fidelity and accuracy at all costs is not at all characteristic of the history of performance as a whole”.²²

In his book *Beyond the Score: Music as Performance*, Nicholas Cook dives into the history of musicology, and, going back to the 19th century, examines the

¹⁷ Carolyn Abbate, *In Search of Opera* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), x.

¹⁸ Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score. Music as Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 23.

²⁰ John Rink, “In respect of performance: the view from musicology”, *Psychology of Music* 31/3 (2003), 303–323, 306.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 306–307.

²² Colin Lawson, “Performing through history”, in: *Musical Performance. A Guide to Understanding* by John Rink (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3–16, 4.

reasons for placing the musical text, that is, the notion of *music as writing* at the center of musicological attention. The specific context, from which “the modern discipline of musicology” emerged, reveals the nature of its initial program of “documenting – or inventing – national origins through culture.” “The retrieval, editing, and criticism of national literary canons lay at the heart of this project” he adds, and so it was logical and “natural that the nascent musicology should model itself on philology,”²³ with a strong concentration on the text. I would also like to add that the musical text, unlike the performance, provided material evidence of music and music making, a trace on the basis of which a scientific challenge and a need for research could be justified.

Consequently, performance as a paradigm of meaning production has a significant counterpoint, or, rather, a serious and burdening opponent in *the paradigm of reproduction*. Reproduction was – and still is – viewed through the prism of “reproducing the work, or the structures embodied in the work, or the conditions of its early performances, or the intentions of its composer.”²⁴

This kind of attitude towards performance and performers/interpreters in general, went as far as Adorno, Schoenberg, Schenker, and many others, who dreamed of the possibility of excluding the “middleman interpreter”, and transmitting the music directly into a recording medium.²⁵ That indicated that the music substance was equal to what is written, and that the music was the “true product of the mind,” thus eliminating the social dimensions from the understanding the music, while simultaneously disrespecting and disparaging its performers.²⁶ It is widely known that Stravinsky followed the same line of thinking: “Music should be transmitted and not interpreted, because interpretation reveals the personality of the interpreter rather than that of the author, and who can guarantee that such an executant will reflect the author’s vision without distortion?”²⁷ From the perspective of the composers of the 19th and 20th centuries, the search for an “objective” performer, who would bring out the creators intentions flawlessly, was both tedious and never-ending.

Such a commitment to the musical text was highly influential over an extended period, shaping performance in order to best suit the representation of the composer’s ideas. This type of conditioning also leads to the complete neglect and sidelining of a performer’s bodily, emotional, or creative input.

Remembering the famous sentence from one of the crucial essays in post-modern thought that ought to influence musicology as well as other disciplines of humanities – “the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the

²³ Nicholas Cook, *Beyond the Score...*, op. cit., 16.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 17–18.

²⁷ Peter Walls, “Historical performance and the modern performer”, in: *Musical Performance...*, op. cit., 17–34, 17.

author” – we mark the time when the accent was firstly put on interpretation rather than creation. For music and musicology, the climate of the performative turn – the intervention of the broader cultural postmodern context – in various social and humanistic disciplines such as phenomenology, semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, deconstructionism, and feminism, gave a decisive push towards studying performance. Nevertheless, the (neo)*avant-garde* and experimental practices in post-Second World War Europe, and especially in the USA, have already encompassed performance into their usual way of thinking about art, expressing artistic intentions, and creating meaning.

The new, critical in its nature, way of *performing* musicology in the late 20th century, was, in such a way, a result of the critique of musicological modernism and the turning away from a factographic (analytical or historical) way of thinking about music to studying *the meaning* behind the music.²⁸ Looking behind music, or *beyond the score*, takes musicology in the direction of examining the context in which music is written. But, does it take performance into account and does it change the musical object that is studied?

In most cases concerning the “established musicological discourses,” it, in fact, does not. The struggle for the place of performance in a musicological context continues. Several practices – like the “modern turn” of the historically informed performance movement, and the music-theoretical approach that works “from page to stage” to name only a few, which are apparently interested in performance, still hold on to the ‘old problems’ with authority located outside of the performers’ realm of creativity and practice.

Having adopted Cook’s stance on the importance of studying music *as* performance, and not music *and* performance, as well as the idea of seeing performance as the production of meaning itself instead of viewing it as the interpretation of a composer’s authority, be that historical or otherwise, I believe that it is possible for musicology to address the *performance imperative* more adequately. *Beyond* the composers, the composition, and the text, the issues to be addressed are those concerning performance (as a complete product) and performing (as an action/process), the identities of human and non-human performers, the performance context, and modern technology in performance.

Though some might fear for the future of musicology in the age of expanding transdisciplinary and postdisciplinary modes of *performing* scientific research, it may be more useful to follow the optimistic stance of the philosopher and feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti, who sees the intertwining of the disciplines in recent decades as potentially dangerous but also as a sign of new opportunities that indicate not a crisis in the humanities, but rather its vitality.²⁹ Opening up to influences coming from very timely and self-updating fields such

²⁸ Мирјана Веселиновић- Хофман, *Пред музичким делом...*, op. cit., 18.

²⁹ Rosi Braidotti, *Posthumano*, prev. Mirjana Stošić (Beograd: Fakultet za medije i komunikacije, 2016), 192.

as performance studies may not only shine the light on musical and musicological performance in a contemporary performance/performative-driven context, but also demonstrate the genuine interdisciplinary nature of musicology, as well as reveal its immense potential to produce knowledge about contemporary practices.

SUMMARY

Performance is one of the ‘buzzwords’ of our time, in everyday life, work, technology, politics, science, and art. That is why, by asking ourselves the question “what is the nature of the relationship between musicology and the notion of performance?” we are opening up a rather heated subject.

A glance on the history of 20th century thought in social sciences and the humanities reveals that musicology, compared to the field of performance studies, was quite late – and quite hesitant – in deciding to ‘hop on the performance train.’ One of the leading influences on the noticeable changes in musicological thought at the turn of the millenia is certainly the field of performance studies, emerged during the 1960s and 1970s in an Anglo-Saxon context. However, as Alejandro L. Madrid indicated, the different understandings of the notions of performance and performativity among musicologists and performance scholars imply a “different intellectual project altogether.” Thus, taking into account the said changes in musicology, the questions I posed in this paper are ones concerning the studying of performance within the realms of performance studies and musicology.

According to John McKenzie and his study “Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance,” the present moment demonstrates that the demand for performance has become a fairly common social phenomenon. The emergence of performance studies during the second half of the 20th century has undoubtedly influenced – among other fields – musicology and its initial grounding in a musical work/musical score as a primary research object. Together with the critical approach of new musicology, there started to appear musicological studies that placed the performer, performance and sound (rather than composer, composition and score) at the center of their research. Considering the interdisciplinary nature of musicology to begin with, the author of the text believes that it is possible to answer the contemporary *performance imperative* even more adequately as we head into the 2020s and beyond.

CONTRIBUTORS

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