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## **Musical Performance as Storytelling: Memory, European Integration, and the Baltic Youth Philharmonic Orchestra\***

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### **Abstract**

Storytelling has been theorised as a performative, narrative practice, but it has not been employed often as a trope in studies of musical performance. This article outlines a theoretical context for exploring the possibilities of such a conceptual move within musicology by referring to the anthropological and performance studies approaches of Turner and Schechner. Benjamin's reflection on the storyteller as a narrator of memory and history frames the presentation of a case-study on the Baltic Youth Philharmonic Orchestra.

### **Key words**

Performance, storytelling, Baltic Youth Philharmonic, orchestra

Storytelling has been theorised as a performative, narrative practice, but it has not been employed often as a trope in studies of musical performance. This article outlines a theoretical context for exploring the possibilities of such a conceptual move within musicology. In interweaving theoretical context and ethnographic case-study, this article focuses on the Baltic Youth Philharmonic orchestra. A starting point for my exploration is Walter Benjamin's writing on the storyteller as a teacher or sage, who can offer counsel based on his or her own lifetime experiences as well as on reaching into the past, into other lifetimes, which have been narrated and remembered in stories. In crafting a story, the storyteller displays a kinship with the mystical, the mythical, the fairy tale and the artisan. Moreover, in the possibilities of drawing on stories from the past and in

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reproducing them, the storyteller becomes a historiographer, narrating the “record kept by memory” and becoming a link in the “chain of tradition” through which memory is narrated to future generations (Benjamin 1969: 8–9). The links of these chains are simultaneously fragile and strong. Memories do not always achieve the status of ‘history’. Sometimes, people retrospectively reclaim fragments of memories told through the life stories of past generations to retell stories and to demand recognition of their historical importance. Historians have written about the ruptures between memory and history in a disciplinary critical turn that considers historiography as ideologically informed and implicated in the political production of knowledge. Dipesh Chakrabarty, for example, writes about the ‘artifice of history’ in which historiography is not an objective account of the past but is implicated in the political production of knowledge (2000). Pierre Nora, writes about the “conquest and eradication of memory by history”, as a discipline based on our memory (where ‘our’ is from the vantage point of colonising power) and on the “sifted and sorted historical traces” that lead to historical texts (1989: 8). Yet, critiques about subjectivity and power relationships in the production of disciplinary knowledge about the past could be applied to memory which, as a form of knowledge transmitted through experiences and generations, is unreliable and partial, but also tenacious and revisionary. While Benjamin predicted the end of storytelling, “the embarrassment all around when the wish to hear a story is expressed” (1969: 1), new perspectives on memory, history and performance lead to greater recognition of storytelling as a way of remembering, and as a narrative practice which is a performative and pervasive mode of communication in shaping daily life (Langellier and Peterson 2004).

From an ethnographer’s perspective, storytelling as a trope is immensely useful to thinking about musical performance. It is also useful for thinking about writing ethnography as storytelling, although I will not elaborate on this point here. It suffices to note that both bear witness to memory and history. The trope is useful since stories abound in, and around, musical performance. Song texts can be analysed as examples of narrative musical performance, even when the stories told therein are not straightforward. The possibility of ambiguity is vital to focusing on musical performance as storytelling, allowing new performances, interpretations, variations and altered insights. A story or a performance can change. New stories can be told. New stories can replace old stories. A ‘story’ may be more ‘truthful’ than memory or history since truth, belief, and moral conviction stand in awkward relationships with storytelling. While songs offer textual narratives that can be clearly read as stories, I am interested in considering storytelling as a trope that might be

employed in studying musical performance more generally. Thus, the case-study on the Baltic Youth Philharmonic illustrates the different kinds of stories that can be told concerning not only the past but also the present and the future through musical performance. This is a perspective on musical performance as storytelling that engages with political aspiration rather than with reading one performative mode (musical performance) through the frames of another (storytelling). My primary interests in this article, then, lie in considering the trope of storytelling in relation to musical performance and its capacities for promoting political ideologies.

On one level, ideologies are simply “stories about the world we live in”, and political ideologies are important because the political systems they generate are the ways that “societies make decisions about their most important values” (Sargent 2009: 3). This view corresponds with an anthropological understanding of stories as creating social systems and shaping social changes. On another level, ideologies are implicated with performative modes, in that “some stories are more potent than others not because of their content or the skill with which they are told but because of assumptions made about their tellers” (Polletta 2006: xi). In this respect, storytellers can be compared with truth-tellers, as discussed by Arendt in highlighting power relations in public and private realms to reflect on political thought. Storytelling leaves open the possibility of being understood as fiction since “ascertaining facts without interpretation” is impossible and facts are chosen “and fitted into a story” told from certain perspectives (Arendt 2006: 234). Truth-tellers assert validity in a coercive rather than persuasive mode when they are not receptive to the possibilities of interpretation (Arendt 2006: 235). Arendt’s thoughts underpin Jackson’s ideas about the ‘existential imperative’ of storytelling to help us feel that the world is in our grasp and that we have control of our lives. Storytelling is not necessarily a mode of self-expression since it can effect a transformation that “switches the locus of action symbolically from one context of relationship to another” (Jackson 2006: 18). A focus on the “action of meaning-making” informs my choosing orchestral practices as a way of thinking about the ‘social processes of storytelling’ (Jackson 2006: 18), and it is this emphasis on action that makes exploring storytelling as a trope for musical performance worthwhile. Storytelling as an intersubjective practice effecting symbolic transformations in the locus of action is relevant because discourses about orchestras often switch from thinking about performance to politics, even to the extent that orchestral relationships are conceptualised in terms of changing political ones (Spitzer and Zaslaw 2004: 514).

By emphasising the capacity of musical performance to tell stories, including political ones, this article contributes to

the multiplicity of approaches in studying musical performance. Common approaches include performance psychology (for example, how performers perform, stage-fright, and cognitive processes) and historical performance practice. Ethnographic approaches have highlighted how musical performance can also be analysed as an event, as an embodied practice, as socio-political action, and as a cultural process in global contexts. Amongst the wide variety of intellectual perspectives and methodological approaches characterising the study of musical performance, my focus on musical performance as storytelling resonates with the anthropologist, Victor Turner's concept of the 'social drama', which was developed in his ethnography, *Schism and Continuity in an African Society* (1957). This ethnography focuses on conflict, conflict resolution and social relationships in the village contexts of Zambia and the concept of social drama was later elaborated to reflect on metaperformance. For another project, Turner's ethnography is itself worth re-telling from the wider political perspectives of British imperialism. But, for now, and for the ethnographic case-study on the Baltic Youth Philharmonic to follow, it is worth noting that Turner's social drama focuses on the cyclical processes of fragmentation, conflict resolution and integration. His story about social relationships in an African village can be retold (with variation) in a northern European context.

Turning to storytelling as a trope is removed from how musical performance has often been conceptualised within musicology: as the realisation of compositional intent. At first sight, an emphasis on the musical work and on performance as an interpretation of the score underpins Daniel Barenboim's statement that "as performers we must accept the printed score as an infinite substance while not forgetting that we are finite, temporary" (2009: 54). Such a stance is far from ideas about the performativity of storytelling through which storytellers (as performers) creatively reproduce stories (as performances), although it is not far from ideas about the ways in which storytellers' performance practices can be framed temporally and historically. His statement, however, is part of a larger reflection on thought and interpretation, only partially indebted to hitherto dominant musicological discourses, and it is followed by an exercise in imagining alternative musical possibilities and extrapolating the implications therein for political action. Barenboim's example rests on imagining different melodic, harmonic, rhythmic directions to the opening of Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* as a route to imagining different political scenarios. So, in Barenboim's imaginative leap he elaborates on the correspondences between musical and political possibilities in terms reminiscent of Turner's social dramas and the invitation to understand human relationships performatively: "A

nation's constitution could be compared to a score and the politicians to its interpreters, who must constantly act and react according to the principles outlined within it. In a democracy this constitution can be challenged and adapted to changing times by the people, becoming a kind of collectively composed symphony" (Barenboim 2009: 55). The score recedes and the performer comes into greater focus as Barenboim continues: "just as a performer must be constantly vigilant and curious enough to re-examine formerly conceived notions of interpretation and performance, a politician must be aware of his nation's actions" (2009: 55).

This shift in Barenboim's narrative resonates with changing musicological views introducing more critical, interdisciplinary understandings of the ontological status of musical performance. Thus, musical performance, like storytelling, has been theorised in the realms of everyday experience and in constructions of the person. Music provides the soundtracks that mark stages in human life-cycles through live performances or media technologies. Music is performed in establishing gendered identities and social hierarchies, and performance takes place in a nexus of diverse social relationships, including those between performers and audiences, and between people and their environments. Frith stresses that studies of music-making and musical use should be integrated and suggests working towards a "timetable of engagement, the reasons why particular music gets particular attention at particular moments, and how these moments are, in turn, imbricated in people's social networks" (Frith 2002: 46).

The timetables of engagement are evident in Barenboim's notion of dialogic potential (2009: 59), just as they are in the Performance Studies theorist, Richard Schechner's suggestion that theorising performance requires intercultural reflexivity. In writing about magnitudes of performance, Schechner noted that these "are not only about time and space but also about extensions across various cultural and personal boundaries" and that we all seem to be "entering a postmodern phase where the construction of intercultural aesthetics and ritual is essential" (Schechner 2009: 324).

The emphases on dialogue and intercultural reflexivity are responses to the contemporary political world and to everyday experiences in a globalising era. There is the ring of Benjamin's "counsel" in Barenboim's 'dialogue' and in Schechner's 'intercultural reflexivity'. If an "orientation toward practical interests is characteristic of many born storytellers" the counsel they offer "is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding" (Benjamin 1969: 2-3). What are the unfolding stories of orchestral practices? How

does orchestral performance contribute to the narration of political ideologies, memories or histories? The Baltic Youth Philharmonic is an apt case-study for examining an unfolding story about the shaping of contemporary Europe. In turning to the particular (as did Benjamin whose 1969 essay on the storyteller focuses on Nikolai Leskov), I tell a story about performance, politics and economics in the practices of youth orchestras, which resonates with other examples such as the West-Eastern Divan or the Simón Bolívar, each situated within specific political and historical contexts.

My interests in turning to the symphony orchestra as a domain of ethnographic enquiry to reflect on the political agency of musical collectives have been reported previously in thinking about orchestras and the politics of civil society. Earlier, I posed questions about agency and collectivity (especially the social mobilization of groups, construction of community, and the relationship between the individual and society) to argue we might move beyond the orchestra as social metaphor to viewing it as a socio-political actor. Orchestral interaction is potentially a mode of civic collaboration and orchestras act as socio-political agents (Ramnarine 2011). This perspective is developed further here. But first, it would be useful to provide a contextual frame on youth orchestras.

### *Youth orchestras*

Orchestras are highly valued musical institutions with dominant transmission systems in music education from schools to conservatoires. The term 'orchestra' was used for a group of instrumentalists in France and Italy by the 1670s and in Germany and England by 1725. The orchestra is linked with the rise of public concerts from the eighteenth century onwards, new systems of musical training in nineteenth-century institutions (conservatoires), economic growth and migration to urban centres, and support from commerce and patrons. Several of today's major orchestras were established during the nineteenth century (e.g. the Helsinki Philharmonic in 1882, Berlin Philharmonic in 1882). Contemporary economic considerations include funding (including for concert artists and conductors) and orchestral sustainability in the digital age.

Youth orchestras were first established in the United States of America and in Europe in the early twentieth century and they have been analysed in terms of audition processes, repertoire choices, funding and administrative structures. Kartomi proposes a classification of types of youth orchestras based on selection processes, for example, across a group of nation-states, within a nation-state, a region, or an educational institution (Kartomi 2007:

7), and notes that orchestral mission statements are clustered around three concerns. The first is educational with aims to improve playing standards and career prospects. The second is socio-ethical, including the promotion of equality, access and opportunities to play, of which the Simón Bolívar Youth Orchestra is an example. The third is socio-political and includes hopes to improve relationships between people, of which the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra is an example (see Kartomi 2007: 19).

There are examples of youth orchestras promoting ethnic and class equality (the Buskaid String Project in South Africa, the Youth Orchestras of the Americas, the Greater Boston Symphony Youth Orchestra, see Kartomi 2007: 21–22). But, it is disconcerting to note that despite the rhetoric of access and equality, once players in Europe and the USA move onto professional levels, career opportunities are limited. Statistical data on gender representation is considered by Allmendinger, Hackman, and Lehman (1996). The rhetoric of orchestral access cannot be reconciled with the fact that European white male musicians dominated the profession until the end of the 20th century, and non-white musicians, who appeared infrequently on-stage were seen as ‘exotic’. While the colour barrier was broken in the 1950s in the USA, Holoman notes that having faced a discrimination suit in 1969, there was one African-American player in the New York Philharmonic but, in 2009, none (see Holoman 2012, chapter 2). Similarly, the participation of Asian musicians in western classical music is growing but, as Yang comments, this is perceived as “unnatural or less than salutary” (Yang 2007: 1) since “old paradigms of cultural proprietorship and political domination still inform aesthetic judgements” (Yang 2007: 16). Globally, however, symphony orchestras have been established in diverse contexts, including Shanghai, China (dating back to the establishment of a public ensemble in 1878–1889, Bickers 2001), Kolkata, India (established in the 1920s, and with which Daniel Barenboim and Yehudi Menuhin performed as soloists), and Mumbai (the Bombay Symphony Orchestra, 1935–1950s, and the Symphony Orchestra of India established in 2006).

With these examples, stories about youthful orchestral aspirations have shifted towards considering equalities issues and the “polycultural nature of music and its practitioners” (Yang 2007: 22–23). In the following case-study, the kinds of stories that can be told are diverse, making it a good example for thinking about musical performance as storytelling, especially within Benjamin’s frames of memory and history. The discussion will focus on one story that is currently prominent, showing how a youth orchestra “might serve as the embodiment of an idea and/ or ideal” (cf. Etherington 2007:

121). The ideal in this case-study is European integration in the Baltic Sea Region. Given the short history of the youth orchestra as an institution, it is remarkable that it has begun to play such an important role in political and economic projects globally.

*The case-study: the Baltic Youth Philharmonic*

The Baltic Youth Philharmonic is an experiment in ‘polyculturalism’ (cf. Yang 2007), emerging from political interests in both national sovereignty and European integration. Adopting a macro-regional approach is useful in analysing cultural exchanges, cross-regional musical influences, musical pluralism and cross-border music initiatives in the Baltic Youth Philharmonic. Online press releases from the orchestra’s inaugural year in 2008 emphasised the initiative’s collaborative aspects between young musicians from ten different nation-states, as well as between festival organisations and industry.<sup>2</sup> The orchestra was established by the Usedom Music Festival (on the Baltic island of Usedom on the German-Polish border) and the energy company, Nord Stream. The Council of the Baltic Sea States welcomed the initiative as representing “the common cultural heritage of the Baltic region”.<sup>3</sup> The inaugural concert of the Baltic Youth Philharmonic was given in Riga, Latvia, in June 2008. The program featured Dvořák’s Ninth Symphony, a new work commissioned from the Danish composer Niels Marthinsen and Beethoven’s Triple Concerto. In the 2008 press campaign, the conductor, Kristian Järvi stated “Youth orchestras are able to play as all orchestras should: without borders, boundaries and judgment.” His statement was reproduced in the 2013 online brochure as his ‘music without borders’ idea (Hummel and Warnig 2013: 4).

The youth orchestra performed in Germany in September 2008 and the Usedom Festival organised a parallel Youth Forum to which 500 high school students from Denmark, Poland and Germany were invited to discuss their thoughts about the Baltic Sea Region. The aim of the forum was announced in the press “to promote exchange and understanding between young people throughout the Baltic Sea region and provide an immediate experience of shared culture” (Franke 2008). By 2013, these opportunities for dialogue had been extended to a cross-border pedagogic initiative (details below). A politics of unification fosters common cultural understandings in musical projects rather than national preoccupations and interests, and it diminishes an emphasis on histories of empires, occupation

<sup>2</sup> These are no longer accessible online, last accessed May 2011.

<sup>3</sup> The original 2008 press release no longer seems to be available online at <http://www.cbss.org/>.

and regional conflict. The Baltic Youth Philharmonic is reminiscent of collaborative projects in the Soviet era, such as unification of the musics of different republics or academic co-operation between scholars of the Baltic countries (through the conferences of Baltic musicologists launched in 1965), noted by Vita Gruodytė (2009: 44). Such collaborations included orchestral projects, for example, the Second Festival of Chamber Orchestras in 1978, which drew musicians together from Weimar, Azerbaijan and Lithuania in a programme of Pärt, Balsys and Haydn (Gruodytė 2009: 46).

The multi-national membership of the Baltic Youth Philharmonic corresponds with intensifying political shifts towards integration in the Baltic Sea Region and in the wider Europe. Today, this is a region of new transnational alliances, demographic changes, cultural revivals, diverse ecosystems, and developing arts, transport and trade routes, all of which highlight its increasing importance in global economies and politics. It is an important geo-economic region of European cooperation in relation to energy (gas and oil) supply routes, in particular. The European Union's strategy for the future of the Baltic Sea Region will test a new model of intensified co-operation aiming for greater European integration (Goulet 2010). Looking at the past, as well as aspiring towards the future, northern Europe's most recent regional configurations overlap with historical geo-political formations (including Viking, Hanseatic League, Swedish Empire, Russian Empire, Soviet Union) as well as with nineteenth-century nation-state geographies.

The Baltic Youth Philharmonic's auditory cartographies sketch political aspirations, environmental resource considerations, and revised understandings of nation-based historical narratives. The ways that musical traditions are connected are played out in the orchestra's rehearsals, audio-visual web-postings, and concert programmes. This is in contrast to the West-Eastern Divan which is an orchestral project to "find common ground between estranged people" (Barenboim 2009: 66) based on assumptions about equality and symphonic repertoire (e.g. Barenboim's view that "before a Beethoven symphony all people are equal", 2009: 85). The Baltic Youth Philharmonic's membership rests on narratives of playing together because of shared cultural heritages, musical affinities (which do not conform to ideas about the universality of composers such as Beethoven), and political interests.

### *Repertoire choices and the turn to tradition*

The Baltic Youth Philharmonic's repertoire choices are regionally-based. The Spring tour of Russia in 2013, for example,

was marketed under the title of “Baltic Voyage”. The programme featured works in the standard repertoire by Brahms, Grieg, Lutoslawski, Nielsen, Shostakovich, Sibelius, and Tchaikovsky, as well as works by the Swedish composer, Stenhammar, the Estonian composer, Tubin, the Lithuanian composer, Gelgotas (born in 1986 who composed “Never Ignore the Cosmic Ocean” for this orchestra), and the Latvian composer, Kalnins (born 1941, the first movement of the “Rock Symphony”). On the online Baltic Youth Philharmonic TV channel video materials illustrate the diversity of repertoire and genre, including folk-inspired works.

Next to audio-visual material illustrating repertoire diversity, Kristian Järvi’s ‘music without borders’ idea is elaborated on the orchestra’s web pages as follows:

“The idea of Baltic Youth Philharmonic (BYP) is to create a new voice in the north: innovative, creative and outstanding. Music without borders. Believing that music knows no boundaries, limitations or borders. Not geographically, not between genres. Taking young musicians on a journey through the centuries, through styles, through performance practices, to create ‘generalists’, not specialists. Diving back to the roots of folk music, embracing contemporary and pop music, to emerge with a voice for today. Overcoming prejudice; tearing down boundaries within our heads”.<sup>4</sup>

Three points can be made about this broad approach to repertoire, which includes ‘diving back to the roots of folk music’. The first point is about the authority of the folk tradition. While a politics of nationalism was still prominent in northern Europe in the early 1990s (framing responses to the political changes in Russia and the Baltic States and supporting the continued promotion of folk music as a musical representation of the nation), countries in the Baltic Sea Region like Finland, Denmark and Sweden began to deepen ties across the Baltic Sea and to emphasise the importance of European Union membership in the post-Soviet era (Riegert 2004: 127). These two trends – on one hand an insular turn towards the nation state and on the other an expansive view of the wider geographic and cultural region – are simultaneous markers of recent political orientations in this context. Located in the interstices between memory, history, and invocations of tradition, the Baltic Youth Philharmonic’s programming and repertoire choices highlight complex connections between musical traditions and how cross-border musical practices are represented within contemporary political discourses of nationalism, integration, and the retrieval of memories in changing political circumstances. With the inclusion of folk-based repertoires

<sup>4</sup> For an example see <http://vimeo.com/channels/byptv/25180467>.

we see a turn to the authority and force of musical traditions which were significant in nineteenth century nationalist projects, resonating with Arendt's reading of the primarily political contexts in which the "past is sanctified by tradition" (2006 [1954]: 124), but for which tradition no longer provides "salvation" or "political authority" thus leaving people with "the elementary problems of human living-together" (2006 [1954]: 141).

The second point raises questions about musical genres and the validity of analysing genres as separate. The Baltic Youth Philharmonic's invocation of folk traditions and the orchestra's attention to folk music influences on classical works support Joachim Braun's view that genre distinctions between 'traditional music' and 'Western music' have resulted in methodological flaws that lead to incorrect evaluations of Baltic musical culture. (He considered twentieth-century music but the point remains applicable). Misplaced genre distinctions overlook the double meanings, the aesthetic resistances and the non-conformism of an art music drawing on Baltic folkloric elements, liturgical chorales or Japanese Zen-Buddhist works during the period of Soviet occupation (Braun 2009: 7–9). Further questions are raised about the socialist past in Baltic musical practices (Karnes and Braun 2009), but the central point here is that the incorrect evaluations noted by Braun lead to distorted understandings not only of genres but also of the manifold ways in which musical traditions are geographically and temporally connected in the distant as well as more recent past. Genre distinctions obscure the fluidity of cultural transmissions, which are not confined by either musical judgement or political outlook. The Baltic Youth Philharmonic's practices engage with the politics of integration by fore-grounding cultural connections within the Baltic Sea Region. The turn to the folk, however, also marks a renewal of nationalist sentiment in the context of integration.

The third point is the tenacity of the idea of the nation-state in the context of integration. Music scholarship in the Baltic Sea Region has been concerned with folk music, art composers' use of folk music, and identifying the features of national styles. Music historiographies have focused on showing the development of a national music (Lippus 1999). This scholarship has responded to the influences of Soviet cultural policy too (Karnes and Braun 2009). Beyond scholarship, an ongoing contemporary upsurge in folk music and its incorporation in art music may be a new manifestation of national identity within this region, a subconscious desire to keep national cultural identity alive in view of European economic integration (Korhonen 2000).

*Memory*

The inclusion of folk-inspired repertoires is also interesting because it links to musical and political memory, renewing stories about ancient cultural heritages and renegotiating identity constructions (cf. Ramnarine 2003). The orchestra's repertoire encompasses works once defined as peripheral to the symphonic canon. The re-organisation of musical geographies and the programming of works by composers from the region emphasises cultural richness as well as cultural connections, which cross former centre and periphery canonical borders. Current political aspirations towards integration are calibrated by the multiple ways in which the past is remembered, particularly the renegotiation of the relationship between nation and memory as well as the diverse cultural modes of remembering that embrace both oral narratives and written histories (cf. Erll 2008). Fortunati and Lamberti suggest the study of memory is an interesting site for observing the making of the New Europe and understanding processes of identity formations. Memories re-emerge when political and cultural contexts change (Fortunati and Lamberti 2008: 127–128). Thus, the political and institutional drives which have resulted in a trans-European research project on cultural memory strive to recognise the balances between 'national' and 'European' perspectives. The project outlined five approaches to memory, all of which are applicable to some extent in music examples from the Baltic Sea Region. These are: 1) cultural amnesia (dealing with traumatic histories and the silencing of some voices); 2) bearing witness (through artefacts and archives); 3) memory and place (looking at the interplay between these in different contexts from the regional to the global); 4) oral and written history (considering modes of orality and writing within the same community, and exploring their differences and interrelationships); and 5) foundation texts and mythologies (focusing on myths in cultural invention and the shaping of imagined communities) (Fortunati and Lamberti 2008: 133–135). While Fortunati and Lamberti emphasise the dialectics between nation-states and the New Europe, Erll distinguishes the complex, yet interrelated, levels of cultural memory between the 'individual' and the 'collective'. Remembering as an individual cognitive process is transferred to the level of the collective in discourses on, for example, national memory. One level of cultural memory "draws attention to the fact that no memory is ever purely individual, but always inherently shaped by collective contexts" while another level indicates that "societies do not remember literally" and that reconstruction of "a shared past bears some resemblance to the processes of individual memory... in the creation of versions of the past according to present knowledge and needs" (Erll 2008: 5).

Cultural memories in social worlds rather than in analytical frameworks cannot be categorised neatly into the schemas of nation-state and Europe or of individual and collective. As Erll (2008) and Fortuna and Lamberti (2008) insist there is continuous interaction between these categories. Moreover, memory contributes to historical thinking (as noted at the outset), sometimes with profound examples of reinstatement. Both memory and history mutually interrogate how the past is remembered, how it is rewritten in political and cultural transformations and, importantly, in how memory is returned to written history. The return includes traumatic contexts of communities erased from cultural landscapes with traces left only in archives (e.g. see Karnes 2012 on recollecting Jewish music in the Baltic States).

The Baltic Youth Philharmonic offers an example of the “social performance of memory”, of ways in which practices of remembering are represented in the public sphere. As Erll and Rigney observe, social actors and organisations “ensure that certain stories rather than others enjoy publicity and become salient”, and not only the media but also civic organisations, of which the Baltic Youth Philharmonic is literally one, can “orchestrate public attention for particular stories or issues in the form of official commemorations” (Erll and Rigney 2009: 9).

### *Environment, energy, and orchestral economics*

The Baltic Sea Region is a culturally, economically and environmentally heterogeneous region. One-fifth of the EU’s population lives in the Baltic Sea Region. The EU’s aspirations for this region include increased cross-border trade, greater transfer of innovation knowledge from the Nordic countries and Germany to the Baltic States and Poland, improvements to sustainable transport and energy infrastructures, and attention to maritime safety (e.g. in transport of oil from Russia). Baltic Sea pollution is an environmental and political concern. The EU strategy for the region notes that a macro-regional approach is vital to combat long-term deterioration of this unique sea area, which is one the world’s largest bodies of almost completely enclosed brackish waters (a combination of North Sea water and fresh water from rain and rivers). The EU is a formal member of the 1992 Helsinki Convention thus ensuring representation on the Helsinki Commission known as HELCOM. The commission is focused on Baltic marine environmental protection and it has established inter-state and inter-organisational cooperation through various environmental and policy networks to deal with issues such as pollution, coastal development and water treatment. The commission was an initiative of the 1974 Helsinki Convention,

the first regional international agreement to address marine pollution (VanDeveer 2011). In the Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, environmentalism has been linked with independence movements and with questions about identity that have shifted from not being Soviet to emphasising national and Baltic affiliation and then subsequently to asking what it means to be European. The relationship between environmentalism and nationalism is complex and it is affected by political and economic uncertainty as seen in the early post-Soviet period (Galbreath 2009).

In 2008, the Baltic Youth Philharmonic was co-initiated and sponsored entirely by Nord Stream AG, the new gas supply route for Europe. The company's web press release tapped into the "ethical potential" of the youth orchestra (cf. Etherington 2007: 129) in stating:

"Nord Stream understands its social responsibility in maintaining sustainable development in energy infrastructure, while also making a lasting contribution to society, environment, and cultural life. Therefore, the company supports transboundary projects in several fields. For example, Nord Stream has initiated the Baltic Youth Philharmonic orchestra, consisting of talented young musicians, mostly from the nine Baltic Sea states. The Baltic Youth Philharmonic brings to life a vision of a culturally unified Baltic region and disseminates it throughout Europe."<sup>5</sup>

By 2012 other commercial companies were sponsoring the orchestra, such as Saipem, an international contractor in the oil and gas industry, which sponsored the orchestra's 2012 tour.<sup>6</sup> The 2012 season included a concert to mark twenty years of the existence of the Council of Baltic Sea States, at the invitation of the German Chancellor, Angela Merkel. Press reports promoted the Baltic Youth Philharmonic as "an ensemble that uniquely reflects the harmonious way the region is growing and working together" (Ahlbeck 2012). Stories about orchestras often emphasise social harmony and collective endeavour and, indeed, orchestras are becoming increasingly aware of their civic political roles (see Ramnarine 2011). Nevertheless, it is worth emphasising that sponsorship of this musical enterprise by companies such as Nord Stream or Saipem focuses attention on cultural benefits and obscures the contested environmental and energy politics of constructing a gas pipe line in the Baltic Sea. The story of the Baltic Youth Philharmonic is also a story about contemporary industry and environmental concerns involving complex political dialogues. Nord

<sup>5</sup> See <http://www.nord-stream.com/press-info/press-releases/nord-stream-welcomes-pipeline-installation-at-venice-biennale-2008-186/>, accessed March 23, 2013.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://www.baltic-youth-philharmonic.org/?id=26>, last accessed March 20, 2013.

Stream is a joint venture between Russian and German companies and common interests in energy resources were highlighted in the 2014 debut concert (22 January) in the Berlin Philharmonic concert hall. The theme evoked both musical and energy resources: “Feel the Energy: German-Russian Voyage”. The programme featured German and Russian composers, Richard Strauss (Don Juan), Sergei Rachmaninov (Paganini Rhapsody), J.S. Bach (Concerto in A minor for Violin) and Alexander Scriabin (The Poem of Ecstasy). But, as Ellen Karm discusses, all Baltic Sea Region countries have interests in ensuring that the gas pipeline project will not cause harm to the environment, and the Baltic states, Finland, Poland and Sweden have expressed concerns about the environmental aspects of the project, especially negative impacts on Baltic Sea fisheries and disturbance of chemical weapons discarded post-1940s (Karm 2008: 115). The Baltic Youth Philharmonic’s 2013 online brochure devotes a page to Nord Stream, which outlines the company’s transition from pipeline construction to gas pipeline operator with a capacity to transport 55 billion cubic metres of gas to the EU. Assurances about monitoring and minimising harm to the Baltic Sea environment stand alongside statements promoting industry contributions to a united Baltic Sea Region as co-founder and sponsor of the Baltic Youth Philharmonic (Hummel and Warnig 2013: 22).

### *Educational projects*

In January 2013, a Baltic Music Education Foundation was launched to support the work of the Baltic Youth Philharmonic and to operate as a centre for music education within the region (Hummel and Warnig 2013: 4). It is one of the most recent music education initiatives within the region aiming to draw attention to cultural connections. Other examples include a ‘global music’ programme alongside Finnish folk music studies at the Department of Folk Music, Sibelius Academy of Music (Ramnarine 2003). Since 2007, this Department has also participated in a programme called ‘Nordic Master in Folk Music’ with the Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts in Odense, the Royal College of Music in Stockholm and the Ole Bull Academy in Voss. The programme recognises shared cultural heritages and political affiliations between the Nordic countries. The Sibelius Academy’s Folk Music Department has also focused on a wider Europe through participation in the European Union Education and Culture Programme funded European Network of Traditional Music and Dance. Since 2000 this network has aimed to use traditional music and dance as a way of developing cooperation in a multicultural Europe and to strive for the development of a common European

cultural policy through institutional frameworks.<sup>7</sup> Cross-border and trans-regional cooperation are emphasised as a route to developing a sense of ‘European citizenship’ in the network’s charter, which concludes:

“it would be advisable to develop an intermediary level of cooperation... linking various regions and nations from the same geo-cultural area, who thus possess common elements of identity due to shared geography, culture, language or history, while situating them in a larger European framework whose goal is to promote their similarities as well as their differences. There could exist, for example, a Nordic area, an Anglo-Celtic area, a Mediterranean area, an Alpine area, a Balkan area, a Slavo-Hungarian area: areas of varying geometry which are not homogenous zones, but rather larger ‘European’ regions where one discerns veritable kinship among cultures and similar regional traditions. These would be areas where the frontiers of nation states are absent and where the relationships are born of cultural traditions, thus suggesting a new European cartography. This level of co-operation is inevitable in many crossborder zones where the same musical culture is found on all sides of two or three national frontiers” (cited in Doherty 2002: 107).

In 2011, European Union funding from the Education and Culture Programme led to a trans-European collaboration called the European Network of Folk Orchestras, a development of the European Network for Traditional Music and Dance’s initiative on establishing the European Youth Folk Orchestra. Partner institutions are the Sibelius Academy, Escola Municipal de Música Folk e Tradicional and Fundación SonDeSeu (Vigo, Spain), Associazione ArteMotiva (Torino, Italy), and the Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama (Glasgow, UK). There are plans for expansion. In July 2012 the network advertised for more partner institutions via its Facebook site. The principal objectives of this network are fourfold: 1) to create new contemporary folk orchestras linked to educational institutions that teach traditional music; 2) to consolidate an infrastructure for sharing knowledge and promoting European contemporary folk music; 3) to encourage transnational mobility among musicians; and 4) to organise musical events and meetings to explore Europe’s musical diversity.<sup>8</sup>

These kinds of educational initiatives to connect musical practices within Europe inform the Baltic Youth Philharmonic’s educational project and the social stance of its conductor, Kristian Järvi, who stated: “BYP is not an orchestra, it is the cornerstone of

<sup>7</sup> See <http://eurotradmusic.org/network.asp?lang=en>, last accessed May 15, 2013.

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.enfoeurope.org/?sec=inicio&lang=en>, last accessed May 15, 2013.

a much bigger idea which is coming into view; the Baltic Music Education System. It is a multinational 10 country education system using music as the vehicle for social, economic, and cultural development. It represents the central, Scandinavian and eastern European diversity of cultures of nearly 100 million people as one true and unified product of the Baltic Sea Region” (Järvi cited in Hummel and Warnig 2013: 10).

### *Ending comments*

In choosing to reflect on performance as storytelling in relation to the Baltic Youth Philharmonic, I wanted to show how orchestras are implicated in re-thinking the past and how political and cultural borders are re-orchestrated in the diverse national imaginaries shaping political visions for European integration. I could have told very different stories about musical performance in this case-study. One of those stories could have focused on Turner’s processes of expansion and fragmentation in the ‘social drama’, which resonate with current aspirations for integration and the maintenance of national sovereignties. Instead of focusing on the idea of cultural connection that shapes the youth orchestra, and which is a dominant narrative in the orchestra’s self-representations as a Baltic Sea Region institution, I might have focused on the region’s conflicts and on its twentieth century military histories. Or, I might have focused on the trading relationship between Germany and Russia for energy resources. This is a major economic factor underpinning the youth orchestra’s performances. ‘Feel the Energy’ highlights that trading relationship as well as the historical axes of power within the region. Environmental concerns over resource management, which are paralleled in the European Arctic (geographically within some of the member states of the Baltic Sea Region) provide another way of telling the story (Ramnarine 2009). Or, the same banner ‘Feel the Energy’ could tell a story about orchestral branding and other arts institutions’ sustainability strategies. Another banner, the ‘Baltic Voyage’ offers a story about the histories of the region’s smaller population groups and of specific kinds of cultural connections, including linguistic ones, which contrast with the stories that can be told in adopting an integrative macro-regional approach. Cultural connections could be conceptualised also within the tropes of intercultural aesthetics or multiculturalism.

Walter Benjamin suggested that “it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it” (1969: 4). Thinking about musical performance as storytelling emphasises the narrative, interpretive and intersubjective roles of all participants,

including the ethnographer's. We are storytellers with our own political experiences as musicians and scholars and we reflect the broad trends of our time. But which story will we tell in investigating musical performance? And which stories do musical performances tell? Benjamin's pessimism about the future of storytelling is ill-founded as long as we continue to pose such critical questions and, as ethnographers, to seek explanations.

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МУЗИЧКО ИЗВОЂАШТВО КАО ПРИПОВЕДАЊЕ:  
ПАМЋЕЊЕ, ЕВРОПСКЕ ИНТЕГРАЦИЈЕ  
И БАЛТИЧКА ФИЛХАРМОНИЈА МЛАДИХ

(Резиме)

Приповедање је у теоријама разматрано као перформативна, наративна пракса, али се не употребљава често као троп у студијама музичког извођаштва. Ова студија скицира теоријске контексте, преузете из антропологије и студија перформанса, како би истражила могућности наведеног концептуалног помака у оквиру музикологије. Разматрање Валтера Бењамина (Walter Benjamin) о приповедачу као наратору памћења и историје уоквирује студију случаја о Балтичкој филхармонији младих, као и о капацитету музичког извођења за промовисање политичких идеологија, у овом случају нарочито истакнутих европских интеграција.

Виђење идеологија као прича одговара антрополошком поимању прича које могу стварати друштвене системе, обликовати друштвене промене и наглашавати односе моћи. Схватање оркестарске праксе као начина мишљења о друштвеним процесима приповедања значајно је зато што се дискурси о оркестрима често преусмеравају од разматрања извођења до политике, чак до те мере да односи који се везују за оркестар бивају концептуализовани попут политичких односа.

Студија случаја контекстуализована је у односу на оркестре младих уопште. Оркестри представљају музичке институције високе вредности, са доминантним системом преношења у оквиру музичког образовања. Оркестри младих испрва су оснивани у Сједињеним Америчким Државама и Европи почетком XX века, те су анализирани у погледу процеса аудиција, избора репертоара, финансирања и административних структура. Имајући у виду кратку историју оркестара младих као институција, значајно је навести да су они заузимали све значајнију улогу у оквиру политичких и економских пројеката широм света. Ова студија указује на то како су оркестри укључени у поновна посматрања прошлости, и начине на које су политичке и културне границе реоркестриране у оквирима различитих представа националног, обликујући политичке визије европских интеграција. Мноштво претходно

саопштених, различитих приступа промишљању Балтичке филхармоније младих, у етнографском наративу, истакнути су у закључним разматрањима. Кључно место ових закључака подразумева да мишљење о музичком извођењу, као приповедању, наглашава наративне, интерпретативне и интерсубјективне улоге свих учесника, укључујући саму улогу етнографа. Ми представљамо приповедаче са сопственим политичким искуствима музичара и истраживача, и као такви одражавамо општа кретања нашег времена. Али, коју причу бисмо испричали истражујући музичко извођење, и које приче музичка извођења преносе?

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