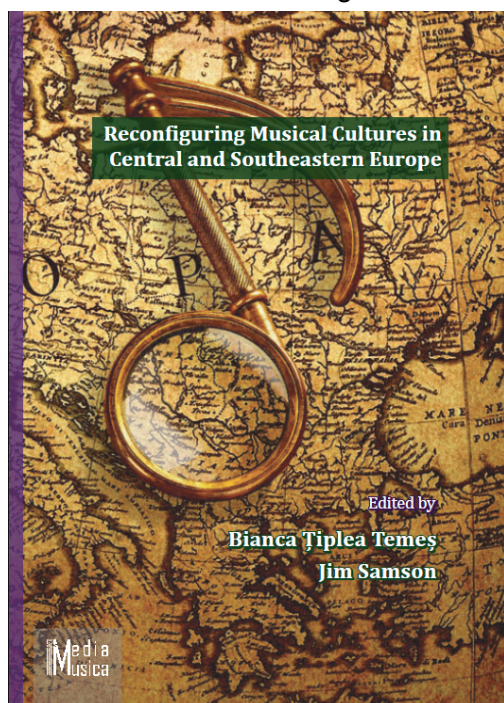


BOOK REVIEW

**RECONFIGURING MUSICAL CULTURES
IN CENTRAL AND SOUTHEASTERN EUROPE¹**

‘Music has to belong to someone to have an identity, it seems. And as political borders force cultural communities either side of a line, invented histories validate the new spaces’ (Samson, 3). With these two statements, Jim Samson sets the scene for the following studies — all of which explore how musical traditions, legacies, or tropes are entangled with the processes



of identity formation in Central and Southeastern Europe. Focusing on neglected regional perspectives in terms of Anglophone scholarship, which are nevertheless becoming increasingly accessible (not least thanks to several authors of this very volume), this collection is a welcome addition to understanding music and identity in these meta-regions. The striking cover artwork by Miklós Bencze complements the aims of this undertaking and suggests some of the themes and complexity found within the pages.

This volume is based on papers presented at the symposium ‘National Musical Cultures in Central and Southeastern Europe: Initiatives and Arguments, Development and Dialogue’, which formed part of the

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2019 Cluj Modern Festival at the Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy in Cluj-Napoca. It is edited by the symposium organiser, Bianca Țiplea Temeș, Reader in Music Theory at the Gheorghe Dima National Music Academy, and Jim Samson, the symposium's keynote speaker and Emeritus Professor of Music at the University of London.

The study of how music relates to identity has occupied musicologists since the establishment of the discipline, only reflecting the ever-evolving nature of these processes as well as our understanding of them. Today, the idea of national musics as reductive narratives contextualised by the 'age of nationalism' has been replaced by nuanced investigations into the kinds of intersections, interactions, and constructions with which the studies in this volume are concerned. Nevertheless, and as is here further demonstrated, there is much yet to untangle, not least in relation to the upheavals of the twentieth century.

Each study in this volume privileges specificity yet addresses a common thread: the 'reconfiguring' of the title. This refers to the processes which unfolded as the reach of empires shifted and eventually collapsed, the subsequent drawing and re-drawing of state lines, and the resulting legacies which continue to shape musical identities today. 'Reconfiguring' encompasses not only interactions amongst manifold musical cultures, but the active shaping of musical identities in new political, ideological, and social contexts.



Under this premise, the book is organised thematically. In Part I, 'Arguments: Exploring Musical Identities Within and Outwith National Borders', two of the four studies are concerned with the 'within' of the title. Zdravko Blažeković chronicles the role of the single-string fiddle, the *gusle*, in Serbian identity. The historical sweep, covering roughly two centuries, exposes how malleable this musical symbol proved in invoking ideas surrounding shared history in various contexts. Through examining 'moments of Austrian self-reflection' (Mayer-Hirzberger, 47), Anita Mayer-Hirzberger reveals the reconfiguration of identity throughout the twentieth century and beyond in Austria, namely music's role in 'de-Austrianization' and 'Austrianization'.

Juxtaposing key moments of identity-building highlights, once again, the malleability of musical traditions in another specific locale and context. Both studies expose how the need for self-identification can be a response to tensions and anxieties, whether through drawing pride and strength from the heroic deeds of the past or adjusting to a new state which was previously the seat of an empire.

The chapters comprising the ‘outwith’ of the title take something of a panoramic approach to peoples and traditions. Samson’s examination of entangled musical interactions in the Eastern Mediterranean points out several ways in which we are still far from de-nationalising musical histories. Taking an unanticipated but illustrative meander through ethno-pop, Samson makes an illuminating point about the prevailing understanding of how musical markers invoking a national identity are reinforced by intention and reception. Tracing how Ottoman musical influences are present in much of today’s Balkan ethno-pop, Samson suggests that such musical markers are a mode of ‘self-exoticisation’ — a process similar to how stock musical markers functioned in musical nationalisms in nineteenth-century Europe. In identifying how musical identities were reconfigured with the aim of creating specificity, Samson identifies, paradoxically, ‘a unitary convergent culture’ (Samson, 14).

Bianca Țiplea Temeș’ study explores how diversely music can evolve across space amongst a diaspora, examining how communal musical identity amongst the Aromanians has been variously shaped in and by divergent contexts, as existing traditions evolved variously and simultaneously amongst several communities across the Balkan meta-region. In doing so, Temeș also complicates the idea of the ‘Orient’. Through the example of Rogalski’s *Gaida*, exchange between Romanian folk music, Oriental features, and Aromanian folksongs is demonstrated, as is the use of Oriental elements as ‘organically assimilated’ into musical traditions, as opposed to representing an ‘exotic flavour’ (Temeș, 74). Temeș also indicates how musical practice amongst Aromanian communities South of the Danube developed, such as the incorporation of Greek names and the bilingual performance of epic songs, and sketches theoretical frameworks through which to complicate these examples of exchange and assimilation.

The premises of these two chapters are somewhat opposing — and complementary. Whilst Samson reveals the similar nature and function of constructing musical markers of identity across communities, Temeș reveals how varied the influences which encompass a communal musical identity can be.

Placing these four studies under the umbrella of ‘exploring musical identities’ is productive in the sense that they highlight similar tropes in music’s role in identity-formation across space and time, but through an array

of contexts. Emerging from Part I is the necessity of a variety of histories, perspectives, and approaches in examining how these processes morph and shift. These studies also shed light on the often-complex explanations for why musical identities become reconfigured — as responses to military threats, adapting to a newly-formed state, to foster diaspora identity or to use communal traditions to assimilate, as a self-modelled ‘other’ to Europe — and much more beyond.

The question of how we can overcome the limitations of local histories, whilst grappling with the linguistic and logistical challenges of meta-regional approaches is a prevailing challenge to grapple with. Nevertheless, Part I demonstrates that furthering our understanding of how music and identity function inherently involves homing in on local and regional expertise as well as broadening the focus to trace phenomena, exchange, and developments.



Part II, ‘Dialogues: Romania and Its Neighbours’, delves into the often-entangled musical heritage of Romania and Hungary from historical, local, regional, and (newly-formed) state-wide perspectives.

Tracing ideas developing simultaneously in specific Romanian contexts and amongst generations, Otilia Badea complicates the ideas of traditional music and foreign musical influences amidst a growing sense of cultural nationalism after the First World War. Investigating how representative composers related to ideas of peripherality, and the implications of and anxieties about whether or how folk music and modern aesthetics might be reconciled, Badea demonstrates how these aspects provoked various degrees of tension as political developments unfolded.

Elena Chircev’s study contextualises how the singing practice of Byzantine music in Romania evolved since the fifteenth century, demonstrating how the repertoire was shaped linguistically and through religious and theoretical contexts. Chircev explains how the Byzantine music taught in the Romanian language in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries came about in the context of Byzantine music practice in this region.

Confronting the question of what elements define Hungarian musical identity, György Selmeczi outlines the process of musical self-identification throughout ages, identifying paradoxes in the process of arriving at the dichotomy of the chapter's title ('On the Dichotomy of Hungarian Musical Character'). For example, the 'revival' movements stimulated by comparative research into the musics of Central Eastern Europe in the early twentieth century led to seeking 'authenticity' through the 'global gestures' of pop (Selmeczi, 127). The 'value-driven' approach to musical sources established by Bartók, Kodály and others did not fundamentally disturb how the *verbunkos* was viewed in musical self-identification, meanwhile the composing mainstream largely ignored the 'identifiably Hungarian formulas' (Selmeczi, 135). Selmeczi points out, therefore, that both 'folklorization' and archaic layers of Hungarian music simultaneously (self)define Hungarian musical identity.

Florinela Popa uses the often-polarising 'clichés' of musical identity to expose how the idea of a national music related to the specific contexts — and agendas — of the shifting political and ideological contexts of twentieth-century Romania. Popa identifies that throughout radicalised approaches to musical 'purity' and scapegoating as a way to explain a lack of musical culture during the Legionnaire period and the ensuing decades of socialism (where the definition of 'national' in the 1970s and 80s became increasingly radical), the crucial question of how the national and the universal should relate in creating national music alluded the kinds ideological manipulation which variously informed approaches to folklore and the mythologisation of the past.

These discussions give a sense of how discourse relates to the broader context of modernity, and how such discourse helps to explain the ideological frameworks at play (and vice versa). The dichotomies that characterised Hungarian and Romanian music in the twentieth century as composers and critics simultaneously grappled with the past and modernity, assists our understanding of the anxieties and tensions such self-identification sought to address, and why musical identities evolved as they did — including their paradoxes and surprising turns.

Part II identifies some specifics of how and why music was reconfigured in Romanian and Hungarian contexts — throughout history and under regime changes. What emerges here is that whilst the topics of discourse are often rooted in similar concerns, their unfolding is dependent on manifold contextual aspects. Furthermore, these discussions show the ways in which music can become a tool to address problems of ideology and identity in these contexts in a variety of ways, and reveals how reconfiguration is a phenomenon steeped deeply in history — whether in relation to explaining shortcomings of the community or valorising heritage, and even when seeking to break with the past.

Taken together, this volume indicates something of the complexity with which the musical cultures of Central and Southeastern Europe have evolved — with implications for further explorations in these and other meta-regions. Juxtaposing historical periods; the regional with the meta-regional, and the local with the state-wide, can help to reveal how and why music and identity converge at times of change, and what role music takes in the desire to foster community. This allows for identifying specificity as much as broad trends, but whilst helping to avoid the quagmires we still grapple with in national music histories. The claim that ‘the eight essays ... build a composite picture of the musical universe of east central and southeastern Europe’ (Temeş and Samson, vi) is, I believe, deftly delivered upon.

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