

The Rose Ensemble: Workshops

Notes from meeting on Oct 19, 2012

Present: Lisa, Linda, Andrew, Kim, Nick, Ginna, David, Jordan, Holly

Setting the context:

- Holly clarified that this is a cross-disciplinary project, intended to bring together biblical scholars who work with or are interested in oral tradition together with those who actively engage in presenting historically and cultural informed performances of oral traditions.
 - Jordan emphasized that the performers should not think of their work as purely entertainment; it has distinctly scholarly dimensions that form an important foundation for each performance.
- Holly emphasized that this is an audience who doesn't necessarily know a lot about music, but is interested in digging deep. *Scholars are also fairly (actually, very) self oriented: they want to know 1) how this can help them with their own research and 2) how this can help them in teaching. The more you can assist them in thinking about research methods and, in particular, questions they might not think to ask the more successful the workshop will be.*

Working Definition of Oral Tradition (drawn from comments by the group):

- It is both oral and aural: that is, it is vocalized and heard.
 - 'Tradition' more broadly can involve objects, movement, dress and so forth.
 - **Oral** tradition may involve, as an integral component of the tradition, gestures, dance, objects and so forth.
- It is a cultural artifact: That is, it is culturally specific. For the purposes of this project, the primary focus is on musical oral traditions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; it is recognized that the oral traditions of these three religions will be embedded in specific cultural contexts.
 - Holly clarified that examples from other contexts can be employed for the purposes of illustration; however, it is important to keep a primary focus on the three faiths.
 - Of particular interest would be areas or ways in which there is overlap between the three faiths in terms of text/narrative, style, melody, harmony and the role of context (social, political, cultural) in creating these areas of overlap.
- Tradition is distinct from performance:
 - A 'tradition' is something that is transmitted across generations because it has value to the community in terms of shaping identity and passing on of cultural values, norms, behaviors or practices.
 - Although it can exist in written form, the primary mode of transmission is oral.
 - So, oral tradition is different from, say, a work by Palestrina which is performed orally; it is not, however, a 'traditional artifact'.

Workshops *Questions that were highlighted in the course of conversation; I've tried to do a little sorting to keep the focus of each workshop distinct. Some questions repeat, but in relation to a different 'emphasis'. I've also re-arranged some of the questions posed by Holly and Lorna on the original handout, in response to the conversation. Finally, I've thrown in a few questions that arose post-conversation. So stimulating!!!*

Workshop I: Research Methods *It strikes me that you might consider using the ‘three faiths’ program as a case study for this workshop. Just a thought.*

- How are you defining ‘oral tradition’? *This is very likely a question that would be raised from the audience so you may want to clarify this up front. You might want to do this in every workshop.*
- What are the *assumptions* that govern research into religious musical oral traditions?
- What are some of the different ways, as researchers, that you encounter and attempt to authenticate ‘oral traditions’?
 - You perform ‘ancient’ oral traditions – some of which have ceased to function ‘orally’ – that is, they are no longer transmitted orally. How do you determine whether something was *tradition* and not simply a *performance piece*?
 - Do you ever encounter evidence to indicate why a tradition may have ceased to circulate?
- When a musicologist encounters a text without accompanying musical notation, how does s/he know it is an oral tradition?
- What are the differences, from your perspective, between encountering an oral tradition in writing/musical score and encountering it through a person.
 - *Where does the authority lie? Is a score more reliable than an individual? How important is ‘relationship’ in the transmission of oral tradition?*
 - *What might a written score ‘tell you’ that a person might not? Or what might a person tell you that a written score might not?*
- You really have to pursue two lines of inquiry: text and music. What challenges does that add?
 - How do you think paying attention to music could be useful to those of us who tend to focus exclusively on text?
- When you are researching a tradition, do you look for multiple forms of the tradition (variant forms) in different contexts? What does this tell you about the tradition, its performance and/or its significance (i.e. is it given a different emphasis – and especially, how does music contribute to shaping this emphasis?)
 - When you are pursuing a tradition from one faith tradition, do you ever come across a variant form of the tradition in another faith tradition (similar either in terms of text, style, or melody)? What have you learned from this that might be helpful or important for scholars of religion to think about?
- In what ways does the religious dimension of the tradition complicate the research process?
 - Do you ever encounter ‘barriers’ arising from religious customs or restrictions?
 - What are the varieties of contexts that you consider when seeking out musical religious oral traditions?
 - Do you distinguish between ‘low’ and ‘high’ traditions (informal/formal; ‘of the people/restricted to a designated group’)?

Workshop II: Performance [case studies]

- When thinking in terms of ‘oral tradition’, how do you determine ‘historical authenticity’? What does ‘purity’ mean?
 - Do you distinguish between “transmission of tradition” and “reproduction”?
- Can you give an example of how you have negotiated between historical authenticity and the impact of contemporary social, political, and cultural contexts? How has religion played a role in this

- Where do you encounter tension between preservation and innovation in preparing to perform musical oral traditions?
 - When and where is improvisation a part of the tradition itself?
 - When and where are dance or movement a part of the tradition?
 - Are there specifically religious values/traditions that restrict or shape performance in a particular way? Do these differ among the three faiths?
- What do you 'see' when you look at a score/manuscript and think about moving from manuscript to performance? i.e. what does a musical score tell you – or not tell you – about performance?
 - How is this different from being how you move from 'reception' to 'performance' when you receive the tradition from a person or persons?
 - Are there times/reasons to disregard an existing musical score of an "oral tradition"? Why might this be?
- What do you listen for? What are the different ways that 'hearing' is important for performance? Or, to put it another way, what different kinds of things do you need to 'hear' in order to generate a performance?
 - What is the relationship between words and music? How does the one shape the other?
- How do you think your way into music that you have never heard before?
- Different traditions seem to require different kinds of 'voice' (i.e. tonal quality, ornamentation, style). In what ways do you understand these to be an integral part of the tradition?
 - Is there anything in the text itself that gives you cues to these dimensions?
 - For those who tend to focus only on text (i.e. biblical scholars), what do we need to learn to pay attention to?
- Does it make a difference to performance if you have inherited the tradition via a musical score or an individual? In what ways?
- As you have developed a performance repertory, have you encountered religious musical traditions that you have determined – or been told – are not appropriate for public performance? What were these, and what reasons were given? How do you see this as a part of 'historical authenticity' and 'purity'?
- What role does the audience play in performance?
 - Does the audience 'shape' the performance in any way?
 - In your research, have you come across any descriptions of how performances of religious oral traditions were perceived and/or received?
 - Have you encountered personal experiences with audiences that are 'remarkable' in terms of how the tradition has been received (beyond accolades for the performance itself)?
- What difference does the performance *context* make:
 - Does the tradition itself restrict the context? Or is it historically designed for a particular context?
 - What difference, in terms of your own experience, does context make?
- If you were trying to coach scholars of written texts in terms of what they should think about relative to performance, what would you say?
 - What, in your mind, is the difference between performing text and performing musical texts?

Workshop III: Preservation

- In today's complex media world, what makes an 'oral tradition' oral?
 - Is oral tradition (in terms of musical oral tradition) necessarily anonymous?
- When a musicologist encounters a text without accompanying musical notation, how does s/he know it is an oral tradition?
- How important is the master-apprentice relationship for the preservation of musical oral traditions?
 - How do master and apprentice negotiate the end of the mentoring relationship (authority/independence/claiming voice)?
 - In what ways besides 'master-apprentice' relationship is musical oral tradition transmitted? Do these have the same kind of 'authority' or 'authenticity'?
- As the intimate nature of learning becomes more diffuse, who is the actual authority?
- What affect does modern media have on the transmission of oral tradition? *Here it is probably important to know that John Miles Foley's last book, published after his death last April, is on this very subject: Oral Tradition and the Internet: Pathways of the Mind.*
 - What is the effect of this on the master-apprentice relationship?
 - E.g., Holly raised the example of students who 'identify' with a figure on you-tube but do not actually have a personal relationship with that individual.
- Who 'owns' oral tradition? The master? The community? Does this differ from context to context? From religion to religion?
- What are the assets and liabilities in attempting to preserve a musical interpretation one did not receive first hand?
- What preservation issues affect the 'authenticity' of written scores?
 - How are suspicions/hunches/guesses formed about its oral antecedents?
- What are the challenges in notating oral tradition? What affect does this have on the preservation of *oral* tradition?
- Are there times/reasons to disregard an existing musical score of an "oral tradition"? Why might this be?
- How is 'hearing' important for preservation? What do you need to 'hear' in order to adequately preserve a tradition?
 - Is hearing more important than 'seeing'?
 - What role does the body play in remembering?
- What ways does cognition/the ways in which we remember things affect the preservation of musical oral tradition?
 - In what ways does music assist in the memory of text?
 - How might this help scholars of text think differently about text?
- Do commercial recordings/DVD's/Video's validate historical, linguistic and musical accuracy. *Think, for example, of recordings of The Rose Ensemble.*
 - If not, what should we think about when thinking about accuracy?
- What role, in your experience, does the 'community' or group play in preservation?
 - To what degree are 'individuals' important for the preservation of tradition?
- In your experience, in what ways do the three different faiths preserve tradition?
 - Are there differences between them in terms of how they do this?
 - What role does access play in terms of preservation: who has access and how?
- In what ways is preservation of religious oral musical traditions important for scholars in terms of learning about religious practice and belief?