

The Rose Ensemble at the Society of Biblical Literature/American Academy of Religion

Context: Joint meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature and the American Academy of Religion. The former focuses (as you would guess) on biblical materials and related ancient documents, as well as archaeology and interpretive trajectories and theories. AAR focuses very broadly on theology, ethics, religion and the arts, sociology of religion and so forth. Each of these Societies is divided into research sections. At any one point in the day there may be as many as 20 different sections meeting. (For more information see www.sblonline.org)

The Bible in Ancient and Modern Media Section, which is presenting the artist in residency, is a research section of the Society of Biblical Literature dedicated to the study of the relationship between the Bible and media, in all eras and manifestations (film, art, print, oral tradition and so forth). This particular section is one of the oldest research Sections (over 25 years) so it is well known and respected.

Audience: Because of the special nature of this program we are hoping to attract at least 100 participants to each of the workshops. The vast majority of the audience will be people who explicitly identify as scholars of religion (think book people), each with their own particular area of focus - in other words, diverse. Some of these will be people who are particularly interested in oral tradition, some who are particularly interested in the three faiths dimension, some who are particular interested in music, and some who are attracted because this is something different. The second workshop is open to the public as well as members of SBL/AAR so may have an even larger audience, and more diverse. In all cases, some people will consider themselves religious and will identify with a particular faith tradition (mostly Jews and Christians, but some Muslims, Buddhists, and Hindi); just as many will identify as agnostics or simply 'spiritual'. Because this is a scholarly meeting, there is no expectation that the material will be approached from a 'faith' perspective, unless this is from a sociological angle (i.e. how 'faith' shapes worldview).

Goals: The goal of the residency is to bring together groups with two different areas of expertise to see what they can learn from each other: 1) Performance musicians with expertise in researching, reconstructing, and performing oral traditions of the three Abrahamic Faiths; 2) biblical scholars and scholars of religion who have an interest in and/or who do research in the area of oral tradition, the transmission of oral religious tradition. A major reason for bringing these two groups together is to help scholars experience how performance both shapes the transmission of tradition and serves a particular rhetorical function by shaping the way in which the tradition is performed. The emphasis is on dialogue.

Our hope is that the scholar types will walk away with:

- 1) insight into how musicians research and reconstruct oral traditions (and providing scholars with ideas about how they can expand their own research skills);
- 2) an increased appreciation for the important role that music plays in the transmission of religious oral tradition;
- 3) increased understanding for ways in which the three Abrahamic faiths intersect and engage in cross-fertilization through music (and shared oral traditions, or variant forms of traditions);

- 4) an understanding of the important role that performance plays in shaping tradition (what that looks like from the perspective of the performers; how performers interact both with the tradition they are transmitting and the audience--e.g. the kind of decisions they make relative to performance including awareness of how the tradition engages traditional themes/ideas/images and interacts with themes/ideas/issues that are present in the immediate performance context.
- 5) an enthusiasm for thinking about how they might include music as a part of their teaching about religion and, in particular, oral tradition (including the involvement of musicians).

I might just mention that you have the opportunity to plant the seed of inviting TRE to perform or engage in residencies at literally hundreds of colleges, universities and seminaries around the U.S. and abroad.

Workshops: Below are the descriptions of the workshops that will appear in the program book. These had to be written months ago; they are intended to be ‘open’ and ‘suggestive’. In other words, there is room to be flexible within the broad parameters of the titles and descriptions. They have been titled ‘workshops’ to indicate that they will be interactive. By all means, engage the audience; just remember two things 1) they are mostly not musicians 2) they are scholars and are used to engaging in sometimes very intense dialogue. The more you invite them to engage/participate, the more they will.

We have assigned a ‘presider’ to each workshop who will be responsible for a general introduction, acknowledgement of sponsors, and distribution of evaluation forms that we need to meet the terms of the NEA grant. The presider in each case is someone who has done considerable research in the area of oral tradition.

We have also assigned two ‘respondents’ to each workshop. The idea of including the ‘respondents’ is to build a bridge between the scholars and the musicians. They have been asked to be prepared to ask questions and to speak to ways in which the workshop interests with or illuminates their own area of work/research. If you want to employ them in a particular way, let me know. I can also give you their contact information so that you can communicate with them directly.

The “normal” course of events at SBL/AAR is for there to be a panel presentation of some kind with several talking heads, followed by a time for respondents to speak, followed by general discussion. **There is absolutely no expectation that you will follow this format.** It will be helpful if, at the beginning of each workshop, you briefly outline what the workshop will look like. **If you want to circulate something in advance for people to read, that can be arranged.**

Following the description of each workshop, I have given some thoughts and questions from two readers: Lorna (an interested outsider) and me (director of the project). These are presented as ‘stream of consciousness’ - i.e. they have not been systematized in any way. Also, you may find that questions/comments listed under one workshop may better serve another workshop. *These are simply meant to engage your imagination and give you a sense of where your audience is coming from.*

Workshop 1 (Sunday, Nov. 18: 9-11:30 a.m.)

Research Methods and Critical Issues in the Recovery of Oral Traditions

Oral vs. Written: In modern chamber music circles, the dividing lines between folk and classical genres run deep. That which can be definitively attributed to a composer or written source is embraced as historically legitimate while material procured from oral sources is often discounted and placed in the seemingly lesser categories of “folk” or “world” music. The result is a largely unbalanced representation of the whole of the repertoire (particularly vocal music). Is it the daunting task of conducting research that prevents equal representation, or is there an underlying belief that orally-transmitted is, by definition, less authentic? How do we challenge those who exclude oral traditions? In this session we will examine the assumptions that govern research into religious musical oral traditions and explore how can we both encourage and develop research skills for preserving oral traditions. In addition, we will consider how orally transmitted music differs from that which is preserved in manuscript and the particular issues this raises for those doing research into oral traditions.

Lorna: There seems to be a tacit assumption that written music is self-evidently authentic, but what preservation issues affect the ‘authenticity’ of written scores? Does context of performance affect written music in ways similar or dissimilar to the ways it may affect orally transmitted music? What is the role of elitism (literacy, high culture/low culture, etc) in the privileging of written music over orally transmitted music?

Holly: How do you go about researching musical oral tradition? What kinds of sources do you engage? Do you encounter religious parameters that limit access to oral tradition or may result in only ‘partial disclosure’? What differences do you encounter in locating oral tradition through written texts (in which case, how do you know it is an oral tradition or has circulated as ‘oral tradition’?) and that which is transmitted through a ‘bearer of the tradition’ (i.e. a person)? Do ‘oral traditions’ belong to particular genres that are distinct from written/composed traditions? What challenges are present in attempts to notate something that is fundamentally oral? What about variant traditions? In researching oral traditions do you encounter similar traditions (musical, rhythmic, textual) in the three Abrahamic faiths? What do these areas of overlap tell us about the transmission of oral tradition? In what ways are you aware of how politics or shifting social dynamics impacting the preservation and transmission of traditions, and how does that affect efforts to ‘research’ oral traditions?

Presider: Holly Hearon; **Respondents:** 1) Joanna Dewey (member of BAMM): a biblical scholar who has written extensively on the recovery of oral tradition and oral dynamics of the written texts of the New Testament 2) Ruth Stone: an ethnomusicologist/folklorist at the University of Indiana whose work has focused on Africa and the Middle East

Workshop 2 (Sunday, Nov. 18: 4-6:30 p.m.)

How Performances Shapes Tradition

When musicians present concert programs featuring music that has been transmitted orally (e.g. through field recordings or by rote learning), how can they ensure authenticity in source material? And how does each performance contribute to the gradual and inevitable shaping of

the tradition? This session explores the tension between preservation and innovation in the performance of musical oral traditions, and will demonstrate how scholarly performers negotiate the challenges presented by a desire to maintain purity and historical authenticity while being attentive to the impact of contemporary as well as historical physical, social, political, and cultural contexts. Case studies will include the music of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Lorna: Are there ways in which the interpretive process/task in music resembles that in written text? What are the questions one might ask about provenance, socio-historical setting? What artifactual evidence helps shape reconstruction and interpretation? How is the performer as interpreter understood as “voicing” the music? What does “authenticity” mean in relation to orally preserved music?

Holly: I would be interested to know more about how performers experience the movement from oral tradition to notated text and from notated text to performance. How conscious are you, as you prepare what is received as oral tradition for performance, of the ways in which you are shaping the tradition? What kinds of discussions does this involve? (It could be really interesting to show us a little ‘case study’). What ‘rhetorical moves’ do you make musically? How aware are you of the ways in which present circumstances will shape the way in which a performance is received - i.e. are you aware of the tradition ‘shifting’ in its reception as you move from context to context? What role does the audience have in shaping performance - both as you ‘anticipate’ your audience and in the actual act of performance? Are you aware of ways in which music you have performed continues to be transmitted orally? How does instrumentation impact performance or affect the ‘rhetoric’ of the performance? What limitations or restrictions do the individual religions place on the performance or transmission of oral tradition? How does that affect you as performers of tradition? How do you perceive your role as ‘bearers’ of tradition and performers of tradition? What do you think scholars most need to know about performance? Why do you think performance is critical to understanding oral tradition?

Presider: Art Dewey (a member of BAMM who has explored in particular the ways in which oral tradition engage the social and political arena); **Respondents:** 1) Anne Wire: a biblical scholar who has done extensive research in the area of women’s oral tradition; she has, in addition, collected oral Christian musical traditions in China (she is fluent in Mandarin) 2) Dan Fitzgerald: a member of the NIDA Institute (which focuses on translation of biblical texts) who is an ethnomusicologist who has done work in Africa

Workshop 3 (Monday, Nov. 19: 1-3:30 p.m.)

Preservation to Performance: Discovery and Re-oralization in the Modern Age

When a musicologist encounters a text without accompanying musical notation, how does he/she know it is in oral tradition? What consideration should be given to the transmission and re-oralization of text, with respect specifically to the nature of religious traditions? With myriad dynamics introduced by YouTube and other modern media, the potency of the master-apprentice relationship is greatly diluted. And as the intimate nature of learning becomes more diffuse, who is the actual authority? Does the internet rule? Do commercial recordings validate historical,

linguistic and musical accuracy? What can scholars learn about religious practice and belief through the study of musical oral traditions?

Lorna: When a musician/musicologist looks at written music, how are suspicions/hunches/guesses formed about its oral antecedents? How does a musician “think her way into music she has never heard? Where is the breaking point between reproducing what written music seems to dictate and what the musician *feels* about how the music should sound? How do master and apprentice negotiate the end of the mentoring relationship (authority/independence/claiming voice)? What are the assets and liabilities in attempting to preserve a musical interpretation one did not receive first hand? How do you think about the interplay between music/tradition and religion/tradition, both being evocative, emotive, emotional and ethereal?

Holly: What makes an oral tradition ‘oral tradition’? How do you, as a performer, make that distinction? Does that alter the way you engage or perform the music? Does the way in which you have received the tradition alter the way you engage or perform the music? Oral tradition is often thought of as ‘anonymous’: what does that mean in relation to the master-apprentice relationship? Who ‘owns’ oral tradition? Does ownership differ from context to context? What constitutes ‘accuracy’ with respect to oral tradition? Does this differ depending on the kind of oral tradition and its place within a religion? What affect does our shifting media world have on our experience of and perception of ‘oral tradition’?

Presider: James Maxey (who works for the NIDA Institute and who is very interested in inter-semiotics); **Respondents:** 1) Ruth Stone (see above) 2) Richard Swanson (member of BAMM): a biblical scholar whose primary focus is on performance, both dramatic and musical, of biblical texts. His interest is in cracking open the text and revealing the tensions and contradictions within it.