



The Congress of the Catalonia Musicological Society, Solsona, 1997: developments in the teaching of musicology in northeastern Spain

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In the Catalan-speaking areas of the northeastern Iberian Peninsula there are three Benedictine monasteries. The best known of these is the monastery of Montserrat (Montserrat 1995:1 532), near Barcelona. This monastery is regarded as extremely important for the development of Catalan religious music, while the second in line is the Santuari d'El Miracle of Solsona, lying towards the higher ranges of the Pyrenees. On the other side of the Pyrenees in France (traditionally a Catalan-speaking area), there is the Benedictine abbey of Saint Miquel of Cuixa, near Prades (Prades 1995:1 607), which may be regarded as the third most important monastery of its kind in this vicinity. Interestingly enough, many of the appointed priests here at Cuixa hail from Catalonia.

In this article I shall deal mainly with a congress of the Societat Catalana de Musicologia held at the Santuari d'El Miracle from 8 to 10 October 1997, highlighting the importance of an event like this for the future development of the teaching of the discipline of musicology at tertiary level in Spain.

The theme of this congress of the Catalan Musicological Society, *La Musicologia a Catalunya, propostes de future*, or when translated 'Musicology in Catalonia, suggestions for the future', not only marked an important point in the history of this society, but with its timing it also fell together with a most significant development in the teaching of musicology in the most northeastern province of Spain. During the 1997 to 1998 academic year musicology as a separate discipline was introduced for the first time at a Catalan university – the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona – as opposed to the usual way in which musicology is taught under the umbrella of a wider arts education. In the light of this historic musicological event in Spain, suggestions were made at this congress about possible future

developments in the teaching of musicology in the twenty-first century. Over a period of two days the most prominent musicologists of Catalonia read 13 major papers, while much time was also allowed for a younger generation of researchers to deliver invited and free papers.

Although the congress took place in Spain, most of the papers were read in the Catalan language and not in Castilian (Spanish), as spoken in the larger part of the country. Catalan is spoken by almost 11 million people in the northeastern part of the peninsula as well as the Balearic Islands which, apart from the difference in language, warrants the formation of a separate musicological society, and should not be confused with a separatist organisation. The accents of the different regions, from the more closed sounds of the Barcelona sector to the much wider and open pronunciation of the Valencia and Majorca areas, added much colour to the varied subjects presented.

Santuari d'El Miracle (near Solsona) comprises a Benedictine monastery and church, which lies isolated on top of the Solsones mountain range with a full and splendid view of the higher Pyrenees. The magnificent ornate golden altar of the half-completed church, is one of the most important Baroque masterpieces of its kind in Catalonia, and because of its sheer beauty without doubt a real inspiration for many of the congress participants.

Papers were mainly organised and presented in historical context, starting with the music of the Middle Ages leading up to the present time, but in their presentation not necessarily arranged in chronological order. The proceedings were started off by Jordi Rifé i Santalo, secretary of the society, with a philosophical and sociological look into what the future might hold for research and methodology in the discipline of musicology in general, as well as in Catalonia. Joaquim Garrigosa and Bernat Cabero then followed with two

presentations on the medieval period, giving much insight into this lengthy and important epoch of Spanish music history. The music of the seventeenth century, with the many villancicos created in Catalonia under influence of the Italian aria, was dealt with by Francesc Bonastre. Even more localised and specialised subjects were introduced: Francesc Crespi spoke about musicology in the Balearic islands and Jaume Aiats, Anna Cazorra and Roma Escalas cover with the disciplines of ethnomusicology, music aesthetics and organology respectively. Musicological developments in Catalonia during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were explained by Francesc Cortes and Xose Avinova, before one of the older and much respected participants, Josep Climent, spoke about the official and non-official practise of musicology in his own region, Valencia, with all its political restraints.

Sergi Casademunt spoke on the religious function of an unsigned motet with two obligato violins, Ms. 1620/21, housed in the collection of the archives of the Cathedral of Barcelona, which could probably be ascribed to the Catalan composer Francesc Valls. He indicated how, for instance, the basso continuo part coincides with the harmonic scheme often utilised by Valls. According to Joan Cusco, the style of the masses performed in Barcelona during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries had a profound influence on those masses and other music performed at the chapel of Vilafranca del Panades (another very important monastery which played a role in the development of Spanish religious music). Although in his discussion Francesc Cortés evaluated the Romantic music movement in Spain rather poorly, he succeeded in propagating the need for editions of those works.

Francesco Bonastre touched on the evaluation of a so-called Catalan Renaissance musical model, which, according to him, actually does not exist. He then considered the inevitable question: which historical model should be used, or whether this period ought to be dealt with without preconceived formal models. Much more basic work needs to be done in terms of a positivistic and historical approach towards this music (finding, collecting and transcribing the musical texts), before even considering analysis or new editions. Josep Maria Gregori dealt with how Italian music influenced the Catalan region during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in respect of terminology, and he incorporated some idiomatic and geographic influences. Discussing a foregoing historical period in relation to the topic of the previous speaker, Joaquim Garrigosa gave a brief survey in a nutshell of the state of affairs regarding

the inclusion and cataloguing of monodic manuscripts from medieval times, and what role Catalonia played in the domain of the church concerning the topic of literary paleography.

Ethnomusicology was compared to *vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* (Christensen 1997:1 259–262) by Jaume Aiats, who also touched on interdisciplinary endeavours and racist models. Josep Martí, however, preferred to show how and to whom this discipline could most easily relate in terms of a musical and cultural environmental critical approach. Romà Escalas gave an illuminating picture, illustrated by many music examples, of the rich heritage of musical instruments still to be found in this northeastern part of Spain. In his discussion on the twentieth century, Xose Avioa, emphasised the unhappy division that exists between the course structures of bachelor's and doctoral students, while Jordi Rifé pointed to the lack of proper research and methodology in the field of musicology at many of the Catalan university and conservatory institutions, expressing the optimistic view that the situation would improve during the twenty-first century. Before the closing session of the last afternoon, Josep Maria Vilar dealt with the question as to how Spanish music of the eighteenth century ought to be treated as a musicological discipline.

One of the big disadvantages of this congress was that no time was available for discussions after individual lectures, so the time set aside for open discussion during the closing session was welcomed by most of the participants, allowing them to air their views. Although some of the finer points of the papers could not be dealt with at this late stage, the respondents were in a better position to give a summary of the more urgent problems encountered. Most pressing and conspicuous were the aspects to which little attention was paid, such as critical editions and archival collections.

Now, almost five years later, the changes in approach to the teaching of musicology in Spain have had time to establish themselves – although few concrete suggestions were made during the congress as to the improvement of university structures, nor to the role the discipline of musicology might play in improving and promoting the functions of these institutions of higher learning. However, without the important input contributed by Spanish musicologists at this initial congress in Solsona there would have been many more teething problems in introducing the discipline.

It is often worthwhile and sometimes very necessary for musicologists, anywhere, to convene and put their heads together in order to map out a

possible future route for their discipline, as has also happened at the local congresses of the Musicological Society of Southern Africa during recent years. Musicologists are not clairvoyants and so errors of judgement will inevitably occur.

However, the advantages of such an exercise make it worthwhile and can only contribute to a better propagation and understanding of what we are busy with and trying to achieve in the field of musicology.

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