

## SOCIETY OF ETHNOMUSICOLOGY

By PROFESSOR WILLARD RHODES, President.

It is a pleasure to accept the kind invitation of the Honorary Secretary and Editor to contribute a short article to 'African Music' informing the members of the African Music Society of the history, aims, and activities of the recently founded Society for Ethnomusicology.

In December, 1952, at the 51st Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Philadelphia, David P. McAllester, Alan P. Merriam, and the writer, met and decided to attempt to re-establish communication among scholars in the field of ethnomusicology. To this group was added Charles Seeger, at that time Director of Music and Art of the Pan-American Union, Washington, D.C. Seeger had been President of the American Society for Comparative Musicology before it became defunct in the late 1930's, and was able to supply a sense of continuity with the past while contributing valuable advice in the development of a program of action.

In December, 1953, the group issued 'Ethno-Musicology Newsletter No. 1.'—a modest mimeographed pamphlet of ten pages. This initial effort to communicate with our colleagues in the field of ethnomusicology through an exchange of information and news met with a cordial and heartening response. It was evident that the Newsletter was meeting a need among workers in ethnomusicology. In two years the mailing list grew from 75 to nearly 600. With this assurance of wide-spread interest it seemed that the time had come to consider formal organisation.

On November, 18th 1955, at the 54th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association in Boston, a group of interested persons met and organised the Society for Ethnomusicology. The Society held its first Annual Meeting in conjunction with the Fifth International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences meeting in Philadelphia, September 1—9, 1956. In two sessions the following papers were presented: "Cheremis Music", Bruno Nettl (Wayne University); "The Rôle of Music in Western Apache Culture", David P. McAllester (Wesleyan University); "Jazz Choreology" Gertrude Kurath (Michigan Folklore Society); "A new Use for Songs" Edwin G. Burrows (University of Connecticut); "Ethnomusicology, its Problems and Methods" Mieczyslaw Kolinski (Hunter College); "Training and Research Methods in Ethnomusicology" Mantle Hood (University of California in Los Angeles); "The Making of Steel Drums" Film with Sound, Peter Seeger (Beacon, New York); "A Study of Norms in the Tribal Music of Uganda" K. P. Wachsmann (Uganda Museum); "Objective Sound-writing in Ethnomusicology" Charles Seeger (Santa Barbara, California); "Some Past History of Ballads Migrant in New England" Helen Hartness Flanders (Springfield, Vermont); "The Christian Hymnology of the American Indians" Willard Rhodes (Columbia University).

At the business meeting a constitution was provisionally adopted and the following officers were elected: Honorary President, Curt Sachs; President, Willard Rhodes; 1st Vice-President, Mieczyslaw Kolinski; 2nd Vice-President, Frances Desmore; Secretary-Treasurer, David P. McAllester; Members-at-large of the Executive Board, George Herzog, Gertrude Kurath, and Alan P. Merriam, Councillors, Bruno Nettl, and Charles Seeger. Other councillors will be elected later by the Executive Board and a limited number of foreign scholars will be invited to become Corresponding Members.

The official organ of the Society is "Ethnomusicology", published three times a year in the form of a Newsletter under the editorship of Alan P. Merriam. Until recently it was limited to Notes and News, Bibliography, and Discography, but an increasing membership, now numbering more than 260, and a small grant from the Institute for the Study of Man, have made possible the inclusion of articles and book reviews in the last two numbers. It is hoped that in the near future the Society can follow the policy of the African Music Society by expanding its Newsletter into a Journal.

The aim and purpose of the Society is the advancement of research and study in the field of ethnomusicology and the dissemination of the results of such work. Though the policy of the Society will be determined and administered by an Executive Board of scholars, the officers are not unmindful of the rapidly growing interest in the material of this field among amateurs and students in neighbouring disciplines, and efforts will be made to satisfy the needs of these members as well as those of the professional ethnomusicologist.

Through the friendly co-operation of Moses Asch, Production Director of Folkways Record and Service Corporation, and William Grauer and Orin Kepnews, Directors of Riverside Records, members of the Society are enabled to purchase phonograph records from their catalogues of ethnic music at a discount of 33½%. It is hoped that such benefits may be eventually extended to include books, publications, and other materials.

The Society is interested in establishing communication and exchange with sister organisations throughout the world and at the business meeting in Philadelphia action was taken authorising the President to appoint a committee to study ways and means of effecting a co-operating, collaborating relationship with other societies. In the interest of the discipline of activity must be avoided.

The term, Ethnomusicology, has raised questions in the minds of musicologists and laymen alike as to the subject matter and objectives of the discipline. It was the Dutch musicologist, Jaap Kunst, who introduced the term as a more appropriate designation for comparative musicology or *vergleichende*

*Musikwissenschaft*<sup>1</sup> In an attempt to define the field of investigation one may be "guided by the work of those pioneer scholars who not only established the methodology and techniques of our discipline, but staked claims to those uncharted areas in which the historical musicologist had shown scant interest." Their studies ranged from the art music of the Orient to the music of pre-literate peoples throughout the world and the folk music of Europe. To these fields of study I have suggested the addition of two areas which have received relatively little attention from scholars, the dance, and popular music. "By popular music I refer to that sizeable body of material which, while failing to qualify as genuine folk music or as art music, represents by its wide-spread popularity a musical expression of the mass of people who produce, consume and support it. In more complex civilisations this category would include jazz as well as most of the commercial music that clogs our air-waves. Among accultured tribal societies and ethnic groups it would include all non-traditional material. The hybrid musics that have developed as a result of the impact of an alien culture upon indigenous cultures are rapidly increasing in quantity and significance. As they assume the social and spiritual functions of the traditional music which they displace, they become ever more important as subject matter and data for the ethnomusicologist."<sup>2</sup> The fact that these fields of study "are so vast that no person is able to master them in their entirety should not exclude them or any part of them from ethnomusicology. Within the discipline there are places aplenty for the specialist."<sup>4</sup>

Ethnomusicology is not a new discipline. It employs the methodology and techniques of comparative musicology, which it has inherited from the past. But it brings, I believe, a new approach in the interpretation of its material. No longer satisfied with the description and analysis of music as an end in itself, the ethnomusicologist attempts to regard music in its functional setting as a vital and important activity of society. Melville Herskovits, one of the few anthropologists who has recognised the importance of music in culture, states, "But it is at the core of anthropological thinking that each problem investigated be recognised as only one manifestation of one segment of man's complex culture, and that it be studied with full consciousness of its wide implications."<sup>5</sup> In his discussion of the comparative study of music of peoples outside the stream of Euro-American culture, he writes, "For its implications lead us to some of the most fundamental truths about the nature and functioning of culture, and suggest the importance of the contribution that investigations carried on in this field can make to the study of culture as a whole."<sup>6</sup>

The Society for Ethnomusicology holds in high esteem the important work of the African Music Society under the able leadership of its Honorary Secretary and Editor, Hugh Tracey, and looks forward to a closer collaboration between the two societies in the future.

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1. Kunst, Jaap; 1950, *Musicologica*. Koninklijke Vereeniging Indisch Instituut, Mededeling No. 90, Afdeling Culturele Physische Anthropologie No. 35, Amsterdam. P.7.
  2. Rhodes, Willard, April, 1956 "On the Subject of Ethnomusicology" in *Ethnomusicology Newsletter* No. 7, Middle own, Conn. P.3.
  3. Rhodes, *ibid*, p.4.
  4. Rhodes, Willard, June 1956, "Toward a Definition of Ethnomusicology" in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 58. No. 3, Menasha, Wisconsin, p.461.
  5. Herskovits, Melville, 1948, "Man and His Works" New York.
  6. Herkovits, *ibid*, p.435.