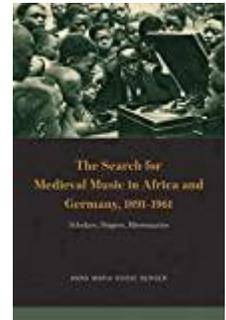


Anna Maria Busse Berger. *The Search for Medieval Music in Africa and Germany, 1891-1961: Scholars, Singers, Missionaries (New Material Histories of Music)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. xii + 351 pp. \$49.34, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-74034-8.



Reviewed by Jonathan O. Wipplinger (University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee)

Published on H-German (August, 2021)

Commissioned by Matthew Unangst (SUNY Oneonta)

In this compelling work, musicologist Anna Maria Busse Berger offers three cycles of inquiry into the unique relationship between medieval European music and African music in Germany during the first half of the twentieth century. At the time, there was a widely held belief in the academic discipline of comparative musicology (*vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*) and even in the popular culture that premodern music in Europe and non-European music of the present shared deep affinities. For some, African music acted as a window into the European past, a way to study, hear, and relive preindustrial, premodern music making today. Others sought to apply insights from the history of early music to understand non-European music. Finally, the comparison and contrast of the two was seen as a potential means of revealing universal qualities of all music.

Obviously, at the core of the tethering of the two lies a "denial of coevalness" to African music, to use Johannes Fabian's famous phrase, and such racialized modes of thought are not particular to musicology but rather a hallmark of the racist

and evolutionist thinking that undergirded European knowledge at the time. Accordingly, Busse Berger's takes a broad, interdisciplinary approach to the examination of the creation, perpetuation, critique, and eventual toppling of this idea. The result is a wide-ranging work that uncovers layers of reciprocal influence between comparative musicology, early music historiography, the culture of the *Jugendmusik- und Singbewegung*, and German missionaries in Africa.

The first part of the book begins with the origins of the connection in the field of comparative musicology. Chapter 1 considers the Romantic underpinnings of the discipline vis-à-vis the development of (comparative) linguistics and anthropology in the nineteenth century. Here, the author lays out the two central frames of cross-cultural comparison at the disposal of early comparative musicologists. On the one hand, there existed a linguistic, evolutionist model that was accompanied by either a narrative of degeneration or one of growth toward ever-greater perfection. On the other stood the relativist vision embodied by

thinkers like Johann Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt, who emphasized the intrinsic value and uniqueness of different cultures. Busse Berger argues that this background is not only important to understanding later inflections of the perceived connection between African and medieval European music but also serves as an interdisciplinary reminder to music scholars “of the extent to which the founding fathers of their discipline were influenced by linguists” (p. 24).

Chapter 2 turns to Erich Moritz von Hornbostel, a towering figure of comparative musicology and key figure in the story told by Busse Berger. Hornbostel’s ideas return in numerous later chapters and in many ways his person, work, and ideas function as the gravitational center of the monograph. This structure of this chapter also acts as a model for future chapters and so a few words on this subject are in order. As the first part of the book is concerned with individual scholars, most of the chapters are organized less around key questions than individual scholarly biographies and summaries of major works and arguments. Thus, after briefly recounting the main phases of Hornbostel’s well-known career and life’s work, the author proceeds to a discussion of his most important contributions to the discourse surrounding early European and African music. To begin with, as director of the Berlin Phonogramm-Archiv, Hornbostel established numerous contacts across the globe in his pursuit of recordings of non-European music. Second, while he valued non-European music and sought to understand it on its own terms rather than according to European norms and expectations, he was also obsessed with preserving only “authentic” non-European music. A few words of explanation may be in order here. For Hornbostel, contact between “undeveloped” non-European and European music always led to a degeneration of the former. This tendency was particularly applicable in the case of African music. As he wrote in his highly influential 1928 English-language essay, “African Negro Music”: “No race is so well prepared for,

and so susceptible to, European influence as the Negro” (p. 37). Here Hornbostel’s thinking betrays a common racist trope of the period, namely that non-Europeans, especially Black people, were mimetic in nature and would instinctively copy European music, thereby leading to the demise of their own culture and music traditions. This search for and preservation of “authentic” non-European music was especially important to Hornbostel. The ultimate goal of his work was to discover a universal, Ur-form of human music via comparison of different systems of music. It was as part of this search for the origins of music that he came to compare medieval European and African music. Hornbostel looked to medieval music as the earliest accessible, that is, notated, form of European music and compared it to “undeveloped” music as a means of teasing out these universals. Though Hornbostel’s method and claims would eventually (but only eventually) be debunked, this assumption of a correlation between current African music and medieval European music, in addition to his activities as director of the Phonogramm-Archiv catalyzed the network of knowledge and exchange covered in Busse Berger’s work.

The next three chapters examine the deployment of Hornbostel’s thought in comparative musicology. They treat Marius Schneider, Georg Schünemann, and Jacques Handschin and Manfred Bukofzer, respectively. In Schneider, Busse Berger covers not only one of Hornbostel’s students but a highly divisive figure, who took over the operation of the Phonogramm-Archiv after Hornbostel’s forced exile in 1933. Schneider’s political record during the Third Reich comes under scrutiny from Busse Berger, but even more so does his scholarship, which the author views as ultimately lacking in depth and as being overall of a poor quality. More than this, Schneider never modified the approach he inherited by Hornbostel and his use of explicitly racialized forms of analysis remained a constant throughout a career that stretched into the 1950s. As Busse Berger laconic-

ally summarizes: “It was one thing to be a racist in 1908, another in 1938 and yet another in 1946. A thoughtful man would have noticed by 1946 what these racial categories imply” (p. 58). Like Schneider, Georg Schünemann, the subject of chapter 6, was a non-Jewish disciple of Hornbostel with a disreputable record during the Nazi era. After 1933, he not only fired all Jewish faculty members from the Berlin Musikhochschule but joined the Nazi Party and was later directly involved with the *Amt Rosenberg*. On the surface, this behavior stands in contrast to his activities in the 1920s, when Schünemann was a central actor in the reform of the German music education system, for which he worked closely with the socialist Leo Kestenberg. Schünemann’s scholarship, however, reveals telling lines of continuity that contextualize the apparent contradiction. This began with his recording of German-speaking Russian prisoners during the First World War. Based on data from these recordings, Schünemann argued in his *Habilitation* that these German-speakers “preserved their original German culture and have for the most part not been threatened by industry and metropolitan culture in their way of life” (quoted on p. 62). In other words, and standing in parallel to the use of African music more generally, these recordings represented instantaneous time capsules into the (German) past, allowing the reconstruction of missing links of historical development. Overall, in Schneider and Schünemann, Busse Berger shows how Hornbostel’s thinking and method were developed and applied by two scholars towards highly ambivalent, ethically and scholarly, ends.

The penultimate chapter of the first section presents a dual analysis of Jacques Handschin and Manfred Bukofzer. Unlike the prior two figures, each of them was an innovative scholar who, rather than hewing to Hornbostel’s thinking, critiqued some of its core conclusions. As a result, Busse Berger argues, they eventually succeeded in destabilizing the very foundations of comparative musicology. Significantly, both were medieval mu-

sicologists. Foremost among their targets was Hornbostel’s “theory of the blown fifths.” This was the main support structure of his idea of a universal pitch system for all music (pp. 68-69). In the 1930s, Handschin and Bukofzer showed this theory to be based on incorrect measurements and thereby dealt a significant blow to Hornbostel’s universalist approach to music history. In recounting the work of Handschin and Bukofzer, Busse Berger covers an extremely important turning point in the history of comparative musicology and ethnomusicology and at the same time further demonstrates the significant interplay between medieval and comparative musicology in the era.

While Handschin and Bukofzer’s work destabilized the field of comparative musicology from without, the work of the Sierra Leonean composer and comparative musicologist Nicholas G. J. Ballanta did so from within, making the sixth chapter particularly important to the overall arc of this volume. Indeed, while so much of the story presented in *The Search for Medieval Music in Africa and Germany* is done from the perspective of white Europeans writing on African music, Ballanta’s voice, as a Black scholar and thinker, adds necessary balance to the work. At the same time, Ballanta’s academic career seems to have been stunted due to not only individual racial prejudice but also the racism inherent to the discipline itself. For example, over his career he published relatively little and did so in nonspecialist publications. His major book project, “The Aesthetics of African Music,” meanwhile, was torpedoed by the peer review of George Herzog, another student of Hornbostel. This meant that Ballanta’s contributions were largely, if predictably, ignored at the time. Yet as Busse Berger’s discussion of Ballanta’s scholarship shows, he should be considered a forerunner of much current thinking. To begin with, he is one of the few scholars of the period who did not see a connection between medieval European and African music. As Busse Berger summarizes: “Ballanta rejected any parallel to me-

dieval music and believed that African music had to be analyzed on its own terms” (p. 81). This basic, if fundamental idea was predictably not well received within the field of comparative musicology. Another distinguishing element of Ballanta’s scholarship is his belief that “in the musical perception of the African there is something which should not only be preserved but also developed” quoted on p. 82). In other words, while Hornbostel constantly fretted over finding “untouched” examples of pure African music that preserved his sense of the music’s authenticity, for Ballanta, African music was already historical, a unique cultural construction emerging and changing over time. Ballanta’s important correctives to Hornbostel were fortunately not entirely ignored and his thinking would have a major impact on one of the missions analyzed in the third part of Busse Berger’s study.

In part 2, Busse Berger shifts her focus from scholarly discourse to the revival of medieval music in 1920s Germany. This took place as part of the distinct, yet related cultural phenomena of the *Jugendmusik-* and *Singbewegung*. Similar to her embedding of comparative musicology within longer arcs of German intellectual history, she situates these two movements as part of a deeper cultural trend away from industrialized modernity and toward nature and natural lifestyles (the *Lebensreform* and the *Wandervogel* movements in particular). Crucial here, and the subject of chapter 7, were a number of music historians who facilitated knowledge about medieval music in the early 1920s. Among these, perhaps most important was Heinrich Bessler. Bessler and his cohort were especially interested in the communal, social side of medieval music performance. Rejecting the fragmentation and specialization of bourgeois society, which divided dance, play, music, and singing into distinct art forms and spaces, Bessler emphasized the positive role of “participatory music making,” which he summarized in the immensely influential term *Gebrauchsmusik*. For Bessler and many others, participatory music

making served an end beyond itself, namely as the expression of a “fundamental community spirit” (p. 97). Community, or *Gemeinschaft*, was a central idea for him and others involved in the revival of early European music through scholarship as well as contemporary performances in Karlsruhe and Hamburg in 1922 and 1924, respectively.

Chapter 8 descends from the academic into the popular and focuses on how the ideas of Bessler permeated the wider cultural context. Busse Berger begins the chapter by highlighting the connection between key figures in the *Wandervogel* movement, like Hans Paasche, and the interest in Africa and African music. Figures like Paasche were dissatisfied not only with bourgeois concert music but also with modern popular music such as jazz, which Paasche (and indeed Hornbostel as well) saw as an inauthentic and ultimately Europeanized and/or Americanized form of music. With no contemporary European music fitting their needs, members of the *Jugendmusikbewegung* like the pedagogues Fritz Jöde and Herman Reichenbach therefore argued for the introduction of medieval music into music education in German schools. The *Singbewegung*, meanwhile, concentrated its efforts on effecting the same end in churches, a project in which they were aided by the early music publishers Kallmeyer-Möseler and Bärenreiter. While the interest in early music may at first glance appear unrelated to comparative musicology, as Busse Berger demonstrates, the enthusiasm for medieval and German folk music was almost always paired with an appreciation for non-European music.

Having set the stage through extensive discussion of the development of comparative musicology and the revival of medieval music in the early twentieth century, Busse Berger’s third part concentrates on the intersection of these two frameworks at a set of four German missions in Africa. In chapter 9, she lays out the context and history of missionary societies in Germany. In chapter 10, she introduces readers to the Moravians and the

unique and impactful theology and practice of Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinendorf. Busse Berger argues that deep respect and appreciation for cultural difference characterized Moravian missionaries. Such openness to dialogue and exchange made the Moravian missions unique among the German missions. This belief system would find an ideal representative in the iconoclastic figure of Traugott Bachmann. Though Bachman was more of a linguist than a musicologist, he did provide Hornbostel with more than a hundred recordings of local Nhya musicians in Mbozi (Tanzania). For Bachman and for many of the missionaries discussed in future chapters, the question of local music and its use (or non-use) within religious services was a highly contested matter. For some, like Bachmann, including local music and/or adapting it to Christian services was a means of respecting local cultures and customs, as well as effective for delivering their message. Bachmann thus produced a hymnbook (now lost) in 1916 using local melodies with translations of German hymns. This was quite a revolutionary act as local African music, and even more so local dance, carried profane and non-Christian connotations within the mission communities. After Bachmann was forced to leave Africa during the First World War, the next important Moravian missionary was Franz Rietzsch, who arrived in Tanganyika in 1930. Before arriving there, he had been an active member in the *Singbewegung* and was well versed in the field of comparative musicology, especially the writings of Hornbostel. With this background, he was able to analyze and understand the fundamental differences between Nyakyusa and European music. And, yet, as Busse Berger points out, “unlike modern ethnomusicologists, Rietzsch lacks the terminology to describe precisely what he is hearing; therefore, like many comparative musicologists of his generation, he turned to the Middle Ages for help” (p. 152). If this aspect of Rietzsch’s approach is by now highly familiar, as a missionary, he was also faced with the practical matter of whether and how to apply this

idea. Like Bachmann, Rietzsch was enthusiastic about using local music in church settings and so set about creating original compositions that mixed his understanding of Nyakyusa music with medieval church modes. Even more significant than the existence of these works is the complicated response of the Nyakyusa to Rietzsch’s music. For the most part, local singers rebelled against it on a variety of grounds. Some felt that Rietzsch was racially segregating them by forcing them to sing “African” rather than European music. Others disagreed with the inclusion of non-Christian music in a church setting. Still others preferred the English Sankey hymns over Rietzsch’s remix of medieval church modes and the Nyakyusa tonal system. Such moments of engagement with Black voices in Busse Berger’s monograph are extremely welcome and important. Similar to her chapter on Ballanta, the discussion of the Nyakyusa response to Rietzsch’s compositions serves to disrupt the intra-European monologue about African music that at times dominates the work.

Chapter 11 shifts from the Moravian to the Leipzig Mission. The key figure at the Leipzig Mission was Bruno Gutmann. Though the mission itself was intimately connected to the German imperialist project, as Busse Berger relates, Gutmann himself was vehemently opposed to it and violent administrators such as Carl Peters. Like Bachmann, Gutmann was not a musicologist but a linguist and Africanist, concentrating in his scholarly activities on Chagga rituals. Music was important to Gutmann only to the extent that it was connected with these rituals. That said, Gutmann would later play an instrumental role in the creation of Wachagga hymnbooks. His participation in this project was a turnabout from his earlier exclusion of local traditions in church music. This shift in his perspective, argues Busse Berger, occurred after his forced return to Germany following the First World War and his encounter with the rising *Jugendmusik-* and *Singbewegung* in the 1920s. For Busse Berger, the renewed interest in communal music represented in these movements motivated

Gutmann to not only document Chagga culture but to promote its incorporation and development in the Leipzig Mission.

The Bethel Mission, covered in chapter 12, was a Lutheran mission and owed its existence to the important Bodelschwingh family. Like the Leipzig Mission, Bethel was also located in German East Africa. Yet whereas the Leipzig Mission had been concentrated in the Chagga region near Kilimanjaro, the Bethel Mission was positioned inland of Dar es Salaam. The central missionary there was Walther Trittelvitz, who ran the mission for four decades. While little is said about Trittelvitz's activities before the 1920s, a seismic shift took place in his thinking after he heard Nicholas Ballanta argue in a 1926 lecture for the use of local African music in church settings. As Trittelvitz was not musically trained, the task of putting this idea into practice fell to another missionary, Otto Hagena, who did possess some music training and background. As with other Westerners, Hagena struggled initially. Due to the fact that Haya is a tonal language (among many other reasons), Hagena eventually realized that using European songs with translated texts would not be effective. Instead, Hagena forcefully argued for the use of local music. Crucially and at least indirectly influenced by Ballanta, Hagena is one of a select few white German missionaries who did not turn to medieval music as a means of understanding and/or bridging differences between European and African music systems.

The final chapter, chapter 13, covers the Catholic mission in German East Africa, run by the Benedictines of St. Ottilien. For a variety of reasons, Catholic missionaries were among the most conservative. This, of course, extended to the prohibition on the use of local languages and music, something that did not truly end until the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. More generally, Catholic scholars tended to view African music as existing on a lower plane of development and in figures such as Clemens Künster we again see a deni-

al of coevalness. Another familiar element in the discussion of the Catholic mission is Hornbostel, who again requests and is supplied with recordings for the Phonogramm-Archiv. Though some earlier progress was made, ultimately it was only after Vatican II that local Angoni music was incorporated through the energies of Stephan Mbunga, a student of a German missionary Johann Baptist Wolf.

Busse Berger's work is extremely ambitious and dense in detail. The number of archival materials, not to mention scholars and individuals treated over the course of its thirteen chapters is rich and impressive. At times, however, the parade of individual scholars can interfere with the main thrusts of the work. That said, Busse Berger's work thoroughly succeeds in fleshing out the context and implications of one of the more confounding (at least from a contemporary perspective) assumptions of early comparative musicology. It reveals the varied and nuanced ways in which this idea was mobilized in comparative musicology, German culture generally, and at German missions in Africa across more than seven decades. Another key outcome of this study is its exploration of the complex origins and impact of comparative musicology and Erich Hornbostel specifically. As this work makes abundantly clear, Hornbostel's importance far exceeds his role as one of the founders of an academic discipline. Over the course of his career, he stood at the center of the propagation and dissemination of the discipline's methodologies, technologies, and assumptions on a global scale. He and equally so the Phonogramm-Archiv emerge as a major nexus of contact and conflict, both epistemological and political, and this work's tripartite approach is uniquely suited to capturing this quality. From a slightly different perspective, Busse Berger's volume also injects a new knowledge into German music studies of the early twentieth century. While numerous works of musicology and music history concern themselves with the bourgeois classical tradition of operatic composers, works,

and spaces and still others engage with popular traditions, folk and modern, her attention to the interplay between early music revivalism and ethnographic recordings inestimably adds proportion and depth to our understanding of the multiple points of inflection within music culture and practice in early twentieth-century Germany.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-german>

Citation: Jonathan O. Wipplinger. Review of Berger, Anna Maria Busse. *The Search for Medieval Music in Africa and Germany, 1891-1961: Scholars, Singers, Missionaries (New Material Histories of Music)*. H-German, H-Net Reviews. August, 2021.

URL: <https://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=56866>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.