The wording of my title is not intended to be quite as ambiguous as it sounds. To be sure, I shall have occasion to refer to the theory and practice of music in India; but the main theme of this report is the theory and practice of studying Indian music.

At the time of the organizational meeting of the Society of Ethnomusicology, “The general consensus favored the view that ‘ethnomusicology’ is by no means limited to so-called ‘primitive music,’ and is defined more by the orientation of the student than by any rigid boundaries of discourse” (Ethnomusicology Newsletter). Some years later Alan Merriam (1960: 111) wrote in part:

If our field can be defined as “the study of music in culture,” then it is as applicable to the study of...art music forms...as it is to a non-literate group...Ethnomusicology is the method of study which searches for certain goals in certain ways and which is applicable to any of the varied musical systems of the world.

The two phrases I would like to emphasize in the foregoing are “the orientation of the student” and “a method of study.” I would like to suggest that there is no single orientation or single method of study, which is equally, usefully, and meaningfully “applicable to any of the varied musical systems of the world.” Different types of cultures show vastly different functions of the attitudes towards music and musicians. The degree to which a culture’s music is separable from the cultures as a whole varies enormously, and it is this degree of separability, which must determine the basic attitudes and methods of the researcher.

The late Robert Redfield, in The Primitive World and Its Transformations, made a general distinction between three types of society, which he called “civilized,” “pre-civilized,” and “peasant,” using these terms as purely objective categories in social science. Following V. Gordon Childe, Professor Redfield listed a number of characteristics of the society-type he was labeling “civilization,” among which are two that have a special relevance to musical activities: the presence of “full-time technical specialists,” and the presence of “a privileged ruling class.” To these I would add a special characteristic for the musical aspect of “civilization”: the presence of some sort of more or less independent theory of music, containing (minimally) names for notes or for other melodic units of musical discourse. There is, surely, an important distinction to be made between musical cultures which have developed or preserved theory and musical cultures which have not, even though the presence of theory is often allied with another of the Redfield/Childe characteristics of “civilization,” the presence of “the art of writing” (loc. cit.). And this is a distinction, which is more a cultural distinction than a musical one: indeed, the presence, survival, or absence of a theory of music is itself an important index of the relative independence of musical phenomena in a culture.

We can say roughly, then, that in a “civilized” society music will have several kinds and levels of development, and that at its highest levels, which we customarily call “art music,” it will be produced by professionals or by leisured amateurs, for an elite or for one another and that musicians and/or scholars will talk about musical phenomena as if they had some sort of existence independent of other parts of daily life.

In contrast to this picture, Professor Redfield (35) points out that “in the pre-civilized society the dramatic and lyric arts are inseparable from the
religion or from the mythic content of the local culture, and secular professional entertainment is unknown.” To rephrase this for music, we can roughly say that in a “pre-civilized” society music will be produced by persons whose primary roles are other than that of musician, for the benefit in some way of the group as a whole, and that music will normally be tied to and structured by, at least in considerable part, external factors of the culture, factors we would call non-musical. For this last reason in particular, as well as for the more predictable reason of probable pre-literacy, there is not likely to be any pure music theory, any speculation about why or how the notes relate one to another. The notes behave the way they do because they do or because they must.

Needless to say, this dichotomy is greatly over-simplified, even allowing the omission of the musical problems of Professor Redfield’s “peasant” societies, the most difficult of all. Nonetheless, I think these general contrasts between “civilized” and “pre-civilized” societies and music make a useful point of departure for any discussion about scholarly equipment, and biases in musical studies.

I mean to imply then that in working with “pre-civilized” music—and this would include tribal music in India—one is constrained by the culture to work in anthropological terms and with anthropological techniques. But in working with “civilized” music—including Indian art music as well as Western and other art music—I believe that one is at least permitted by the culture to work in musical terms, and that the “orientation of the student” and his “method of study” are as much dictated by the nature of the musical materials themselves and by his own free choices as they can be in our own cultures.

The art music of India, perhaps more than any other, has shown a gain rather than a loss in our own time. Some of this gain can be attributed to the encouragement of cultural nationalism, but for the most part it stems from and is made possible by the vitality of the tradition itself, as a tradition of pure music. An Indian may be quite “deculturized” in religion, manner of thought and behavior, domestic practices, and even language, and still retain an intense interest in and devotion to music. Indian music is of course an integral part of Indian culture; but it can evidently be separated from the culture to an enormous extent and still retain whatever it has that makes it work, both as a vehicle for composition and as a vehicle for improvisation. To this extent I would disagree with Mantle Hood’s (58) observation that “fluency in the art of improvisation... means an understanding of... not only music... but also language, religious, customs, history—in other words, the whole identity of the society of which music is only one, but one very important part.” And I do not contradict myself if I say that securely to entrench oneself in Indian musical practices requires an intimate acquaintance with the ways in which Indian musicians are accustomed to deal with and talk about music. But the emphasis is on “musicians” rather than “Indian.” One must first revise one’s musical habits, not one’s cultural ones.

I suppose each of us feels that his own little corner has special and unique problems, and perhaps special and unique advantages as well. Let me itemize some of the advantages in working with Indian music. First of all, it is an advantage, at least for a musician, to be working with people of one’s own profession. Second, there is a language advantage: in both North and South India there are enough intelligent professional musicians and musical scholars with a good command of English to make shop talk in English possible, provide one is gradually making oneself familiar with the practice of music, and its technical vocabulary. Third, it is an advantage, for those accustomed to books, to be working in a literate society; there is much to be learned from Indian books on music, including many in the English language, in conjunction with direct observation of practice and granting the normal critical approach of the scholar.

A final advantage, from the point of view of direct experience with musical practice, is the fact that Indian art music is both soloistically and vocally oriented: one can spare oneself the time-consuming mechanical obstacles of acquiring an instrumental technique before participation and the test of performance becomes possible. Even on
the rhythmic side, as is well known, anything that can be drummed can be said.

I can think of only a single disadvantage in working with Indian music and that is the necessity of learning to improvise. And yet even here the difficulty soon becomes an advantage. Once one has learned two or three standard compositions in a single raga, one is not only prepared, one is vastly tempted to extract the common elements and try a little spontaneous creation; this becomes an invaluable performance test of one’s analytical abilities and conclusions.

I turn now to the question of theory and practice in Indian music itself. I have mentioned that I consider the presence, survival, or absence of a theory of music to be a valuable index of the degree of separability of a culture’s music from the culture as a whole. Within a particular culture, the specific relationships of theory to theory, and theory to practice, are important on several levels.

One should distinguish basic types of theory. There is theory that concerns itself with the relationship of given musical phenomena to non-musical ideas or entities and there is theory that attempts to deal with the musical phenomena themselves. There is also theory, either cosmological or technical, that is concerned with a specific practice directly and theory that is speculative or based on older theory.

All these modes of theory are well represented in India, both in Sanskrit treatises and in modern writings. There are elaborate cosmologies based entirely on sound (not, however, on the mathematics of acoustical relationships), and there are the well-known ideas, still surviving in part, about the physical and ethical properties of ragas. Treatises and passages in treaties, which deal with such matters are as a matter of course based on and derived form one another, from a continuing speculative tradition of such ideas.

There is also a large body of descriptive and prescriptive theory, theory that discusses the combinations of notes and the combinations of rhythms. But here also, there is much which is not based on the practice of any particular time but rather on an older scholastic tradition of such theory. In this area lies a methodological pitfall for the scholar. One of the principal obstacles to an understanding of the history and practice of Indian music has been a failure critically to distinguish between theory that reports on theory from theory that reports on music, and a failure critically to examine the relationships of either to contemporary practice. There is and has been, in and out of India, a pronounced tendency both to try to prove that modern practice can be derived from ancient theory and to try to explain ancient theories from the modern practice.

Since this is a real question of appropriate methodology, let me illustrate with an example: the question of the relationship of the celebrated ancient doctrine of the twenty-two srutis to the modern usages of what we may call microtonal distinctions and differences. Now these modern usages can be explained in terms of purely musical function; they originate in fact in very much the same ways as the implicit and explicit microtonal features and problems of European music from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries. The question then becomes, is the sruti-doctrine a continuing doctrine from somewhere in the first millennium AD to the present, a doctrine which has been understood right along as a way of accounting for such microtonal distinctions and differences? Or is it a doctrine arrived at once on this or any other basis and then respectfully transmitted, but with its essential nature forgotten once its original terms of reference has been replaced?

Two quite different methodological approaches are needed here. One is musicological: to determine whether the twenty-two sruti doctrine, which has been more or less officially adopted in India, is necessary and/or sufficient for the modern microtonal situation. If it should be neither, then must we suppose that the doctrine, though no longer adequate, still has some legitimate contemporary basis of meaning because of a historical continuity? The answer to this part of the question cannot be got at through musicology, but only through historical and textual criticism of the Sanskrit sources, in short through philology.

Leaving aside ethos and cosmos, and assuming also that we are able to separate out theoretical material based solely on received doctrine, there is still a large body of purely
descriptive theory, both ancient and modern, which is intimately connected with a practice, in that it tells us how the music is supposed to go, often with schematizations of actual musical entities and/or hypothetical illustrations in rough letter notation. This kind of theory is generally more or less concretely intelligible as it relates more or less closely to some verifiable practice. Certain treatises from the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries have enough in common with modern practice so that they become important historical sources for that practice. And there are many modern books that describe and illustrate ragas, which are important aids to a researcher, both in becoming acquainted with musical materials in the practice, and eventually in interpreting those materials. Theory of this kind, in its most useful forms, is far less separable from practices in Indian music than it is in any other music with which I have any acquaintance, in that it has a direct, even a governing relationship to what Mantle Hood (58) calls the “maze of traditional rules that govern improvisation.” In fact it is in those rules, in a sense, or at any rate a codification of them. But Indian descriptive theory stops at that point (as, for that matter, does most descriptive theory, including Western); it does not attempt seriously to explain or to analyze the relationships among the materials it presents so exhaustively; it does not ask why or under what conditions; it simply lists and classifies.

This being so, one is justified in making one’s own structural analyses—indeed, one is forced to do so. But they must be analyses which operate entirely within the domain of Indian art music. One cannot on any a priori grounds adopt methods or principles from a discipline, but rather one must find these methods and principles within the music, and within the modes in which that music is understood by those to whom it belongs.

Once having arrived at those methods and principles from within the musical practice, however, one is not necessarily bound rigidly to eschew non-indigenous theoretical concepts. Since Indian theory is essentially descriptive rather than analytical, one would indeed expect to have to infer and to introduce new concepts and new techniques in analysis. One such concept which has arisen from my own work is the notion of hierarchy of structural levels, with concomitant techniques for dealing with the relation of ornamental decoration to basic formulas, the relations of basic formulas one to another, and the relation of both to a few simple invariant tonal formations. This may have a familiar sound: it is remarkably like the basic concept and the basic techniques of the analytical school of Heinrich Schenker. One must remember, of course, that neither the Western tonal-harmony apparatus and source material nor the historic and cosmic bias of Schenker’s own work are essential to the basic principle—structural levels—or the rather intuitive analytical techniques, the so-called “reduction-techniques” of the Schenkerites.

Since I am insisting that my arrival at these notions for Indian music has been quite independent of their usefulness for Western music, let me briefly relate them to some of their Indian points of origin. First and foremost, it is almost immediately apparent in Indian music that the tones, varying somewhat from raga to raga, which may be prolonged without ornament—we may call them “standing-tones”—have a basic and essentially harmonic register-defining function with respect to the musical formulae which both include and elaborate them. Second, the elements of ornamented non-standing-tones, which we call their “auxiliary tones,” have a clear pitch-connection with the standing-tones, confirming them as stationary pivots, points of departure, or goals of motion. In other words, certain non-standing-tones are established as passing-tone or neighbor-tone functions with respect to the standing-tones by the “auxiliary” pitch-components of their ornaments. Third, the boundary-tones of single phrases in both the pitch and time dimensions—the high and low points, the beginning and points—have clear-cut and unambiguous functions with respect to the standing-tones and their immediate neighbor-tone and passing-tone elaborations: they either clearly circumscribe a single register or they provide connecting and overlapping links into another register. Now many of these crucial functional tones have names in Indian terminology, ancient and or modern, though no attempt has there been made to bring them into a single analytical
pattern, which rationally would account for the undeniable esthetic unity and consistence of an Indian raga. And these points find indirect larger-scale confirmation in many more or less obvious characteristics of Indian music. One such characteristic is the harmonic parallelism of not just single tones but of whole phrases or motives; in such parallels the conflict between the parallelism on the one hand and the differing positions of the phrases with respect to the tonic and the principal standing-tones on the other hand is reflected in slight variations in the ornamental detail between a given phrase and its transposition elsewhere by fourth or fifth. Finally, I might add that similar and analogous hierarchic structuring can easily be shown in the purely rhythmic domain of drumming.

In fact, given any music in which the notes are related one to another more or less independently of textual, ritual, or social considerations, one suspects that hierarchical levels and modes of relatedness might be found, and that some sort of general theory of structural levels might well be applicable. In published scores of both Japanese gagaku and Javanese gamelan music both ornamental and fundamental musical entities appear to exist quite clearly, even on the surface of the music; and I myself imagine that I hear these musics in this way in the large as I do Western and Indian music. I have often wondered if scholars familiar with such repertories might not find some sort of quasi-Schenkerite structural levels and reductions techniques, inferred and applied from within the particular music in question, to be useful for study, analysis, and description of that sort of developed art music. If this were to be so, we would then have an excellent opportunity to try and develop a common abstract analytical vocabulary for dealing with independently viable, highly contrasted musical edifices, including several styles of Western music.

Let me turn now to the more familiar and less esoteric and speculative powers of recording, learning, and notation, vis-à-vis the study of Indian music.

For reasons of time as well as money I am not drawn to the idea of indiscriminate, preservative recording. Indian music is a living art, showing no signs of decay as a whole; in the main tradition, at least, what I may miss someone else will pick up. Believing as I do, with Alan Merriam (113), that the work “must be followed through by a single investigator, who gathers his materials in the field, analyzes them himself, and applies the results,” I do not propose to record more than experience suggests I can handle myself. This means that, since I do not wish to rely on chance for my material, I must play a definitive role in the selection of the material to be recorded, though of course I may be guided frequently by more authoritative judgments. This is by no means impracticable in India. Artists can be found who are willing to go along with what an experienced investigator may feel would constitute a meaningfully consistent body of repertory, to the best of their abilities and in the light of their own artistic consciences. Since many of the best artists, particularly of younger generations, live in large cities, it is even possible sometimes to make such recordings under optimum conditions, in a sound-proof studio, with professional or nearly professional equipment and staff.

On the level transcription, analysis, and interpretation of such recordings, I have found that the very process of transcription—it does not matter into what—assists immeasurably in the understanding of detail, and what is also important at least to me, in improvement of performance. It is a sort of circular process: on the basis of whatever practical experience I already have I approach the transcription and analysis of a particular item; I already know up to a point how the music is supposed to go, and in many instances will have studied or even performed the item in question. But the process of getting into the jungle of ornamental detail, in the sense of having to try to find a reasonable way of writing it down, is one of the best ways of refining a performance, and it carries one a long way towards the intuitive sense of style which one hopes eventually attain.

When one is working not with a machine but with a musician, it is possible to regard that musician as either informant or teacher; my own experience is that one has to do both. It is sometimes felt that the best way to immerse
oneself in an alien art-music is to immerse oneself in the teaching routines which are used for potential native practitioners of that art-music. This may be a practical necessity in some instances, but it seems to me a little naive as a positive principle. In the first place, a foreign investigator is not a member of the culture, and was not born with that culture’s sounds ringing in his ears. In the second place, a foreign investigator presumably is bringing with him an adult’s knowledge of his own musical language. We do not normally expect adults to acquire mastery of an Indian language by learning it as an Indian child does; by doing so we would forego all the advantages of developed intellect and knowledge of some language, which an adult possesses, without gaining the advantage of the unconditioned tabula rasa of the child.

When one is studying Indian music, one’s time in India is usually short enough to suggest that one bring every intellectual and musical resource which one has to bear on the problems at hand, and that one eschew everything which seems non-essential. The early and intermediate stages of musical training in South India are designed primarily to acquaint students with theoretical scale-types and meters and to provide drills in them. Now, unless one is trying it simultaneously to acquire an instrumental technique, most of this is unnecessary; both theoretical scale-degrees and durations are readily transferrable from Western equivalents. But the sound-quality, and the incommensurable pitch, dynamic, and rhythmic elements in the ornamentation and general style are a different matter.

Every Indian child who is about to study music will have these things under considerable control already, and of course the teaching routines need not and do not take any account of them. But these are precisely the hardest and most important things for the foreign student to acquire. They cannot be taught; one has to work them out oneself, using whatever methodological and psychological crutches one has already at hand or can devise. On that level, one has to treat one’s teacher as an informant. One has to tell him on the one hand that this or that essential stage in one’s training is not really essential at all; and one has to badger him on the other hand with questions, which are both too trivial and too difficult to be answerable. But as long as the teacher-informant can put up with trying to answer those questions, one learns a great deal from the dialogue.

When one has reached a standard of performance reasonably acceptable in Indian terms, when one has learned to use and understand the musical language with reasonable facility, then is the time to fall into the indigenous teaching patterns. The barrier to communication has somehow been breached, and one is henceforth limited not so much by one’s foreignness as by one’s talent and industry. But the actual breaching of the barrier can be done only by the student, with his own resources both native and acquired, even the right teacher can help as enormously as the wrong teacher can hinder.

Communication about music, as opposed to communication by means of music, means talking, writing, and especially notation. I would like to consider two aspects of notation: Indian notation in the stage of gathering and learning about musical materials, and notation of whatever sort in stage of presentation and interpretation of musical materials.

In the past seventy or eighty years, there has been much discussion and experimentation in India with notation. There are two basic approaches: in one, which has an abortive seventeenth-century precursor, two kinds of symbols are used—letter names for notes and special symbols for ornaments; in the other one kind of symbol is used, the letter names of the notes, and the ornaments are either written out in small note-values, taken for granted, or described verbally. In either of these approaches, or any combination of them, one can of course replace the letters by positions and durations on a five-line staff; in either case, the problem is the old one—a readable notation communicates only a fraction of the total sound picture.

Given an intelligent understanding of the limited and limiting applicability of any notation, a Western investigator, culturally conditioned to reading rather than memorization, should be able
For transcribing Indian music, I have used three different notations, all specifically orientated to Indian music: 1) a simple letter or long-note staff notation, with ornament symbols in great and superimposed profusion, which is usually combined with 2) an elaborate written-out notation, usually on the staff, with considerable defined conventionalization of the incommensurable pitch, dynamic, and rhythmic factors; and 3) an aurally transcribed diastematic neumatic notation, a sort of imitation melograph in which the incommensurable factors can be present more suggestively. In all three notations, durations are usually spaced out along the horizontal axis to whatever degree of refinement seems applicable or necessary in any particular context. Each of these three notations has its particular advantages for the Western reader, and each in its own way is inadequate.

One might well ask, why conventionalize the “incommensurable pitch, dynamic, and rhythmic factors” when these are among the most important factors in the characteristic flavor of Indian music? Why an “imitation melograph” rather than a real one, objectively set down in varying levels of complexity and detail by the impersonal electronic ear and stylus of the machine? The answer to this is not only to avoid infinite variability, unreadability, and confusion, but more significantly because these factors are mostly predictable—they are conditioned by their contexts. It is up to the investigator to determine what factors are to be brought out in his notation, and what factors are general, and capable of general definition. He must decide how much of the non-essential and variable should be included in his transcription to make the essential and invariable readily apparent to the eye. These decisions can only be made on the basis of his experience with the music itself, and on the basis of his analyses.

Perhaps the most important aspect of notation, when it is used (as it must be studying non-Western music) for analytical and descriptive purposes, is its capacity for, so to speak, “time-blind,” through its translation of at least some features of audible sound into visible space. Through notation, especially graphic notations...
like staff notations, one is often able to discover at a glance and demonstrate in a moment important relationships which in the real domain of music, the temporal domain, are widely separated or otherwise concealed, and hence operate only cumulatively and through memory experiences in subtle ways on the psychic ear. This is the greatest argument for using notation in presenting musical materials: it has a tremendous advantage, in whatever form, for analysis and explanation. But though I must use it for this purpose, I cannot claim it as a satisfactory substitute for the music itself, in attempting to communicate with persons who are not already thoroughly familiar with the style of the music. If circumstances permit it at all, I prefer to beg the question. If it is a matter of talking or writing at length about specific processes in Indian music, I fall back on modern machinery—I feel I am bound to illustrate with both live or recorded sound and notated symbol.

After all this special pleading and personal reminiscence, I come at least to the recapitulation and code by returning to the opening subject in the original key.

It would appear to me that the investigation of music in a “pre-civilized” society must almost necessarily be done form the point of view of music as a part of the culture. At every turn one seems to be faced with the necessity of talking not so much about the notes themselves as about who makes them, under what circumstances, and for what reasons. A mere musicologist, even a very good one, may find himself at a loss under such circumstances. On the descriptive level, so far at any rate, we are quickly reduced to talking about intervals in cents, scales of 1 to n tones, melodies in third-chains or steps, and so on. Very seldom however, do we find a musician—in any culture—who thinks about and understands his music in such terms, or anything like them, unless there is already a theoretical base or superstructure attached to his music, which then makes it, by one of my criteria, no longer “pre-civilized.” Abstract, scientific, extra-cultural inferences are useful and interesting, and I do not mean to belittle them. But they are not musical or even musicological categories, they are ethnological categories, and they can perfectly well be obtained by an anthropologist—with the recent appearance of sophisticated instruments for measuring and weighing music, even by a musically illiterate, tone-deaf anthropologist. And an anthropologist is not likely to attach undue importance to the notes over against other factors.

In “civilized” societies, on the other hand, most anthropologically oriented persons seem to be at a loss when it comes to the music as music. The more the music in a particular culture is professionalized, the more it depends on experience with an understanding of the way the notes fit together, and the more independent it is of other cultural factors.

This emphatically does not mean that anyone with so-called musical training is automatically thereby better qualified to deal with someone else’s music than anyone without such formal training. But I am confident that there will be a high correlation between a person’s ability to acquire and communicate meaningful insights into his own music and his ability to do the same with someone else’s music—provided always that it is possible in the culture under study to make independent statements about music at all.

These remarks, furthermore, are not intended to suggest that one must always approach “civilized” music, Western or non-Western, from a culturally separable point of view. Even the purest pure music belongs to one culture or another, has varying uses in the culture, and so on; and all such matters can be of interest and importance to an understanding of the notes. But I do mean to suggest that the more a culture acts as though its music had a life of its own, the more it behooves an investigator to consider it primarily on that basis. In a highly professionalized art there is likely to be a strong feeling of cross-communal and even cross-cultural confraternity among professionals of that art; it seems to be that the quickest and most effective approach to the inner cultural meaning of that sort of music is to aspire to the condition of a professional, not to aspire to membership in the culture. And for a musician this is the most easily accessible route to membership in the culture as well.

Sources
Discussion Following Harold Powers’ Paper

I. What Is Ethnomusicology?

Merriam: I think this is a very interesting distinction, although I abhor the use of the terms "civilized" and "pre-civilized." But I think the most interesting point that comes of this is what I will phrase in terms of a question to you. Do you feel that what you did was ethnomusicology?

Powers: No.

Merriam: I thought that would be your answer and I think this is a very, very interesting point. Now I think that on this point you and Bill Malm would have great arguments.

Powers: I think we would; I think we have.

Merriam: But you and I have no arguments on this point. I don't think it's ethnomusicology either, but I think Bill will say it is.

Malm: I'll save that for tomorrow's paper.

Powers: Saying that something is done primarily from a musicological rather than an anthropological point of view doesn't mean that one doesn't use a little common sense. Obviously it doesn't mean that one doesn't even read anthropological journals. It's very helpful to read what someone says about "How I worked with my informant in South Tuul" or something. You pick up all sorts of lovely pointers on how you work with your teacher from that sort of thing, but this is a sort of borrowing on a very amateurish level. This is not professional anthropology or even professional ethnomusicology, I would say. I mean, I dealt with my piano teacher in the same way.

Merriam: That seems to be the point that is of prime interest to the whole conference, whether if you say it's not ethnomusicology and I say it's not ethnomusicology and others say it is ethnomusicology, then what do we mean by ethnomusicology? It's obvious that you and I have much the same idea.

Malm: What would your approach to a "higher civilization art music" be then? As far as you are concerned, ethnomusicologists dealing with Indian art music must know who makes music, why does he make it, what do people think about it, and so on. As far as the product is concerned, that is irrelevant basically to the equally important questions an ethnomusicologist should ask about art music.

Powers: I would agree with that also, but I would say that for me the final answer is how does the music work. Now I have to know the answers to all of the questions that were asked. Who makes the music? Why? When? How? I have to know the answers to those questions, but my interest in the answers to those questions is not to get those answers but rather to find out what bearing this has on the way the music works.

Merriam: Of course this is a matter of emphasis. I feel for me as an anthropologist it is more important to know the answers to the other kinds of questions.

Garfias: You seem to be agreeing here that the cultural context and the music itself are of equal importance.

Powers: I didn't agree to that. I think Alan is interested primarily in the music as a clue to
the cultural situation whereas I am interested in the cultural situation as a clue to the music.

Garfias: That isn't what I thought we had agreed to.

Merriam: I thought we were talking about what ethnomusicology is and we were saying that the two sides of it, the music side or the culture side, were equally important to understand in ethnomusicology. I thought we agreed here that, for me, the interest of one is high whereas the interest of the other is high for you. But that has nothing to do with what ethnomusicology is.

Powers: Well, I'm not sure that it doesn't. I'm not sure that it matters whether you have to decide what ethnomusicology is or what it isn't. To paraphrase a famous remark, "Ethnomusicology is what ethnomusicologists do."

Merriam: Providing you can discover who is in ethnomusicology. You have removed yourself from the class, which is your decision to make, but I felt you were making that decision on the basis of your and my understanding of what ethnomusicology is.

Garfias: It seems to me that essentially we are talking about music, and anthropology or the cultural context should qualify or explain or set the limits of what we are working at.

It's as if we go to study basketry and study who makes baskets where, why, and when. Everything there is, except how the baskets are actually made. If you are a basket maker, your primary center of interest is the material itself that you are working with and, while the cultural context may be important, it only sets the limits or throws more light on the things you are really working on.

Merriam: We have a flat disagreement.

Garfias: We do.

Hood: The two ends, I think, are two disciplines. I would like to think ethnomusicology is another discipline and I think both anthropology and musicology have much to contribute. The anthropologist is primarily interested in what the object symbolizes and wants to know what it means in its society.

Powers: The musicologist's primary concern is the object itself. What makes this basket tick? What are the materials involved? How is it made up? What is its form? What are its determinants?

Powers: I love it and I want to make one like it. (Laughter)

Hood: I would say that the anthropologist is going to miss some of what is symbolized if he doesn't have a pretty thorough understanding of the object itself. Vice versa, I would think the musicologist is going to miss really comprehending the object itself if he doesn't understand some of its symbolism in society.

That's how I would like to try to begin to define ethnomusicology. It's these two elements in whatever limited measure one person and his background can combine them.

Powers: It is a question, first of all, of the relationship of the music to the culture as a whole. In certain cultures, the most efficient initial method is the musical one, and in other cultures, the most efficient initial method is to study the culture as a whole. In the end we have to know all of the answers to all of the questions, and of course we never will.

Seeger: Couldn't we grant that the musicological viewpoint and the anthropological viewpoint in any music produce two different views, two different accounts of one and the same object? In other words, anthropology tells you something about the music which musicology doesn't and vice versa. Until you connect those two things, you are not making use of what we might call the ethnomusicological viewpoint. It's the connection of the two things that makes ethnomusicology.

Powers: There's a great deal in what you say. On the other hand, if you are talking just in terms of efficiency and meaningful statements, it seems to me that there are approaches and ways of describing the phenomenon that can be more meaningfully described from a primarily anthropological oriented point of view. I think that from certain points of view, certain kinds of music are less interesting than they are from other viewpoints.
Seeger: I wouldn't admit your "more meaningful" criterion. I'm trying to lay the thing out in such a way that we can unify these two opposed views of music, and not give an anthropological description of one music and a musical description of another. It seems to me that would produce anarchy in the study of music.

Rogers: The same sort of controversy exists in other fields. Erwin Panofsky distinguishes the connoisseur from the historian. The connoisseur uses the historical background, culture and so forth, to investigate the work of art. The art historian uses the work of art to investigate the culture or civilization, that is, the collective activity of men that has some sort of meaning--life.

McKinnon: I was thinking in terms of a possible parallel between some people's conception of the literary historian and of the literary critic. What often happens is that a literary historian may find himself, either by choice or by limitations of time, using literary drama to explain the historical and cultural setting.

II. Categorization into Art, Folk, Primitive, and Popular

Morton: Would you say you were dealing, in a phrase we are getting rather fond of using, with music in terms of itself only then and not the social context?

Powers: No, I wouldn't go that far. I would say that obviously one has to be interested in the social context of the music.

Morton: I got the feeling that you suggested it could be by-passed in your particular case.

Powers: Well, I was suggesting that if you put the emphasis on the music itself that you would find what you need. Now I am talking about art music and I would use cultural criteria, not musical ones, for defining art music. I would try to find such criteria. But once having decided that something is art music on intuitive or rationalistic grounds, I would say that the best thing to do is to learn music and to learn it any way you can, and that you will pick up what you need as to the answers to the other questions in the process. Now you will not get enough answers to the other questions to be able to answer the questions about the music in culture that Alan would ask. I could tell him a great deal about specific details here and there relating to these questions. But as for formulating a general answer to the historical and present position of music in Indian culture, I couldn't give him any better answer than anybody else that would spend a few years there.

Morton: Do you think the social context of music in this so-called "high art culture" of India is less important than in a culture where the music was in a "pre-civilized" state.

Powers: Yes, I do. This idea of whether music is culturally separable or not (leaving aside the question of how you determine that) has a very important bearing. In some cultures you simply cannot study the music independently. There is no way you can get at it. You can't ask them questions that they can answer and in certain cultures even if you are an honorary member of the tribe, you still may not be allowed to perform certain pieces in the appropriate cultural circumstances and contexts.

The test of performance has always been the final test on my findings. I work up a theory and then I apply it to my performance and if the teacher says, "Yes, yes, your performance is fine, it's improved considerably," then I think that there is something in the theory. Judging from the reports that I have read, in working with a pre-civilized society, this is often just plain impossible. You really can't approach the music from that point of view. You can't separate it from other things. So this culturally separable aspect, if it can be defined or organized in any way, I feel is a very important aspect of music and I think it should be determined primarily on cultural rather than musical terms.

Hood: The idea of strata seemed to me a good one. I can think of a number of different musical cultures that might yield to this kind of approach. Secondly, I like what you said about recording only what you thought you could get
around to handling yourself analytically. I think that's fine. There are a lot of individuals who are devoted entirely to the opposite objective of just recording everything they can, and they'll never look at it. I suppose we need both kinds.

I would heartily agree that notation is essential and has all kinds of usages, and it should exist in many forms depending on the purpose it serves: communication, study or analysis. Further, I would say that probably the ultimate is the sound of the music itself, in situ. I think the tape recording that was heard here earlier is a terribly flat, thin thing compared to hearing a large gamelan in a formal pendapa surrounded by a lot of Javanese in a humid, tropical atmosphere. I think there is a great difference.

Now, if I can go on the offensive, I really despair of these terms "civilized, pre-civilized, peasant," whether you attribute them to Redfield or not, or "primitive, half-civilized, and civilized." These are odious terms. We do not need them and I would beseech us not to take refuge in them. They serve no purpose.

Powers: The terms are bad, but are you saying "to hell with the terms" or "to hell with the categories?"

Hood: Categories. And the terms. Even if we found softer terms for these categories, so far as I am aware, they don't exist any more than the terms, "art, folk, primitive, and pop." I don't believe in these terms. I see in the Western world confusion over them and when you get to South America or Africa or the Orient with them, they are just no good. There's nothing useful about them.

From the standpoint of relative involvement, of music in social context, that is a very slippery one. Much of the social context that I have observed is below the surface. It's not something that bangs you over the head. The extent to which there may or may not be verbal intercourse about music seems to me an invalid judgment. I know the musicians I got involved with in Africa for a very limited time were certainly not the equivalent of Indian musicians. They don't have centuries of conscious theory behind them. They don't verbalize in that sense, but they are certainly not illiterate when it comes to their music. Their critical judgment is very fine.

Powers: There are two different kinds of ways of talking about music. I was taken to task once for saying in the review of a book that in folk music the question of right and wrong notes does not occur. It was pointed out that Leadbelly or someone would be easily able to tell whether something was right or wrong. This is not, of course, what I meant. The point is that there are certain kinds of mistakes that I can make in performing Indian music which an Indian can tell me right away are mistakes, on a pure "yes" or "no" basis and in terms which I can understand immediately.

This is certainly not true in the case of Anglo-American folk music. A folk singer can tell you that you have done it wrong but it is virtually impossible for him to tell you how or why. Now the Javanese musician who could tell Mantle he was playing flat but didn't think to do it, that is quite a different kind of distinction from the kind of distinction I am trying to make here. He knew. He even used the Javanese word for flat and sharp. When you have a culture that has words of that kind, if he can tell you that note was too low or too high and if this is something he learned himself and could have described and saved you all those hours of work, this is already on the way to having a theory.

I haven't been able to find really good minimal criteria for what constitutes theory and what doesn't. I think it would be something like names for the notes or names for phrases. I am well aware that in certain kinds of music in many different parts of the world, people have names for the strings on the instrument. When they use the same name for the pitch produced by the instrument and the pitch produced by the singer, then you have, in a sense, a kind of abstract category and that is the beginning of art music.

McAllester: I would like to make a plea for some kind of terminology. I think that there are different kinds of cultures vis-a-vis their music
and other things. To say that it's pejorative to discriminate between degrees in which the music is integrated into the whole culture is to warp our view of cultures, because I feel these differences myself very much.

I am working in a culture where the music is tremendously integrated with religion, drama, art, etc. and could clearly be called "pre-literate," although I don't like the term, because it implies that they will eventually come to be literate. In Navajo culture there isn't even a word for music. If I wanted to get some general statements about how people felt about music, you just couldn't ask such a question. I feel that you need terminology to describe a culture like that and that it is useful to have it.

Malm: I think that music serves a folksy, popular, or artistic function in every single society. In Africa, India, or Japan there are certain musics, which I would consider "artsy" and certain musics, which I would consider to be "folksy," and something in between which I would call "popular." I would fight against lumping all music into some big, nebulous glob and saying "This is music."

Powers: This is something that one ought to look into, but I would be very surprised if the criteria used to distinguish between art, folk, and popular in one society would work in another. If you applied them as a priori methodological distinctions, you would find that one category or another did not, in fact, exist in a given society.

Malm: Well, I am very anxious to put it to the test. In the test I think the anthropologist would have the floor, because it is a functional test.

Merriam: I do not think you would find a functional distinction. I think that for a Basongye, you would find a popular music and another kind of music. I don't think there is a "right" name for it. But I do not think you would find a folk, art, or a popular distinction.

Powers: I would like to try and find some categories that seem to me to work for the particular material in question. In other words, whether it's within a culture or within a dozen cultures, in the end it is the material itself—the musical material and its position in the culture—which has to determine the categories, not some rationalistic, a priori, Linnaean scheme, which you make up in advance. You make up a scheme, of course, as best you can, but you are constantly changing and modifying it as the material requires you to.

Seeger: A primitive tune from Tierra del Fuego has just as much right to be called "art" as a Beethoven symphony.

Powers: By all means, but I didn't mean to use the term "art music" or "pre-literate" or "civilized" or any other term in any sense other than as an abstract designation for a kind of category. If there is any implication in anything I have said of a critical evaluation of some of these things, I certainly didn't mean it to be there.

III. Field Work Problems

Hood: I tried this technique, too, on the rabab to find out how you improvise, but I think you have to be a little careful. Kunst arrived at the conclusion that slendro was intended to be equidistant. As one of his verbal arguments he mentioned the fact that he had a Javanese instrument tuned equidistantly, as precisely as he could, using a monochord. He had a Javanese musician play on this and asked, "Is that a good slendro?" He said, "Yes, it is very nice." Well, he would have been rude to say it isn't quite right. Now when I was there many years later, the leading musician of Djojagkarta attempted to give me some theory. He wanted to discuss slendro when we were first trying to figure out how to play slendro on the rabab and he said, "You must know that slendro is equidistant." I sat there sinking into the floor because I had really spent a lot of time in my own way establishing that it wasn't. Then he said, "That is only theory." Actually, he explained that they never play it equidistant. In short, I think we have to be careful, being intruders in asking "How about this? Is this okay?" And having them say, "That is not bad, that is fine. That is pretty good."
McAllester: I don't look very much like a Navajo, but people would ask me very seriously, "Aren't you really a Navajo?" on the basis of my singing a Navajo song very badly. Not because I did it so well, but because no one except a Navajo would even try, and there are Navajos who do it even worse than I do! So there are all kinds of levels of being a "native."

One last point I wanted to make was the question: are you listening to music to learn about the culture, or are you learning the culture to know about the music. I don’t know which I’m doing. It varies at different times. Sometimes I’m finding out about the culture in order to understand the music better, and sometimes I’m looking for things in the culture that the music reveals. I’m sure all of us get into this fix eventually we’re working in any music. It is no longer clear that we have one bias or the other, but that we get involved in the whole picture.