

ABSTRACT

THE CIMBÁL (CIMBALOM) IN MORAVIA: CULTURAL ORGANOLOGY AND INTERPRETIVE COMMUNITIES

by

Jesse Alan Newhouse Johnston

Co-Chairs: Judith O. Becker and Amy K. Stillman

This dissertation advances the concept of cultural organology through a detailed study of the *cimbál* (cimbalom) as it is played in Moravia (Czech Republic). Organology is often understood as the description and classification of musical instruments; however, cultural organology takes a broader approach that considers instruments as evocative objects that connect musical, experiential, and cultural knowledge. Musical instruments are artifacts that focus musical thought and tangibly center personal and collective musical experience. Instrumental performance practices enliven instruments from material artifacts into objects that open up and center musical worlds. Instruments imply a player, history, pedagogy, repertory, audience, and ethos—all of which constitute an interpretive community. Viewed through a lens of cultural organology, the cimbalom discloses musical and cultural aspects of Moravian interpretive communities.

The dissertation develops a framework of object-centered ethnography and applies this approach in a series of case studies centered on the Moravian cimbalom. The study begins with a narrative description of a concert in south Moravia that opens up a theoretical discussion of ways that musical instruments are understood (Chapter 1). This

is followed by an introduction to the cimbalom as it has developed in cultural and musical contexts in Moravia (Chapter 2). Four detailed case studies follow that demonstrate the way that the cimbalom centers interpretive communities and is understood in specific, Moravian ways: nineteenth-century efforts to transcribe and sponsor performances (Chapter 3); the relationship of the cimbalom to folk culture and Communist ideology, particularly as experiences through urban folk groups and orchestral radio ensembles (Chapter 4); a history of cimbalom teaching in Moravia and an investigation of cognitive and kinesthetic concepts of playing the instrument (Chapter 5); and a study of the cimbalom's recent use in world music as heard in the performances of two contemporary Moravian artists (Chapter 6). This dissertation offers a detailed view of the relationship of contemporary Moravian folk music performance with nineteenth-century models, investigates the relationship of traditional music ensembles before and during the Communist period, and illustrates the value of an object-centered approach to musical ethnography and cultural organology.