

# SCIENTIFIC DIMENSIONS IN MUSICOLOGICAL RESEARCH

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“Scientific research is that place where questions are asked and answers are sought to the most difficult and most important science and technology matters, with a direct impact on mankind’s medium- and long-term welfare.” Marius Leordeanu

**Abstract.** *Musicology is a scientific field that studies music and its manifestations. In its turn, musicological research elucidates an infinite range of questions and problems occurring in the context of the interaction of human personality with musical art and that require scientific solutions. Moreover, the science about all the musical phenomena is manifested as a form of music self-knowledge. In this respect, musicology is a system of systematic music knowledge that examines the content and form, functions, evolution, and many other aspects whose solutions contribute to the formation of musicians’ stylistic orientations, to the determination of purposes in the practical activity, to the adjustment of the artistic communication process, etc..*

**Key words:** *music, science, musicology, musicological research.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Music has always had a significant importance in human life, even if people have been more or less aware of this phenomenon over time” [1, p.155]. The influences of music on human personality manifest affective and intellectual complexities borne by our nature. Thus, the impact between music and man causes an ever increasing number of questions that are obviously rooted in the scientific field.

After all, *what is music?* There are countless more or less scientific attempts to define this word. Looking for a conventional summary of all the explanations existing in this respect, we can say that music is the art of combining various sounds in such a way as to generate various human affective states and to express feelings, impressions or certain ideational aspects.

Ever since ancient times, music was born due to purely useful needs, while later, in the following historic periods, it became one of the usual forms of artistic manifestation, with a specific communication role and function. Viewed as a part of human life, *music and its manifestations* have had, over time, countless motivational sources, in the attempt of being studied more or less scientifically. At the same time, the music field has always exercised a strong attraction on great thinkers and scientists of all times, who, in their attempt to find and determine viable fundamental regularities, contributed, to various extents, to the establishment of a musical science known under the name of *musicology*.

## 2. MUSICOLOGY – THE SCIENCE ABOUT MUSIC

Although it was designated an independent science only in the Age of Enlightenment – a period when an impressive number of fundamental papers were written in various fields of knowledge, and consequently, most sciences were constituted in their contemporary aspect– musicology empirically includes millenary theoretical references. These references have contributed to the formation and establishment of a scientific field, whose complexity is paradoxically focused on only one object of study – knowing the sound art in its various hypostases. Being a part of the

science system, musicology is among the scientific fields whose foundations were laid way back in ancient times, such as sociology, pedagogy, history, theology, ethics and aesthetics, etc. As is the case of each of the above mentioned sciences, given that science is a set of knowledge in a certain field, musicology includes the whole knowledge about music. The etymology of this word confirms that: from Greek, the two roots *mousiki* (μουσική) and *logos* (λόγος) mean science or word about music. At the same time, the translations in various international languages (*musicology* in English, *musicologie* in French, *Musicwissenschaft* in German, *musicologia* in Italian and Spanish, *μουσικολογία* in Greek, and *музыкаведение* or *музыказнание* in Russian, etc.) do not change this meaning at all.

Based on the decoding of this word, scientists propose various means of perceiving the term *musicology* and various methods of studying music and its manifestations which, as a whole, lead to the conclusion that the science about all the musical phenomena is manifested as a form of self-knowledge of music. In this respect, musicology is a system of systematic knowledge in the field of music that examines the content and form, functions and evolution, as well as many other aspects whose solutions contribute to the formation of musicians’ stylistic orientations, to the determination of purposes in the practical activity, to the adjustment of the artistic communication process, etc.

“Many branches of musicology determine the question: which is the place of this subject matter among contemporary subject matters? The answer is conditional upon an evolutionary aspect [...] Musicology was included among humanities, or, according to certain conceptions, among the sciences of the spirit[...] On the other hand, the emergence of branches of musicology that depend on the natural sciences was present since ancient times and is revived again nowadays” [2, p.13]. In the beginning, music was studied from the perspective of other fields, as well as from the perspective of mathematics (the *mathematical theory of sound* developed by Pythagoras), ethics (the *Pythagorean ethos* theory, continued by Plato and Aristotle), history (the *history of music* initiated by Heraclides Ponticus and continued by Plutarch), etc. Later, scholastics followers imposed to theoreticians *musica coelestis* (celestial music) and *musica mundana* (earthly music), and in the Middle Ages, music was the only art that enters *quadrivium*, along with astronomy, arithmetic and geometry. The Renaissance applied new theoretical aspects in the study of sounds and the relations between them (after Zarlino) and in the modal system (after Glarean), and then the Baroque promoted, in principle, organology and the new innovative systems (temperate and chromatic). The versatility of the Baroque representatives (Praetorius, Kircher) leads the science of music towards that of nature or towards humanities (musical theory, history and encyclopaedia (Forkel, Cantemir), *ethnography* (Cantemir), *aesthetics* (Baumgarten), etc.).

“Along with the problem of musicology’s place among sciences, another problem that concerned researchers from ancient times, was that of including its branches in a unitary system” [2, p.13]. Ancient researchers grouped the subject matters of music in two main categories: *theory and practice*, while Middle Ages researchers retained this principle of dichotomy besides *musica coelestis* and *musica mundana*. The modern science of music returned, in the Age of Enlightenment, to the classification problem and proposed a structuring according to various objective and subjective factors. Thus, musicology included all the branches of studying music, and grouped them according to various criteria: *historical and systematic, history-ethnology-psychology, theory-history-ethno-musicology-music criticism*, etc. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this systematisation is continued, and among musicologists concerned with this problem there were Riemann, Adler, Wellek, Keldish, Drager, Wiora, Handschin, etc. Moreover, since the differentiation of certain primary branches from secondary ones continuously varied depending on changes occurred in the musical culture, a few musicological subject matters were withdrawn in the background in favour of adopting others, among which *musical linguistics, semiotics, musical sociology, cybernetics*, etc., but “the evolution of musicology is thus related not only to its continuous improvement along with the scientific knowledge, but also with the emergence and gradual development of the branches that are part of it” [2, p.13].

Contemporary musicology adds, in the evolution of the main interdisciplinary field, both its ontological level, as well as its epistemological one. The problem of interdisciplinarity is nowadays a *sine qua non* means within the musical science. Given the specific nature of musicology, the correlation among the inner subject matters of the system is essential in a scientific study.

### 3. A FEW REFERENCE POINTS IN MUSICOLOGICAL RESEARCH

“Although it is the oldest of the sciences of art, the only one acknowledged as such in Antiquity and taught in Medieval universities, the science of music, according to the traditional modern thinking, is still positioned within limited coordinates. Widening the contemporary horizon, diversifying musical facts, the scientific progress determines, in the musical science, a review of the object and methods of research” [2, p.12]. However, just as in the case of other sciences, musicological research is based on a few important reference points: object of study, objectives, functions, methods of research, etc.

Among the first parameters of a scientific study there is the objective, which is closely interrelated with the objectives, either singular or multiple within one and the same investigation. According to them, a scientific research in the field of musicology can be crucial from the theoretical point of view, essential in knowing music and its laws, or applied, initiated with the purpose of implementing the theoretically determined aspects into practice. The connection between the two types of musicological study is indispensable, and the theoretical, as well as the applied research cannot be carried out absolutely separately. Moreover, a few musical laws determined following a theoretical study can have access towards the society only by means of another practical study, applied in fields such as musical pedagogy, theology, criticism and musical journalism, etc.

When we talk about the selected object of study, it is important to mention that a musicological research can examine many musical aspects. They can be aesthetic or philosophical in nature, focused on the content of music and the day-to-day reality, but they can also focus various cultural aspects of music. Two other important directions in the musicological research, which also represent two major fields of musicology, are ethnomusicology and professional musicology. The first is related to the various forms of existence and perpetuation of folk music, while the second one refers to the manifestations of professional art, to the musical language elements, the composition and interpretation techniques, etc.

In conclusion, any musical manifestation and form of existence of music can lead to a new research in this field, especially since “the object of musicology is amplified not only in space, but also in time. In its preoccupations, it adds the present to the past, and eventually the future” [2, p.12]. Nevertheless, the central object of musicology, which is the starting point of all scientific investigations, is the musical work in itself. And, since it “experiences the same diversification in all its hypostases: creation – interpretation – perception” [2, p.11], it leads to three directions of musical study that provides the researcher with three potential ways of finding and determining finalities.

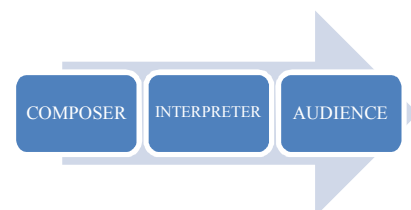


Figure 1: Participants in the realization of a musical work

Each participant of the triad that can be seen in figure 1 manifests its own attitude related to the musical work and expresses interest in it in a certain manner. The composer presents the product of his composing activity, and the audience receives his message. The link between these two extremities is the interpreter’s activity, whose duty is to provide a connection between the message conveyed by the composer and the message perceived by the consumer audience, in such a way as to guarantee an infallible finality of the process. However, there is only one composer and there are several interpreters, but listeners can be many, different, with various education and unpredictable moods” [3, p.16]. In such case, the musicologist’s activity intervenes, and is oriented towards the scientific perception of the message of the musical work created by the composer and its analysis, either from the point of view of composition theory or techniques, or from that of interpretative art, in such a way as to favour a reception as effective as possible by the audience. However, “the composer does not write for a predictable audience; instead, he generally launches his message in the unknown” [3, p.16], while on the other side, “the interpreter, remaining at the same informational level, becomes, in an extreme hypostasis, creator too, while on the other side he is completely circumvented from a minus-infinity of the total scientific organization acquired by certain creative conceptions” [2, p.11].

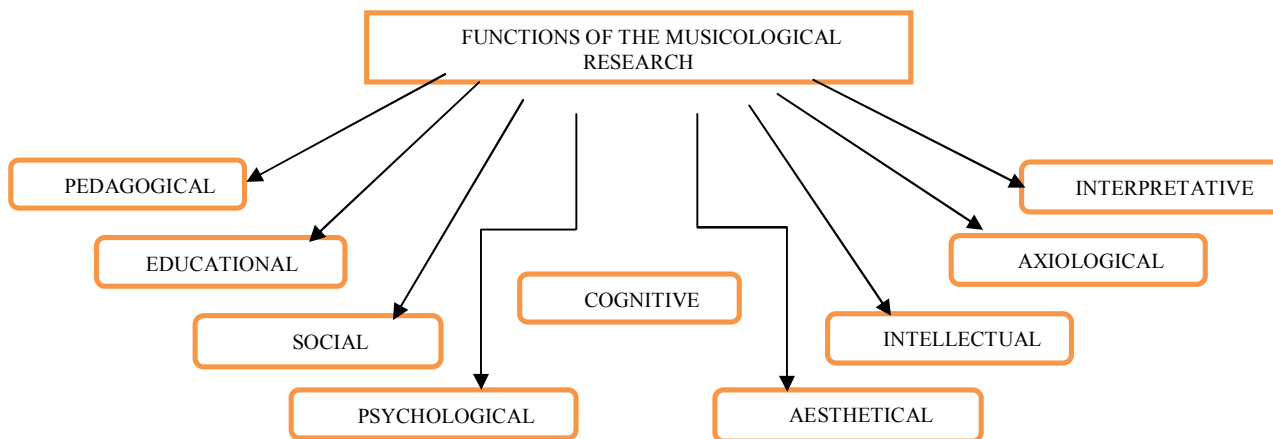


Figure 2: Several functions of the musicological research

The first function mentioned in the figure above and one of the most important in a research in the field of musicology is the pedagogical one. This implied a familiarization of the musicians and music lovers with the music and its laws, a conveyance of the cultural values by means of musical perspectives with the purpose of cultivating artistic preferences and predilections. The educative and social functions aim at educating various social classes through musical art, and the psychological and aesthetical ones – the implications of music under a superior form of beauty into the affective, emotional and volitional life. The next two potential functions of a musicological research indicated in the figure above are the cognitive and the intellectual ones, which allow for the accumulation, maintenance and conveyance of knowledge about music in the form of highly refined and complex intellectual activities. Musicology operates with authentic artistic values that belong to the human spirituality as a whole. The axiological and interpretation functions involve a deep knowledge of the musical phenomenon and aim at assessing it, and then the explanation and translation of the knowledge using various criteria of analysis of the reviewed phenomena. In conclusion, whether pedagogical, axiological, social or cognitive, the function can be individual in the case of a musicological research, or can be associated with other functions, more or less closely interrelated.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Contemporary musicology tends to penetrate as deep as possible into the musical phenomenon and to research, in an exhaustive manner, any form of musical manifestation, especially due to the fact that “contemporary thinking experiences a new wave of embedding sonority and musical temporality” [5, p.15]. The object of study of musicology was and still is as multilateral as possible, and the conglomerate of means of musical expression is cannot be subjected to unitary perceptions. Consequently, the researcher has to cope with a huge composing production,

with a complexity that is slightly discouraging, in a variety of styles that are impossible to systematize based on a unique criterion” [5, p.13]. The more we insist on the investigation, the more questions are raised. These questions can become, in their turn, other objects of study themselves, because one cannot exhaust the resources of a musical work by studying it. “The substance requires you to return, it cannot be perceived all at once. The meanings have to be understood little by little, they cannot be seen instantly” [3, p.16]. Moreover, as Robert Sapolsky said in his paper *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers*, Science is not meant to cure us of mystery, but to reinvent and reinvigorate it [6]. Therefore, if a researcher intends to know a musical work, he can discover new and important details, both from the theoretic point of view of science as well as from the practical one. Thus, by means of an infinity of objects of study, or of scientific studies respectively, a continuity is provided by correspondence in the existence of musicology as scientific field.

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