

# Theory and Method in Historical Ethnomusicology

Historical ethnomusicology is a field of study that examines the music of past cultures using the methods of ethnomusicology. It is a relatively new field, with most of its development taking place in the last 50 years. However, it has quickly become one of the most important fields in ethnomusicology, as it provides a unique perspective on the history of music and culture.



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by Jonathan McCollum

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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## History of Historical Ethnomusicology

The roots of historical ethnomusicology can be traced back to the early 20th century, when scholars such as Curt Sachs and Erich von Hornbostel began to apply ethnomusicological methods to the study of historical music. However, it was not until the 1960s and 1970s that historical ethnomusicology emerged as a distinct field of study. This was due in part

to the work of scholars such as John Blacking, David P. McAllester, and Bruno Nettl, who developed new methods for studying historical music.

## **Key Concepts in Historical Ethnomusicology**

Historical ethnomusicologists use a variety of key concepts to understand the music of past cultures. These concepts include:

\* **Musical change:** Historical ethnomusicologists are interested in how music changes over time. They study the factors that contribute to musical change, such as cultural contact, technological innovation, and social change. \* **Musical meaning:** Historical ethnomusicologists are also interested in the meaning of music in past cultures. They study how music is used to express social, political, and religious ideas. \* **Musical performance:** Historical ethnomusicologists study how music is performed in past cultures. They examine the role of performers, the use of instruments, and the context of musical performance.

## **Research Methods in Historical Ethnomusicology**

Historical ethnomusicologists use a variety of research methods to study the music of past cultures. These methods include:

\* **Historical research:** Historical ethnomusicologists use historical research to examine written and visual sources from past cultures. This research can help them to understand the cultural context of musical performance and the meaning of music in past societies. \* **Ethnographic research:** Historical ethnomusicologists also use ethnographic research to study the music of living cultures. This research can help them to understand how music is used in contemporary societies and how it has changed over time. \* **Musical analysis:** Historical ethnomusicologists also

use musical analysis to study the music of past cultures. This analysis can help them to understand the structure, style, and meaning of music.

## **Challenges and Opportunities in Historical Ethnomusicology**

Historical ethnomusicology faces a number of challenges, including:

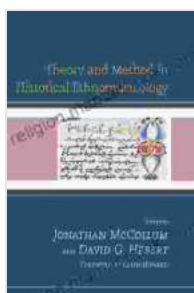
\* **The lack of written sources:** Many past cultures did not leave behind written records of their music. This can make it difficult for historical ethnomusicologists to study the music of these cultures. \* **The bias of written sources:** The written sources that do exist are often biased towards the views of the ruling class. This can make it difficult for historical ethnomusicologists to understand the music of marginalized groups. \* **The difficulty of reconstructing past musical performance:** It is often difficult to reconstruct past musical performance based on written sources and ethnographic research. This is because music is a ephemeral art form that is difficult to capture in words or notation.

Despite these challenges, historical ethnomusicology offers a number of opportunities for scholars. These opportunities include:

\* **The ability to gain a deeper understanding of the history of music:** Historical ethnomusicology can help us to understand how music has changed over time and how it has been used to express different social, political, and religious ideas. \* **The ability to gain a better understanding of the cultures of the past:** Historical ethnomusicology can help us to understand the cultures of the past by providing us with a window into their musical practices. \* **The ability to contribute to the development of new musical traditions:** Historical ethnomusicology can help us to develop

new musical traditions by providing us with a deeper understanding of the traditions of the past.

Historical ethnomusicology is a field of study that is still in its early stages of development. However, it has already made a significant contribution to our understanding of the history of music and culture. As the field continues to grow, it is likely to make even more important contributions in the years to come.



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