

BOŻENA MUSZKALSKA (Wrocław, Poznań)

Biological and social aspects of the theoretical thought of Richard Wallaschek

ABSTRACT: The article is devoted to the work of Richard Wallaschek, who was sharply criticised during his lifetime, and only in the 1980s did the academic community renew its interest in his achievements. His book *Primitive Music* (London 1893) is considered to have laid the foundations for comparative musicology. He sought to prove that comparing European music with the music of primitive peoples was essential, and was the only way to attain a proper view of the products and development of our own culture. The year 1896, in which Wallaschek received his habilitation from the University of Vienna, is regarded as the beginning of comparative musicology in Vienna.

Wallaschek postulated that 'formal aesthetics', describing merely 'the chronology of composers' and marked by an europocentrism, be replaced by a *modern musicology*, collaborating with music psychology and music ethnography and based on the natural foundations of musical aesthetics – a musicology which would formulate its conclusions on the basis of 'facts and examples', which it would verify by means of natural material. A central place in his research was occupied by the genesis of music, musical experiencing and aesthetic judgment, and the perception and creation of music. Taking up the question of musical abilities, Wallaschek devoted much space to women. He considered them more gifted than men, in which he differed from Eduard Hanslick and from other of his contemporary scholars. Postulating a sociological analysis of the situation of musical women in various cultures, he pointed to the methodological necessity of making a strict distinction between the actual musical abilities of women and the social appraisal of those skills.

KEYWORDS: Richard Wallaschek, comparative musicology, musical aesthetics, musical abilities of women

Although he published many works in which he addressed a wide spectrum of problems and integrated many disciplines, relatively little space has been devoted in the musicology literature to the work of Richard Wallaschek (1860–1917). During his lifetime, he was sharply criticised, and it even seems that the first publication in which he was given an unequivocally positive assessment as a man and a scholar was the posthumous memoir of his pupil, Robert Lach.¹ Only in the 1980s did the academic community renew

¹ Robert Lach, 'Zur Erinnerung an R. W.', *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft* 12 (1917); repr. in *Psychologische Ästhetik* (Vienna, 1930).

its interest in Wallaschek's achievements and begin to discover how far his bold and innovative ideas were ahead of their time.

Today, Wallaschek's *Primitive Music. An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races* (London, 1893) is considered to have laid the foundations for comparative musicology. This work was the fruit of the interdisciplinary studies he carried out in London and his research in the British Museum (1890–1895), which possesses a huge collection of ethnographic materials. This book was published in 1893, and so eight years after the publication of Guido Adler's 'Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft',² in which the author presented a division of musicology into the historical and the systematic, with comparative musicology in the systematic part, aimed at 'the comparing of tonal products, in particular the folk songs of various peoples, countries, and territories, with an ethnographic purpose in mind, grouping and ordering these according to the variety of [differences] in their characteristics [Beschaffenheiten]'.³ In spite of distinguishing a new discipline, Adler dealt in his research solely with European art music, considering folk music not to be art, and deeming the joy of singing which he observed among folk performers (although he could not conceal his fascination with this phenomenon) an 'apish instinct', which had nothing in common with a sense of art.⁴ And so only through the works of Wallaschek did the comparative musicology from Adler's system actually become a cultivated discipline. Throughout virtually the whole of his scholarly work, Wallaschek sought to prove that comparing European music with the music of primitive peoples was essential, and was the only way to attain a proper view of the products and development of our own culture.

The year 1896, in which Wallaschek received his Habilitation from the University of Vienna, is regarded as the beginning of comparative musicology in Vienna. He gained the degree of 'habilitated' doctor in the field of musicology, or more exactly in music aesthetics and psychology, on the basis of his Habilitationsschrift *Musikästhetik und Psychologie der Tonkunst*. It is notable that Wallaschek's Habilitation took place in the same year that Eduard Hanslick, who held the position of professor of music history and aesthetics at the same university, retired, and two years before Adler, Hanslick's successor, founded the institution which is now the Institute of Musicology. In 1908, Wallaschek joined Adler's institution as associate professor in comparative musicology.

² Guido Adler, 'Umfang, Methode und Ziel der Musikwissenschaft', *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 1 (1885), 5–20.

³ Erica Mugglestone, 'Guido Adler's "The Scope, Method, and Aim of Musicology" (1885): An English Translation with an Historico-Analytical Commentary', *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, 13 (1981), 1–21.

⁴ Guido Adler, *Der Stil in der Musik* (Leipzig, 1911).

Wallaschek was critical of the research methods of his musicology contemporaries and of their views on art. He called the orientation of their research 'formal aesthetics' (*Formalästhetik*) and defined it as 'speculative and belletristic'. He postulated that 'formal aesthetics', describing merely 'the chronology of composers' and marked by an Europocentrism, be replaced by a *modern musicology*, collaborating with music psychology and music ethnography and based on the natural foundations of musical aesthetics – a musicology which would formulate its conclusions on the basis of 'facts and examples' (*Thatsachen und Beispielen*), which it would verify by means of natural material.⁵ Wallaschek understood aesthetics as 'a natural science of people who take delight in art and create it'.⁶ His research encompassed not only European music, but non-European music as well, also taking account of psychological and physiological aspects. Thus his approach to research differed from that of Hanslick, who, like Adler, stressed the external, formal features of music (Adler's *Beschaffenheiten*) and clearly distanced himself from so-called 'primitive' music.

The question arises as to how and why non-European music, treated as something primitive, that was not art, and thereby not previously studied by music aesthetics, found itself at the centre of interest among aestheticians. Undoubtedly not without significance here were the changes taking place in music aesthetics itself, which, under the influence of the natural sciences, was developing from a philosophically-oriented discipline into a psychological-scientific discipline.⁷ The links between ethnology and aesthetics began to be noted, as is attested by the decision taken by the Habilitation committee to allow Wallaschek, as part of his Habilitation procedure, to deliver a lecture entitled 'Der Nutzen der Ethnologie für die Ästhetik' (Ethnology's usefulness for aesthetics).⁸ The statement of differences in the aesthetic judgments of people living in different parts of the world was Wallaschek's chief argument in favour of ethnological research being treated as an indispensable complement to aesthetics.⁹

⁵ Richard Wallaschek, 'Die Aufgabe der Musikwissenschaft', *Die Zeit* 92/4 (1896).

⁶ Richard Wallaschek, *Psychologie und Pathologie der Vorstellung* (Leipzig, 1905).

⁷ See Christian G. Allesch, *Geschichte der psychologischen Ästhetik. Untersuchungen zur historischen Entwicklung eines psychologischen Verständnisses ästhetischer Phänomene*, (Göttingen, 1987), cit. after Gregor Kokorz, 'Ausgewählte Aspekte zur Geschichte der Musikethnologie', *Newsletter MODERNE. Zeitschrift des Spezialforschungsprojekts Moderne – Wien und Zentraleuropa um 1900* 4/1 (2001), 12–19.

⁸ See Personalakt Wallaschek Z 3912, Universitätsarchiv Wien; cit. after Kokorz, 'Ausgewählte Aspekte', 2.

⁹ In the Berlin institution, the starting point for the distinction of comparative musicology was acoustic research and the psychology of sound (Carl Stumpf), into which non-European music was incorporated.

Wallaschek, like no other turn-of-the-century scholar, made use in his research of the achievements of many disciplines: music history, ethnography, physiology, psychology, neurology and zoology. A central place in his research was occupied by the following problems:

- 1) the genesis of music,
- 2) musical experiencing and aesthetic judgment,
- 3) the perception and creation of music.

An important aspect of Wallaschek's considerations of these issues were his investigations into what in music, and in the behaviours associated with it, is given by nature and what is the result of the action of the environment, that is, culture.

Wallaschek first wrote on the origins of music in 1891, in the journal *Mind*, and he developed his theory in the above-mentioned book *Primitive Music*,¹⁰ in the chapter 'On the origin of music'. Wallaschek linked the emergence of music to the need to perform rhythmic movements, universally felt by man. According to Wallaschek, the most plausible explanation of the source of this need was offered by the theory propounded by Herbert Spencer, whom Wallaschek criticised elsewhere. This need supposedly arose in organisms at a higher level of evolution, out of an excess of energy not wholly spent in the satisfying of the basic needs of life. In order to expend this energy, man begins to perform rhythmic movements, which turn into dance.

To Wallaschek's mind, dance was originally inseparably linked to music. 'Dancing and music are in fact one act of expression, not merely an occasional union like poetry and music. There is no dance without music.'¹¹ In the dances of primitive peoples, he noted the occurrence of all the movements which are necessary for meeting those vital needs which he considered to be fighting and hunting. Wallaschek was of the opinion that dances served to maintain skills that were essential in situations of fighting and hunting. Also striking in the dances of primitive peoples is the imitation of the behaviour of animals. Using the term 'dance-chorus', Wallaschek stressed the social character of dance. He asserted that music has an integrating effect on dancers and enables a group to act simultaneously. He had a high opinion of the dancing abilities of women, noting that they had greater endurance in dancing than men. And since they were also better singers, it was primarily to them that music owes its duration.

¹⁰ Richard Wallaschek, *Primitive Music. An Inquiry into the Origin and Development of Music, Songs, Instruments, Dances, and Pantomimes of Savage Races* (London, 1893); an expanded German version of this work, *Anfänge der Tonkunst*, was published in Leipzig in 1903.

¹¹ Wallaschek, *Primitive Music*, 293.

According to Wallaschek, in the most primitive stage of the development of music, melody was only a secondary element, as it is rhythm that allows us to perceive intervals and their ordering and grouping. 'An interval as such has no musical value for us without rhythmical order in time. Even animals recognize and utter intervals, but cannot make any intelligent use of them, because they do not understand rhythmical arrangement.'¹² Wallaschek explained, however, that rhythm gave man only an impulse to the ordering of sounds, and the ultimate effect of this ordering depended to a large extent on what he called the 'contingent ideas and feelings' that arise in the human mind, that is, the recognition of the intensity of sound, of tempo, and of the quickening or slowing of motion. These processes differ in the psyche of individual people. Therefore, the creation of music was linked not only to the effect of rhythm on the emotions, but also to the perception of a particular form of time division, namely division into measures and periods. In Wallaschek's opinion, the next stage in the development of music, following the rhythmic stage, was singing at intervals and with accompaniment. He thus expressed the opinion that part-singing was not discovered by Europeans.

Within the context of his considerations on the origins of music, Wallaschek took issue with the theory of Herbert Spencer, who saw the source of music in the natural melody of speech under the sway of emotions.¹³ In a section of *Primitive Music* devoted to 'speech theory', Wallaschek analysed examples drawn from various cultures and arrived at the conclusion that the music of the most primitive societies was rather more 'noise reduced to time' than melody. And the earliest form of music could not have been 'recitative' – he argued further – since among primitive peoples this exists alongside music in which a leading role is played by rhythm. Besides this, in many cases, songs are sung in these societies without words. Therefore, the setting together of music and poetry could only have occurred at a higher stage in the development of language. Finally, he refutes the view that voice modulation developed from emotional speech, citing the fact that in many of the songs of primitive societies the rhythmic motion is based on a single note. Thus it was decidedly rhythm that provided the spur for the creation of melodic modulation. A sense of time was proper to man considerably earlier than the conception of that which we call melody. Music is the expression of emotions, and speech is the expression of thoughts – states Wallaschek. If we assumed that music arose and developed from speech, then we would also have to assume that emotions developed from thoughts. While it is possible that such is in-

¹² *Ibid.*, 233.

¹³ Wallaschek first took issue with Spencer's views in the article 'On the Origin of Music', *Mind* 16 (1891), 375–86 [reply to Herbert Spencer, 'The Origin of Music', *Mind* 15 (1890), 449–68].

deed the case in adults, this statement cannot be generalised. The many cases of aphasia show that expression need not be the combining of emotion and intellect, as these are governed by different parts of the brain.

Wallaschek also criticised Charles Darwin's theory, according to which 'the original music was the bird's love-song, and [...] the agreeable feelings which naturally accompanied it were transmitted (through individual heredity) to further generations and even species, and that this accounts for the pleasure men have in music'.¹⁴ From the psychological point of view, there was no evidence, to Wallaschek's mind, that the emission of notes by animals was accompanied by such complex mental processes as are demanded by 'music'. Even birds, for the singing of which the term 'song' appears to be most adequate, do not demonstrate a sense of time, that is, beat. Animals are also devoid of a sense of beauty, even in their sexual relations, which constitute a key question in Darwin's theory. According to Wallaschek, Darwin's views are also contradicted by evidence of a biological nature, since the emission of notes in nature does not develop together with the evolution of animals. Birds are able to perform their 'songs' not as a result of heredity, but through imitation. A bird of one species can even adopt the song of another species. Physiological evidence testifies that the songs of animals have something in common with speech rather than music, and musical skills are not in the least dependent on the speech centre in the human brain.

Wallaschek described the functioning of the organs of speech and hearing among insects, birds and mammals and analysed the sounds they produce. As a result of his analysis, he stated that all the deliberate 'utterances' of animals which reflect their emotional state serve communication, and are not an aesthetic product. They resemble primitive speech more than primitive art.

Addressing the question of the inheriting of musical skills, Wallaschek came out in favour of a conception according to which it was not possible to inherit acquired changes. He backed his assertion by citing the rapid development of music during his times, which could not have been the result of inheritance, and the lack of changes in the structure of the human ear during the period in the development of music from primitive times to contemporary times. In Wallaschek's opinion, this progress must have occurred without the participation of inheritance, the function of which was taken over by what he termed 'living tradition'.

It is worth mentioning that five years after the appearance of Wallaschek's article 'Origin of Music' and two years after the publication of his book *Primitive Music*, the link between music and rhythm was also emphasised by Karl Bücher (1846–1930). In his work *Arbeit und Rhythmus* (Leipzig, 1896),

¹⁴ His critique of Darwin's theory was contained chiefly in the section "'Music" in the animal kingdom' of his book *Primitive Music*.

Bücher formulated a socio-economic conception linking the origin of music with rhythmic work, thanks to which one can minimise energy loss. However, in a later book, *Industrial Evolution*, from 1901, perhaps influenced by the works of Wallaschek, he opined that 'play is older than work, and art is older than functional production'.

As with Hanslick, an important place in Wallaschek's works was occupied by the question of *musical experiencing and aesthetic judgment*. However, as a result of his taking account in his research of ethnographic, physiological and psychological facts, as well as pathological cases for comparison with the normal process of hearing, Wallaschek found himself at odds in his concepts with Hanslick's views. Drawing conclusions from his analysis of the gathered material, he became convinced that aesthetic experience was based to a large extent on emotional reactions and evoked only a general sense, which was further determined by the listener's experience. Only in this way was it possible to account for the emergence of religious, moral and similar sentiment and various kinds of intellectual impulses. Wallaschek stressed the influence of the cultural factor on the quality of one's musical experience. In the forming of aesthetic judgment, he prioritised, in contrast to Hanslick, feeling.¹⁵

The theory concerning the mental processes connected with the perception and creation of music, supported by materials gathered during his research in London, were Wallaschek's most original contribution to music psychology. For him, the perception of music took place through two kinds of mental representation: the representation of the note (*Tonvorstellung*), which refers to individual elements of music, and the representation of music (*Musikvorstellung*), relating to a musical structure of a higher order.¹⁶ In reference to issues connected with musical time and rhythm, Wallaschek described the mental process of 'sensing time' (beat), that is, the intuitive perception of groups of notes in the musical work. In his opinion, this process takes place on the mental, rather than emotional, plane. The only way the human mind can perceive the rhythm contained in music is by tracking temporal divisions.¹⁷

With his concept of the 'representation of music' (*Musikvorstellung*), whereby the mind is capable of perceiving individual elements as a whole, Wallaschek anticipated gestalt psychology, which emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century.

In presenting his theory concerning the creation of music, Wallaschek argued, in opposition to Spencer – as we saw when discussing the origin of mu-

¹⁵ Richard Wallaschek, *Psychologische Ästhetik*, ed. Oscar Katann (Vienna, 1930).

¹⁶ Richard Wallaschek, 'How we think of tones and music', *The Contemporary Review* 66 (1894), 259–268.

¹⁷ Richard Wallaschek, 'On the difference of time and rhythm in music'. *Mind*, new ser., 4 (1895), 28–35.



sic – that music and speech were connected with different processes occurring in the brain; music was the expression of emotions, whereas language expressed intellect. This idea was based on the results of research carried out by renowned neurologists active at the end of the nineteenth century in London. At that time, there appeared many descriptions of patients with aphasia, who were unable to utter words but were able to sing them. This was supposed to prove the efficient functioning of the emotional centre responsible for singing, in spite of the fact that the speech centre in the brain had been damaged.¹⁸

Taking up the question of musical abilities, Wallaschek devoted much space to women. He considered them more gifted than men, in which he differed from Hanslick and from other of his contemporary scholars. Postulating a sociological analysis of the situation of musical women in various cultures, he pointed to the methodological necessity of making a strict distinction between the actual musical abilities of women and the social appraisal of those skills. In his opinion, the fact that in cultures at higher stages of development women can boast lesser achievements than men in the creation or performance of music was influenced by social factors. In the history of European music, it has been considerably more difficult for women to gain musical training, and their compositions have not been appreciated.¹⁹ As we may conclude, according to Wallaschek, from observations of primitive societies, in former times women participated in both the performance and the creation of music to a much greater extent.²⁰

Even if the 'facts and examples' (*Thatsachen und Beispiele*) put forward by Wallaschek appear today to be somewhat exaggerated, it should be noted that many of his innovative ideas resurfaced in later research, and some of them remain current today. He discerned the huge diversity of cultures which was later the starting point for Alan Lomax's cantometric project. He noted that the studying of other cultures allows us to identify poorly visible aspects of our own culture. He emphasised that music is not an abstract art, but is firmly rooted in life. With his conviction of the social role of dance and music, which reinforce group solidarity and organise collective action, he anticipated

¹⁸ Wallaschek, 'On the Origin of Music' (see footnote 11); 'Über die Bedeutung der Aphasie für den musikalischen Ausdruck', *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 7 (1891), 53–73; *Primitive Music*.

¹⁹ Richard Wallaschek, 'Das musikalische Gedächtnis und seine Leistungen bei Katalepsie, im Traum und in der Hypnose', *Vierteljahrsschrift für Musikwissenschaft* 8 (1882), cit. after Irmgard Bontinck, "...zum Komponieren gehören noch andere als rein musikalische Faktoren...". Musiksozioethnologisches zum Thema Frau und Musik', in *Die Frau als Mitte in traditionellen Kulturen. Beiträge zu Musik und Gender*, eds. Gerlinde Haid and Ursula Hemetek (Vienna, 2005); also *Berichte und Informationen* 27 (2005), 26–35.

²⁰ Richard Wallaschek, *Anfänge der Tonkunst* (Leipzig, 1903).

the concepts of sociologists. With his descriptions of the holistic perception of music, he anticipated gestalt theory. And he was also the first to undertake research, unpopular in his day, into the importance of women in traditional music cultures, which were continued only much later in gender studies.

Translated by John Comber

