

Romanies, to the enlightening and colorful *Cultural Policies and Minority Musics in Kosovo and Sri Lanka: What Can We Learn from a Comparative Study?*

Compared to the previous meeting, the Prague conference was atypical in several ways. For the first time speakers were chosen on the basis of anonymous evaluations of the program committee. (The same process will also be followed for publication of the papers.) For the first time, a keynote speaker (Prague-born Bruno Nettl, one of the world's leading ethnomusicologists) was invited. Although he had to cancel his participation at the last minute because of ill health, he sent not only his provocative keynote speech *Minorities in the History of Ethnomusicology: A Meditation on a Half-Century of Experience*, but also a short confession in Czech.

Not only from the program of the Prague conference, but also from the composition of the whole "Music and Minorities" group (some hundred scholars from four continents) it is clear that the subject of minorities is, in ethnomusicology as in other social sciences, very topical not only because, as Nettl said, *everybody is in one or several minorities... there are only minorities*. At the same time a running paradigmatic schism was confirmed in Prague: while many participants from the East and mainly from Southeast Europe spoke about "music itself," to anthropologically orientated ethnomusicologists, such terminology (of course, along with related concepts and methods) was quite incomprehensible and/or some sort of antedeluvian echo. The question is to what degree we should accept such multiparadigmaticism and

resign ourselves to the advantages of a wide view and greater possibilities of generalizations. Conferences are, at the least, opportunities to reflect on this paradigmatic fractionalism. In the best case, it is possible to take advantage of (not only) paradigmatic convergence. At the next "Music and Minorities" meeting, a round table about methodologies is planned and, on this occasion, basic concepts will undoubtedly be discussed.

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PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY LEGEND.

International Society for Contemporary Legend Research, 26th International Conference, Dublin, Ireland, July 7 – 9, 2008.

Contemporary legends, rumors, gossip and other ephemeral forms of folk narratives typical for postmodern society represent one of the most interesting issues of contemporary social sciences. Since the 1980s, when these fictional narratives told as true were "discovered" by U.S. folklorists, their study attracted not only specialists in folk narratives, but also cultural anthropologists, sociologists, literary historians, media researchers and scholars from other disciplines. The vanguard of the study of these narratives has always been represented by the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research (ISCLR). This scientific society, founded in 1988 in Sheffield, UK, originated from (now almost legendary) Sheffield theoretical and terminological seminars organized by British folklorist

Gillian Bennett and Canadian folklorist Paul Smith. It was the ISCLR that coined the now standard term for these narratives "contemporary legend" (instead of *urban legend* and *urban myth* preferred by media and popular culture) and it was the ISCLR publications – the journal *Contemporary Legend* and the newsletter *FOAFTale News* – which are now regarded as standard research tools for anyone interested in contemporary oral tradition. The most important part of the ISCLR activity is its annual international conferences, held in North America and Europe. The last, 26th ISCLR conference, titled *Perspectives on Contemporary Legend*, was held in Dublin, Ireland, July 7-9, 2008, with more than twenty active participants from the fields of folkloristics, cultural anthropology, psychology, literary history and media and cultural studies. The majority of the presentations were devoted to well-documented case studies of actual legend traditions; the most interesting ones were *Contemporary Legends Are Ephemeral: What Was Really Told About the Hatchet-Lady At Red Rocks, Colorado* by Michael J. Preston (University of Colorado, USA), *The Search for Winnie the Puma. Wild Animals in Civilized Environment* by Theo Meder (Meertens Institute, The Netherlands), *Japanese Ghost Lore* by Gunella Thorgeirsdottir (University of Sheffield, UK) and *Collecting Student Lore in Göttingen: Expectations and Results* by Christine Shojaei Kawan (Enzyklopädie des Märchens, Germany). Two special sections were devoted to historical narratives; these included papers on various local guises of traditional folkloric character: Spring-heeled Jack – *Unmask-*

ing Spring-heeled Jack: A Case Study of a 19th Century Ghost Panic by David Clarke (Sheffield Halam University, UK) and *Urban Maniac Or Resistance Fighter? Rumours And Legends About the Spring Man* by Petr Janeček (National Museum, Czech Republic), and interesting socio-cultural interpretation of Soviet post-WWII cannibalism narratives in *The Legend of the Sausage Factory: Post-War Images of Violence and Evil* by Eda Kalmre (Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia). One interesting section touched on economical exploitation of folk beliefs by mercantile corporations – e.g., the so-called *Spikeys* and *date-rape drug test strips* utilizing the false belief in drink spiking in clubs and discotheques (*Crime Legends in Different Media* by Peter Burger, Leiden University, The Netherlands) or *sleeping gas alarms* inspired by false public scare of gas attacks directed against tourist in caravans, trucks and trains (*Gassed and Robbed* by Sandy Hobbs and Seonaid Anderson, University of the West of Scotland, UK). The issue of deliberate utilization of folk beliefs was also touched on in other papers, the most interesting ones being *Contemporary Legend: A Fundamentally Political Act* by Bill Ellis (Pennsylvania State University, USA), interpreting political use of rumors in official U.S. propaganda during the Gulf and Iraq Wars, and *Man Disposes, God Discloses: Legend of the Levees* by Carl Lindahl (University of Houston, USA), interpreting African-American rumors about deliberate flooding of low-income neighborhoods of New Orleans during the hurricane Katrina disaster in order to save rich "white" neighborhoods. Mechanisms of planting false

beliefs in the media and wider cultural systems were subjects of other interesting papers – *What Else is Black, White and Read All Over: Legends That Sounds Like News* in a journalistic interpretation of Russell Frank (Pennsylvania State University, USA) and an anthropological interpretation in *Contemporary Legend and Cultural Proscriptions* by Mark Glazer (The University of Texas–Pan American, USA). In comparison with earlier conferences, there was a slight shortage of purely psychological papers, one interesting exemption being *Classifying Contemporary Legend By Their Psychological Function: A New Look* by David Main (University of West of Scotland, UK). The twenty-sixth international

conference of the ISCLR showed again that investigation of contemporary legend is far from the scientific fad typical of the 1980s and 1990s, but still attracts more international scholars from various fields, most notably anthropology and media studies, and from a still-growing number of countries (represented not only by “traditional” English-speaking countries, but also Western European countries like Germany or the Netherlands and Eastern European countries like the Czech Republic and Estonia). Let us hope that the next conference held in Baddeck, Nova Scotia, Canada in 2009, will present similarly interesting issues and topics.

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