

Research Ireland – Harrison Medal 2025

Citation Philip Bohlman

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In March 2018 I was in Berlin with a group of our Master's students, exploring the cultural and musical highlights of that city. As part of the trip we had arranged a visit of the collection of musical instruments and the phonogram archive then housed in the buildings of the ethnological museum at the Free University in Dahlem. Imagine our surprise when we unexpectedly run into Philip Bohlman who just happened to undertake some research there. He graciously interrupted his work to spent quite a bit of time with us, giving the students a chance to talk to someone in the flesh they had all read in their courses, and discover that a titan in the field can also be a lovely and very approachable human being. I know that many of you already know him, but let me outline to the few others what makes him such a titan.

Philip Bohlman's research focuses on music and religion, music, race, and colonial encounter, and music and nationalism. Jewish music history particularly (yet not only) in Central and Eastern Europe has been a core area of his work, while he also engages with South Asia; the Middle East; Cabaret; the Eurovision Song Contest and the history of ethnomusicology. He is Ludwig Rosenberger Distinguished Service Professor at the University of Chicago, where he has taught since 1987 – that is, for almost 40 years. Yet what makes his work particularly interesting and relevant for me is his specific approach to whatever he works on. During our email exchanges in relation to planning today's event I mentioned that to me he always appears to be

both ethnomusicologist and historical musicologist at the same time, and he fully acknowledged that.

“My research over many years has never not been historical. My research in many places throughout the world has never not been ethnographic.” This is the opening of a forthcoming chapter by Phil Bohlman that our UCD Master’s students and I had the privilege of reading recently. It represents very well what he stands for, and also why he is a perfect recipient of a medal named after Frank Llewellyn Harrison. The Dubliner Harrison started life as an organist and composer in Ireland, then continued in England as a historical musicologist – a medievalist, in fact – before moving to Amsterdam where he turned into an ethnomusicologist during the later stages of his career. Since my days as a student in Hamburg I always found the often perceived mental gulf between historical musicology and ethnomusicology regrettable, and I feel that the term “musicology” is often readily yet wrongly identified with “historical musicology” (particularly in the English language, although sometimes the same applies to “Musikwissenschaft” in German). I regard “musicology” as an umbrella term for all kinds of musical research – historical, ethno, popular and otherwise. They are all equally valid and relevant and can only prosper together. Hence one of my goals during my term as President of SMI is to try and bring the different branches of musicological research on this island closer together. Harrison did that in his person, and Bohlman clearly does something very similar. In the essay quoted above he develops the notion of what he calls the “ethnohistorical moment”, an approach requiring a mix of ethnological and historical ways of thinking. Bohlman often researches traditional musics from a more distant past – beyond even the time of wax cylinders like those preserved in the Phonogram Archive in Berlin – so that the “usual” ways of undertaking fieldwork aren’t readily

applicable. He convincingly advocates for an interdependence of oral and written sources and in his chapter undertakes “charting a counterhistory in which the historiographic schism between history and ethnography has been challenged and bridged”.

Some musicologists focus on one of two things: They either undertake meticulous case studies, like unearthing primary sources and making them available, yet don’t develop new conceptual or methodological approaches. Or they operate mainly at a meta-level, reflecting on the state of the discipline (God knows there’s a lot of navel-gazing going on in musicology), discussing methodological issues yet not doing much work at the coalface, as it were. Phil Bohlman is a rare example of someone covering both of those sides. A look at some of his books demonstrates the range and depth of his scholarship. Despite regularly warning my students against it I am about to refer to a list of his titles featuring in Wikipedia – but then, this is not an academic text. Also, the Wikipedia list is the longest one I have found – longer even than the one on his University of Chicago page. It contains 28 monographs and edited volumes in English and German yet is still headed “Partial List of Books”. The list contains titles that have become classics such as *World Music – A Very Short Introduction* or *Disciplining Music: Musicology and its Canons*. He has edited the *Cambridge History of World Music*, *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music: Essays on the History of Ethnomusicology* as well as *Jazz Worlds / World Jazz*. His interest in nationalism is reflected in titles such as *Song Loves the Masses: Herder on Music and Nationalism*, and *Focus: Music, Nationalism, and the Making of the New Europe*. The religious aspect of music is covered by titles such as *Revival and Reconciliation: Sacred Music in the Making of European Modernity*, *Music in American Religious Experience*, and *Enchanting Powers: Music in the World's*

Religions. Issues of race and identity feature in *Music and the Racial Imagination* or *Land Without Nightingales: Music in the Making of German-America*. Jewish musical traditions are the topic of books such as *The Folk Songs of Ashkenaz; Jewish Music and Modernity* and *Jewish Musical Modernism, Old and New*. Other regions are covered by titles such as *Balkan Epic: Song, History, Modernity; Celtic Modern: Music at the Global Fringe*, or *Sounding Cities: Auditory Transformations in Berlin, Chicago, and Kolkata*. He also has some publications on art music, including *Hanns Eisler – In der Musik ist es anders* (Hanns Eisler – It's different in Music), written together with his daughter Andrea, and *Heiner Müller and Heiner Goebbels's Wolokolamsker Chaussee* (about a work from 1989/90).

Some of this year's UCD master's students are here in the room with us. A few weeks ago we discussed the ideas of the Canadian singer and musicologist Dillon Parmer who argues that a good musicologist also should be – even has to be – a good practicing musician. On that count I would be out – yet not Phil. Alongside his scholarly work he also has a practical side: He is the founder and artistic director of the New Budapest Orpheum Society, a cabaret group particularly engaging with central European Jewish heritage. He acts as dramatic speaker on several of their recordings – there are altogether four CDs, which have added to his list of awards. Alongside the University of Oxford's Donald Tovey Prize they also earned him the Noah Greenberg Award from the American Musicological Society. By the way, I earlier mentioned the Wikipedia list of 28 books – I also found another one with 37 entries, which also contains his recordings with the New Budapest Orpheum Society and a few other things, thus combining academic and creative output.

Alongside his creative achievements, Bohlman's scholarly work has also received many prizes, awards and honours, of which I can only name a few here. In 1997 he was awarded the Edward J. Dent medal from the Royal Musical Society (the first ethnomusicologist to receive it). In 2003 the American Academy in Berlin presented him with their Berlin Prize, while in 2007 the British Academy bestowed him with its Derek Allen Prize. Perhaps among his most outstanding awards is the 2022 Balzan Prize. The Balzan Prize is awarded to four academics and artists per year, yet since its inception in 1961 the recipients have included no more than two composers and three musicologists (although – I'm sort of obliged to say – György Ligeti is one of them). Bohlman was the first music scholar to receive it since 2012, and is – yet again – the only ethnomusicologist among its winners.

Phil has contributed to the development of our discipline through more than just his scholarship and teaching. He has been editor of the International Musicological Society's journal *Acta Musicologica*, as well as series editor of the "Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology", "Big Issues in Music", "Europea: Ethnomusicologies and Modernities", and "Recent Researches in the Oral Traditions of Music". He is member or corresponding member of several national Academies of Arts or Arts and Sciences (including in the US and Britain). He has been awarded honorary doctorates and held visiting professorships in many of countries.

Yet there is one more reason to award Phil the Research Ireland – Harrison Medal tonight. That is because a central though as yet unmentioned attribute of his is his love of Ireland, and his regular visits to our shores. He has long-standing relationships with many Irish people and institutions. In 2003 he gave a keynote at the *Second Conference on Irish Traditional Music* at the University of Ulster in

Derry (I mentioned the resulting volume *Celtic Modern: Music at the Global Fringe* earlier), in 2007 he keynoted again (if that's a verb, I'm never quite sure) at the annual ICTM Ireland conference in Cork (that was before they added the "D" to their name), and in 2020 he did the same at the SMI / ICTM Ireland Postgraduate Conference in Limerick (that one can still be watched on YouTube). He has acted as external PhD or programme examiner at the University of Limerick, UCC and UCD, and has presented UCD's Larchet Memorial Lecture in 2012. Several friends and colleagues supervised or examined by him are here in the room with us. Two years ago I was flying out to the US and unexpectedly run into him after one of his recent visits to Ireland as we were waiting for the same plane to Chicago (btw, there's no other musicologist I have run into accidentally in different countries that often – indicating some sort of omnipresence on his part).

Let me close by thanking the people who made our gathering here possible: Patrick Geoghegan and the Long Room Hub, Nicole Grimes and the Department of Music, as well as Taighde Éireann, Ireland's new academic innovation and funding agency. It is today represented by Dr Gráinne Walshe, Assistant Director, Researcher Development, and we are most grateful that Taighde Éireann has agreed to continue the collaboration we had with the Irish Research Council, one of its predecessors. Yet I am *most* grateful to Phil for agreeing to accept this award, come over from Chicago and join us tonight!

And now it is my great pleasure to invite Dr Gráinne Walshe to jointly present the 2025 Research Ireland Harrison medal to our wonderful and most distinguished colleague, Professor Philip Bohlman.