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**Author:** Costin Moisil

**E-mail:** costin.moisil@unmb.ro

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## Laudatio for Professor Philip V. Bohlman

Festive Meeting of the National University of Music Senate.  
Bucharest, November 22nd, 2019

It is a great honour and gladness for our university to grant today the title of *doctor honoris causa* to Philip Vilas Bohlman, the Ludwig Rosenberger Distinguished Service Professor in Jewish History, Music and the Humanities in the Department of Music at the University of Chicago.

As you have already noticed on the event poster, Professor Bohlman is an ethnomusicologist. Among the 45 musicians to whom the title of *doctor honoris causa* has been granted by the Bucharest National University of Music there are only eight musicologists. Professor Philip Bohlman is the second ethnomusicologist who receives the title after Professor Jean-Jacques Nattiez who is rather appreciated as musical semiotician. The granting of this title to an ethnomusicologist represents a great happiness for the Department of Musicology, whose member I am and whose founder there was another ethnomusicologist, Constantin Brăiloiu.

For some of you, mostly for the freshmen, the ethnomusicologist is the person who uses to travel from village to village in search for original songs. If he is lucky, he may record them from old ladies, then transcribe them into staff notation and later may publish them in order to “make them valuable” through further harmonizations for SATB choirs and any other way. Apparently the whole world appreciates him but, in fact, the conductors take compassion on him for his difficult reading in bass clef and no more than one single line at a time, the instrumentalists despise him since he does not know how to play an instrument, and the musicologists have no consideration for him because he is not used to reflect upon important issues and because of

his clumsy, essenceless manner of writing. In this respect, my intention is to make anyone sure that this image is quite distorted, if not completely false, and Professor Bohlman's activity is the living proof for giving credit for ethnomusicology as something totally different.

Philip Bohlman has studied piano, graduating as Bachelor in Music at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Later he attended the courses of musicology with Alexander Ringer as well as ethnomusicology with Bruno Nettl, two famous professors of Jewish origins, graduating in 1984 with the title of PhD of University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. In respect to the aforementioned professors it is worth mentioning that the former was born in Berlin, studied in Berlin and Amsterdam, was imprisoned in a concentration camp and emigrated to America at the end of the war. The later was born in Prague but emigrated to the United States from a very young age, before the World War II.

Shortly after obtaining the PhD title, Philip Bohlman joined the faculty at the University of Chicago, where he was appointed professor in 1999. He has been a visiting professor at the universities of Berlin, Freiburg, Kassel, Hildesheim, Vienna, Bologna, Newcastle, Jerusalem, at Yale University and Berlin University of Arts. He is also a honorary professor at Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media.

Philip Bohlman has done field researches in Israel, Europe (mainly in Central Europe), United States of America, and India, not only in villages but also in cities, on pilgrim roads or in his living-room in front of TV or computer, in accordance to the object and topic of research. Professor Bohlman has dedicated more than four decades of his life to the study of the Jewish music, mainly to Askenazi music, but it would be inappropriate to consider his researches only from the perspective of the ethnic, religious and social groups he has studied. It would be more appropriate to point out the fact that each area of research provided a great amount of information as well as great opportunities for dwelling on the connections between music and society. According to his own short biography, his research "addresses issues at the intersections of music with race, nationalism, and colonial encounter; the ontological and ethical dimensions of music; and the social agency of aesthetics and performance." He is equally interested in the music of Jews from the beginning of the last century from the Burgenland, the music of the immigrants in Israel and the United States of America, as well as the music of Romanian and Roma peasants from Maramureş or the music of the Eurovision contest; and mainly in *the people* who make and listen to these musics.

Professor Bohlman's scientific studies do not solely concern the immediate present but he also employs his field research as an entrance door into the music of the past. At the same time, he is interested in the historical aspect of the musics he explores, and this fact connects him with his colleagues musicologists and their studies. (I do not intend to dig too deep into the debates regarding the relations between musicology and ethnomusicology, although I am tempted to do so and to bring about Charles Seeger's view.) Besides, Philip Bohlman states in an article:

In my writing, I have obsessively tried to provide something for as many readerships as I am capable . . . of reaching. I write for readers in folk music and Jewish studies. I deliberately search for a voice that draws ethnomusicologists and historical musicologists together. I performatively transform the music itself, to the extent that I have wrested it from the past, to sound a present that is meaningful. (Bohlman 2008: 247)



**Fig. 1.** Costin Moisil gives the laudatio for Philip Bohlman.  
Photo: Sorin Antonescu.

Philip Bohlman's activity cannot be summed up only to the scientific and didactic aspect but it contains a performative component too. He is the artistic director of the New Budapest Orpheum Society, a Jewish cabaret ensemble which performs pieces created by popular musicians during the Holocaust, including in the ghettos and concentration camps. Moreover, together with his wife, the pianist Christine Wilkie Bohlman, he delivers stage performances of works for piano and dramatic speaker created during the Holocaust. The records of the two ensembles were awarded by the American Musicological Society, Oxford University and were nominated at Grammy awards.

The distinctions awarded for his scientific activity are various, only to mention few of them: the Edward J. Dent Medal from the Royal Musical Association; the Derek Allen Prize from the British Academy; the Bruno Nettl Prize from the Society for Ethnomusicology; the Fumio Koizumi Prize in ethnomusicology. Professor Bohlman is a Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy.

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Philip Bohlman is now in Bucharest to attend a three-day conference organized by our university and New Europe College, with the topic *Elites and Their Musics: Music and Music-Making in the 19th-Century South-Eastern Europe Salons*. Some of you already met and listened to him yesterday when he delivered his keynote lecture "*Balkan Borderlands*" and "*Transylvanian Transit*": *Cabaretique Topographies of East European Modernity* and also have attended this morning session chaired by him. Most of us did not meet him until today although Europe represents a second home for him and he has visited Romania and Bucharest since the last century. However, his presence in this university is particularly important, more than expected. In the university library and in the bibliography of the course on anthropology of music there could be found several volumes written or edited by him such as: *World Music: A Very Short Introduction*; *Comparative Musicology and Anthropology of Music*; *Discipling Music: Musicology and Its Canons*; *Ethnomusicology and Modern Music History* (Bohlman 2002; Nettl and Bohlman 1991; Bergeron and Bohlman 1992; Blum, Bohlman and Neuman 1991). Even more, the musicologists of this university are already familiarized with the volumes of the series *Europea*, coordinated by him and Martin Stokes. (In fact, one of these volumes – *Manele in Romania: Cultural Expression and Social Meaning in Balkan Popular Music* – was accomplished by our colleague, Speranța Rădulescu, together with Margaret Beissinger and the late Anca Giurchescu; Beissinger,

Rădulescu and Giurchescu 2016.) It is not surprising that the students on musicology share among themselves PDF versions of some volumes about folk music and nationalism (*The Study of Folk Music in the Modern World*, *The Music of European Nationalism* a.o.; Bohlman 1988, 2004) achieved from the sources that I don't have a clue of.

You may say that the number of those to spend a lot of time in the university library hall or the number of those who attend the courses on anthropology of music is rather small in comparison with the total number of the members of our academic community. I could not contradict any of you. Actually, I would remark the fact that our approach, the approach of those who have read Professor Bohlman's writings, has been significantly influenced by them. Due to this fact, during the courses on music history or traditional musics, for example, we share his views and opinions even when we relate to the topics he has not approached. Philip Bohlman is more present among us than you might be tempted to believe.

We are profoundly glad that today Professor Bohlman is also physically present among us, not only in our minds and souls, and this makes us deeply honored by the fact that he accepted the title of *doctor honoris causa* granted by our National University of Music in Bucharest.

Costin Moisil

National University of Music Bucharest

English version by Carmen Dominte

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