

# Music and Place - On Ethnomusicocartography and the Kielsterachterweg.

One of our students has started working for her research on the topic of 'Music and Place'. I hope she will realize through her research the all-involving importance of this topic. Because one of the most important functions of music is to connect people with place.

It does so in many ways. It connects people to the place where the music was conceived of; to the place they first heard (or played, or saw, or even smelt or felt or tasted) that music; to places where they heard (or played, etc) that music in significant ways; to their current place while listening, playing, seeing, smelling, feeling, tasting that music; et cetera et cetera. Any piece of music has a personal geography, which maybe might be expressed in a personal musical map of that piece of music. And any piece of music may also have a more general cartography, if there would be patterns in those connections between music and place that would be more general.

I just invented a new discipline in the previous sentence, I believe: cartomusicography, or musicocartography. And if you study musicocartography all over the world, no doubt you will be an ethnomusicocartographer. Someone with an XXL businesscard.

But anyway (as I am prone to write in these blogs). Not only the ways of connecting music to place are interesting, also the instruments used to obtain the connection are interesting. How does music refer to place? Part of it is individual psychology - tied to the personal history of the person. But another part is sheer musicology - the way in which elements within the music refer to place. Using the nahawand-mode no doubt refers to the Arab world. Playing a sitar to India, and playing the bouzouki to Ireland, of course. Singing in Frisian to Friesland. Playing Beethoven on the grand piano in Carnegie Hall while wearing a kilt to Scotland (I like the image; if it would be televised it would require some cautious craftsmanship from the cameraman regarding certain camera positions). Et cetera.

In those times in which we seem to have become 'globalized' through travel, the media, internet, one would think that 'place' is less of a category for music - isn't music a universal language, after all? The answer is clear: no. Just look around

you, and notice how music keeps connecting us to place all the time. Maybe in different ways than before, maybe even in new ways (although I think we tend to overestimate the 'newness' of our era and our important selves) - but because place, as Mr. I. Kant already showed, is a necessary category of perception, we can do nothing else than situate ourselves while hearing, playing, seeing, smelling, feeling, tasting music.

So that is what we do, all the time. Music provides us with a sense of place and of being placed. With a somewhere. A somewhere in the here and now which at the same time is a somewhere scattered all over the world.

And so it came to be that I was visiting a concert by [Bert Hadders & the Nozems](#) in Veendam, the other week, and halfway was confronted (that's the word: confronted) with a song sung by one of Hadders' guests, [Jan Henk de Groot](#). For me the most powerful song of the evening (sorry, Bert; it was a close finish with [Elvis](#) and with [Beloofteland](#)), sung with intense expression.

'Kielsterachterweg', it is called - check out [here](#) the recording of that song at the very same concert I visited. And although, of course, it is impossible to explain why precisely this song lifted me out of place and time by precisely grounding me in place and time so fundamentally for the five minutes the song lasted, I can at least try to give you a small phenomenology by telling you that the song took me to Groningen province (because of the dialect it is sung in), to Harkstede (because that is the village where I hear that dialect the most), to Groningen city (because I work at the conservatoire where Jan Henk studied), to my home village in Friesland where I grew up (because the song is about driving a car into an accident on a road called 'Kielsterachterweg', and I have my memories to similar accidents on similar roads long ago), to the place my secondary school stood (again the accident-connection, now tied to a fellow pupil who did not survive the accident), to Amsterdam (because when living there I bought biological stuff coming from Kielwindeweer, and the song is connected to that place), to the USA (through reminiscences of songs by Johnny Cash and Tom Waits), and to so many more places I cannot even begin to write them down.

Ethnomusicocartography, yes.

And please spread the word about Jan Henk de Groot and his 'Kielsterachterweg', if you feel like it.