

« Les relations internationales au point de vue musical » – Music and Intellectual Cooperation

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Sibille Christiane. 2022. “« Les relations internationales au point de vue musical » – Music and Intellectual Cooperation”. *Centenary of the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation of the League of Nations*. Geneva, 36. <https://intellectualcooperation.org/sibille-2022>

In my paper I will focus on the activities of the League's organizations for intellectual cooperation in the field of music. Most discussions about music took place in the Sous-Commission des Lettres et des Arts/Comité permanent des Lettres et des Arts. In a first step, the paper will outline and contextualize the work of the Sous-Commission/Comité permanent in the field of music. The experts involved discussed various topics, like the creation of national sound archives, the international role of the standard pitch, and the promotion of folk music research. The activities were strongly influenced by (Western) elite culture, educational ideas, and new technologies. This made it possible to include discussions about music also in other projects of intellectual cooperation in an easy way.

The commission members - comparable to their colleagues in other fields - had to face numerous challenges: e.g., the selection of “qualified” experts, the lack of practical influence, and the question of how to appropriately handle highly politicized topics such as folk music research. Thus, while examining a very specific topic, the paper also contributes to a broader analysis of the internal functioning of the League's intellectual cooperation.

In a second step, I will embed the activities of intellectual cooperation in their external context and focus on the cooperation between the League of Nations and existing international organizations in the field of music. One of the most important persons in this context is Edward Dent, who not only served on the Sous-Commission des Lettres et des Arts, but also held leading positions in the International Musicological Society and the International Society for Contemporary Music.

Finally, in a third part, two examples will be used to examine how UNESCO's approach to musical issues differs from its predecessor organization. This will be shown by two examples. The first deals with the immediate postwar period and the development of the first work programs of UNESCO. The second analysis focuses on the establishment of the idea of intangible cultural heritage at the beginning of the 21st century.