



Letter from the Editor

Author: Hannah Snavely (University of California, Riverside)

Source: *SEM Student News* 19.1 "Music and the Anthropocene" (Spring/Summer 2023)

Stable URL:

https://cdn.ymaws.com/ethnomusicology.site-ym.com/resource/group/dc75b7e7-47d7-4d59-a660-19c3e0f7c83e/publications/19_1musicanthropocene/snavely_semsn_19-1.pdf

Published by the Society for Ethnomusicology

ISSN: 2578-4242

I'm mesmerized, frolicking along a creek in an alpine wilderness with an aquatic field biologist friend, a pair of environmental scientists, and their high-energy children. Heading from one pair of glacial lakes to another, we tiptoe over the moss, lichens, and small flowers that cover the spongy, volcanic ash terrain. Our motley crew is hours away from the closest Patagonian town, in a remote, inhospitable region few scientists and only one ethnomusicologist that I'm aware of have dared to conduct research. As a *friolenta* (someone who is cold, like, all the time), I admittedly don't want to be the ethnomusicologist researching here. Instead, I'm content to spend some February mid-fieldwork reflection time in a glacial valley escaping the pavement and smog of urban life.

Guilt pricks at the back of my neck once again as I consider how my research topics—traditional music education and interpretation—might seem frivolous compared to the work of my hiking companions who are tackling myriad climate-related issues. This concern has been a recurring feeling while pursuing doctoral studies in ethnomusicology, especially as friends and family work in environmental engineering, urban forestry, and climate change organizing to ameliorate a bit of the damage (settler) colonial populations have caused to the earth. What importance does my music research have in 2023, within the broader scope of the Anthropocene and impending climate disasters?

Fast forward to the end of April 2023, and I'm in Rapel de Navidad, Chile, with some women *cantoras* (a meaning-laden word that most simply translates to "singer"), visiting a friend who moved from the capital, Santiago, to this small coastal town chock-full of *cantores* and other artisans. The weekend is deeply restorative, nay, *healing*, for me, as we improvise poems, eat warm bread and steamy pumpkin stew, gaze upon herons gliding down the river, and belt out *cuecas* at the kitchen table. One night, we heatedly debate whether the region's musical practices are disappearing and how capitalist values of urban life contribute to this phenomenon. One friend argues, if young folks don't even want to learn local agricultural knowledge from their grandparents, how are they going to be interested in their songs? In Rapel, human bonds to music, nature, and the local community necessarily connect to each other. I'm reminded that a bit of what ethnomusicologists do—promote the sustainability of musical cultures, and hopefully bring healing to others and ourselves through music—is intrinsically bound to the earth and the flourishing of its inhabitants, even if it's just in the moments when we step away from our "real" (valued, compensated for) labor of researching and publishing.

The essays in this issue of *SEM Student News* address current discussions in music and the Anthropocene through highlighting the interconnectedness across academic disciplines and among species. Three works focus on the sonic aspects of interspecies research. Through creative writing, pantea, ●mid welcomes us to listen *with* the last living Siberian Crane, to better understand love, desire, and home-making across species. Marie Comuzzo explores how writing about, composing with, and depending upon humpback whales has influenced humans' self-perceptions and understandings of music. Intimately recalling her voiced celebration of new orca life in the Salish Sea, Anne Greenwood proposes listening as a way of making interspecies kin.

Several authors highlight the importance of place and how the physical environment informs musicking. Josh O. Brew encourages us to listen relationally to and engage with Ghanaian palmwine music in a way that promotes musical and environmental sustainability. Next, Abigail Lindo theorizes sonic eco-cosmopolitanism through her ethnography of music festivals on the Azores islands, describing how festival participants simultaneously engage in global musical movements while raising environmental awareness.

Moving to the ways in which issues of music and the Anthropocene intersect with politics, Kelvin Venturin offers case studies from fieldwork in Brazil to demonstrate how scholars can collaborate with musicians experiencing racial exploitation and silencing under oppressive structures. Connecting Chilean metal music to extractivist industrial practices, Jan Koplow Villavicencio argues for a consideration of metal as not simply transgressive, but rather critically reflective toward its local environmental and political contexts.

Our student researcher, Luca Gambirasio, provides an overview of activist ethnomusicology in the Anthropocene. He invites readers to participate in a discussion of what activism in music studies means. We thank Jim Sykes, Lee Veeraraghavan, Mark Pedelty, and Alexander Rehding for graciously contributing to our Dear SEM column, addressing, among other concerns, the question I posited at the beginning of this letter about the purpose of ethnomusicological inquiry in the face of environmental disaster. As postlude, student relations officer Lydia Wagenknecht returns us to Patagonia, this time through an encounter with the calafate bush, to call us towards sonic kin-making in the Chthulucene.

The authors in this publication are all thinking critically about decolonial and anti-capitalist processes and creating research methodologies that reflect these values. These include:

Holistic kin-making.
Community fostering.
Relational listening.
Radical inclusion.
Collaborative engagement.
And, most importantly, a level-headed, tenacious hope.

In the face of countless global crises, may we embrace this hope and continue approaching music studies with imagination and wonder.