Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences
SEM Pre-Conference Symposium
Wednesday, October 21st, 2020

The theme of the pre-conference symposium of the SEM 2020 Annual Meeting, Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences, invites deep and careful reflection on issues related to political and musical activism and the potential of music to bring attention to contemporary critical issues. Central to these considerations is the role of performers and music creators, as well as consumers and audiences, in challenging dominant narratives and simplistic understandings of music vis-à-vis politics and activism. Sites of resistance—virtual and place-based—and the accountability of researchers as witnesses to musical activism and contributors to new narratives offer crucial opportunities for exploration. Questions around responsible and respectful engagement with activist communities and musicians are critical to current and future directions in ethnomusicological inquiry. Each roundtable will feature dialogues between musicians and ethnomusicologists and presentations by researchers who have been deeply engaged with communities, individuals, and cultural practices. Presentations in all roundtables will be given in succession, followed by a live roundtable discussion.

All activities associated with the symposium will be conducted virtually in Eastern Time. Pre-registration is required.

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**Schedule**

9:45 a.m.  
**Welcome**

10 a.m. – 12 p.m.  
**Roundtable One – Music, Environment, Health and Displacement**  
Chair: Judith Klassen (Canadian Museum of History)

Participants in this roundtable discuss ways in which contemporary musicians and activists use their artistic practice and output to bring attention to environmental issues and the forced relocation of peoples. Collectively, these presenters address issues of health, sustainability, displacement and migration and the ways in which music supports, documents and embodies activist agendas.

1) Rebekah Moore and Gede Robi Supriyanto: “‘Making a Hole in a Stone’: The Peril and Potential of Music Activism to Safeguard Indonesia’s Biodiversity”

2) Michael Frishkopf: “Music for Global Human Development”

3) Eric Martin Usner: “Teaching in Place”

4) Klisala Harrison: “Music of Independence and Self-determination in Greenland: Colonial Histories, Climate Futures”

5) Laura Risk: “Share the Arts, Share the Planet: Lessons from the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition”
1 p.m. – 3 p.m.  **Roundtable Two – Sites of Resistance**  
Chair: Anna Hoefnagels (Carleton University)

This roundtable is concerned with the physical and virtual spaces in which activism and resistance take place, and the specific ways that those sites establish meaning and shape outcomes. By examining the “site of resistance” from diverse angles and as emergent from distinct contexts, participants contribute to important reconceptualizations of place as it relates to, and embodies, sound and activism.

2) Joshua Brown: “We are Not a Crime: Embodiment and Absence in Contemporary Spanish Protest Movements”
4) Liz Przybylski and Joshua Thunder Little: “Lakota Hip Hop and Online Activism”
5) Darci Sprengel: “Troubling Resistance Narratives Ten Years after the ‘Arab Spring’”

4 p.m. – 6 p.m. **Roundtable Three – Confronting Extractionism: Responsible Research Ethics and Professional Practices**  
Chair: Margaret Walker (Queen’s University)

In recent years, ethnographic research methods have been criticized for extractionist, transactional tendencies. At the same time, the significance of positionality and reflexivity vis-à-vis power, human interactions, and the shaping of “knowledge” through fieldwork and community engagement have been underscored. This roundtable examines relationships and subject positions that inform contemporary ethnomusicological research and the responsible and ethical practices that such research demands.

1) Ioanida Costache: “Re-Mapping the Field: Positionality, Power, and Privilege in Ethnographic Methods”
2) Matt Stahl and Olufunmilayo B. Arewa: “Royalty Accounting and Resistance”
3) Bruno Deschênes: “Appropriation or Transpropriation?”
4) Kate Galloway: “On the Silences and Soundings of Extraction in Environmental Sound Art”

**Closing Remarks**
ROUNDTABLE #1: “MUSIC, ENVIRONMENT, HEALTH AND DISPLACEMENT”

Rebekah Moore (United States, Northeastern University) and Gede Robi Supriyanto (Indonesia, musician): “‘Making a Hole in a Stone’: The Peril and Potential of Music Activism to Safeguard Indonesia’s Biodiversity”

For more than twenty years, Balinese singer-songwriter, rock musician, and organic farmer Gede Robi Supriyanto has been a leader in environmental activism in Indonesia. Following in the tradition of Indonesian protest balladeers like Iwan Fals and Sawung Jabo, he and his award-winning and internationally-touring rock band, Navicula, use song, street and media activism, and sustained partnerships with environmental research and action groups to sound the alarm on Indonesia’s environmental crises. Supriyanto joins ethnomusicologist and research collaborator Rebekah E. Moore to call out the world’s richest nations for contributing to Indonesia’s current environmental perils and stop to think about their burdens on equatorial and island nations—about food contamination and clean water shortage, flooding and drought, and displacement and death. Supriyanto and Moore weave poetry and dialogue with the narrative thread of Navicula’s song “Saat Semua Semakin Cepat, Bali Berani Berhenti” (When the World Spins Faster, Bali has the Courage to Stop). The song, in turn, weaves together Balinese knowledge and activist self-reflection on Nyepi, the Balinese Day of Silence, when the use of resources for light, travel, cooking, and communication is prohibited. Symposium participants are asked to sit still, keep silent, and meditate on the global environmental crises we all face. The stillness of silence is not inaction nor a sign of surrender; it is an opportunity for the reflection and spiritual rejuvenation that will engender solutions. Listen carefully to the solutions embedded in song and in silence, and commit to saving ourselves, from ourselves.

Michael Frishkopf (Canada, University of Alberta): “Music for Global Human Development”

I outline an engaged ethnomusicology fostering human development, locally and globally, through sustainable music-centered community collaborations. Human development is a human process of upholding human value in the world—rights, freedoms, social justice—by reinforcing the I-thou essence of human connection. Human development is impeded by dehumanization—the human treated as a nonhuman—resulting from mediation of personal relationships through an impersonal world system (and ironically characteristic of far too much “development” work today).

My model is systems theory, including a modified Habermasian duality of system and lifeworld. But maintenance of the lifeworld—locus of human value—depends not only on rational “communicative action” (as per Habermas), but equally on affective social connectivity, constructed primarily through a profoundly social “soundworld,” where sonic feedback loops of thought-feeling produce what I term “resonance.” Within that soundworld, music—the nonhuman treated as human—provides a crucial technology for rehumanizing social relations damaged by system mediation, inoculating the lifeworld against system depredations.

My method is participatory action research, forging collaborative, extensible, community-engaged networks, blurring differences between “researcher” and “researched,” “outsider” and “insider,” drawing participants themselves into a shared, resonant soundworld, across boundaries of ethnicity, religion, nation, and class, transforming their own awareness and practices, as well as those of the societies in which they live.

After outlining the problem, theory, and method, I present examples of resonant participatory action research networks, illustrating two broad types: “songs for sustainable peace and development” (including projects addressing post-conflict trauma of Liberian refugees in Ghana;
public health issues in Liberia; and maternal and neonatal health in Ethiopia); and “music for cultural continuity and civil society” (including projects, in Egypt and Ghana, encouraging active musical participation). I suggest that resonant networks of participatory action research in ethnomusicology have the potential not only to transform local communities—whether rich or poor—but also the network itself, towards global human development.

Eric Martin Usner (United States, Franklin & Marshall College): “Teaching in Place”
Collaborating with students and community, I have been making teaching into an ever-evolving response to the conjoined global crises of our times—the climate emergency and forced migration. Animating how the global is manifest in the local, an Introduction to World Music course revolves around the refugee communities where he works (Lancaster, PA, the highest per capita refugee population in the U.S.). An American Studies/Environmental Studies course on food is an examination of eating, sustainability, and climate change. Cultivating these conversations simultaneously each summer yields a surprising cross-fertilization of ideas, rooted in themes of relationship and responsibility revealed when listening and consuming and distilled into a question of what we owe one another. In “normal times,” a pedagogy of place is a dialogic process determined by both geographic and historical place as well as the individuals in the classroom. This ethnographic, process-oriented, community-based approach to co-creating learning experiences in real-time is proving surprisingly adept for re-imagining learning during Covid-19 times.

Klisala Harrison (Finland, University of Helsinki): “Music of Independence and Self-determination in Greenland: Colonial Histories, Climate Futures”
Given that the Arctic is an increasingly contested space due to economic possibilities opened by climate change and struggles around Arctic governance, what is the role of music in related politics? Drawing on my continuing fieldwork in Greenland—which is about 90% Inuit and 10% settler European—I consider Greenlanders using music performance and media to promote their own self-determination, including the island’s political independence from Denmark. Therewith, I discuss why and how activism of Greenlanders through popular music and music media engages and resists histories of colonization; the exploitation of natural resources by Denmark and international corporations; and climate change.

Laura Risk (Canada, University of Toronto, Scarborough): “Share the Arts, Share the Planet: Lessons from the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition”
In addition to my day job as an ethnomusicologist/musicologist, I have worked as a touring musician for over two decades. In early 2019 I co-founded the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition (www.sustainablertouringarts.org), a musicians’ collective that promotes environmentally sustainable touring practices, including 1) reducing single-use plastics, 2) offering sustainable food options, 3) lowering carbon emissions and, more broadly, 4) using the public forum of the arts to advocate for community-based environmental action. The COVID-19 pandemic has decimated the touring music industry. At this roundtable, I present several pre-pandemic STAC projects and discuss the challenges of implementing sustainable practices in an industry composed primarily of freelancers. I then present preliminary findings from a series of interviews with touring musicians about the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on their creative practices and livelihoods, including environmental concerns.
ROUNDABLE #2: “SITES OF RESISTANCE”

Nicolas Royer-Artuso (Canada, Laval University) and Ülfet Sevdi (Canada, Concordia University): “New Oriental Music: Experimental Music in the Middle-East Following 9/11”

In this talk, we will present some results of our current research on 21st century experimental/conceptual music in the Middle East. The last two decades have seen the burgeoning of different approaches to music making (musicking) in the region. Partly due to globalism and linked to the accessibility of Internet and therefore to a direct access to the most advanced avant-garde works; the availability of cheap music software and house studios; and the possibility of sharing instantly to the world creative outputs, experimental music from the Middle East is now becoming a methodology amongst its practitioners to call for new ideas and new systems of organization.

We will propose new analytic frameworks to deal with these emerging new forms, building on notions such as cultural reception/translation of western ideas into local idioms, the influence of the past (reference to tradition) and of local musical systems, rhythmic organisation, instrumentation, timbre, etc.

This presentation will also touch on the blurriness of the distinction ethnomusicology/musicology when it comes to analyze these very different outputs, and will touch on the topic of cultural appropriation.

Joshua Brown (United States, Chapman University): “We are Not a Crime: Embodiment and Absence in Contemporary Spanish Protest Movements”

This presentation connects recent ethnographies of precarity and austerity in southern Europe to literature in performance studies and critical urban theory, as well as larger conversations regarding social movements and digital media. I will focus alternately on the work of two groups: Flo6x8 and No Somos Delito (We Are Not a Crime). The former is a performance collective that protests financial and political malfeasance in Spain by converting corporate banks into flamenco performance and video recording spaces. Based on ethnographic fieldwork, I will explore how Flo6x8 generated new physical and conceptual spaces for political expression and protest in Spain’s 15M Movement through their pioneering use of digital media and flamenco performance. No Somos Delito is a prominent association comprised of over seventy groups and NGOs dedicated to social movements and civil rights activism across Spain. This group, credited with launching the world’s first holographic protest in April 2015, engineers performances that highlight the impossibility of human presence and action in a state where profoundly repressive and antidemocratic measures continue to prevail. By bringing the work of these two groups into conversation, I intend to evaluate the meanings of place, embodiment, presence, and absence in contemporary Spanish protest movements.

Rebecca Draisey-Collishaw and Kip Pegley (Canada, Queen’s University): “Ensounding the Election: The Politics of Playlists during Canada’s 2019 Federal Election”

While music has a long history in Canadian political campaigns, candidates in the 2015 federal election took this medium to a new level by publishing playlists that strategically “represented” them, communicated their message, and galvanized their electoral base. Examining their playlists, however, reveals that their music did more than “introduce” voters to candidates: it constructed distinct notions of Canada for popular consumption. Audiences, in turn, responded on social media sites by both praising and challenging their selections. In this presentation, we explore the 2015 and 2019 playlists as virtual sites where “Canadianness” was formed by political figures -- and questioned by everyday citizens.
Liz Przybylski (United States, University of California, Riverside) and Joshua Thunder Little (United States, University of California, Riverside): “Lakota Hip Hop and Online Activism”
This roundtable presentation asks listeners to consider how hyperlocal place-based resistance and online activism mutually inform each other. Joshua Thunder Little and Liz Przybylski read the musical interventions of Lakota rappers Prolific, Frank Waln, and others for how they resonate at Standing Rock and globally on social media. We ask, how do ideas of wolakota, or treating others as relatives and living a Lakota life, echo through resistant rap? How are different Oceti Sakowin (Lakota, Dakota, Nakota) groups impacted by this kind of pipeline activism? And although the physical grouping people in the camps came to a halt, how does the musical response extend Native environmental resistance in place and time?

Darci Sprengel (England, St. John’s College, University of Oxford): “Troubling Resistance Narratives Ten Years after the ‘Arab Spring’”
Ten years have passed since the so-called Arab Spring of 2011. In Egypt and elsewhere, music was widely celebrated for playing an important role in these events. Much of the writing published initially approached creative expression in ways that linked artistic practice with acts of ‘resistance’. This discourse was quickly met with pushback from local musicians, however, who viewed it as limiting, foreign, and/or part of a larger project of Western imperialism. This paper draws from my research among independent musicians in Egypt over the last decade to interrogate some of the limitations and assumptions that arise when viewing musical practice primarily through the lens of resistance. It especially questions how intersecting relations of class, gender, and race/ethnicity can become more prominent in this discourse and argues for the importance of ‘quiet practices’ even during moments of mass mobilization.

ROUND TABLE #3: “CONFRONTING EXTRACTIONISM: RESPONSIBLE RESEARCH ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICES”

Ioanida Costache (United States, Stanford University): “Re-Mapping the Field: Positionality, Power, and Privilege in Ethnographic Methods”
I examine the political and social hierarchies, power relations, and economic conditions that play a determining role in contemporary ethnographic endeavors. From both an emic and etic standpoint—as both an ethnographer of Romanian-Romani music and a member of this ethnic community—I reflect on the ethical nature of ethnographic fieldwork, which is largely a task of collection/extraction. The [master’s] tools (Lorde 1984) of ethnography have been historically wielded by white, cisgendered, heterosexual, Euro-American men. If the practices of ethnography take such an agent as its default subject, what happens when differently raced/sexed subjects appropriate these same tools? I describe how the subjectivity and positionality of the researcher infringes upon their ability to successfully perform the role of ethnographer in the field. I re-imagine ethnographic practices to eschew the legacies of colonialism, extractionism, and exploitation that current practices perpetuate.

Matt Stahl (Canada, Western University & Olufunmilayo B. Arewa (United States, Temple University): “Royalty Accounting and Resistance”
The recently formed Black Music Action Coalition, a growing group of music executives and performers, advances Black Lives Matter’s critiques of American racial formation in their demands that record companies redress “inequities in the treatment of Black artists.” Inequities including non- and underpayment of royalties have contributed to the impoverishment and early death of performers, especially Black performers. We examine performers’ resistance to corporate business
and accounting practices that have improperly—and often fraudulently and illegally—denied royalty payments owed by companies to performers. Performers’ capacity to audit company accounts is crucial to making their resistance count in practical terms, but this capacity is radically, structurally constrained. Our research into the centrality of royalty accounting and audits to the life chances of Black performers and their families, and performers’ rhetorical and legal tactics in episodes of resistance since the 1980s may be useful in advancing contemporary challenges to these longstanding problems.

Bruno Deschênes (Canada, independent researcher): “Appropriation or Transpropriation?”
One notion that is ethically pivotal in ethnomusicology is appropriation. Is there another term that would give a different, yet less reproachful view of situations deemed to be cases of appropriation? This presentation will explore one such term: transpropriation. In cultural encounters, appropriation can be defined as taking from another culture something for oneself without giving back in return, while transpropriation refers to a mutual exchange, each side showing an intentional willingness to share reciprocally something from each one’s own culture. By taking the standpoint of transpropriation in their analysis, this might provide ethnomusicologists with a more balance, or at least a less constricting or one-sided view of their study of musical activism and agency in cultural encounters.

Kate Galloway (United States, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute): “On the Silences and Soundings of Extraction in Environmental Sound Art”
I explore music and sound art that serves as a remedy to extractive music in an era of perpetual ecological violence, institutionalized climate change denial discourse, environmental catastrophe, and ongoing settler-colonial destruction of traditional Indigenous lands. Extractive music refers to music where compositional and listening practices ambiguously serve as an ecological remedy while also inflicting environmental harm. For example, soundscape compositions remove, rework, and remediate site-specific sounds to create immersive soundscapes that listeners can occupy from the comfort of their high-quality headphones. And the digital music industry appears to produce less material discard, but it’s not a form of carbon-neutral listening, demanding high energy use and large acreages of sever farms (Devine 2019). Drawing on examples of extractive music from environmental sound art, I illustrate the material, cultural, and environmental realities of music that is complexly caught up in contemporary ecological politics as I listen to examples of anti-extractionist activism in music and sound art focused on ecological issues and the climate crisis.
Preconference Symposium Committee

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Acknowledgements

The Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences pre-conference symposium is generously supported by funding from Carleton University, Queen’s University and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.