

In Memoriam: Katherine Johanna Hagedorn

Dr. Katherine Johanna Hagedorn passed away at the age of 52 on November 12, 2013, after almost a year of intensifying struggle with cancer. Katherine was Professor of Music and Director of the Ethnomusicology Program at Pomona College in Claremont, California, where she taught since 1993. She earned her doctorate from Brown University in 1995, publishing widely on Afro-Cuban religious ritual and folkloric music; but Katherine's work reached beyond the areas of Cuban, Afro-Caribbean, and Latin American musics and performance. Her book, *Divine Utterances: The Performance of Afro-Cuban Santería* (2001) won the 2002 Alan P Merriam Prize for the best music ethnography. That book and her many articles continue to inspire a generation of scholars thirsty for examples of vivid, poetic, and courageously vulnerable field research narratives fully grounded in the most pressing scholarly discourses, including issues of race, class, gender and feminism, language and intercultural communication, dance, musical aesthetics, tourism, postcolonial studies, and the musical channels of religious experience.

At the time of her death, three major articles were forthcoming in three different edited volumes: "Ochún and Añá: Engendering Spiritual Power and Empowering Gendered Spirits" in *Wood That Talks: The Yoruba God of Drumming in Transatlantic Perspective* (edited by Amanda Villepastour, University Press of Mississippi, 2014); "Resorting to Spiritual Tourism: Sacred Spectacle in Afro-Cuban Regla de Ocha" in *Sun, Sound, and Sand: Reflections on Music Touristics in the Circum-Caribbean* (edited by Timothy Rommen and Daniel T. Neely, Oxford University Press, 2014); and "'Where the Transcendent Breaks into Time': Toward a Theology of Sound in Afro-Cuban Regla de Ocha" in *Theorizing Sound Writing* (edited by Deborah Kapchan).

Katherine was well into the preparation of her second book *Toward a Theology of Sound* (with five out of six chapters drafted), which is on the associations between rhythmic patterns and concepts of divinity. This work, Katherine explained in a progress report for Pomona College, will offer both a "meta- and a micro-analysis of... what happens in the central drumming performance (tambor) for the Afro-Cuban religious tradition known as Regla de Ocha (also known as Santería)... specifically, what particular drum patterns mean in the context of a tambor, and the process of 'possession performance' or coger el santo (literally, 'catching the saint')." Katherine was also in the midst of co-authoring with her friend and colleague Raul Fernandez an article on popular Cuban music post-1989. Preliminary plans are being made to bring both the

book and the article to publication.

As part of her broader field research on Cuban religious and folkloric performance, Katherine studied batá drumming (traditionally a male genre) in Cuba with drum master Alberto Villareal and in Los Angeles with the late master Francisco Aguabella. She was also a committed performer of Balinese Gamelan, playing *reyong* with Gamelan Burat Wangi in Los Angeles, and with the Pomona College Gamelan. She was an accomplished classical pianist. At Pomona College Katherine taught courses in the performance traditions of Latin America and the African diaspora, Roma performance, and seminars in the theory and practice of ethnomusicology. In 2000, Katherine was named California Professor of the Year by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. On the college's memorial page many of Katherine's



former students comment on her impact. This one, offered by Mark So (Pomona class of 2000) is especially insightful: "I loved her so much! Such an odd and gentle trust, such a strong inspiration—she made me (and so many others) feel truly loved, like you could really go inside and dig and stir up something necessary, and it could be arcane or unfamiliar, something to study, but also something right there for you, the gift of music, the heart beating darkly. The topic was one thing, but what counted was the personal connection, the sense that thinking through music should be equal in complexity, vitality, and mystery to its subject, and lead back in the end to the start, to music, perhaps even in breathtakingly unexpected ways. Katherine gave me music again." In 2002, Pomona College honored her with a Wig Teaching Award,

and in 2005 she won an esteemed Mellon New Directions Fellowship for her book project. Katherine served as Associate Dean of Pomona College from 2009 to 2012. A member of the Board of SEM from 2003 to 2006, Katherine served the Society on many levels, including several terms on the SEM Council and as President and Vice President of the Southern California Chapter.

Beyond these accomplishments, however, Katherine had special qualities evident to those who knew her; first, a sense of humor at once sympathetic yet critically irreverent, that pushed back against scholarly posturing and bureaucratic absurdity. A delightful combination of elegance and mischief, she was a spot-on mimic and could capture the voices, accents, and gestures of those around her in side-splitting parodies. [Continued on next page]

She infused much of her writing with this revealing subjectivity, highlighting the nuances, conundrums, and politics of intercultural miscommunication. Her article “Sacred Secrets: Lessons with Francisco,”¹ focuses directly on this topic. Also profoundly serious, Katherine developed over a long period a personal devotion to Regla de Ocha religious practices, beginning in earnest with her initiation as a daughter of Ochun in 1998, and fundamentally informing her research and writing.

Although both Katherine and I attended Tufts University at the same time, we did not travel in the same circles. We must have passed each other in the Music Department hallways, Katherine maybe heading to perform in a piano recital, I to drum and dance in David Locke’s classes. We finally met a decade later, in the Fall of 1992, after Katherine had become disillusioned with her short career in the State Department and had veered toward ethnomusicology, and I had finished my doctorate in Performance Studies and begun an adjunct position at Brown. Katherine was assigned to be my teaching assistant in a course on performance in Africa, having just returned from Cuba the day we met. We began in the morning conversing in Brown’s Orwig Music Building, then we moved to the local Vie de France bakery, and then to another café in Providence. After hours of incessant talk we realized we still had more to say, and so much in common, that we continued into the evening at a Thai restaurant. I have never spent so many hours talking nonstop to someone I’d just met! During my short time at Brown I had the pleasure of serving on Katherine’s dissertation committee (along with Carol Babiracki and Jeff Titon). As she completed her dissertation, we discussed how writing about musical performance should more often turn to poetic narratives of experience, so as to effectively parallel the life we wanted to understand and convey, and do justice to the relationships we have in the field. We became best friends for years to follow, collaborating on SEM panels—for the first time in 1992 in Seattle with a panel on “ethnomusicology and critical theory,” and for the last time in 2011 on a panel on tourism in the African diaspora.² We forged transdisciplinary connections at performance studies conferences, including the first PSI at NYU in 1995, where I introduced Katherine to the field. Katherine was, reciprocally, my own tether to ethnomusicology, which was rapidly changing but within which I still felt marginal.

We went on adventures to Cayo Costa Island in Florida, drove to Baja California (where we spent a clueless first night in Mexicali in a hotel dominated by women of the night—but no one bothered us.) We ventured to the Big Island of Hawai’i together with Ingrid Monson and Ocolo. We roomed together every year at SEM (unless one of us had our family along, and sometimes even then....). We visited each other’s parents even when the daughter in question was not present, and our parents even visited

each other. Our lives followed a strange parallel trajectory of major changes, and our sons (Gabriel and Max), though separated by two and a half years and much distance, played like fond brothers whenever they met. From opposite ends of the country, we indulged in long phone calls comforting each other in crises, catching up with life’s details, and bouncing ideas, theories, and potential projects off of one another. Katherine was an extraordinarily giving, thoughtful, and supportive friend, sometimes to an extent I found impossible to match.

Katherine is survived by her sweet son Gabriel Hagedorn, her devoted husband Terry Ryan and stepdaughters Quincy B. Ryan and Greer B. Ryan, her parents Grace and Fred Hagedorn and her sister Martha Hagedorn-Krass and family. Because of her exceptional kindness, inspiring intellectual focus, and generosity, Katherine is also survived as a colleague, mentor, and cherished friend by many within the family of the Society. Preliminary discussions have begun to establish an SEM prize in Katherine’s name that will recognize outstanding mentorship. An unofficial, open, word-of-mouth annual gathering will take place in her honor at upcoming meetings, celebrating rebellious laughter and heartfelt friendship. Her sudden absence is palpable and we will miss her terribly.

Michelle Kisiulik

1. In *Mementos, Artifacts and Hallucinations from the Ethnographer’s Tent* edited by Ron Emoff and David Henderson (Routledge 2002).

2. This panel included Tim Rommen, Daniel Neely, and Ama Aduonum.