Welcome Back!
a letter from the staff

Welcome to the second issue of SEM Student News! We hope you are all able to enjoy some rest and relaxation after a long academic year. To recent graduates, admittees, comps-completers, and grad school survivors, we offer our heartfelt congratulations. To those still slogging through readings, papers, and summer programs, we wish you sleep, caffeine, and humor. And to those of you in the field, we wish you safe and productive journeys!

Regardless of where you are in your grad school trek, this issue aims to equip you with interesting and helpful discussions in response to two current concerns of the student community: intellectual property and student publishing. We are excited to share with you the following pages, which feature editorial articles written by our peers as well as the advice of our senior colleagues. We have expanded our content considerably since our last issue; it is our hope that these contributions will further the dialogue already taking place in our listservs, seminars, grad lounges, and pubs. So enjoy the newsletter—and let us know what you think!

Send us your feedback, comments, ideas, and concerns to our Facebook page or email us at semstudentnews@gmail.com so we can continue to expand the conversation among students in ethnomusicology.
Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to the Spring/Summer issue of SEM Student News! This time of year marks a period of renewal and regrowth—a theme we took to heart when started to think about this issue. Since the creation of SEM Student News, our main goal has been to create something useful, helpful, and current for the SEM student community. Consequently, in drafting the editor’s letter of this issue, I felt it important to address directly the conflicted feelings many graduate students are currently experiencing as a result of the tense conversations circulating throughout the larger SEM membership. The last six months on the SEM Listserv, for example, have featured often-heated debates between senior scholars regarding the currency, validity, and utility of “ethnomusicology.” While these academic arguments are to be expected in any discipline and indeed may be necessary for the field to grow, the nature of some posts have been downright discouraging to us younger scholars. They have caused us to question, halfway through a laborious PhD, what light (aka job) will be at the end of our proverbial tunnel. What, exactly, are we getting ourselves into? What is ethnomusicology and why does it matter? How can we as young scholars envision, participate in, and further our field? How do we deal with the constant threat of job scarcity, lack of relevance, and the frustration of senior scholars while we are trying to carve out our own academic stances? These are not new questions, of course, but what is new is this forum, SEM Student News, where we can discuss these issues together.

As such, the major aim of this newsletter is to offer some renewed hope, advice, humor, and wisdom from some of our colleagues. In realizing our own academic projects and positions, as graduate students, we must stay optimistic and committed to what we are doing, even in the face of disciplinary uncertainty and contestation. Ultimately, it will be us who define the future of this field—so let’s start voicing our visions of how ethnomusicology can move forward! Let’s get involved in the debate and show that we, too, have ideas that need to be heard. We welcome your feedback in short 250-300 word responses for a new column entitled “The State of Our Field” in our next issue. What is ethnomusicology, and how should it relate to other fields of music scholarship? How do you think ethnomusicology should change in response to contemporary issues? What are your criticisms and aspirations for the field? How can we work collaboratively to generate a constructive dialogue among our peers? We hope you will join us, fellow students, in answering the challenge set forth by our predecessors to continue creating an ethical, useful, critical, accessible, and positive ethnomusicology.

Warmest Regards,

Lauren E. Sweetman
New York University

Upcoming Conferences for graduate students


Reflecting on Our Origins
an update from the student concerns committee

By Elizabeth Whittenburg Ozment (SCC Co-Chair, University of Georgia)

On behalf of the SCC, welcome to the newest edition of SEM Student News! The SCC is the voice of SEM student members, founded in 1983 with the purpose of drawing attention to student issues and strengthening student activism. This year, a goal of the SCC is to reflect on our committee’s origins in order to realize and revise our mission statement as part of continued efforts to better serve you, the SEM student body. As part of returning to our roots, Ian Goldstein unearthed the society’s original announcement about the creation of the SCC from the January 1984 SEM newsletter. In the words of Carol Robertson:

“The purpose of this committee will be to isolate and define issues affecting student members of the society, career concerns, and vital suggestions that should be brought to the attention of the Council and the Board of Directors. [...] We hope that this committee will make students active in the Society more visible for nomination to advisory bodies and thus enable members to make a more active role in decisions affecting the Society and the profession as a whole.”

Robertson’s statement emphasizes a need for student visibility and activism, two characteristics that this newsletter successfully highlights. The SEM Student Newsletter is a forum for discussion and celebration of student achievement and a space for reflection about our past, present, and future roles in the larger SEM organization. The SCC thanks the editor and contributors of this volume for their continued efforts and invites all SEM students to become active members of the SEM SCC community.

Community News
updates from student groups

Ethnomusicology Student Association, Indiana Univ.

By Matthew Buchbinder (Indiana Univ.)

The Ethnomusicology Student Association at Indiana University jointly meets with the Folklore Student Association. We work to plan and execute many of our student activities and events. Our biggest event for the year has been the annual graduate student conference, which we host with Ohio State Univ. Between the two days of the conference, more than 30 presentations were given relating to this year’s topic: “Cultural Mediation.” The amazingly diverse and thoughtful presentations proved to be fruitful in continuing to develop and nourish the inter-disciplinary and inter-institutional relationships from which this conference began. The attendance for the conference has been quite diverse, drawing scholars from a range of geographic locations (Arizona, Finland, Oregon) and disciplines (folklore, ethnomusicology, art history, English, rhetoric). We look forward to continuing this budding tradition next year, on the campus of Ohio State Univ.!

Univ. of Hawai’i Ethnomusicology Association

By Justin R. Hunter (Univ. of Hawai’i at Mānoa)

In January 2011, the ethnomusicology students at the Univ. of Hawai’i at Mānoa formed the Ethnomusicology Association (EMA). The EMA springs from a desire to pursue projects beyond the confines of the academic classroom—in other words, to explore applied ethnomusicology. We intend to seek out opportunities to deliver outreach to our surrounding communities and develop professional skill sets through sharing music. We endeavored to find ways to serve our student body as well as our surrounding communities. In our first semester, we invited Dr. David Hughes (SOAS, Univ. of London) to give the inaugural talk in our speaker series entitled “Words on Music.” In another initiative, we took student-musicians to Waikiki to present “got music?”, a project that gave both tourists and local residents hands-on experiences in world music on their territory—the beach. Our crown jewel, and final initiative this semester, was, “Bringing Back da Music,” which started as a class project in 2010 and became the impetus for EMA. In this project, we took our ethnomusicology students into local high schools and gave musical workshops. The project has challenged our members to write for small grants, develop lesson plans, and share a wider musical world with public school students—the project has now reached over six hundred kids. So far the workshops we have brought include: Philippine kulintang, Japanese folksong, Taiwanese dance, Korean janggu, Mongolian throat singing, Philippine dance, and Tahitian dance and drumming. As we continue to develop the EMA into the coming years, we are excited to see what other areas to explore and new ways we can address the needs of our communities through ethnomusicology.
Community News
updates from our chapter reps

Mid-Atlantic Chapter
By Yuko Eguchi (Univ. of Pittsburgh) + Melanie Pinkert (Univ. of Maryland)

Yuko Eguchi and Melanie Pinkert, MACSEM Student Representatives, called an ad hoc meeting for students during the chapter meeting on Mar. 20, 2011 to discuss their concerns. Students were invited to express their thoughts about MACSEM in general, the meeting in progress, and any issues regarding SEM and/or the recent national conference in Los Angeles (Nov. 2010). Points raised dealt mostly with the SEM annual conference, and included concerns about the deadline for abstract submission, availability of data about abstract acceptance rates, avoidance of dates that conflict with the meetings of other scholarly societies, allowance of sufficient time for panel discussants at the conference, scheduling of free time to enable students to both socialize and attend paper sessions, construction of a manual to keep the Program Committee more consistent from year to year, and encouraging panel attendees to maintain respectful and collegial regard to presenters during the question and answer session.

Northern California Chapter
By Ian Martyn (UC Davis)

The NCCSEM chapter meeting was held at San Francisco State Univ. on Mar. 5, 2011. Members from schools as far south as UC Irvine and as far east as UMass Dartmouth attended. Schools represented through presentations included UC Berkeley, UC Davis, UC Santa Barbara, UC Irvine, UC Santa Cruz, Cal State East Bay, San Francisco State Univ., San Jose State Univ., UMass Dartmouth, and Skyline College. Among the various topics presented were Gnawan music, Flamenco, World’s Fair, Scottish fusion, and Odissi music. Lunch at the local mall inspired lots of casual, friendly conversation as students and professors mingled, giving everyone a chance to get to know each other outside of the conference space. The academic environment did not preclude a convivial atmosphere. Each presentation inspired many thoughtful questions and discussion. A good time was had by all!

Southeast + Caribbean Chapter
By Erica Watson (Univ. of Memphis)

The 2011 SEMSEC chapter conference was held Mar. 25-26 in Nashville, TN. Vanderbilt University was the host institution and attendees were treated to an address by keynote speaker, Peter Guralnick. Guralnick is the author of the acclaimed book Sweet Soul Music and shared many anecdotes about his experiences with some of the greatest stars of soul music. The attendees also visited the Country Music Hall of Fame and attended a performance of the Grand Ole Opry. Next year, the chapter conference will be held in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic at the invitation of the Academy of Sciences of the Dominican Republic. The chapter is excited about this meeting because it will be the first in the chapter’s history to be held in the Caribbean. The dates for the conference are Mar. 9-11, 2012.

Midwest Chapter
By Jessica C. Hajek (Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign)

This year’s Midwest chapter meeting took place at Bowling Green State University in Ohio, Apr. 8-10, 2011. Despite the cold weather, the conference was attended by over 120 people from over 20 different Universities in the Midwest (and beyond). This year’s theme was “Music and Everyday Life” and featured a total of 14 panels. With a particularly strong showing, the students of the BGSU College of Musical Arts and Department of Popular Culture gave an extraordinary 25 paper presentations out of 60 total! BGSU students were also pivotal in organizing and volunteering at the conference, so a special note of thanks to our colleagues for helping put on a tremendous chapter meeting this year. Student concerns expressed at this year’s meeting included traveling to and from the chapter meeting, accommodations, and general issues with funding for conference attendance. Fortunately, thanks in part to the academic units at Bowling Green State University, the conference registration fee was waived this year. At the business meeting, a vote was taken to design and maintain a centralized MIDSEM chapter website. Hopefully, in the future, students will have more networking options to work out rideshares or other arrangements through this website. Also at the business meeting, Garrett Spatz of Bowling Green State Univ. was elected the new MIDSEM Student Representative for 2011-2012. We hope to see you all at the Univ. of Wisconsin Milwaukee in 2012!

Southern Plains Chapter
By Kim Kattari and Eben Graves (Univ. of Texas at Austin)

Greetings from the SEM-SP Chapter! This year’s conference was held jointly between SEM-SP and AMS’ Southwest Chapter at the Univ. of Texas at Austin on Apr. 15-17, 2011. Faculty and students from over 13 universities in Oklahoma, Texas, and Arkansas came together to share their diverse work and interests. The conference featured a plenary session, “Critical Developments at the Intersection of Musicology and Ethnomusicology,” during which AMS and SEM members discussed the current fissures and similarities between the two fields (especially in terms of the fluid use of cultural studies and historical methods and theories), and suggested ways for further collaboration and shared goal-reaching. Also, Dr. Zoe Sherinian, (Univ. of Oklahoma) presented her documentary film This is a Music: Reclaiming an Untouchable Drum, about the changing social and economic status of outcaste (Dalit) drummers in Tamil Nadu, India. We are pleased to congratulate UT Austin graduate student Christina Hough for receiving the 2010 Vida Chenoweth Student Paper Prize of the SEM-SP chapter for her paper entitled, “Obscured Hybridity: The Kurdishness of Turkish Folk Music.” The work was published in the Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology (2010). We are also pleased to announce that UT Austin doctoral candidate Sidra Lawrence received the SEM African Music Section student prize for her paper, “Sounds of Development?: Race, Authenticity, and Tradition among Dagara Female Musicians in Northwestern Ghana,” which she presented at SEM’s 2010 conference in Los Angeles. Her paper will be published in African Music.
Dear Little Man,

As grad students, we hear about publishing a lot! Yet many of us don’t know how to proceed. What advice do you have for us first-timers?

**TOMIE HAHN:** I’d like to pose a question that I often ask myself: why would someone want to read my article/book (or attend a conference presentation)? This leads to related questions: how can I reach as many people as possible? What does this text have to offer? I present these questions because I believe that if I take extra care to look beyond the specifics of my (culture or genre) area study, the possibilities for larger contributions to the field stand out—Japanese dance versus embodied transmission; Monster Trucks versus fieldwork experiences; extended human-computer performance versus interactive music/dance. On first glance this shift seems obvious, even trite, yet how many times have readers turned the page because a title or opening paragraph prioritized the area study over the thematic focus? Running parallel to these questions above I ask myself: OK, Tomie, how will you display the ideas you have been mesmerized by for so long? By this time in my process the minutiae of my long-standing research has taken over my life, bringing me back to square one—the details of the area study—so I find I need to return to the primary conceptual frames of my work. What does display mean? What form best conveys the humanity, the aesthetic, the conceptual focus of the work? How might form shape the transmission? Perhaps the best way to display your research/art will be in a text for an article, or photographs, or poems, or in charts, an on-line display, or combinations. But these are only a few examples! The rapidly changing state of publishing challenges our creativity for display. I am looking at the graduate students to see what innovations they envision will take the field to a new level of conveying the humanity of the performing arts. It’s all about transmission. 😊

**DAVID SAMUELS:** I’m currently sitting with three single-spaced pages of reader’s comments on an article in progress, generously provided by the person whose work I most take to task in the essay. Every time I encounter responses from outside readers, I’m brought back to my first experiences in getting my scholarship published.

End of first year of grad school, a professor encouraged me to submit my final seminar paper to a top journal. I was of course floored and excited, and spent the summer perfecting the manuscript for submission. A few months later it came back, with a positive response, to publish with some revisions. The package was unique, however, because the editor had enclosed one of the readers’ marked-up manuscripts in the envelope. This reader—who thought the piece should be published, mind you—had had a particularly strong response to my essay: so strong that the editor sent the copy back to me, because “you should know what kind of reactions your essay might elicit.”

Interested and armed with coffee, I sat down and began to leaf through the comments and marginalia, thinking of ways that I could address the queries, add the additional references, make a more complete presentation in additional footnotes. And then I just had to stop, because there, in the margin of a page about 2/3 of the way through the article, underlined three times and with two exclamation points after it, was a compound noun making reference to the male of the bovine species and the inevitable end result of his ingestion of solid food. Well, maybe I’m embellishing the story in my memory. Maybe it wasn’t two exclamation points. Definitely underlined, though. For more than one year, I was unable to think of how I might respond to such a strong reaction. And so the essay sat in a drawer.

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Dear Little Man, 
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Every so often I would pick it up and put it down again when I got to that spot. Finally, involved in a reading group, I brought the essay to my peers and let them encounter the reader’s marginalia along with the essay. At our next meeting, after I described my paralysis in the face of that comment, one member of the group asked me, “Well, what do you think of that comment?” I thought for a minute. “I think it’s wrong.”

It suddenly dawned on me. I thought the reader was wrong. And it was okay for me to think that. What I needed to do was to be able to anticipate various readers’ positions and reactions, and write in a way that would acknowledge that those other positions and reactions are out there. As another colleague said to me years later after I returned from a particularly awkward paper presentation, “That’s why you present papers: to find out how people are going to misinterpret you.” Or, how you’ve misinterpreted them. The comments I’m looking at now? Actually, yes, I do oversimplify this reader’s argument in order to make my point, and I need to strengthen that part of my presentation.

Thinking about publication means thinking about your audience in a new way. You’re now writing for a group of people who have not been living inside your head for the past two years, and certainly have not been putting things in your head by making you read the material on their course syllabus. The peer-review process, arcane as it is, helps you understand how the people outside your inner circle are going to make sense out of what you’ve written. This is especially important when you’re turning a seminar paper into that vaguely-defined entity known as the “publishable essay.” Because you are no longer writing for one person’s acceptance, but for a broader audience that may or may not dance to the groove that you are laying down. Anticipating the variety of responses you’ll get to your ideas, and how to make use of those responses in the review and editing process, is an important step in developing your scholarship chops.

SEAN WILLIAMS: One of the best things you can do first is get some writing done; I do this by starting (always) with the easiest part first. What aspect of your knowledge makes you feel the most confident? If someone asked you about your fieldwork, what part of it would leap to the front of your mind in telling a story? Tell that first. You might not even use it in the final piece, but it’s a great way to begin. I often aim at a particular level of comprehension: if a smart upper-division undergraduate student can read it, so can everyone else. Once you’ve started with the easiest part, fill in other elements as they unfold, like telling a story, using brackets for stuff to do later, as in [give examples here]. You don’t need to include a review of the literature; that only works on your dissertation committee and no one ever likes reading them (including your dissertation committee)! Your grasp of the current literature should appear as a natural consequence of drawing from the works of the great thinkers in your area, scattered throughout the article or book. I never write the intro first; I write it once I know where I’m going.

Let’s imagine that you have a terrific article and you want to try publishing it. It’s about 35 to 40 pages, offers something new and exciting in the field of ethnomusicology, and it’s something you understand that no one else does. It’s normal to include at least a couple of photographs or other interesting additions to your article; you don’t always have to include transcriptions or tables, but those can be worthwhile to include because they reveal your information in non-textual ways. Since this is your first publication, you might aim for any one of the half-dozen ethnomusicology journals: the flagships (Ethnomusicology, Yearbook for Traditional Music, The World of Music, and Ethnomusicology Forum) or the area journals (Asian Music Journal, Latin American Music Review, African Music Journal, and many others). The Pacific Review of Ethnomusicology is intended specifically for graduate student publications. Non-ethnomusicology-specific journals include Popular Music, the Asian Theatre Journal, the Journal of American Folklore, and others. Each one of these journals has quite specific style considerations, and you should submit your article precisely in the form they request. It’s normal to receive a “revise and resubmit” response, once your article has gone out for initial reviews. If you agree with a suggestion, do the revision. If you disagree, you need to politely respond to it one way or another, defending (to the editor) your decision not to take the suggestion. Don’t delay too long in the revision process. This goes for book publication as well.
Ready to turn that term paper into a published article? Before you send it off to *Ethnomusicology* or the target journal of your choice, consider the following tips.

As graduate students, many of the papers that we hope to publish will likely grow out of projects that we’ve completed for a seminar or presented at a conference. If you’re a bit further along in your studies, publications could develop from a master’s thesis or a dissertation chapter. Whatever the origin, it’s important to emphasize from the start that if you’re serious about developing a paper for publication, you should be prepared to think about it, read, and edit your piece accordingly for months, sometimes years, until it’s ready for print. So if you aren’t highly dedicated to the topic of your paper, it’s probably best to hold off on pursuing publication until you work on something with which you really connect. However, if you’re willing to put in many, many hours of reading, thinking, writing, and editing, your manuscript could blossom into something compelling and worth sharing with your academic peers.

First, talk with the professor for whom you wrote the paper to get her or his input on whether it’s a good candidate for publication. Although this input shouldn’t be the final word, an honest and direct opinion could save you a lot of time, effort, and self-pity. Ask for help identifying journals that are well suited to your paper’s topic, theoretical approach, methodology, etc. As a rule of thumb, peer reviewed journals tend to carry the most prestige and are the gold standard for academic publication.

Accordingly, publication in these venues is highly competitive and difficult even for senior members of the field, so it may be better to pursue publication in a student-run venue. Wherever you do decide to publish, be sure to read the journal’s mission statement and recent articles to engage if and how your work fits with the journal as a whole. This will also help you become familiar with the audience’s general knowledge and interests. If your work doesn’t seem like a good fit, search out other venues.

Before sending your paper to any journal, polish it as much as you can. This means not only editing your work for grammar and clarity, but also searching for important, overlooked references that support, challenge, or add nuance to your arguments. If your professor has time, ask for advice about additional sources or weak spots in your paper. Seek out a fellow graduate student or two for input from another perspective—in many cases, advice from knowledgeable peers can be just as helpful, if not more so! Take their comments seriously and reevaluate your work, even if it means making significant revisions. Any work you do at this stage will be helpful down the road, as good scholarship and thoughtful writing could save your manuscript from the journal editor’s chopping block.

When you identify an important new source that should be added to your paper, be sure to look at its reference list to find any other important citations you might...
Paper Labor ... continued

have missed. This can seem like an endless task that branches out seemingly to infinity, but familiarity with your field and the ways in which academic texts are in dialogue is an important cornerstone of good research. Of course, you should always return to your document’s central thesis to make sure that you haven’t spun out into a new galaxy of distant literature, but the more information you have about closely related work, the more tight, focused, and scholarly your paper will be.

Once you’ve edited and refined your paper, have someone (or several people, like professors and other grad students) read through it one more time. But a word of caution: do not revise endlessly! Set a deadline for yourself, take it seriously, and be sure that your paper is ready for submission by that deadline. Remember, there is no such thing as an absolutely complete, perfect article; rather, you are engaging in scholarly dialogue, and the field is always changing as new voices emerge and others recede. Your task is not to be the final word on a topic, but to contribute to your field and present the best work you can.

Be sure to visit the target journal’s website and examine its formatting requirements. Each journal has slightly different style guidelines, and properly formatting your paper will go a long way towards convincing the editor that you are professional and dedicated to the particular journal in which you’re seeking publication. Moreover, this will give your paper the look and feel of a paper that “belongs” in that journal. While formatting and style will not guarantee you space in the pages of your target journal, it will definitely help. At the very least, you will save the editor and production team time and headaches with your early attention to their “in-house” style.

Next, you’ll need to construct a cover letter. This letter should briefly summarize the major points of your work and discuss why the target journal is the best venue in which to publish it. Be sure to articulate clearly why your work is important and will be of interest to other scholars, asking yourself the following: Does my paper respond to a timely scholarly debate? Is the journal’s readership particularly interested in this field of study or thesis? How does my work contribute to important, broad social goals?

When you are ready to submit your paper, find the editor’s contact information online or in the pages of a recently published issue of the journal (most journals now accept submissions via email). You should submit your documents in the requested format and provide your contact information—you may also want to attach a brief C.V. or resume with your submission.

Now comes the wait. It may be several months until you hear back about the fate of your paper. If it’s been more than a few months, send a friendly, professional inquiry about the status of your submission. But be patient: journal editors and reviewers (particularly in smaller humanities fields) are very busy people who juggle many tasks and jobs, and it may take some time for them to give your paper the attention it deserves.

If your paper is ultimately rejected, this can feel like a frustrating blow to your ego and prospects of academic success. Publishing your work is important—it’s one critical way that scholars communicate their research and thoughts to one another, and you will probably eventually want to enter into that community. But even the biggest academic rock stars have almost certainly dealt with rejection, and they’re not remembered for their “failures.” Rejection letters can even be to your benefit, as they signal that your work would not be a good fit for the journal and would be better appreciated by another audience. Whatever the reasons for rejection, do not be discouraged. Try not to take personally the editor’s or reviewers’ comments, which can sometimes be blunt and unforgiving. Rejection is part of academic life, so learn to deal with it and use it to hone your craft. Take any constructive advice seriously and revise your document to address the previous editor’s or reviewers’ concerns before moving on to the next journal on your list.

And if nobody publishes your hard work, there is always the blogosphere. Best of luck, and we can’t wait to read your work, wherever it appears!
Lonán Ó Briain (Univ. of Sheffield): I recently returned to the UK from a final fieldwork trip I took to Vietnam, where I conducted research on the music of the Hmong minority group for my PhD dissertation. Like many other countries, “counterfeit culture,” that is the culture of distributing illegal copies of musical recordings, is rife in Vietnam. Although the government has reportedly begun to clamp down on this issue, there is little evidence of any policy shift on the ground. Two experiences—one with professional musicians based in Hanoi, the Vietnamese capital, and another with amateur musicians on the socio-geographic periphery of Vietnam—illustrate some of the ways in which I have had to consider varying interpretations of intellectual property and its ties with fieldwork ethics.

During my first year in Vietnam, I studied Vietnamese traditional music with professional musicians in Hanoi. When I would ask where to purchase recordings of their music, the musicians would typically either present me with a burned copy of one of their CDs or transfer their audio files directly to a USB stick. Their justification was that they had received a flat rate for the recordings and were expecting no royalty payments from sales. This practice was so ingrained that I found it nearly impossible to purchase legitimate copies of musical recordings. Seeing myself as a responsible ethnomusicologist, I strove to purchase music through legal means. This was an eye-opening experience for me: in order to obtain copies of music for research purposes, I often had to make choices that conflicted with my sense of intellectual property ethics.

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channels, but inevitably I had to resign myself to unreliable copies like everyone else. This was an eye-opening experience for me: in order to obtain copies of music for research purposes, I often had to make choices that conflicted with my sense of intellectual property ethics.

A year later, I returned to Vietnam to conduct PhD fieldwork on the musical activities of the Hmong ethnic minority group. Their situation contrasted starkly with the professional musicians of Hanoi. The Hmong are predominantly illiterate and among the poorest of the ethnic groups in Vietnam. They live mostly in the mountainous regions around the northern borderlands of Vietnam, and their livelihoods tend to be agriculture-based. While gaining consent from the Hmong to conduct research in their communities was rarely an issue, providing them with the necessary information as to the possible or potential outcomes of my research—a fundamental aspect of the informed consent process—was a challenge. Frequently, musicians indicated that they were happy to let me use their recordings however I wished. Yet, although I appreciated these generous offers for free and unlimited use of their work, I was concerned that the Hmong musicians might not have been aware of the possible implications of such open consent. As a result, I have had to carefully navigate how I interpret this consent and their understanding of my intentions, and I have also had to limit outside access to many of these recordings until I can clarify these issues with individual participants.

These tales from the field briefly illustrate two ways in which I have negotiated contradictory interpretations of intellectual property. With the increasing hegemony of international law, intellectual property issues will continue to impact our work and the ways in which we protect our research participants’ rights. These practical experiences have as much to do with fieldwork ethics as with legal issues. Prior to my fieldwork, I took an interdisciplinary discussion-based class on fieldwork ethics that helped inform my on-the-spot decisions in the field. Rather than arriving at clearly defined answers, I have learned to devise a series of temporary solutions to these dilemmas on a case-by-case basis, which I have only touched upon briefly here. The more that we as colleagues can share our experiences and solutions to these issues in the field, the better we can prepare each other for future challenges that we will all face during our fieldwork.

Larisa Mann (UC Berkeley): As both trade law and a system for regulating social and cultural practices, copyright is an important lens through which to examine tensions between local communities’ practices and state or international institutions’ interests in a particular definition of legal order. Entities like the World Trade Organization (WTO) push for global minimum copyright standards: that is, a universally applicable set of rules for how people engage with works of cultural production covered by copyright law. The goal is a global, standardized system to regulate rights of access, exclusion, alteration, transmission, and other methods of engaging with artistic works.

However, such standards rely on historical conditions and categories of actors, practices, and products that don’t always neatly apply to other circumstances. Copyright law is administered by relying on fixed, individualistic, exclusive claims over clearly defined and unchanging musical works. One's ability to enforce such laws increases the more one has a written record of a work clearly attributed to a particular creator and moment of fixation. These assumptions, however, fit poorly with traditions of musical creativity in areas such as Jamaica, where shifting coalitions of people use recordings as part of a collective, dynamic creative process. Furthermore, literacy, recording, and to some extent formal record keeping and management rely on access to social and material capital, which have historically been distributed along colonial lines. As such, copyright law tends to reinforce core institutions of colonial power.

I’m a 7th year PhD student in Jurisprudence and Social Policy at UC Berkeley Law School, and I’m also a DJ, where I explore questions about re-use, originality, and the social function of music in conjunction with dancing crowds. I believe that law should not be used in the service of colonial power, but instead in the service of equality. My dissertation situates a local culture of music-making within modern global colonial capitalism by examining its relationship to copyright law. Through an ethnographic study of Jamaican music-making, my work suggests that the specific assumptions
Student Profiles
... continued

in copyright law align its enforcement with colonial power and against disenfranchised creative communities. For example, copyright relies primarily on rewarding individual authors by granting them control over the circulation of their works, pitting “consumers” against “producers.” But Jamaican musical engagement blurs those categories. Recordings and performances circulate among a variety of people who make additions and subtractions to a social musical experience. I contend that requiring permission for access to recordings grants control over music circulation to whomever has the most control of resources (studio equipment, literacy, and legal advice) at the time the recording is made.

Although rooted in the practices of the Jamaican urban poor, this music also circulates throughout the Jamaican diaspora. Through fieldwork conducted in Toronto and London, my research builds a transnational analysis rooted in this diaspora rather than within national boundaries, showing how global colonial capitalism continually shapes people’s ability to gain from musicking and impacts the kinds of gains different people can make. Grounding my analysis of copyright in local contexts reveals two key points: first, in Jamaica, musical creativity is concentrated among the poor and has social functions beyond direct profit-making; second, that regardless of musickers’ goals, their ability to profit from music partly depends on their ability to conform to existing institutions of power. This means that attending to musickers’ interests and practices will challenge local and possibly global power relations.

The increasing prevalence of globally networked technology reveals local practices, often highlighting contradictions between formal law and local behavior. Many local musical practices involve imitation, accompaniment, and interaction, which used to occur offline and without permission. As these unpermitted practices appear online, however, many observers of global and local creative industries that predate the digital era have argued that copyright law is currently in crisis and that technology is the cause, arguing that the ease of copying or remixing recordings has made more people violate the law. Recognizing that people have always incorporated musical recordings into a lived social practice suggests that the way to understand and resolve the apparent crisis is not through enforcing existing rules, but through examining the underlying social pressures and interests and understanding how they relate to inequality. One aim of my work is to inform policy makers and to help local creative communities generate a vocabulary to describe what is currently missing in official discourse around copyright and creativity. Ideally, the next step would be to suggest changes to rules that allow creative practices that subvert or work against current inequality. My work as a scholar and artist furthers this goal.

Allen Roda (NYU): For the past two years I have been working with drum makers in North India to research the techniques used to make tablas. I chose this topic because I thought both the instrument makers and instruments have been under-represented in musical ethnography. I began my research thinking largely about how various individuals involved in musical production are tied together through different materials and about how these material objects become focal points for larger social, economic, and musical relationships. I spent much of my time learning how to prepare the materials for tablas myself, and even made my own pair of tablas from scratch with the belief that by actually doing the construction, I could better demonstrate to a wider audience the artistry involved in the production of this instrument.

As my research progressed, I began to realize that the skills involved in the preparation and fine-tuning of tabla are often closely guarded trade secrets. The transmission of trade secrets for instrument builders is similar to that of instrument players in the sense that secrets usually flow from the expert, or guru, to the student through an intimate relationship. For musicians, propagation of performance techniques often does not result in increased competition, as

“I believe that law should not be used in the service of colonial power, but instead in the service of equality.”

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Student Profiles

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it is presumed that the student will not be in a position to steal performance opportunities from a master. For instrument makers, however, some production techniques are such that they can, in fact, be mimicked. Once students have learned the tricks of the trade, there is nothing to prevent them from opening their own stores, and if the master’s price is significantly undercut by the student, this can threaten the master’s business.

In this regard, although I did not realize I would need to engage in issues of intellectual property so deeply, I have found the subject unavoidable due to methodological decisions I have been forced to make in the field. I have had to relocate recording sessions to manufacture; I have worried that have compromised trade secrets; whether and exactly how to use informants. I have also faced informants have flatly refused to full weight of colonialism upon informant, conflating all fair-refused to work with me on the much from India, so why should everyone has the right to refuse nevertheless tried, in vain, to in creating competition for him actually increase his business.

“Although I did not realize I would need to engage in issues of intellectual property so deeply, I have found the subject unavoidable due to methodological decisions I have been forced to make in the field.”

Going into the field, I was not focusing on these types of potential ethical and methodological pitfalls, nor was I aware of the degree to which issues of intellectual property, secrecy, and ownership would impact my work. As I now transition into the stage of writing my dissertation, I am beginning to reflect upon this research time and think about how the tangibility of a drumhead makes it qualitatively different from a recording or a text. In India, at least, there is no notion of “copyright” related to the manufacture of drumheads: once purchased, it is understood that I can do with a drumhead as I choose, unlike with a commercial recording or even a book. Reverse engineering is a real threat in this sense, as there are no legal channels for protecting one’s innovations in tabla production. Tabla makers would rarely (if ever) buy each other’s tabla heads for reverse engineering, but when an old tabla is brought in to be re-headed, often the first question is who made the old head? Furthermore, it is common practice for storeowners to have tabla made by other producers and put their own stamp upon the head, as if they had made themselves.

Navigating a world in which individuals feel comfortable telling me things as an outsider that they are unwilling to tell to others was an unexpected aspect of my research that has proved to be simultaneously trying and rewarding. It has revealed a world of secrecy and partial knowledge that depends largely on calculated estimations risk vs. benefit. That is to say, I feel that in many cases, it was precisely because I was a foreigner and someone from “outside” of the community that the risk in telling me secrets was perceived as relatively low. Moreover, that I might write a book which someday might include their names and photographs was conversely seen as a fairly high potential benefit. Because individuals were willing to confide in me, I have been able to gain a perspective of the overall process of tabla making that would not necessarily have been available to any individual who was more directly involved. This position is exciting from the standpoint of a researcher who has learned many things that, as of yet, have not been written about in English. However, my new position in this community still requires a delicate balance, as I now try to tread carefully with respect to what I shall reveal or not and under what circumstances. “Intellectual property” is a concept that in common parlance has primarily legal connotations. In the field, I found myself much more engaged with broader and varied notions of “secrecy.” Finding the intersections and boundaries between these two concepts is one of the many interesting challenges that await me as I shift from research to writing.
For ethnomusicologists, intellectual property is not only an issue in our fieldwork, but also one that directly affects our academic lives. Recent discussions on the official Society for Ethnomusicology listserv (henceforth “SEM-L”) have reflected the ambiguity and delicacy of these issues.

The first SEM-L discussion of academic intellectual property this year began with an alert regarding websites that aggregate theses and dissertations, often in full-text, without the knowledge or consent of their authors. These works then become available to a wide public, who can download, comment upon, or possibly disseminate them.

Although theses and dissertations have been available in hard copy in libraries for some time, various ethnomusicologists who chimed in were concerned that the greater ease of obtaining theses and dissertations would increase the potential for the misuse of information, and might compromise agreements made with research collaborators and communities.

Other scholars argued that more openness was, on the whole, better for scholarship, despite some potentially negative consequences of this greater ease of distribution. Those who espoused this view stated that plagiarism has always been an issue regardless of distribution platform, and is also quite feasible when dissertations are in hard copy. Debate was almost evenly divided, with many people providing extremely nuanced, and legally and ethically informed, input.

The second major discussion, which became quite heated, dealt with a new SEM pilot program: live-streaming select panels at the upcoming conference this November. Those submitting abstracts this year were asked to check a box if they consented to being filmed, should their paper be accepted. According to policy for this pilot program, all of the speakers on a given panel would have to consent for the panel to be filmed.

This became a major point of contention: some contributors to the discussion thought that consent and filming should be determined by individual presenter, and others highlighted the logistical difficulties in streaming intermittently. The original intent of live-streaming particular sessions was to make parts of the conference available to colleagues around the world who are unable to come to the conference; on the other hand, many contributors raised concerns that, as in the discussion about theses and dissertations, information would be interpreted incorrectly and that streaming in such a way would violate agreements made with research collaborators.

One important point of discussion revolved around the issue of mediation: are live-streamed conference presentations substantially different—in kind, in risks, in ethical obligations—from those that are not streamed? In many ways, this question, and responses to it, paralleled the debate regarding electronic versus hard copies of theses and dissertations.

The last discussion directly regarding intellectual property was less controversial. Several people came forward saying that they had been contacted by a suspicious company, with no reputation for academic publishing, that sought to publish papers that they had recently presented at conferences. After some research, other SEM-L members were able to determine that these companies make their money off of academics who pay sometimes-hefty fees to get their articles in print. Senior colleagues warned that, although given the rough job market it can be tempting to publish by any means possible, these companies are not considered credible, and publishing with them will in fact hurt a young scholar’s reputation.

As people engaged in knowledge work, understanding intellectual property with regards to policy, law and, perhaps most importantly, ethics, is crucial. This not only affects our relationships and methodologies while engaged in ethnographic research, but is an issue that has almost-daily bearing on our lives in non-profit work, writing and speaking for popular audiences, and in the academy. Questions of mediation, archiving, disclosure, global connectivity, privacy, and many more are part of the fabric of our working lives, and as young scholars we have a responsibility to educate ourselves well regarding these issues.

Archived SEM-L posts can be found at https://listserv.indiana.edu/cgi-bin/wa-iub.exe?A0=SEM-L, searchable by keyword, date and other parameters.
Drawing lines around intellectual work involves high stakes—stakes high enough to give us pause to consider the ethics of scholarly discourse, to cause us to step back and think reflexively about what might constitute, or dangerously approach, the neocolonial governance of knowledge. As claims to intellectual property rights are made for “discoveries” of new knowledge, we are in a position to question whether such claims surreptitiously perpetuate the historical blueprint of Euro-American privilege. But the ostensibly simple idea of “sharing” manifests its own problematics. How can knowledge be shared effectively, globally, and reciprocally amidst pervasive economic disparity, prioritized national-cultural representations, and academic elitism? To attempt an answer, and to reflect on the role of intellectual property in our work, let’s consider how notions of the shared, of sharedness and sharing, might serve as vital discursive sites for resolving the problematic of (un)fairness that inhabits, at least historically, the conceptual and methodological frameworks of ethnomusicology.

Recent scholarship continues to speak to the complex interaction between emic and etic cultural analyses in contemporary and historical ethnomusicological ventures. The work of folklorist and ethnomusicologist Javier F. León, as one of many strong examples, very specifically engages with the deficiency of etic/emic collaborativity in Western studies of Peruvian music, questioning whether their inclusion of “native voices” has really been equal—or “whether there are some voices that are ‘more equal’ than others.”1 Because Peruvian researchers have comparatively limited access to etic publications, their work may be perceived as uninformed and thus inferior, a perception that has led to two unfortunate consequences: Western researchers paternalistically “champion the interests of Peruvian colleagues” while local scholars are compelled/forced to conform—to adopt Western theoretical norms in order to be heard above the din of Euro-American conversations.2 The question thus remains as to how the scholarly development of inter/transnational, multicultural intellectual property can sustain an ethical infrastructure of fruitful reciprocity. For León, the solution lies in familiarity with local research: “Since Western academia and the aforementioned academic vogues tend to assign a marginalized role to the local researcher, it is useful to discuss the writings of local researchers in relation to their Western counterparts in order to deconstruct the myth of the local researcher as an academic Other.”3 Of course, such research requires translation, a sometimes difficult and costly process, but one that will reciprocally benefit local and foreign researchers alike (presuming equal accessibility to translated work). Perhaps, then, the new direction of fieldwork-based ethnomusicology is one aligned with collaborative ethnography, reciprocal ethnography, and activist ethnography,

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methods evident in the work of scholars such as Luke Eric Lassiter, Elaine Lawless, and Melissa Checker. This new direction might necessitate, or even demand, translation of and shared digital access to written research in order to further mobilize the recognition of intellectual property’s sharedness.

This is not to say that the mere translating and sharing of research alone will equalize power relationships, but that, contemporaneously with such sharing, there may develop an environment in which an epistemology invigorated by reciprocity becomes both the goal and the foundation for intellectual work ahead. Ethnomusicologists are poised and ready to shift historical trends of exoticizing “the Other” by incorporating local scholarships. As we confront the unbalanced construction of others, the pre-existing, Orientalistic patterns of knowledge that we so actively interrogate may be more effectively deconstructed if we are to delimit—in light of the fundamental sharedness of humanity too-often overlooked in the process of claiming intellectual property—a clear precedent of collaborative intentions. In other words, etic/emic scholarly interaction could contribute to leveling the unbalanced playing field of a Euro-American academic elite, and a true sense of collaboration might lead to increasing development in localized self-representationality. The social-cultural anthropologist Arjun Appadurai writes that the present is marked by a global cultural process “of the infinitely varied mutual contest of sameness and difference on a stage characterized by radical disjunctures between different sorts of global flows and the uncertain landscapes created in and through these disjunctures.”

If the contested grounds of global culture and intellectual property are to be engaged with ethically, then central to the production of knowledge remains the pursuit of context-dependent, self-defined and many-voiced configurations of that knowledge. Through recognition and inclusion, then, as opposed to objectification and isolation, local scholars are better positioned to equally enrich the ethnomusicological knowledge base.

Perhaps we are conditioned to object to “sharing” because present conditions mandate private ownership for individual success, and so perhaps privilege will continue to be privileged. But privilege, we know, as an association of credibility with sociocultural advantages, is the very notion that feeds Western ethnocentricism, and so we now proceed with quiet caution in claiming rights to the privilege of intellectual property. Ethnomusicology, then, as an inter/transnational discipline, has several goals still intrinsic to its disciplinary existence: opposing ownership-based meritocracy by recognizing our often-unspoken transcultural collectivity, diminishing sociocultural privileges by amplifying local self-representationality, and facilitating as best as possible the sharing of knowledge by decommercializing access to our scholarship.

And ethnomusicology has immense opportunities knocking at its multidisciplinary doors: the opportunity to initiate a conceptual and methodological shift away from the counter-(r)evolutionary emphasis upon “intellectual property” as an acquisitive signification of individual achievement, the opportunity to pioneer a rearticulation of intellectual property as intellectual work rooted in collectivity, and the opportunity to reflexively embrace and renew as global that simple lesson we most likely learned as children: that we really ought to share.

Notes:
2 Ibid, 171.
3 Ibid, 172.
My recent experience in the field has led me to re-think my views on copyright law. I am currently investigating the musical heritage of the New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians in an effort to expand the discourse on the relationship between Native Americans and African-Americans. The Mardi Gras Indians are African-Americans who dress in elaborate beaded costumes, called suits, and headdresses (à la plains Indian style). They parade throughout New Orleans’ black communities on Mardi Gras, St. Joseph’s Night, and several Sunday afternoons during the spring called “Super Sundays.” The Indians also make appearances at the New Orleans Jazz Festival and other celebrations. The purpose of wearing the suits and parading (called masking) is to pay homage to Native Americans for providing refuge to escaped slaves. Creating a Mardi Gras Indian suit is a time consuming and expensive endeavor. Purchasing the materials may cost thousands of dollars and the beading and sewing of the intricate designs takes months to complete. Mardi Gras Indians will begin to create a new suit for the next Mardi Gras season as soon as the previous one ends. While masking may pose financial hardship for some, the Indians feel the sacrifices they make to mask are necessary to insure the survival of this tradition.

An Act of Justice: Copyright

Prior to the 2011 Mardi Gras parades, Mardi Gras Indian Howard Miller copyrighted his suit. The legal argument asserted by Miller and his attorney is that the suit Miller designed, sewed, and wears, is not a costume, but art—a designation protected under copyright law. Miller’s actions may appear extreme but he and other Mardi Gras Indians have made claims that others are benefiting financially from their images and not sharing the profits with them. They view copyrighting their suits as a legal remedy for what they feel is an injustice.

One publication that the Indians cite as an example of their argument is Michael P. Smith’s *Mardi Gras Indians.* The publication contains beautiful photographs of Mardi Gras Indians, but unfortunately, some Indians featured maintain that Smith did not have permission to publish their images. When I learned of this conflict, I concluded Smith was another contributor to the narrative of outsiders stealing black culture and profiting from the theft without giving remuneration to the culture bearers. However, my own experiences at Mardi Gras Indian functions has brought to light additional aspects to be considered regarding this situation.

Implications for the Researcher

Similar to Michael Smith, I took many photographs of the Mardi Gras Indians parading through the streets of New Orleans—a public space. The environment where most Indian masking takes place is a public parade on public streets. Professional photographers, tourists, and others jockey for position to get the best photographs of the Indians while they parade. The majority of photographs taken are most likely for personal use and possibly may be shared with others on Facebook and the like. My photographs and images are for academic study and will be used in the future for my publications. The recent action by Miller raises several issues for those of us conducting research in public space. In my circumstance, if I am photographing images, how do I know in the scope of a parade which suits are copyrighted? In addition, if I happen to take a photograph of a copyrighted suit during a parade and the identity of the subject is unknown, whom do I seek permission from to reprint or publish the image? I offer as an example the photograph that accompanies this article (next page, right). It was taken during a Mardi Gras Indian Super Sunday parade. Unfortunately, I was

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unable to get the name of the Mardi Gras Indian photographed and I do not know if he had made any attempts to copyright his suit. In the soundscape and confusion of a moving parade, it is difficult to stop a participant and ask for identifying information. In addition, one must also consider the spiritual nature of the activities and not offend participants by interrupting. Once festivities have reached their conclusion, I do work to obtain as much information as possible. I am not always successful.

When I pursue publishing, I would like to use in my publications some images where the subject of the photograph is an unknown Mardi Gras Indian and he or she may don a copyrighted suit. I would be unable to obtain the proper permissions for reprint. The Fair Use statutes of U.S. Copyright Law (section 107) allow me to include these images in my dissertation and other academic work without penalty. However, if I published these same images in a book, I may be subjected to legal action. Section 106 of U.S. Copyright law gives copyright holders certain protections as well as the exclusive authority to dictate if, and in what manner, their copyrighted material may be reproduced. No consideration in this section is given to the concept of public space.

A Course of Action

I feel some ambivalence regarding the copyrighting of the Indian suits. I assert the Indians are just in the claims they have made. The creativity, expense, and effort required to create a Mardi Gras Indian suit deserve artistic recognition and some form of monetary compensation. But the fact that the Indians parade in public space should not be overlooked and—I do posit this with some reluctance—the Indians’ expectations for control of their images may be unrealistic given the parade environment.

Certainly, it is not my intent to exploit anyone and adhering to my own moral code compels me to attempt to get the permissions I need and be fair regarding monetary compensation. An option I will most likely pursue, until this issue is clarified by the courts, is to donate a percentage of any profit received from my images to the Mardi Gras Indian Council. But I wonder if I pursue this, would I still be legally liable to the subjects of my photographs if they decide to sue on the basis that I photographed and published a copyrighted image (the suit) without their permission? I do not know if my current plan for remuneration would be acknowledged legally but it is my feeling this is a fair course of action. My hope is that during the current discussions regarding copyright, officials can reach some consensus of what is just for the artist as well as the researcher and include in their decision some specific language regarding public space.

We, as scholars, must voice our concerns and opinions when our elected officials bring copyright issues forth for consideration. However, when we voice our concerns, they must be framed in a context that not only expresses our wishes but also addresses how what we desire may affect the artist or culture bearer. This, at best, demonstrates not only our concern for our own interests, but for the culture and most importantly, the people we study. I also suggest, for those of us who are fortunate enough to attend or work at a university with a law program or law school, that we begin a dialogue with law professors where we ask their assistance with clarifying our own understandings of copyright law and with explaining the finer points to our students. Although I have not found relief for my angst over this copyright issue, I offer my account as an additional thread in the discourse concerning researchers and copyright law.

Notes:
2 Ibid.
4 U.S. Copyright Law §107.
5 U.S. Copyright Law §106.
Meredith Aska McBride, Facebook manager + contributor

Meredith has just finished her first year as a graduate student in ethnomusicology at the University of Chicago. Much of her research lies at the intersection between the history of American Jewish popular music and critical whiteness studies; she is also interested in Irish-American popular music and contemporary music education, especially children's European classical music education in the United States. Meredith is a violinist and violist and an active teacher of both instruments.

Charlotte D’Evelyn, SCC liaison + contributor

Charlotte D’Evelyn is a doctoral candidate in ethnomusicology at the University of Hawai‘i at Mānoa. For her dissertation work she is examining creativity, ethnicity, and conceptions of modernity in the music of Mongolians in China, with a particular emphasis on players of the morin khuur (horse-head fiddle). She has been active in SEM as co-chair of the Student Concerns Committee, secretary of the Association for Chinese Music Research and former student member on the Council. Charlotte is proud to be a mother of two beautiful boys, one of whom arrived just prior to the publication of this newsletter! [CONGRATULATIONS to Charlotte and family on the healthy birth of baby Micah!!!]

Elizabeth de Martelly, contributor

This spring, Elizabeth completed her MA degree in Music History/Theory at SUNY Stony Brook, where her thesis examined the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality in the online fan community of a contemporary U.S. queercore band. She is very excited to begin her PhD work at the University of California Berkeley this fall, where she plans to map changes in American middle class white identity in the 1980s and early 90s (“Generation X”), examining how grunge music expressed and contributed to these changes sonically and ideologically.

Lauren E. Sweetman, editor, contributor + design/layout

Lauren has just finished the second year of her PhD in ethnomusicology at New York University. She received her BMus and MA from the University of Toronto. Lauren’s research is currently focused on the politics of Māori music, healing, and health in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Lauren is particularly invested in advocacy-based, collaborative research, and serves as the Development Officer for The Paradigm Shift Project, a non-profit organization that works to promote education on environmental and social justice issues through documentary film. In addition to her work, Lauren is a member of the professional drumming group Taiko Masala in Brooklyn, New York.

Thank you to Rebecca Sweetman and The Paradigm Shift Project (www.theparadigmshiftproject.org) for providing the cover photograph for this issue.