

Sound Matters Blog Archive (2014-2018)

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Jennifer Kyker - From scholarship to activism in Zimbabwe

Posted June 8, 2014



During the President's Roundtable at the 56th Annual Conference of the Society for Ethnomusicology in 2011 I suggested that ethnography is critical in sustaining a sense of urgency into the fourth decade of the AIDS epidemic. Turning to musical modalities, those infected and affected by the epidemic frequently sing aloud that which all too often still cannot be said, positioning ethnomusicologists to offer important insight into lived experiences of HIV/AIDS. Yet in the context of the global pandemic, producing knowledge alone seems insufficient, compelling us from scholarship to activism. As I observed in 2011, our discipline has long advocated that the music of all the world's people is worth studying. To become an activist in the struggle against HIV/AIDS is an extension of this principle, making clear that the lives of all the world's people are likewise worth saving.

Responding to HIV/AIDS through women's education

I would like to share a few words about my personal involvement in social activism in Zimbabwe, where HIV infection rates soared to well over 25% of the total population in the late 1990s. Over the course of several extended trips to Zimbabwe during this time, I witnessed firsthand the devastating effects of HIV/AIDS, and following a year-long stay as a Fulbright Fellow in 2002-2003, I returned to the United States determined to make at least a small difference.

Seeking to identify a response that would be meaningful, feasible, and familiar, I settled upon educating orphaned and vulnerable teenaged girls, the demographic group at highest risk of new HIV infections, in

the urban, high-density townships of Highfield, Glen Norah, and Epworth, where I had primarily lived and worked. Tsitsi Magaya, daughter of the famed mbira player Cosmas Magaya, offered up a name, the Zimbabwe Music Festival Association provided a start-up grant of \$3,000, and in August of 2003, I suddenly found myself directing a new, 501(c)(3) non-profit organization called [Tariro](#), or "Hope."

Educating girls, shaping individuals

At the heart of Tariro's work is our recognition that women's education represents a key intervention in preventing the spread of HIV; as the [Global Coalition on Women and AIDS](#) has observed, "Growing evidence shows that getting and keeping young people in school, particularly girls, dramatically lowers their vulnerability to HIV... Evidence from Zimbabwe shows that among 15-18 year old girls, those who are enrolled in school are more than five times less likely to have HIV than those who have dropped out." Yet in Zimbabwe, no child attends school for free, and the ability to pay school fees, buy required uniforms, and purchase necessary supplies is increasingly out of reach for over a million children who have lost one or both parents to HIV/AIDS.

Working with local headmasters, Tariro identifies academically gifted girls at risk for dropping out of school, and who in many cases have already spent extended periods of time out of class. We currently sponsor over fifty students, paying school fees, purchasing uniforms and supplies, including sanitary products, and making textbooks available through a lending library. Reflecting the power of individual voices and stories, a common theme within musical ethnography, Tariro offers students highly personalized attention. Further distinguishing our localized approach from that of larger, multinational aid organizations, we are committed to supporting students throughout the duration of their education, maintaining sponsorship even at the university level.



Pauline K., Tariro's first university graduate, completed her Bachelor's degree at the University of Zimbabwe in 2010

The role of music and dance



Tariro students with mbira player Sekuru Tute Wincil Chigamba, center left, and dance instructor Daniel Inasiyo, center right)

From the beginning, music and other forms of expressive culture have featured prominently in Tariro's work. For many of our students, music, dance, poetry, drama, and visual arts constitute important means of self-expression. In a society where HIV/AIDS is often stigmatized, these artistic modes help young people speak openly about the disease, and share their experiences as individuals living in communities deeply affected by the virus. These expressive forms are likewise ideal activities in a setting with limited resources, as students can engage in them at little or no cost. In the following video, for example, a group of Tariro students living in the informal, [peri-urban](#) township of Epworth perform an original song they composed about HIV/AIDS. The same group of students regularly wrote poems and staged dramatic skits dealing with HIV and related issues, such as child abuse, giving them a platform to publicly communicate a children's perspective on the epidemic.



[Tariro \(Video\)](#)

Tariro also offers students the chance to participate in more structured musical experiences. Every Saturday, our students gather on the grounds of Chembira Primary School, a government institution with the motto "The home of traditional dance."



Daniel Inasiyo demonstrates choreography for a marimba arrangement of mbira music

Under the instruction of Daniel Inasiyo, the school's traditional dance instructor, Tariro students join forces with the Chembira traditional dance group, learning to sing, dance, and play indigenous genres such as *mhande, jukwa, mbakumba*, and *mbira*, as well as the neo-traditional Zimbabwean marimba.

[Tariro students perform mbakumba \(Audio\)](#)

Many of the musical styles Tariro students perform are rarely represented in scholarly literature, or in extant recordings of Zimbabwean music, which have focused predominantly on mbira and related popular styles. After the demise of Zimbabwe's National Dance Company in 1991, these styles have also increasingly disappeared from public performance contexts in Zimbabwe, with the exception of a few annual festivals, such as Neshamwari and Jikinya. Through public performances at venues such as the German Zimbabwe Society and the Mannenberg, as well as a set of self-published field recordings entitled [Maungira EZimbabwe](#), our students participate in maintaining the audibility of these musical forms within the contemporary Zimbabwean soundscape, eliciting deeply enthusiastic responses from listeners.

Music, ethnography, and social justice

As [Jeff Todd Titon](#) has observed, applied ethnomusicology is more than a "process of putting ethnomusicological research to practical use," reflecting instead a broad "desire to intervene with music on behalf of peace and social justice." Engendering true social change is a long and difficult process, and Tariro's modest successes do not diminish the many challenges inherent in our work. In an environment characterized by macroeconomic instability, hyperinflation, frequent power and water outages, and political upheaval, we see a small percentage of our students drop out of school or fail their exams each year, and at least one of our former students has died. Tariro must likewise negotiate pronounced disparities of power, from the household gender relations confronting our students to the legacies of capitalism and colonization that shape our very existence.

Inherent within our work, the methodologies of musical ethnography have greatly contributed to Tariro's ability to navigate this complex situation. Joining our localized approach and long-term commitment to educating girls in Zimbabwean communities affected by HIV/AIDS, the participatory nature of Tariro's traditional music and dance ensemble, which offers students the chance to develop musical skills, form social networks, and acquire cultural knowledge in a supportive, peer environment, points even more explicitly toward applied ethnomusicology's promise in responding to issues of social justice in the field.

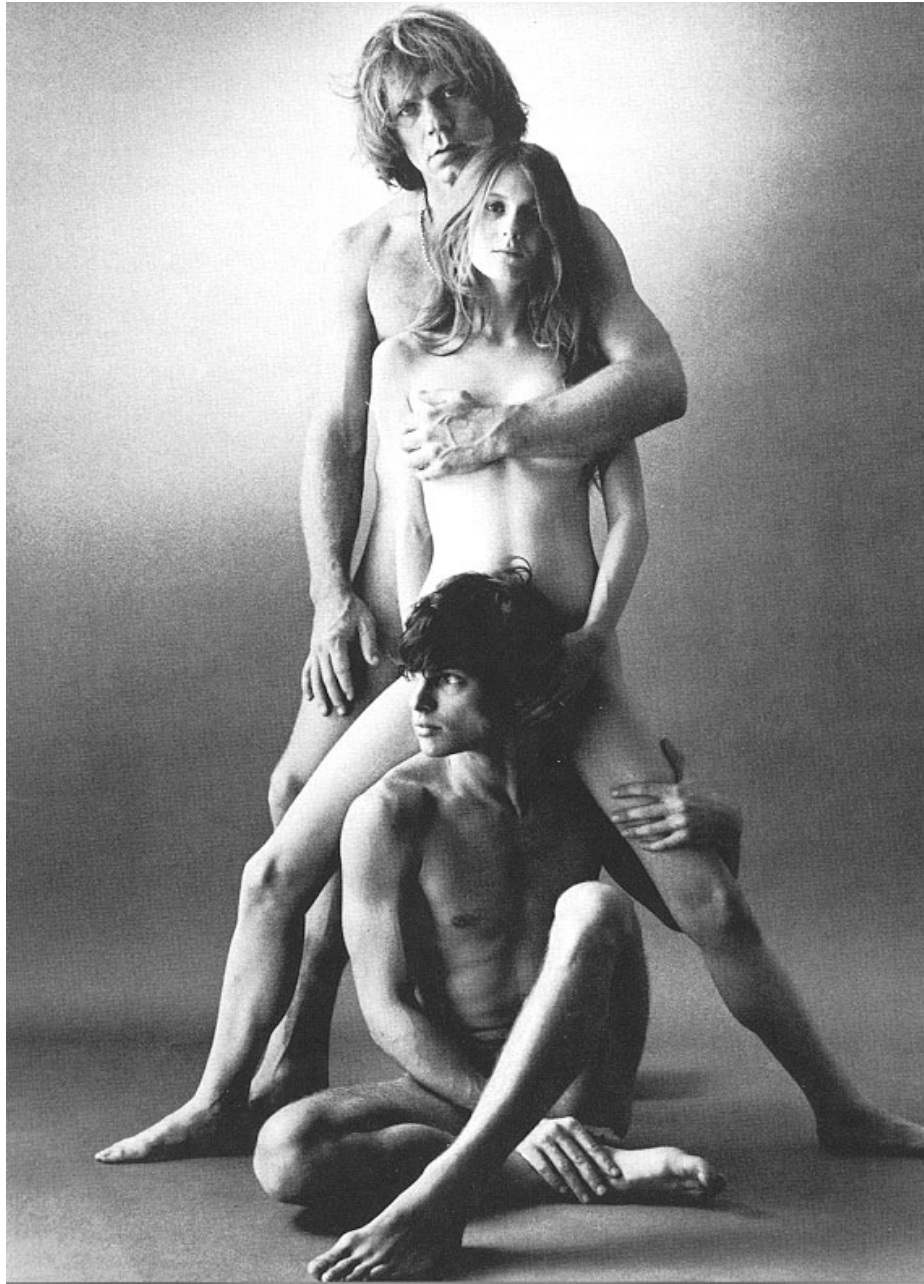
[Jennifer Kyker](#)

University of Rochester

[Originally published on 4 March 2014]

Elizabeth L. Wollman - Nudie Musicals in 1970s New York City

Posted June 16, 2014



Unidentified cast members from the original Broadway production of Hair. The [Kenn Duncan](#) collection, New York Public Library Digital Gallery

[Editor's note: This post contains numerous hyperlinks to video and sound files that enrich the text with excerpts from the films and productions that the author discusses. We suggest that you read through the post once without clicking the hyperlinks to get a sense of their context in the discussion, and then go back through to reap the benefits of these additional illustrations.]

The grubby 1970s tend to lurk dejectedly in the shadow of the glorious '60s. Certainly, the sexual revolution is most commonly associated with that earlier, more frequently romanticized decade. But when it comes to the sexual revolution's active absorption into the mainstream, the '70s trumps the '60s any day. The '70s, after all, saw the flowering of second-wave feminism and post-Stonewall gay activism and—following a series of Supreme Court rulings (Roth v. US, 1957; Jacobellis v. Ohio, 1964; Miller v. California, 1973) that made the term "obscenity" increasingly impossible to define—more hard-core porn than anyone knew what the hell to do with.

The resultant confluence of complicated, even directly contradictory messages about sexual liberation, ethics, and gender politics resulted in seismic social changes that continue to be played out in this country at present—and thus a great deal of cultural anxiety that manifested itself in all forms of mass entertainment.

In the film world, 1960s [sexploitation](#) movies and imported art-house films like [I Am Curious \(Yellow\)](#) (1967) gave way, by the turn of the decade, to porn flicks like [Behind the Green Door](#) and [Deep Throat](#) (both 1972). Deep Throat, in particular, became a hot ticket in New York City in the summer of 1972, when everyone from Jackie Onassis to Johnny Carson started snapping up tickets to see it in Times Square. Following suit, middle-class audiences across the country started flocking to theaters to see hard-core porn in such droves that the New York Times ran a feature about the trend, dubbed "porno chic," in early 1973.

Hard-core porn, though, was merely an extreme example of what was being reflected in most '70s entertainments. Like the public consuming them, films and tv shows wrestled with the decade's radically changing sociosexual mores. Movies proffered radically diverse, even contradictory messages: domestic dramas like [Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice](#) (1969), brutal morality tales like [Looking for Mr. Goodbar](#) (1977), and screwball comedies like the aptly-titled [First Nudie Musical](#) (1976) added to the national dialogue about contemporary sexuality. In tamer ways, so did tv sitcoms like ["Alice"](#) (1976) and ["Three's Company"](#) (1977). So, too, did the commercial theater in New York City.

The Off Off Broadway movement, which began in the early 1960s, was invested in making experimental theater that might challenge and help transform an increasingly turbulent nation. Because many Off Off Broadway troupes were actively pushing the boundaries of what was deemed theatrically appropriate, stage nudity and simulated sex—along with a wide variety of experimental techniques—had become faddish on the fringe by mid-decade.

But the trend didn't cross into the mainstream until [Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical](#) moved from Off Broadway to Broadway in 1968. A musical about youth cultures that strove to depict the social and political concerns of hippies and the new left unflinchingly and honestly, Hair was the first Broadway musical to feature simulated sex and, in one brief, much-talked-about scene set during a be-in, the full-frontal nudity of both male and female cast-members.

["Sodomy" from Hair \(Audio\)](#)

Hair's enormous commercial success spawned, on the one hand, tons of rock musicals and, on the other, many musicals with nudity and simulated sex (most of which also featured scores that drew, to some extent, on contemporary popular styles). One of the first, and easily the most commercially successful, was [Oh! Calcutta!](#) (1969), devised by the theater critic [Kenneth Tynan](#). Tynan envisioned his revue as a highbrow antidote to the tawdry peepshow or sleazy strip-joint, and spared no expense on it. A theater was renovated expressly for the production; its set design was state-of-the-art; and sketches were contributed anonymously by prominent writers like Samuel Beckett, Sam Shepard, Leonard Melfi, and

John Lennon. The groovy jazz-rock score was written and performed by a trio called the Open Window, which featured Peter Schickele in his pre-PDQ Bach days.



The original cast of Oh! Calcutta! takes an unorthodox curtain call at the final "dress" rehearsal in spring, 1969. Photo by Ormond Gigli

Oh! Calcutta! was panned by critics, most of whom found it too self-conscious to be erotic, or even consistently entertaining. But who cared what the critics thought? Calcutta! ran for three-and-a-half years; the 1976 revival ran for another decade. By the time Calcutta! finally closed in New York in 1986, it had been seen by so many people from so many places that programs had been made available in seven different languages.

Oh! Calcutta! set off a minor craze for nudie musicals in New York, which lasted through much of the decade. The low-budget Stag Movie (1971) ran across the street from Oh! Calcutta! for six months, picking up spillover from sold-out houses and helping launch Adrienne Barbeau's career.



Tod Miller, Adrienne Barbeau, and Brad Sullivan (l-r) in David Newburge's Stag Movie. Photo courtesy of Photofest

The revue [Let My People Come](#)—a raunchier, more sexually varied response to the rigidly heteronormative Oh! Calcutta!—ran at the Village Gate from 1974 to 1976, closing only after an ill-timed move to Broadway in the waning days of the city’s financial crisis.

[“Choir Practice” from Let My People Come \(Audio\)](#)



The cast of Let My People Come at the Village Gate in the mid-1970s. Photo by Vernon L. Smith

Even hard-core darling Marilyn Chambers tried to get in on the act with her own Broadway revue, Le Bellybutton, which opened in April 1976. Plagued with technical problems, the threatening backstage presence of Chambers’ manager-boyfriend Chuck Traynor, and the fact that Chambers’ talents did not extend to singing, Le Bellybutton lasted only a few weeks before closing.

[“Marilyn’s Theme” from Le Bellybutton \(Audio\)](#)

The nudie musical trend reached its apex in 1977 with the Broadway premiere of the almost obscenely tame Cy Coleman musical I Love My Wife, which tackled partner-swapping in the most conservative way possible, featured no actual nudity, and had only one scene of (goofy, clownishly inept, eventually thwarted) simulated sex.

[“Sexually free” from I Love My Wife \(Audio\)](#)



Jason Alexander, Lea Thompson, Vicki Lewis and Patrick Cassidy in the 2008 Brentwood revival of I Love My Wife. Photo by John Ganun

As social and political conservatism grew in the lead-up to the Reagan landslide in 1980—and as New York recovered from near-bankruptcy by gradually reinventing itself as a family-friendly tourist mecca—nudie musicals disappeared by the end of the decade (unless you count the premiere, in 1998, of *Naked Boys Singing* as a very late addition to the trend).



*The cast of *Naked Boys Singing* does what the title of their show says they will.*

<http://www.broadway.com/buzz/161047/the-boys-are-back-naked-boys-singing-opens-off-broadway/>

What is most striking about nudie musicals that ran in New York in the 1970s—aside from the many naked, jiggling bodies, of course—was just how conventional they were. Even the raunchiest of the bunch espoused the same basic messages: Human bodies are beautiful! Sex, regardless of with whom, is natural and fun! The seismic cultural shift that is taking place right outside this theater is not threatening or confusing or scary at all! In marked contrast with XXX theaters, peepshows, and sex clubs like Plato's Retreat, the sex that nudie musicals featured was simulated—never real—and was almost always packaged in a familiar, age-old format: the musical revue.

Like *Hair*, which spurred the fad, adult musicals encouraged mainstream theatergoers to take simple, vicarious pleasure in a sociocultural movement that was unprecedented and profound—and thus, for many, enormously confusing. Adult musicals allowed audiences to feel a little dirty, a little liberated—but at a safe viewing distance, in a controlled environment, with a groovy pop-music score and a lot of jazz hands.

While many adult musicals have been forgotten to time—just one more silly fad from a notoriously silly decade—they helped push the boundaries of the American stage musical as it has developed in decades since; there would be no *La Cage aux Folles* (1983), *Falsettos* (1992), *Rent* (1996), or *Spring Awakening* (2006) without them. Shows like *Let My People Come* and *Oh! Calcutta!* might not be as revered (or as regularly revived) as some of the musicals they have influenced, but they ran when they did, for as long as they did, for a reason. They were entertaining, sure, but they also helped educate and ameliorate countless spectators during an especially confusing and tumultuous era in American history.

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Ana Hofman - SINGing, SOCIALizing, SELForganizing: An insight into an engaged Viennese music collective

Posted June 16, 2014

It is the evening of 11 December in Vienna's 15th district, and I am sitting with Jana, Lejla, and Šarlot, eagerly awaiting the screening of a documentary about a unique community choir on the occasion of its fourth anniversary. We are in Brunnengasse, known as a migrant district of Vienna, at the [AU Gallery](#), which is starting to crowd with men, women, and children of all ages and various ethnicities, all of them warmly greeting each other. In this setting, through the documentary and a public rehearsal that soon began, I became acquainted with a most interesting Viennese singing collective, the [29th of November](#) Choir. Vienna is a city known for its music, and one can expect many different musical networks, organizations, and professional bodies. And yet the choir members, many of whom I met at the documentary screening, do not perceive themselves as musicians at all. Rather, they claim radical amateurism, musical self-education, and self-organization. Why?



Performance of 29th of November in front of the Ministry of Internal Affairs in support of Asylum seekers, 3 October 2012

An experimental sonic collective

Members of this self-labeled “punk choir” use collective singing to “shout” social problems, “scream” social anger and discontent, and “give voice” to those who are suppressed. The choir cherishes a diverse

repertoire including partisan songs, worker songs, revolutionary songs, pop music and folk pieces from former Yugoslavia, as well as the so-called repertoire of the “global left”–the most popular songs of various social movements ranging from the Spanish civil war to recent social movements.



[Die Arbeiter von Wien \(Video\)](#)

The choir was created by Saša and Alexander, both second-generation Viennese-born Yugoslav gastarbeiters (guest workers; a full definition is [here](#)). Its name was chosen to mark the founding date of the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, which symbolically associated the choir with both the legacy of socialism and the Yugoslav idea.

Initially founded as a short-term artistic project dedicated to the neglected histories of [guest workers from the former Yugoslavia](#), the choir has grown into a self-organized music collective with international membership and a strong dedication to self-learning, [street performances](#), and [flash mobs](#). The choir practices a strong inclusiveness in terms of ethnicity, gender, sexuality, language, and musical genre.

While from the very beginning the repertoire did not consist only of the songs from former Yugoslavia, as the Austrian members were joined by ones from other parts of the world (such as France and Ghana), it became even more internationally oriented. The members will say that they perform in “various languages and constantly expand the repertoire,” as stated in the promotional video [Bastards of Yutopia](#), which displays their goals and portrays their main activities–debates, rehearsals, and performances.

Bastards of Yutopia

None of the members have musical training or previous singing experience (with the exception of the conductor and most recent member to joined the choir, Jana). The internal structure of the choir does not imply fixed membership, but rather one that is relational and fluctuating. As a collectivity, it is characterized by temporal discontinuities–some singers reappeared after having been absent from rehearsals for weeks, months, or even years; others appear only at performances.

That non-centralized and self-organized nature in which music is a central link in new forms of organization, socializing, and decision-making is also visible in the fact that anyone can join the collectivity at any time and “everyone chooses his/her own level and intensity of involvement. Still, there is always a danger of transforming it into a more structured organization or disappearing,” Milan explains. The choir thus embodies the potential for sound itself to increase the ability for individuals to act collectively, also through the specific productive instability associated with the temporal nature of both the collective and its sonic actions.

In their undertakings, the choir members employ the generally rediscovered social and political productivity of utopia and the politics of hope. Particularly in the case of migrants from former Yugoslavia, it serves as an outlet for therapy and healing, enabling singers to legitimize their emotional continuity with the personal and historical past. The members of 29th of November mobilize the unique power of the sonic collective to promote idealism and believe in a better world as a “utopian rethinking of art’s relationship to the social and its political potential” (Bishop 2010: 3).

Radical amateurism

Could this singing collectivity in its very existence be a seed of a new society? Or, to put it in Angela McRobbie’s words, are these just glimpses, flashes, cracks, or moments within a landscape of capitalist domination, which entails new levels and forms of submission (McRobbie 2010: 70)? We should not forget that the potential of arts for social engagement has also been recognized by stakeholders, and contemporary forms of capitalist organization also demand cooperativeness, participation, creativity, and other practices of communal work (Gill and Pratt 2008: 19).

Yet what differentiates the 29th of November is their practice of radical amateurism with an emphasis on self-emancipation through musical self-learning, which is both a politicized strategy and a kind of existential experimental practice. The members share a common goal of resistance to the contemporary mechanisms of the privatized and deeply individualized, consumerist, and professionalized music industry by offering an alternative audio-social networking. Such radical amateurism is rooted in Rancière’s concept of self-education as an important vehicle of emancipation (see his [“The ignorant schoolmaster”](#)). Employed as a counter-response to market-led democratic individualism, the choir promotes the idea of abolishing art itself through practicing the loss of individuality as an attempt to argue an anonymous subjectivity that draws its capacity from the paradoxes of what political art should be in global capitalism.

For that reason, I believe that the potential of this choir should be considered in all possible experiential registers of the radical amateurism that it promotes. In their case the process is far more important than the outcome or impact; producing temporal socialites through music and sound is a contribution to rethinking the conservative idea of politics in favor of the little affective powers available in everyday life (Bertelsen and Murphie 2010: 139). The choir’s performances thus not only increase the capacity to act in the actual world, but also open up a wedge into an alternative ethic of living as a vision of a self-sustaining society of cooperation and solidarity, making room for new political forms that produce new distributions of power. This singing collective thus can be seen as one of a number of experiments of effective togethernesses (Stengers in Thrift 2008) that are currently taking place, aimed at disrupting given spatial and temporal arrangements and new political forms in this post-liberal moment.

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More about the choir:

FB profile: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/HOR-29-Novembar/165602634039>

Blog: <http://hor29n.wordpress.com/>

Short visual biography: <http://vimeo.com/51376030>

Story of Jana, the new conductor (in Serbo-Croatian): <http://www.transeurope-express.eu/jana-dolecki-kad-aktivizam-zapeva/>

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Her research interests include music in socialist and post-socialist societies with an emphasis on former Yugoslavia; music and cultural memory, music and gender; and applied ethnomusicology. She has published numerous book chapters and articles, and in 2009 and 2010 she was a co-editor of the International Journal for the Euro-Mediterranean Studies. In 2011 she published the monograph Staging socialist femininity: Gender politics and folklore performances in Serbia (Balkan Studies Series, Brill Publishing), which was translated into Serbian in 2012.

Rasika Ranaweera, Michael Frishkopf, and Michael Cohen - Folkways in Wonderland

Posted March 4, 2015

Folkways in Wonderland (FiW) is a cyberworld for musical discovery with social interaction, allowing avatar-represented users to explore selections from the [Smithsonian Folkways](#) world music collection while communicating through text and audio channels. FiW is built on [Open Wonderland](#), a framework for creating collaborative 3D virtual worlds similar to Second Life.

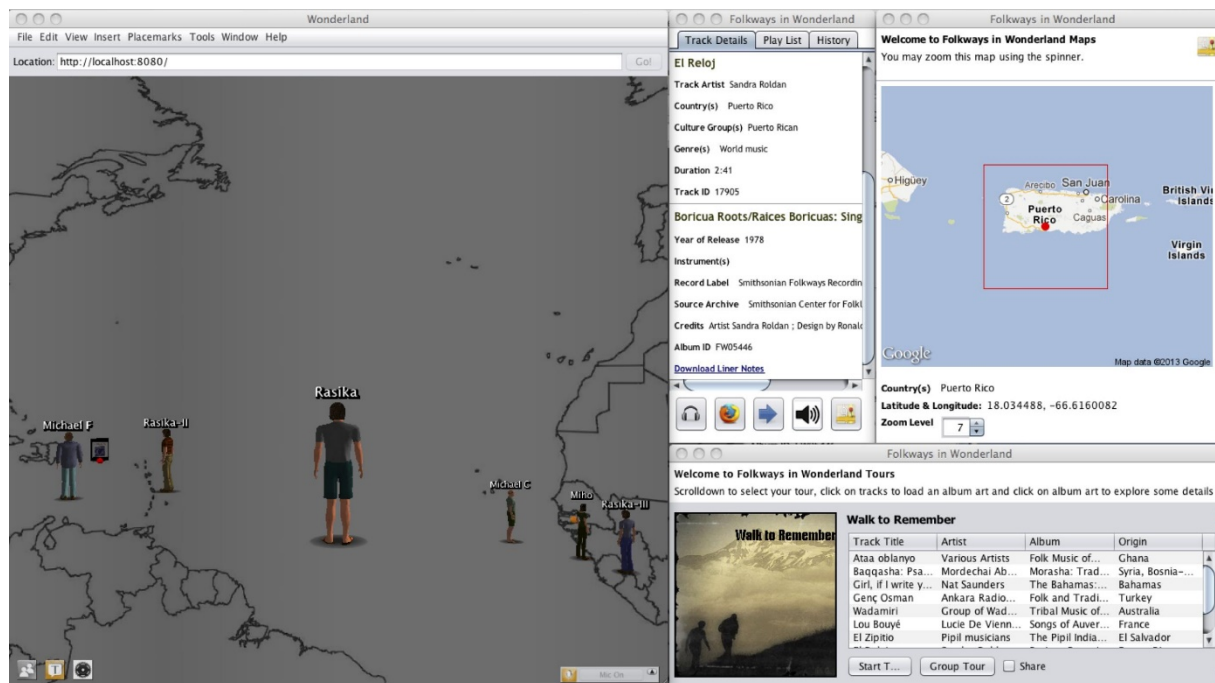


Figure 1. A typical *Folkways in Wonderland* session: In the upper-center window, the user browses metadata for the track (located in Puerto Rico) selected in the left window; buttons allow the user to view liner notes, listen via virtual headphones (excluding competing sounds), locate the track on the Smithsonian Folkways website, teleport to the track's origin, search for other tracks, or view track location on a zoomable Google map (upper right). The user may also embark on a tour, using a window such as that shown in the lower right.

Our musical cyberworld is called *Folkways in Wonderland* because it is populated with track samples from [Folkways Recordings](#). Since acquiring the label in 1987, Smithsonian Folkways has expanded and digitized the Folkways collection while enhancing and organizing its metadata, all of which is now available electronically. The Folkways collection thus offers a number of compelling features: it is large, diverse, global, well-documented, and digital. Furthermore, it is, in itself, one of the most important and enduring products of ethnomusicological research ever assembled. From the full Folkways collection, we have selected, encoded, and geotagged a set of 1,166 music tracks, chosen for aesthetic and cultural interest and geographical distribution, to represent a broad spectrum of world music. Out of these, we have selected a smaller number to be embedded in FiW.

Exploring Folkways in Wonderland

Our cyberworld music browser centers upon a cylinder upon which a rectangular map of the world is texture-mapped. Musical tracks are geotagged (according to location of performance, performers, and style), and visually identified by a placemark, a clickable sphere acting as a landmark. Once clicked, a track's album cover appears above the chosen node, a metadata window (displaying title, artist, album, genre, origin, instruments, and other track-related information) is updated, and a menu item (similar to a bookmark in web browser) is added to the placemarks list in the client browser. The placemark is also a sound source, a virtual stereo speaker display that loops the corresponding audio track, radiating throughout its nimbus and enabling location-aware multisensory browsing.

Multiple avatars can enter the space, listen to these virtual speakers, and contribute their own sounds (typically speech, but potentially music) to the mix. Avatars hear all sound sources (tracks, as well as channels associated with other avatars) within the space, attenuated for distance, and rendered with a spatial sound engine that emulates real-world binaural hearing.

Avatars are free to explore the cyberworld, using keyboard and mouse controls to navigate throughout the cylinder and in the surrounding virtual environment (including a building and a verdant park, suitable for casual conversation or more formal conferencing), while interacting with each other and listening to music. Wonderland supports multiple perspectives, including endocentric (1st-person) and egocentric (2nd-person) points of view.

While inside the cylinder, a user may click a marker to highlight a particular track. (For each avatar, only one track may be highlighted at a time.) The corresponding marker changes color from orange to red to indicate its highlighted status; the track's album cover appears above the marker, and its metadata is displayed in a separate window (as shown in Figure 1 top center and Figure 2), together with a Google map providing detailed, zoomable, topographic information. Buttons are available allowing an avatar to teleport to the selected track's location, to don virtual headphones connected to this track (thereby excluding competing sounds), to search for other tracks by metadata (users may teleport to a search result by clicking), or to purchase a track. Liner notes may be downloaded as a PDF file (viewable in a separate application).

Avatars can also join any of several configurable tours, organized according to themes (for instance, a tour might feature fiddling around the world), each of which automatically leads them through a sequence of tracks in a predefined order. While visiting a particular track its metadata is displayed; the visiting period is user configurable, and users can also elect to leave a tour at any time. In addition, two track lists can always be displayed: a playlist containing the complete track collection, and a track history listing tracks that have been visited in the current session. A simple text search function is provided to search across all metadata, generating a list of matches. Items appearing on any track list may be clicked to teleport directly to the selected track.

FiW is collaborative: multiple avatars can enter the space, audition track samples, contribute their own sounds (speech or other) to the soundscape, and also communicate through text chat. Nearby users can hear music together, as well as hear and see each other. Wonderland also provides in-world collaborative applications, such as a shared web browser or whiteboard. Thus users are provided with a real-time, immersive, audiovisual representation of the virtual sociomusical environment, together with multiple means of communicating within it.

When tracks and avatars are near each other, overlapping nimbus projections create a dense mix, continuously shifting as the avatar moves and turns, guiding exploration. However, in order to listen to a

particular track, an auditory focus function is available, causing other audio streams to be blocked; this narrowcasting feature is described in the next section.



Figure 2 (Metadata Display Window): The 'Track Details' tab shows song information, the 'Playlist' tab shows the entire collection as an outline, and the 'History' tab shows the tracks visited by the user. Other operations, invoked by buttons at the bottom of the panel, allow (in left-right order) exclusively auditioning a track, browsing selected track information at the Smithsonian Folkways web site, teleporting to origin of track, muting a track, and 'opening map window' with a Google Map (Figure 3) to provide detailed, zoomable, topographic and cartographic information. Clicking on album art brings up liner notes, which may include a score, musician interviews, and critical commentaries, besides provenance data.

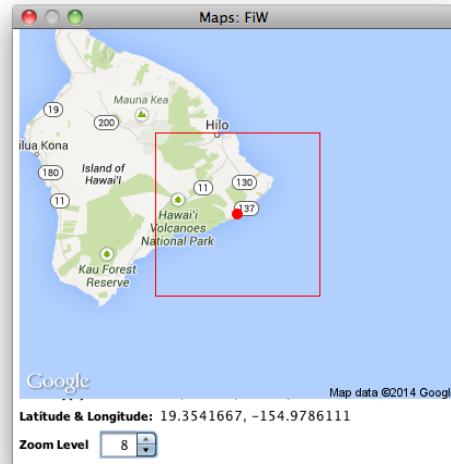


Figure 3. Map Window: Locates currently selected track's origin in a Google map.



Figure 4. Extended voice chat panel: List of users indicating current status and matrix of narrowcasting operations.

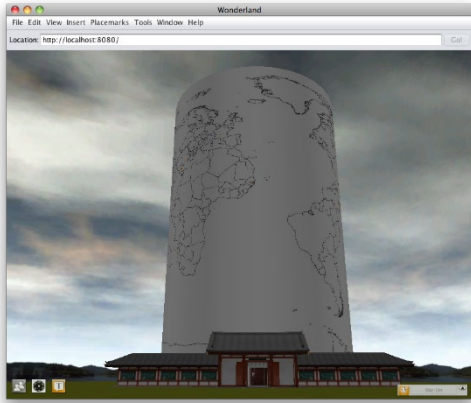


Figure 5. Exterior view of the cyberworld.

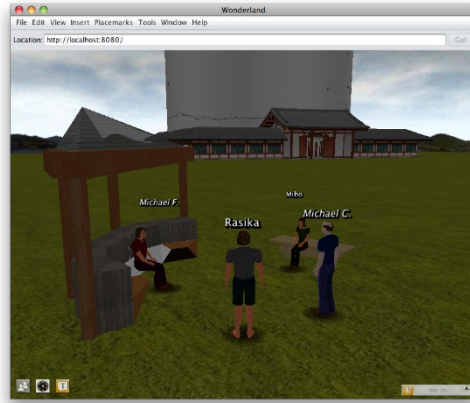


Figure 6. A discussion park allows quiet conversations among avatars.

Narrowcasting and Multipresence in Wonderland

While exploring the collaborative musical space, users hear a rich binaural audio mix, spatialized to source locations, whenever those sources (whether tracks or avatars) are nearby. Sometimes users may want to focus auditory attention on a particular source, or conversely may want to address only particular target avatars. *Narrowcasting* denotes a set of techniques allowing audio streams to be filtered for focus, comprehension, privacy, security, and user interface optimization in groupware applications.

Narrowcasting includes four tools, comprising two complementary pairs: select & mute (applied to sound "sources", whether tracks or avatars), and attend & deafen (applied to sound "sinks," or avatars). The "select" (or "solo") function reduces a soundscape by selecting which sources are audible in the mix; the converse is "mute", which silences them. The user can likewise limit which avatars will hear his or her own sounds, using "attend" (causing only selected avatars to hear) or "deafen" (the converse). All of these tools can be used to avoid unwanted cacophony, to maintain privacy, or to enable more intimate conversations.

Multipresence allows each user in the virtual environment to create and control multiple avatars (as shown in Figure 7). In this way, a user can interact at more than one position within the virtual environment. For instance, one may wish to accompany different social groups, as they explore and discuss tracks in different parts of the world, or to participate in a virtual conference while listening to a particular track, or to compare two tracks that are distant from one another without having to navigate between them, or to be guided passively through a tour while actively conversing about it. In all these cases, he or she can "fork" presence and locate self-representations at multiple locations of interest. Each such avatar "clone" captures a different soundscape, modifiable by independent narrowcasting options.

Representations of Narrowcasting Operations





Representation	Mute	Deafen	Select	Attend
Avatars with decorated names floating over their heads indicate applied narrowcasting operations.				

Table 1. Various methods for representation of narrowcasting operations.

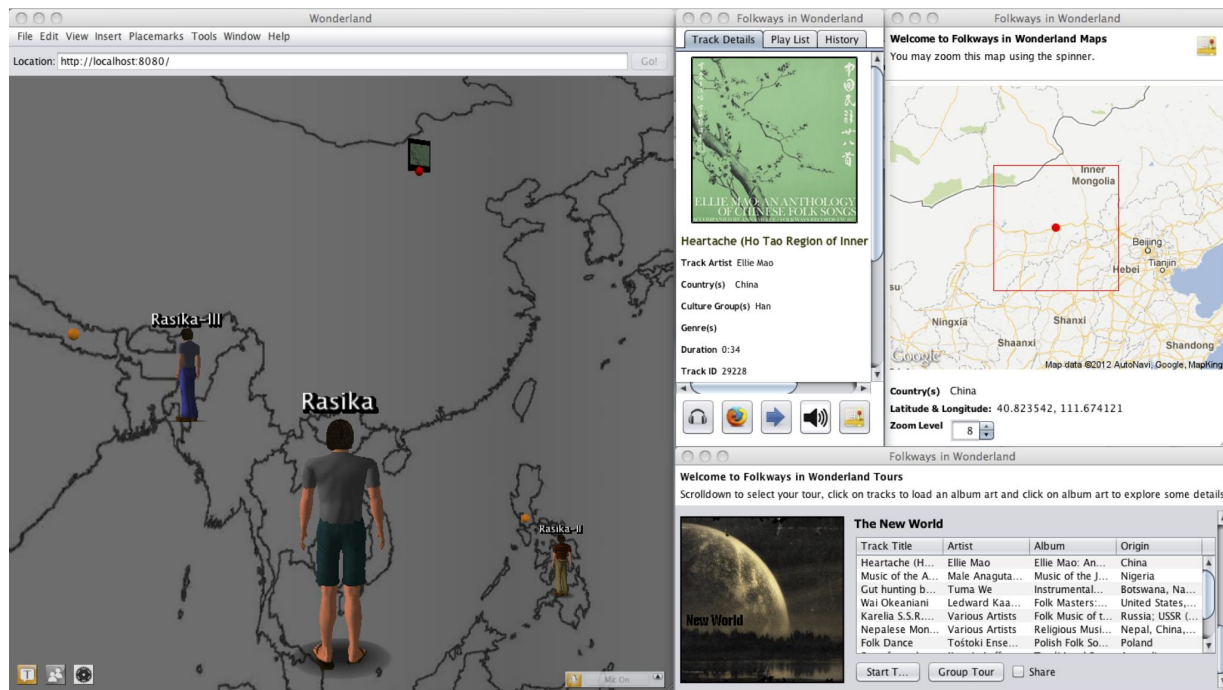


Figure 7. A user with multiple instances of self can audition music in different places at once. The metadata window (top center) shows details of the current musical track with respect to the selected clone. Narrowcasting functions can be used to control soundscapes and filter audio, musical, and textual streams.

Experimenting in FiW: A virtual laboratory for ethnomusicology

We use FiW as a virtual ethnomusicological laboratory for controlled experimentation on the social impact of musical communications in cyberspace. We pose the following general questions: How do social actors, as represented by avatars, interact in an immersive cyberworld when presented with a specific collaborative task (for instance, to locate an audio sample)? What sorts of social groups and interactions emerge through virtual world music interactions, and how do these depend on the kinds of music and actors populating the cyberworld? As compared to ordinary ethnomusicological field settings, the virtual laboratory environment offers unparalleled levels of observation and control, allowing us to answer questions about such dependencies in ways unachievable in the real world.

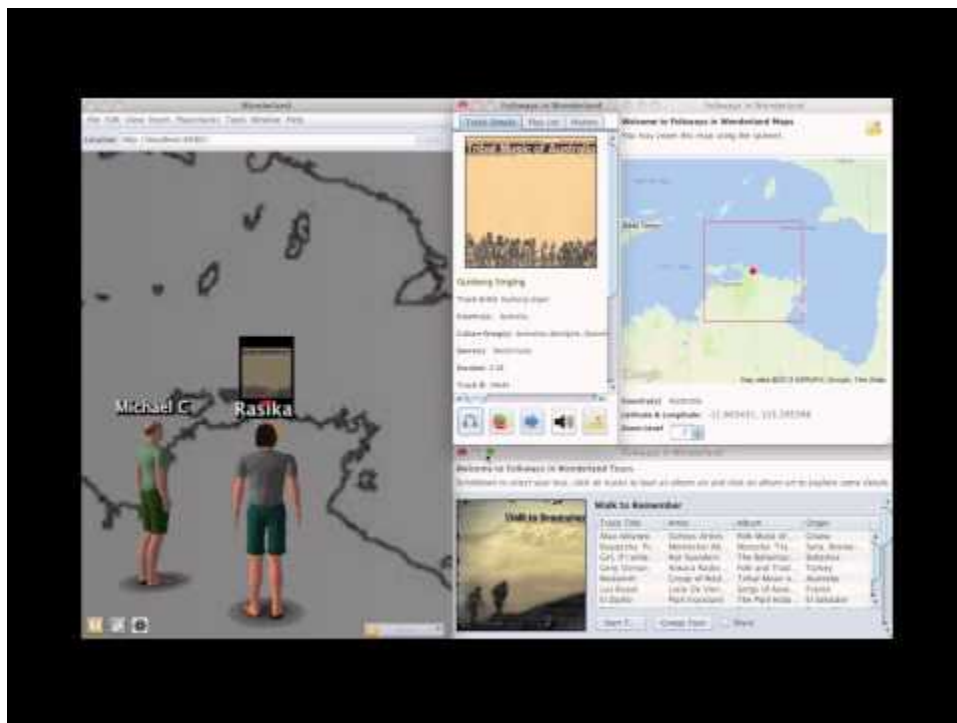
In particular, we are concerned with two primary clusters of independent variables known by ethnomusicologists to shape the emergence of musical community: the *social* and the *musical*. Here, social variables include the number and demographic profiles of cyberworld participants, while musical

variables include the number and kinds of music tracks populating the map. Variables within either cluster can be manipulated: the former through participant selection, the latter by loading different collections of music tracks into FiW. Participants are selected from among a volunteer adult population, subject to informed consent and the availability of a common language for communication. Researchers perform participant observation from within the cyberworld, embedded as virtual ethnomusicologists and entering into the cyberworld's virtual intersubjectivity, using multipresence to assume one or multiple avatar identities.

Adopting a more observational, bird's-eye mode, researchers may also document the total system from without, either in real time or subsequently, by analyzing avatar worldlines along with timestamped transcripts of avatar communications. Currently such transcripts are not archived, but future research regarding such close analysis might motivate such logging. Combining these complementary subjective and objective perspectives with associated qualitative and quantitative analysis offers a powerful new approach to ethnomusicological study, one of increasing relevance as the rate at which we inhabit such virtual spaces in our everyday lives continues to escalate.

[Rasika Ranaweera](#), [Michael Frishkopf](#), and [Michael Cohen](#)

Get connected



[Folkways in Wonderland \(Video\)](#)

Running Folkways in Wonderland:

- Click [this link](#) to open the server's Open Wonderland installation
- Then click the "Launch" button to download the file *jnlp*.
- Make sure you have Java (versions 7 or 8) installed, and that ["http://nelly.u-aizu.ac.jp:8080"](http://nelly.u-aizu.ac.jp:8080) is added to your Java Security > Exception List.
- Then double-click *jnlp* to download and run the FiW cyberworld client on your computer. Note that the first time you run Wonderland, it will take a while for the application to download.

- You will be asked to log in. Your username will become your name in the virtual world. No password is required.

Navigating Folkways in Wonderland:

- Click on your avatar, then use the up and down arrow keys (or W and S) to move forward and backward, or page up and down (fn arrow on a Mac) to move up and down (hold down shift to run). Use the left and right arrow keys (or A and D) to step left or right.
- Scroll to zoom in and out, and control-drag to look around.
- Change your view by using the View menu to select a camera type.
- Use the Tools menu to determine whether Collision or Gravity is enabled (if not you can move through solid objects or defy gravity).
- The Help menu provides additional resources, or consult the Useful Links below.

Useful Links

Project site: <http://bit.ly/FiWonder>

- [Quick Start Guide](#) (including Navigation in Open Wonderland)
- [Learning the basics of Open Wonderland](#)
- [Open Wonderland Home](#)
- [Smithsonian Folkways Recordings](#)

Publications

Rasika Ranaweera, Michael Cohen, and Michael Frishkopf. Narrowcasting Enabled Immersive Music Browser for Folkways World Music Collection. In *Int. Conf. on Computer Animation and Social Agents*. May 2013, Istanbul. <http://www.cs.bilkent.edu.tr/~casa2013>.

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Many thanks to folkwaysAlive! at the University of Alberta, Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, and the University of Aizu, for their support of this project.

Catherine Grant - “They don’t die, they’re killed”: The thorny rhetoric around music endangerment and music sustainability

Posted April 15, 2015

In a recent edition of [the SEM newsletter](#), Robert Garfias reflected on the issue of music endangerment:

[L]ike biological diversity, species are disappearing, languages are disappearing. And in a sense cultures are disappearing. Every few years somebody dies who was the last person who knew how to do something or other; the last person who did this or the last person who knew this tradition dies. And when that species dies, you can’t reconstruct it, you can’t bring it back. So I’m concerned about the things that are being lost forever. . .it’s terrible to lose something. (in Rice, 2014, pp. 7–8)

As the viability of music genres features increasingly as a topic for (applied) research in our discipline, it is important to keep a close eye on the way we characterize the issue. The words we choose—the rhetoric, the metaphors and analogies—reflect and reveal certain values and assumptions, and for this reason warrant careful consideration. Perhaps even more critically, they affect whether and how we take action against a perceived threat to, or loss of, music genres (for example by supporting communities to reinvigorate intergenerational transmission, secure funding, grow governmental support, or engage the media or music industry).

To begin, consider how linguists talk about the parallel problem in their field: the threat of extinction, within this century, to fully half of all the world’s 6000+ languages (Crystal, 2000). *Language endangerment* is a term—and a concept—so widely accepted that it refers to a whole sub-discipline of sociolinguistic research.

The rhetoric and the metaphors get significantly more uncomfortable than that. Some of them are shocking, like the terms *language death* (e.g. Crystal, 2000), *language suicide* (e.g. Beck & Lam, 2009), *language murder*, and *language genocide* (both Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). When these terms are employed, they are used in an effort to convey strong messages about the agency and urgency of the problem of language loss. “I cannot regard people being coerced—no matter how subtly—into abandoning their languages as anything other than a form of violence”, writes David Harrison. “It represents an erasure of history, of creativity, of intellectual heritage” (2010, p.177).

Arguably, if (as Harrison believes) even subtle coercion is an act of violence, then failure to respond where a response is possible could be considered complicity in violence. This is as true of musical as it is of linguistic expressions of culture. Communities can undoubtedly be coerced—however subtly—into abandoning their music practices, and power imbalances (such as those arising from the ongoing effects of colonization) are a major force in the viability of music genres too. In a TED Talk on endangered cultures, Wade Davis reasons, “It’s not change or technology that threatens the integrity of the ethnosphere [“the myriad cultures of the world”]. It is power, the crude face of domination” (14:50-15:54).



[Wade Davis on endangered cultures](#) (click for transcript)

Yet far from using terminology like *genocide* or *death*, ethnomusicologists still tend to be uncomfortable with even the rhetoric of *endangerment* or *loss*: it's too romantic, too colonial, too Eurocentric, too paternalistic (Grant, 2014, pp. 3-4). Perhaps the specter of "salvage ethnography" (Calhoun, 2002) looms large when, anxious about having such charges laid against us, we revert to talking about "change", or find other ways of speaking about (or around) the problem.

But while loss is indeed a kind of change, speaking in such terms fails to fully acknowledge that specific traditions are simply no longer being practiced, against the will of the communities concerned. Nor does it adequately acknowledge the crude face of domination, or the grief of individuals and communities at the loss. As [Ampush \(Lucas\) Ayui Chayat puts it](#): "If I lose my culture I'm no longer Achuar".

One kind of rhetoric critiqued at length in our discipline is that of UNESCO's *intangible cultural heritage* and the concomitant notion of *safeguarding* it. As Jeff Todd Titon and various others have convincingly argued, such terminology, while it has its uses, embodies and invokes a defensive and preservationist approach to music genres.

More aligned with current ethnomusicological understandings of the way music works is the rhetoric of ecology and sustainability (as reflected in the Garfias quote opening this post), which has been very useful to our discipline, as [Titon's blog](#) makes abundantly clear. Among other things, it reminds us that the maintenance of culture is a matter of future justice, of responsibility to next generations. Schippers (2015) argues in favor of the term *music sustainability*, which he believes "has the best chance at transcending 'tradition under siege' associations", suggesting as it does "a more gentle process" playing on music genres.



[The video for the SoundFutures research project](#) draws on the ecosystem metaphor to argue for the need to support music sustainability

But what of those cases where the process is anything but gentle? Where cultures are indeed under siege? The years of war and oppression under the Taliban; the [devastating ongoing effects](#) of colonization in Aboriginal Australia; the genocide in Cambodia (1975–79), when an estimated 90% of artists were killed and 50% of musical traditions were lost?



Master-musician Sok Duck, 87 years old and one of the very few artists to survive the Khmer Rouge regime, continues to make efforts to pass on his skills to younger-generation Cambodians. Photo by the author, February 2013

In these cases, *sustainability* may still be a useful concept through which to gauge the various complex factors at play. But categorically avoiding terms like *endangerment*, *loss*, or *extinction* downplays the harsh realities of force, coercion, violence, power, and domination acting on many genres. Worse, it may also fail to mobilize action in the way that using stronger language could.

What would it mean, for example, to talk about the *genocide* or *murder* of music traditions? Perhaps most of all, such language would underscore in no uncertain terms the agency at play in many situations. Anthony Seeger is one of very few ethnomusicologists to use courageous language like this to speak about issues of sustainability: in his words, many traditions “don’t die, they’re killed, in a sense, they disappear for a reason—they’re disappeared.”

[In a lecture at UCLA on February 22, 2012](#), Anthony Seeger talks of music genres “being disappeared” (from 1:16:50-1:18:16). Audio from [Ethnomusicology Review](#) (Vol 17, 2012).

I am not necessarily arguing for our adoption of terms like *music death*, *extinction*, or *genocide*. There are indeed problems with this rhetoric too. Some linguists argue that such forceful terms, applied to languages, “make it too easy to blur the difference between language shift and violence. This either makes the former seem worse than it is, or cheapens our moral language for talking about the latter” (Levy, 2003, p.230). Another problem with these terms is their finality; even if music genres are no longer living traditions, the existence even of a single recording leaves open the possibility of revival at a later date, as various recording repatriation projects have shown.

Instead, what *is* needed is greater acknowledgement in ethnomusicology of the reality, seriousness, urgency, and agency of the problem facing many communities trying to keep their music practices strong. Careful choice of rhetoric will go far here, because “naming realities is owning them” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, xxxii). In situations where it is more appropriate to talk about endangerment than change, for example, let us have the courage to do so.

Only once we ethnomusicologists fully acknowledge—in our language and in fact—the real and imminent threat to many music genres across the world will we be impelled to mobilize consolidated local and global action in collaboration with the communities directly affected, as linguists have done for around a quarter of a century now.

[Catherine Grant](#)

University of Newcastle, Australia

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Stefan Fiol - Encouraging dialogue: A new workshop format at SEM conferences

Posted April 28, 2015

I have long felt the need for another kind of forum at conferences—supplementing paper sessions and roundtables—that encourages more intimate and sustained intellectual discussions between scholars with overlapping interests. As President of [MIDSEM](#) in 2013 I had the opportunity to introduce a new workshop format called Ethno in the Rough at the Midwest Chapter Meeting at the University of Cincinnati. The idea was to create an opportunity for junior scholars (including students as well as pre-tenured faculty) to present research projects that were in progress and to gain critical and constructive feedback in an informal, conversational setting from peers and at least one senior scholar in ethnomusicology. I want to tell you a little bit more about what we did in the hope that others can adapt and build upon our experience, which was overwhelmingly positive.

Several weeks prior to sending out the Call for Proposals, I confirmed the participation of nine senior scholars in the region (the only criterion in this case was that they have tenure), and I included their names in the CFP as extra incentive for proposals. The CFP asked junior scholars to submit an abstract of 250 words addressing main research objectives, overview of research methodology, and challenges and remaining questions. The Program Committee then grouped the abstracts on related research topics (no more than three junior scholars were combined in a single group) and paired the groups with a senior scholar who has expertise in that area. As expected, defining *area* was sometimes a challenge for the Program Committee, but they did their best to match people on the basis of concepts and theoretical approaches first, and geographical area second. Selected participants were then asked to expand their abstracts into research prospecti of approximately 2000 words and circulate these among their assigned group members several weeks prior to the conference. Group members were asked to read each other's prospecti in advance of a 90-minute workshop, where participants spent approximately thirty minutes at a table discussing each research project in turn.

We solicited anonymous feedback on the workshop after the conference. One junior scholar wrote "Submitting to anonymous peer review is often deeply demoralizing! This workshop provided a low-stakes chance to get specific feedback. If I have the opportunity to attend another Ethno in the Rough in the future I will jump at the chance." Another wrote "Having the perspective of, and one-on-one time with, a senior scholar was golden. It was really helpful to have time to go into depth about issues raised in the prospectus, and to be able to flesh them out in a low-key, conversational fashion. I think the prerequisite prospectus idea worked well, since it gave us all a foundation to work with. Even though I receive stellar academic guidance for my research, it's still really valuable to hear how another scholar outside my committee but in my field thinks of the subject." One recommendation was to allow the circulation of longer research submissions (e.g., chapters, articles, or research proposals in progress) between group members prior to meeting.

I was initially skeptical that I would get enough senior scholars to volunteer their time to read prospecti and attend the workshop. I need not have worried. I was overwhelmed by the positive response of ethnomusicologists in the region, including Bruno Nettl (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Thomas Turino (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign), Adriana Helbig (University of Pittsburgh), Joanna Bosse (Michigan State University), Louise Meintjes (Duke University), Inna Naroditskaya (Northwestern University), Christopher Scales (Michigan State University), and Gabriel Solis (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign). (Thank you all!) A number of these professors welcomed the opportunity to have sustained mentoring opportunities with students outside of their program, and many

noted the particular benefit of this workshop to students and faculty in small programs or programs with less ethnomusicological activity.

Curiously, the number of student submissions for the workshop was low—only nine (compared with thirty paper proposals)—and we were not able to use the services of all the senior scholars who graciously offered their time. I tack the low number of submissions up to fear of the unknown and also a frequent need for students and faculty to present 20-minute papers in order to receive funding from their home institutions. (We did not restrict people from submitting two abstracts—one for the workshop and another for a paper presentation—and three people ended up doing both.)

Eventually, I would love to see such a workshop format introduced at our national SEM conference. Having greater numbers of participating junior and senior scholars would result in closer matches in areas of interest. The SEM Council has had some discussions about this, but it may take time to implement, given the already bloated schedule at the national meeting. At present, it may be best to keep trying out such a workshop format at regional meetings, tweaking it as we go. If this strikes you as a worthy enterprise, please spread the word, and if any of you have done something similar or feel up to trying it out, please share your thoughts and experiences!

[Stefan Fiol](#)

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Comments

Michelle Kisliuk, April 28, 2015:

Well done! I completely agree and have made efforts in this direction over the years, but somehow default always slips back in. A more sustained effort towards flexible format options is called for in the SEM Annual Meeting. Hope to try this model for next year's MACSEM at UVA.

Tony Perman, Dec 7, 2015:

This conversation obviously should take place beyond the comments section on here, but I agree with Michelle. As an attendee of the MIDSEM conference in which this was tested, it seemed a fantastic success. The students, at least, seemed enriched in every professional sense. Their work got better, and they had a chance to engage productively with a senior colleague from another institution, which can be intimidating for students and awkward for others. Beyond the inertia of institutional habits, I can't think of any reasons why this couldn't work at the national meetings.

Beverley Diamond - Patriarchs at work: Reflections on an ethnomusicological symposium in 1963

Posted Jul 27, 2015 at 6:49 AM

The memory of the symposium is still quite vivid to me and it comes as something of a shock to realize how long ago this was. (Robert Garfias, "[Introduction and Commentary. Reflections on the Symposium](#)," p. 2)

A valuable historical resource is available at [this link](#), thanks to Robert Garfias. I offer a few reflections on this resource in hopes of stimulating some other posts about disciplinary history and the ways to read the ideas of our academic predecessors (and thankfully also our contemporary elders in some cases) .



Robert Garfias

The document is a set of photographs, a symposium introduction by Garfias, presentations by prominent ethnomusicologists of the day, and transcripts of their discussion at a unique ethnomusicology symposium hosted by the University of Washington in 1963. We should cherish the fact that two participants and others of their generation are still active in the Society for Ethnomusicology. Presenters described their views of the discipline with particular attention to fieldwork. It was a heady moment in the discipline, one where there was a sense of a distinctive emerging disciplinary identity only a few years after the first conference of the Society for Ethnomusicology, and in the midst of the first expansion of academic positions at UCLA in particular.

The presenters were Mantle Hood, Harold Powers, Shigeo Kishibe,¹ who developed the ideas for the symposium and suggested participants, Robert Garfias, William Malm, David McAllester, Nicholas England, and Alan Merriam. Among the discussants were Charles Seeger, José Maceda, Willem Adriaansz, Max Harrell, and Tom Kassa; the discussion transcripts also include interventions by the medievalists James McKinnon and David Morton. A single woman attendee, identified as Ayame Tsutakawa—a promotor of Japanese arts who was married to George Tsutakawa, a sculptor who taught at the University of Washington’s School of Art at the time—is visible in the symposium photographs.



Shigeo Kishibe

Garfias describes the presenters as “the second generation of ethnomusicologists” (after Hornbostel, Stumpf, Kunst, and Sachs), a phrase that is accurate as simple description but one that has a certain aura of import, perhaps even entitlement. The import was noted explicitly by Mantle Hood, who describes the meeting as “one of the most distinctive conclaves of active participants in the field of ethnomusicology in my experience.”

At the same time, they expressed vulnerability to a greater degree than one currently sees at most ethnomusicological gatherings. It was a safe space, perhaps because they were all men, all somewhat established and feeling honored to be there. The vulnerability is evident in stories about fieldwork failures, problems of access, and other difficulties that they encountered. Malm frames his presentation as “confessions of an ethnomusicologist.” Garfias reflects on American assumptions about their own prestige in the world when he says “my arrival on the scene did not cause the sensation I had somehow hoped for.” In a couple of instances, there are admissions that they could only “feel” the music of their own culture.

¹ Japanese names are given Western-style here, with the family name second.

They were, in fact, mostly early to mid-career scholars at this point, except for Charles Seeger, the elder statesman at age 77. While Garfias was the youngest, all were in their thirties and forties except McAllester and Kishibe, who had edged into their fifties. Garfias notes the absence of Bruno Nettl but one could also look in vain for other established colleagues: Rhodes, Kolinski, Wachsmann, Richard Waterman or John Blacking. The selection was partly due to Shigeo Kishibe's original intent to gather Asian studies specialists, who predominate; Kishibe and Garfias then expanded the group somewhat with McAllester, England, and Merriam.



The photographs depict this array of rather formally attired men, seated at a conference table with ashtrays at every space, the smoke-encircled enclave of dark-suited men an iconic image of academic patriarchy. It's hard to read body language from the photos, although I can't help but observe that Seeger looks distraught with head in his hands in two of the photos (including the one above). There is an outer circle with lesser knowns (including graduate students perhaps, or ensemble directors such as Max Harell, who was not yet appointed at UCLA and, as mentioned above, Ayame Tsutakawa).

While audio recordings were played according to the transcripts, the technologies that are visible in the photos include, predictably, a blackboard, a few pens and pads of paper, those ash trays, some coffee cups, and print materials. The need for print—to show photos or transcriptions perhaps—was clear in the pre-digital era. Nonetheless, the magnitude of the stack of books surprises me: about three dozen, arranged almost like ramparts down the centre of the table between those seated on opposite sides. Some photos show individuals looking intently through some of the volumes. This physical and visual validation of literacy had parallels in their discussion.

What can we learn about their motives for studying other cultures?



William Malm

Malm is perhaps the most explicit when he says that he seeks to help cultures survive, perhaps foreshadowing current debates about cultural sustainability. Powers, on the other hand, overtly wants to change teaching methods “to try and teach the students [in other cultures] to think...Westernize them to the extent that they are perceptive on a more conscious level.” McAllester explains that he has “felt most success in the role of the preserver of the tradition, though why a stranger from outside should feel the call to do this understandably escapes the imagination of many of the local people.”

There are some predictable aspects to the symposium presentations, many of which are noted by Robert Garfias in his fascinating introduction. He points out debates about disciplinary identity, and particularly the methodological division between those trained in music or anthropology. Garfias sees this event as pivotal in staking out the oppositional ground that Merriam and Hood would occupy through the 1970s.

In spite of traces of continuing interest in questions of universals, the terms of and reasons for their different positionings were presented as quite rigid and stark categorizations, binaries in most cases, although Charles Seeger attempted interventions on several occasions to dismantle some of these: simple/complex, fixed/improvised, tribal/urban, literate/non-literate, sonic structures/culture, musicologists/anthropologists, insiders/outsideers. To our eyes over half a century later, various conflations of these binaries amount to highly problematic over-arching and totalizing constructs that are racist at worst and rigid at best. The entwined and porous processes of cultural production and reception that we more often focus on today would probably have been unthinkable for some of the 1963 participants.



Alan P. Merriam

I wonder, however, where our own blind spots lie. Do we yet acknowledge problematic concepts that underpin settler colonialism or recognize their traces in our work? I will also add some observations about issues that they did not discuss directly but referenced nonetheless: interdisciplinarity, embodiment, technology, and ethics. Notably absent are discussions of power relations, and for the most part there is little mention of international, national, or local events that shaped musical practices.



The assumptions that underpinned various disciplinary formations were baldly asserted and occasionally questioned. The most blatant of these was the assumption that anthropologists (e.g., Merriam and McAllester) should study African or Native American music while musicological approaches were more

appropriate for the art music traditions of Asia. Malm avoided stating this directly but rather indicated that he is a “product musicologist.” Powers reflected a widely held musicological view of the time, that in cultures with elite art traditions, music is separable from the cultures as a whole. He goes on to state that “a privileged ruling class” and “more or less independent theory of music” are marks of “civilization” and this is what “permits” scholars “to work in musical terms.” Merriam also veered toward a racist simplification when he referred to Africa “where you don’t tend to have a very differentiated type of society.” England stated more ambiguously that “the level of culture at which the people under investigation exists is the primary factor governing methodology in an ethnomusicologist’s work.”



David McAllester

McAllester, on the other hand, questions the hierarchies, with reference to the “century of dishonour” in dealing with Native Americans, and by modestly asserting that “I need more musical sophistication than I have” to study Navaho music well, noting in his presentation the many genres that Navajo have created, alongside their sand paintings, silver work, and rug weaving. He argues that “a tribal music may well be as complex as a classical music,” not that “one music is more ‘social’ or more ‘musical’ than another, but that the interests of the observer are likely to be more social or musical according to his background.”

Among the musicologists present, Powers has the greatest dislike for fieldwork, commenting in a response to McAllester that “when you started talking about the kind of work that you do, and how much you do, I figured I would spend the summer at the seashore!” Garfias recalls Seeger’s response to the discussion of such disciplinary distinctions: “Seeger—I can see him throwing up his hands—argues that we cannot allow this kind of scholarly anarchy to take over the field, one kind of ethnomusicology for one music and a different one for another.” Some argue that teamwork is the only way to do ethnomusicology adequately—a comment that was quite thinkable for American scholars in a period when such academic teams were sponsored by U.S. agencies but was unthinkable for those working in less affluent countries. Malm, for instance, believed that a single scholar could not do a good job on the broad range of both

musical and anthropological topics of relevance to understanding music. Seeger's response was classic: "Then we don't do anything very well, but we live."

A conflation that surprised me concerned improvisation, a topic that was inevitably tied to the validation of notation, literacy, and fixity, but was also used by some to hierarchize different cultures. Some offer culture-specific comments about improvisation. Hood reflects on the complications of group improvisation and the different degrees of completeness in scores for gamelan. He proffers admiration for the subtle way repeated patterns are varied. But his ambivalence shows when he asserts that his teacher "could not impart the fundamental principles which support improvisation."



José Maceda, Harold Powers

Powers quotes Hood on the relatedness of fluent improvisation and cultural competence, but is unequivocal when he states that "a single disadvantage in working with Indian music...is the necessity of learning to improvise." McAllester again tempers the discussion by observing that while Apaches improvise funny and sometimes critical verbal speech in the middle of songs, Navaho would be "scandalized" if they witnessed such a performance. He also questioned the print-driven emphasis on a "note" arguing that "Maybe you have a false reality, something that doesn't really exist—a note."

The sweeping assessments of improvised music *vis à vis* composed music, as well as examples from local practice that demonstrate the falsity of such sweeping assessments, are arguably echoing today. Improvisation scholars now more often claim the moral high ground, arguing that such responsive musical practices are vehicles for building community or imagining future possibilities. Some contemporary improvising musicians respond, as McAllester did in 1963, with examples that show the cultural specificity of their practice and the problematic nature of searching for universals.

While many participants were skeptical about the feasibility of studying sonic and performance aspects while attending equally to cultural issues, they had little fear of interdisciplinarity. Kishibe's historical work on T'ang Dynasty music was far-ranging. Given the fragmentation and scarcity of materials, he turned to such things as literary materials, court historians, and even books on medicine, aware of the difficulties of interpreting fragments found in these sources. Hood's well-known fascination with science is evident in his description of collaboration with cognitive and computer scientists.



Mantle Hood

In hindsight, one can see that other topics were prescient: Garfias' multisensory presentation of embodying sound, as he describes instrument construction as well as playing techniques for the "sound of bamboo"; Merriam's call for re-studies; Malm's acknowledgement of media as a factor that shapes what an ethnomusicologist might or might not choose to record; McAllester's concern with listening practices and his constant attunement to the perspective of the culture bearers with whom he worked.

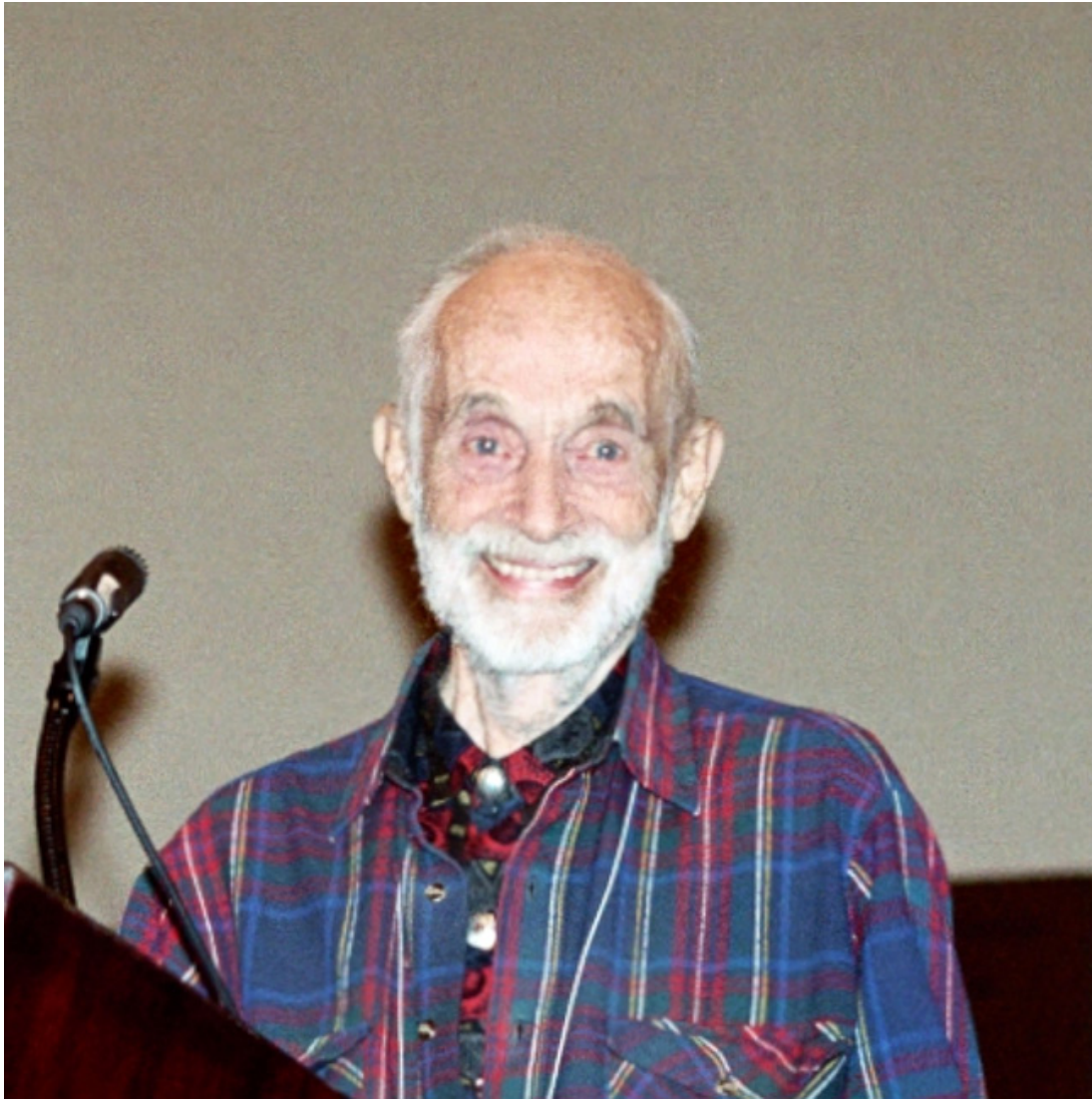
The shifts of emphasis in our discipline during the last half century have indeed been extensive and multifaceted. It is all too easy to think that we know better, rather than seriously exploring what made their ideas thinkable at a certain time and place. This fascinating set of papers should encourage such exploration. Of course it will be equally fascinating to see what ideas will stand the scrutiny of ethnomusicologists in another fifty years.

[Beverly Diamond](#)

Memorial University of Newfoundland

Matthew Harp Allen - Interview with David Park McAllester

Posted Aug 24, 2015



David McAllester in 2005

(Photo courtesy of [Alan R. Burdette](#))

Editor's note: In 2004 the [Society for Ethnomusicology's](#) Board of Directors asked Matthew Allen to interview his friend and former teacher [David P. McAllester](#), Professor Emeritus of Music at [Wesleyan University](#), on the occasion of the latter's award of an Honorary Membership in the Society. They met in McAllester's home in Monterey, Massachusetts, on 10 January 2005. A short excerpt from the interview appeared in the SEM Newsletter at that time; thanks to the efforts of Professor Allen, the full interview appears below (Allen's interpolations are in square brackets). The text has much to offer to those interested in the history of ethnomusicology and to those who—like myself—had the honor and pleasure of knowing Professor McAllester personally.

Matthew Allen [MA]: David, we're here, it's January 2005 at your lovely home in the Berkshires with you and Beryl. I've made this trip to speak with you about your role in the founding of the Society, your

impressions of what it was like to work with those colleagues, and what they were like, those founding fathers and at least one founding mother I found on the list of those early convenors of the Society. And I figured we could take it from there.

Fine. Very good. Well, I met [Willard Rhodes](#). He was a Professor of Music at Columbia, teaching in the opera school, and conducting operas, but his daughter worked for the [Bureau of Indian Affairs](#) and she made arrangements for him to go and travel around the country recording Native American music from tribe to tribe. And he did it summer after summer. And you're probably familiar with the Library of Congress series of records that was produced from those recordings. He visited a good many tribes, and he got more and more ethnomusicological as he did it. He was a very friendly, open kind of guy.

So when I began to take some of [George Herzog's](#) courses, Willard Rhodes was there and George introduced him to me as a fellow enthusiast of Indian music. So he and I were at one of the anthropology meetings in the early 1950s, and Willard said "you've got to meet this man [Alan Merriam](#)" who he had met recently. They both had an interest in Africa, and so he took me to lunch with Alan Merriam. And Alan immediately began proposing that we organize an American society of ethnomusicology. What there was then was the sister to the *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft*.

MA: And I gather that was fairly moribund after World War II.

It was. It was in Berlin, and a lot of the members were Jewish and had fled the country. And so this Society for Comparative Musicology had some beginnings here [in the USA] with Curt Sachs, and George Herzog, and Mieczysław Kolinski. And so there was also then after that, well, the *Vergleichende* did sort of collapse. And [Helen Roberts](#), that was the founding mother, I would say; she was at Yale, or lived in New Haven, and she had done several studies herself. And she was I think sort of a secretary of this Society for Comparative Musicology, and it, everything kind of came to a halt during World War II, and after the war, the European group regrouped and got organized with the help of the United Nations and became the, what was it, if I remember, I've forgotten now what its title was [the International Council for Traditional Music]. It's still going but it wasn't as scholarly as Alan Merriam wanted.

MA: Was it called the European Seminar?

That's what it became, I think, but it had another name...I haven't thought of it for a long time, but it's in all the literature. They would have festivals rather than scholarly meetings. And they would get together a whole lot of performers. And they'd all sit there and would enjoy it. And they didn't read scholarly papers, but kind of appreciations. And some of them were scholars, and a lot of them were not. Anyway, Alan had this idea to collect reviews, for one thing, and to do bibliography. And he wanted to start a newsletter which would have a good solid bibliography, properly done. Jaap Kunst had produced something that he was calling *Ethno-musicology*, with a hyphen, that had some bibliography that were not...they were a bit casual. And Alan thought we could do better than that. And not only have bibliographies, but articles. So it began as that newsletter. And the idea was to get together whoever we could find who was interested in the United States and abroad, which really meant mostly Europe. And start with a newsletter and go on to a journal. And all of that I guess is right in that issue [issue #1 of the SEM Newsletter].

But to get to the personalities of the people; Oh, after we had that meeting, Willard and I—and Merriam—went to New Haven where the American Musicological Society was having a meeting, to talk to [Charlie Seeger](#). Because he wrote their, their organizing, he did their constitution and all the ins and outs, and had talked about this idea. And thought it would be a good idea. So we hunted him down at that meeting and broached the idea to him. So we were the four, then. And it was really Willard and Merriam who knew the field, somewhat; knew the people in Europe as well. And I was just fresh out of graduate school (laughs), at Wesleyan. But I guess I had published *Peyote music* (1949), and that made me one of the few people who had published anything in the field at that time. So, we got organized and we asked ...I guess it was, we didn't have a president...We had...I forget what; Alan was the organizer, and I just was doing...body work with the newsletter and subscriptions. We charged \$2 a year.

MA: The first Newsletter says “we don’t have any financial obligation at this time”, but by about Newsletter 6 it was \$2.

Is that it? (laughs) Oh I see; so we let them in easy. And Charlie was his imperious self, giving off ideas, and really organizing it. And Willard was the genial, friend of everybody. And Alan was the scientist. As he wrote in his *Anthropology of music*, ethnomusicology was going to be sciencing about a humanity. I always chuckled over that phrase (laughs). To call music “a humanity”. But, he had the *American anthropologist* [journal] sort of as his model, I think, in his mind. I remember on the way up Willard and I started singing some Indian songs; we’d hooked a ride with somebody who was going to those meetings, from Philadelphia, I think. Wherever it was, we drove to New Haven. And as we drove along, Willard and I started singing some Indian songs that we both knew, and Alan said, “Oh, do you have to sing?” (laughs) We were threatening his scientific stance. Though he studied drumming himself, but I don’t think he did African drumming in public. He was a very good jazz player, much interested in jazz, went to a lot of jazz concerts, wrote about jazz in his books.

MA: While we’re on the subject of Merriam’s scientific emphasis, I was struck in the reports from the field in the first Newsletter, how consistently the things that were reported on were, well, this person has been in this place for this long, and they’ve brought back this many reels of this kind of tape, taken on that kind of tape recorder (David laughs). That seemed to be the real stuff, right? They never announced it but the implicit assumption seems to be that, now they’ve brought it back to the laboratory and they’ll get to work on analyzing it. Is that an impression that that’s really the emphasis that was in people’s minds at that time?

Well it was in Alan’s, certainly. But Willard and I both loved the music, and I think Charlie Seeger was more literary, perhaps, than scientific. But Alan used to say there are different kinds of interpretations. One is the folk interpretation, and that’s what the people who make the music think it’s about, then there’s the scientific interpretation, that’s the scientific view of what the music really is. So he gave us a good impetus on being factual, and he and his students did, but many of them were jazz performers and had a special interest in Africa. He and Richard Waterman were both at Northwestern. They were students of Melville Herskovits. Herskovits, I don’t know what his musical background was, but he certainly did encourage musical study. He had been a student of Franz Boas, and Boas was the first anthropologist to sort of realize that music too is a part of culture.

At Harvard, where I did my undergraduate work, it was not a part of ethnology. They knew that I was singing Indian songs that I’d gotten out of books, and that I had an interest in Indian music, but it never occurred to anybody there that I might make a career studying American Indian music. Alice Fletcher worked out of the Peabody Museum collecting...Pawnee, was it? The Hocko...yes I think it was. Anyway, there were these well-to-do Boston ladies who took an interest in Indians and helped them, represented them in Congress at hearings on Indian land claims and things like that. So they were active there, but it was not a thing for anthropologists, not at Harvard.

MA: If you might back up just a little bit there, how did it come to be that you ended up singing Indian songs out of books? Where did your own interest come from?

Oh well—I am part Naragansett. That is, my grandmother’s grandmother’s grandmother was a Naragansett, according to our family tradition. And I have a grand-niece who has found the name of that woman, just lately, with the advantages of the Internet. We knew what the relationship was, but we didn’t know anything more about her except that my grandmother, at her grandmother’s house, saw an oil painting of this woman—her grandmother’s grandmother. But that got me interested in Indians. And then I read the books of Ernest Thompson Seton. Is that anyone you ever heard of?

MA: No.

Well, a lot of people knew about him in the days of my youth. And he brought out something called the Birch Bark Library, and he was a naturalist. But he collected a lot of...he didn't record Indian music himself, but in his books he included the songs that Alice Fletcher and [Frances Densmore](#) had collected, and some others too. He had something called the Wood Crafters League, which was a rival of the Boy Scouts of America at that time. And then when World War I came along, Seton protested getting into the war, and became very unpopular. And Baden Powell in England who was starting up the Boy Scouts, was very much *for* the war and gave the Boy Scouts the sort of semi-militaristic qualities that some aspects of scouting have retained.

So these [Seton's works] were very appreciative of what Indians knew, how much knowledge they really had about their world. And one whole section was on philosophy, the philosophy of the red man. All of these things I ate up. And so I discovered that a lot of people came into anthropology having had a boyhood experience of Ernest Thompson Seton. I was at a gathering of anthropologists at Yale after I came to Wesleyan. And one of the Yale anthropologists said he had been at a meeting, where somebody raised the question, how many of you people have read Ernest Thompson Seton? And most of them had, and he had. It's kind of interesting. I don't think he ever gets mentioned in our ethnomusicology these days. Because he just printed the work of other people as far as Indians went.

MA: So he published some of the translations of Frances Densmore, for example?

Yes. So I learned some of those; those are what I was singing. I really got started on some pretty good people, actually.

And Frances Densmore became our honorary president when we organized as a society, about 1953. Willard knew her and called her up. We were at some anthropology meetings at Boston at that time. And after, she would be president, she said. She said as long as she didn't have to go anywhere or do anything, she didn't mind being an honorary president (laughs). So those were the personalities that we had, and... have you seen the book by Ann Pescatello, *Charles Seeger: A life in American music*? She's a historian, and she and Bonnie Wade knew Charlie very well, visited him every year, and knew the rest of the family too, but it was Charlie they were interested in. And Ann wrote this history which is a very interesting thing, about the whole Seeger family, but particularly Charlie, the influences that made the man. I think he was a father figure to them, they saw him whenever they could.

So, in that group of four, Charlie was the great musicologist; Willard and I were almost bystanders; and Alan was the driving force in making the Journal the way it was in the beginning. And I remember further along in the years, Charlie Seeger said in one of his talks to the Society, "Of course Alan is our scientist, and what David brings is love!" (laughs)

I think he was referring to my Quakerism. I became a Quaker shortly before World War II because I knew I was going to be a conscientious objector and I had begun to attend the Friends Meeting in New York. I used to sing in St. George's Episcopal church choir, across the street from the 15th Street Quaker Meeting, and I used to see the Quakers coming out of Quaker meeting as we came out of St. George's church, and I wished I was there! Because the pronouncements I was seeing from them as World War II began to loom on the horizon were just what was in my mind. So I finally did quit the choir and became Quaker. It took a while. They were getting lots of people who wanted to be Quakers as they saw the war coming on. In the early years before the war, there were full-page ads by the American Friends Service Committee and other pacifist organizations, protesting the movement we were going in. There was a very strong pacifist movement.

There was an Oxford oath, started at Oxford University, where thousands of students swore that under no conditions would they engage in another World War. The First World War did not make the world safe for democracy or anybody else, and they could see the beginnings of it. There was a movement, what was it called—The Veterans of Future Wars, among students at Harvard. One of my classmates at Harvard was Rolf Kaltenborn, whose father was a well-known commentator on the radio. As the war clouds were

gathering, he had a lot to say about international relations. Rolf was the commander of the Veterans of Future Wars. And he would begin his speeches with “Buddies!” and the females in the group were “Future gold star mothers!” And the Oxford oath was afloat at Harvard, and Susan and I joined it when it came. But many of our contemporaries after Pearl Harbor changed their minds, but we didn’t.

But to get back to personalities in the Society. I got to know Helen Roberts quite well. I would visit her when I came to Wesleyan, because she was just down the road in New Haven. She was a well-to-do lady, and she had a beautiful greenhouse full of orchids, which was one of her primary interests. And she had lots of memories of George, I think George Herzog may have...let’s see; he knew Edward Sapir, and Sapir was at Yale, and I think she knew of course Charlie Seeger in the Society for Comparative Musicology, and she was a little bitter that when that was disbanded, they left her with all the cleaning up after them.

MA: What was there to clean up, David?

Well, to take care of the finances, and the records, and whatever there was left.

MA: The Newsletter said a couple of hundred dollars was left over, which was then used to start the new Society.

I guess so, and maybe we got that from her.

But one of the big financial aids in getting the Society started was Wesleyan University. Wesleyan had a financial advisor, who persuaded them to put most of their endowment into purchasing the American Educational Press [in 1949], that published things like *My weekly reader*. And that was bought by school children all over the country. And suddenly Wesleyan became quite wealthy. In fact we found that owning the American Educational Press was more than we could handle; it was the dog beginning to wag the tail of Wesleyan. Then Xerox bought that from us for something like 400,000 shares of Xerox stock, which was just beginning to skyrocket. So suddenly we were a very wealthy university. [Wesleyan] President Butterfield sent notes to the different departments, saying, “Can you think of unusual experimental areas of teaching and studying that we can undertake here that haven’t been thought of before—the more expensive the better?” (laughs) Almost in those words.

So, then [Wesleyan Music Professor] [Dick Winslow](#) had the vision to say the direction the Music Department could go in would be ethnomusicology, but we had better be prepared to turn into a very large hard-working enterprise. We’ll have a great many students. The music department at that time was a kind of ornament to the college at that time. And maybe once every few years, somebody would do an M.A. in it, but it was not...it was just making music and it was preparing young gentlemen to have a musical side to their background. And to get out there into the field and to get a world perspective was not what the department chairman at that time had in mind. And then he retired, and Dick took his place, and it *is* what Dick had in mind. So we went out to UCLA, and visited their program, and got a lot of great ideas and picked up [Bob Brown](#) who was there. That is, Dick met him, and liked him very much; and I don’t think he even realized though what a dynamo Bob Brown was, in his quiet way. But he couldn’t get Bob out of his mind and we made him an offer and that’s where he came. And he gave us an impetus that we’re *still* moving with.

MA: David, why couldn’t he get Bob out of his mind? Was Bob showing an entrepreneurial flair already, or sort of a program-building propensity?

No, I don’t think we saw that; what he saw was this quiet-spoken charming person, musical to his fingertips, who had already been in India learning to perform the music. I think it was the performing that attracted Dick. That of course was the big emphasis at UCLA anyway.

MA: When you went out there was that around the time T. Viswanathan was at UCLA, from 1958 to 60?

Hmm...I think he was Bob Brown's friend already. I mean, Bob had met that family in Madras. I'm not sure about that. I know that they had Japanese music with Miss [Namino] Tori, and Indian music with Viswa and Ranga [flutist-vocalist T. Viswanathan and his brother, mṛdaṅgist T. Ranganathan], those were our first musics. And right away Bob had a bunch of students singing *sa ri ga ma* and performing, and one of the early ones was Jon Higgins, who was such a star in India, the Indians couldn't believe it.

So, by these circumstances, we were the ones who took off in the East, and UCLA were the ones [in the West], and Mantle Hood studied with Jaap Kunst and brought back the idea of bimusicality. And Mantle, I don't know why he wasn't in on it from the beginning with us. Maybe it's just so far away, or maybe because he had his own empire to build. But we quickly enlisted his aid, and we certainly knew about his program, and he was very generous to us and very receptive, and we attended some of the famous seminars that he and Charlie Seeger gave together. Mantle attached Charlie as a kind of local god (laughs) of the program at UCLA. They had a very happy relationship there developing their machine to do transcriptions [the melograph]. Accurate transcriptions were the big issue... and this was going to be a machine that did it without human failures.

MA: That's interesting—now, was that picked up with enthusiasm at Wesleyan to the same extent?

No. I think maybe we received one of their outmoded models, but we didn't have anybody there who picked up with it and got interested in it. But certainly, the performing emphasis was joyfully accepted at Wesleyan and still is there.

MA: And did Alan Merriam like the idea of this machine that could do these very scientific, supposedly scientific transcriptions? Or was that restricted to just UCLA?

I think maybe one or two places that tried to use it, but it never was really operable. It was a prelude to what can now be done with computers. But it was...And it showed certain things people were quite excited about, such as in some singing, you have a certain pattern drawn by the little pen on the cylinder moving around, and you'd see the vibrato, and then you'd see in some singing, some vibrato on that one, and that explained why it sounded the way it did, and kind of gave you a mechanical glimpse of something that was happening, that was an exciting idea.

MA: Well David, I've known you to be a little deferential about the founding of the Society and your own role, but I wonder if could you talk a little bit about what were your own ideas at Wesleyan, what were your passions? How did you want to see the Wesleyan program develop? What was really important to you?

Well, I'm trying to remember those times...Because it was Bob Brown who was bringing visiting artists. He had an insatiable hunger for more visiting artists of more musics. And for quite a while, Wesleyan was able to go right along with it, and the program got very large very quickly. I was...had started [in] the Anthropology Department about this time. And I visited the Music Department, as it were, and some of my anthropology students became ethnomusicology students, but I didn't really...resign from anthropology until the Society was organized, I guess. Then I really did move, well, when we built the new music building, I moved out of the anthropology building altogether. But for a long time the archive of the music program was in the basement of that little building on the corner of Wyllys Avenue and High Street.

MA: I remember one vacation when you were going away, when I emptied the dehumidifiers for you. It was in bad shape...

It was terrible. Yeah. (laughs) Well, then it moved into the new building. But in the old building, in a bad rainstorm, there'd be puddles on the floor in that room that we had. It was nicely fitted up, except it was in the basement of an old building. The Outing Club used to be in that basement. And they had it all fitted up with slab siding so it looked like the inside of a log cabin. (laughs)

MA: I was just reading an article on the web about you—this is where your essay on Coyote Song was published. It mentions that the collecting you did amounted to the largest collection of Navajo ceremonials and music in the country, evidently, and I guess that's now housed at Wesleyan.

Well, there was a recording of—George Herzog and a number of other people were hired by [Mary Wheelwright](#), who started the Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art in Santa Fe. She was a Boston blueblood: Mary Cabot Wheelwright. And she bought a hacienda on the Rio Grande, and she got to know a particular medicine man, and she recorded nearly all of his songs. And she hired artists to make watercolor reproductions of his sand paintings. And I think it was something like 5,000 recordings that she made of a number of different ceremonies. And they were on wax cylinders. That's what was available at that time. But George [Herzog] was one of the people who was supposed to be transcribing those, and never got around to it. But several Athabascan language experts worked with her, and they transcribed the texts into a proper phonetic alphabet.

Much of that is duplicated at Wesleyan. And all of that...where else did it go? I think maybe to Indiana, too. And the reproductions of sand paintings all went back to the Navajo tribe in due course. But I think *that* maybe is the biggest collection, on those wax cylinders. And Edward Sapir the linguist recorded a lot too. And I got into Navajo studies transcribing some of those wax cylinders. I worked for Harvard, with a lab assistant to transfer them from wax cylinders to tape. And I began transcribing them myself, and those transcriptions are at Wesleyan. And then she asked me to do some other recording. She was trying to get those published in some form or other. And I thought the wax cylinders weren't really publishable, for lack of technical perfection, full of all kinds of incidental noises.

So I took one of the earliest—the earliest tape machine that was available to the public, called a Soundmirror—out there, and re-recorded quite a bit of material for her, and for me, to work with. But she certainly needs to be mentioned as far as—and she *is*—as far as Navajo studies go. Her Museum of Navajo Ceremonial Art is now called the Wheelwright Museum; and much of it has been transferred to the the Navajo Tribe, to their Cultural Center in Tsaile, Arizona. She was interested in similarities between the art of the mandalas in Tibet and the Navajo sand paintings. She went to Tibet several times. And she recorded hundreds of sand paintings with various artists, bringing medicine men to her museum. And the particular [Navajo] medicine man she worked with is buried there; she kind of adopted him. A man named Hastiin Klah, which means Mr. Left Handed. And a good many of his recordings have been transcribed.

There was a man named Father Bernard Haile, a Franciscan friar, who went out from Cincinnati to the reservation and essentially became a Navajo. He learned, really, to speak Navajo, and he became a friend of Navajos, and I think he became a Navajo himself. He learned to think like a Navajo. He was right there at Chinle where...and he worked with Frank Mitchell, the man that I studied with for ten years.

So...all these things come together, don't they? She, Mary Wheelwright, was a very powerful lady. She said she never married because she never found a man strong enough for her. And at one point she said she felt I was her spiritual son, and we certainly got along together, did a lot of work together.

My tutor at Harvard—the Harvard system is that you have a faculty member who is your tutor, and your particular advisor—was a man named Clyde Kluckhohn, who became Mr. Navajo Scholar of those days. Nowadays people don't think much of his work, but in those days he was the new young person on the scene. He had studied with Freud, he had been to Vienna, he was a psychological anthropologist and a literary man as well. Something very different from the sort of explorer-anthropologists that we had at Harvard at that time. When he joined the Harvard faculty it was a moment of change, that he was...he kind of civilized the anthropology department. So he interested me in the Navajos, and pretty soon, we were...in his linguistics course, we had Navajo speakers, a family, so we could hear Navajo pronounced by father, mother, and children. And we began to be trained, and really quite good linguistic training for those days. Linguistics was just taking off as an important part of anthropology.

To go back to Charlie [Seeger], he was imperious as I mentioned. And somewhat arrogant. And he didn't, what's the word, he didn't suffer fools (laughs). And he gave a pretty high tone to the Society and its development accordingly. I wonder if anybody quite understood him. Have you read much of his work?

MA: It's difficult.

It is. Sometimes Tony [Anthony Seeger] has given some lectures and written some articles to explain what his grandfather was saying, and I'm not sure they were all that much more easily understood after Tony finished (laughs).

MA: I never saw him speak. I saw [Buckminster Fuller](#) speak, and sometimes I felt some similarities in the prose and the intentional use of language. I know that Fuller would make up words that would be just what he wanted to say, he totally would disregard as to whether they would be in common parlance. His idea was, well you come to me, I'm not coming to you.

He was at the Center for Advanced Studies at Wesleyan. One time a student and I went to a jazz concert and walking across campus we met some friends of ours, the Rosenbaums, who were on their way to see a lecture by Buckminster Fuller. The jazz band concert was over two hours late, the jazz band was stuck on the road. Finally we had to leave, and as we did we met the Rosenbaums coming back from the Buckminster Fuller talk. They asked us how the jazz concert was and we said well it hasn't begun yet. And we asked how Buckminster Fuller was, and they said, he hasn't stopped yet. He didn't show any signs of stopping, and they had to leave.

I showed him a picture of a teepee that I'd built with fibreglass and he got very excited. He said, "This is the basic structural form!" He loved ideas. When he came for that visit, he was staying with [classicist-philosopher] Norman O. Brown and his family and they said he never stopped talking the whole time he was in their house. He just gave off ideas. He was one of the first people I think who was hired by big corporations to come and just talk, because they knew there were wonderful ideas all through it that would be useful, even if they didn't understand them.

But he often loved to say some basic things, like, you have to know how much a building weighs, the way you do when you make a ship. And he was saying how much safer it was to travel by air, because human beings don't like to be off the ground. They build cars with very sloppy engineering, because it's running on the ground. And cars are much more dangerous than ships are, and ships are nowhere near as safe as airplanes are. The further you get away from our original topography, the more careful we are, and the better our engineering is. He loved to make pronouncements, and made a dozen a minute.

MA: Can I ask you to talk about one more thing while we've got the tape rolling? When we talked on the phone the other night you were telling me you've really had a second career since you left teaching at Wesleyan. Other things are going on. I wonder, how does the whole trajectory of the Society look to you? What seems logical to you about how one evolves in their tenth or twentieth year as an ethnomusicologist? How do you make sense of the way the Society has grown and changed?

I've been mulling over some of these ideas, since I'm going to be on the panel in Atlanta [at the 50th SEM conference] this year. I was a product at the beginning of Herzog, and I was...he drilled and drilled me in making transcriptions. And I was trying to make good transcriptions. And I wasn't seeing the music from a humanistic point of view, that is, that it was music of people. And my experience, once I got among the Navajos, caused me to drop out of anthropology. I dropped the scientific point of view to a large extent, and I became...um, an *advocate* of the Navajos, rather than an objective viewer. And I was certainly among those in ethnomusicology who began to value the... the views of the people who make the music, more than the value of the trained scholars who were studying it.

I also respected the Navajo apprehension of having their material misused, because they consider their music has a life of its own, and it's vulnerable too to misuse, it could lose its power. It's something...it's religious, it has a function. And I began to get answers to my questions that reorganized my thinking. And

so I've never written THE BOOK on Navajo music, for instance. Merriam, who wrote *Ethnomusicology of the Flathead Indians*, asked me one day, "McAllester, when is that book on Navajo music coming out?" (laughs) So I've written little articles about this song or that song, but I haven't felt that I ever knew enough to write *Navajo music*.

In fact I had my eyes opened at the University of Sydney in Australia where I was a Fulbright professor for a while. I gave a talk in the anthropology department, and they said "Why do you use the word *music* to describe what the Navajos do? Isn't it really prayer? Or magic? Or something other than...Does our word 'music' describe it at all?" And I just hadn't thought of that. And their word is not...they don't have a word. So if I wanted...

I had [prepared] a questionnaire in the early days: "How do you feel when you hear music?" You know, I wanted to get into what their feelings were. And the question came out in Navajo like, "Well you know there's drumming, and there's shaking a rattle, and there's singing ceremonial chants, and there's singing squaw dance music—squaw dance songs, and how do all those different things affect you? How do you feel when you hear them?" And the Navajos said to me, you maybe have heard me tell this before, they said, "I'm alright! There's nothing wrong with me!" It was a completely different answer to a question that I didn't know I had asked, which was, "Are you affected by witchcraft? Are you being bewitched?" I got right into a subject that I didn't want to discuss at all, which is at the core of music...or much of what we call their music. Because it's healing, it's dealing with witchcraft, it's dealing with strong forces of disharmony that have to be controlled somehow. And, yet when I see a book about Navajo witchcraft and sorcery and things like that, it upsets me because we have such different attitudes towards those things. Those words themselves are pejorative and condescending.

And so I just got more and more aware of how little I knew, and how much I did not want to be discussing things like that in our forums. So there's where I began to, as some anthropologists would say, I opted out of my profession. And I wasn't doing my duty (laughs). I was a traitor to my training. So you could say I got Navajo-ized, which I think I did up to a point, to the extent what I learned was valuable. But as I say, I resigned from the American Anthropological Association and published very cautiously, and kept out of some areas altogether.

So I guess maybe I found that I couldn't be a scholar of this material. I could be an admirer, and I could, well for instance I made kind of a career of the work of [Carlos Nakai](#), the flute player. Because that was a kind of Navajo music that didn't have all this in it, and yet it was Navajo music. And at first I just thought it was ridiculous, and then I began to see how it *was* Navajo music. And so that was one of my secondary careers. And I didn't see that I had any need to see all and tell all. That comes up every now and then among anthropologists; how much do you tell of what they've trusted you with?

MA: As someone who's just received tenure and who's enjoying very much for the first time the latitude to choose my next project, when and how I desire to do so, as you speak I'm thinking of the young scholars in the field who are of course driven by the need to publish for professional survival.

Indeed.

MA: What does one say to them in the light of how...you gained a certain reticence? I wonder what words you have for the young people in the Society.

(laughs) Pick your area. I remember once I was on a panel on field work; and Bill Malm was one of the people. And Bill was listening to me and some other people who worked in cultures where there's great sensitivity about exposing their music and religion to the general world. And he said, "I work in radio studios!" (laughs) He said "If I had to go and work with shamans, where there's all this secrecy, and danger, real danger, danger that you can..." [end of tape].

[Matthew Harp Allen](#)
[Wheaton College](#)

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Comments

Jeff Todd Titon, Aug 24, 2015:

I just read through Matthew Allen's interview of David McAllester with great interest. I imagine Dave gave many similar interviews and presentations over the years. Sixteen years earlier, on April 10, 1989, Dave spoke for a couple of hours at my Brown University seminar on the history of ethnomusicological thought, where he went over many of the same topics that are in Matthew's interview. But, sixteen years younger, his memory was sharper then and he talked in greater detail about the history of his own career, his teachers, his works (especially *Peyote Music* and *Enemy Way Music*), and the founding of SEM, offering information and opinion. After he was done, there was a question-and-answer session with the students in attendance. The whole was videotaped, and transcribed; copies are in the Brown music library, and several years ago I sent a copy to the music library at Wesleyan. I drew on the transcription of this event for my recent sketch of the formation and early history of SEM, which is in my introductory essay for the just-published *Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*. It never occurred to me to publish the presentation, and the question-and-answer session; permissions would need to be gotten, not only from Dave's estate but also from the students whose sometimes pointed questions elicited his further opinions and information. However, the transcription of the entire event should be available for research purposes from the Orwig Music Library at Brown, and also from Wesleyan. The original 8mm video of the entire session is with my collection recently transferred to the American Folklife Center, at the Library of Congress.

Ruth Rosenblatt, Aug 25, 2015:

I am very glad to see these posts on the blog about David P. McAllester. Through the years I have heard a great deal of this in perhaps other words and I enjoyed reading this interview, also Jeff Titon's words. Thank you.

Ruth Rosenblatt

Peter Cooke - Sound repatriation in Uganda “And...er...of course, I...we didn’t just leave it at that.” And a saga from the pre-digital archiving age

Posted Oct 5, 2015



Klaus Wachsmann

Klaus Wachsmann’s remark (quoted above) was made when a mother singer burst into tears after singing for him on one of his first recording safaris in rural Uganda in 1950. It was discussed in the two-part exchange (*Ethnomusicology* 59/3, Fall 2015, 475–82) following the appearance of “The audible future: Reimagining the role of sound archives and sound repatriation in Uganda” by Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Andrew Weintraub (*Ethnomusicology* 56/2, Spring/Summer 2012, 206–33).

It is unfortunate that the remark was omitted from a summary transcript of the interview with Wachsmann that Lucy Duran recorded in 1983 for the British Library Sound Archive, for Wachsmann’s treatment of the woman could well have seemed off-hand. Like Wachsmann then, I now feel that two further issues need exploring—which I hope may complete our exchanges on this topic.

Privileged information

In their response (p.481) Nannyonga-Tamusuza and Weintraub suggested that I had access to privileged information, though precisely what information they referred to is unclear. Certainly, much information that ethnomusicologists dig out from libraries and archives or record from informants can be described as privileged in one sense or another. The writers possibly had in mind information derived from the interview mentioned above. Since Uganda and its music is one of my continuing research interests, I had contacted the British Library Sound Archive over a decade ago and asked for an audio copy of the Duran–Wachsmann interview; it was readily supplied and I made my own transcript. Apparently the only reason

why the interview is not posted online at the British Library, like other interviews with ethnomusicologists, is because of a technical problem with the second cassette used. Click below to listen to the relevant section taken from the first cassette, where he recounts his early experiences recording in the field.

[Audio Clip](#)

If, however, as seems possible, the two respondents suggest that the information I provided about the singer herself was privileged, the interview itself contains no more information on her. However, what data there is about her has for some years been freely available online via the Internet (since 2009 in the case of Uganda). To discover it today is simple enough. One visits the Sounds BL site (<http://sounds.bl.uk/>) and enters the two words “Wachsmann lullaby” into the search box and one is presented with 18 results, all identifying lullaby performances recorded by Wachsmann and labeled as such. It is then a simple matter to locate the earliest along with the data that I referred to in my part of the exchange, namely the precise date, the place, and the singer’s ethnicity, as well as Wachsmann’s own index number (50.003); the page is [here](#).

Klaus Wachsmann’s collection: Safeguarding, copying, and repatriation

There remains one other issue that I touched on in my part of the exchange: the time it took between Wachsmann’s collection leaving Uganda and the repatriation of good quality copies of the recordings and indexes. I mentioned that this was an area needing further research and I was recently privileged (again!) to visit the British Library and examine Klaus Wachsmann’s folder of early correspondence concerning his recordings. It reads as quite a saga on the difficulties that could face pioneer collectors during the analog era of sound recording, especially those who lacked suitable institutional support. For ethnomusicologists young enough to know only the digital era, the tale provides useful insights into archiving problems faced—I suspect—by more than one of their predecessors. I give just a summary below, but I have attempted to present all available salient details of the narrative. Wachsmann’s careful preservation of much relevant correspondence relating to the collection allows us to learn the sequence of events that eventually led to the repatriation of his collection six years later (not forty or more, as implied in EM 56/2, p. 206). The gist of this correspondence is given below, though it does not provide a complete picture of the whole sequence of operations carried out on the disc and tape collection; anyone wishing to examine the correspondence in more detail will need to visit the British Library.

The saga

Before Wachsmann’s return to the UK in 1957 to rejoin his wife and children who had left Uganda earlier, Patrick Saul, the Director of the British Institute for Recorded Sound (BIRS), wrote to Wachsmann about the recordings he had made. Wachsmann’s intent was to locate safe storage for his original media and also to find funds and equipment so that he could make sets of good quality copies to ensure their permanent preservation and to return a set to the Uganda Museum, so he was happy to allow the BIRS to store them safely and he hoped then to realize his intent with the help of the institute, for he had no suitable equipment of his own.

This proved a formidable task. The BIRS was a small charity renting part of a terraced house at 38 Russell Square, Bloomsbury, London. It had few spare resources (equipment or staff) to cope with the work needed to be done on Wachsmann’s large collection. The disc recordings needed copying to tape and editing with the addition of recorded announcements to identify each item. Wachsmann was also concerned about the decaying condition of many of the recordings, which had been made on acetate tapes in 1954 and might need repair before copying.

In what follows, for S read Patrick Saul, for W read Klaus Wachsmann and for B read W. W. Bishop (Wachsmann’s successor as Director of the Uganda Museum).

May 21 1957. S (London) to W (still at the Uganda Museum, Kampala): He would be grateful if W could make available copies of the material to the BIRS.

Oct. 12 1957. S to W: He wishes to mention to his executive board W's suggestion that tapes be deposited. If it goes ahead they will need to give warning to the present occupant of the spare basement room that it will not be available.

Meanwhile Wachsmann left Uganda to join his wife and family in London. He needed to find employment and his health, which had suffered during nearly two decades living and working in Uganda, was not good. One must remember too that he first came to England as a refugee from the Nazi regime and had no previous permanent base in the UK.

Nov 15 1957. W to S: Sorry for not turning up yet. "We are moving house, present house is being demolished."

Nov 23 1957. W to S: "I am afraid I will be hospitalised from 25 Nov. on—for some weeks."

June 14 1958. W to S: "The Uganda government agrees that the complete set of the original recordings can be given to the National Institute of Recorded Sound provided that copies are supplied to the Uganda Museum. They will arrange for the tapes and discs already in Uganda to be shipped to the United Kingdom...."

Oct 28 1958. Delivery note from British Crown Agents for the Colonies to S at the BIRS: "Please receive 137 magnetic tapes, 1 tuning fork."

Jan 1959. W to Crown Agents: applying for £200 for cost of tapes for copying discs to tape at the BIRS.

Feb 3 1959. S to W: reporting the gift of a further £100 by the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust for purchase of blank tapes.

July 7 1959. Colonial Office to W: about request for funds for tapes.

July 20 1959. W to S: Saying he would be unable to "put my back" into helping with cataloging of the institute's [own] folk music collection. "There is first of all the problem of transferring Uganda stuff on tapes if and when the new tapes come to us and of course provided that the acetate tapes haven't given up the ghost recently."

July 30 1959. News of a grant of £200 for purchase of tapes for copying.

Aug 5 1959. Peckham (at the Colonial Office) to W: The government of Uganda has asked when copies of your recordings will be available and we are informing them that one set of the copies of the new tapes will be sent to them as soon as they are available.

Aug 31 1959. Crown agents: "Will be glad to order the new tapes as soon as it is clear what is wanted."

While in Uganda Wachsmann had apparently acquired a Ferrograph tape recorder to copy and edit some of his recordings and he may have brought it with him to be able to continue his work.

Sept 7 1959. The Ferrograph machine is mentioned. If the Uganda government requires it urgently he would try to make arrangements to obtain a replacement more quickly.

Sept 10 1959. Peckham (Colonial Office) to S: I am telling Uganda that the Ferrograph will not be available until December.

Oct 29 1959. S to Freeland (Crown Agents for the Colonies): Specifying: "It is important that the tapes are "extra thick polyester-fibre tape (quarter inch) on 7-inch spools type 102" (Minnesota) it is badly needed in order to get on with the copying operation."

Nov. 24 1959. Tapes were ordered.

Jan 24 1960. W to S: "I am down with flu. The tape problems have been with me ever since; this is an understatement of course... Please do go ahead with copying the new tapes as they are... apologies for the delays."

Jan 30 1960. S to Peckham at the Crown Office: "I wonder if the Ug. Govt. would consider selling us the Ferrograph tape-recorder that we have here and—if they require to have one—ordering a new machine from the manufacturers...for technical reasons there is some advantage in playing tapes on the identical recorder on which they were recorded, if the highest quality results are sought."

July 10 1961. Despatch order from Crown agents for LEP Transport to collect Ferrograph recorder for export to Ministry of Education, Kampala.

W now was unable to continue work on the collection.

Dec 19 1961. W to S: Could he borrow a tape recorder and microphone for editing and providing announcements between items? Could either technician help him set up the connections?

April 24 1962. S to W: "We would now be in a position to lend you the Ferrograph and a Cadenza microphone. Alternatively we could possibly get [technicians] Gentle and Snow to help you if you wish to come here to finish the announcements..."

Jan 1 1963. S to B (curator at the Uganda Museum): "We have not yet begun to make copies...simply because of pressure of work."

Apr 9 1963. W to S: Worried because he has had "absolutely no news".

Jul 18 1963. W to S: He would be taking up an appointment at UCLA in September adding, "This will give me the opportunity for which I longed for many years of concentrating on the recorded material from Uganda and of doing the work which still remains to be done with the tapes". He further suggested the BIRS lend the tapes to UCLA for this purpose, with UCLA paying all costs. In return, "The university would ask for permission to keep a copy of the finally edited material for my own academic studies. A copy of this 'final' set of [edited] tapes would also be sent to you so that you can provide the copy for the Uganda Museum"... "It is a matter of very great importance to me to be able to finish this job as I want it to be done, and do not see a better solution of my problems anywhere."

Sept 25 1963. W to B: Apologies for delay in replying to letter of Aug 17—his move to UCLA was responsible. Confirms that the BIRS, in whose safekeeping the material is kept, has undertaken to provide an unedited safety copy of approximately 1600 items) to W by the end of December. W will do the editing at UCLA, expense borne by UCLA. A copy of final tape and of the catalog will be made available to Uganda Museum. Meanwhile pending completion of editing S will try to get a copy done for the Uganda Museum.

Oct. 24 1963. B (Uganda Museum) to S: He hopes Institute can get copying done by end of year but failing that he will call when on leave in UK early next year.

Nov 1 1963. W to S: Mentions that B will be coming to collect the Uganda tapes early next year. "I have confirmation from the University [UCLA] that the cost of editing the Uganda tapes will be covered by them. So you see I am all set."

Nov 2 1963. W to S: A reminder of necessity for despatching tapes to UCLA.

Dec 12 1963. W (at UCLA) to S: Has S been in contact with Bishop regarding a set of copies? "I have authority to ask you to pack, ship and insure the material."

Dec 21 1963. S to W: "I am sorry that the engineer has not yet been able to complete the copying...He has been exceptionally busy installing new equipment and recording in theatres. We do not seem to have had

the Decalium back which we lent you. Can you tell me what has happened to it, as we occasionally need a transportable disc-player.”

Jan 1 1964. S to Bishop (Uganda): “We have not yet begun to make copies of Dr W’s tapes though the discs have been copied on to tape. I do not think that the tapes in their existing state should be copied; Dr W has not yet completed editing the tapes and if they are copied and sent to you before this is done they would, in my view, not be nearly so useful as the edited copies which Dr Wachsmann tells me he can fairly easily supply once the originals are in his possession in California.”

April 9 1964. W to S: He is worried because he has had absolutely no news.

Apr 30 1964. S to W: Sorry, unable to copy tapes and discs yet.

Aug 15 1964. S to Mantle Hood (UCLA): about the imminent despatch of the tapes to UCLA. “For safety’s sake we have made a complete copy of the collection...in case of an accident to the original tapes in transit to California.” He mentions also that he had further made a complete unedited copy since the present Director of the UM states that the collection is the property of that Museum and that he will be visiting us to recover a copy to take back to Africa. He ends, “I am sorry the copying of the tapes has taken far longer than we had hoped.”

He also wrote to B the same day saying he had been expecting B to call for the tapes.

Sep 15 1964: LEP Air Services to collect packages of tapes for flight to Uganda.

Certificate of shipment dated 9/16/1964—68 recorded tapes==23 kilos.

Sep 18 1964. W to S: “I am often thinking of the Institute and sometimes have nightmares when I imagine the difficulties you have had to battle with.”

Oct. 1 1964. B to S: “I am happy to say that the five boxes containing copies of the recordings of Dr Wachsmann’s tapes of Uganda music have now arrived safely in Uganda.” Thanks etc.

Nov 2 1964. W to S: “The Institute at UCLA tells him it wrote to you on 27 Oct asking for details of number and size of reels so that it can send him the proper number of metal boxes” and he adds “I can well imagine how overworked you are...”

Nov 11 1965 W (from UCLA) to S: “I have been looking forward to this moment for many years....The Uganda tapes are now completely edited, and at long last I can begin to think of doing the work with the material that I always longed to do.

The major debt is owed to you. However it took me six months, with the unavoidable interruptions of someone going on holiday or something like this, to finish the job. It was absolutely necessary, and without my field notes and my analysis of many rather complicated corners, nobody else could have seen the task through. I am learning a lot about documentation that I can pass on to my students. But of course today things are different and recording with a Nagra round one’s neck is rather like handling a Kodak box camera, in comparison to what it was years ago.

The next step is the making of sets of copies of this edited master tape. As soon as that is done, we will return the original tapes to you together with one of the edited sets. I am working on the catalogue and this material, too, will be made available to you.”

[Peter Cooke](#)

Comments

Philipp Wachsmann, Oct 7, 2015:

I am very grateful to Peter for his work on this and for researching into the reality of the times, and issues of integrity in context.

I am of course also very grateful for the essential work that Sylvia Nannyonga-Tamusuza is doing for the valuable musical heritage that Uganda has, to which Peter Cooke is also contributing so much.

Philipp Wachsmann (KPW son)

Thomas W. Ross - Amir Khan and the South.

I

Posted Mar 28, 2016

Rāga

In [The sword and the flute](#), an exquisite documentary on Indian culture told entirely with miniature paintings, the court and the temple offer clashing views of human experience. The dominance of the 16th-century Muslim Mughal emperor, Akbar, adopts a symbiosis with the Hindu Rajputs that is evident in Indian music even today. The lighter-skinned potentate stands respectfully while hearing the great [Tansen](#) sing songs that depict the cowherd girls sporting with a dark, flute-wielding god, Krishna himself. Thus the ascetic meets the worldly in a rich mulligatawny brew.



That courtly Northern master, [Amir Khan](#), was in a similar stance to the Southern [Balasaraswati](#) family style. It was mutual admiration, and he always stayed with Bala when he had a concert in Madras. One could hazard that two minorities, the Muslim and the devadāsī temple-dancer caste, were equally challenged to excel. Khansahab's father didn't let him perform in public until he was thirty; Bala's and [Viswa](#)'s performances, stellar though they might have been, were met only with fault-finding from their mother Jayammal.

The dynamic of North/South borrowing today retains the Mughal/Rajput imbalance: There are numerous examples of Karnatak musicians doing credible and even excellent renditions in Hindustani style, but the reverse is not true.

Amir Khan, however, was an alert witness to the depth in the Balasaraswati style, where some of the most inventive and profound music could happen in friendly competition between Bala and Viswa while sitting around preparing the evening meal. Because Bala engaged even me in lick-trading at her house, it's hard to imagine musical exchanges not arising with some frequency, on an Olympian level, between herself, Viswa, and Khanshab during his stays.

And yet the same Karnatak rāga Chārukeshī, from Amir Khan and, say, [M.S. Subbulakshmi](#), reflects these contrasting world-views.



[M S Subbulakshmi – Charukeshi raga alapana \(Video\)](#)



[Ustad Amir Khan Raga Charukeshi \(Video\)](#)

Tāla

From the get-go Amir Khan diverged. He learned sārāṅgī from his father before settling on singing. He introduced a super-slow version of tālas for the dhrupad-like development of his slow khayāls. And he appropriated rāgas and rhythmic concepts from Karnatak music. I think these came especially from the family of Balasaraswati.

Without a gecko on the wall, we can only guess at the specific nature of Amir Khan's musical exchanges with Bala and her family when he stayed with them in Madras. He surely kept his own twice-daily [riyāz](#) practice, as he did with me in my Calcutta flat. I remember the house scene in Madras as rāga- and tāla-soaked, continually.

Here I'm thinking about [Ranganathan](#), Bala's brother and one of my first Indian teachers at Wesleyan. In addition to the special skills needed to accompany dance, like any good mṛdaṅgam player Ranga never stopped figuring out pieces, at or away from the instrument. In his final days, bed-ridden, he seemed to do nothing but. At odd hours, he'd call up old students like me:



T. Ranganathan

Tom. This one's in khaṇḍa [5 beats]. Do you have a pencil and paper? Any number fits in this piece. They won't get it because it's anti-dramatic. [By "they" he meant the general Indian audience.]

Two people are talking. At each exchange, the first person (A) keeps his speed, while the second (B) talks slower. So it's

A: x.

B: x.

A: x.

B: 2x. [Twice as slow]

A: x.

B: 4x. [Four times as slow]

This gives you 10 exes, so everything fits in five beats, regardless of the value of x. So for the tisra (3) version of this ingenious little piece (spoken simply as ta ki ta), you'd have:

A: (3) ta ki ta

B: (3) ta ki ta

A: (3) ta ki ta

B: (6) ta - ki - ta -

A: (3) ta ki ta

B: (12) ta - - - ki - - - ta - - -

which gives 30, a multiple of 5. Try it with 4, 7, 9 . . . they all work!

Wow. I'm not a math person, but this is elegance itself. It's really a paradigm for making more pieces, itself a model modularity.

Although Bala refrained from improvised swaras in performance ("too unladylike"!), the entire family were rhythm whizzes, and it's very likely that such pieces as Ranga's were aired while Amir Khan was a guest. In a rare interview, Khansahab speaks of his rhythmic approach in the *dhrut* (quick) sections of his

music. Without acknowledging the devadāsī family specifically, he rattles off the classic Karnatak *jātīs* (in the traditional order!): *chatusra*, *tisra*, *misra*, *khaṇḍa*, and *sankīrna*, 4, 3, 7, 5, and 9.



[Ustad Amir Khan – Interview to Pandit Nikhil Banerjee – Year Unknown \(Video\)](#)

Amir Khan was of course also a master of North Indian rhythmic approaches. There was, for instance, a legendary exchange of sophisticated pieces one evening between him and the great tablist [Ahmedjan Thirakwa](#). But he obviously benefited from his stays with perhaps the most eminent music and dance family of the South.

[Thomas W. Ross](#)

Thomas W. Ross - Amir Khan and the South. II

Posted May 3, 2016



Grape, banana, and coconut

Because the goddess [Sarasvatī](#) holds both the book and the vīṇā, we are encouraged to summon both mind and heart in the pursuit of any learning.

This apparent contradiction has guises such as left brain/right brain, Apollo/Dionysus, and many more. It's handy for sketches of the familiar: Herbie Hancock/Wynton Kelly, Béla Bartók/Aaron Copland, or Steely Dan/Justin Bieber.

But Indians seem to acknowledge a middle ground between these extremes: the triumvirate of South Indian composers, [Tyāgarāja](#) (1767–1847), [Śyāma Śāstri](#) (1762–1827), and [Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar](#) (1775–1835), are likened to the grape, banana, and coconut. The first you pop in your mouth immediately. The second has to be peeled. And the third has a shell protecting its alabaster treasure.

The three are called *vagayakar*, ill-translated as *composer*: the term implies an equal mastery of book and *vīṇā*, of words and music. Dīkṣitar, for one, came from an illustrious line of musician-scholars whose formidable pieces betray a poet's knowledge of Sanskrit.



[Viswa](#) told me that he first learned Dīkṣitar's highbrow, gnarly, big-design coconut pieces, to the neglect of the other two composer-saints. Such august fare earned his early performances the gossip of being one-sided, so he added Tyāgarāja (the ultimate bhakti popularizer) and Śyāma Śāstri (a middle-ground) pieces as an appeasement. Same with swara kalpana, improvised solfege: they joined his concerts as a nod to mainstream Karnatak orthodoxy.

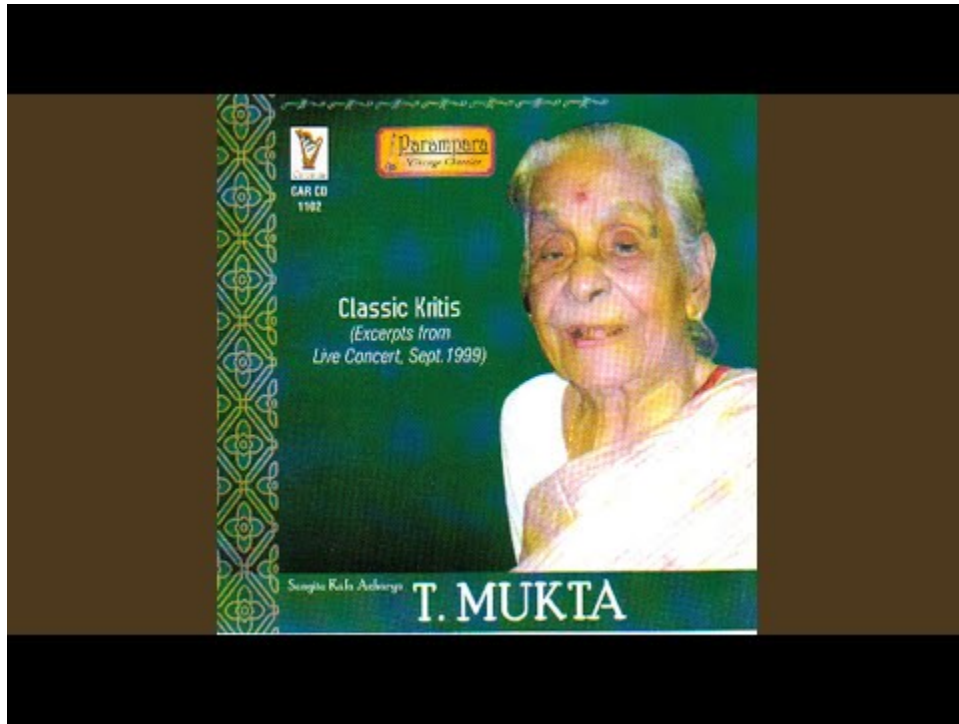
Dīkṣitar's semi-legendary life has striking parallels to the eclectic and somber [Amir Khan](#)'s. The *vīṇā* - playing devotee of Shiva visited *tirthsthans* (pilgrimage sites) all over India, including a stint in Banaras. His interaction with the glacial-tempoed dhrupad singers and *bīnkars* of that music-drenched town (when indeed the Hindustani and the Karnatak weren't so far apart as today) seem to me likely to have had a profound effect on his compositions.

The Word and the Lute, the Sword and the Flute. Amir Khan was an alert and thoughtful gatherer of influences that he came to call the Indore gharānā or school. A common cultural memory of Mughal/Rajput, worldly and ascetic, resonated between the disparate worlds of a Muslim animus of khayālthe North and a Hindu anima of the South. Khansahab admittedly could be downright ponderous in the slowest of his Jhumra (14-beats). I'm not the first to nod off with him occasionally. But his rāgas were leavened later in a performance by astonishing flights of *tān* melismas, even while retaining their bhāva or particular flavor.

The [Balasaraswati](#) family style also championed the leisurely and architectonic together with the sensual and the pyrotechnic, both by their renderings of the Dīkṣitar repertoire and in the sultry seriousness of

the padams with which Bala ended her concerts. This musician's musician's milieu was Amir Khan's during his visits, where the admiration went both ways. It's a good guess that the impossibly slow tempi of his opening khayāls were encouraged, if not by direct influence, by a common taste for gravity.

In the Balasaraswati style, here's [Muktamma](#)'s version of Dīkṣitar's devastatingly gorgeous "Vīṇā pustaka dhāriṇī" (we were taught it in Jhampa tāla, a slow 10 beats, 7 + 3). Like Ahīr Bhairav in the North, the rāga Vegavahini (also called Chakravakam) is 1 b2 3 4 5 6 b7.



[Karuna Joodu \(Video\)](#)

Borrowed and stolen

Amateurs borrow, professionals steal. (Variously attributed)

Two Dīkṣitar pieces have recently been given amateur or professional treatments by the North, I'm thinking: "Vātāpi Ganapatim" and *Anandamritavarshini*. From the latter, I hope to shed light on a mystery rāga by Amir Khan, sometimes called Amirkhani.

I was taught "Vātāpi," the closest to a potboiler that Dīkṣitar ever wrote, by [S. Ramanathan](#) at Wesleyan in 1963. The kṛiti, in the sunny rāga Hamsadhvani, is the icing on a serious composerly cake, albeit well-wrought:



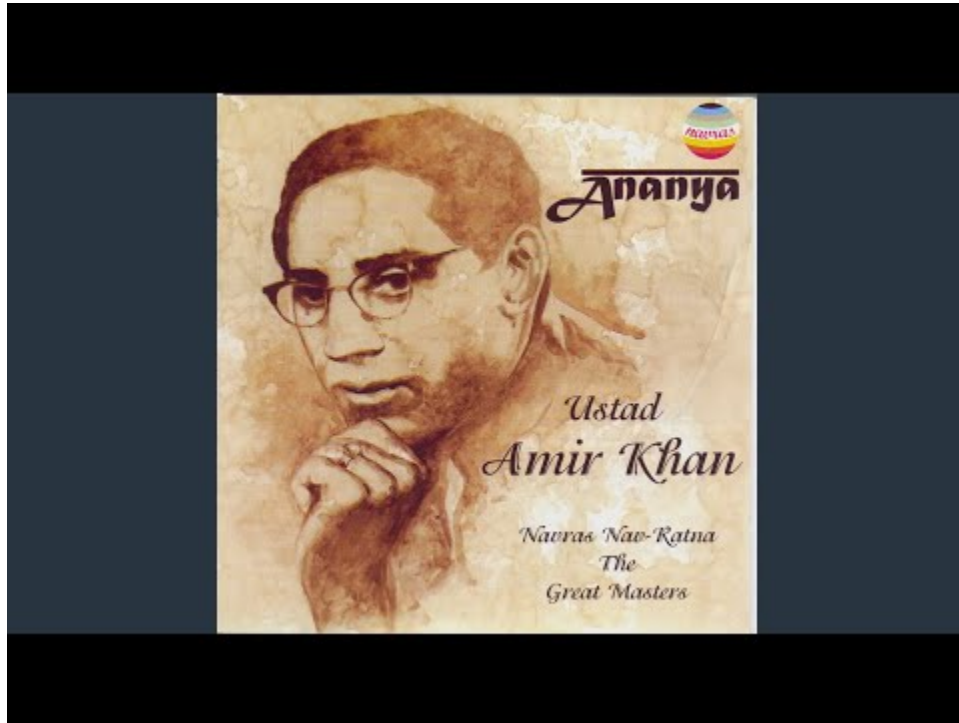
[vAtApi gaNapatim - hamsadvani - Adi - muthuswAmi dlkshitar \(Video\)](#)

Later I learned its Northern offshoot in the same rāga, starting with the words “Lāgī lagana”. The little khayāl appropriates, as it were, the first two lines of a famous poem (and no more) without acknowledging it’s by someone called Robert Frost. This in turn has recently spawned its own grotesquerie in an army of high school-level sitārists fronted by dark-skinned ringers from the South:



[First time ever in the World, a Grand Symphony of a 1000 Sitarists -Raag Hansadhwani \(Video\)](#)

Amir Khan's quick khayāls in Hamsadhvani retain some of the rāga's lightheartedness. Its smile is wider than a major scale. In this rendition, he keeps *Lagi lagana's* basic melody but abandons the brief Bṛjbhāshā text, transforming Dīkṣitar's *saṅgati* variations into a brisk drum-syllable *tarānā*:



[Raga Hamasadhvani – Tarana In Drut Teental \(Video\)](#)

But what of this mystery rāga? One of the last recordings Khansahab made, at a Calcutta gathering, featured an unknown rāga that he treated with his characteristic introspection. It combines the optimism of the Kalyāṇ family with a lowered 7th degree: 1 3 #4 5 b7. Any effort so far to parse it points South, either as an arcane offshoot of the Vāchaspati family or, I'm guessing, as an ingenious twist on the rāga to Dīkṣitar's most famous and accessible tune, "Ānandāmritavarshinī." It differs from the mystery rāga only in its 7th degree, and given the preference in Bala's household for Dīkṣitar's music, I think Khansahab lowered the 7th degree of Āmritavarshinī for what's now called Amīrkhānī:

Although we must be thankful for all of Khansahab's contributions, this last caps a career which included an openness to anything musical transpiring in the Madras home of his hosts, the Balasaraswati family.

[Thomas W. Ross](#)

Abstracts for Ethnomusicology Vol. 60, No. 2 (Spring/Summer 2016)

Posted May 12, 2016

Domesticating Otherness: The Snake Charmer in American Popular Culture

A.J. Racy

University of California, Los Angeles

Abstract. Metaphoric allusions to otherness are widely encountered and oftentimes taken for granted. Exploring the use of the snake-charming theme in American popular media, I discuss why and how such a supposedly foreign theme is borrowed, metaphorically adapted, and locally applied. The central premise is that such a process is integrally linked to the borrower's own history and cultural outlooks. Besides reflecting my own first-hand experience, the narratives engage relevant discourses on representation, exoticism, imagination, metaphor, and power. Generally, the research illustrates how tropes of otherness acquire their forms and meanings as they become localized, or domesticated.

Sounding Against Nuclear Power in Post-3.11 Japan: Resonances of Silence and Chindon-ya

Marié Abe

Boston University

Abstract. In this paper, I explore the tension between the socially mandated silence of *jishuku* and the sounds of anti-nuclear power street protests to investigate how *chindon-ya*, an ostentatious musical advertisement practice on the street, has become politicized as a sonic emblem of the recent anti-nuclear movement in post-3.11 disaster Japan. By listening to both the sound of *chindon-ya* at demonstrations and the weighty silence of *jishuku* together, I suggest that *chindon-ya* sounds are foregrounding new political possibilities, enabling a broader-based movement towards, and *beyond*, what anthropologist Marc Abélès calls "the politics of survival" in contemporary Japan.

Black Like Me: Caribbean Tourism and the St. Kitts Music Festival

Jessica Baker

University of Pennsylvania

Abstract. In recent years the St. Kitts Music Festival has become a platform for popular American, Jamaican, and a relatively small number of local Kittitian-Nevisian artists--a shift that mirrors the changing demographic of audiences who attend the festival. These contemporary artists represent the black faces of Caribbean tourism that have previously been unacknowledged within discussions of mass tourism in the Caribbean. This article questions the stability of categories such as *tourist*, *local*, and *visitor* by examining the St. Kitts Music Festival as an occasion for local engagement with American blackness as one aspect of modern Kittitian identity and Caribbean tourism.

On Hybridity in African Popular Music: The Case of Senegalese Hip Hop

Catherine M. Appert

Cornell University

Abstract. This article critically considers the legacy of hybridity in African popular music studies and questions whether contemporary African engagements with diasporic popular musics like hip hop call for new interpretations of musical genre. Through ethnographic research with hip hoppers in Senegal, I explore how practices of musical intertextuality reinscribe global connections as diasporic ones and challenge the conditions for musical hybridity. I argue that the formal parameters of musical genre themselves constitute conscious and strategic social practice that situates human actors in local and global place.

Evrım Hikmet Öğüt – Soundscape of a coup d'état

Posted September 6, 2016



F-16 jet flying low over Istanbul, 15 July 2016

Editor's note: What follows is the author's translation of an article that appeared on 17 July 2016; the original Turkish version is [here](#).

It was an extraordinary, traumatic 24-hour period. We do not have a full grip on the details of what happened, but it is highly possible that it will result in bringing more authoritarianism and stronger polarization, fear, anxiety, and intervention in the lifestyles of almost half of the people in Turkey, along with many other catastrophes that we fear to think and say aloud.

The oppression of the coup d'état attempt has already turned into a collective and summoned frenzy where attacks on Alevites, Syrian refugees, and people drinking alcohol outside started to occur.

There will undoubtedly be a great number of analyses of 15 July 2016 and its aftermath. My intention is not to add another one to the list; instead, I will strive to describe those 24 hours through their soundscape, which, I believe, presents highly fertile ground for sociological analysis. Some of the sounds I mention below have entered our lives for the first time and in a very striking manner, and we have been constantly talking about sounds for 24 hours whether we realize or not.

Although this time we did not see [Hasan Mutlucan](#) on the screen, and the coup did not come with the "sound of combat boots", what heralded the events to follow was sounds. On the night of 15 July a social media post by a friend in Ankara about F-16 jets flying over the city gave the first hint of something going on. Of course, what enabled her to notice the fighter jets was the loud sound they made: a sound that we, living in the western part of the country, are not used to hearing. After a short while, upon noticing the sound of a helicopter over my apartment in Istanbul, I joined those sharing posts on social media in an attempt to make sense of the commotion outside.

As the night went on and the sounds of the coup become varied with sirens, ambulances, clashes and blasts, these sounds enabled us to learn about what we could not see as well as bringing forth the emotions of surprise, fear, and anxiety. For us, the newest and the most striking one was possibly the explosion-like noise coming from the jets that break the sound barrier—a sonic boom.



[Jets and sonic boom](#)

The opposition to the coup did not stay silent during 15 July and its aftermath. The strongest sound against the coup attempt came from mosques. From mosques, which use the *ezan* (*adhan*) sound to designate the spatial limits of their community, this time came the *sala* to invite the citizens to the streets. The *sala*, which serves to notify the community of an all-concerning event in an Islamic context, was used in line with its purpose, defining the ideological content of the news as well.



[Sala and bombs](#)

In addition to the *sala*, untimely *ezans* and announcements inviting people to reclaim the motherland, posts indicating the recitation of the *fetih sura* and other parts of the Quran from different mosques—even a call for jihad from a mosque in Ikitelli—circulated on social media.

While citizens responded to the call by taking to the streets chanting the *tekbir* and slogans, the oppression of the coup instigators started to be celebrated with honking, the *salavat*, the Turkish National Anthem and the [mehter](#) anthems coming from cars. (Mehter music is an incredibly influential tool for the current government in shaping the space of public struggle.)

Our conversations, which incessantly continued in both public and private spheres, constitute another auditory aspect of this 24-hour period. That the conversation among children playing in front of my apartment focused on the opposition between the soldier and the police indicates the reach of vocabulary and the world of meaning surrounding the coup.

Sounds/noise play an influential role in creating a space of public struggle and strengthening the hegemony of both the government and the opposition over masses, regardless of their ideological orientation. Sounds are far more effective than verbal expressions in their appeal to the collective memory and ability to reach across wider space. Thus, while reading 15 July through sounds, we should keep in mind that neither the choice of these sounds nor their impact on us is coincidental.

No coup attempt brings democracy. The idea that a coup attempt can be oppressed by public reclamation of democracy, and people's own willpower, is important. However, the fact that this willpower in the current example is far from a real, all-encompassing discourse of democracy emerges as a startling reality.

If we describe it through sounds, the mehter music and the audioscape of the street protests in the aftermath of 15 July point to a cultural and historical context that is far removed from providing democracy for us (as phrased by [Erdoğan Aydın](#) in the TV program *Türkiye'nin gündemi* on 16 July).

We do not have the option of leaving the demand for democracy to these sounds and giving up the struggle for making ourselves heard. That is, we have to speak up.

Evrin Hikmet Öğüt earned the Ph.D. in ethnomusicology at the Centre for Advanced Studies in Music (MIAM) at Istanbul Technical University with the dissertation "Music in transit: Musical practices of the Chaldean-Iraqi migrants in Istanbul". She currently works as a teacher and research assistant at Mimar Sinan Fine Arts University. Her website is [here](#).

Gabriele de Seta – The no-venue underground: Sounding Hong Kong’s lack of performance spaces

Posted December 19, 2016

It’s 10 October 2012. I’ve been living in Hong Kong for less than two months, and Dennis Wong is waiting for me to arrive at the performance venue and do my sound check. Fellow experimental musicians from Shanghai suggested Dennis as one of the local organizers with whom I should get in touch.

A few weeks before, Dennis asked me if I wanted to play a show at a newly-opened local venue called C.I.A. (Cultural Industries Association—the acronym is also a play on the covert and secret operations of the U.S. [CIA](#)). “Sure,” I said, “when and where?” Dennis gave me an address and asked me if I needed anything else besides a guitar amplifier. I didn’t.

Now I stand outside the [Kwai Hing MTR station](#), which, according to [Google Maps](#), is the closest station to the venue. As I carry my hollow-body guitar and a backpack full of effect pedals, I try to find my bearings via [GPS](#). The air is still heavy and humid, although Hong Kong is cooler in the fall than during the summer, and there aren’t many useful reference points around the station: a convenience store, a small noodle restaurant, and an overpass leading to the entrance of a shopping mall. Behind me stands a dense cluster of residential towers and a public housing estate. In front of me I see a wall of industrial buildings, the overpass disappearing into a small crevice between two of them.



Google Street View of the industrial buildings on Wah Sing Street, where art gallery/performance venue C.I.A (Cultural Industries Association) was located. Source: Google Maps, June 2011.

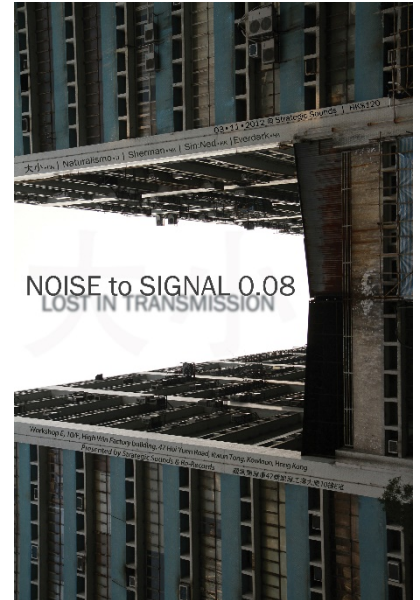
I spend ten minutes circling around the block, following the directions provided by Google Maps, only to realize that there is no way of crossing the six lanes of Hing Fong Road. I memorize the address of C.I.A. and put my smartphone back in my pocket: Unit 7, 8th floor, Block B, Wah Tat Industrial Centre, 8-10 Wah Sing Street, Kwai Hing, Kowloon, Hong Kong. I head back to the station, walk through the overpass,

an elevated courtyard, another overpass, down an escalator, and venture into an alleyway between two industrial buildings. I end up in a maze of streets without shops, cars, or pedestrians; only container trucks come in and out of garage doors and loading ramps. Once I find the Wah Tat Industrial Centre, I still have to figure out how to reach Block B and how to get to the eighth floor. When I reach the elevator, the security guard instructs me: “that is the cargo elevator. People go in that other one.” The only signal that helps me find C.I.A.’s metal door is the bass frequencies reverberating in the damp corridors. I slide a heavy metal door open and I’m greeted by Dennis and the other musicians doing their sound checks and preparing for the show in a large whitewashed room with no windows.

A few weeks later, my Shanghainese friend Huang Lei tells me he’s been invited to perform in Hong Kong and asks me if I can help him organize another show. I get in touch with Dennis, who kindly agrees to set up a show for Huang Lei in his “NOISE to SIGNAL” series. We coordinate the details of the event through Facebook messages and I help him designing a flyer.

This time the venue, Strategic Sounds, is located on the 10th floor of the High Win Factory Building in [Kwun Tong District](#), an industrial area on the other side of the Kowloon peninsula. Huang Lei, Dennis, and I end up playing an improvised set together, a twenty-minute mess of prepared guitar, crackling electronics, and distorted feedback echoing down the grimy ventilation shaft right outside the venue.

Throughout the following year, I was generously invited to play a few more shows at Strategic Sounds and C.I.A., meeting several of the experimental musicians active in the city at the time. Later, both venues closed down under the pressure of increasing rents and the challenges of sustaining an independent performance space in Hong Kong, a difficult enterprise even when eased by the relatively cheaper rents of vacant units in industrial buildings.



[The author improvising](#) with Shanghai-based musician Huang Lei (as 大小) and local organizer Dennis Wong (as Sin:ned) at Strategic Sounds, Hong Kong, November 2012. Video by Rolf.

Of the eight venues where I had the pleasure to play experimental music during my three years in Hong Kong, seven were located in industrial buildings. Besides C.I.A. and Strategic Sounds, they ranged from Dimension+, a small makerspace attached to an artist studio, to Hidden Agenda, a long-standing live-music house well-known among local independent music audiences. During these years, I also enjoyed live performances by some of my favorite musicians and bands, such as [Makoto Kawabata](#), [Hijokaidan](#), and [Laibach](#), which played in shows organized by the same people I hung out with in former factory premises.

The two factors that pushed Hong Kong's experimental musicians to find spaces in the post-industrial peripheries of the city were the infamously high cost of Hong Kong's real estate market and the lack of suitable and welcoming performance venues in more central areas. The pubs and clubs hosting live music in central Kowloon and Hong Kong Island predominantly featured DJs and cover bands that catered to the tastes of the commercial audiences that they rely on for financial stability. Given the scarcity of spaces like garages, squats, cellars, and warehouses, experimental musicians turned to the industrial buildings hollowed out by the recent delocalization of factories. Other local artists and creative enterprises had also started taking advantage of these empty spaces.



"Performance area" signage on a mezzanine of the A.C.O. stairwell delimiting KWC's live set during Sound-On-Site: Space Oddity #1: From Below show, January 2015.

The first Sound-On-Site show organized by booking agency [Twenty Alpha](#) and record label [Re-Records](#) at [A.C.O.](#) (Art & Culture Outreach)—performed at the end of January 2015 and aptly titled "From Below"—poignantly exemplifies the lack of performance spaces for the local underground and experimental music scenes in Hong Kong. Rather than playing in the small bookstore located on the 14th floor of the Foo Tak Building, the three performing musicians decided to set up their equipment on different landings of the stairwell: laptops on small stools, with amplifiers turned on their side to fit the constraining spaces, cables dangling between floors, and performance areas marked off by improvised signage. Puzzled audiences moved up and down the stairwell, trying to figure out how to reach the floor from which the sounds were coming, or sat on the concrete steps listening to droning frequencies reverberating through the building, which itself became an essential architectural component of musicking. "This reminds me of

Beijing,” commented a friend visiting Hong Kong from Mainland China, “but where in Beijing musicians are taking back *hutong* alleyways and old housing, here it’s all about industrial infrastructure.”

Jonathan Solomon, Ciara Wong, and Adam Frampton have defined Hong Kong as a “[city without ground](#),” lacking the concept of “ground” both physically and culturally. It is somehow ironically appropriate that in this city without ground, underground musicians find themselves relegated to a precarious “overground” actively created out of fleeting spaces strewn across the upper floors of post-industrial peripheries. These precarious venues appear and disappear following the inexorable inflation of property prices, leaving local show organizers to work in the present tense with whatever space is available at the moment.

Predominantly sustained by personal passions and practices cultivated in spare time carved out of full-time non-musical careers, Hong Kong’s experimental music scene finds its most reliable spaces on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media platforms, where shows are organized, promoted, documented, and inscribed in the event geography of the city. Riffing on [a locution coined by Rob Hayler](#), the British musician Jon Marshall describes the experimental music scene of Western Russia as a “[no-audience underground](#),” a fluid social milieu in which performers also double as organizers, promoters, critics, and audiences. The situation in Hong Kong isn’t very different. Yet, despite the [recurring lamentations of local musicians and organizers](#), diminutive audiences are not the biggest issue faced by the community. The precariousness and ephemerality of performance spaces determines the elastic and resilient fabric of the local experimental music scene, which could accurately be called a “no-venue underground.”

The institutionalization of ethnomusicology: Responses

Posted February 6, 2017



On Friday morning of [last year's SEM Annual Meeting](#) the round table *The institutionalization of ethnomusicology: Current perspectives, challenges, and opportunities*, was livestreamed and the video was archived by SEM. We invited the participants of this roundtable to summarize their responses to the discussion that took place during the session. Below is the video of the full session and the responses provided by the presenters. We hope to continue the dialogue that began at the roundtable through this forum (the SEM Blog) and invite you to share this blog post widely and to add your own responses and suggestions in the comments section below. To view the archived video, click [here](#).

Intro (summary of discussion) by [Kathleen Wiens](#)

The skills and talents that ethnomusicologists offer are vital to public culture. For many of us, public-facing work* is a life calling in which we use our skills and talents to empower and mobilize our ethnomusicological knowledge. However, the contribution of this work within our field's historiography is treated as peripheral. This treatment is reinforced throughout professional preparation (graduate studies) and the institutions that guide that process. Our roundtable identified ways in which academic training falls short of addressing the needs of public-facing work.

The different aptitudes and experiences of our six roundtable participants complemented one another. That the resulting whole was stronger than its separate parts was proven by the dynamic discussion between speakers and attendees. Whereas speakers identified ways in which our academic job preparation did or did not play into our current professional roles, attendees helped identify and illuminate the received wisdoms and rationales (for better or for worse) that academic culture clings to

with tenacity – many of which have led to the absence of preparation for public-facing work both in the development of practical skill sets, recognition of individual talents and aptitudes, and realistic attitudes towards what public-facing work entails.

** I use the term “public facing” as opposed to “public” or “applied” work. I use this term to describe work for which the primary intent is public engagement. This can include work that is government supported, privately funded, NGO, independent, or supported by an academic institution so long as the primary audience is public and final outcomes are aimed to be accessible by the public.*

Q&A response by Kathleen Wiens

In the months leading up to the Washington meeting, none of our roundtable participants expected that we would, simultaneous to the conference, be coping with a devastating emotional blow caused by the November 11th presidential election results. Media commentators tried to make sense of the confusing result by pointing to a deep “divide” (a lack of empathy and conversation) between people of political, financial, and educational privilege in the USA and people who feel excluded from one or more aspects of those privileges. Three statements from our morning stand out to me as speaking to that perceived divide. First is a statement (I paraphrase here) made by Janet Sturman, that “insularity has led to a current divide [between academics and non-academics]; if we leave the conversation in the academy the divide will never be bridged.” Ameera Nimjee addressed “the divide” by declaring “more than ever public work is crucial work” (my paraphrase). Eric Hung pointed towards division when he explained that he teaches about public musicology as a way of teaching how to make “allyship.” Museums and accessible cultural events are among the few remaining domains in which members of the public actively seek to have their worldviews simultaneously affirmed and challenged. As a museum professional I see evidence every day that museums and cultural events become places where hundreds of thousands of people meet, talk, learn, and develop empathy for life experiences that are different from their own.

Response by [Katherine Palmer](#)

During the discussion portion of the panel, I was most struck by Cullen Strawn’s restatement of a trusted advisor’s idea that “strict adherence to disciplinarily will kill you,” which brought a spirited laugh from both the panel and audience. Throughout students’ tenure in music school, they are being pushed to assume a major (performance, music education, music history, ethnomusicology, etc.), and to develop a deep understanding of a singular discipline within music. While focus and practice within music study cannot – and should not – be discounted, encouraging students to work across these sub-disciplines and to seek out interdisciplinary collaborative opportunities will empower them in non-traditional career paths, such as public-facing, community-based work.

Collegiate educators need to reach “across the aisle” – both inside and outside the department – to foster relationships that enable this work to happen, an idea that was echoed during our discussion. While finding time to allocate for building new relationships and seeking out collaborators may be challenging, networking will eventually begin to build upon itself into a web of people, places, and resources. As the job market shifts (as evidenced by the decreasing number of collegiate openings and increasing number of terminal degree recipients), higher education needs to adjust. Ethnomusicology, in particular, is already well prepared to work towards a more inclusive music curriculum that promotes community-focused projects and research. In a world that needs more cultural awareness and understanding, let’s encourage current students to lead rather than follow in antiquated footsteps.

Response by [Cullen Strawn](#)

Ethnomusicology’s history includes chapters on the justification of existence alongside established disciplines in academe. Today one might ask for an extension of that work relative to life beyond the terminal degree, particularly for those interested in public-facing endeavors. The group discussion following our panelists’ presentations touched on shifts in the field and their impact on students, the

need to recalibrate public engagement as primary work, the importance of understanding administrative and public audiences and the “languages” they speak, and our potential to add quantifiable value in contexts of partnership, among other related themes.

If academic ethnomusicology seems out of touch with market realities and has little incentive to adjust, if it persists in minimizing, however tacitly, the worth of knowledge, skills, and abilities developed in public-facing settings, if it seeks instead faculty whose qualifications sit comfortably within a familiar mold, thereby limiting needed offerings to students, students can consider using their critical training to question whether the return on their investment in undergraduate and graduate studies will likely be enough to satisfy their goals. What other professional orientations might well complement their academic credentials? What valuable resources, whether known by students’ advisors, might already be available at their institutions? Developing and maintaining such awareness requires efforts that ideally should be in motion across all strata of higher education, but that can begin with you.

Response by [León García Corona](#)

Today more than ever, the work that ethnomusicologists do is paramount. But how can we encourage others to follow a career in ethnomusicology when salaries are stagnant across disciplines—particularly in the humanities—and when jobs in ethnomusicology continue to be scarce?

Programs in ethnomusicology—at least in the United States—continue to focus primarily on creating future ethnomusicology professors; hence, the possibilities of other career paths have been largely overlooked. During our presentation, and as our chair highlighted, touching on the emotional devastation of the recent elections, we discussed the importance not only of ethnomusicology but also of the skills needed for ethnomusicology beyond academia.

In my contribution I shared some of my experiences and projects as a producer and education specialist at Smithsonian Folkways, such as the Smithsonian Folkways Magazine (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/magazine>), an online publication featuring current ethnomusicological research and promoting the Folkways catalog. This publication, in the words of Folkways curator Daniel Sheehy, is located in the crucial “sweet spot” between academic rigor and publication for a larger audience. I also shared an online database of music lesson plans (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/lesson-plans/smithsonian>) created and used by music educators, allowing them to exchange teaching ideas while promoting the Folkways brand. Last, I shared an online educational bilingual interactive site for jazz, which included a video, a map, a timeline, and a mixer (<http://www.folkways.si.edu/jazz-education-web-site/music/smithsonian>). All of these projects faced similar challenges, primarily funding, but also access to copyrighted material and the lack of IT resources and staff with the practical skills necessary to execute them.

The presentation put into evidence the need for professionals who understand the importance of fostering and increasing cultural understanding through music (ethnomusicologists) and who also have experience in practical and mundane aspects of production; promptness, fundraising, video/audio editing, html, etc.

During our final thoughts I put some questions on the table:

- What are current offerings in ethnomusicology programs that respond to this demand?
- How do we reconcile the need for revenue and the dissemination of knowledge?
- In what other ways can we combine ethnomusicological training with other practical skills?
- What can educational institutions incorporate into the core curriculum to achieve this?

As one member of the audience put it: “the face of ethnomusicology has changed,” and the sooner we realize it, the better equipped we will be to deal with our current political and social moment.

Response by [Eric Hung](#)

I have been heavily influenced by Stephen Greenblatt's 1990 article "Resonance and wonder" (*Bulletin of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences* 43/4 [January 1990] pp. 11-34). He defines wonder as something that is so unique, awe-inspiring, or overwhelming that it stops audience members in their tracks. It's a powerful feeling in the moment, but it is unlikely to affect the audience in a lasting way. In contrast, he defines resonance as the ability of an artwork, exhibition, or performance to make audiences think about the wider world and the complex sociocultural forces at play. Resonance might not generate "oohs" and "ahhs," but it will be more powerful in the long run.

In my training as a musicologist and ethnomusicologist I learned how to study why specific musical traditions have resonance for their practitioners. My training did not, however, teach the most important skill needed for public-facing work—namely, how to help my audience create resonance for themselves. For ethnomusicologists to bridge the academic divide and be relevant to the wider world, we need to study not only who our public audiences currently are, but also to think broadly about who they can be. Once we have identified a potential audience, which can be done through partnerships, we have to learn about the issues that matter to them. We then need to present lectures, exhibitions, and/or performances that are informative, meaningful, and pleasurable to this specific audience. We have to learn to not take ourselves so seriously, and must allow ourselves to be imaginative, creative and whimsical.

To be sure, some ethnomusicologists have done and are doing great public-facing work with unconventional audiences. They are, however, the exception. I think it's time for our discipline to "center" public-facing work. This involves learning from fields that have long studied users, such as public history, human-computer interaction, and marketing. In this political and cultural environment, the future of our field depends on this.

Response by [Ameera Nimjee](#)

It seems transparent to me that humanities-based work in public-facing institutions is crucial at this historical moment. Reflecting on our roundtable and discussion, this year's SEM pre-conference presentations, and of course the events that coincided with the beginning of the annual meeting in the election of a new President of the United States, this work bridges perspectives and facilitates dialogue in our ever-changing world. In my experience while working in museums, I have watched individuals and families engage in exhibitions and programming that discuss the history of migration and citizenship in Canada—stories that outline the framework of their daily lives and realities. I have listened to young second-generation Canadians practice Islam in secular spaces, transforming museum architecture into a space of ritual congregation. I have witnessed patrons and visitors learning about places and traditions in ways that are alternative to narratives presented by the media. As ethnomusicologists, not only *can* our work contribute to these experiences—it *must* do so.

Our panel presentations incited several trajectories of discussion, including one on how graduate students receive training in their curricula to conduct public work. Indeed, while the skills required to plan exhibitions, write in non-academic genres, and conduct data synthesis and navigate software can be built into graduate methods courses, I add that we must seek out projects that encourage parallel systems of learning during our careers as students. I began working in museums as an undergraduate student, and have since worked on a variety of projects in the worlds of curating exhibitions, programs, and performances that have challenged me to apply my research in ethnomusicology in new and interesting ways. I have worked on various project-based collaborative teams—a welcome break from the solitude of dissertation writing that has informed how I conceptualize my fieldwork, research questions, and disciplinary theory. I echo my fellow panelists in challenging the secondary position of public-facing work in ethnomusicology. The primacy of this work defines my ethnomusicology, and how I seek to contribute to my broader communities as my career continues.

Sean Bellaviti - In search of the Organization of American States 1970s field recording collection in Caracas, Venezuela

Posted February 21, 2017

Sporting a baseball cap and sunglasses, I did my best to look inconspicuous as I ascended the wide stairway leading to Venezuela's national library. It was early 2015, and while seeming more tranquil than I had been led to believe, Caracas must at all times be treated with a double dose of caution. Once within the impressively large library compound, however, I tempered my wariness and took in the view. To the right, the towering [El Ávila National Park](#) looms over the large plaza that forms the library grounds. Boasting an impressive 819 square kilometer range, the great mountain park and the feat of eco-preservation that it represents are best appreciated at night, when it appears as a massive swath of darkness in a seemingly endless field of incandescent lights.

Across the plaza stands Venezuela's [Panteón Nacional](#). As the final resting place of Simón Bolívar it is one of the most compelling symbols of Venezuelan nationalism. Coming this close to *El Libertador* seemed fitting given that I had come in search of a collection of Latin American field recordings that owed their genesis in his vision of a league of American republics which, in its way, laid the foundation for the creation of the [Organization of American States](#) (OAS) in 1948.

The project was funded by the OAS and officially dubbed the *Proyecto multinacional de etnomusicología y folklore* (Multinational Project of Ethnomusicology and Folklore). Its goal was to document the traditional cultures of many of the member states. This extraordinary undertaking took place mainly throughout the 1970s and developed into a very large collection of musical instruments and documentary materials, especially field recordings from some eighteen countries.

I first became aware of this collection through an obscure 1975 Panamanian report uncovered by my colleague and fellow Panamanianist, Nodier Casanova. The report provides a description of the Panamanian portion of the collection. What excited us most was an eyebrow-raising inventory of 68 reels of audio recordings in addition to film, photographs and extensive fieldnotes (see Hassán de Llorente 1975). All were said to have been deposited in Caracas at the Instituto Interamericano de Etnomusicología y Folklore (INIDEF), which is now known as the [Centro de la Diversidad Cultural](#).

In contrast to its size and significance, as of 2015 the collection seemed to have all but faded into oblivion. When attempts to locate it online proved unproductive I decided to take advantage of a 24-hour layover in Caracas to visit the Centro's main office, a showpiece country house in the middle of the city. Here, however, my inquiries were met with puzzled expressions. One person nonetheless recalled a large number of recordings having been stored away in a room many years earlier. This news was both promising and discouraging. The collection may still exist, but what would be the state of the reels of acetate tape after 40 years of tropical heat and humidity? My search having stalled, I decided to try my luck with a team of Centro researchers who, I was told, worked out of an office in the National Library. With closing time fast approaching I hopped into one of the many "official" cabs—in my experience the safest way to get around the city—and was soon making my way into the library building.

Entering the Centro's library office, the visitor's eye falls upon a variety of folkloric and research artifacts, including a retired Nagra IV-S. I took the presence of this portable recording machine, once a popular part of a fieldworker's kit, to be a good sign. On the walls are pictures of Luis Felipe Ramón y Rivera (1913-1993), Isabel Aretz (1909-2005) and other legendary Latin American folklorists and ethnomusicologists, a reminder that INIDEF was also, at one point, an elite school for students who aspired to work in these fields. In the absence of the office's director, I quickly launched into my by-now well-rehearsed pitch to the first person who greeted me. I admit I was completely surprised when my interlocutor, Humberto José López, confirmed that there was indeed a very large collection and, better yet, much of it had been digitized and was currently in the process of being catalogued. No doubt sensing my excitement, he offered to give me a tour.

The collection is located just behind the main entrance. While the absence of cataloguing makes it hard to know just how many hours of archival material it contains, its sheer physical presence provides some indication. 24 ceiling-high metal shelves arranged in groups of four hold rows of compact disc jewel cases positioned next to larger age-worn magnetic tape reels. Filing cabinets line the walls of much of the room. These, Humberto informed me, hold the many sheets of slides that make up the collection's photographic component.



Humberto standing next to the collection (Caracas, 2015)



Slides from the collection (Caracas, 2016)

As closing time was already upon us and I had a flight to catch the next morning, it was clear I would not be able to actually listen to any recordings on this trip. Summoning whatever patience I could muster, I bid the friendly staff goodbye and promised to return as soon as possible. And I managed to make good on that promise the following year, returning to Caracas for one week in August, 2016.

After an absence of a year and a half, the city seemed familiar, yet also quite different. As before, the capital's security problems, serious no doubt, did not appear as extreme as many Venezuelan expats had led me to believe. I could still get around with (official) taxis, take the metro to certain destinations, and even walk through many parts of the city. Many caraceños I met were keen on showing me around, with some expressing dismay at the dismal view their friends and relatives abroad had of the city. Yet life in Venezuela had certainly not become easier. Rapid inflation and a critical lack of basic goods resulted in a steep increase in the cost of living. In order to avoid the prohibitive black market prices for traditional staples such as *harina pan* (cornmeal), rice, and sugar, most caraceños had to wait in long lines for a chance to buy their quota of government-subsidized goods. These tense gatherings, now a familiar sight throughout the country, compounded what was already a very difficult situation.

I was excited to revisit the collection and finally get a chance to listen to the material. Accessing the recordings, however, proved unexpectedly complicated and time-consuming. I was not allowed to handle the CDs directly, but had to wait for Humberto to convert them into MP3 files—a task that took up the entire first day. This unusual system, Humberto explained, was his idea. It was meant specifically to keep researchers from handling and potentially damaging the CDs, as these were commodities that were becoming increasingly difficult to find in Venezuela. The care with which he managed the archive was impressive, underscoring its priceless nature and ultimate fragility. I promised to bring a stack of blank CDs on my next visit, which, indeed, would be a welcome gift from any other researcher who would hope to access the collection.

To my joy and considerable relief, the large majority of recordings I listened to were of good quality—that is, they were audible with minimal pitch fluctuation and static. They bore a close resemblance to the field recordings made by Alan Lomax, in that they featured mainly informal performances that encompassed a variety of traditional forms including music, game songs, storytelling, and oral histories. Also included are observations by the researchers, as well as ethnographic interviews (many focusing on performance technique and instrument construction), which, along with detailed fieldnotes, provide a greater understanding of context.

INSTITUTO INTERAMERICANO DE ETNOMUSICOLOGÍA Y FOLKLORE

PLANILLA DE GRABACIONES PARA TRABAJO DE CAMPO

MATRIZ No. *Pan 322-M*

Misión: *Panamá 78* País: *Panamá* Año: *1978* Grabador (marca y serial): *Nagra IX-S*

Micrófonos (cantidad): Marcas: 1) 2) 3) Tipo de grabación: *Full track* Medio: *Half track* Mono: *Estereofónica* Cuadrifónica

Cinta marca: Tema: *1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.13.14.15.16.17.18.19.20.21.22.23.24.25.26.27.28.29.30.31.32.33.34.35.36.37.38.39.40.41.42.43.44.45.46.47.48.49.50.51.52.53.54.55.56.57.58.59.60.61.62.63.64.65.66.67.68.69.70.71.72.73.74.75.76.77.78.79.80.81.82.83.84.85.86.87.88.89.90.91.92.93.94.95.96.97.98.99.100.* Duración: *1.2.3.4.5.6.7.8.9.10.11.12.13.14.15.16.17.18.19.20.21.22.23.24.25.26.27.28.29.30.31.32.33.34.35.36.37.38.39.40.41.42.43.44.45.46.47.48.49.50.51.52.53.54.55.56.57.58.59.60.61.62.63.64.65.66.67.68.69.70.71.72.73.74.75.76.77.78.79.80.81.82.83.84.85.86.87.88.89.90.91.92.93.94.95.96.97.98.99.100.* Técnico grabador: *José Luis Gudiño*

№	Contenido	Lugar	Fecha	Medios de Expresión	Informantes	Velocidad	Observaciones
1	Chocolate	Cartón, provincia de Coclé	26/8	Voces M+F Tambores almirón almirón y guitarra	Canta cantante: Ana Paola Murillo	7 1/2 (19 cm/s)	Grabación sin final intersección
2	Armando quemte Bago.	"	"	"	Canta: Rosalba Victor Herrera	"	Vov-Gsf
3	Pasacallia Hay Mando---	"	"	"	Canta cantante Ana Paola Murillo	"	Grabación mala, canto descartado y fiddle Tambor.
4	Jael Jael	"	"	"	"	"	"
5	Repetición de la misma sin terminar	"	"	"	"	"	"

Accompanying fieldnotes (Caracas, 2016)

The fieldnotes indicate that the researchers included representatives from both INIDEF and local institutions, the latter likely arranging the introductions and providing translations when needed. In the Panamanian case this collaborative approach yielded some interesting results; for example, the collection is much more inclusive of non-*mestizo*-identified traditions than would be typically the case, featuring a large number of performances by indigenous groups as well as Panamanians of African descent. The greater degree of ethnic diversity fits well with broader Latin American ideas of *mestizaje*, often based on the tri-ethnic mixture of African, indigenous, and European peoples, even as it differed from established national folk canons. George Amaiz, the Centro's Collections Coordinator, reminded me that inclusivity had its limits, pointing out that the collection was restricted only to OAS member states. Cuba, for example, was notably absent in the original collection—a lacuna subsequently filled by a collecting expedition sponsored by the government of Hugo Chávez.

Throughout my stay, the Centro's staff members were always on hand to answer my questions and help to locate materials. Through our many conversations I learned that several were also active as researchers and collectors, traveling with some frequency to specific research sites throughout the country. Although the staff members seemed very active in their various research projects, I couldn't help but notice that the Centro received very few visitors. There was little doubt in my mind as to why this was the case. Venezuela's precarious political situation makes for one of the most challenging fieldwork destinations in the Western hemisphere today. And indeed, the concern for one's personal safety and the challenges outsiders face with respect to mobility and access to basic necessities (not to mention technologies), it should be emphasized, do not only apply to foreigners, but local researchers as well.

Venezuelan academics, in fact, are faced with the additional problem of having to negotiate a politically charged environment where the choice to work with a particular musician or musical community, for example, can have political repercussions that may affect their livelihood and careers.

Based on my own experience, I would say that these challenges should not deter others from visiting the library and making use of the excellent resources available there. In spite of what we read about the complex difficulties that the country and its people face today Venezuela continues to be an active and productive site for various forms of musical research—for how long remains to be seen.



Centro personnel: (front row) George Amaiz, Rosangela Barrios, Noemi Gonzalez, Irama Matheus, Kelina Campoverde Franklin Meza, (back row) Sean Bellaviti (author), Humberto José López, Juan John and Omar Pérez (Caracas, 2016)

Reference cited

Hassán de Llorente, Coralia. 1975. "Proyecto Multinacional de Etnomusicología y Folklore auspiciado por el Instituto Interamericano de Etnomusicología y Folklore (INIDEF) y la Dirección Nacional del Patrimonio Histórico: Informe parcial de las investigaciones realizadas en Panamá entre la población afro e hispano indígena." *Patrimonio Histórico*, Vol. 1, No. 4: 125-135.

Sean Bellaviti received the Ph.D. in ethnomusicology from the University of Toronto. He is currently an instructor at Ryerson University. His research focuses on Panamanian popular music and salsa, and extends to themes of nationalism, regionalism, political economy, and genre studies.

Disciplinary intervention for a practice of ethnomusicology

Posted May 5, 2017

The statement below—signed voluntarily by practitioners of ethnomusicology in April 2017—builds on disciplinary concerns that music and sound scholars past and present have identified. It affirms the need to move beyond narrative debates and toward structural change in music institutions, toward enacting justice. The primary authors of this statement intend it to be a living document that cultivates discussion and stimulates proposals of concrete measures that can redress institutionalized inequities.

This statement has grown out of nearly a year and a half of discussion and writing. The authors intend it to generate conversation and action. Please sign using [this form](#), providing your name and institution if you are comfortable doing so, or your initials or "Anonymous" with no institutional affiliation. To sign, you will need to scroll past all the previous names to enter yours as prompted. Signatory list will be updated daily. Response essays are welcome for consideration for publication by [Sound matters](#).

This statement calls for active change in the practices of ethnomusicology. We believe we must critically engage with current modes of systemic violence, working collectively toward the goal of comprehensive transformation. We support a radical restructuring of professional societies, academic publications, and the multiple spaces in which ethnomusicology occurs.

This is a declaration of commitment to changing the academic structures that deny many scholars full inclusion in their fields. We gratefully and respectfully acknowledge those who have risked placing their careers, safety, and well-being in jeopardy waging these battles. Proceeding from a framework of intersectionality that understands all forms of oppression as inextricably linked, we encourage all scholars to consider their positions within these systems of inequity. At a political moment when ethnomusicology is increasingly at risk, as are the bodies and well-being of its practitioners and participants, this work is urgent.

We state the following:

The call for inclusion itself issues from within a sphere of discourse constructed by systems of oppression that unequally renders audibility and visibility.

We recognize that modern academe—ethnomusicology included—is rooted and deeply embedded in colonial ideologies.

We acknowledge that the themes, techniques, theoretical approaches, and pedagogies valued in music institutions also devalue certain musicians, music cultures, and methodologies, and we believe this value structure is inherently unjust.

We are aware that the academic system continues to reaffirm old barriers to scholars of color and members of other marginalized communities, demands their visibility while rendering them inaudible, and assigns these scholars a disproportionate burden of institutional service and emotional labor.

We believe that tokenism and diversity rhetoric potentially mask and intensify structural inequity. The language of inclusion must be actualized and further actions should be taken in order to actually be more inclusive.

We see that contextualizing and minimizing microaggressions through discourses of political correctness obscures the reality of the daily struggle for personal and cultural survival faced by our students, classmates, friends, and coworkers.

As articulated in the SEM Position Statement in Response to the 2016 U.S. Presidential Election, we reaffirm our commitment to globally-engaged dialogue, scholarship, and advocacy. We believe the practices of ethnomusicology can work against racism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, misogyny, sexism, heteronormativity and cisnormativity, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and war.

We pledge to:

Speak up when we observe systemic injustices. We recognize that it is not always safe to do so, and that individuals must assess potential risks before making a decision regarding whether or not to speak.

Not speak for people who are in epistemic positions different from our own.

Cultivate listening practices and create spaces for a multiplicity of voices.

Reflect on our own positionality and the inevitable biases arising from those positions. We listen thoughtfully when it is pointed out that our own biases and assumptions reinforce structural injustice.

Prioritize attention to intersectional oppressions over singular agendas that ultimately uphold structures of injustice. We seek to deploy our listening, writing, teaching practices, and service to challenge and reframe normative structures that restrict the liberatory potential of ethnomusicological work.

Require that societies and organizations to which we belong publish statements of institutional stance regarding the inclusion of, respect for, and safety of their members. This is not only a political matter: it is an ethical one that requires an explicitly articulated position.

Request that societies and institutions to which we belong ensure infrastructural support for individuals and communities facing issues of access based on citizenship, visa eligibility, mobility, and financial considerations.

Request that societies and organizations to which we belong divest their endowments from entities that maintain structures of oppression.

Request that societies and organizations to which we belong dedicate activities engaging social justice movements—for example, conferences or pre-conference symposia, section or group meetings, journal issues, concerts, and community outreach.

Request that societies and organizations to which we belong devote resources and attention to democratizing and horizontalizing representation within these societies.

If we are to expand meaningfully the narratives and practices of ethnomusicology, we must center marginalized perspectives and engage with current critical issues. We believe that these are our obligations in 2017.

Signed,

Katherine Meizel, Bowling Green State University
Sidra Lawrence, Bowling Green State University
Denise Gill, Washington University in St. Louis
Evan Pensis, University of Chicago
Yun Emily Wang, University of Toronto
Chris Nickell, New York University
Natalia Bieletto, Universidad de Guanajuato
León F. García Corona, Northern Arizona University
Kyle Decoste, Columbia University
Tes Slominski, Beloit College
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Nate Renner, University of Toronto
Susan Thomas, University of Georgia
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Jason Busniewski, University of California, Santa Barbara
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Jonathan Ritter, University of California Riverside
Sonja Downing, Lawrence University
Eve McPherson, Kent State University at Trumbull
Eric Hung, Westminster Choir College of Rider University
Nicol Hammond, University of California, Santa Cruz
Heidi Chan, York University
Justin R. Hunter, University of Arkansas
Anonymous
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Megan E. Hill, Ypsilanti, Michigan
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Matthew Sumera, Hamline University
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Richard Emmert, Musashino University, Tokyo
Scott A. Carter, University of Wisconsin-Madison
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Dave Wilson, Victoria University of Wellington
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Rachel Adelstein, University of Cambridge
Jeongin Lee, University of California, Davis
Muriel E Swijghuisen Reigersberg, The University of Sydney, Australia
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Jeremy W. Foutz, STEAM Workgroup Indianapolis, IN
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Bernd Brabec de Mori, University of Vienna
Amber Clifford-Napoleone, University of Central Missouri
Andrea Douglass, UMass Boston
Jennifer Fraser, Oberlin College
Evan Rapport, The New School
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Marissa Moore, Yale University
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Alexandria Carrico, Florida State University
Tyler Bickford, University of Pittsburgh
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Gavin Douglas, University of North Carolina at Greensboro
Gordon Thompson, Skidmore College
Nomi Dave, University of Virginia
Jeff Roy, Paris Sciences et Lettres
Nicole Reissner, Cornell University
Anaar Desai-Stephens, Cornell University
Gage Averill, University of British Columbia
TK
Christi-Anne Castro, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor
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Eduardo Herrera, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
Russell Skelchy
Daphne Carr, New York University
Hadi Milanloo, University of Toronto
Kariann Goldschmitt, Wellesley College
Ellen Koskoff, University of Rochester
Randal Baier, Eastern Michigan University
Nicholas Tochka, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne
Jesse P. Karlsberg, Emory University
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Katie Stufflebeam, Boston University
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Kelley Kipperman, Mills College, Oakland, California
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Miriam Piilonen, Northwestern University
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Anna Farhan, New York University
Kathleen Wiens, Canadian Museum for Human Rights
Joel E. Rubin, University of Virginia
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Tamar Sella, Harvard University
Andrew Normann, Bowling Green State University
James Roberts, Toronto, Ontario
Marié Abe, Boston University, Boston MA
Otto Stuparitz , University of California, Los Angeles
Alia O'Brien, University of Toronto
Kathryn Metz, Rock & Roll Hall of Fame
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Madison Heying, University of California, Santa Cruz
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Jessica S. Baker, University of Chicago
Kiri Miller, Brown University
Glenda Goodman, University of Pennsylvania
Vijay Iyer, Harvard University
Amy Frishkey, Austin, TX
Meryl Krieger, Indiana University
Priscilla Tse, University of Illinois
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Joshua Brown
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Aaron Pettigrew, University of British Columbia
Daniel B. Reed, Indiana University
Solmaz Shakerifard, University of Washington, Seattle
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Katherine Lee, University of California, Davis
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Panayotis League, Harvard University
Kate Brucher, DePaul University
Anonymous, Oakland, CA

Beezer de Martelly, UC Berkeley
Nadia Chana, University of Chicago
Thalea Stokes, University of Chicago
Meredith Schweig, Emory University
Nil Basdurak, University of Toronto
Shana Goldin-Perschbacher, Temple University
Danielle Sirek, University of Windsor
Lindsay Wright, University of Chicago
Rebecca Bodenheimer, Independent scholar
Harris M. Berger, Memorial University of Newfoundland
Philip J Murphy Jr
Made Mantle Hood, Universiti Putra Malaysia
Andrea Emberly, York university
Joe Kinzer, University of Washington
James R. Cowdery, Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale (RILM)

Comments

Jody Diamond, Aug 22, 2018:

Those interested in the values expressed here may like my article “There Is No They There” which includes a manifesto for cultural interaction. It is based on my work with contemporary composers in Indonesia. It appeared in MUSICWORKS 47 Summer 1990.

HTML: <http://www.gamelan.org/jodydiamond/writing/theythere.html>

PDF (with graphics): http://www.gamelan.org/jodydiamond/writing/theythere_musicworks.pdf

Academic flying and climate justice: Toward an inclusive and sustainable ethnomusicology

Posted September 28, 2017

by Catherine Grant, Aaron Pettigrew, and Megan Collins

Earlier this year, SEM members released a Statement entitled “Disciplinary intervention for a practice of ethnomusicology” ([available in full on this blog](#)). According to its authors, the Statement is intended as “a declaration of commitment to changing the academic structures that deny many scholars full inclusion in their fields.” It calls for greater equality and justice in the practices of ethnomusicology, through “active change” and a “radical restructuring of professional societies” and the “multiple spaces in which ethnomusicology occurs.”

We wholeheartedly agree with the sentiment of the Statement. In this post, we draw particular attention to a single such practice of ethnomusicology (and other academic disciplines) that we believe requires radical restructuring in the names of inclusion, equality and justice. That is the phenomenon of *academic flying*: frequent air travel for conferences, networking, fieldwork, and other academic activities.

Although only a privileged few of the world’s population fly regularly, according to the International Civil Aviation Organization plane travel is [responsible for around 2-3%](#) of all greenhouse gas emissions. The European Commission notes that by 2020 [emissions from fossil fuel flying are predicted to be 70% above their 2005 levels](#). Emissions from flying need to be [urgently and dramatically reduced](#) in order to limit global temperature rises to well below 2 degrees Celsius, in line with the [2015 Paris Agreement](#).

Scholars in some disciplines have stopped questioning whether unfettered academic flying is an environmentally sustainable practice—clearly it is not—and have instead begun engaging with it as an issue of ethical and moral concern. Some leading climate scientists have committed to [radically reducing their own flying](#), or [even ceasing it altogether](#). Others are advocating for systemic change (see Parke Wilde’s [online petition](#)); still others are [spearheading change within their institutions and professional organizations](#) (like those associated with the [Tyndall Centre for Climate Change Research, UK](#)).

In light of the Statement mentioned above, we wish to bring this wider discussion about academic flying and climate change to the discipline of ethnomusicology. We believe that climate change (as an issue of social justice) and academic flying are inextricably connected with the wider systemic concerns around access, inclusion, and justice raised by members of SEM and our other professional societies.

Take academic flying as an issue of [climate justice](#). Ethnomusicologists fly around the world to carry out or disseminate our research on important issues such as the global refugee crisis, poverty, civil unrest, and cultural endangerment — all topics of recent research in our discipline. And yet we little acknowledge that through our flying, we are contributing to a global intergenerational crisis that is set to tremendously exacerbate these and other issues of social justice and human rights. We also seem to overlook the fact that climate change is [likely to have the worst impacts](#) for those peoples and cultures that have least contributed to the problem — those same people and cultures that the discipline of ethnomusicology has historically been most concerned with.

In fact, it is rather astounding that climate justice so rarely surfaces as an explicit factor for consideration in our ethnomusicological decisions around funding applications, research design, or conference planning. By failing to embed climate justice in our collective consciousness in the same way that principles of mutuality, collaboration, and respect are now embedded in our work as ethnomusicologists, we simply further ingrain those global imbalances of power that have led to a privileged few being able to fly in the first place.

This, of course, directly invokes a problem SEM and other ethnomusicological organizations have been struggling with for decades: how can we enable the broadest possible participation at our conferences and other scholarly gatherings? The issue rightly causes angst. When only some researchers are able to gather (often at fancy conference hotels) to report on their work, the absence of those who cannot be there for economic reasons is perhaps the most obvious manifestation of inequality and injustice in our discipline.

One organizational response has been to offer travel bursaries or registration subsidies to researchers (and indeed, we authors have been recipients of such bursaries in the past). Though well-intentioned and often very helpful for individuals, this approach arguably entrenches existing economic and power imbalances, with those already in positions of relative power or privilege determining the participation of less powerful and/or less wealthy members. Further, such a strategy is not scalable to anywhere near the degree necessary to achieve a fair global practice of ethnomusicology, because it does not address the root problem — the considerable costs associated with conference travel that are prohibitive for most people in many countries around the world.

So, we believe that one necessary step toward making ethnomusicology more inclusive and equitable is to reconsider the way our conferences and symposia are run. One way to enable participation by researchers who cannot fly (or who choose not to for environmental reasons) is to permit virtual or remote presentations, and to actively support such presentations through ensuring technological capacity at the conference site.

While SEM has been [live-streaming selected conference presentations](#) since 2011, [current SEM policy](#) does not allow remote presentations (except [under rare circumstances](#)). Allowing such presentations would reduce the carbon emissions associated with our gatherings, while also increasing their accessibility. Successful prototypes exist for [low-emission](#) or even ‘[nearly-carbon-neutral](#)’ conferences that enable [geographically dispersed](#), interactive participation and networking opportunities through online means.

By signing SEM’s “Disciplinary intervention for a practice of ethnomusicology”, we pledged to “[r]equest that societies and organizations to which we belong devote resources and attention to democratizing and horizontalizing representation within these societies.” In this spirit, we invite SEM and its membership to reinvigorate a conversation around more democratic, inclusive and environmentally sustainable conference practices that reduce the need for flying.

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In July 2017, the authors delivered a (semi-virtual) panel “The Plane Truth: Academic Flying, Climate Change, and the Future of Music Research” at the International Council for Traditional Music World Conference (Limerick, Ireland) The panel was featured on an [episode of Culture File on RTE Irish National Radio](#).

Waiting for Aspiring Progressives

Posted August 15, 2018

by Gavin Lee (Soochow University)

I recently decided to revisit the issue of teaching opera in prison again with colleagues. Despite insightful responses by William Cheng and Bonnie Gordon to the widely condemned post “Don Giovanni Goes to Prison” by Pierpaolo Polzonetti (all on the *Musicology Now* blog, published by the American Musicological Society), it seems that musicologists¹ as a community have not developed a deeper understanding of the issues related to racial dynamics in the US as expressed through music and musical institutions.²

The reaction of many in the musicological community reflected a progressive commitment to anti-racism and anti-colonialism as anchored in the concept of cultural difference. Accordingly, many regard it as unacceptable for a professor who is “white” in the contemporary US context³ to impose his music on students who are drawn from a prison population which is majority people of color. “Colonialism” is a term I’ve heard in discussion with colleagues which was used to describe Polzonetti’s educational endeavor. Implied in “colonialism” is the power differential between the educator and students, and the cultural mismatch between the “white” music and the target audience consisting primarily of people of color.⁴ Many read Polzonetti’s post through discursive lenses: Polzonetti’s portrayal of a black male student protesting Donna Elvira’s shoddy treatment (by the title role in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*) was interpreted as an instantiation of the racist stereotype of the violent black man; Polzonetti’s self-described attempt to get his students to “chill out” by focusing on the music analysis of emotion was interpreted as a discourse of the civilizing force of white opera on a black man.

Much more needs to be said about opera and Western empire, including opera’s racism and orientalism, and the contemporary globalized reverence for Western art music. Here, I’ll focus on the *reception* of Polzonetti’s post and suggest alternative strategies for the progressive movement in musicology, which is unavoidably contextualized by heightened racial tensions in the US: recall that Polzonetti’s post appeared in February 2016 as Trump was emerging as a presidential candidate and running a campaign characterized by abhorrent racist discourses. What if, instead of assuming the worst about Polzonetti, we had given him the benefit of the doubt, assuming that educators who volunteer in prison have good intentions? Can we regard Polzonetti’s work in prison, crossing racial and class lines, as progressive to some extent? I wonder what the effect of the “calling out” of Polzonetti through public denouncement on social media has been on him as a scholar, educator, and individual. And I wonder if Ngọc Loan Trần, who has critiqued call-out culture for alienating instead of engaging those deemed to be offenders, would approve of calling “in” Polzonetti, which means inviting him to join an even more progressive agenda by developing conceptual and pedagogical frames together with him.⁵ Is there a way in which we could have acknowledged Polzonetti’s effort to reach across the aisles of race and class—albeit in a highly problematic way—and persuade him to revise his position and adopt what progressives would accept as a more ethical way of relating to racial others?

This is a question that has been bothering me, and not just because of the “reparative” view that seeks to acknowledge at least some traces of good intention, versus a “paranoid” view that Polzonetti’s efforts were made in the name of naked oppression.⁶ The question bothers me because call-out culture is fragmenting progressive communities at large (which aim for social, cultural, and legal reform) through policing in public platforms and a tendency to shame and cast outside those aspiring progressives who are deemed *not progressive enough*. The more pressure that is applied on race in the Trump era, the more aggressive call outs are likely to be, and the less patient progressives are likely to be with one another. The result is that instead of coalition building, parts of the progressive movement seem to aim to become

more and more progressive by slicing off other unwanted portions of itself. This revolutionary avant-garde mentality that insists on the purity of resistance seems a little paranoid—“You are not progressive enough, and so you must be here to destroy the progressive movement by watering it down.” Sedgwick appropriately describes the *stylistics* of paranoid readings as that of “minimalist elegance and conceptual economy”—sounds like call-out culture?

There are of course inherent problems with certain practices of pedagogy which focus on the transmission of knowledge from expert to novice, problems exacerbated in prison context; Polzonetti’s account seems to suggest that he opted to convey specialized knowledge (the musical analysis of emotion) as a response to the emergent feminist narrative of the student protesting Donna Elvira’s treatment. In doing so, Polzonetti appears to have missed an opportunity to create a community of learning where students collaborate in the making of musical knowledge—this is particularly disappointing given the dire need for avenues for negotiating the personal and social spaces of a harsh carceral environment (Harbert’s research is instructive in this regard⁷). Teaching is a relational activity where race relations are often unavoidable and can even be instructive. A unit on opera as part of a larger course can become a chance for everyone in the classroom to participate in a discussion of the history of the adoption of Western art music, including opera, by the white majority in the US, and from there move on to the general racialization of music. This could lead to further discussion of issues like the acquiring of cultural capital (through opera courses) as well as sheer musical enjoyment, and the complicated ways in which race, history, social status, and musical joy intersect. Most often, however, many of my colleagues attach a “racist” label to teaching opera in prison and stop there; and many of them, including opera specialists, have yet to develop a conceptual frame for thinking about the racial dynamics of the teaching of opera. This does not necessarily mean that they hold beliefs about the superiority or inferiority of races; it means that musicology as a whole is lagging behind other disciplines in its racial reckoning. In the context of institutional racism, individuals may unwittingly perpetuate a racist system or “formation” by maintaining conventions (such as doctoral translation exams in the key operatic languages of German, French, and Italian).⁸ They may even be aware of personal culpability within a racist system without knowing how to walk out of it. It is a mistake to lump together those opera scholars with no interest in reaching beyond racial lines, with opera scholars who teach in prisons with good intentions and might even want to develop a pedagogical framework that addresses race in a responsible way—if only we had waited. In the age of online social media, literally waiting in terms of quantitative time is improbable as we rush to comment. But what I mean is waiting in the sense of withholding judgement, and opting instead to sow the seeds of change in others’ minds. Is it possible that this less radical approach might be able to achieve something that fiery critiques can’t?

In the age of Trump, it is important that we examine how racial critique has had to suffer the additional burden of speaking ever more loudly against power. Lived racial lives and race as a concept and symbol have had to carry the heavy responsibility of serving as vanguards of the resistance against Trump, which must surely have had the effect of sharpening progressives’ racial awareness. But racisms within and without AMS are not one-of-a-kind necessarily—they exist on a continuum of the capacity for physical and social harm, have different genealogies, and call for different responses. Where there are good but misguided intentions, where there are willing interlocutors, we might create room for patient conversation. To recognize when and where “calling in” might be appropriate, we have to differentiate: the institutional racism of AMS that musicologists today inevitably and perhaps unwillingly inherited is not necessarily the same as the kind of racism wrought alongside political and economic forces in global hyper-mediatized neoliberal context. It is not necessarily of a kind with racism wrought in the heteronormative imaginaries of reproductivity and the organic body. We need to think in terms of *radical* intersectionality between racial scapegoating and off-shoring of jobs in the US, between race and its symbolic reproduction, between organic and inorganic racial bodies, and between anti-racisms that limit rather than expand agency and participation—that is to say, we need to think of race as part of a much larger *material “assemblage”* (after Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari)⁹ or “queer assemblage” (after Jasbir

Puar) of different components that continuously change in terms of relationality to another, relative visibility, and impact on racial lives.¹⁰ Racism is real. It relies on, has a complex relation with, and can sometimes even distract us from the *equally* devastating effects of poverty, capitalist exploitation, psychological manipulation, and environmental degradation. Because racism is rampant and is deadly, we can become impatient—in light of that simple truth—for scholars undertaking European-focused musicological or music theory studies to develop a critical awareness of race. In *not* waiting for that, we risk closing our ears to any anti-racist voice that is not already amped up to the highest volume. “No aspiring progressives allowed!”

Particularly in a moment of impending, intertwined ecological, economic and social disasters brought on by global predatory capitalism that has been practiced by appointees of the Trump administration (drawn from Goldman Sachs, ExxonMobil etc.), it is more important than ever that progressives find strength in one another and work to broaden their base of support. We must apply innovative approaches to address the rise of racial and other forms of social reactionism, and understand the alignment between reactionary politics and ideologically coherent, profit-driven practices (job offshoring, weakening unions, climate change denial etc.) that have created a fertile ground of white poverty for hate to fester in. It is against this background that we must ask, How should those of us who are in relatively less precarious situations develop a strategy for the complexities and ambiguities of confronting and working through our national legacy of institutionalized racism and the current neoliberal racial regime, so that we all are given a chance to evolve and build a stronger movement together?

¹ “Musicologists” in this post denotes the contemporary North American understanding of term as referring to scholars involved mainly in the study of primarily Western art music and to a lesser extent popular and global music.

² Pierpaolo Polzonetti, “Don Giovanni Goes to Prison: Teaching Opera Behind Bars,” *Musicology Now*, February 16, 2016. http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2016/02/don-giovanni-goes-to-prison-teaching_16.html

William Cheng, “Musicology, Freedom, and the Uses of Anger,” *Musicology Now*, February 21, 2016. <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2016/02/musicology-freedom-and-uses-of-anger.html>

Bonnie Gordon, “The Perils of Public Musicology,” *Musicology Now*, February 22, 2016. <http://musicologynow.ams-net.org/2016/02/the-perils-of-public-musicology.html>

³ It should be noted that historically Italian-Americans were not considered “white,” which is a continually negotiated category.

⁴ The historical and contemporary construction of opera as white is a complex process that involved multiple moving parts, of which pedagogy is a key component. Vocal programs in conservatories play a part in the construction of operatic and art song singing as white through their admissions process, by admitting only candidates who adhere to those forms of singing, while rejecting those who sing in the style of blues and jazz—i.e. black music. See Julia Eklund Koza, “Listening for Whiteness: Hearing Racial Politics in Undergraduate School Music,” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 16.2 (Fall 2008): 145-155.

⁵ Ngọc Loan Tràn, “Calling IN: A Less Disposable Way of Holding Each Other Accountable,” *BGD Blog*, December 18, 2013. <http://www.bgdblog.org/2013/12/calling-less-disposable-way-holding-accountable/>

⁶ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, “Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading, Or, You Are So Paranoid, You Probably Think This Essay is About You,” in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

⁷ See e.g. Benjamin J. Harbert, “Only Time: Musical Means to the Personal, the Private and the Polis at the Louisiana Correctional Institute for Women,” *American Music* 30.2 (2013): 203-240.

⁸ See Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States* (New York: Routledge, 2014).

⁹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

¹⁰ I suggest that we need to go much further than analyzing race in relation to nation, ethnicity, class, and “color blind” ideology, as outlined in Omi and Winant. In order to counter the politically constrictive forms of identity politics which fail to be intersectional, Jasbir Puar, for instance, disarticulates identity using the figure of the material terrorist body dismembered by a bomb, such that notions of self and other are radically reconfigured. See Jasbir Puar, *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

SEM Blog: new mission statement

Posted Nov 12, 2018

About

[Sound Matters \(https://soundmattersthesemblog.com/\)](https://soundmattersthesemblog.com/) is a blog about making ethnomusicological research and debates accessible to and engaged with the wider public. Sponsored by the [Society for Ethnomusicology](#), the blog is a peer-reviewed digital publication that emphasizes collaboration and new ways of doing ethnomusicology. Sound Matters provides a platform for young, independent and tenured scholars, inclusive of those working inside and outside academic institutions, to challenge the status quo in the field of ethnomusicology and colonial forms of knowledge production.

The blog welcomes and encourages media-rich contributions (sound, video, photos) as a way to provoke new research questions and generate a broader interest in ethnomusicology scholarship and teaching.

Sound Matters was launched in 2014 by the inaugural Editor-in-Chief Jim Cowdery ([RILM](#)). The current Editor-in-Chief is Eliot Bates (The Graduate Center, CUNY).

Directions to Contributors

Sound Matters seeks blog posts on a variety of topics including but not limited to opinion pieces, theoretical/methodological perspectives, ethnographic findings, area-focused essays, the teaching of ethnomusicology, and public-sector ethnomusicology. Posts should be accessible to the general public.

Posts should not exceed 1200 words and contributors are encouraged to include photos, videos and/or audio clips. Posts should be submitted to the editorial team: soundmattersblog@gmail.com

- text as .doc or .docx
- a succinct title for your post
- a list of 3-5 suggested tags/keywords
- a one sentence bio and photo, followed by (optional) links to one or more online profiles (e.g. academia.edu, researchgate, github, personal blog or website, soundcloud, twitter)
- photos or images for which you control the rights and that are not currently hosted online can be emailed directly to us (.jpg or .png formats accepted). For 3rd-party hosted images, videos and sound, please provide a separate .doc file with the links and the desired captions (please note: we can not publish multimedia that you do not have permissions for, unless you are linking to already-hosted material hosted on a 3rd-party site that adheres to DMCA policies, such as YouTube, Vimeo, or SoundCloud).

Language: Sound Matters endeavors to engage with ethnomusicological scholarship in languages other than English. For posts that are not in English, we require a 250-word abstract in addition to the post, and the post will be reviewed and edited by a specialist in the particular language. At present, we can readily accommodate posts in Spanish, French, Arabic, Turkish, or German. Other languages may be possible; please contact us at soundmattersblog@gmail.com for more info.

Bibliography: Sound Matters follows the conventions of the journal *Ethnomusicology*, and uses Chicago 17th author-date references. See [here](#) for more info.

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Comments are highly encouraged, but moderated. We do not permit the following in comments:

- Abuse and personal attacks
- Advertising and self-promotion
- Off-topic discussion

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-eliot, farah, and brian @soundmatters