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“Dancing Fingers”: Embodied Lineages in the Performance of Okinawan Classical Music

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Abstract. In this paper I examine the use and meanings of body movements in the performance and teaching of Okinawan classical music. I draw on an extended period of participant-observation in Okinawa itself, as well as a series of recorded interviews and demonstrations by performers, made in 2010 and 2011. I present these results in the context of a number of recent studies of physical gesture from the ethnomusicological and music psychology literature, and argue that these gestures hold a number of musical and extra-musical meanings that are actively debated and constructed by performers themselves.

Becoming the Floor / Breaking the Floor: Experiencing the Kathak-Flamenco Connection

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Abstract. Of the many percussive dance forms across the globe, it is curious that two so geographically remote as kathak from North India and flamenco from Southern Spain share so many visual, rhythmic, and kinesthetic similarities, even more than other percussive dances. While these commonalities may point to some loosely shared historical and cultural links, which this article explores, my focus employs comparative movement analysis to investigate each form’s distinct heritage, ethos, and aesthetics. Intertwining personal narrative with insights gleaned from embodied practice, movement observation, and participant-observation, this study offers insights into understanding dance as embodied culture, and rhythm as worldview sounded and visualized.

The Chop: The Diffusion of an Instrumental Technique across North Atlantic Fiddling Traditions

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Abstract. The “chop” is a percussive string instrument technique pioneered by bluegrass fiddler Richard Greene in the 1960s and adopted into contemporary string styles by Darol Anger in the 1980s. This article traces the diffusion of the chop through a number of North Atlantic fiddling traditions in the 1990s and 2000s. It also considers the circumstances and implications of musicians’ decisions to adopt, adapt, or reject the chop. Drawing on both sociological research on the diffusion of innovations and genre theory, this article demonstrates that the diffusion trajectory of a musical innovation depends on the innovation itself, on the sites of transmission, and on the interplay of the lived and imagined musical worlds within which musicians play, work, and study. It concludes by suggesting that, when studying North Atlantic fiddling, both regional divisions and generational trends should be taken into consideration.

Remembering the Borderlands: Traditional Music and the Post-Frontier in Aisén, Chile

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Abstract. In the Region of Aisén, in Chilean Patagonia, musicians claim Argentine popular music from the early twentieth century as regional tradition, and call on it to express local identifications and Chilean patriotism. This seemingly paradoxical form of traditionalism is rooted in narratives of Aisén’s early history, when Chilean settlers depended on Argentina for their survival in marginal, frontier circumstances. This article introduces the concept of the “post-frontier” to explain the position from which residents of Aisén claim this music as their own. This research opens new territory in the study of transnational music, tracing the various ways in which temporality acts upon and within notions of regional identity, national belonging, and transnational affinity.

Culture as Freedom: Musical “Liberation” in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka

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Abstract. This article provides three vignettes of musicians living in Batticaloa, Sri Lanka, who bravely define their musics against or outside the communal languages promoted by the two armies – the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE (Tamil Tigers) – that fought a civil war in the region for close to three decades (1983–2009). Noting the curious symbiosis between musicological languages of community and those promulgated by the dueling sovereign powers, the article asks how we might represent musical actions aimed at “liberation” from discourses of community without situating them in the communal discourses they seek to avoid.