**WEBB-GANNON — Musical**

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**Digital Musical Industry and Identity in Melanesia**

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This panel discusses and embodies three key ideas expressed in ‘A Manifesto for Music Technologists’, an online declaration emerging from Microsoft Music New England’s 2014 symposium ‘What is Music Technology For’ (http://www.musictechifesto.org/?page\_id=2), and applies these ideas to the contemporary digitalization of music in Melanesia. Specifically, the panel explores the ways in which music technology is contributing to the creation and imbrication of new Melanesian identities—political, economic, and sociocultural—and to the disintegration of the traditional notion of a Melanesian music ‘industry’. It attends to the ways in which music digitalization at once contributes to improved justice for Melanesians in these areas (for example, in politics and culture), and undermines justice in others (for instance, in the music economy).

The first idea from the manifesto that we examine is that ‘music technologies create possible futures and offer new ways to inhabit the present and past. Their changes presage changes in culture, signaling trends yet to come. They are thus sites of struggles over money, membership, power, and prestige. Technological change is inseparable from economic, cultural and political change’. Crowdy discusses the ‘musical poverty’ in Melanesia that stems from the dissolution of the commercial music industry, which traded in cassette tapes and ‘linked [industry] to [music] creators in terms of sales and royalties’. He examines how different economic possibilities are simultaneously opening up for musicians with the development of new smartphone apps (which he is currently creating and will be trialing with the other panelists in an action research project), which will allow musicians to create and distribute music for payment using their own mobile phones. Dick and Stern explore how ancient oral narrative traditions in Vanuatu are interfacing with music technology, anchoring present changes and networks in the past. They look at the role that identity factors such as gender and location (urban or rural) affect Ni-Vanuatu musicians’ access to and interaction with digital technology, and examine what these changes to traditional musical cultures in Vanuatu might mean for the future of Vanuatu’s music ‘industry’. Webb and Webb-Gannon discuss a developing Melanesian regional approach to music and technology by documenting and analyzing Melanesian trends in creating, posting, and commenting on YouTube music and visual content, as well as proclamations of a regional identity through music that shakes off longstanding negative stereotypes of Melanesians and invites the world to see Melanesians as empowered, political, and proud of where they are situated globally.

The second point from the manifesto that we take up in this panel is the notion that ‘meaningful innovation bridges multiple perspectives—yet the music technology field remains predominantly white, male, and tends toward assumptions that its user base is Western and able-bodied. . . . Meaningful innovation happens when fields intersect—yet those who work in music technology are too often siloed in distinct fields within universities, industry, startups, journalism, hobbyist and fan subcultures’. The panelists—three ethnomusicologists (one specializing in music technology), a peace and conflict analyst, and a cultural events producer-facilitator—will discuss their diverse academic research in an effort to actively bring together multiple perspectives on the innovation and justice-related change that music digitalization is bringing about in Melanesia. The panel not only features research from different disciplines/professions but it uses music case studies from the non-Western world (Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, West Papua, Solomon Islands) to examine what characteristics of music from these places are locally or nationally distinctive and can be identified as being of the region. It also highlights music created by Melanesian women, considering whether the digitalization of such music contributes to greater agency in the region for women musicians and listeners alike.

Third, we attend to the idea and call to action in the manifesto that ‘music technologies make worlds. Let us make better worlds. Let music technology do good, serve public interest, foster belonging, justice, collaboration and sharing, enable greater access to positive musical experiences and personal connections, and create durable objects and practices’. Webb and Webb-Gannon survey the online music movement for a Free West Papua, examining how non–West Papuan Melanesians are using new media such as YouTube to advocate through song for West Papua’s right to self-determination, and the ways West Papuans are using YouTube to record musical messages of resistance for the world. Dick and Stern assert that young Ni-Vanuatu musicians are bridging two worlds: a traditional world of music with deep endogenous cultural significance and a globally connected world inviting musicians to share with and imbibe other music cultures. Balancing or merging these to create better cultural worlds for Ni-Vanuatu musicians and listeners is a delicate undertaking, as Dick and Stern attest. Crowdy turns his attention to the durability of music technology objects. Warped-sounding cassettes are no longer a lucrative commodity for musicians or producers; digital music products in the form of piratable SD card libraries have contributed to performer poverty. But Crowdy sees the mobile phone, with its potential for music creation and distribution, as the hope of Papua New Guinean musicians’ economic future, at least until the arrival of superior technology that allows sweeter-sounding worlds to be constructed.

**1. The Impact of Gender and Local Identity on Vanuatu’s Digital Music Industry**

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In Vanuatu, where new technologies are overlaid on social structures built on thousands of years of oral tradition, story and voice are important concepts. Musical exchanges are deeply embedded in the archipelago’s traditional culture, and alongside the old circulation systems of musical knowledge, the Internet and mobile phones have created new networks for the circulation of music. In the new millennium Vanuatu has experienced considerable development in digital technologies, with the arrival of the Digicel mobile telephone company in 2008. In the first decade of the new millennium, mobile phone ownership rose from less than 1 percent to more than 50 percent of the population. The possibilities for digital storage have made the mobile phone an indispensable tool for young musicians.

This paper explores how music and technology are converging in Vanuatu. Today, the nascent music industry in Vanuatu is a site of many conflicting forces. Young Ni-Vanuatu men, and to a lesser extent women, are engaging with global media, as evidenced by the internationalization of the urban Fest’Napuan festival and action around this annual event, and the emergence of two provincial ‘sister’ events. The dynamic of locality on identity provides a lens to explore the ways that digital technology is shaping the future of the Vanuatu music ‘industry’. How are the modes of distribution and dissemination of music changing? In particular, the authors explore the possible synergies between the emerging practice of transmedia production and the importance of story for Ni-Vanuatu musicians. Does the participatory culture of transmedia storytelling resonate with the way musicians in different parts of Vanuatu are representing themselves domestically and internationally? Are Ni-Vanuatu musicians idiosyncratic transmedia producers? The authors examine the situation of young musicians in different Banks islands in Vanuatu, looking at how they use music to express identity with the resources available to them, and ways in which global elements are being co-opted and appropriated by local ones.

**2. Mobile Phones and Musical Impoverishment in Papua New Guinea**

Denis Crowdy

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In many places around the world, mobile phones and associated communication networks are widely used for distributing and listening to music. As smartphones become more commonplace, the range of activities and possibilities surrounding such mobile music expands. This paper probes the impact of the smartphone through a number of case studies from Papua New Guinea, a nation where rapid growth in mobile telecommunications has occurred since 2007. This has coincided with the rapid growth of home studios that create music featuring an increase in the use of synthesised and sequenced instruments over guitars and ukuleles, previously important instruments in contributing to local popular music styles. The commodity status of music has also changed as a result of digital production and sharing, and is related to similar changes occurring in music industries elsewhere. What was once considered a commercial music industry with a clear commodity—the cassette, linked to the creators in terms of sales and royalties—is now a more dispersed amateur activity. Indeed, it is possible to see locally recorded music as essentially free media fuelling commodification in other areas such as phones, network bandwidth, digital media hardware, and advertising, for example. While this is similar to developments in many other parts of the world, disparities in income, wealth, and basic infrastructure intensify concerns about economic justice in Papua New Guinea and speak to issues recently explored in ethnomusicology around musical poverty and impoverishment. Observations from the case studies described have been used to design an applied ethnomusicology project involving the development of music production applications for mobile phones and collaboration between a number of scholars and organisations focusing on Melanesia; the paper concludes with a discussion of this activity.

**3, 4. Music, Video, and the Internet as Means to Increasing Political and Cultural Participation and Engagement in Melanesia**

Michael Webb

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Camellia Webb-Gannon

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In his renowned post-colonial critique of the ways outsiders have portrayed the Pacific Islands and its inhabitants, Epeli Hau‘ofa commended paying attention to local expertise, to ‘images, sounds and movements that speak to us, that speak of us in our place and our time’ (Hau‘ofa, 2008). This paper has two parts, which together provide an overview and a specific instance of how digital technology appears to be contributing to the fulfillment of Hau‘ofa’s desire for Islanders. Increasingly, images, sounds, and movements are being created and employed by indigenous innovators to project new senses of identity and belonging across Melanesia. The paper considers how communities and individuals are gaining access in various ways to the tools and resources required to create and launch new digital music and video products that have in recent years begun circulating on the Internet, and which have the potential to significantly increase political and cultural engagement and participation in the region as well as contribute to the reshaping of senses of belonging in the world. We believe that at present we are only witnessing the beginning of a trend that will likely blossom as technologies become more affordable and widely available in the southwestern Pacific region. Part One of this paper, by Michael Webb, provides an introduction and overview—an analytical survey of the kinds of musical products that Melanesians are authoring that communicate a desire for their perspectives to be seen and heard. It examines the technologies that Melanesians are employing to create and promote new local, national, and regional music forms, and discusses the types of interactions taking place on Internet forums between musicians, promoters, and listeners. This first part assesses the social and cultural-political implications of the digitalization of new popular Melanesian music for its producers and intended consumers. Part Two of the paper, by Camellia Webb-Gannon, offers a case study of Melanesia-wide identification through music, dance, and video, with the West Papuan desire for political independence. It examines songs and accompanying video content created by non–West Papuan Melanesians professing solidarity with West Papuans, and music written and performed by West Papuans proclaiming their affinity with other Melanesian peoples. The message of such music, the paper argues, is strategic on a number of levels. At an international level, it links West Papuans to Melanesian culture and politics, thereby distancing it for listeners from Indonesian sovereignty claims. Regionally, it is also an attempt by non–West Papuan musicians to rally support in their respective Melanesian countries for West Papuan self-determination, and represents an effort by West Papuan musicians to do the same. Locally, it buoys West Papuans’ morale, which energizes the struggle. The digitalization of West Papua–related solidarity music has enabled members of the West Papuan diaspora to experience solidarity virtually, with, for example, West Papuan political prisoners recording musical messages of support for diaspora leaders, which have been uploaded to YouTube. It has also allowed traditional treasured protest songs to be preserved for posterity, and has provided West Papuan musicians with access to the music of other ‘black’ political struggles—styles such as reggae and hip-hop that serve as models for their own new expressions and aspirations. The social justice impact of this solidarity music and the technologies it is utilising form the analytical core of this case study.

**Reference**

Hauʻofa, E. (2008). *We Are the Ocean: Selected Works*. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.