COMMENTARY MUSIC TRADITIONS

Losing Sound

The Threat to Local Musics and Global Musical Diversity

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UNESCO's 2003 Convention on the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage represents the first concerted international effort to minimize the widespread threat to the world's languages, musical traditions, dance and theater forms, traditional environmental and medical knowledge, and other intangible manifestations of culture. The threat is seen to be primarily a result of deep and rapid sociocultural transformations of recent decades brought about by a host of phenomena, from environmental challenges to technological developments, from rural-to-urban migration to economic and political shifts.

These transformations have brought marked changes in the functions and contexts of many music genres, especially those of indigenous and minority peoples. Sometimes these changes boost musical vitality: a popular YouTube clip or single can quickly raise a genre's national or international profile, which in turn may serve to regenerate local interest in it.

In other situations, though, these changes compromise viability. For instance, entire sets of New Zealand Maori paddling and food-bearing songs disappeared when they became functionally redundant due to changing ways of life. The urban settlement of traditionally nomadic Mongolian herding communities resulted in the loss of ritual contexts and was thus a primary factor in the atrophy of the string fiddle culture *morin khurr.* Television, the internet and other mass media have displaced community gatherings in which music once was central, and young people especially are turning more and more to these newer forms of diversion; anthropologist Adrienne Kaeppler partly attributes the precarious situation of the Tongan choreographed sung speech tradition *lakalaka* to the encroachment of European and Asian music and cultures on Tongan youth culture. Other examples abound.

According to ethnomusicologist Keith Howard, these are grounds for action. He believes that "while music will change over time ... , it's important to find strategies to ... give [communities] the power to promote, preserve, and maintain their musical heritage, allowing that heritage to develop but to maintain their sense of identity and belonging" (interview with Huib Schippers, Nov 2008). Indeed, the costs of losing musical heritage may be high in terms of concomitant loss of individual and collective identity, systems of knowledge, connection with ancestry and heritage, social cohesion, cultural or ethnic pride, and loss of other forms of intangible heritage in which music is integral (such as dance or theater forms). In this way, consequences of the threatened viability of small music genres extend well beyond the individual and community levels.

This commentary first looks at approaches developing in response to this threat to local musics and global musical diversity, beyond those directly related to the UNESCO convention. It then suggests how efforts from other fields, particularly language-related disciplines such as linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics, might play a role in understanding possible ways forward for threatened music genres.

A New Applied Research Focus

Much as early anthropological linguistics was devoted to documenting dying languages, early ethnomusicological (or "music folklore") research centered on documenting musical traditions seen as doomed to extinction—an approach scholars now refer to as *salvage ethnomusicology.* Current approaches to musics in decline are more pragmatic, acknowledging the natural emergence, change and decay of musical traditions. Yet they also embody an acute awareness of many forceful global processes currently acting on small music genres.

Increasingly, researchers and activists are addressing the complex challenges of sustaining and revitalising small music genres, spurred by the 2003 UNESCO convention and other calls-to-arms, such as the 2006 International Music Council report *The Protection and Promotion of Musical Diversity.*

The issues are multifaceted. How can a musical tradition's natural processes of change be reconciled with efforts to safeguard it? What roles should advocates, researchers or fieldworkers play in maintaining the vitality of a single music genre or global music diversity at large? Who should have the final say on what to safeguard, and how, particularly when communities harbor many voices? How can the commercial goals of the mass media and music industry be balanced with efforts to maintain the vitality of small music genres?

Action-oriented perspectives such as those found in anthropology and sociolinguistics, where the applied agenda is an explicit part of the discourse and approach, are now emerging in ethnomusicology, too. Increasingly, researchers of music in and of the cultures of the world are recognizing the possibility—and sometimes the obligation—to act as agents of change in the communities they study. Applied ethnomusicology is still in its nascent stages and is striving to determine what constitutes progressive, respectful enquiry into what is now an issue of some urgency. To this end, sustainability was a focus topic of the Applied Ethnomusicology Study Group meeting of the International Council for Traditional Music in Hanoi in July 2010; it was also the theme of a 2009 edition of the leading journal *World of Music.*

The five-year research project *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: Towards an Ecology of Musical Diversity,* led by Queensland Conservatorium Research Centre (see http://musecology.griffith.edu.au) is representative of the applied ethnomusicological approach. Funded by the Australia Research Council (2009–13), the project is designed to build a solid base of knowledge and resources to help communities and other stakeholders (such as cultural organizations, policymakers and researchers) negotiate more successful practices relating to music sustainability. The charitable foundation Musical Futures has been established as part of the project, with the aim to provide seed funding to enable communities to act on the project's research outcomes.

Learning from Other Disciplines

To some degree at least, mechanisms emanating from the 2003 UNESCO convention have already begun to help specific endangered musical traditions. UNESCO's "List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding" often brings genres raised visibility, government support, and increased community pride in music. In some cases this has had a positive effect on musical vitality, such as in the endangered North Vietnamese chamber music genre *ca trù;* community engagement has grown significantly in the last five years or so, not least due to the extensive preparations for nomination of ca trù to UNESCO's list. On the other hand, for ca trù as for many other genres, external pressures continue to mount, and it remains to be seen whether UNESCO recognition or various practical initiatives emanating from it (such as festivals, national conferences and youth music classes) can outweigh the forces of the changing sociocultural environment.

The global processes acting on small music genres are beyond researchers' or communities' power to stop, even should they wish to do so. Efforts to mediate therefore require a keen appreciation of the ecosystems in which musics operate—of the multifaceted web of economic, political, ideological, social, environmental and other musical and non-musical factors at play in musical viability. It seems wise to move beyond protecting music genres in isolation and to refocus our attention on their ecologies; that is, to tackle the problem at the level of the forest, not the trees.

In this regard, other disciplines may prove informative for ethnomusicologists. Since the early 1990s, when the dire predicament of many languages was recognized (a number of linguists believe 50% of the world's 6,000-odd languages are at risk of disappearing this century), the study of endangered languages and their ecologies has given considerable impulse to the development of maintenance and revitalization initiatives.

Music and language are both intangible manifestations and expressions of culture, and both are impacted by similar forces within the global and local environment. For this reason, applied ethnomusicology might be well positioned to draw on related insights from the

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This month commentaries by Rupert Cox, Flagg Miller and Ronda Sewald include supplemental files available through AnthroSource.

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Circulating Theory

Thinking about music in terms of circulation might help elucidate what has been going on in a case such as the modern Algiers-Tlemcen tradition, but it is a two-way street. On the one hand, thinking about music in terms of circulation has made me think about the work that goes into delineating, maintaining and moving musical goods. On the other hand, it demands new ways of thinking about circulation. Music may be like Weiner's textiles, but there are also important differences. Its evanescence implies that in the absence of audio recordings and notation, music is maintained through its performance, meaning that its circulation and production-through-display are fused. And the evanescence of its performers and listeners—in other words, their mortality—freights transmission and performance with a particular pathos. In the process, the question of authority—how does the piece really go?—takes center stage, to be hashed out among generations of listeners and performers, thus connecting back to the problem of maintaining musical goods over time. Good theory travels and, like any traveler, has always changed when it comes back home.

Jonathan Glasser *is visiting assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at the College of William and Mary. His current book project is titled* The Lost Paradise: Andalusi Music in Urban North Africa. *He is also an active performer of Middle Eastern and North African music.* AN

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Saudi Arabia (revealed elsewhere on the tape)—conveys his appreciation of irony, the cook elaborates in more provocative ways. In turn 10, his eggs, he states, might compel Abu Hamza and his associates to extremes of self-consuming hunger, inciting them to a kind of self-denial achieved not through asceticism but rather through its opposite, a ravenous pleasure that is at once acutely parochial—they are, after all, simply eggs—and also transnational. In turn 12, the speaker redeploys the second-person plural to ratify a more inclusive political community. The eggs are so delicious, he jokes, that Abu Hamza should spread the word among politicians back at home that he and his colleagues have, in fact, entered the lists as top-notch chefs. Such discourse not only positions the cook and associates as purveyors of cultural capital; Abu Hamza himself becomes a humorous figure, an aspect that—illustrated here but also more explicitly elsewhere on the tape—highlights his own penetrability as a global modern subject.

Flagg Miller *teaches in the religious studies program at the University of California–Davis. Publications include* The Moral Resonance of Arab Media: Audiocassette Poetry and Culture in Yemen *(Harvard's Center for Middle Eastern Studies, 2007) and the preface to* Poems from Guantánamo: The Detainees Speak *(University of Iowa Press, 2007).* AN

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field of language maintenance to determine the most effective ways forward for endangered music genres. Similarly, linguistic and cultural anthropologists can make an enormous contribution to the development of efforts to sustain musical heritage by illuminating the wider picture of how music (like language) contributes to social identity; interrelates with expressions of cultural beliefs, ideologies and behaviors; and functions in relationship to wider representations of social worlds.

We are just beginning to comprehend the effect of rapid global change on the small music genres of the world. The wide-scale threat to these genres may hold wider repercussions for cultural identity, strength and diversity. Music, like language, is one of the key links that ties us to one another—both within and across communities—as well as to the past. The challenge for researchers is to bring clarity and understanding to the forces underlying this threat so that communities, in collaboration with other stakeholders, can establish sustainable futures for their music.

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off over the edge of the lagoon and beach that gives the community its name moved him to take us on a peripatetic memory journey that traced his and the community's escape from the US invasion forces in 1945. Among the hidden, overgrown and out-of-the-way places along the wandering line of this route we collaborated in making sound recordings that focused on the relationship between their aural character and his memory of the sense of what had happened in 1945 and of his relationship with these places in the period since. These recordings are available with this article through AnthroSource, and I invite you to listen to them now. They were made in the cave beneath Sunabe where he sat with his family listening to the sounds of battle and at the site in the Yanbaru forests of northern Okinawa where he finally met American troops and to which he returned annually with his wife on hiking trips. These sounds, like those of the overflying jets that start the recording and initiated the journey, are placed together to suggest that it is through their relationality and their vibrational affects that we can begin to understand the power and the tragedy of "the sound of freedom."

Rupert Cox *is a lecturer in visual anthropology at Manchester University. His interests revolve around the relationships between technology, the senses and media practices as a form of sensory anthropology. He focuses on topics in Japan such as the Zen arts, the idea of copying and aircraft noise.* AN

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