

Atlantic Roots and Routes: Introduction

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“Roots and Routes” has become something of a commonplace in ethnomusicological circles in the past decade (e.g., Fox and Ching 2008; Pietilä 2009; Russell, Guigne and Lovelace 2010; Giuffre and Spirou 2012). It works particularly well as the theme of a Canadian journal, given that in Canadian English dialects, “routes” and “roots” are homonyms. Its appeal, however, beyond linguistic word play, lies in how it allows us to imagine and tell the stories of human emplacement, *dérangement* and relocation; of severing and linking; of visiting, staying and returning. This issue of *MUSICultures* is devoted to “Atlantic Roots and Routes,” one of six themes of the 2011 world conference of the International Council for Traditional Music, held in St. John’s, Newfoundland. For a millenium—at least since the Vikings ventured West (see Ingstad and Ingstad 2000)—the Atlantic Ocean has served as a major thoroughfare connecting Africa, the Americas, Europe and the Arctic region.¹ In our call for papers, we asked scholars to consider how historical and current circuits of exchange have contributed to the reformulation and resignification of expressive practices and to the configuration of new cultural spaces. The six articles presented here respond in various ways, casting their net across the northern and, to a lesser extent, the southern Atlantic. Together, they create new understandings of the world’s second largest ocean as a cultural crossroads.

In the case of some musical encounters, particularly those framed by scholarly studies of “world music,” “globalization” and the global music industry, the question posed is which music is uprooted and moved to other contexts, and what happens to that music when it is “taken on the road.” In his article, Andy Hillhouse understands the work of transatlantic festival musician, Filippo Gambetta, not as a representative of a particular style or genre of music so much as the embodiment of a “new folk music sensibility,” a sensibility characterized by common musical, social and economic processes (rather than sonic characteristics) and an emphasis on innovation and “boundary-pushing.”

Though Gambetta now plays mostly in his native Genoa, he complicates notions of “home” and “roots” by rerouting local musics and sounds through “a globalized Celtic sound.” That sound suggests the consequences of inhabiting a transatlantic folk music economy and the pragmatics of tuning musical practice to audience desires and expectations. At the same time, Hillhouse asks whether this music has audible roots, becoming “folk music from nowhere,” or whether its roots can be found in “emerging forms of belonging ... that exist outside of the local.”

Alesia Whitmore’s article also addresses the results of quite conscious and recent efforts to integrate musics associated with different locales. Taking a textual approach, Whitmore provides a discursive analysis of the ruminations of contemporary Senegalese, Malian and Cuban musicians—musicians who play “new” syntheses of Cuban and West African musics in two ensembles: Orchestra Baobab and AfroCubism. West African artists reveal that by adapting a foreign popular music, they can both project a modern cosmopolitanism and position themselves strategically in the world music market.

In particular, Whitmore’s discussion of AfroCubism, which effects a collaboration across the “black Atlantic” (Gilroy 1991), highlights the productive “frictions” (Tsing 2005) inherent in cross-cultural work. AfroCubism, dubbed “Buena Vista Take Two,” was deliberately created for the world music market in 2008, and Whitmore’s analysis reveals the power differentials involved when a British world music producer, Nick Gold, hand-picks musicians of varying experience, expertise and musical genres from Cuba and Mali to play together. In his anthology, *Music and Globalization: Critical Encounters*, anthropologist Bob White calls for a study such as Whitmore’s:

Even in the field of anthropology, which has a long history of examining various forms of cultural borrowing or blending, analyses have been more concerned with the result of encounters than the encounters themselves. Indeed, the idea of encounters in cross-cultural settings, in which various types of actors and agents are called upon to negotiate power differentials and different versions of reality, has rarely been the object of systematic inquiry. (White 2012: 6)

We were not surprised that several papers submitted for consideration in this issue focus on the global music industry, for it is all but impossible to avoid it, no matter where one lives, and no matter whether one is an amateur or professional musician. Much world music, of course, is based on musical traditions rooted in particular places, but taken out of their original contexts

to interact with other musical traditions and global audiences. In other words, it is all about roots and routes. But while Bob White argues that understanding the emergence of world music “as a commercial and musical phenomenon improves our ability to understand the links between consumer capitalism, new regimes of technology, and the evolution of the modern nation-state” (2), there are other, sometimes more productive, aspects of musical encounter worth investigating. Indeed, in the remaining four papers in this collection, the focus is more on the significance of historical musical encounters in the lives of people many generations removed from the original interactions. While the circulation of commodified music has impacted the individuals, music and dance described in each of the four articles, interpersonal transmission and contact take on particular significance.

In a close reading of a single recorded performance, Aileen Dillane puts the focus on American fiddler Liz Carroll. Carroll is the child of Irish immigrants, born and raised in Chicago, a city known for its extensive Irish population. Carroll is, of course, well aware of Irish music in Ireland, having travelled there on many occasions and participated in high-profile Irish music events, and also having listened to many recordings. But Carroll is not herself an Irish immigrant. She fashions a “post-ethnic” musical voice that indexes her attachment to an American home and an Irish heritage. Careful structural analysis of Carroll’s “[Great] Lake Effect,” arranged for fiddle and string quartet, reveals the subtle interplay of Chicago’s vernacular sonic histories and the foundational Celtic orientation of her music. Carroll’s “Lake Effect” exemplifies a site where contemporary musicians and musical elements from both sides of the Atlantic interact with each other, as well as with the legacy of earlier Irish and American cultural contact.

Any discussion of roots and routes will likely result in some reference to diaspora, a topic heartily debated during the 1990s (Safran 1991; Clifford 1994, 1997; Chaliand and Rageau 1997), and which has had considerable bearing on music studies (Turino and Lea 2004; Ramnarine 2007; Cooper 2009; Levi and Scheduling 2010; Zheng 2010). Muriel Smith considers two Polish music and dance groups in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and the ongoing and changing relationships between them and Poland, other Polish diasporas and non-Polish communities. Shifts in the ensembles’ personnel, repertoire, style, transmission and purpose have been effected by changes to Polish politics and cultural policies, immigration patterns, as well as performance opportunities. In analyzing five significant moments in the histories of the Sokol Polish Folk Ensemble and S.P.K. Iskry, Smith explores how tension and change can be productive forces resulting in a “vibrant, responsive praxis distinct to Winnipeg.” Smith’s use of Lundberg, Malm and Rönstrom’s “fields of tension” (2003) to

explore how disagreement and conflict regarding multiple issues, including how homogenous or diversified, how pure or mixed, and how global or local the ensembles are at various points in their histories, calls to mind Tsing's concept of "frictions" in Whitmore's paper, suggesting routes across articles as well as within them.

Whereas diaspora studies have tended to focus on the immigrant community's attitude toward and relationship with the originating homeland, Mats Melin's article on Cape Breton step dancing in Scotland complicates the notion of diaspora by focusing on how the original homeland looks to the diaspora for cultural materials and inspiration in a moment of nationalist crisis. Melin's emphasis is on the processes and results of transoceanic transmission: Scots acquired competency in Cape Breton step dancing through brief, intense encounters with Cape Bretoners on both sides of the Atlantic. Lacking the institutional structures that regulate other dance forms in Scotland, such as Highland dancing and Scottish country dancing, the Scottish dance community, self-burdened by questions of correctness, negotiated Cape Breton step dance moves anew.

In Melin's article, Scottish step dancing was believed to be routed to Canada via 18th- and 19th-century Scottish immigrants. It was rooted in Cape Breton for generations before it was rerouted back to Scotland in the late 20th century. Frances Wilkins' article also addresses a Scottish tradition introduced to Canada, but more than a hundred years earlier and in very different circumstances. The 17th-century establishment of London-based Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) initiated a set of Indigenous-European encounters stretching across the North Atlantic. Matching historical, bibliographic data with contemporary ethnographic research, Wilkins examines musical relations among James Bay Cree in the Canadian Subarctic and sojourning male HBC employees, most of whom hailed from the Orkney Islands. Focusing on transplanted Orcadian fiddle tunes and dances, she shows how Cree fiddlers integrated and continue to integrate and reconceptualize the Scottish dance-tune repertoire, adapting performance practice to enact an indigenous modernity.

All papers clearly identify how transatlantic musical movement has involved high degrees of collaboration between musicians from diverse cultural and musical backgrounds. The six articles illustrate clearly the global circulation of music and dance performance, both in early instances of globalization through human movements (as in articles by Wilkins, Melin, Smith and Dillane) and through more contemporary movements of music via the ever-expanding music industry (as in articles by Whitmore and Hillhouse). We invite you, through these articles, to take a musical trip from one side of the Atlantic to the other and back again! 🍀

Notes

1. The Arctic region includes Greenland, which lies astride the Atlantic and Arctic Oceans. In fact, it's hard to know where oceans begin and end. Speaking to the malleability of the oceanic designations, in 2000, the International Hydrographic Organization “created” the South Ocean, the fifth and newest ocean. It comprises southern portions of the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans and completely surrounds Antarctica.

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