

## INTRODUCTION

### Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences

ANNA HOEFNAGELS and JUDITH KLASSEN

The theme for this special issue, *Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences*, recognizes music's potential to draw attention to contemporary critical issues. In particular, it provides space for examining the roles of performers and music creators in music in/as activism and the shaping of knowledge through fieldwork and community-engaged research. The issue features work that was presented at the "Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences" pre-conference symposium of the 65th Annual Meeting of the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM) on October 21st, 2020. The local arrangements committee for SEM 2020 organized the pre-conference symposium, concerts, and workshops for conference delegates, while members of the Canadian Society for Traditional Music/Société canadienne pour les traditions musicales (CSTM/SCTM) programmed roundtables and keynotes within the SEM program to highlight music discourse and ethnomusicological scholarship in Canada. The gathering was scheduled to take place in Ottawa, Ontario, and Gatineau, Québec, co-hosted by the Canadian Museum of History, Carleton University, and Queen's University from October 21st to the 25th. Due to COVID-19, however, the entire event and all related activities were moved to a virtual platform. Though different than originally imagined, the online format for the pre-conference symposium enabled a wide reach, bringing together researchers, musicians, and community activists from many locations to critically assess and engage responsible research within global contexts of music and activism.

Framing the symposium around the theme of musical activism and agency allowed for careful reflection on the role of musicians and researchers as activists and agents of change; it also created space to consider related

connections to social justice issues, locally and globally. The sub-theme, contestations and confluences, signals how music can serve as a tool for activist engagement while also highlighting the intersectionality of many contemporary issues. Inspired by the anticipated location of the symposium — at the meeting point of the Ottawa River, the Rideau River and the Gatineau River — we envisioned the symbolism of the confluence of these important waterways, historically and presently. Ottawa is located on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Algonquin Anishinabek and, as Canada's capital city, is also the epicentre for government decision-making and a regular site of political and social protest. Contemplating both the place-based nature of environmental concerns and the federal policies that guide “development” and resource extraction, we sought to highlight the contested spaces and philosophies that animate many local and global issues. We also sought to bring our own methodologies into the conversation — to consider ethical research practices and to problematize and discuss the nature of ethnomusicological research itself. The theme of extractionism was thus extended to allow for reflection on how research is conducted in ethnomusicology, foregrounding relationships and critically examining the goals of our research and its impacts on the people and communities with whom we work. Unsettling the dichotomy of researcher and interlocutor and contemplating the power relations within collaborative research are urgent priorities for many ethnomusicologists.

In the Spring of 2019, the pre-conference symposium committee circulated a call for papers for “Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences,” identifying three roundtable themes of Music, the Environment, and Displacement; Sites of Resistance; and Confronting Extractionism: Responsible Research Ethics and Practices. The committee also developed a SSHRC Connection Grant application and began planning concerts and workshops that would animate the pre-conference symposium and the larger SEM conference. Funds and in-kind support were secured through the Canadian Museum of History, Carleton University, and Queen's University, allowing for the programming of concerts that featured a wide range of musics and traditions, and the ability to hire graduate students to assist with event planning and logistics. Although all events were moved online, performers, workshop leaders, and participants adapted quickly and creatively, sharing pre-recorded concerts and workshops with conference delegates, presenting academic papers, and engaging in critical discussions through Zoom. Performances included full concerts by Ottawa-based Silla and Rise, a fusion ensemble that features Inuit throat singing and contemporary beats; the Angelique Francis Quartet, an Ottawa-based ensemble that brings elements of blues, soul, jazz, gospel, folk, and rock into their music; and Le Vent du Nord, a contemporary Québécois

ensemble that engages original composition and traditional sources to create new sounds within Quebec's francophone folk movement. Shorter concerts featured Bangladeshi Baul music performed by Golam Rabbani; Ghanaian popular dance by Benedictus Mattson; Chinese fusion music featuring Mei Han and Randy Raine-Reusch; virtuosic balafon works shared by Lassana Diabaté; spoken word poetry by Jamal Jackson Rogers; Anishinaabe musician and composer Melody McKiver's viola-based sound art; and songs from Quebec, Morocco, Turkey, Greece, Spain, and Portugal performed by Judith Cohen; a pre-recorded workshop about traditional Haudenosaunee social song and dance was also prepared by members of the Native North American Traveling College, enabling delegates to participate despite geographic distance.

Pre-conference symposium themes were inspired by contemporary concerns around environmental degradation as well as decolonial turns within the discipline of ethnomusicology. Relationships between music, politics, and human rights have received increasing attention among ethnomusicologists in recent years (Fast and Pegley 2012; Peddie 2011a & b; Rasmussen et al. 2019; Sprengel 2019), as has the place of music within contexts of Indigenous survivance and resistance (Carter Vosen 2019; Hoefnagels 2019; The Kinonnda-miini Collective 2014; Leza 2019; Moisala 2019; Robinson and Martin 2016). Likewise, attention to environmental issues has increased, underscored by the emergence and growth of ecomusicology (Cosgrove 2014; Galloway 2014; Pedelty 2016; Perlman 2014; Schippers and Grant 2016; Sykes 2020; see especially Allen and Dawe 2016).

As the work of figures such as water activist Anishnabekwe Autumn Peltier (Wikwemikong First Nation, Ontario) shows, issues regarding the environment, human rights, and Indigenous autonomy are not discrete; they are equally forms of "slow violence" (Nixon 2011). Likewise, the global attention that Greta Thunberg has garnered as another youth deeply concerned about the future of the earth demands reaction and contemplation. In the aftermath of Idle No More in Canada and Standing Rock in the United States, awareness of the violation of Indigenous communities' rights to protect their lands and waterways has increased. At the same time, Indigenous and settler groups around the world are bringing urgent attention to the need for respectful treatment of land and water for the survival of humankind (see, for example, Burow et al. 2018; McGregor 2018).

Complementing this environmental activism are demands for cultural sovereignty and a recognition of the vitality and importance of Indigenous lifeways to First Peoples internationally. A great deal of attention is being given to links between respectful engagement with Indigenous communities, environmental concerns and ethical research in Indigenous Studies, including

a rapidly emerging literature on relationality (see, for example, Findlay 2016; Johnston et al. 2018). Numerous publications address community-engaged research methodologies while also highlighting the sensitivity of Indigenous research and connections with the local environment (see, for example, Chilisa 2012; Dawes and Maufort 2014; Kovach 2009; Lambert 2014; Mertens, Cram, and Chilisa 2013; Ostaszewski et al. 2020; Przybylski 2018; Smith 2012; Walter and Andersen 2013; Wilson 2008). New case studies introduced in the symposium demonstrate the care and attention that are imperative vis-à-vis First Peoples' sovereignty and environmental concerns.

Building on this foundation, the "Musical Activism and Agency: Contestations and Confluences" symposium brought together the voices of many people, including ethnomusicologists and musicians working in Canada, the United States, Finland, Norway, Sweden, New Zealand, Indonesia, Egypt, Ghana, Liberia, Spain, and the United Kingdom, fostering international professional and educational exchanges through the sharing of research and experience pertaining to issues of music, the environment, activism, resistance, and ethics. Through dialogue, participants explored intersections between local activism, expressive culture, and ethical principles that allowed for connections to be made across sectors, music and dance genres, and geo-political and cultural boundaries.

The first roundtable of the symposium, "Music, Environment, Health, and Displacement," addressed ways in which contemporary musicians and activists use their artistic practice and output to bring attention to environmental issues, health, and the forced relocation of peoples. Rebekah Moore and Gede Robi Supriyanto examined the mobilization of expressive culture in response to environmental degradation and human displacement in Indonesia, whereas Michael Frishkopf looked at the rehumanizing of social relations through music-centred community collaborations in multiple contexts. Complementing these modes of engagement, Klisala Harrison considered the role of music in Arctic governance and political resistance in Greenland, while Eric Martin Usner and Laura Risk presented North American projects focused on sustainability and regeneration. Collectively, these presenters addressed issues of health, sustainability, displacement, and migration and the ways in which music supports, documents, and embodies activist agendas.

The second roundtable, "Sites of Resistance," considered the physical and virtual spaces in which activism and resistance take place, and the specific ways that those sites establish meaning and shape outcomes. Nicolas Royer-Artuso and Ülfet Sevdi presented a provocative conceptual video charting "Experimental Music in the Middle-East Following 9/11" (<https://youtu.be/P54Fw5qvBgw>), a piece that forced reflection on gaze, analysis, and power.

For Joshua Brown, the site of resistance was manifested in the literal and symbolic transformation of geographic locations in Spain: banks repurposed as flamenco and video recording spaces. Shifting to virtual sites, Joshua Thunder Little and Liz Przybylski considered how place-based resistance and online activism mutually inform each other, while Rebecca Draisey-Collishaw and Kip Pegley examined distinct ways that online spaces become loci of engagement. Drawing on research among independent musicians in Egypt, Darci Sprengel raised important questions about the lens of resistance itself, specifically within the context of artistic practice and Western imperialism. By examining sites of resistance from diverse angles and as emergent from distinct contexts, participants contributed to important reconceptualizations of place as it relates to, and embodies, sound and activism.

The final roundtable was organized around the theme, “Confronting Extractionism: Responsible Research Ethics and Professional Practices.” In recent years, ethnographic research methods have been criticized for extractionist, transactional tendencies. At the same time, the significance of positionality and reflexivity vis-à-vis power, human interactions, and the shaping of knowledge through fieldwork and community engagement have been underscored. This roundtable examined relationships and subject positions that inform contemporary ethnomusicological research through several discrete lenses: Bruno Deschênes brought his voice as a performer to the table to raise tangible questions of positionality, while Matt Stahl and Olufunmilayo B. Arewa uncovered vital spaces where performers resist the underpayment of royalties. Ioanida Costache and Kate Galloway addressed subjectivity and positionality not only within specific fieldwork settings, but also in the tools and practice of ethnography and sound art creation itself.

The articles in this special issue provide a representative sample of the presentations that shaped symposium dialogues. While the immediacy of exchange that animates roundtable discussions cannot be replicated on the printed page, the depth of inquiry that the authors bring to their areas of exploration allow for another form of deep engagement, one that builds on the important conversations initiated at the symposium and enables those conversations to continue. By engaging with artists and communities who actively respond to contemporary issues in multiple and varied ways, the authors in this special issue are attentive not only to *what* but also to *how* music is created, shared, and understood. Collectively, they speak to the urgency of contemporary issues connected to environmental degradation, health, social justice, and extractionism, while also naming — in tangible ways — the importance of community building, listening, critique, and action in contexts of musical activism and agency.

In “Coalition Building towards Postintersectional Futures through Sámi Activist Music,” Klisala Harrison engages the work of artists allied with LGBTQ+ rights and environmental movements to move conversations beyond categories of inclusion and exclusion and towards postintersectional futures. Exploring the reorienting strengths of love-politics while drawing attention to the work of specific artists, Harrison examines the ways that musicians share activist messages while also creating transformative inter- and intra-group affiliations.

Liz Przybylski and Joshua Thunder Little, too, explore activist music that is at once community strengthening and a vital part of moving beyond boundaries in their article, “Hearing Resistance through Wolakota: Lakota Hip Hop and Environmental Activism.” Examining the active role of music in the #NoDAPL movement at Standing Rock and its ongoing and international resonance on social media, Little and Przybylski invite readers to “listen through Wolakota” — to understand kinship relationships with land and water that require care and respect, and to recognize that while the immediate issues of caring for water, land, and relationships are urgent, histories of engagement with them cross borders of time and place.

The importance of participatory and community-engaged networks is foregrounded in Michael Frishkopf’s “Music for Global Human Development: Participatory Action Research for Health and Wellbeing.” Using examples from Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects in multiple contexts and communities, and drawing attention to resonant networks that emerge through these collaborations, Frishkopf underscores the potential of PAR in ethnomusicology “not only to transform local communities ... but also the network itself.” Here, not unlike in Harrison’s description of listening assemblages that move beyond divisive categories, connections are forged in ways that do not depend on common identity markers, and in some cases actively work across them.

Moving into the sphere of music and sound art, Kate Galloway’s article, “On the Ethics of Extraction in Environmental Sound Art,” presents case studies that respond to ecological violence and extractionism, examining the social, material, and environmental realities at play in each work. Through careful contextual readings, Galloway not only draws attention to the critical issues to which artists respond, she also reflects on the ethics implicit in the creation of the art itself.

Building on Frishkopf’s community-engaged work and Galloway’s reflections on the ethics of art creation, Laura Risk’s “Share the Arts, Share the Planet: Toward a ‘Regional Residency’ Model for Sustainable Touring in the Post-Pandemic” highlights the importance of local and community networks

in the making and sharing of music, while also critiquing the environmental impacts of current touring practices. Using the development of the Sustainable Touring Arts Coalition and the experiences of specific artists as entry points, *Risk* encourages active movement towards the creation of sustainable touring models that take environmental, human and community sustainability as fundamental. 🌱

## Notes

1. Details about the pre-conference symposium and information about special conference programming for SEM 2020 can be found at [https://www.ethnomusicology.org/page/Conf\\_2020\\_Special](https://www.ethnomusicology.org/page/Conf_2020_Special).

2. The pre-conference symposium committee included Anna Hoefnagels (Carleton University), Judith Klassen (Canadian Museum of History), Michelle MacQueen (Queen's University), Gordon Smith (Queen's University), and Margaret Walker (Queen's University). Ellen Waterman (Carleton University) and Carolyn Ramzy (Carleton University) organized the CSTM/SCTM-specific panels of the SEM conference. We would like to extend special thanks to Michelle MacQueen and acknowledge her exceptional work with authors and editors throughout the production of this special issue.

3. Rebecca Draisey-Collishaw (Queen's University), Sonia Caceres (Carleton University), and Akash Iyer (Carleton University) created a vibrant concert program that included information about and interviews with musicians and performers; see [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/media/sem2020\\_concerts\\_and\\_worksho.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/media/sem2020_concerts_and_worksho.pdf).

4. Two annotated bibliographies were prepared in connection with the pre-conference symposium and CSTM/SCTM events at SEM 2020 with a view to supporting ongoing dialogue about related issues and ideas. The first was prepared by Gale Franklin and Ellen Waterman (Carleton University) to complement the CSTM/SCTM-sponsored SEM 2020 roundtable discussion, "Many Voices at the Table: A Conversation about the Need for Equity in Canadian Ethnomusicology"; it draws on themes such as diversity and decolonization in ethnomusicology with particular attention to how they might relate to Canada (see [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/2020\\_annual\\_meeting/sem\\_annotated\\_bibliography\\_-.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/2020_annual_meeting/sem_annotated_bibliography_-.pdf)). The second bibliography was developed by Jennifer LeBlanc, Golam Rabbani, and Margaret Walker (Queen's University). It focuses on resources associated with pre-conference themes of activism, agency, and extractionism, particularly as they relate to ethnomusicological research (broadly defined); see [https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/2020\\_annual\\_meeting/sem\\_annotated\\_bibliographies.pdf](https://cdn.ymaws.com/www.ethnomusicology.org/resource/resmgr/2020_annual_meeting/sem_annotated_bibliographies.pdf).

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