Chapter 8

Ethnomusicology in the modern world

Once upon a time, ethnomusicologists studied primarily "traditional music." Many expressed their aversion to the study of popular, commercial, and urban musics and to neotraditional music tainted by supposedly inauthentic modern performance contexts such as folkloric ensembles, radio and television broadcasts, conservatories of music, Christian missions, and tourism sites. Today these reservations have been completely erased, and ethnomusicologists are busily studying every kind of music they encounter in the world, including American popular music, European art music, local and ethnic forms of popular music, Christian music in postmissionary settings, music for tourists, music that supports or resists totalitarian regimes, and on and on. If ethnomusicologists once championed ostensibly pure forms of traditional music, today they revel in the musical hybridity, fusion, deconstruction, and bricolage that musicians everywhere are deploying to make sense of the modern, globalized, spatially unbounded, unstable, frequently painful world of endless possibilities in which they live, work, travel, and make music.

Globalization and popular music

Ethnomusicologists once acted as if they made a radical distinction between themselves as modern and cosmopolitan and those they studied as traditional and local. They went in search of

"authentic" and perhaps ancient musical expressions of premodern culture and society, and eschewed new, arranged, "folklorized," planned interventions ("fakelore" some called it) by nation-states, tourism entrepreneurs, and other modern institutions. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, I bypassed Bulgaria's communist-era "national ensembles" of folk music, song, and dance, with their choreographies, orchestras and choruses, conductors, and European harmonies and counterpoints, and headed to villages where I looked for what I imagined to be ancient, exotic, unique ways of making music. I hoped to document and understand part of the record of human musical diversity.

It did not take long for ethnomusicologists to realize that modern life had come to many of the local cultures we studied long before we arrived in the field, whether in the form of Spanish and Portuguese colonization in the New World in the 1600s, the arrival of U.S. Admiral Matthew Perry's squadron in Japan in the 1850s, or communist totalitarianism in the 1900s. Ethnomusicologists were soon studying musical forms created in the blending of indigenous, African, and European cultures in Latin America, saxophones in Cantonese opera orchestras, Highlife dance music in urban West Africa, compositions for the Japanese *koto* (zither) by Michio Miyagi (1894–1956), and reggae and dub in Jamaica.

Ethnomusicologists today have largely abandoned their construction of the world in two spheres—the traditional and the modern. They have, instead, become completely engaged with the mixing, hybridization, and syncretism of musical forms that arguably began along the ancient silk road, became a fact of life in the wake of European colonialism, and has reached unprecedented proportions with the capitalist penetration of world and local markets, and the commodification of labor and social relationships. Today, the ease of travel, the migration of people from villages to cities, the emigration of people from troubled lands, and readily available

technology to share ideas and cultural artifacts across vast spaces help configure musical processes in nearly every part of the globe.

Ethnomusicologists study not only the new hybrid forms that occur in these conditions but also how local musicians use them to advance personal and social agendas, and to resist the social and cultural destruction that can accompany these flows of goods, services, people, and ideas. Globalization has created wildly disparate economic advantages and disadvantages for individuals and groups in particular local circumstances. Ethnomusicologists worry that commodification, coupled with the vast difference in wealth between the West and the rest, disempowers local musicians and may result in the disappearance of noncommodifiable musical practices. On the other hand, globalization and its accompanying spatial, economic, and ideational disruptions call into question, threaten, and require a healing musical response to crises of personal and social identity.

Musical production in these contexts can be a helpful way to deal with the psychological and social ruptures caused by separation from older ways of being and by expanded social interactions with people in cities, new countries, or over the Internet. Steven Feld has written that

> Musical globalization is experienced and narrated as equally celebratory and contentious because everyone can hear equally omnipresent signs of augmented and diminished musical diversity. Tensions around the meanings of sonic heterogeneity and homogeneity precisely parallel other tensions that characterize global processes of separation and mixing.

While some ethnomusicologists worry about the homogenizing effects of globalization, others celebrate local musicians' capacity to respond creatively to the disruptive effects of globalization.

Another matter altogether is commercial world music created by Euro-American artists such as Paul Simon, Peter Gabriel, Deep Forest, Ry Cooder, and others, who have been criticized as exploitative because of differences in economic wealth and symbolic capital between these musicians and the local artists with whom they work. For example, Paul Simon's albums, at least the ones that depend on the musicians and musical styles of South Africa and Brazil, have created a double-edged sword: money, power, prestige, and copyright rest with Simon, while the local musicians share principally in the reflected glory, which they can use to their advantage locally and in subsequent world tours, where they can make a bit of money. While Simon would surely characterize his appropriation of these styles as an act of admiration and respect, Feld worries that his "melody" is "harmonized by a counter-melody" of power, domination, and control:

> All of the performance styles (the grooves, beats, sounds, genres) are South African in makeup (whatever influences they synthesize and incorporate). While the contribution of Simon's lyrics is clear and important, the contribution of the music, its unique and distinct and formative influence on the quality and particularity of the record, is clearly downplayed.

Examining Simon's *Graceland* as a cultural product, Louise Meintjes, originally from South Africa, published a multilayered analysis of this album and its local effects and interpretations. Among Black South Africans, some argued that international exposure to Black South African music and musical styles was a sign of high value being placed on African music. Others worried that such commodification of their traditions risked erasing those sounds as signs of community. Those in the liberation movement thought that international cooperation at that fraught moment in history might confuse people about the nature of their resistance to apartheid. White South Africans interpreted *Graceland* differently, as well. Conservatives saw Simon's effort as an "improvement" on

African expressions and a challenge to the "silliness" of the cultural sanctions imposed on South Africa. Liberals saw it as a "gateway to the future" and a sign of respect for African musical forms. Meintjes's study delineates the local tensions brought to light, addressed, worked out, and given emotional power through the creation of hybrid musical forms.

Although the work of European stars like Simon may grab most of the public attention, ethnomusicologists are increasingly documenting how immigrant musicians in metropoles around the world are creating new works in the commercial category of world music. These immigrants often feel disconnected from their homeland but not yet connected to, and even marginalized in, their new homeland. There, they have access to a vast array of musics and musicians from which to fashion a new self through a new musical style based on fusion, syncretism, hybridization, creolization, and pastiche. These new, personal musical styles, if successful, speak to a whole community and beyond, to a world of fans seeking new renditions of something they imagine to be traditional and authentic. In his book *Global Pop*, Timothy Taylor profiles some of these artists living in Paris, London, Africa, and South Asia, including two Anglo-Asians: Sheila Chandra and a man who took the *nom de musique* "Apache Indian." Chandra, for example, imagines a kind of global consciousness in which similarities of musical style are more important than musical differences. She rejects a fusion of Indian music with European music in favor of a belief that musicians from all over the world can sing in her "ancestors' voices": "I believe that my heritage comes not specifically from my own culture. I believe I am a spiritual heir to a universal form of inspiration." The result, predictably, has a vaguely indistinct, new-age quality. Apache Indian, on the other hand, imagines a new self and a new music born of the combination of the Punjabi popular-music genre *bhangra* and Jamaican reggae! He grew up with both musics in his ears and combined them to express a sense of self that was an amalgam of these two worlds: "Regardless of what anybody said [about reggae], it was for me."

Today ethnomusicologists routinely study not only these international syntheses but local versions of Anglo-American pop, rock, and rap, and the cultural work they do. A short list gives a sense of the range of music being covered: the extreme metal scene in Brazil; Balinese death/thrash metal; hip-hop in Istanbul; Burmese rap; punk in China; and rock music among Tibetans exiled in Dharamsala, India.

When ethnomusicologists turn their attention to American popular music, they run into a problem created by their ethnographic method. Although they can conduct fieldwork among fans, producers, club owners, and unknown musicians and bands, the stars of the genre usually refuse to be studied, fearing, reasonably enough, that there is nothing in it for them except unwanted critical scrutiny. If ethnomusicologists do write about pop stars, they are often forced to fall back on archival research, analysis of recordings, and reading interviews by journalists, all respectable research methods but a bit distant from their interest in encountering their sources directly, and reporting on intentionality and meaning from the perspective of the makers of musical traditions.

Music, media, and technology

Recently, a colleague who teaches a course on fieldwork methods in ethnomusicology reported that the students reacted to her lessons on audio recording techniques in the field with indifference and even disdain. They pointed out that they would not be studying live musical performances, as she had; they would be studying traditions already made in recording studios and released on commercial recordings. There was no need, they contended, to make live recordings of the traditions that interested them; they were already recorded. This anecdote signals a real shift in the work of ethnomusicologists, who once tended (and some still do) to regard live performance as the source of, and therefore more "authentic" than, recorded performances. Or, they might

argue, live performance is better able to contribute to face-to-face community building than the mediated construction of imagined communities of fans and affinity groups sharing a dehumanized, "schizophonic" (sound makers separated from their sounds) musical experience in far-flung places. Today, ethnomusicologists rarely encounter music that has not been mediated in some way, and they recognize the extent to which listening to recordings has become, in many parts of the world, people's principal experience of music.

The recognition of the importance of media and technology, not simply as a means of recording live music but as a fundamental fact of modern musical life, has led to the study of what René Lysloff terms music and "technoculture." Arguing that "the ethnographic Other is now fully plugged in," he suggests that ethnomusicologists examine the cultural use of musical technology as seriously as they study unmediated performances. Many interesting questions arise: How do the musical communities formed by using technology differ in their use and experience of music from communities formed by physical proximity or shared cultural heritage? What are the effects of technology on musical memory? How do recordings change our ideas of what is "authentic" and "real" in music? How are recordings and other media put in the service of reflexive projects such as the construction of individual and social identities? How are relationships of power and authority enacted in mediated performances and their distribution? How do recordings expand or contract the audiences and the incomes of traditional musicians? Answering these questions has led to new orientations toward, and locales for, fieldwork.

A now-common topic concerns the introduction of electronic musical instruments into traditional ensembles and performance, usually to make them sound more modern while retaining something of their original meaning. Lysloff reports that "in Javanese shadow theater performances in the region of Banyumas, musicians sometimes use a Casio keyboard in addition to the gamelan, for creating sound effects to accompany action scenes." A popular music genre, *dangdut*, "featuring an Indian tabla-like sound" is transformed into *disco-dangdut* through the introduction of "sampled sounds and high-tech musical instruments [and] a faster beat."

Some have worked on how people deploy musical products like LP records, audio cassettes, and CDs and their attendant playback technologies to create live performances, music scenes, or new recordings, techniques that are the lifeblood of hip-hop, Jamaican dub, and electronic dance music of all sorts. A pioneering effort in this regard was Charles Keil's 1984 study of karaoke in Japan, just as dub in Jamaica and rap in the United States burst on the scene. Keil commented,

> What is striking to me in all these instances of mediated and live musical performances is first of all the humanizing or, better still, personalization of mechanical processes. . . . Perhaps it gives people a sense of reclaiming the music from the record companies and their machinery. Adding a "rap" or mixing the prerecorded tracks differently in "dub" puts the individual back in control of the processor or at least gives the illusion of such control.

Some ethnomusicologists have taken on parts of the music industry, including record companies, radio, magazines, and music publishing as sites for research. Recording studios are particularly fruitful fieldwork sites because of the musical and cultural work that goes on there. Louise Meintjes's study of "the politics of Zulu music production in the South African music industry in the early 1990s" shows how mixing in the studio includes the "negotiation for control over the electronic manipulation of style" and the creation of musical signs of "Otherness, Africanness, and Zuluness."

The Internet, websites, and services like iTunes, Pandora, Facebook, MySpace, and online games are potential sites for

community formation, and ethnomusicologists are beginning to study them. William Cheng employed virtual and real fieldwork to understand a virtual gaming community in which players in a multiplayer game called *The Lord of the Rings Online* used "music to sound out alternative identities and to forge social ties in a dynamic role-playing universe."

Music, health, and healing

Ethnomusicologists have long been interested in the relationship between music, illness, and healing. Until recently these have taken the form of local ethnographic studies in cultures that believe in the power of music to cure illnesses, particularly illnesses that are attributed to supernatural causes. Most local explanations of music's efficacy depend on, and embed music within, the logic of deep cosmologies. Some ethnomusicologists are searching for medical explanations of these phenomena. In a study of a healing ritual in the Pamir Mountains of Tajikistan, Benjamin Koen's measurements of changes in heart-rate and blood pressure showed that devotional music lowered blood pressure and presumably stress, a finding that suggests that integration of physiological experiments with musical ethnography may be fruitful.

Other ethnomusicologists have turned their attention to what role music might play in dealing with health issues in the modern world, in particular the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the apparent increase in cases of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in the United States. In the latter case, ethnomusicologists are working with medical professionals to document the musical effects they observe when they perform music with and for children with ASD. In one study Michael Bakan and his colleagues used world-music instruments to animate improvisatory musical play among children and adults. They found that children who participated in this highly individualized program showed improved ability to connect socially on and beyond the music playground, and were able to transfer their musical experiences back into their home and school environments.

In the case of HIV/AIDS music has been employed principally to educate people about the clinical reality of the disease in parts of eastern and southern Africa where public policy and cultural ideologies sometimes combine to obfuscate the causes of the disease and deceive people into ignoring safe sexual practices. Gregory Barz reports that songs have been utilized in Uganda to deal with HIV/AIDS in health education, biomedical interventions, promotion of communication about disease, and the loss of cultural memory when an entire generation is decimated. Advocates for the ability of music to heal or to ameliorate illness and its causes have dubbed this emerging subfield "medical ethnomusicology," a praxis joining music, medicine, other healing arts, social action, and the study of culture.

War, violence, and conflict

Perhaps because ethnomusicologists for so long focused on traditional music in stable settings of communal performance or institutional patronage, they have been rather slow, compared with their colleagues in anthropology, to deal with the severe problems facing people around the world. Only since the late 1990s have ethnomusicologists fully engaged with questions of music's role in ameliorating or exacerbating the wars, violence, and conflict facing so many of the world's people today.

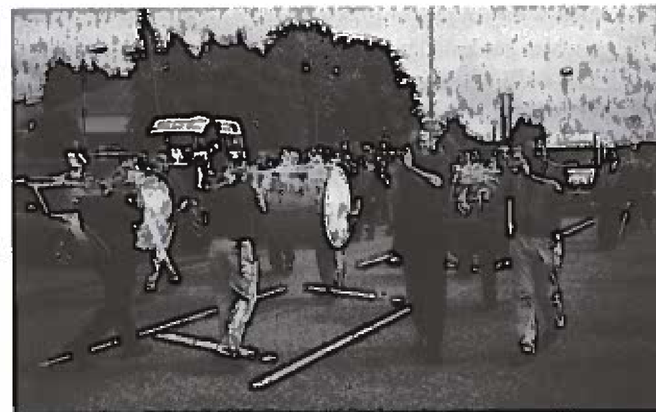
Among the first to do so were ethnomusicologists living in worn-torn areas. Croatian scholars caught in the horrible, ethnic-cleansing wars attending the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s published a heartfelt collection of essays called *Music, Politics, and War: Views from Croatia*. Americans endured their own local experience of war on September 11, 2001, which stimulated a collection of essays titled *Music in the Post-9/11 World*.

Working in war zones, postwar zones, and other places of violence, conflict, and profound loss has led many ethnomusicologists to design or participate in practical projects to heal the wounds of

loss and separation, and improve relations between communities in conflict. Croatian ethnomusicologist Svanibor Pettan, for example, designed CDs, films, and other publications less for an academic audience than to educate policy makers about the plight of Roma musicians displaced by the war between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. He also worked in Norway to create musical bridges between Bosnian refugees and Norwegians through shared musical performances of Bosnian repertoire. He wanted to help Bosnians feel proud of their identity and help the Norwegians understand better a minority in their midst.

One of the sobering realizations brought to the fore in these studies is that groups in conflict often use music to shut out, antagonize, exacerbate differences from, and even terrorize Others, while ethnomusicologists and those favoring peace generally believe that music is an ideal expressive form for conflict resolution, intercultural understanding, and healing. In Northern Ireland, during the "Troubles" between Catholic Republicans and Protestant Unionists from the 1960s to the 1990s, Protestants emphasized differences in what was once arguably a shared tradition. Some Unionists rejected Irish musical traditions as "alien" and instead valorized "Scottish" folk music or a constructed "Ulster-Scots" tradition. Protestant extremists used loud fife-and-drum bands to mark space as their own on certain holidays, throwing music in the faces and ears of those they opposed and terrorizing them with their loud iconic threats of military-style violence.

This example and newer ones from the battlefields of Afghanistan and Iraq and the interrogation rooms of the so-called war on terror illustrate how music can be used, according to John O'Connell, "to incite terror in the hearts of the dispossessed." However, it is much more common for ethnomusicologists to find examples, like Salwa Castelo-Branco does, where music provides "a platform for dialogue among factions in strife, relaxing tensions, stimulating communal feelings, expressing solidarity, reducing conflict, ultimately leading to reconciliation and peace." Anthony Seeger has described how



9. The aggressive music of bands of fifes and Lambeg drums, like this one marching in a parade in the town of Ballymena in Northern Ireland, often supported extreme Protestant loyalists during the conflict with Catholic Republicans from the late 1960s to 1998.

music created a peaceful mediation between Brazilians and the Suyá Indians of the Amazonian basin when they first contacted one another in 1959. The Suyá, who heard the nonmusical sounds of the Brazilians' boat engines as threatening, might have attacked them using silence, whispers, and shouts in their own language as sonic tools. Instead, realizing they were vastly outnumbered and doomed to defeat, they engaged the Brazilians with music and dance performances, expressive forms not requiring mutual linguistic understanding. Faced with these performances, the Brazilians also rejected violence and sang songs with guitar accompaniments for the Suyá. Music and dance, organized in rhythmic and melodic unison, and reciprocal listening provided icons of the proper functioning of social relationships. When the Suyá sang for the Brazilians, it "was the opposite of attacking them and was an expression of [their] peaceful intentions."

Finally, there have been a few studies of music in countries completely devastated by war. In Afghanistan, the Soviet

occupation of the country in 1978 initiated a long period of conflict, which has lasted to the present. Many musicians have been killed while others have fled to the neighboring countries of Pakistan and Iran or to Europe, the United States, and Australia. Music schools, universities, and the national radio station have been severely weakened. Songs that before 1978 were principally about various forms of romantic, mystical, and patriotic love were politicized by the communists and the opposition mujahideen, banned by the Taliban, and transformed by Islamists into laments and tales of heroism. In 2005 no female singers were being trained, and teachers of any form of music were hard to find, because so many musicians had emigrated. Clearly these armed conflicts have been devastating and need to end before, as Veronica Doubleday puts it, "Afghanistan's remarkable musical culture [can] regenerate fully and flower again."

Climate change

The study of music in its relation to culture and society has also led some ethnomusicologists to embed their studies of music in a larger world of sonic experience. They have examined the boundaries between speech and song; the effect of tonal languages in Africa and China on melodic patterning; the way poetic meter affects musical rhythm; the relationship between speaking style and musical style; appropriate moments for talking, singing, and remaining silent; and the relationship between music and the environment.

The last topic is inspired in no small part by Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer and his World Soundscape Project. Calling his work "acoustic ecology," he challenged musicians to hear the "soundscape" as a composition for which they bear some ethical responsibility. Partly as a result, an enlarged domain of "sound studies" is currently emerging around the edges of ethnomusicology. Steven Feld has been one of its leaders, coining the term "acoustemology" to capture the notion that

anthropologists and ethnomusicologists need to understand a culture's sonic epistemology, their way of knowing the world through its sounds, in balance with its way of knowing the world visually and verbally. This phenomenon is often characterized as directly physical and therefore emotional; as deeply connected to the experience of "truth"; as a supplement to now-standard accounts of music's meaning and reference to a social and cultural world; and as a way to bring attention in sound and music studies to sensation over representation, emotion over meaning, and aurality and physicality over literacy and reflection.

Tina Ramnarine, for example, describes the acoustemology of the Sámi of northern Europe, an indigenous nomadic people famous as reindeer herders. They perform a genre called *joiking* (vocalizing with "irregular phrasing . . . a distinctive vocal timbre . . . and rising microtonal pitches"). They believe that they can *joik* people, landscapes, and animals into existence, in the process placing themselves discursively in the environment rather than in relationship to it, a way of talking about the human-nature relationship rather different from familiar European ones. In his 1993 *Bird Symphony* Nils-Aslak Valkeapää (1943–2001), a Sámi composer, poet, and activist, placed *joiks* within a recorded soundscape of birdsong, water sounds, and reindeer bells. He wanted to express the unity of man and nature, and to call attention to indigenous concerns about the degradation of the polar environment due to climate change, nuclear-waste dumping, and logging. Other Sámi composers have placed *joiks* in a sound environment that includes snowmobiles and other machines as a way of engaging critically with their emerging actual soundscape, not with a mythical, idealized, "natural" past. These new Sámi compositions, in harmony with the newly noisy polar soundscape, challenge "the notion that sound mediates between humans and their environments, inviting us instead to consider human musical creativity situated within sonic ecosystems and across species-boundaries," and opening up the possibility for what Ramnarine calls "environmental ethnomusicology."

Nancy Guy worries that ethnomusicologists may be ignoring the single greatest crisis of our time, climate change, and argues for adopting an "ecocritical" sensibility. Her project documents the references in Taiwanese popular song to nature, particularly to the Tamsui River, which runs near Taipei. Before World War II, popular song lyrics evoked its beauty in narratives of human love and affection for the river itself. After the war, references to the river disappeared as immigration of mainland Chinese and rapid industrialization turned it into a polluted nightmare that needed to be cut off from view with high walls. Such songs were no longer relevant in a world that valorized growth and development at the expense of the physical world. This changed again in the 1980s when the river returned as the focus of songs critical of environmental degradation. Her vision of an "ecomusicology" leads her to ask whether music may be a resource that can "contribute to our survival" or whether it is indifferent to our species' possible extinction.

Whether it involves globalization and popular music; music media and technology; pandemic diseases; war, violence, and conflict; or climate change, ethnomusicologists today engage with the full range and richness of human music making the world over, not least because so many people in the modern world seem to believe that music is indeed a matter of life and death.

Chapter 9

Ethnomusicologists at work

Most very short introductions to academic disciplines assume them to be, well, academic. Disciplines are about the life of the mind in a particular domain supported by universities, research institutes, governments, and, in the case of the sciences, private industry. Ethnomusicology is a bit different in this regard. It has always been on the margins of music studies, struggling for a seat at the master's table, as it were. And, because ethnomusicologists work with human beings, they have always been concerned about the ethical implications of their work and what responsibilities they have to the people with whom they conduct research. So the question of where ethnomusicologists work, and what kind of work they do, has long occupied a central place in their thinking about the field.

To flourish, academic disciplines must be supported by societies and institutions that find their research potentially valuable. Scholars, in turn, must contribute their newly discovered knowledge to society, whether in the abstract, as an addition to knowledge, or in its practical application to society's problems. Finding institutional support for ethnomusicology has been somewhat problematic because its advocacy of a global perspective on music and its belief in the equal human value of all music challenge widely held notions, supported by powerful institutions, that value in music is defined by the supposed aesthetic