

may choose to have background music that is manufactured and programmed to increase worker productivity. This of course represents a particularly powerful type of unrequested music. Some do not even notice it.

This brief survey of music-making organized around family, generation and gender, leisure, religion, ethnicity, regionalism, nationalism, and commodified music should help you select a subject for your project: a nearby musical world that you're interested in, have access to, and can gather information about.

Doing Musical Ethnography

Your aim in discovering and documenting a world of music is a **musical ethnography**—a written representation, description, and interpretation of some aspect of a music-culture. The **subject** of your musical ethnography is the aspect of the music-culture that is being represented; the **topic** of your musical ethnography enables your analysis and interpretation of your subject. Approaching a music-culture for the first time, you may feel overwhelmed, but if you use Table 1.1 (p. 19) to organize your thinking about what you see and hear, you will see how you might go about gathering information on specific aspects of it so that you may write on a particular topic within the music-culture. Your writing may be accompanied by photographs, recordings, or even videotapes that you make while documenting the music-culture.

The music in the repertory can be recorded for later study and analysis. Much of social organization and material culture can be observed. By listening to musicians talk with each other, and by talking to them, you can begin to understand their ideas about music; through interviews you can learn more about those ideas, the repertory, musical activities, and material culture. (After all, conversations and interviews formed the basis for the musicians' life histories in this book.) But discovering and documenting a world of music is not like examining an amoeba under a microscope. People will differ in how they behave, what they believe, and what they say to you. Different people will sing "the same tune" differently. Under these conditions, accurately representing and interpreting a music-culture, even a single aspect of it, in a musical ethnography is a complex and subtle undertaking. It is probably not something you will have done before.

SELECTING A SUBJECT: SOME PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS

It is obvious that your project requires you to collect, understand, and organize information about music in order to present it. It differs from the usual school research paper in that it focuses on a musical situation that you seek out directly from people rather than from books in a library. In ethnomusicology, as in anthropology and folklore, this in-person witnessing, observing, questioning, tape recording, photographing, and in some cases performing is called **fieldwork**. Fieldwork is research "in the field" rather than the laboratory or library. Of course, library research is often quite helpful as part of this endeavor. You might find background information on your topic in the library and by searching on the Internet; and you should not overlook the opportunity to do so. But most of your project takes you into the field, where you will obtain your most valuable and original information.

Collecting, understanding, and organizing information about music are, of course, interrelated. You will begin with certain insights about the information you collect. As you organize it, you will gain new insights. After you organize it, you will be able to describe it and move toward an interpretation of it.

You can approach the choice of a research subject in different ways. First, you might try to chart the music you hear daily:

1. Keep a log or journal of all the music you hear over three or four days or a week. Note the context, style, and purpose of the music. Calculate how much of your day is spent with music of some sort.
2. Record, videotape, or simply describe in words several television commercials that employ music. Note the style of the music and the image it attempts to project. How is the music integrated into the message of the advertisement? Is it successful? Offensive? Both?
3. Map the uses of music in various movies or television shows as you watch them. For contrast, select a daytime serial and a crime-fighting show, or a situation comedy and a popular dramatic series, for example.
4. Survey the uses of background music in local stores. Interview salespeople, managers, owners, customers (always obtaining their permission). See what they say about music and sales.
5. Survey the music that you listen to on the Internet. On what occasions do you seek out music there? What is your relationship to this music and how does it compare with your relationship to other music in your daily life? Is there a group of people interested in the same music you are? If so, does this group get together, over the Internet, to discuss this music? What kind of a community does this constitute?

A second approach is to examine the music in your own background. Explore your memory of songs and music. Note how your religious and ethnic heritage influenced the music you heard and your current musical interests. How has your musical taste changed as you have grown older? Survey the contents of your CD collection or your preferences in listening to music on the radio, television, or the Internet. You can ask your friends and family the same questions.

A third approach is to explore music in your community—your school community or your hometown. There you can interview people, listen to musical performances, possibly take part in them yourself, and gather quite a lot of information. Here are several possible subject headings:

- Ethnic groups
- Piano teachers
- Private instrumental instruction (music stores, private lessons in the home)
- Choir directors
- Church organists, pianists, and so on
- School music (elementary, junior high, high school)
- Music stores
- Musical instrument makers
- Background music in public places
- The club scene (bars, coffeehouses, restaurants, clubs)
- Musical organizations (community choral groups, bands, barbershop quartets, and so forth)

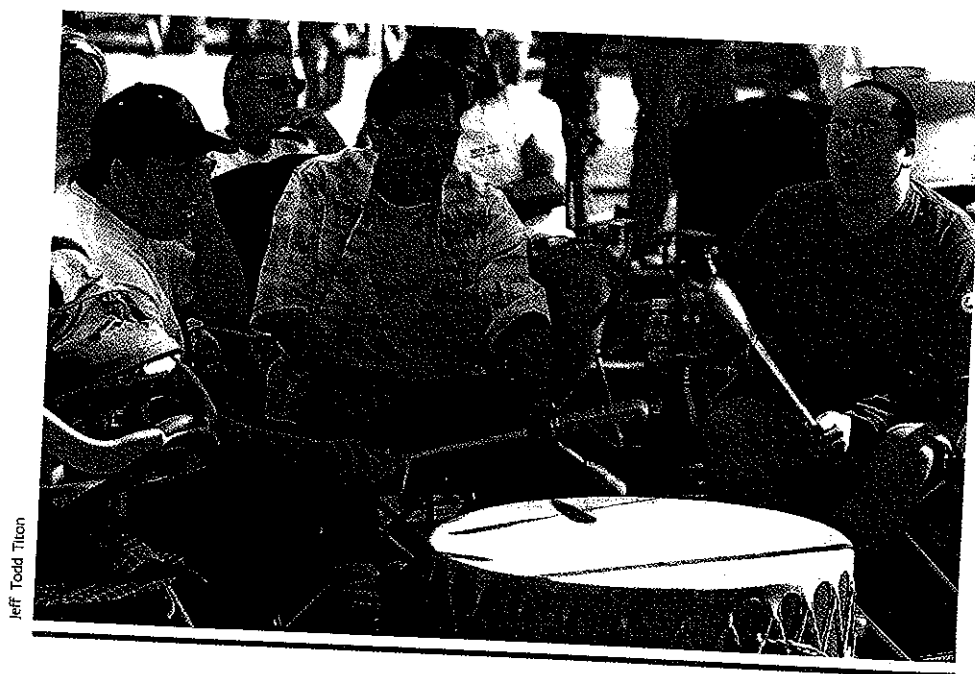
Part-time (weekend) musicians
Professional or semiprofessional bands (rock, pop, jazz, rhythm and blues,
country, gospel, and so forth)
Chamber music groups
Parades and music
Disc jockeys
Symphony orchestras

A fourth approach narrows the subject and concentrates on an individual musician's life, opinions, and music. Often we focus our attention on the musical superstars, but in the process we forget the many fine and sensitive musicians, many of them amateurs, who live in our communities. Senior citizens, teachers, owners of record or music stores, or tradespeople like the local barber, school custodian, or factory worker have sometimes had rich musical experiences as professional or part-time musicians. To search out such people is not always easy. Try the musicians' union, ethnic organizations, word of mouth, school or college music teachers, radio station disc jockeys, the clergy, club owners, newspaper columnists and feature story writers, or even local police stations and fire departments. Musicians can be approached directly at fairs, contests, festivals, concerts, and dances (Figure 11.8). Many colleges and universities have foreign-student associations that include amateur musicians, and they can tell you about others in the area. Ethnic specialty restaurants and grocery stores provide another resource.

The musical world that surrounds you is so diverse that you may feel swamped, unable to focus your energy. But when it finally comes down to deciding on a subject for your project, two guiding principles will help you: *Choose something you are interested in, and choose something you have access to.* Succeeding will be hard if you are not curious about the music you examine, and you must be close to it in order to look at it carefully. Many students find it helpful to discuss their proposed subjects with the instructor and other students, in class if time allows.

FIGURE 11.8

Nathan, Chris, and Robin
Sockalexis, Penobscot
Nation, Old Town, Maine,
singing and drumming.
Bangor, Maine, 2003.



Jeff Todd Titon

COLLECTING INFORMATION

Once you have chosen a subject, your next move is to immerse yourself in the musical situation, consider what aspects of it interest you, and select a topic. Then you need to plan how to collect information—what questions to ask when you talk to the musicians or others involved, what performances to record, and so forth. Almost always you will need time and flexibility to revise your plans as you collect the information you need. For that reason you should get started as early in the term as possible. Most people will be happy to tell you about their involvement with music as long as you show them you really are interested.

GAINING ENTRY

Musical activities usually have a public (performance) side and a private (rehearsal) side. The performance is the tip of the iceberg; you will want to understand what lies beneath, and that is best learned by talking to the people involved. If you must approach a stranger, you may want to arrange an introduction, either by a mutual friend or by a person in authority. If, for example, you want to talk with musicians in an ethnic organization, it is wise to approach the president of the organization and seek his or her advice first. This not only allows you to get good information but also to share your plans with the president, who needs to know what is going on in the group. In other situations it is best to let the people in authority know what you intend to do, and why, but to avoid having them introduce you, particularly if their authority is legal only and they do not belong to the same ethnic group as the people whose music you will be studying.

The first contact is especially important, because the way you present yourself establishes your identity and role. That is one reason why you must take the time to be honest with yourself and others about your interest in their music and the purpose of your project. If you are a college student, you may find yourself being assigned the role of the expert. But this is a role to avoid. Tell the people who give you information that they are the experts and that you are the student who wants to learn from them—that otherwise you would not seek their help. Let them know that you hope they will be willing to let you talk with them, observe them, and, if appropriate, participate in the music.

PARTICIPATION AND OBSERVATION

Doing research in the field requires a basic plan of action. Which people should you talk with? Which performances should you witness? Should you go to rehearsals? What about a visit to a recording studio? If you are studying a music teacher, should you watch a private lesson? Should the teacher teach you? Will you take photographs? Videotape? What kind of recording equipment can you get? Who will pay for it? You have probably been thinking about these and many similar questions. One more that you should pay attention to at this time regards your personal relationship to the people whose music you will study. Should you act as an observer—as a detached, objective reporter? Or should you, in addition to observing, also participate in the musical activity if you can?

Participating as well as observing can be useful (and quite enjoyable). You hope to learn the music from the inside. Rather than hanging around the edges of

the action, depending on others to explain all the rules, you will come to know some of the musical belief system intuitively.

But participating has its drawbacks. The problem with being a participant-observer is that you sometimes come to know too much. It is like not knowing the forest for the trees: The closer you are to a situation, the less of an overall view you have, and in order to address your project to an outside reader, you will need to imagine yourself as an outsider, too. We tend to filter out the regularities of our lives. If every time we met a stranger we had to stop and think about whether our culture says we should shake hands, rub noses, or bow, we would be in constant panic; if we had to think hard whether red means stop or go, driving would be impossible. This filtering process means that we take the most basic aspects of a situation for granted. So if you are participating as well as observing, you must make a special effort to be an outsider and take nothing for granted. This dual perspective, the view of the participant-observer, is not difficult to maintain while you are learning how to participate in the musical situation. In fact, when you are learning, the dual perspective is forced on you. The trouble is that after you have learned, you can forget what it was like to be an outside observer. Therefore it is very important to keep a record of your changing perspective as you move from outsider to participant. This record should be written in your field notes or spoken into your tape recorder as your perspective changes.

In fact, you may already be a full participant in the music-culture you intend to study. Writing a musical ethnography about a music-culture in which you have been involved for some time may seem quite appealing. Although this kind of research appears easy, it is not. Your knowledge usually is too specialized for general readers. Further, the issues that matter to you as a member of the music-culture may not interest anyone outside the music-culture very much, and if that is so, your musical ethnography will find a limited audience. You may feel that because of the depth of your knowledge, you do not need to interview any other members of the music-culture, but this is not so. Other participants' perspectives will differ from yours, and although you may favor your own, in a musical ethnography they are all important. You may also, without even realizing it, express a particular point of view as if it is a generally accepted truth rather than a bias coming from inside the music-culture.

What if you work as an observer only and forego participation? There are some advantages to doing so. It saves time. You can put all your energy into watching and trying to understand how what people tell you is going on matches what you can actually see and hear going on. You can follow both sides of "what I say" and "what I do" more easily when you are merely observing as opposed to participating. On the other hand, you do not achieve objectivity by keeping yourself out of the action. Your very presence as an observer alters the musical situation, particularly if you are photographing or tape-recording. In many situations, you will actually cause less interference if you participate rather than intrude as a neutral and unresponsive observer. If you are studying dance music, it is a good idea to dance (Figure 11.9).

SELECTING A TOPIC

After you have narrowed your subject, you face the next step, which is one of the most difficult: selecting a good *topic* to write about. In most undergraduate writing

projects, students work on assigned topics. But for this project you are being asked to generate your own topic. A topic is not the same as a subject. A subject may be a music culture, a musical scene, a musician, or a group of musicians. A topic is your subject viewed from a particular perspective, and with a thematic question in mind. By themselves, subjects cover too much ground. Topics focus your attention on specific questions that will (1) help you organize the information you collect and (2) lead you from documentation to interpretation. For example, "the Jewish cantor" is a subject, something to investigate. "Musical education of Jewish cantors in New York City" is a topic. The cantor is viewed from a thematic perspective: education. You want to understand what the education of a cantor consists of and what the results are. Putting this into a thematic question, you ask "What is the musical education of cantors in New York City?" Another example of a subject is "the Outlaws, a local country music band." A topic turned into a thematic question that involves the band might be "How is gender a factor in the music of the Outlaws, a local country music band?" Here the focus is on the band members' attitudes, interactions, lyrics, social scene, and so forth, as they relate to gender. This topic is in itself too large and would have to be refined further, narrowed down, perhaps to "What role does gender play in the social scene that surrounds the Outlaws, a local country music band?" The social scene would include the members of the band, their activities, and their interactions with the music industry and their audience.

The process of refining a topic is gradual and involves a lot of thought. To begin, go back to Chapter 1 and use the music-culture model to select aspects of your subject that interest you. Do you want to focus on conceptions of music, activities involving music, repertoires, or material culture? Of course, these aspects are interrelated, and ignoring any of them completely will be difficult; nevertheless, concentrating most of your attention on one of them will help you select a topic you can manage. It will also give you some initial ideas to think about as you gather your information. While doing field research you will find that some areas of your topic yield better information than others. As you assess the results of your research-in-progress you should be able to refine and refocus your topic to take advantage of the good information you have gathered. As you do so, you may have to deemphasize, or possibly even discard, other aspects of your topic that you have found difficult to research.

Your instructor can help you move from a subject to a topic. Many teachers ask students to begin their field research early in the term and to make a short written proposal in which they describe their subject and, if they have done



Russell Lee. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

FIGURE 11.9

Fiddler and guitarist at a fiesta. Taos, New Mexico, 1940.

enough fieldwork to this point, their topic. Instructor feedback at this point can save you a lot of time later. As we have suggested, students at first often choose topics that are too broad, given the limitations on their time and the instructor's guidelines for the paper's length. Another common problem is a topic that is too vague. Interpretation—figuring out what your documentation means—always goes in the direction of answering increasingly specific questions about your topic. If you have decided to focus on one band's repertory, a thematic question like "What is the repertory of the Accidental Tourists, a campus rock band?" should be made more precise with questions like "How does the band choose, learn, arrange, and maintain songs for their repertory?" A series of questions like this can help you focus your observations and interviews. In this case, you would want to ask the band members these questions and to attend some rehearsals and see how the band chooses, learns, and arranges their songs. After starting field research, working with your thematic question to generate a series of more precise, related questions will help you, in that you can organize your project around those questions. When you write your project up, the answers to those questions, and how the answers relate to each other, will lead you to an overall interpretation of the topic and the main point you want to make.

For example, you may be interested in bluegrass music and find a local group of bluegrass musicians who allow you to observe one of their rehearsals. Or possibly you go to a bluegrass festival and observe the jam sessions in and around the RVs and tents on the site. You may become interested in how bluegrass harmony works. "What are the principles of bluegrass harmony?" is your thematic question. As you do your fieldwork observation and interviewing, you will find that you can ask more-specific questions. You would hear the musicians use terms for the different harmony parts, like "lead" and "tenor" and "baritone," and you could observe, hear, and ask about the role of each part and how the parts relate to the whole. Alternatively, you may become interested in the etiquette of the jam sessions. What is the purpose of these elaborate social arrangements, and how does jam session etiquette promote social and musical harmony as well as minimize conflict? What are the rules of jam session etiquette? In both cases you have proceeded from a subject (bluegrass) to a topic (bluegrass harmony or bluegrass jam sessions) and you have narrowed down and further sharpened those topics through questions that will lead you from documentation to interpretation of those aspects of the music-culture.

In other words, gathering information is not simply a matter of recording it all as a sponge soaks up water. You will want to be selective in what you document, because after documentation you will need to interpret your material. In the bluegrass rehearsals you will pay particular attention to the way the musicians work out the harmonies, and when you interview them you will ask them about that. If your topic involves jam session etiquette, you will focus on that rather than on other aspects of bluegrass.

To take another extended example, suppose that your subject is music on the school radio station, and your topic has to do with the radio station's attitude toward women's hip-hop groups. Your topic will be rephrased as a thematic question: "What is the station's attitude toward women's hip-hop groups?" To find out, you listen carefully to the station over a period of time. You decide to interview some of the people who work at the station, and you try to figure out a way to approach your topic during these interviews. One deejay might play a lot

of women's music on a particular show, and you might find out something about this deejay's attitude by asking. As you gather information, you try to estimate how well theory is put into practice—the station people say they are in favor of women's music, but you find that overall they do not play very much of it. You wonder why. Do the station people think the audience does not want to hear it? What does the audience want to hear, how do they know, and should they play what the audience wants to hear, anyway?

Questions that arise during the course of your research can help you to select the kind of documentation that you will do—whether, for example, to survey the recordings in the radio station's library or to interview members of the listening audience—and help you to focus your interpretation so that by the end of your project you will have some answers to your questions. You will not merely be gathering material but also focusing that material on a topic; the heart of your project is your own interpretation of the material in light of the topic you have chosen. In our example about women's hip-hop on campus radio, perhaps the station does not express a coherent attitude toward this music at all. Perhaps you find that female deejays have a different attitude than male deejays do. The answers to your questions should lead you to your main point, or the thesis of your interpretation. One thesis might be "On the campus radio station, male deejays ignore women's hip-hop, while many female deejays are very much aware of it, play it, and expect their listeners to enjoy it." If your fieldwork led you to a different conclusion, your thesis might be something like, "On the campus radio station, male deejays feel obligated to play women's hip-hop, and they do, but without much knowledge or understanding of it. Female deejays play women's hip-hop because it represents a point of view they understand and sympathize with, but they also realize they can't overdo it because they don't want women as their main audience." Or maybe they do: Maybe there is one show that does. Such a narrow topic might be the best of all, as you discovered after learning about this particular deejay and show. This very narrow focus would have the advantage of specificity—you would not feel like you were generalizing about the station all the time, then making exceptions for different points of view. But this narrow topic would fall into place only after you had done a good deal of fieldwork.

LIBRARY AND INTERNET RESEARCH

Depending on the topic you have selected, you may want to search the Internet at this point to see if anyone has published information on your topic. Wikipedia is often helpful on music topics. Do not neglect your library's collection either. It might be useful to spend a couple of hours in the library stacks, looking at books on the shelves and opening any on your subject, for finding everything you need in the electronic card catalog can be challenging. One reference work that you may find useful is *American Musical Traditions*, edited by Jeff Todd Titon and Bob Carlin (Titon and Carlin 2001).

If your library subscribes to *Ethnomusicology*, the journal of the Society for Ethnomusicology, you will find in each of its three yearly issues an invaluable guide to published research in the "Current Bibliography, Discography and Filmography" section. The most recent years' entries are available on the Society for Ethnomusicology's website: <http://www.indiana.edu/~ethmusic/>. Another useful resource is *Ethnomusicology On Line*, at <http://research.umbc.edu/efhm/eol.html>.

The American Folklife Center, at the Library of Congress, and the Smithsonian Institution's Center for Folklife and Heritage, both of which have extensive collections of recorded sound, can be accessed on the Internet via the following addresses:

<http://www.loc.gov/folklife/>

<http://www.folklife.si.edu/>

You may find some of the following additional periodicals helpful:

American Music

Asian Music

Black Music Research Journal

The Black Perspective in Music

Bluegrass Unlimited

Journal of American Folklore

Journal of Country Music

Journal of Jazz Studies

Journal of Popular Culture

Journal of Popular Music and Society

Latin American Music Review

Living Blues

Music Educators' Journal

The Old-Time Herald

Popular Music

Southern Exposure

Western Folklore

World of Music

Yearbook of the International Council for Traditional Music

FIGURE 11.10

Corozal, Puerto Rico. Orchestra furnishing music for dancing at a tenant purchase celebration, 1941. Two men, one with guitar and one with cuatro, and a boy with maracas.



Jack Delano. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

If your library subscribes to JSTOR or other electronic databases with articles from scholarly journals, you should search for your subject and topic there. Look also in the reference section of your library or on the Internet for such bibliographies as the Music Index and RILM, as well as specialized bibliographies and reference works. There may even be discographies (a list of musicians, titles, record numbers, places, and dates) of recordings in music in the area you are researching. For example, Richard Spottswood's *Ethnic Music on Records: A Discography of Ethnic Recordings Produced in the United States, 1893 to 1942* is a five-volume work that lists 78-rpm recordings made during that period (Spottswood 1990). If your research topic involves a U.S. ethnic music, then this could be a valuable resource for you. Music and photographs on the Internet can also be helpful in your research (Figure 11.10). The

bibliographies will point you toward books and articles on your subject. The reference librarian can help you find these. Many of these music-related bibliographies and discographies are now available electronically. Some are on the Internet and others are available on CD-ROM.

The Internet has become a vast resource for information about music. Try searching for keywords that surround your topic. You will probably have to refine your search greatly in order to make it efficient. Also realize that some of the information you find on people's websites, such as their opinions about music, does not carry the authority of a scholarly book. Nevertheless, some of these specialized sites offer a good deal of useful information that you might not be able to find in books; amateur research has contributed significantly to certain areas of music, such as discographical information.

The Internet is particularly good for gathering groups of people together to discuss a subject of common interest and share insights. For example, numerous bluegrass websites reflect how bluegrass fans think and talk about their music. A bluegrass list (discussion group) called Bluegrass-L is open to subscribers and might even be a good place to do research. Other interest groups involving music abound on the Internet. Look in the newsgroups listed under Rec.Music. Several discussion lists focus on musics in India, for example; there is an Arab music list, and so forth. Of course, the Internet also offers a great deal of music, now available in mp3 and other audio formats, as well as in streaming audio and video.

Another good reason for visiting the library early in your project is that you may find a reference to a promising article or book that you will need to request on interlibrary loan. But avoid the temptation to read everything that might somehow be relevant. The Internet can also take up a lot more time than it should, and its information is not always scholarly or reliable. Remember that you will gather most of your information directly by observing a music-culture in action and by speaking with people who participate in the music-culture. Library and Internet research merely provides background information, and sometimes it cannot even do that—your subject may not have received attention yet, or the little that has been written may not be useful. But if research on your topic has been published, learning about it will help you undertake a better project. Further, the people whose music you are studying often can suggest good books and articles for you to read, saving you time in your search.

ETHICS

Doing fieldwork involves important ethical considerations. The people you photograph, record, and interview have ethical rights to their musical performances and their images. Most colleges and universities have a policy designed to prevent people from being harmed by research. Be sure to find out from your instructor if your project is bound by your institution's human subjects research policy and whether you need to get it reviewed and approved by your institution. Also be sure to discuss the ethics of the project with your teacher before you begin and, if things change, as you proceed.

Whether your project is part of a course or not, think carefully about the impact of what you propose to do. *Always* ask permission of the people involved. Besides ethical rights, people have legal rights to privacy and to how they look, what they say, and what they sing, even after you have recorded it. Be honest with yourself and with the people you study about your interest in their music and the

purposes of your project. Tell them right from the start that you are interested in researching and documenting their music. If you like their music, say so. If the project is something for you to learn from, say so. Explain what will happen to the project after you finish it. Is it all right with them if you keep the photographs and tapes you make? Would they like a copy of the project? (If so, make one at your expense.) Is it all right if the project is deposited in the college or university archive? Most archives have a form that the people (yourself included) will sign, indicating that you are donating the project to the archive and that it will be used only for research purposes. If this project is not merely a contribution to knowledge but also to your career (as a student or otherwise), admit it and realize that you have a stake in its outcome. Ask the people whose music you are studying why they are cooperating with you and what they hope to achieve from the project, and bear that in mind throughout. *Never* observe, interview, make recordings, or take photographs without their knowledge and permission.

Today many ethnomusicologists believe that simply going into a musical situation and documenting it is not enough. The fieldworker must give something back to the people who have been generous with their thoughts, music, and time. In some cultures, people expect money and should be paid. Fieldworkers sometimes act not simply as reporters, or analysts, but also as cultural and musical advocates, doing whatever they can to help the music they are studying to flourish. Not all ethnomusicologists work in colleges and universities. Some in the United States work for arts councils, humanities councils, and other public agencies where they are expected to identify, document, and present family and community-based arts to the public. Some work for government or nongovernment agencies that formulate cultural policy. Many taxpayers believe that if the government supports the fine arts, it should also support folk and ethnic arts. In fact, most European governments do more than the United States and Canada to preserve and promote their folk and ethnic music. Ethnomusicologists hear a similar kind of commercial popular music throughout the world, and many conclude that local musics—of which there are a great variety—are endangered. It is to humankind's advantage to have many different kinds of music, they believe. For that reason, they think advocacy and support are necessary in the face of all the forces that would make music sound alike the world over. This argument may at first seem remote to your project, but not when you think about your own involvement with the people and music you are studying.

FIELD GEAR: NOTEBOOK, RECORDER, CAMERA

The perfect fieldworker has all-seeing eyes, all-hearing ears, and total recall. Because none of us is so well equipped, you must rely on written notes, recordings, and photographs that you make in the field. You may also be able to use a video camcorder. These documents serve two purposes: They enable you to reexamine your field experiences when you write up your project, and they may be included in the final form your project takes because they are accurate records of performances, interviews, and observations. On the other hand, field equipment presents certain difficulties: It costs money, you need to know how to work it properly, and you may have to resist the temptation to spend much of your time fiddling with your gear when you should be watching, thinking, and listening instead.

Fifty years ago, fieldworkers relied primarily on note-taking, and today it is still necessary. No matter how sophisticated your gear is, you should carry a small pocket

notebook. It will be useful for writing down names and addresses, directions, observations, and thoughts while in the field. In the days before sound recording, music was taken by dictation in notebooks. While this is still possible, it is not advisable except when performances are very brief and you have the required dictation skills. Dictating a song puts the performer in an unnatural context and changes the performance. However, notebooks are especially useful for preserving information learned in interviews, particularly if a recording machine is unavailable or awkward in the interview situation. In addition, you should try to write down your detailed impressions of the overall field situation: (1) your plans, questions, any difficulties you meet with; (2) as complete a description as possible of the musical situation itself, including the setting, the performers, the audience, and the musical event from start to finish; and (3) your reactions and responses to the field experience. Your field notebook becomes a journal (and in some instances also a diary) that you address to yourself for use when you write up your project. As such, writing in it daily is useful.

Most university music departments and many university libraries now loan inexpensive portable recorders to students for use in fieldwork projects. Whether you use a recorder, and if so what type it is (microcassette, portable cassette, minidisc, CD, DAT, flash, and so forth), largely depends on the nature of your project and your instructor's expectations. Although they may be adequate for some interview situations, microcassette recorders do not record music well enough for documentation purposes. The inexpensive, portable, full-sized cassette tape recorders are well suited to recording speech (interviews, for example). Although they come with built-in microphones, the sound quality can be improved dramatically if you use an inexpensive external microphone plugged into the recorder's microphone input jack. So equipped, a portable cassette tape recorder may be adequate for recording music. Of course you need to be thoroughly familiar with its operation—*before* you go into the field—in order to make accurate recordings. But the portable cassette recorder is mechanically simple, and anyone can learn to operate it in just a few minutes. Digital minidisc, DAT, and flash card recorders can make higher quality recordings. One thing to remember about cassette tape is that it does not age well. The useful life of a cassette tape may be as short as ten years, while a DAT or videotape may not last longer than five, depending on storage conditions. Digitized and stored on a hard drive, CD-R, or DVD, an analog tape recording can have a longer archival life. Original digital recordings can be directly uploaded into a computer.

The best way for beginners to improve the sound of a recording is to place the microphone in a good spot. If the sound is soft or moderate and it comes from a small area (a solo singer, a lesson on a musical instrument, or an interview, for example), place the microphone close to the sounds and in the middle of them. If the sounds are loud and spread out (a rock band or a symphony orchestra, for example), search out "the best seat in the house" and place or hold the microphone there. Make a practice recording for a few seconds and play it back immediately to check microphone placement and to make certain the equipment is working properly (Figure 11.11). Take along spare batteries and blank tapes.

If properly used, even the simplest cameras take adequate pictures of musical performances. A picture may not be worth a thousand words, but it goes a long way toward capturing the human impact of a musical event. A consumer-grade digital camera is especially useful because it allows you to see the photograph



James T. Koetting

FIGURE 11.11

A chief checks the quality of a recording of his musicians. Kasena-Nankani Traditional Area, Ghana.

immediately and correct mistakes (such as standing too far from the action) at once. Digital pictures have another advantage: You can give copies easily to the people you photograph. But an older SLR film camera with interchangeable lenses is a better value and can produce better pictures, particularly under difficult lighting conditions.

Using a video camcorder to document a musical event offers the advantage of sound combined with a moving picture. It may allow you to focus selectively on certain aspects of the musical event, such as dancers or particular musicians, so that they can be seen as well as heard in action. Video accompanying your project should be edited down to a manageable size, and it should reveal those aspects of the music-culture that are related directly to your topic. Video formats are changing rapidly, while the quality available at a particular price point keeps improving.

Americans are in love with technology, even technology to get away from technology (backpacking equipment, for example). If you already know a lot about recording and photography, and you own or can borrow high-quality equipment,

by all means use it. Some of the photographs in this book and the accompanying recordings were made by the authors using professional equipment; after all, fieldwork is a part of our profession. But the more sophisticated our equipment is, the more difficult it is to use it to its full potential. Consider the true story of a photographer who went to a rock music festival and brought only his pocket camera. In the photographer's pit in front of the stage, he had maneuvered himself into the best position and was standing there taking pictures when a professional nudged him, saying, "Get out of here with that little toy!" The pro stood there with cameras hanging from his neck and shoulders, covering his body like baby opossums. "Well," said the amateur, yielding his position with a smile, "I guess if you need all of that equipment, you need to stand in the best spot, too!"

INTERVIEWING

Interviews with people whose music you are studying can help you get basic information and feedback on your own ideas. Ethnomusicologists used to call such people *informants* but today they are often called *consultants*. Be careful not to put words in your consultants' mouths and impose your ideas. The first step in understanding a world of music is to understand it as much as possible in your consultants' own terms. Later you can bring your own perspective to bear on the musical situation. Remember that much of their knowledge is intuitive; you will have to draw it out by asking questions. Observe the relationships among the musicians in the music-culture you are documenting and interpreting (Figure 11.12). This will help you formulate questions for interviews.

Come into an interview with a list of questions, but be prepared to let the talk flow in the direction your consultant takes it. In his 1957 preface to *Primitive Man as Philosopher*, Paul Radin distinguished between two procedures for obtaining information: question-and-answer and "letting the native philosopher expound his ideas with as few interruptions as possible" ([1927] 1957). Your consultants may not be philosophers, but they should be given the chance to say what they mean. Some people are by nature talkative, but others need to be put at ease. Let the person know in advance what sorts of questions you will be asking, what kind of information you need, and why.

Often you will get important information in casual conversations rather than formal interviews; be ready to write down the information in your field notebook. For example, you may be able to gather information informally by listening to conversations that musicians have in the normal course of their music-making activities. Some people are by nature silent and guarded; despite your best intentions, they will not really open up to you. If you encounter that sort of person, respect his or her wishes and keep the interview brief.

Beginning fieldworkers commonly make two mistakes when doing interviews. First, they worry too much about the tape recorder, and their nervousness can carry over to the person they interview. But if you have already gotten the person's consent to be interviewed, then getting permission to tape the interview should not be hard. One fieldworker always carries her tape recorder and camera so they are visible from the moment she enters the door. Then she nonchalantly sets the tape recorder down in a prominent spot and ignores it, letting the person being interviewed understand that the tape recorder is a natural and normal part of the interview. Still ignoring the recorder, she starts off with the small talk that usually begins such a visit. Eventually the other person says something like, "Oh, I see you're going to tape-record this." "Sure," she says steadily. "I brought along this tape recorder just to make sure I get down everything you say. I can always edit out any mistakes, and you can always change your mind. This is just to help me understand you better the first time." She says that once they have agreed to be interviewed, nobody has ever refused her tape recorder. But she adds that if anyone told her to keep the recorder shut off, she would certainly do so.

A second problem is that beginning fieldworkers often ask leading questions. A *leading question* is one that suggests or implies (that is, it leads or points to) one particular answer. Leading questions make the information obtained unreliable. In other words, it is not clear whether the person being interviewed is expressing his

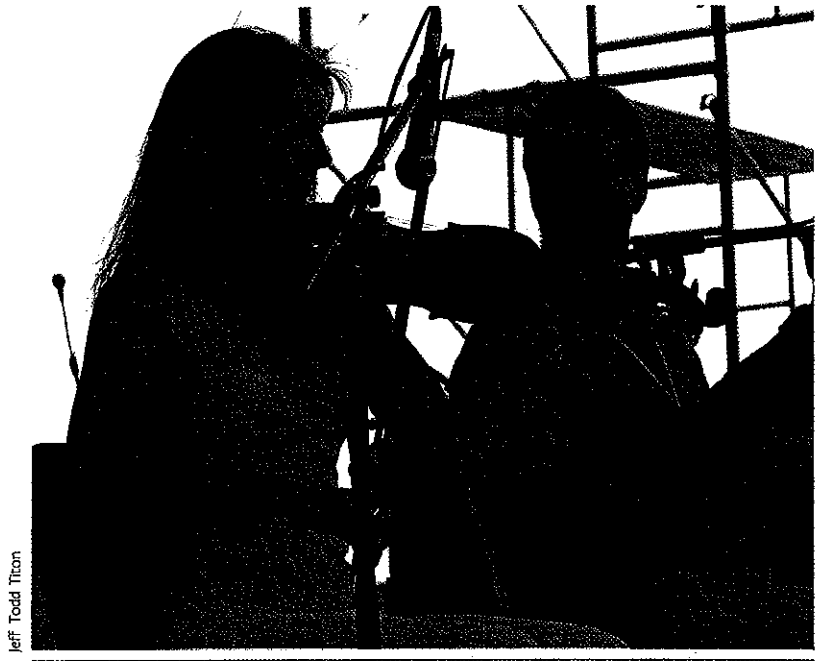


FIGURE 11.12

Erica Brown performs the traditional Franco-American music of her family and community with her teacher, Don Roy. She is also the leader of a bluegrass band, American Folk Festival, Bangor, Maine, 2005.

or her own thoughts or just being agreeable and giving the answer the consultant thinks the interviewer wants. In addition, leading questions usually result in short, uninteresting answers. Study this first dialogue to see how *not* to interview:

FIELDWORKER 1: Did you get your first flute when you were a girl?

CONSULTANT: Yeah.

FIELDWORKER 1: What was the name of your teacher?

CONSULTANT: Ah, I studied with Janice Sullivan.

FIELDWORKER 1: When was that?

CONSULTANT: In college.

FIELDWORKER 1: I'll bet you hated the flute when you first started. I can remember hating my first piano lessons.

CONSULTANT: Yeah.

The trouble here is that the consultant gives the kinds of answers she thinks are expected of her. She is just agreeing and not necessarily telling the fieldworker what she thinks. She is not even giving the conversation much thought. The fieldworker has asked the wrong kind of questions. Now look what happens when another fieldworker questions the same person.

FIELDWORKER 2: Can you remember when you got your first flute?

CONSULTANT: Yeah.

FIELDWORKER 2: Could you tell me about it?

CONSULTANT: Sure. My first flute—well, I don't know if this counts, but I fell in love with the flute when I was in grade school, and I remember going down to a music store and trying one out while my father looked on, but I couldn't make a sound, you know!

FIELDWORKER 2: Sure.

CONSULTANT: So I was really disappointed, but then I remember learning to play the recorder in, I think it was third grade, and I really loved that, but I didn't stick with it. Then in college I said to myself, I'm going to take music lessons and I'm going to learn the flute.

FIELDWORKER 2: Tell me about that.

CONSULTANT: Well, I had this great teacher, Janice Sullivan, and first she taught me how to get a sound out of it. I was really frustrated at first, but after a while I got the hang of it, and she would always tell me to think of the beautiful sounds I knew a flute could make. I used to think a flute could make a sound like water, like the wind. Well, not exactly, but sort of. And then Mrs. Sullivan let me borrow a tape of *shakuhachi* music—you know, the Japanese flute?—and I heard different kinds of water, different kinds of wind! I knew then that I would play the flute for the rest of my life.

Compare the two fieldworkers' questions: "Did you get your first flute when you were a girl?" is a leading question because it leads to the answer, "Yes, I got my first flute when I was a girl." What is more, fieldworker 1 implies that most people get their first flutes when they are girls, so the consultant probably thinks she should answer yes. By contrast, the question of fieldworker 2—"Can you remember when you got your first flute?"—is open-ended and invites reflection, perhaps a story. When the consultant says "Yeah," fieldworker 2 asks for a story and gets a much better—and different—answer than fieldworker 1. Go over the rest of the first interview, see how fieldworker 1 injects her opinions into the dialogue ("I'll bet you hated the flute when you first started") and fails to draw out the consultant's real feelings about her lessons, whereas fieldworker 2 establishes better rapport, is a better listener, asks nondirective questions, and gets much fuller and truer answers.

If your project concentrates on a single consultant, you may want to obtain his or her life story (Titon 1980). For this purpose you truly need a recorder to get the story accurately. Because the way your consultants view their lives can be as important as the factual information they give, you should try to get the life story in their own words as much as possible. This means refraining from questions that direct the story as you think it should go. What matters is how your consultant wants it to go. Come back later, in another interview, to draw out specific facts and fill in gaps by direct questioning. In the initial interview, begin by explaining that you would like your consultant to tell you about his or her life as a musician (or whatever is appropriate—composer, disc jockey, and so forth) from the beginning until now. Once begun, allow plenty of time for silences to let your consultant gather thoughts. If he or she looks up at you expectantly, nod your head in agreement and repeat what has just been said to show that you understand it. Resist any impulse to ask direct questions. Write them down instead, and say you will come back to ask questions later—for now you want the story to continue.

Not everyone will be able to tell you his or her musical autobiography, but if you are fortunate enough to find someone who can, it may turn out to be the most important part of your project. On the other hand, if your consultant's life story is a necessary part of your project, but you cannot obtain it except by direct and frequent questioning, you should certainly ask the questions. If you get good answers, the result will be your consultant's life history, a collaborative biography rather than an autobiography.

Interviews, then, with the people whose music you are studying (and perhaps with their audience) help you obtain factual information and test your ideas. They also help you begin to comprehend the musical situation from their point of view: their beliefs, their intentions, their training, their feelings, their evaluations of musical performance, and their understanding of what they are doing—what it is all about. Ultimately, because this is your project, you will combine their ideas with your own interpretations when you write the project up using the information you have collected.

OTHER MEANS OF COLLECTING INFORMATION

Another technique, often used in social science research, is the questionnaire. Although its role in studying music is limited, and it should never be substituted

for interviewing, a questionnaire can help you map out the general nature of a situation before moving into a specific subarea to focus on. For example, to begin exploring the meaning of pop songs in students' lives, you may want to circulate a questionnaire to uncover the eventual sample you will study intensively. Questionnaires are most at home in studies of musical attitudes. To find out how shoppers react to supermarket background music, it would be hard to set up interviews but easy, if the store manager agrees, to distribute a questionnaire.

Aside from questionnaires, which seek out information, you might find information already gathered: autobiographical manuscripts, diaries, photos, and recordings made by consultants for themselves. Clubs, fraternities, schools, churches, and various organizations often store away old materials that shed light on musical activities. At concerts, the programs handed out may be rich in information, ranging from descriptions of the music to the type of advertisers that support the concerts. Membership lists and patrons' lists may be included as well.

Newspapers are enormously helpful. Hardly a day passes without journalistic commentary on the musical environment, in news stories, reviews, and advertisements. Feature stories provide up-to-date information on current concerts, trends, and musical attitudes, both local and national, while advertising can furnish insights into the ideals of the U.S. musical world projected by the media, ideals that influence most of us one way or another.

FINISHING THE PROJECT

As you do all the hard work of organizing and collecting information, always think ahead to what you will do with it. As you go along, return to the list of questions you formulated in relation to your topic—the questions you wanted to ask about the musical situation. You also will have formulated more questions during your fieldwork and other research. These questions and the information you have gathered are related, and they offer a natural organization for your project around your main idea, the answer to the question posed by your topic. Remember that the point of your project is to document some aspect of a nearby music-culture and to interpret it based on the topic you have chosen. More-specific advice on how to write it up and what form to present it in will be available from your instructor. He or she may ask you to write a preliminary proposal describing your subject and a topic phrased as a thematic question; then, after you have been immersed in your fieldwork for a week or two, you may need to write a final proposal describing both your subject and your refined topic. Feedback on these proposals, from your instructor and, possibly, from other students, will be helpful; they may know some things that will help your field research go better, or they may have some good suggestions for questions to ask of the music-culture you are documenting and interpreting.

If you need to clear up research questions, check back with your consultants. As you interview, collect information, and think about the musical situation you study, new questions always will occur to you. It is no different when you write up your project; you will probably find it helpful to get back in touch with your consultants and ask a few final questions. Thus, unlike some term papers, a fieldwork project is built up and accomplished gradually over at least several weeks' time, not quickly at the end of the term.

You are not the only one affected by your finished project. Your work reflects other people's feelings and, on occasion, their social position. Be clear in what you say about the people you worked with. Confidentiality may be important; if people asked you not to use their names or repeat what they said to you, respect their wishes. As is customary in many anthropological works, you may decide to change names of people or places to make certain no one is identified who does not want to be. Imagine the problems created for the member of a band who criticizes the leader if word gets back to the group, or for a school music teacher if he criticizes the school board to you in private and you quote him.

The authors of this book intend, as the Preface put it, that our readers experience "what it is like to be an ethnomusicologist puzzling out his or her way toward understanding an unfamiliar music." A good field project inevitably provides just that experience and makes an original contribution to knowledge. Valuable and enjoyable in and of itself, discovery, documentation, and interpretation of a world of music takes on added significance, because even the smallest project illuminates our understanding of music as human expression.

 Book Companion Website

You will find tutorial quizzes, Internet links, and much more at the Book Companion Website for *Worlds of Music*, Fifth Edition, at academic.cengage.com/music/titton/worlds_5