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# Society for Ethnomusicology

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# ABSTRACTS

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University of California Riverside

Department of Music

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## **ABSTRACTS**

### **In alphabetical order of surname**

**Hannah Balcomb** (UC Riverside)

*Son jarocho* and the *Fandango Fronterizo*: Deploying Traditional, Participatory Art Forms to Confront Contemporary Issues

For the past six years, musicians and enthusiasts of *son jarocho*, a regional style of music and dance from Veracruz, Mexico, have gathered on the Mexican border in San Diego and Tijuana to conduct a *fandango* across the fences that separate two nations. A *fandango* is a traditional musical practice in which musicians, dancers, and spectators perform around the *tarima*, a small stage for percussive footwork. In the *Fandango Fronterizo* (“Border Fandango”), participants create one fandango out of two by placing individual tarimas on either side of the border and trading call-and-response verses. This deeply symbolic unification demonstrates the participants’ fundamental belief that their “music has no borders.” In this paper, I examine the ways that people in the *Fandango Fronterizo* use *son jarocho* to form community, express political dissent, and claim public space. I will draw from Mark Mattern’s definition of community that represents a theoretical and practical way for disparate individuals to recognize and act upon common interests and concerns, negotiate differences, and assert themselves in public arenas (Mattern 1998:5). I argue that *son jarocho*, in a traditional *fandango* setting, has inherent characteristics that make it particularly potent for bringing together diverse groups. Building on Thomas Turino’s model of participatory versus presentational musical settings, I demonstrate that both the sonic features such as vocal style and improvisation as well as an emphasis on general participation over individual displays of perfection make *son jarocho* a powerful vehicle for collective social action in the *Fandango Fronterizo*.

**Rachel Beckles Willson** (Royal Holloway, University of London)

*Simulated culture and the juggernaut of capitalism. (Western classical music in the Middle East)*

Western classical music travels well, whether when dropping by as a passing arabesque of self-celebration (the ‘tour’), staying longer as part of a sustained visit (the colony), or becoming a more rooted resonance of social stratification (through local economic growth and aspiration). But if its journeys resonate with rather obvious shifts in wealth and prosperity, they are nonetheless varied in nature and significance. For instance, Edward W. Said observed that one 19<sup>th</sup>-century opera in the tradition, Verdi’s *Aida*, was simply ‘of Empire’, by which meant that it was written about, for, and premièred in, imperial Egypt. Yet when works of western classical music travel today, they have few such obvious internal links with their performance sites. Thus, rather than saturation with context, I suggest we might speak of its opposite, namely a hollowing out. In my paper I discuss this idea with reference to an opera performance in 2009 on the Palestinian West Bank. The opera, initially titled *The Sultana of Cadiz*, had been newly constructed by a German musician and German playwright from fragments of music by the 18<sup>th</sup>-century Spanish composer Arriaga Crisóstomo, a process funded by the Barenboim-Said Foundation in Spain. I suggest that a useful framework for reading the opera and its performances in Ramallah is provided by Jameson’s theory of late capitalism in combination with Baudrillard’s theory of the simulacrum. This framework, I hope, may be broadly applicable to music’s (hollowed out) travels today, when its meanings float, subject to largely remote but unfettered appropriations.

**Joshua Brown** (UC Riverside)

*Not Just Another Residence: Flamenco Peñas, Patrimony and Noise Control in Seville, Spain*

In this study, I will look at how Sevillian flamenco peñas, or social clubs, act as sites of community building that are often antithetical to official municipal interests. The ambiguous status of these venues as both public and private spaces imbues them with a functional versatility that enables many modes of interaction and performance, but also poses problems with regard to governmental classification. The local authorities treat peñas as public entities on the one hand, and private domiciles on the other. The latter interpretation has allowed police officers to repeatedly fine these institutions for causing noise disturbances. Such actions indicate a particular disjuncture between the interests of peña administrators, community members and government officials. Furthermore, the municipal and regional government's efforts to both assimilate legal standards from the European Union and strictly enforce laws that generate income in the current economic crisis have come at the expense of working musicians and venues across Andalusia. These developments not only contradict the protectionist ethos of UNESCO's inscription of flamenco onto the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, but also call into question the very purpose of such declarations. Drawing from ethnographic fieldwork conducted in two of Seville's best-known peñas, I will explore how actions taken by local authorities increasingly threaten common flamenco practices, including late-night fiestas. Finally, I will demonstrate the ways in which flamenco artists and community members continue to negotiate distinctions between public and private performance in relation to a wide variety of pressures and power structures.

**Stephanie Choi** (UC Santa Barbara)

*The Revival of the Traditional Notion of Music in the 21C Korean Music Project*

During the last fifty years, the South Korean government has maintained a national agenda for Korean traditional music to construct national identity through new compositions. The 21C Korean Music Project, a Korean traditional music contest that has been held annually from 2007, is one of the ongoing projects of this agenda. The contest includes a course of programs, starting from the preliminary rounds to the representative meetings, the workshop, the mentoring and recording sessions, and the final round. Through this process, the 21C Korean Music Project aims "to propose a new direction for Korean music and to contribute to modernization and popularization of Korean traditional music" (Gugak Broadcasting System 2007). In this paper, I explore the government's strategy to transform individual creativity into national identity through the 21C Korean Music Project. By analyzing the process of the Project, I argue that the government proposes the revival of traditional notion of music as the "new direction" of Korean music—music as social activity, not as an object—and that it attempts to stress the collective Korean identity to the contestants by educating them through various programs. I also examine how this revival of the traditional notion of music brought about identity conflicts between the government that defines the contestants' entries as collective music and the contestants who claim their individual identities through their music, lyrics, instrumentation, performing site, and records.

**Froilan Fabro** (UH Mānoa)

*Rondalya Ilokana: The Ilokano Identity Consciousness in Rondalla Music in Santa Lucia, Ilocos Sur*

In the late 1960s, the Department of Education: Bureau of Public Schools in Manila, Philippines, issued a bulletin report mobilizing the state practice of Rondalla (plucked-string ensemble) in the interest of national identity. Drawing from Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities, I argue that this musical practice became assimilated into the various lowland cultures and thus created a national consciousness through Rondalla. One example of this national consciousness is the International Rondalla Festival, premiered in 2004 and held every 3 to 4 years. In the case of the municipal Santa Lucia, Ilocos Sur, an essence of Ilokano identity is conflated into the national sphere of the rondalla ensemble through their construction of a localized tuning system. Regardless of the instrument in the ensemble or the age of the student, this localized tuning system allows them to transition freely and retain fundamental finger positions. While this practice is useful for regional musical styles, I argue that the use of their own tuning system excludes themselves from the national rondalla practice and creates problematic issues for their students who want to further their musical studies or perform in rondalla ensembles outside their region. This paper will utilize one case study of a student that experienced these pedagogical changes from the Santa Lucia to the University of Northern Philippines rondalla ensemble.

**Benjamin Fairfield** (UH Mānoa)

*The Map that Christmas Carols Made: A Case of Musical Appropriation and Application in a Karen Village.*

Referred to by Southeast Asian scholar Charles Keyes as the most successful case of Protestant conversion in Southeast Asia, anthropologists, historians, and missionary accounts of Karen music have typically described the Karen people's subsequent experience with musical change as one of "loss" or "abandonment" of tradition. These accounts portray Karen musical practice in negative terms of disappearing traditional instruments, diminishing performance of oral poetic narratives, and a hegemonic replacement of traditional expression with western Protestant (Baptist) music. Taking guarded inspiration from James Scott's portrayal of agentic positioning of the highland communities of Zomia and based upon my own field research and musical analysis of appropriated, adapted, and applied Christmas carols in a Karen village in Thailand, I argue that a framework of agency provides a better means of understanding Christian Karen musical practice. In the small village of Huay Nam Khao ("Thi Wa Klo") in Chiang Mai province, local Karen church members make annual treks through their village, marking out religious insiders and outsiders through domesticated Christmas music. Presenting these activities through an agentic understanding of Karen musical practice and as an ethnic forging of Karen identity rather than through a lens of degrading tradition, this paper shows how Thongchai Winichakul's theory on maps can extend to music as a map-making technology that plays an active role in shaping and perpetuating community and ethnic identity.

**Jeremiah S. French** (UH Mānoa)

*Eclecticism and the Digital Database in Post-Apocalyptic Video Games*

Videogame music often uses instruments and techniques from around the world to evoke places, people, and themes intended to promote player immersion in the videogame world. Some composers however purposely try to move beyond standard essentialized representation. *Eclectic multicultural approaches*—a term coined by video game composer Darren Korb—move beyond cultural identification to create unique musical identities that enhance the gaming experience through fantasy and sci-fi themes, locations, characters, and action while still operating within typical game audio parameters and functions outlined by scholars like Kiri Miller, Zach Whalen, and Karen Collins. In this paper, I will analyze how eclectic musical approaches are used in two post-apocalyptic themed video games, *Borderlands* (2009) and *Bastion* (2011). Through musical analysis, interviews with composers Raison Varner and Darren Korb, surveys of gamer experiences, and fieldwork at Varner's production studio in Plano, Texas, I show that the *eclectic musical approach* appropriately mimics the restructuring of society and culture in post-apocalyptic settings. Drawing on concepts from Jean Boudrillard's simulacrum in *Simulations* and Hiroki Azuma's application of the database in *Otaku: Japan's Database Animals*, I examine the notion and application of material from what I call the *global digital database*, the accumulated cultural resources found in digital media. I argue that these soundtracks of these two games and the utilization of technology in making them are indicative of contemporary production and represent both the eradication of modern exoticism in the face of postmodern eclecticism and the composers' value of the music as sound.

**Jennie Galvin** (National University of Ireland, Galway)

*El Movimiento Alterado: narrating a world of gender hierarchies, drugs and violence*

Narcocorridos are ballads about the drug trade which originate in a very specific northern Mexican *corrido* tradition, the so-called *corrido norteño*. The narcocorrido chronicles the world of drug dealing within the dispossessed sectors of particular border areas. The lyrics are influenced by various factors: the social relations that constitute gender hierarchies in Mexico, the music industry itself and the local neighbourhood conditions of the musicians and their fans. The ballads also report the lifestyles of drug traffickers, sometimes justifying them and sometimes condemning them. A new wave of narcocorridos known as the *Movimiento Alterado* (M|A) has been reinventing and rejuvenating the genre with lyrics more explicit and more graphic than ever before. This movement emerged during one of the most violent periods of Mexico's history (2006-2012) and the songs mimic the high levels of brutality, with frequent imagery of torture, killings and dismemberment of bodies. Furthermore, the songs of the MA illuminate a certain kind of cultural valorisation of gender stereotypes in Mexico and it is thus surprising that little research exists on gender relations in the songs. By drawing on data from fieldwork carried out by this researcher in Mexico in 2012, as well as on the theory of hegemonic masculinity as developed by R.W. Connell, this paper will address issues of gender which are present in the music and assess whether they reflect the reality of this world where drug trafficking and gangland violence are the daily norm. It will further explore whether visions of gender only serve to perpetuate existing gender stereotypes of Mexico rather than challenge them.

**Aaron Kaplan** (UC Riverside)

*What Exactly is “Free” about Free Improvisation? The Meaning of Improvisatory Music in Los Angeles*

Improvisatory musics such as free jazz are too often assumed to embody ideals of freedom and liberation. Free jazz is often used as a metaphor for liberation as it is historically linked to black struggles for equality in the 1960s, but I question whether today this metaphor still has the same power. In this paper, I will interrogate how this improvisatory discourse has changed and investigate new values that may serve as a unifying force for free jazz and improvisatory music. I will explore various meanings and social functions of the term “freedom.” I ground my argument in a recent Archie Shepp performance at the 2012 Angel City Jazz Festival in which Shepp sung lengthily about black oppression as his drummer demonstrated a “patting juba” slave dance. This type of performance links the music with a liberating discourse that is too readily accepted and not critically examined. I argue that without contextualizing this performance within the current state of jazz and improvisatory music in Los Angeles, meaning is lost under a broad label of freedom, and its potential value overlooked. I see such issues as directly related to the current struggle of establishing a prosperous jazz/improvisatory music community in Los Angeles. How do rising Los Angeles improvisatory musicians today deal with the inherent assumptions linked to their music, and how do they struggle to form new musical meanings? Drawing on the work of Heble, Lewis, and Monson, I will explore various ties between social freedom and musical improvisation, and investigate their applicability to the current meanings that imbue improvisatory performance in Los Angeles.

**Siu Hei Lee** (UC San Diego)

*Chinese Non-Identified: Overseas Students and National Signs in Chinese Popular Music*

If cultural identity is a matter of “becoming,” as Stuart Hall contends, and national identity is (still) an integral part therein, then Chinese overseas undergraduate students nowadays may have a questionable national identity. They are neither sojourners who long to return to their homeland, as their predecessors once did, nor intended American immigrants who might become part of the diasporic community. This essay examines the engagement with signs of nationhood and statehood in Chinese popular music in an exclusively overseas Chinese student community at the University of California, San Diego. Forty questionnaires, five panel interviews, and participation in karaoke events have pointed me to certain popular music videos and their cover versions in the popular singing contest *The Voice of China*. In this case study, I focus on Mainland Chinese rock musician Wang Feng, whose style ranges from patriotic pop rock to soft rock with controlled screaming that signals lamentation. Interviewees expressed their sympathy with poor migrant workers after singing or watching Wang’s “Beijing, Beijing,” but none paid attention to signs of statehood that appear as two-second snapshots in the music/karaoke video thirteen times. The students’ selective assimilation of texts, images, and sound textures with national signs, I argue, exhibits what Christopher Tonelli calls non-identification, encounters with signs with which we neither identify nor counter-identify. My study grounds nomad adolescence, previously overlooked, in musical-cultural discourse, and also sheds light on the politics of non-identification that, in this case, prevents progressive possibilities in challenging the national-cultural power of the Chinese statehood.

**Andrew Pettit (UCLA)**

*Passing Traditions: Lullabies and Cultural Change in Urban India*

Singing lullabies to children is a near universal human phenomenon and constitutes some of a child's first exposure to their native language, culture, and music. Simultaneously expressing a caregiver's love, affection, and aspirations for the child, these songs are also filled with fear, sadness, and even hostility towards the child or the caregiver's condition. Yet, lullabies are more than just expressive tools, they can affirm and contest socio-cultural values, can be a medium of social protest, and their study offers unique insight into the processes of cultural transmission and adaptation. If with increasing cross-cultural contact childhood is, as Ashis Nandy asserts, a "battleground of cultures," (Nandy 2004) then lullabies and child-directed songs comprise some of the weapons of this war. Previous scholarship has focused on the psychology of lullaby singing (e.g. Custardo, Britto, Brooks-Gunn 2003; MacKinlay, Baker 2005), analyzed the cultural and mythological content of the songs themselves (e.g. Giudice 1988; Ebeogu 1991; MacKinlay 1999), and examined the role of lullabies in pre and post-verbal communication and infant development (e.g. Fernald 1989; Trehub 2005). In this paper, I will highlight the changing practice of lullaby singing in urban India and show how these songs have been used to help establish social hierarchy, how they help formulate regional identities, and how they serve as the soundtrack to memories of place and home. Finally, I will illustrate how the practice of these songs is being transformed by technology, the demands of a modernizing economy, or abandoned due to shifting cultural values.

**Nicholas Ragheb (UC Santa Barbara)**

*The Social Impact of Technological Innovations in Turkish Instrument Making*

A new profession has emerged in the past thirty years with recent transformations in the production methods of the Turkish goblet-shaped *darbuka* drum. This profession of *yönetmen* or "director" plays a key role in the construction of cast-metal and newer ceramic models by introducing innovations in design such as changes in dimensions and weight as well as the enhancement of an internally mounted light-bulb used to control the tension of animal-skin drum heads. This new role exists at the margins of professional musicianship, engineering, and craftsmanship and has derived insights from these different traditions that have been central to recent innovations in *darbuka* design. The propensity of this emergent profession towards innovation may be understood in terms of its "creative marginality"—a concept developed within the sociological discipline of Science and Technology Studies and applied to the study of European musical instrument production by Bijsterveld & Schulp (2004). Related to this is Pinch and Trocco's notion of "boundary shifters," (2002) which highlights the transfer of knowledge, skills and experience between the fields of engineering and music that were key to the development of the Moog synthesizer. Drawing on the insights of these studies of innovation in musical instrument production, as well as interviews and ethnographic observation conducted in Istanbul between 2007 and 2011, I discuss how the ability of these *darbuka* production directors to apply knowledge across the boundaries of traditional professions has led to a radically new styles of *darbukas* that have become popular in Turkey and abroad.



**Alex W. Rodriguez (UCLA)**

*Creating Space for Creative Music at LA's Blue Whale*

Opened in December 2009 in the midst of the Great Recession, the downtown Los Angeles jazz club Blue Whale has quickly established itself as a major hub for creative improvised music in the city. Club owner and vocalist Joon Lee's dual interests in jazz improvisation and architecture inspired him to construct the space; through designing, building and opening this unique venue, Lee has employed his skills as an improviser—"playing what's not there," as Miles Davis famously commanded. In this presentation, I intend to explore the club's unique "vibe" through interviews with the dedicated musicians that have made it their creative home base, as well as photos and video of the space. In doing so, I suggest that Davis's mandate can manifest itself in many musical contexts, including non-acoustic ones. As both a creatively-produced space and a space for creative production, the club provides a useful lens for examining the jazz communities with which it interacts. In her 2009 essay "Jazz as Political and Musical Practice," Ingrid Monson calls for ethnomusicology to embrace a definition of the field as "the interdisciplinary study of music as cultural practice, in order to emphasize a practice-based anthropological conception of culture." In this paper, I intend to understand the *what* of jazz cultural practice by considering this particular *where* of it: the cultural and physical space carved out by the Blue Whale in its ongoing operations as a jazz venue in the 21st century.

**Barbara Taylor (UC Santa Barbara)**

*Family Reunion: Revisiting the Banjo in Diaspora*

In 2007 Kentucky old-time banjo player Randy Wilson was on faculty at the Festival of American Fiddle Tunes in Port Townsend, Washington, a weeklong pedagogical music camp dedicated to transmitting the fiddle-based traditions of in North American vernacular music. In addition to the standard 5-string, open back banjo, Wilson brought two West African plucked lutes: a Jola *akonting* and a Mande *ngoni*. Tuning the instruments his way, Wilson played traditional Kentucky tunes on them, using the *akonting* and *ngoni* to make a broader argument about the persistence of the connection between the musics of Africa and Appalachia. How did an Appalachian old-time banjo player come to make an argument for African cultural retentions by playing Kentucky tunes on a West African plucked lute at a music camp devoted to the traditional musics of North America? The answer lies in large part in the recent cultural interventions of loosely interconnected groups of *banjo activists* who have been reaching across the Atlantic to construct a counter-narrative of the U.S. banjo as an instrument of Africa and African America. In this paper I argue that this initiative arises in a long legacy of disputation over the meaning of Africa in the Americas and that the legacy of contention over theories of African cultural survivals versus hybridity and creolization both provides the conceptual ground for and conditions the popular reception of the banjo activists efforts.

**Dave Wilson (UCLA)**

*Singing for Macedonia: Glocalization and National Identity Construction in Macedonian Idol*

*American Idol* is a phenomenon that has swept the globe quickly in its eleven years of existence. Following the well-worn path of globalization to franchises in forty-three territories, the *Idols* empire typifies not cultural imperialism, but rather Appadurai's model of global culture flows, in which local mediation of a global brand can reveal multifarious influences from the local culture, the brand's home culture, and often the brand itself. Globalized media not only invokes Roland Robertson's idea of *glocalization*, the ways in which global cultural products are adapted for local audiences, but also provides opportunities for those local audiences to both enunciate a *desired* cultural identity and challenge others to move towards that identity. In Macedonia, a nationalist commitment to receiving both affirmation as a unique culture and recognition of that uniqueness by the international community (notably the West) often drives public policy, public opinion, and popular culture as Macedonians look for new sites for the construction of a globally-relevant Macedonian identity. In this paper, I suggest that the debut (and only) season of *Macedonian Idol* (2010-2011) provides a site for glocalized identity construction through an analysis of the program's musical content, narrative model, voting procedures, and audience response as models and modifications of *American Idol*. Through infusing its program with Macedonian sensibilities and through adopting and adapting the narrative model of *American Idol*, *Macedonian Idol* provides an image of a Macedonia that can attain relevance as a cosmopolitan society while retaining the distinct characteristics that define it as a nation.