

ICTM Study Group on Audiovisual Ethnomusicology

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The visual dimension of music making: A new challenge for ethnomusicology

The subject of audiovisual ethnomusicology is ethnomusicological film. Although it is a developing concept, audiovisual ethnomusicology is recognized as a very efficient way to represent music through audiovisual means by depicting the lives of musicians, analyzing musical structures, and providing an ethnographic approach to musical performance. The use of audiovisual media has been very helpful in ethnomusicological research, as well as in education and dissemination activities. Audiovisual tools have been demonstrated to be valuable for enhancing and communicating ethnomusicological knowledge, preserving musical systems and cultures, as well as for being a vehicle of cultural transmission and revitalization of styles and musical repertoires, and as a record of musical change in a diachronic perspective.

Ethnomusicological film is able to record the “sound space” (as a physical-acoustic space and as sociocultural space) in which *music makers* and *music users* act and interact as actors of the musical communication in a peculiar sociocultural context. Film can document both the aural and visual dimensions of musical performance and has the capability to show things, people, and events in their physical and temporal context; all such features related to contextualization can best be communicated and represented by *audiovisual* means. This expression is intended to integrate two components: aural perception and visual communication. The term *audio* beside *visual* is a significant factor that discriminates and differentiates the domain of what we can define as “audiovisual ethnomusicology” from other scientific domains related to *visualizing* music, such as musical semiology and musical iconography. In fact, while musical notation and musical pictures (including still photographs) are silent or mute representations of a musical experience, the *sounding image*, as a moving picture with synchronous sound, allows us to document or convey a significant amount of useful information related to a musical performance that, in many cases,

becomes essential to achieve an in-depth knowledge of music in traditional cultures.

Today, audiovisual technologies have offered a decisive contribution to restore the sensitive unity in the representation of events characterized by a multisensory nature. The sound film as a moving picture with synchronized soundtrack is crucial in ethnomusicological studies as it gives visibility to the “actors” of the musical phenomenon in a direct way, whereas a purely written description is unable to convey the visual dimension of the experience. Therefore, visualizing a musical event as a performance, through the audiovisual representation, becomes necessary and complementary to the sound recording and the written text. This is particularly clear in cases where it allows the audience to “see” some contextual aspects of music making, for which the literal description and musical notation are insufficient to allow an adequate representation as a dynamic process of musical action and interaction.

Audiovisual representation of traditional music has many advantages, but it also has some limits: film cannot contain all the information that a written ethnography can convey beyond what can be deduced from a “reading” of the visuals. The film presents clear advantages in representing a musical experience “alive” in its own context, but it cannot portray the “unseen” information of certain events that are hardly conveyed through *sounding images*.

Indeed, there is an intertextual dialogue between the filming process and the more conventional forms of ethnographic investigations. Both in ethnology and ethnomusicology, there is a convergence in considering film ethnography as complementary, and not as a replacement of the written ethnography: “film and written texts should be mutually illuminating; the written text enhances our understanding of what we see, and the visual image makes what we read more comprehensible and meaningful” (Baily 1989:16). Nevertheless, the belief that audiovisual recording has not yet reached full authority or scientific legitimacy equal to written text, still persists. Despite recent technological develop-

ments having imposed an increasing use of the media in ethnomusicological research and dissemination, documentary film is not fully considered a legitimate form of musical ethnography, since academic language remains still anchored mostly to writing.

The main question advanced by the ethno-filmmaker (i.e., ethnomusicologist-filmmaker)—and that encouraged the creation of a “pool” of scholars involved in filmmaking to debate this issue—is: can film convey ethnomusicological knowledge that a written monograph cannot? Or, in other words, how and in what way can moving and *sounding* images teach us about a musical culture?

Beginnings at the Ethnomusicological Film Festival and MusiCam

The process that led to the constitution of a study group focussed on ethnomusicological film is the result of a convergence of two different, but complementary, experiences: the Ethnomusicological Film Festival in Italy, and MusiCam in Spain.

The creation of the first film festival exclusively devoted to the ethnomusicological documentaries represents a milestone in the history of audiovisual ethnomusicology. In 1983, in fact, the FLOG¹ Center for Folk Traditions of Florence, in collaboration with the Maison des Cultures du Monde in Paris, promoted the first Ethnomusicological Film Festival (Rassegna del Film Etnomusicale in Italy, and Festival du Film des Musiques du Monde in France). In 1984, the ethnomusicological film festival became itinerant: it was also organized by the Ateliers d'Ethnomusicologie of Geneva as the Festival du Film des Musiques du Monde, and in London by the Commonwealth Arts Center Cinema as the World Music Film Festival.

The three European cultural centres—Maison des Cultures du Monde, FLOG Center for Folk Traditions, and Ateliers d'Ethnomusicologie—were already well-known in the production and organization of concerts and performances of traditional music and dance from around the world. The decision to establish a film festival devoted entirely to the ethnomusicological documentaries was aimed at providing viewers with a more complete knowledge of musical cultures. Film, in fact, can implement all visual details about the social and cultural contexts of a musical tradition, thereby avoiding the problems of staging such traditions, with resulting consequences such as the de-contextualization of traditional music performances. These festivals have had an important role in the dissemination of ethnomusico-

logical films, since at that time most of them were shot in 16 mm (hence, limited to theatrical distributions and some schools, universities and non-profit organizations). Besides the dissemination purposes, these festivals have stimulated the production of documentary films on traditional music.

It must be also pointed out that in 2004, a conference entitled “Image in ethnomusicology,” organized by the ICTM Italian National Committee, focussed on the use of audiovisual documentation in ethnomusicology, was held in Florence on the occasion of the 22nd Ethnomusicological Film Festival.

In 2010, the Music Department and the research group Miradas Sonoras at the University of Valladolid organized MusiCam, a series of commented screenings of documentary films and audiovisual materials related to ethnomusicological research, on the initiative of three PhD students: Salvatore Rossano (who proposed the name MusiCam—Music + Camera—for the event), Matías Isolabella, and Raquel Jiménez. The goal was to encourage reflection on the use of video as a research and dissemination tool, as well as to engage students in a discussion on the potential for knowledge afforded by the new technologies and the ways in which the several audiovisual languages can be used (and sometimes manipulated) in order to convey specific conceptions of music and musicians from diverse cultures.

Through the critical viewing of relevant films and scholarly literature, the organizers of MusiCam attempted to acquaint course attendees with scholarly ethnomusicological documentation work, as well as to develop specific contents in the field of visual ethnomusicology by arranging the participation of some researchers who have produced films in their respective areas of study. In this way, students were given the opportunity to take part in discussions with outstanding practitioners of ethnomusicological documentation around issues concerning aesthetics, documentation itself, conceptual tools, and technical aspects. The first MusiCam featured the participation—in the form of lectures and screenings—of scholars Jaume Ayats, Enrique Cámara de Landa, Leonardo D'Amico, Mónica de la Fuente, Giovanni Giuriati, Rubén López Cano, Bernard Lortat-Jacob, Susana Moreno Fernández, and Grazia Tuzi.

The initiative's success led its promoters to organize a second MusiCam in 2011, featuring contributions by Mário Correia, Leonardo D'Amico, Héctor Goyena, and Marco Lutzu. In 2012, lectures (again illustrated with audiovisual materials and films) were delivered by Fabio Calzia, Leonardo D'Amico, Marco Lutzu, Ignazio Macchiarella, Nicola Scaldaferrri, and Manuel Velasco (a member of the Samaki Wanne Collective). The organizers (Enrique Cámara de Landa, Matías Isolabella, Raquel Jiménez, Salvatore Rossano, and Grazia Tuzi)

1 Fondazione Laboratori Officine Galileo.



Figure 1. Poster of MusiCam 2014, “International conference on visual ethnomusicology,” Valladolid 2014.

also took part in this third MusiCam, although their contributions did not include film screenings. The 2013 MusiCam featured audiovisual and film screenings, as well as commentaries by Ivan Días, Matías Isolabella, Emiliano Migliorini, and Paolo Vinati. During this MusiCam, the participants decided to submit a proposal to the ICTM for the creation of a study group dedicated to audiovisual ethnomusicology and thus, following the procedure, the fifth MusiCam in 2014 (figure 1) took the form of an international conference. Most of the contents of this event were subsequently published by the University of Valladolid in the book *Ethnomusicology and Audiovisual Communication: Selected Papers from the MusiCam 2014 Symposium*, edited by Enrique Cámara de Landa, Leonardo D’Amico, Matías Isolabella, and Terada Yoshitaka (2016).

The scholarly debate on filmmaking in ethnomusicology

The different theoretical and methodological approaches of representation of traditional musical practices through film have been examined by Steven

Feld (1976), Hugo Zemp (1988), and Artur Simon (1989). In the late 1980s, the problematic relationship between ethnomusicological research and audiovisual representation of music-making in traditional cultures became a topic of interest debated in the scholarly community at several international conferences. In 1988, the ICTM colloquium on “Methods and techniques of film and video-recording in ethnomusicological research” was held in Czechoslovakia: “The purpose of this colloquium was to bring together a number of ethnomusicologists with a commitment to the use of film and video for scholarly purposes, in order to survey and scan what has been done so far” (Baily 1988:193). The conference was attended by influential European ethnomusicologists who were using the audiovisual medium in their research: Oskár Elscheck, Gerhard Kubik, Hugo Zemp, John Baily, and Artur Simon, among others.²

Matters related to an ethnomusicological analysis of filmmaking have been addressed by Zemp (1989; 1990a); the issue of ethics, as well as representation and authority in the production and reception in the ethnomusicological film, were addressed by Zemp (1990b), Titon (1992), Dornfeld (1992), and Wissler (2009); Giuriati (2015) and Scaldaferrri (2015) have dealt with new trends in the use of audiovisual technology in ethnomusicology; and Harbert (2018) laid the foundation for the study and practice of “ciné-ethnomusicology.” In the same years, two books on ethnomusicological films were published in Italy: *Vedere la musica: Film e video nello studio dei comportamenti musicali* (2010) by Giorgio Adamo, and *Filmare la musica: Il documentario e l’etnomusicologia viva* (2012) by Leonardo D’Amico, later followed by a more detailed and comprehensive study on the same subject in *Audiovisual Ethnomusicology: Filming Musical Cultures* (D’Amico 2020).

The constitution of the ICTM Study Group on Audiovisual Ethnomusicology: Its symposia and proceedings

The idea to create a new ICTM study group focused on the use of audiovisual means in ethnomusicology and the ethnomusicological film was born at the 3rd MusiCam in Valladolid (2012), during an informal meeting between Leonardo D’Amico, Enrique Cámara de Landa, and Matías Isolabella. Afterwards, during the 42nd ICTM World Conference in Shanghai (2013), Leonardo D’Amico, Yves Defrance, and Terada Yoshitaka decided to send a first informal request to

² In 1989, the journal *The World of Music* published a special issue on the subject “Film and video in ethnomusicology,” which contains some of the participants’ presentations given at the ICTM colloquium.

ICTM President Salwa El-Shawan Castelo-Branco and Secretary General Svanibor Pettan to establish an ICTM study group concerning visual or audiovisual ethnomusicology. The idea began to take shape during the MusiCam 2014 International Conference on Visual Ethnomusicology held in Valladolid by the Study-Group-in-the-Making. Following this conference, Leonardo D'Amico submitted a request for official recognition, along with the mission statement, to the ICTM Executive Board. It was accepted with a formal letter dated 30 April 2015.

According to the mission statement written by Leonardo D'Amico and Terada Yoshitaka, the Study Group on Audiovisual Ethnomusicology investigates the potentials of audiovisual media in a wide range of ethnomusicological activities: research, preservation, and dissemination.

1. Research

Audiovisual recording has already been considered an indispensable tool in fieldwork and many ethnomusicologists collect audiovisual footage as a tool for analysis and some produce films for sharing research results with colleagues, students and the general audience. The study group will investigate how ethnomusicologists have used this media in their research, and how the use of this media has affected and/or changed their perceptions of music, the method of data gathering, and the rapport with the people and community under study. It will explore the ethics and methodology of using audiovisual media including filmmaking and post-production applications.

2. Preservation/invigoration

Many music and dance traditions are facing extinction due to various reasons. [Although] [a]udiovisual technologies have been used to record music and dance traditions all over the world, reflections on philosophical, ethical, methodological and technical aspects of such efforts have not been sufficient. The study group will discuss why we need to preserve traditions to begin with, what type of preservation has been done and how, what role audiovisual media can play to foster, preserve, reinvigorate, or even to revive disappearing or attenuated traditions. The group will also seek innovative projects to utilize historical audiovisual documents for the same purpose.

3. Dissemination

The research findings in ethnomusicology have been shared primarily in the form of written text with the audiovisual as a supplement or illustration, while the audiovisual media are generally regarded as better equipped to record/document music and dance. The study group will identify the major problems of the textual representation of music and dance and explore the ways in which audiovisual can be effective as primary media to share research findings.³

During its first business meeting, held during the 43rd ICTM World Conference in Astana in 2015, the newly formed study group received an invitation from the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, to hold the first symposium. A governing body was established with Leonardo D'Amico as chair, Yves Defrance as vice chair, and Matías Isolabella as secretary. The theme of the 1st symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Audiovisual Ethnomusicology (Ljubljana, 24–27 August 2016) was “Sounds and visions: Current directions in audiovisual ethnomusicology.” There were also accompanying concerts, screenings, and workshops. The three sections of the symposium aimed to offer some insights into the main theoretical and methodological approaches adopted by ethno-filmmakers, to compare and share experiences about different strategies for archiving and preserving audiovisual recordings as cultural heritage, and to present new research, as well as to take stock of the current directions in ethnomusicological film production. Selected papers from the Ljubljana symposium were published in *Ethnomusicology in the Audiovisual Time*, edited by Yu Hui, Leonardo D'Amico, and Yves Defrance (2018).

The 2nd symposium was held in Lisbon, 27–30 June 2018, hosted by the Ethnomusicology Institute – Center for Studies in Music and Dance of the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. The symposium, under the general theme “Theories and methods in audiovisual ethnomusicology,” aimed to provide a scholarly venue to reflect widely on the use of audiovisual media as a research tool in ethnomusicology (figure 2). At the same time, the symposium was an occasion for exploring new ways of preserving and disseminating ethnomusicological knowledge and fostering debates on the emerging field of audiovisual ethnomusicology.

The two symposia have provided an excellent opportunity for discussion about the use of audiovisual means as valuable tools for research and the preservation of musical systems and cultures, as a vehicle of cultural transmission and revitalization of styles and musical repertoires, and as a record of musical change in a diachronic perspective.

Since 2018, the ICTM Study Group on Audiovisual Ethnomusicology has established a permanent collaboration with the Intercultural Institute of Comparative Music Studies (IISMC) of the Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, for the project “Eyes on music: Projects on visual ethnomusicology.” Every year, the IISMC offers a research scholarship dedicated to the memory of Diego Carpitella for the production of an audiovisual film of ethnomusicological interest. The growing interest in filmmaking in ethnomusicology is also demonstrated by the recent ICTM Film Prize, awarded annually for an exceptional film or video that contrib-

3 <http://ictmusic.org/group/audiovisual-ethnomusicology>.



Figure 2. Participants at the 2nd symposium of the ICTM Study Group on Audiovisual Ethnomusicology. Lisbon, 2018 (photo by Iñigo Sánchez).

utes significantly to the ICTM mission: “To promote research, documentation, safeguarding, and sustainability of music, dance, and related performing arts, taking into account the diversity of cultural practices, past and present, and scholarly traditions worldwide.”

Audiovisual ethnomusicology in the contemporary “mediascape”

Audiovisual ethnomusicology is being configured as an emerging branch of ethnomusicology, intended to study the audiovisual representations of musical cultures through any audiovisual medium (but particularly in film), within the disciplinary framework of ethnomusicology.

The growing interest in the audiovisual dimension of musical performance practice and the use of film as a medium of presentation and research in ethnomusicology is related to the increasingly wide use of visual ethnographic methods of research and representation, and to technological development of modern visual tools used today in field research. At the same time, postmod-

ern ethnomusicology is oriented mainly to study the *process* of music-making through musical performance in the contemporary “mediascape” (Appadurai 1990).

This study group aims to implement a reflection on visual communication in ethnomusicology and issues concerning the history, approaches, problems, and state of ethnomusicological film studies.

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