

ICTM Study Group on Applied Ethnomusicology

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Introduction

When the Executive Board approved the Study Group on Applied Ethnomusicology after the 39th ICTM World Conference in Vienna in 2007, it was not so much the creation of a new subdiscipline, but rather the recognition and validation of approaches that a good number of ethnomusicologists had already been practising for decades. In addition, it was a logical response to applied work and discourse in sister disciplines, particularly anthropology. Ethnomusicological journals had already started exploring the merits of regarding applied work as a discrete part of our discipline over the preceding twenty-five years, perhaps most pointedly in the contributions by Daniel Sheehy and Jeff Todd Titon in *Ethnomusicology* (1992). Meanwhile, various aspects and foci of applied work had become a recurring topic for papers and panels at both ICTM and the Society for Ethnomusicology (SEM).

Beginnings

As Svanibor Pettan and Klisala Harrison, the founding executives of the study group, describe in a volume that emanated from the first study-group symposium in Ljubljana in 2008, forty-four members of ICTM gathered in Vienna to collaboratively formulate a working definition for its area of focus:

APPLIED ETHNOMUSICOLOGY is the approach guided by principles of social responsibility, which extends the usual academic goal of broadening and deepening knowledge and understanding toward solving concrete problems and toward working both inside and beyond typical academic contexts. (Harrison, Mackinlay, and Pettan 2010:1)

Like most definitions, these words have sparked debate at and in between each of the study-group symposia over the past twelve years. Their broadness has invited comments that pretty much all ethnomusicological work can be considered applied, leading some to argue for narrower boundaries in the definition, with a demonstrable focus on public good and/or social

justice. Another issue—particularly in the selection of papers—has been whether research on initiatives for change count as applied, or if the focus and methodology of the research itself is the defining factor. Most of the study group members lean towards the latter.

To some extent, applied ethnomusicology has defined itself informally by the nature of the papers at the study-group symposia and the ensuing publications. There are several clear categories that have emerged over the years, including music and social change (e.g., music and disadvantaged communities; music and power structures; music during conflict and in post-conflict environments); music and communities (e.g., music and minorities, revitalizing community engagement with performance; music in prisons); music, health, and wellbeing (e.g., music for healing; music for people with disabilities); music and the environment; and music sustainability (e.g., music education; revivals of traditions; and cultural ecosystems).

Symposia

Each of the symposia of the study group so far has had a very different setting, which inspired diverse participation, foci, and outcomes. Two were organized in combination with other study groups: in Hanoi (2010) with Music and Minorities; and in Beijing (2018) with the nascent Music, Education and Social Inclusion. In addition, there was the combined ICTM/SEM forum on applied ethnomusicology in Limerick, Ireland (2015), which was technically not a study group activity, but worth mentioning both as an indication of the importance the two organizations attach to the topic, and as an important forum on practice and theory of applied ethnomusicology from the perspective of the two largest ethnomusicological organizations in the English-speaking world.

The Ljubljana symposium (2008) was hosted by Svanibor Pettan at the Slovene Ethnographic Museum and drew over thirty scholars from sixteen countries (figure 1). It revolved around three principal themes:



Figure 1. The first symposium of the study group. Ljubljana, 2008 (photo by Svanibor Pettan).

History of the idea and understandings of applied ethnomusicology in world-wide contexts; Presentation and evaluation of individual projects, with emphasis on theory and method; and Applied ethnomusicology in situations of conflict. In addition to formal presentations, the meeting used three “talking circles,” on endangered musics, music therapy, and music in conflict respectively. Key outcomes of these discussions included calls for training programmes for emerging applied ethnomusicologists, a better understanding of the potential of technology for our work, and the call for a handbook of applied ethnomusicology. A full account of this meeting can be found in Harrison, Mackinlay, and Pettan (2010:3–11).

In Hanoi (2010), we were hosted by Lê Văn Toàn and the Vietnamese Institute for Musicology in their brand-new building in the suburbs of the Vietnamese capital. This was a very rich setting to learn about a country that was actively embracing safeguarding the diverse sound cultures of its Viet majority and fifty-three ethnic minorities, inspired by UNESCO’s Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). The papers focussed on history and workings of applied ethnomusicology; performing arts and ecology; and performing arts in dialogue, advocacy, and education. The event was enriched by sharing the stage with the ICTM Study Group on Music and Minorities in a joint symposium. In addition to papers and discussions aiming to further understanding of the scope, goals, and methods (to paraphrase Adler 1885) of applied ethnomusicology, the extensive contact with the practices

and ideas of Vietnamese musicians and scholars was one of the most valuable takeaways from this symposium.

The University of Nicosia (Cyprus) hosted the third symposium of the study group (2012), with Panikos Giorgoudes as local organizing committee chair. Forty scholars from five continents gathered and furthered the discussion on theoretical approaches to applied ethnomusicology, with papers on politics and practices of applied ethnomusicology in relation to social activism, censorship, and state control; disability and music; and music and conflict. Led by scholars like Klisala Harrison and Samuel Araújo, “this symposium marked the development towards a more theoretical reflection on applied ethnomusicology,” as the study group report observes (Harrison and Sweers 2012:49).

The University of Fort Hare (2014) offered fifty participants from six continents a variety of settings to bring across some of the key achievements and challenges in South Africa, which included a tour of the famed International Library of African Music, established by Hugh Tracey, and the chance to attend the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Hosted by Bernhard Bleibinger, the programme focussed on applied ethnomusicology and institutions/formal organizations; applied work and digital media; and activism. In addition, there were practical—applied—workshops for the participants. A full report of the gathering was published in the *Bulletin* (Harrison, Sweers, and Bleibinger 2015).

The Cape Breton symposium (2016) was hosted by the newly established Centre for Sound Communities



Figure 2. 7th symposium of the study group, held online in August 2020 (photo by Wei-Ya Lin).

headed by Marcia Ostashevski, and coincided with the iconic festival Celtic Sounds in Sydney, Nova Scotia, Canada. It also saw the launch of the project “Global musics—Local connections.” The themes of the conference were music, labour and exchange; research methodology for the 21st century; and intangible cultural heritage in contemporary societies, which included keynotes on culturally responsive methodology and the bureaucracy of intangible cultural heritage (see the report by Seeger et al. 2017).

The symposium in Beijing (2018), hosted by Zhang Boyu of Central Conservatory of Music, continued predominantly on the theme of music sustainability, which was fascinating as China is leading the world in terms of investment and organization of music as intangible cultural heritage. It was also the largest of the study-group symposia to date, with over one hundred participants. This study-group symposium was the first part of an ambitious triptych, continuing with symposia on digital ethnomusicology and music of the Silk Road. It also joined forces with the new Study Group on Music, Education and Social Inclusion, with many papers effortlessly bridging the two study groups. Perhaps the most salient feature of this gathering was the instant translation of all presentations and PowerPoint illustrations between English and Mandarin, allowing participants from both language areas to engage in the work and underlying approaches of colleagues usually “behind the language barrier.”

Like so many gatherings in 2020, the 7th symposium of the study group was affected by COVID-19. After fierce discussions on postponing or conducting the

event virtually, it was decided to proceed fully digital-only (figure 2). Marc-Antoine Camp and his teams at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts created a smooth digital infrastructure in the run-up to and during the meeting, which gave participants the opportunity to share thoughts and discuss papers on the theme of “Performing, engaging, knowing.” This focus, which in addition to providing space for the recurring topics of the applied ethnomusicology study-group symposia, provided space to explore similarities, differences and synergies with another strongly emerging trend in music research, which is generally referred to as “artistic research,” but could equally be seen as applied musicology, with musical knowledge and doing at the core of the research design (e.g. Impett 2017). While the informal meetings over coffee, lunch, drinks and dinner were sorely missed, the digital format did allow the study group to have wide participation, with large panels from particularly Latin America and Africa, addressing some of the ongoing concerns of the study group with equity and access.

Publications and projects

A number of publications emerged directly from the study-group symposia, including the special issue on applied ethnomusicology in the Slovene journal *Muzikološki zbornik—Musicological Annual*, edited by Svanibor Pettan (2008); the Cambridge Scholars Press volume *Applied Ethnomusicology: Historical and Contemporary Approaches*, edited by Klisala Harrison,

Elizabeth Mackinlay, and Svanibor Pettan (2010); and a themed issue of the Finnish journal *COLLeGIUM*, “Applied ethnomusicology in institutional policy and practice,” edited by Klisala Harrison (2016). A publication with Central Conservatory of Music Press resulted from the 2018 symposium: *Applied Ethnomusicology: Practices, Policies and Challenges* (Schippers, Lin, and Zhang 2022). There have also been discussions on establishing a peer-reviewed journal devoted to applied ethnomusicology, but these have not been actioned yet.

Numerous other publications were the direct or indirect result of presentations and discussions at the study-group symposia. Most prominent among these is the *Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*, edited by study-group founder Svanibor Pettan and Jeff Todd Titon (2015), with articles by various study-group members, including Zhang Boyu, Klisala Harrison, Svanibor Pettan, Huib Schippers, Britta Sweers, and Jeff Todd Titon. In addition, Klisala Harrison published a range of articles on applied ethnomusicology, and various other members continue to publish on their specific work or projects across a wide number of scholarly publications.

Arguably, many examples of applied scholarship in our discipline have benefitted from the discussions, interactions, and connections facilitated by the study group. As an example, a major project on music sustainability was developed in parallel with the study group over ten years. I remember having first discussions on the project with Anthony Seeger in Vienna in 2007, then leading a talking circle in Ljubljana on the topic in 2008, and doing a plenary panel with Keith Howard and Anthony Seeger at the world conference in Durban in 2009, with many constructive critical questions from the floor. This was around the time that the Australian Research Council approved funding for an AUD 5 million collaborative research project, “Sustainable futures for music cultures,” which ran from 2009 to 2014.

With its ambitious scope (nine research teams documenting the “cultural ecosystem” of nine traditions as diverse as Western opera and Aboriginal song traditions), the project presented a number of important challenges, such as (1) a return to questions regarding the merit and ethics of comparative approaches (which, from *Vergleichende Musikwissenschaft* to cantometrics, had not had a great run in our discipline); and (2) complex ethical considerations about emphatically aiming to “empower communities to forge musical futures on their own terms” (Schippers and Grant 2016). The dialogues at and in-between study-group symposia helped address the many dilemmas that come with a project of that scope and complexity, and the outcomes arguing for considering music practices in well-defined “cultural ecosystems” (*ibid.*) have been very well received.

Futures

As the study group is well into its second decade, a number of strands of discussion have emerged as ongoing areas of attention: approach and method; ethics; relationship to power; and the place of applied ethnomusicology in the wider discipline.

Method may well be the most distinguishing feature of applied ethnomusicology, and one of the aspects that sets it apart from two earlier main stages of ethnomusical practice, although all three stages can co-exist. If the first stage (say from Adler 1885) was characterized by a considerable distance between researcher and “subjects,” and a key feature of the second stage (let’s say since Merriam 1964) was ethnographic fieldwork with primarily academic goals, applied ethnomusicology may well signify a third stage, where the research methodology is developed much more with and for the communities we work with.

Directly related to this is the issue of ethics, which emerged as a theme in all the symposia, meetings, and publications associated with the study group. While we have had robust discussions on the ethics of our discipline before, particularly in relation to fieldwork (e.g., Barz and Cooley 2008), responsibilities intensify when we emphatically remove ourselves from the guiding principle which Deborah Wong (2008) humorously associated with Star Trek’s first directive: “Do not interfere.” While most of us have come to accept that our presence as a researcher in any community is inevitably an influence on the music and the community, this multiplies when we choose to be an applied researcher. Successful outcomes may improve the lives of musicians and communities, but failure may have negative effects on people and their culture. With that awareness comes considerable responsibility.

A recurring theme related to this has been the relationship of musicians, communities, and researchers to power structures, which inevitably underlies a great deal of applied ethnomusicology, as it actively deals with impact on musicians and communities. I have been surprised at the contrast between the nuanced perceptions we as ethnomusicologists have of the people whose music we study, and the tendency towards sweeping generalizations on institutions and power. In applied ethnomusicology, it is increasingly important to understand power structures—whether they be public authorities, large cultural organizations, NGOs, or corporate structures including media—as forces impacting music practices that can be understood, negotiated with, and even changed. A key success factor in this is to see the people that serve and define these structures as individuals with particular world views, aspirations, motivations, responsibilities, dreams, and disappoint-

ments, just as we approach the other people we work with (Schippers 2021).

In that way, whether we consider applied ethnomusicology as a new subdiscipline or merely a refinement in a variety of approaches, it widens the scope of our work in challenging and stimulating ways. Many consider study groups as the heart of the ICTM. It is truly a pleasure to serve on a study group that has such an exciting agenda of new methodologies, ranges of outcomes, and dilemmas, inviting creative scholarship that will continue to help us refine the inner and outer workings of our discipline, and enable us to truly give back to the musics, musicians, and communities that inspire us.

Acknowledgement

I owe much of the memory of the early symposia to the thoughts and writings of my predecessors as chairs of the Study Group on Applied Ethnomusicology, Svanibor Pettan and Klisala Harrison, its vice chairs, Samuel Araújo and Adriana Helbig, and especially secretaries Britta Sweers and Wei-ya Lin.

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