

Ecomusicology.

The study of music, culture and nature; or, the study of the intersection of human soundworlds and non-human soundworlds. Approaches include the study of influence, mimesis, and/or reference using textual, sound, and/or extra-musical means.

Interest in ecomusicology paralleled increasing environmental concern in Western societies since 1970, a period of ‘greening’ in higher education. Environmental studies fields developed in the physical, natural and social sciences as well as the humanities, e.g. environmental history and literary ecocriticism. The term ‘ecomusicology’ gained currency in the decades around 2000, primarily in Scandinavian and North American academic circles. Early instances of the term (Hambræus 1973-74, Harley 1995) reflected scientific ecology (the study of connections between organisms and environments), but more recently it is literary ‘ecocriticism’ that combines with the inclusive, Seegerian sense of ‘musicology’ to form ‘ecomusicology’.

Literary ecocriticism considers various modes of cultural production that imagine and portray human-environment relationships. In addition to describing such connections, ecocritical approaches include the interpretive (reading into the subtexts of cultural products from literature to film to advertising), political (being concerned about environmental crises and wanting to do something), and critical (subjecting those interpretive and political positions to scrutiny) (Garrard 2004).

Most ecomusicological studies have not explicitly employed the term ecomusicology, perhaps because relationships between music, culture and nature are common in non-Western and Western musical inquiry. Ethnographic methodologies often emphasize local environments in shaping cultural relationships with sound and music. Historical studies throughout Western music regularly connect human and non-human soundworlds. A diverse array of scholarship can be labeled ecomusicological, much of which has been descriptive and interpretive. Most subfields of music have engaged in

ecomusicological discourse, particularly soundscapes, ethnomusicology, and historical musicology.

Early concerted efforts to connect human and non-human soundworlds came from soundscape studies and acoustic ecology. Schafer (1969) founded the field with the World Soundscape Project, which since 1993 is the World Forum for Acoustic Ecology. From Canada, such inquiry spread to the U.S. (Wrightson 2000), Europe (Järviluoma 2009), and beyond, often blending approaches from composition, the sciences, and general music scholarship.

Such interdisciplinarity is fundamental in ecomusicological inquiry. Biomusic involves scientists and musicians collaborating to study non-human soundworlds, e.g. of birds or whales, in relation to human evolution and musicality (Gray 2001, Fitch 2006). The development of the hydrophone in 1967 allowed cetologist Roger Payne (1995) to record whale songs, which captured public and artistic imaginations. Recent multi-species engagements have resulted in historical and cross-cultural studies (Doolittle 2008), semiotic approaches in zoomusicology (Martinelli 2009), and philosophical considerations of interspecies musicking (Rothenberg 2002).

Considerations of place have been a common theme. Feld (1990) described the acoustemology of the Kaluli of Papua New Guinea and related their human soundworld to the local environment. While connecting sound and place is a norm of ethnomusicology, Guy (2009) has encouraged a more explicitly ecomusicological agenda that approaches the political and critical more than the descriptive and interpretive. The Society for Ethnomusicology's 2010 Annual Meeting was titled "Sound Ecologies." Place- or region-specific studies have also considered the influence of local environments, particularly in American (Morris 1998, Von Glahn 2003, Toliver 2004), Scandinavian (Grimley 2006, Torvinen 2009) and Canadian (Waterman 1997) musics.

Most historical epochs have been considered for ecomusicological topoi, e.g. the pastoral (Peattie 2002, Watkins 2007) and birds (Leech 2007, Fallon 2009). Fields such as popular music (Pedelty 2008),

gender (Austern 1998), and opera (Senici 2005) continue the diversity of approaches. Western music theorists often used nature to justify and explain musical phenomena (Clark and Rehding 2001). Since the 1990s, usually conservative German musicologists have produced numerous historical examinations of nature, leading Rehding (2002) to conclude that ecomusicology is not just a “hot topic” of the moment but rather is a serious field well-suited to ask fundamental questions, such as “what is this stuff called music?” The Ecocriticism Study Group of the American Musicological Society has engaged with ecomusicology in an institutional setting since 2007 and maintains an Internet-accessible bibliography.

Issues of sustainability provide an avenue for a socially engaged ecomusicology. Most prominently, Titon (2009) has discussed the issue of cultural sustainability in regard to music. Allen (2011) connected forest conservation to the manufacture of stringed instruments, which relates to the work of the International Pernambuco Conservation Initiative (Wilder 2010). Musical reactions to natural and human-caused environmental devastation have been widely distributed (e.g. the Live Earth concerts of 2007 and relief/benefit concerts for Hurricane Katrina in 2005, the Haitian earthquake in 2010, and the Gulf Oil Spill in 2010). Ecomusicological scholarship is sure to follow.

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