British Forum for Ethnomusicology Autumn Conference 2024

Creative Writing, Music and Ethnography

29 November 2024; 9.45am – 4.45pm (UK time)

Online [Teams]

9.45 – 10.00am
Introductions
Hettie Malcomson [she/they], University of Southampton: Conference Curator
Fiorella Montero Diaz [she/he/they], Keele University: Chair of the BFE

10.00 – 11.30am
Panel 1: Writing Sound: Unities, Echoes and Loss
Chair: Erin Johnson-Williams [she/her], University of Southampton

Jonathan Stock [he/him], University College Cork
On the Unities: Reflections on Action, Time, and Place in Ethnographic Writing with a Creative Turn

Tharupathi Munasinghe [he/him], University of Melbourne
Echoes of Resistance: The Convergence of Literature and Sound in Sri Lanka's Political Uprisings

Yusheng Lei [he/him], Department of Music, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Loss in Sound: On Field-Noting and a Haunting Writerly Dilemma in Urban Xi'an

11.30 – 11.45 [15-minute break]

11.45 – 1.15
Panel 2: Writing Autoethnographies
Chair: Lea Hagmann [sie/ihr/ihre/ihres/ihrer/ihren/ihrem], University of Bern

Jiaxi Xie [she/her], Goldsmiths University
Identity, Diaspora and War: A Sensory Ethnography on Music and Sound of the Karen at Thai-Burmese Border

Stephen Wilford [he/him], University of Cambridge/Wolfson College Cambridge
Writing Grief: Exploring Personal Histories through Romani Musics

Gunseli Naz Ferel Ucar [she/they], City St George's, University of London
Exploring the Expressive Capabilities of Creative Soundscape Composition and Autoethnographical Writing: The Case of Istanbul's Affectual Environment and Electronic Dance Music Culture

1.15 – 1.45 [30-minute break]

1.45 – 3.15
Panel 3: Writing Positionality: Vulnerability, Intersectionality, and More-than-Human Selfhood in Music
Chair: Cassandre Balosso-Bardin [she/her], KU Leuven

Thomas Hilder [he/they], Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Vulnerable Writing in Queer Times: Autoethnographies of LGBTQ+ Choral Activism

Samantha Sebastian [she/her], Faculty of Music, University of Oxford
(Re)Voicing Voicing: Matter and Multivocality in an Intercultural Community Choir

Joseph Browning [he/him], City St George's, University of London
Positions towards a Listening / Walking 'Into the Mountain'

3.15 **–** 3.30 [15-minute break]

3.30 – 4.45pm
Roundtable/Discussion: Writing Experiments, Fictionalising and Positionalities
Chair: Fiorella Montero Diaz [she/he/they], Keele University; BFE Chair

Liz Gre [she/they], University of Southampton
Amanda Hsieh [she/they], Durham University
Hettie Malcomson [she/they], University of Southampton
Sean Williams [she/her], Evergreen State College
Richard Wolf [he/him], Harvard University

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Conference Code of Conduct
BFE conferences are run in accordance with the BFE Conference Code of Conduct. By taking part in a BFE conference, you agree to be bound by this code.

Conference Curator
Hettie Malcomson (University of Southampton) [she/they]

Conference Organisers
Hettie Malcomson (University of Southampton) [she/they]
Cassandre Balosso-Bardin (KU Leuven) [she/her]

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Liz Gre [she/they], University of Southampton
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Lea Hagmann [sie/ihr/ihre/ihres/ihrer/ihren/ihrem], University of Bern

Please do email Hettie Malcomson [she/they] – h.malcomson@soton.ac.uk – if you have any queries.

British Forum for Ethnomusicology Autumn Conference 2024

Creative Writing, Music and Ethnography

Abstracts

Joseph Browning [he/him], City St George's, University of London

Positions towards a Listening / Walking 'Into the Mountain'

We're guided by Nan Shepherd (1974) / 'I have walked out of my body and into the mountain' / in this paper I experiment with / stream-song, Scots pine / autoethnography / inspired by Simone Kenyon's Into the Mountain / performed on a hillside in the Cairngorms in May-June 2019 / moss spanning my field of vision / in this paper I experiment with / focus / not the performance / but the guided walk before it / an experiment with / revealing, loosening, reforming / our sense of self / ptarmigan feathers, boulder fields / we're guided by Kathleen Stewart (2007) / no 'daydream of simple presence' / but movement between fragmentary, multiplex positions / Into the Mountain sought to undo old settlements / mountain climbing as the pursuit of white, middle-class men / privilege naturalised as hobby / instead 'exploring and celebrating women's relationships with high and wild places' / learning to walk 'into' the mountain involved / slowness, silence, sleep / modalities meant to sensitize us to the Cairngorms / a stream sounding over the decades since Shepherd wrote / 'I have walked out of my body and into the mountain' / an experiment with / more-than-human intersubjectivity / intimate, strange, perturbed / walking towards listening / in this paper I experiment with / writing / as voicing and re-voicing / as affective pedagogy / as (dis)embodiment / writing / as map, path, weather / writing / as privilege / taking, shifting, avoiding / positions / in this paper I experiment with / red-green moss / my own place as ethnographer of eco-art / our positionality as Anthropocene subjects / ears raked by wind, eyeing the long horizon / at once firmly situated / thoroughly relational.

Gunseli Naz Ferel Ucar [she/they], City St George's, University of London

Exploring the Expressive Capabilities of Creative Soundscape Composition and Autoethnographical Writing: The Case of Istanbul's Affectual Environment and Electronic Dance Music Culture

This presentation forms and is formed by the preliminary output of the sensory and autoethnographic fieldwork conducted in Istanbul's electronic dance music scenes during the summer of 2024. What are the expressive possibilities of autoethnography in music apart from written work? With Benedictus Spinoza's concept of affect as its forming theoretical framework together with contemporary affect theory, this research is an experimentation on how ethnography can bring about both sonic and written expressions. Defending that writing does not have to be the only type of output of ethnographical research, it uses field recordings and sound notes to build a soundscape composition together with autoethnographic writing, both aiming to uncover creative possibilities of academic analysis. Thus, it is striving to discover the possible co-productive and reciprocal relationship between these two forms in building new expressions that can enable unconventional insights into affect and music.

Thomas Hilder [he/they], Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Vulnerable Writing in Queer Times: Autoethnographies of LGBTQ+ Choral Activism
In this presentation I share a story of LGBTQ+ choirs that poses questions about positionality, voice, and the ethics of autoethnography. An LGBTQ+ choral scene emerged in the late 1970s as part of the swells of post-Stonewall activism that recognised both the importance of creating safer spaces for, and greater wider social visibility of LGBTQ+ people. Through ethnographic research in London, Rome, and Warsaw, as well as community engagement in Trondheim over the last eight years, I have learned of the significance of these choirs for offering community music therapy, creating national and international networks of solidarity, and not least providing messy fora where internal divisions within a so-called queer community are worked through. The story I share is of the 2022 Warsaw Equality Parade, which that year, in solidarity with recently-invaded Ukraine, also hosted Kyiv Pride. Foregrounding affect and embodiment, my vulnerable writing documents my own participation in the queer celebrations alongside my fellow queer choristers from Voces Gaudii – Warsaw's first LGBTQ+ choir – and the Pink Singers – Europe's oldest LGBTQ+ choir, from London – who collaborated in concert the previous evening, while also reckoning with my own affiliation to Norwegian queer communities. Along the way, I hope to inspire and provoke reflections on the politics of writing: How can writing evoke ephemeral emotions and atmospheres that are central to the ethnographic experience yet often lost in normative academic writing? How does my positionality offer unique insights into, or protect me from confronting, the complex swells of contemporary intersectional and transnational queer politics? What are the potentials or conversely dangers of centring the voice of a white, middle-class, queer, activist ethnographer? Drawing on participatory action research, the literary turn in ethnography, and queer auto-ethnography, my presentation hopes to contribute to new debates in queer ethnomusicology and LGBTQ+ rights in 21st century Europe.

Yusheng Lei [he/him], Department of Music, The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Loss in Sound: On Field-Noting and Haunting Writerly Dilemma in Urban Xi'an
"What sounds am I hearing and writing?" I have always been haunted by sensory loss and disorientation when conducting sonic ethnography in Xi'an, a highly eulogized ancient capital, exalted as "the nub of Great Chinese Culture" in contemporary Chinese political discourse. In this striking spot of Northern China (and) of the global south, the city's historical heritage mingles with visual spectacle and political propaganda to churn an unsettling historiography. Moreover, urban historiography and everyday life produce immersive sonic worlds of loss. My field recordings (and other adopted ethnographic methods, e.g. participant observation) may seem meaningful initially to document "certain" sounds; yet the same recordings have often led to what I term "loss," as in an inability to locate nuanced sounds heard in situ, or to reconcile intricate ethnographic encounters with sounds "captured" through machine-generated recordings.

Writing about "sound," in this context, implies depicting loss, creatively, and thus follows a sense of hauntology (Derrida 1993) and multiple entanglements for writing. Where, then, might "writing" lead and not lead (me)? Discussions are based on my field-noting fragments in a composite narrative of urban Xi'an, referring to writing (amid) loss, haunting in and out of Islamic chanting in a de-religionized tourist Muslim Quarter, as well as (non-)silence in the

city's Covid-19 lockdown. I will argue that forming a dynamic relationship between multisensory field-noting and (my) haunted ears is key to exploring sonic loss and its disruptive potential for writing Xi'an. Furthermore, such self-reflection also leads me to ask: what can I note disruptively about my methodological position-making, being immersed and haunted IN loss, as a writerly dilemma? Writing, here, I will ultimately argue, serves to test ethnography and its workings in the global south, through Xian's invitation to radically reimagine sonic loss and its urban historiography writ large.

Tharupathi Munasinghe [he/him], University of Melbourne

Echoes of Resistance: The Convergence of Literature and Sound in Sri Lanka's Political Uprisings

This paper examines the convergence of sound and literature in Sri Lankan social protest musical performances between 1982 and 1991, exploring the interplay between traditional poetic forms and contemporary political expression. Focusing on key works such as Vimukthi Gee (1982), Pavana (1988), Kampana (1990), and Sadhu Jana Rava (1991), the research delves into how protest performances blended musical structures with narrative styles rooted in Sinhala poetic traditions, creating unique sonic and literary experiences that reinforced political resistance.

The paper employs a multidisciplinary approach, combining sound studies, literary analysis, and performance studies to investigate how classical meters, rhyme schemes, and compositional techniques from Sinhala verse were adapted to serve contemporary political themes. Particular attention is given to how literary devices such as metaphor, allegory, and symbolism were employed to convey politically charged messages while evading censorship.

Additionally, the study examines the sonic qualities of the Sinhala language in live performances, focusing on phonetic symbolism, rhythm, intonation, and tonal variations. Through an analysis of live performances, the research highlights how collective chanting, audience interaction, and spontaneous improvisation contributed to the political impact of these performances, transforming them into communal expressions of resistance.

Methodologically, the paper draws on a range of primary sources, including audio and video recordings, written lyrics, interviews, and contemporary accounts. The analysis draws on theoretical frameworks from sound studies, narratology, and cultural studies, allowing for a nuanced examination of the interaction between textual, sonic, and performative elements in these protest performances. Ultimately, the paper argues that these performances created a multi-layered sensory experience that reinforced political messages, offering new insights into the role of artistic expression in social and political activism.

Samantha Sebastian [she/her], Faculty of Music, University of Oxford

(Re)Voicing Voicing: Matter and Multivocality in an Intercultural Community Choir

The Lullaby Choir's Ava Studios session took place in Melbourne in October 2017 and involved twenty-five singers from over ten countries of origin. In this paper I present voice-centered poems that render ethnographic readings of this session. Contrary to the intercultural community choir's usual concerns with what voice represents, the studio was an especially rich fieldsite for examining how voice becomes. Voice-as-matter becomes particularly audible in recording studios, as singers grow hyper-aware of the bodily production of their singing, perforating naturalised regimes of aurality and the voice. Drawing on Chadwick's (2020; 2021) posthuman voice analytics, I argue that the ways

people talk about singing invigorate the felt, corporeal qualities of the experience under discussion. Interrogating this convergence—the voicing of voicing—establishes and methodologically captures the deeply embodied nature of singing through its spoken re-embodiment. Yet the featured narrativised poems are not authentic representations of participants' voices; rather, they provide interpretive renditions of my sensorial, participant observation-listening as an ethnographer, and my experimentation with creative writing and analysis highlight the proxemics of this frame. The poems themselves enunciate shifting agenthood, with moving I/you/we/they/it positions emulating the multiple permutations of self-other dynamics at play.

The presentation therefore highlights how the sociomaterial dynamics of singing resonated within and across observations, interviews, and analysis, made available to me through various acts of vocalising and at multiple ethnographic moments. In this presentation, they will become available again through my oral reading of the poems. Through this affective (re)voicing of the scenes and interviews transcribed using Chadwick's graphic notation and expanded I-poem devices, in this presentation, I hope to extend my ethnographic ears to listeners. In this way, my palimpsestic interpretation of singing in the studio through spoken reflections on and recitations of the same, demonstrates the multivocality through which voice is enlivened in research.

Jonathan Stock [he/him], University College Cork

On the Unities: Reflections on Action, Time, and Place in Ethnographic Writing with a Creative Turn

French classicists in the sixteenth century argued that drama should observe three unities: those of action, place, and time. A play should focus on one narrative, scenes must be set in the same location, and events should occur within the space of a single day. Classic models of ethnographic research seem far from this artificially confined focus, pointing instead to the foundational importance of at least a year in the field. But many ethnographers attend to the close-up nuances of everyday life. Moreover, ethnography is inevitably also a form of selective presentation, putting forward arguments based on accounts of the experiences of certain characters tightly grounded within specific particularities of location and occasion. It is thus not surprising that this set of dramatic principles is applied in some ethnographic accounts. Its utility seems almost self-evident in the illustration of situations where the target material is a "big day" (e.g., sports events, festivals, soundwalking) or when the action is notionally repetitive day after day (everyday life, production of a daily newspaper, law enforcement patrols, etc.). Beyond such settings, writing with attention to the unities encourages an author-researcher to compress events that might have occurred over many months into a vivid and memorably immersive account held together by its own propulsive intensity. The evident deployment of literary devices has impacts in turn on credibility, anonymization, power, representation, and ethics, among several other facets. In this presentation, I assess selected examples of ethnomusicological writing that employ the unities, reflecting on how those examples impacted both my on-the-page and behind-the-scenes decisions as a recent writer of such an ethnography exploring musical life in a Bunun Indigenous village in rural Taiwan.

Jiaxi Xie [she/her], Goldsmiths University

Identity, Diaspora and War: A Sensory Ethnography on Music and Sound of the Karen at Thai-Burmese Border

This paper is based on my PhD project about the music and sound culture of the Karen people along the Thai-Burmese border. The Karen are an ethnic minority group mainly in Burma, many of whom have been persecuted by the Burmese military junta and now settle in Thai border areas. I am studying the Karen music and sound around identity, diaspora, and war theoretically. I am investigating how Karen music and sound shape and express Karen ethnic identity, construct their cultural memory, and engage with themes of war. More importantly, the output of this research would be a sensory ethnography. "Sensory" contains two meanings: first, I aim to conduct "participant sensation" (Howes, 2019) during fieldwork – using my own senses to experience life as a member of the Karen community. This involves investigating whether the Karen people have a distinct sensory pattern to perceive music and sound in a particular way, and how my own embodied experiences in the field are sensed and interact with those of the locals (Feld 1982; Stollers 1989,1994; Pink 2015). Second, I will create a multisensory representation that includes an ethnographic film as a visual ethnography and soundscape compositions as a sound ethnography. I am experimenting with how to discuss sensory experiences and intersubjectivity through autoethnography (Russell, 1999). I also explore how validity in ethnography can be achieved through self-reflexive narratives in writing, and how the sensory representations of the writing, film, and soundscape compositions would interplay with each other.

Stephen Wilford [he/him], University of Cambridge/Wolfson College Cambridge

Writing Grief: Exploring Personal Histories through Romani Musics

In May 2024 my mother died suddenly and unexpectedly. My personal and professional lives were immediately turned upside down, as I struggled to come to terms with the loss and find helpful ways of processing the associated grief. In the aftermath of my mother's death, I was reminded of an aspect of my family heritage which had always remained unexplored: our Romani heritage, running through my mother's bloodline.

Having had little opportunity to investigate my mother's side of the family, I felt drawn to understand more, as a form of personal healing and a way of reconnecting with my mother and grandfather. However, with little information about my grandfather, and having not been raised within Romani society, I found myself very much an 'outsider', searching for something that I was struggling to define. As a musician and academic, it felt as though the most obvious, and hopefully rewarding, way of going about this would be through exploring Romani musical cultures, traditions with which I was relatively unfamiliar. And thus began an ongoing enquiry which ties together my professional and personal lives through grief and mourning.

This intervention seeks to discuss and critically dissect this process of listening, reading, watching, and writing. I aim to explore how researching, musicking, and writing might act as both a form of 'research' and deep, personal catharsis, and what forms such activities might take. Furthermore, this intervention considers the relationship between such individualised writing processes and hopes of more applied methodologies in the future. As such, I draw upon both (ethno)musicological sources and ideas drawn from auto-ethnography, and combine them with personal diaries and critical reflections, as part of an ongoing system for processing personal grief.

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Call for papers

Conventional academic writing is limited. It often precludes the complexities, nuances, contexts of our social worlds, much of the knowledge we encounter through research. Experimental creative writing enables other ways of knowing, other understandings: it reveals our sensory experiences, our gaze, our positionalities; it humbles us and connects us to our academic communities and other audiences. From Zora Neale Hurston's (1935) *Mules and Men*, to the 1980s/1990s 'literary turn' in anthropology and ethnomusicology, to explorations of ordinary lives (e.g., Lortat-Jacob 1995), form (e.g., Taylor 1998), and embodied experience (e.g., Hahn 2007, Aduonum 2022), academics have grappled with the difficulties of capturing the complexity of people's lives through creative writing.

The aim of this conference is to explore the aesthetic, epistemological, methodological, phenomenological, and ethical issues that experimental writing engenders in music ethnographies and other musicological and ethnographic texts. These may relate to experimental academic writing and affect; phenomenological evocations of sensory experiences, vulnerabilities, violence, human and non-human points of view; dialogue, collaboration and polyvocality; autoethnographies and memoirs that narrate personal stories with a critical positionality and political, conceptual or other perspective that goes beyond the personal; speculative fiction, Afrofuturism and science fiction; authorial and narrative points of view; storytelling and care.

Where might we place creative writing in our ethnographic and musicological toolboxes? How might experimental creative writing reproduce or decentre oppressive power dynamics? For example, by explicating violence, or by reinforcing or moving away from acritical, reflexive, 'me-search' of the privileged in ethnographic creative writing? How do notions of academic credibility, evidence, and creative writing intersect? What relationships might there be between experimental creative writing and more conventional academic analysis and academic publishing spaces? Is there space for experimental creative writing in academic contexts without critical commentary? What can we learn from methodological strategies, such as Saidiya Hartman's 'critical fabulation' which attempts 'to represent what we cannot' (Hartman 2008, 11)? What ethical issues does experimental academic writing present?

For this online, one-day conference, we welcome experimental as well as more conventional interventions from any discipline that provoke conversations about the possibilities afforded by creative writing in ethnographic and musicological writings (with examples, where appropriate). These may be short or longer experimental or conventional interventions in distinct formats.

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British Forum for Ethnomusicology Autumn Conference 2024

The British Forum for Ethnomusicology:

Statement of Inclusion

Recent years have seen a surge in intolerance, xenophobia, and racism, manifested in public discourse, and a concomitant rise in hate crime. These developments have been met by various actors with committed work to combat bigotry and inequality; to insist that difference is accommodated; to work towards the safety of at-risk groups and persons; and to interrogate the dynamics of representation, and the legacies of colonialism.
In this context, the British Forum for Ethnomusicology affirms its commitment to diverse and inclusive societies, free of discrimination based on gender, sexuality, class, age, ability, ethnicity, religion, or nationality. We wish to publicly acknowledge our ethos of inclusion and commit to making improvements in our conferences, publications, and governance that reflect this ideal. The BFE as a UK subject association will seek to advocate for our members' rights in pursuing ethnomusicological research and teaching wherever they may be affected by discriminatory laws or policies.

This statement was authored by the BFE Committe and ratified at the BFE Annual General Meeting in Aberdeen, 13th April 2019. The statement was most recently updated in October 2024.

British Forum for Ethnomusicology and Royal Musical Association

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Participants asked to stop any harassing behaviour are expected to comply immediately. If a participant engages in harassing behaviour, conference organisers may take any action they deem appropriate, including warning the offender or asking them to leave.
If you are being harassed, notice that someone else is being harassed, or have other concerns, please contact a conference organiser or a designated assistant, who will be happy to contact university/college security or police, to arrange for an escort, or otherwise help participants feel safe for the duration of the event.
This policy is based on the LIBER 2015 Code of Conduct, which is in turn based on the conference antiharassment policy on the Geek Feminism Wiki.

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If you have any questions about membership, please contact our Membership Administrator, Peter Underwood (membership@bfe.org.uk).

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Membership includes a personal subscription to BFE's peer-reviewed journal Ethnomusicology Forum which from 2011 is published three times per year and includes at least one special issue each year. It provides an internationally renowned forum for the presentation of new thinking in the field of ethnomusicology, and encompasses the study of all music, including Western art music and popular music. As well as receiving hard copies of the journal in the post, members get prior access to journal articles online and can download PDF versions, which are digitally searchable and can be read on an e-reader. BFE members also receive online access to an additional Routledge music journal as a special benefit.

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Access to the Membership Section of the BFE website and Voting Rights

Membership provides access to a network of colleagues with shared interests. The Members Area also provides exclusive access to BFE Special Edition Podcasts, which are part of the BFE Podcast Project and aim to provide a rapid response to current issues within the discipline. There will also shortly be an online membership directory, where members can opt to post their details and view the research interests and contact details of other members. Members shape the future direction of the BFE. They have the right to be nominated for, and vote in, Committee elections and to participate in the Annual Business Meeting.

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