

2017 SEM Niagara Chapter Abstracts  
 March 24-25, 2017  
 Kent State University at Trumbull

**I: 9:15-10:15**

**Billy Kersands, You Are Making A Sure Hit Tonight: The Life and Legacy of Billy Kersands. Maya Brown (Kent State University)**

The most popular form of entertainment in the United States of America during the 19th century was blackface minstrelsy; a form of musical theatrics that began with white male performers blackening the skin with burnt cork for the purpose of not only embodying the African American through song and dance, but also in the interest of creating and reinforcing racial stereotypes. By the mid-19th century, African Americans, too, engaged in this practice as a way of ensuring upward social mobility and as a means of guaranteed participation in the emerging American entertainment industry. According to critic reviews, audience accounts, and praises from his contemporaries, Billy Kersands was revered as the most successful and popular minstrel performer; an African American comedic prodigy who commanded popular appeal from both black and white audiences, and subverted conventional blackface practices such as blacking up. Yet, like other African American minstrel performers, little attention has been given to Billy Kersands' significant contributions. This paper provides a biographical insight into Kersands' legacy as an entertainer and innovator of various song and dance forms as it also critically confronts the historiography of blackface minstrel scholarship.

**Not “Just American”: Two Case Studies of Music as Distinctiveness among Descendants of Immigrants. Jennifer Johnstone (Kent State University)**

In the United States, some individuals identify with reinterpreted cultural signs they associate with their immigrant ancestors. While such identities have been accused of being "shallow" (Herbert J. Gans in Richard D. Alba 1985), this paper shows that, on the contrary, these identities and their musical components can be enormously important in shaping people's lives. This paper is based on six years of fieldwork among two communities: the first is a group of Italian-Americans whose sense of distinctiveness is tied to their village band and its repertoire, and the second is a group of Welsh-descended Americans whose identities are related to hymn singing by the faithful and non-faithful alike. The focus of this paper is on how and why these communities differ in using distinctive musical practices to distinguish themselves from other Americans, and how factors such as language and ancestry contribute to this process. This paper uses sociohistorical explanations as well as theories from the cognitive sciences, including neuroscience (Christof Koch 2004), psychology (Eleanor Rosch 1975; Sebastien Pacton and Pierre Perruchet 2008), linguistics (Vyvyan Evans 2007; Nick C. Ellis and Fernando Ferreira- Junior 2009), and musical meaning (Thomas Turino 1999; Ian Cross 2012). As such, it provides a broader theoretical discussion of music, meaning, and identity (cf. Timothy Rice 2010), and offers implications for future research on the ever-diversifying cultural landscape of the United States.

## II: 10:30-11:30

### **The Sounds of a Chinese Covered Bridge: Music and Ritual Associated with Chinese “Corridor Bridges.” Terry E. Miller (Kent State University, Emeritus)**

Chinese covered bridges, called in Chinese *lang qiao* (“corridor bridge”), although full size, are pedestrian bridges. Most have within them a shrine dedicated to one of the many broadly known or local Buddhist or Taoist deities. Travelers (in the case of isolated bridges) and villagers (in populated settings) may perform personal rituals at these altars, lighting incense and offering prayers with or without chanting. Larger rituals involving priests and musicians may occur as well. Some bridges are closely associated with nearby temples where full rituals take place as well as annual performances of local opera celebrating the deity’s birthday. Before building the bridge, local officials perform rituals at the bridge site involving offerings and chanting. During the bridge’s building or reconstruction, workers may sing songs to coordinate their labor. Most important is the song for installing the “ridge pole.” Fathers sometimes sing a special repertory of songs on bridges when their children cannot sleep. Musicians accompanying wedding processions might stop in the bridge to serenade the couple. Musicians sometimes perform on bridges during the Spring Festival. Perhaps in some towns narrative singers entertained local people seated on the benches that run within most bridges.

In this paper the author brings together his expertise in two fields, Ethnomusicology, with a secondary specialization in Chinese music, and his knowledge of Chinese covered bridges gained from four conferences and visits to nearly seventy bridges. He proposes to focus on Chinese covered bridges as part of a cultural context, with special attention to musical activities that both take place on the bridges as well as in proximity. Additionally, he is collaborating with former student Dr. Luo Qin of the Shanghai Conservatory on this project, who will begin field work with Miller in Taishun, Zhejiang, China in November, 2013. Where possible, Miller will illustrate with audio or video.

### **A Tale of Two Protectorates: Cultural Hegemony in Colonial Morocco and Its Impact on Indigenous Musics. Hicham Chami (Columbia University)**

The enduring linkage between al-Andalus and Fes perpetuated by the Fassi socio-political elite has privileged Andalusian music in Moroccan public life and education: both mirroring its inherent class stratification and impacting the viability of indigenous cultural traditions. The pre-independence backstory must be examined to place the Fassi phenomenon in context. This paper argues that the Gramscian concept of cultural hegemony was a critical factor during 20<sup>th</sup> century colonial rule, with the French and Spanish Protectorate administrations (1912-1956) appropriating music to advance their own agendas, in the guise of cultural preservation. Fernando Valderrama Martinez witnessed a cultural revival in Tetuan during his 26-year tenure as *Asesor-Jefe de la Enseñanza Marroqui de la Delegación de Educación y Cultura Española*.

The ostensible rationale was restoring the "musical treasure" of the *nawbat* (Valderrama 2005); yet this program effectively reinforced a process of Hispanicization in doing so. French

cultural policy “respected pre-colonial customs and traditions” (Sater 2010), *Resident-General* Hubert Lyautey advising Prosper Ricard, appointed to the *Service des Arts Indigenes*, that “Morocco's display ... will be composed of examples of the local arts” (Mokhiber 2013). These “preservationist logics” (Wyrzten 2015) would commodify elements of Moroccan culture, rendering it “static.” This examination of the status of musical genres during the Protectorate era sets the stage for analyzing the post-independence resurgence of the Andalusian tradition, which had lost favor under French rule, and explores the consequences of Protectorate and post-independence cultural policies on the corpus of Moroccan musics.

### **III: 2:00-3:00 Traditional Nordic American**

#### **Rhythm Bones and Kanteles: Musical Instrument making among Finnish Americans of the Keweenaw Peninsula. Carl Rahkonen (Indiana University of Pennsylvania)**

The Finnish American music of Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula has a unique characteristic: the use of rhythm bones as an integral part. This came about largely through the activity of an Italian American, John Perona, who performed frequently with the Finns. Rhythm bones began to be made by Perona's apprentice, Randy Seppala, together with decorative wood carver Jim Lohmann. They used a CNC machine (a computer controlled lathe), to carve the general shape of the bones and completed the instruments by hand. Later Lohmann applied the same techniques to the making of Finnish kanteles, by creating precision “kits” that were assembled in kantele building clinics. Their efforts have provided many of the “Finnish” instruments used by local musicians.

#### **Thirty Years On: Music and Celebration in the Danish Community of Yates County, New York. James Kimball (SUNY Geneseo)**

Several years ago the author reported on music at celebrations within the Danish community in the rural area of Yates County, New York. The annual Christmas tree and dance had started in the early 20th century and has continued, although with significant changes, to the present. An annual picnic associated with the Danish Independence Day in June, was started in the 1980s and also continues, though also changed. The older generation of musicians who played the events in the 1980s, with one exception, have passed away. What was once a group of seven or eight, playing button accordions, fiddle, harmonica and guitar, has now become a less reliable group of two to four, who either hesitate to leave farm work to play, have moved away or aren't native to the local Danish community. The one exception to the older group now mostly leads others in the traditional dances. Both the dances and the tunes have been passed on orally in the local community- with little influence from modern Danish folk practice or other American Danish areas.

The author has attended and documented these celebrations since the mid-1980s. He has also, without any initial intent to do so, become something of a part of the events. He has for years been on the informal mailing list, with the added note of “musicians please bring instruments.”

This paper will discuss the changes in the tradition and challenges which fall, in part, on the long term researcher to keep traditional music as part of the event.

#### **IV: 3:15-4:45 Jazz**

##### **A History of Jazz in Beijing: Its Popularity and the Identity of Jazz Musicians in Post-Modern China. Li Mo (Kent State University)**

The recent musical scenes of China have witnessed a significant rise of jazz. In the media realm and the entertainment circle, there are increasing attention on jazz by the reporters; and the pop stars tend to be more and more admiring towards jazz. They all view jazz as a symbol of musical sophistication and touchstone for talent. In the live performing venues, like bars, concert halls, and jazz clubs, there are more and more audiences listening quietly to the musicians, who are also improving steadily their musical virtuosity. This phenomenon provides an opportunity to look into a new social condition of China, since jazz music was considered as one of the obscene arts by 1980s there. How did the once defiled musical form became a symbol of musical sophistication and touchstone of talent? How the many musicians, excluded by the old norms and traditional education system, devote themselves into jazz? And more importantly, how the many jazz lovers, although started from refuse the old norms, but finally being an inextricable part of the contemporary culture of Beijing? In this paper, all of those questions are supposed to be answered in post-modernism.

Furthermore, although jazz came to Shanghai when it entered China in the late 1920s, the first real Chinese jazz was born in Beijing. This assertion should be articulated not only by musical evidences, but also through a contextualized study into social and historical factors. This paper will explore those factors and delineate a change of the Chinese ideology on jazz over the shifting period from modernization towards post-modernity.

##### **An Undulating Design: The Life of Jazz in Akron, Ohio. Kevin Wilson (Kent State University)**

Ohio has always played a significant role in the birth and cultivation of the arts in the USA. This region has helped produce a significant number of artists that have promoted and carved their path in music such as Art Tatum, The O'jays, Tadd Dameron, The Black Keys, Twenty-one Pilots, and John Legend. For this presentation, my studies of Northeast Ohio will focus on the contributions of Akron to jazz music, drawing upon the history of Akron and concentrating on the economic and social development that helped shape and enable the city to become a hotbed for this music. The rise and fall of the Howard Street District venues that provided music a home during the 1920s through 1960s as well as the current revival of jazz through the network of venues in Akron will also be discussed in order to understand how and why Akron was able to quickly move between being a center for jazz, falling out of fashion, and back into a national spotlight over the course of less than a century. This research is part of an on-going project that continues to be developed with plans of submitting it for my thesis.

We would like to thank **Dr. Eve McPherson** for hosting our annual Chapter meeting. It was a truly excellent meeting. There was a concert and workshop by the Kent State Thai Ensemble on Friday night. Many thanks to ensemble director, **Dr. Priwan Nanongkham** of Kent State. Saturday included eight fine academic presentations. Unique to this meeting was a **world pot luck lunch** featuring live music solo and ensemble performances by many of those gathered. We thank everyone who organized and attended the meeting to make it a great success.