

# **Towards Practice Research in Ethnomusicology**

Author: Simon McKerrell, Newcastle University

[word count: 7320]

**DRAFT FOR COMMENT**

Please email any comments to [simon.mckerrell@newcastle.ac.uk](mailto:simon.mckerrell@newcastle.ac.uk) or leave a public comment on the webpage for this draft at [www.simonmckerrell.com](http://www.simonmckerrell.com). All help gratefully received!

DRAFT date: 10.08.2018

## **Introduction**

This article sets out to examine the trajectory and scholarly potential of practice research in ethnomusicology and to examine the utility of performance in ethnomusicological research. Ethnomusicologists have always been people who play music or dance in their fieldwork, with different emphases on its function, agency and reception, depending on their personal research interests. However, what I argue here is that historically, performance has not been an end in and of itself in ethnomusicology, but has always been a method used in the service of understanding more about human culture and society around the world, and that today, there is potential for practice research to emerge as both a more central method, and the object of research in ethnomusicology . In particular, this paper argues for ethnomusicologists to begin using performance not just as a tool to understand the social and cultural field, but to use music and dance as methods in ‘translational’ ethnomusicology that focuses upon the translation and communication of artistic performance aesthetics and to theorize a space for research outcomes that are sited in original performative knowledge, explored, produced and delivered through performance itself.

Ethnomusicology as a discipline has several aspects that fundamentally challenge the artistic research paradigm that has emerged in other domains of performing arts research. This is not casual exceptionalism derived from the ethnomusicologist’s adherence to relativist values, but is rooted in

the real differences between ethnomusicological and other flavours of musicological or artistic research. Particularly in relation to performance of music and dance, the three key differences that distinguish much of the canon of artistic research in music from ethnomusicology are: 1) the lack of a central canon of repertoire in ethnomusicology as compared to other musicological disciplines who share a more or less accepted (or even continually negotiated) canon of works against which the novelty and originality of new music can be compared; 2) the extreme relativism inherent in the training and professional outlook of ethnomusicologists that emphasises the local and particular over the universal and elite, and; 3) the particular issues surrounding the ontological understanding of ‘new knowledge’ in orally developed or transmitted repertoires from around the world.

Perhaps surprising to some, it is important to note that research in music largely and traditionally results in textual outputs, which includes composers' research outputs which can be captured visually as ‘texts’. As Nicholas Cook points out, making practice the object and means of research has various flavours that have emerged since the 1990s in musicology, which have rested on the performative turn away from the textual score (Cook 2018). The position for ethnomusicology is materially different than for instance electro-acoustic composition or historically informed performance practice in Western Art music because the musical field itself in ethnomusicology is as diverse as cultural practices are diverse around the globe. Ethnomusicology is now fairly widely understood to be defined through method and epistemological approach, rather than by repertoire, genre or geography. Ethnomusicologists and folklorists have since the 1950s, founded their disciplines on extreme relativism which recognises that what we consider to be ‘music’ can be very different across musical cultures and communities of practice, which is different to the position where there is an accepted canon of music such as in for instance acousmatic or electronic music which moves (broadly) from modernism into musique concrète and Elektronische Musik, and includes key figures such as Varese, Schaeffer, Boulez, Stockhausen, amongst many (and more recent) Others. Therefore, in order to understand performance in/as research for some sub-disciplines of music studies, notably composition, acousmatic or otherwise, has been assessing its originality against a pre-defined and accepted canon. Critically however, in these sub-disciplines of music studies, originality is reasonably

**Commented [SM1]:** Check not 2015 reference to earlier work

straightforward to evidence, peer review and communicate: One already has access to a canonical, or core repertoire (or performers); in some cases an accepted chronological narrative about the development of that canon, and in the case of electro-acoustic music, about technology and its various relations with musical sound; expert peer reviewers that can be called upon to evaluate musical sound (often without words) against their expert knowledge of pre-existing creative work, and, in many cases; a shared aesthetic that resides in the ongoing conversations and debate in talk and text.

Composers within the academy have always been examined against previous composers. Examiners in composition have evaluated the scores as musical texts, or the performances as instances of the musical work, where practice is understood as something undertaken within the confines of an accepted historical lineage of methods and ideas and where the new knowledge as research is always understood *in relation to* previous musical works. Composers in the euro-classical schools do not therefore have a particularly hard job to evidence the claim that their practice research is new; if no-one has ever 'written' it or 'composed' it before then it is new, but they may have a harder time convincing examiners or audiences of its quality, which is a different question. Ethnomusicologists on the other hand are very often dealing with music and dance practices that are not new, and that by definition are performing the past in the present. Ethnomusicologists widely agree their discipline to be an approach to studying musical cultures, rather than an object-focused or challenge-led discipline. What ethnomusicologists agree upon and share is mostly to be found in their relativist outlook, ethnographic method and interest in musical cultures. This global dispersal of ethnomusicological research mitigates against any central canonical set of aesthetic or artistic values and practices, and is one of the key attractions of the field for many scholars. That is to say, the real object of study is people, culture and society, and the subject is music. But by no means do all ethnomusicologists study traditional music from around the world. As an approach, ethnomusicologists have increasingly branched out to study the music of the whole globe and in urban and rural environments in increasingly diverse musical genres. In this context, practice itself therefore can take almost limitless form and therefore arguing for practice as research necessarily needs to lean on a different intellectual scaffolding to most other sub-disciplines of music studies.

Ethnomusicology has largely used performance as a means to learn more about global cultures and values, primarily through its use as a research method of 'learning to perform' in an instrument or vocal tradition. However, there have been several key figures in ethnomusicology who have examined the role of performance in research, and critically the notion of 'bimusicality' as a research method over the years. 'Bi-musicality' emerged in Ki Mantle Hood's widely read 1960 article 'The challenge of bi-musicality' (Mantle Hood 1960). Which was then adapted into his very widely read 1982 graduate level handbook *The Ethnomusicologist* (Mantle Hood 1982), rapidly establishing 'bimusicality' in ethnomusicology's foundational methodological canon. Bimusicality in ethnomusicology most usually meant, Western-trained musicians learning to perform in a non-Western musical tradition, and to leverage that process of learning as a research method, thereby embedding all the attendant problems of Western ethnocentrism and postcolonialism for those who came after. Mantle-Hood did not really mean 'bimusicality' to mean performance-as-research, modelled as it was on 'bilingualism'. More, he intended to position performance skills and knowledge learned in non-Western contexts as a means towards greater understanding of social, educational and other structures that are performed in and through music. That ethnocentrism, and the concomitant epistemological problems in an ever more relativist discipline has in Larry Witzleben's view relegated the term 'bimusicality' to the 'scrapheap of the field's history' as understood in New Grove summative essays (Witzleben 2010:137).

A significant contribution in understanding performance as a research method through the work of John Baily, whose position grew out of a wider disciplinary concern with Ki Mantle-Hood's concept of 'Bi-musicality'. Baily avoids the term 'bimusicality' because of this and emphasises a process of 'learning to perform' (Baily, 2001: 86). Like others before him, John Baily advocates the learning of musical instruments as a means towards other epistemological ends, that is performance is in the service of understanding social, political, gendered or ethnic structures and so on. He notes, the famous example of A.M. Jones in the 1930s who advocated practice-based knowledge to Hornbostel, because Hornbostel's Western ears simply heard much African rhythm as incredibly complex and syncopated. Jones suggests that once one has learned how to perform as part of an interlocking, polyrhythmical group, that what at first appears hugely complex, linear rhythm can appear simple

when understood as a collaborative performance practice where simpler rhythms intersect and construct a polyrhythmic surface structure.

Baily's experience of 'learning to perform' in Herat in learning to play three instruments: the dutâr; the sehtâr, and; the Afghan rubâb underlie his five main research-related domains for practice-based research: 1) acquisition of performance skills by the researcher; 2) the study of musicality, learning and cognition, ; 3) role, status and identity; 4) participant observation, and; 5) the post-fieldwork period. Overall he demonstrates his concern with knowing music from the inside, from understanding music from a performer's perspective. His insights as research detail the morphological and organological changes to these instruments and their performing technique, as well as the social structures and cultural traditions surrounding these instruments. He explicitly contends that 'learning to perform' is key for ethnomusicologists to understand the relationship between culture, organology and the human body. For instance, understanding the 'ergonomics' of the musical practice itself can show how traditional repertoire is adapted to particular instruments (2001:94). Baily's second main plank is to demonstrate how musical training can assist in research into musical transmission and cognition. Perhaps most significantly, he suggests that performance based knowledge and skills offers a means to 'improved opportunities for observation', or as he puts it, 'musical relationships forming the basis for social relationships' (2001:96). So Baily's model of learning-to-perform was also primarily used as a research technique to reveal or better understand almost exclusively non-musical knowledge. Epistemologically then, this is very different to the current position of phenomenologically-informed practice-based or artistic research in other disciplines.

We can witness this de-centring of musical performance for its own phenomenological value, in John Blacking's letter to Baily in May 1972, Blacking reveals what was presumably a fairly widespread legacy of bimusicality in the fledgling discipline of ethnomusicology: that learning to perform an instrument or vocal tradition in a particular tradition is a means to a more textual and social end. It's explicitness in exposing Blacking's relationship to performance in ethnomusicology is worth re-quoting again:

'I am not too happy about your plan to study under "masters of the tar" in Teheran..I do not think it at all necessary for you to learn how to play the instrument superbly...unless you plan

to become a concert artist. But I do think it very necessary for you to discover how the average tar player learns and transmits his skills, by spending some time with several different players both in the cities and rural areas...I am assuming that you plan to become an ethnomusicologist first, and a tar player second, third, or fourth. If I am wrong, what I have said will be irrelevant' (Blacking [1972] in Baily 2001:88).

In other words, John Blacking, Mantle-Hood and other key figures in the discipline felt that bimusicality, or Baily's inflection, 'learning to perform', in another musical tradition was a means to another end; to understand more about how music is transmitted, its social function, the position and interaction of performers in broader society, ritual, kinship and the many other concerns of an earlier structuralist anthropology of music (or as Deborah Wong puts it, 'the field of relational power and control created by the transmission of knowledge' (Wong 2001:5 in Witzleben 2010:139)). It views musical, performative knowledge itself as an indirect (but valuable) result of the research which was most often focused upon the underlying, syntactic structures or socio-cultural dynamics in a particular music culture. Or as Baily refers to it, 'the underlying model' for instance of his teacher Amir Jan's folk music (2001:93). Similarly with Blacking, his concern in his model of deep and surface structures, was very much the structuralist's concern with generative grammars and their relationship(s) to social structure: Musical knowledge as a sonic and well patterned domain for the understanding of social structure.

Uncommonly for anthropologically-leaning research, ethnomusicology has benefitted greatly from this emphasis on performance as a research method. It has, as James Kippen and Larry Witzleben point out elsewhere, enabled ethnomusicologists to simplistically avoid the ethical minefield of neo-colonialism of the West and its Others through adopting an initiate's or pupil-status in their chosen cultural field. However, amongst researchers, this has engendered a sense of subservience of the master-pupil, or teacher-student musical relationship, rendering its own set of problematic ethical dilemmas, focused around subservient, pupil-student-learner identities.

The other key area where ethnomusicology has engaged substantively with practice is in relation to world improvisatory traditions. As Bruno Nettl suggested, ethnomusicologists had somewhat

neglected improvisation until the 1960s, but he tracks the historiography of improvisation in performance across South Asia, Iran and in Jazz Studies (Nettl, 1998). As he notes, there is fairly widespread consensus on the definition of improvisation as performance of music at the moment of its creation, or perhaps more simply as Ali Jihad Racy puts it in the same volume; ‘composing while performing’ (Racy 1998:103). But as Nettl notes, in ethnomusicology at least, ‘...the distinction between the concepts of performance practice, improvisation, and, indeed, composition in (at the very least) oral traditions is as yet an unsolved issue’. However, he had earlier made the useful point that when one considers a variety of musical traditions, then improvisation and composition can be understood as lying on a continuum (1974). His introduction to the collection of essays on the topic, *In the Course of Performance*, does tend towards the classic ethnomusicological predisposition for reading across social values and structures in musical practice, citing various research studies as evidence of how different societies read improvisation in relation to East-West, High-Low, Male-Female and straight-gay binaries (Nettl, 1998:6-12). Nettl, like Blacking, tends to lean into structuralist concerns of the twentieth century, and neatly summarizes the most productive work in ethnomusicological approaches to improvisation which focus upon how the underlying musical motifs are mobilized and form the basis for improvisation in performance across diverse aurally transmitted musics beginning with Lord’s classic study of South Slavic epic traditions (1965) and demonstrating how the ethnomusicological concept of mode supports such diverse traditions as the Persian Radif, Carnatic musics in alapana or raga, in Berliner’s (1978) classic study of the music of the Shona people of Zimbabwe and in Arabic taqsim. Indeed, my own doctoral research drew upon these and particularly Harold Powers’ (1958, 1980) research to apply the ethnomusicological concept of mode to Scottish bagpipe music (for a summary chapter see McKerrell, 2009). Many orally developed, or aurally transmitted musics indisputably have motivic content at the heart of their tradition regardless of how much agency is afforded to improvisation as composition in the moment of performance, or as pre-composition. We can learn a great deal from the historical research on improvisation and motivic usage in ethnomusicology, but it is fair to say I think that this work is grounded in curiosity about the grammatical or foundational musical structures that enable those improvisatory performance traditions: It is research about musical performance rather than *in* musical performance, and it is

**Commented [SM2]:** Sort this—first chapter in volume includes Russell.

therefore not really artistic research but research about artistic practice. There is another possibility as yet unexplored in ethnomusicology where improvisation accounts for a deep understanding of the orally developed or aurally transmitted musical mode, but goes beyond it to use improvisation as a research technique in the creation of new musical structures, either within the source tradition, or employing those patterns musically in a new target musical tradition. That has the potential for serious engagement with artistic research methods from other methods.

This work has already begun in ethnomusicology. The Korean flautist, Hyelim Kim's artistic research combines Korean traditional music with Western Jazz performance. Her insights reveal the disjunctures in rehearsals between quite distinct aesthetic and underlying syntactic structures in approaching playing together. She reveals through detailed analysis of audio-visual evidence combined with her own personal ethnography the differences in musical patterned thinking. Specifically, musical and verbal discussions with jazz collaborators revealed both positive and innovative somatic techniques for highly original intercultural performance, but also the problems of integrating Korean traditional rhythms that undermine the ability of jazz musicians to build up the collective 'groove' (personal communication). Her research is leading to new insights in performance in quite dramatic body movements in performance which support the cross-cultural musical performance. She raises very important questions about intercultural aesthetics which are currently unaddressed in the largely Western-centric debate about artistic research, which is dominated by art music and musicians. Her work and that of others including Faye Hield's work on the *Modern Fairies* project at the University of Sheffield in particular, raises some very significant problems about how involved other collaborating performers can, or are involved in producing the *research* insights, as opposed to simply participating in professional performance ensembles. This is an important aspect of practice research, in the sense that as a field of research it may well include artists who are not 'researchers' but who can contribute to the production of research through the production of new knowledge translated and communicated for those beyond the community of practice.

### **Artistic Research and the UK position**

Artistic Research, has emerged as a European movement that examines three domains of knowledge, 'the artistic, the embodied, and the discursive...[and how they emerge from the] ...embodied processes of the creative work' (Östersjö, 2017:89). Practice-led research in other areas of music studies have focused on topics such as social dynamics or somatic-sonic nexus in performance, organological innovations in relation to performance, early music and its contemporary sound world, and topics particularly around the phenomenological position and experiences of performers. But as Henk Borgdorff notes in a wide-ranging examination of artistic research, '...the field is in a continuous state of flux and turmoil' (Borgdorff 2012:7). The epistemological problems are not problems of a shared language or object of study, they circulate around the binary between professional practice and research, usually embodied in music's lack of materiality and the semantic ambiguity of performance.

After lengthy engagement with the UK Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) and now Research Excellence Framework (REF) processes where practice emerged substantially from 2001 onwards, the musicologist Nicholas Cook's own view is that the textual element of practice as research is really essential because it provides the basis for a claim of originality and insight contained within the practice. Clearly disputed by many within the academy; we do not yet have a better way of accounting for the research dimension of practice that rests on the semantic ambiguity of musical sound. Or put in a more inflammatory way; it cannot be the case that all artists are researchers because that is corollary to suggesting that all plumbers are scientists simply because they are vocationally and professionally skilled. Borgdorff echoes these sentiments and suggests that, the communicative element is critical. Indeed, I agree with him when he suggests that the exceptionalism argued by many artists fuels misunderstandings about the nature of the research elements of artistic research:

'The sui generis nature of artistic research also fuels the international debate on whether to conform to the conventions of academic research, such as standards of methodology, verifiability, replicability, and reporting. Opinions on such issues are underlain to a significant extent by beliefs and misunderstandings about the

supposed uniqueness of artistic research methods. I would argue as follows: Even if one accepts that the knowledge embodied in art is of a different order than the more 'conventional forms of academic or scientific knowledge, that does not mean the methods for accessing, retrieving, and disseminating such knowledge are also different. Both those who would welcome a convergence of artistic and academic research, and those who would oppose such a development, frequently show a limited (if not short-sighted) awareness of the broad diversity of methods and techniques in systematic research' (2012:22-3).

Research into musical performance, or the use of musical performance as research means that a textual output alongside a performative one is essential in order to communicate the originality and contribution to knowledge. This is particularly true in ethnomusicology where there is no centrally agreed canon of musical works, and in the case of intangible cultural heritage performances where cross-cultural understanding cannot be based on an assumed, sharing of cultural experience or aesthetics, but can however be achieved through comparative understandings of how symbolic historicism, belonging and identity are performed and communicated, which is why performance must be understood as a relational and social process.

The definition of research for the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF2021) in the United Kingdom is the same as that used in REF2014, and the REF2021 guidance has been published in January 2019 as 'a process of investigation leading to new insights, effectively shared'. That guidance also makes it clear that the submissions can be anything that demonstrates research in, '...the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights'.<sup>1</sup> The key issue in the guidance is the ability of assessors to comprehend the research contribution or process within the submitted output. The argument around the originality or significance of the research dimensions is critical in any ethnomusicological submission, particularly where there is an absence of a canon to evaluate against, or often (but not always), where the material being performed derives from oral traditions or widely performed vernacular practice. Specifically, the panel criteria document released in January 2019

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/guidance-on-submissions-201901/>

states repeatedly that, ‘The material submitted should provide sufficient information to allow the panel to assess the research process, research insights, and time and manner of dissemination’.<sup>2</sup> In other words, ethnomusicology has a special problem in relation to practice as research that does not fall on (for instance) euro-classical composers who can rely on both a very well established canon of material and the textual visibility of that canon. Or in relation to architecture, fine art, dance, visual design or many other areas where practice is part of vocational practice and one can textually or visually evidence originality in the research process (which is incidentally often entirely based in the Anglophone world). Performing the Bucks of Oranmore or Old Clucking Hen on the fiddle, or performing the Gamelan piece Bubarang Kembang Pacar makes for a very hard argument about originality of practice. Not all ethnomusicologists site their research in the field of traditional music, but it is the overwhelming area of research or has been historically at least. Where that genre intersects with practice as research is therefore a key issue when it comes to the UK research excellence framework. Borgdorff’s view (in 2012) of this framework and definition led him to offer a textual proposition of artistic research:

‘Art practice qualifies as research when its purpose is to broaden our knowledge and understanding through an original investigation. It begins with questions that are pertinent to the research context and the art world, and employs methods that are appropriate to the study. The process and outcomes of the research are appropriately documented and disseminated to the research community and to the wider public’ (2012:43).

In other words, there is a difference between vocational artistic practice and artistic research, that lies both in intent, originality, documentation and dissemination *beyond the artistic community of practice* (emphasis added). This last aspect is critical for ethnomusicology, given that many of our colleagues work in musical fields that are unfamiliar to others in the discipline, and therefore when working with music, it is essential for something to count as research that the key original findings can be communicated beyond those familiar with the artistic practice or specific genre itself.

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1084/ref-2019\\_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf](https://www.ref.ac.uk/media/1084/ref-2019_02-panel-criteria-and-working-methods.pdf)

In a recent blog post on practice research in the UK context, Sarah Whatley who works in dance practice research, suggests that a careful and constant approach to documenting the practice itself can facilitate the argument for practice as research. She suggests that, 'it is important that we acknowledge that practice is not always research, and that doesn't mean that the practice isn't good practice (or to suggest that practice appears out of nowhere with no thoughtful process driving it) but Practice Research has to make clear why it is just that, research'. And she goes on to suggest that,

'where the research that drives the practice may actually be ground-breaking, the outcomes can be elusive or can seem to evaporate in the very process of attempting to pin it down for the purpose of review. The playfulness and curiosity that may characterise the development can feel constrained by the processes of recording, but recording we must, so that Practice Research is fully present and can claim its authority' (Whatley 2019).

For ethnomusicologists, again, we have been doing this for a long time; documenting our 'learning to perform' practice with our teachers and using musical sound as a means to understand society in culture both at home and around the world. She identifies one of the key aspects of research; that it can be 'effectively shared'. This is just one aspect of the difference between practice and practice research. Ethnomusicologists then have a ready-made toolkit in the form of fieldwork training in terms of fieldwork diaries, audio-visual documentation, interviews, performance fieldwork notes and so on. Many of these forms of documentation are unfamiliar to performers who have only trained vocationally, and are one of the aspects that separate vocational practice from practice research. Ethnomusicologists, are also therefore, very well placed to evidence research through acts of translational ethnomusicology.

Artistic Research today is still heavily contested, as can be seen in the variety of responses to the twentieth anniversary of the Orpheus Institute, and published in Jonathan Impett's edited volume celebrating the institute (2017). Some contend that artistic knowledge and research knowledge are different but complementary domains, thus placing new knowledge beyond the reach of artistic research that does not involve textual communication. Esa Kirkkopelto (via Mersch) enticingly suggests that 'art is basic research in aesthetics (2017:143), however, again, that knowledge has to be

effectively shared, which for ethnomusicology inevitably means an act of translation, to explain for outsiders what the advance in insiders' aesthetics means or demonstrates. Others rely heavily on somatic or kinaesthetic knowledge as the basis for artistic research, and stress the importance of a system of understanding such as Lacan's 'enigmatic language' (2017:31) or Roland Barthes 'genosong' to place that knowledge in a communicable frame. The body is certainly a universal, but cultured bodies are how we live, and to think of music-as-research, necessarily involves another act of translation, to explain how the somatic knowledge of music shifts and alters our understanding of the world in a particular, cultural space. The key aspect therefore of examining the question of artistic research as ethnomusicological research has to be around what performance can communicate, and how musical invention (whether compositional or performative) can be understood across cultures. This points clearly for ethnomusicology then towards artistic research as an act of *translation*.

#### **Practice Research as Translational Ethnomusicology**

One can claim as an ethnomusicologist that 'learning to perform' an already established research methodology of traditional music, whether at home or elsewhere in the world, is adding new knowledge or insights where practice is not the object of study but a methodology that informs the social and cultural. However, ethnomusicologists are sometimes simply working to present social or grammatical structures that are performed in and through music but are already very well known in the musical culture they are researching. There is certainly a valid argument to be made that presenting clearly and translating hidden, obscured or non-verbal deep structures, or the generative, cognitive or syntactic structures that underlie a particular musical tradition for the first time to a much wider audience can be construed as 'new knowledge or insights', much in the same way as say for instance biologists and botanists have made significant discoveries of the human-medicinal properties of various flora and then translated these into new drugs. The corollary in ethnomusicology would be the translation and 'discovery' of social or grammatical structures in the Others' music, leading to new applications in socially distant music cultures. For example think of the use of Gamelan or cyclical structures in Western Art music, or the commodification of Rom musical traditions into 'Gypsy Jazz'. However, one cannot claim that they were previously unknown; given that the performing community

has been working with them long before the arrival of 'their' ethnomusicologist. In my (2005; 2009) own doctoral research for instance I focused on the inner workings of the modal usage of motivic content in traditional Scottish bagpiping, this knowledge itself was not new, but no-one had ever written it down or explained it before. So in that sense, one's own insider's performative knowledge was constitutive in the necessary act of translation. As Stephen Blum so aptly puts it in his analysis of improvisation: 'Many of the activities we are inclined to call improvisation are evidently taken for granted as basic obligations of performers towards themselves, toward fellow members of ensembles, and toward patrons or other listeners. Moreover, such obligations may well go without saying. Ethnomusicologists are often in the position of trying to describe processes of social interaction that participants have little or no interest in describing' (Blum 1998:28). And in this way, he puts his finger on the key aspect of why performance should be important to ethnomusicologists; performance itself is not research, but can be an act of translational research in communicating and demonstrating new knowledge to those outside the tradition and cross-culturally. In my own case, my doctoral research was a 'new' and 'original' insight textually: no-one had ever before applied mode theory to uncover the motivic basis for bagpipe music and to explain how the notion of 'tradition' and 'traditional' as an aesthetic judgement can be understood at the smallest unit of musical cognition—the musical motif. Pipers knew it, know it, and have developed the canon of acceptable motifs and structural tones over many years, however this was tacit knowledge, tied up so indivisibly with the act of learning to perform, that it can be understood as new knowledge in the textual, musicological domain albeit translated from its pre-existing, tacit and oral folk domain. But it was not performance research, despite that fact that I came from a position of relative expertise as a performer; the research aspects lay in the translational value and communication in text to outsiders beyond the tradition.

Looking elsewhere, one finds the same sense of practice in ethnomusicology as a research method constitutive in an act of cultural translation and communication in a different medium. Brita Lemmens in a recent research article focused on her artistic experience of learning Portuguese Fado as an outsider, suggests that methodologically the relationship between the developing discipline of 'artistic research' and ethnomusicology is that they share '...art-practice-based study and reflexivity (2012). She suggests that much of the scholarship in artistic research focuses upon the performance and

practice of the individual researcher, in common with auto-ethnography. This is essentially at the heart of the tension between research and practice: that the process revolves around the observation of one's own artistic or musical practice. In her artistic research, Lemmens documents her slow acquisition of poetic structure and its relationship to sung agogic stress, vocal inflection, the social dynamics of a fado club, but most importantly she excavates and brings into view the mechanics of tacit cultural knowledge that forms part of the Fado practice. As she suggests, the total process of artistic research for her is an act of translation; of making visible formerly tacit cultural performative knowledge. She suggests that the difference between ethnomusicology and artistic research is that the goals of the research are communicated differently: ethnomusicologists communicate largely in text and artistic researchers communicate through performance (2012).

But the medium is the message here; the original knowledge Lemmens communicates which she translates from the tacit to the textual and audio-visual is knowledge already understood within the Lisbon sub-culture in which she lived, the originality of her research was in revealing and translating performative and embodied musical knowledge into textual and audio-visual information for outsiders. Her research has taken that tacit, culturally-embedded knowledge and translated it for a potentially global audience, effectively translating from tacit to text. In this way her own 'learning to perform' as Baily would probably term it, has been again, constitutive of original research, and the originality lies in the bringing into view the formerly tacit, culturally situated musical knowledge into a wider, global practice. Critically for ethnomusicologists and other musicians; that cannot be done solely through her performance of Fado, much in the same way as my own research into the motivic basis for Scottish tradition could be solely communicated through performance. Musical sound is generally too semantically ambiguous to communicate with the level of semantic specificity needed for research when there is no central artistic tradition or canon. What this points towards is a position, which historically has been the case in the discipline of ethnomusicology where musical performance has been constitutive in the research process, but not the central outcome. And what this reveals more generally, is that ethnomusicologists have been very reluctant to acknowledge or bring forward tacit and performative knowledge as valuable in and of itself.

More recently, Cassandre Balosso-Bardin's research with professional musicians reveals the fundamental divergence of purpose between ethnomusicologists and musicians. Her interviewees have demonstrated that working towards musical performance and towards research, are two quite different activities. She however has demonstrated through her fieldwork that the level of ability, or performative expertise was crucially important to her research trajectory. Her own contextual understanding, knowledge of the history and organology of the Mallorcan bagpipes, and of the repertoire established her credentials which continue to support her research. She argues that high level musicianship can build a strong sense of trust and reciprocity with other musicians in the field where performative ability creates cultural capital that can be expended on research (personal communication). This also raises a key question for artistic research in ethnomusicology about the importance or skill of the performer-researcher; do different levels of performative skill facilitate in different research outcomes and in a different translational project?

#### **Conclusion: Towards Practice Research in Ethnomusicology**

Practice research can therefore be used as an ethnomusicological research method in two ways, firstly; in acts of translational research where practice is used as a method to translate previously tacit or embodied knowledge into other modes of communication such as text for the benefit of comparative research on world musical traditions, and secondly, in primary performance research where the research consists of practice that demonstrates and communicates new knowledge in a particular field of performance. This latter approach bears the most theoretical consonance with the systems approach of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi whose work emphasizes the key issue that creativity involves the act of making a substantive change to a domain in a particular field of practice. Csikszentmihalyi's most often been cited in ethnomusicology for his concept of 'flow' that a number of colleagues have sensibly suggested can be one of the powerful experiences in making music (Fairfield 2018; Cooley 2011; Berger 2015; Jackson 2000). However, in relation to practice research, his key insight, is that 'creativity' involves not just one actor, but a contextually sited person, field and domain. He argues that creativity as a phenomenon involves a domain of practice within a particular culture, a field of practitioners or peers that co-create the domain and the person or individual whose creativity can be

understood through the social acceptance by the field of any changes to the domain of practice (Csikszentmihalyi 2014). This systems approach he developed can therefore be useful for a new field of artistic research in ethnomusicology which focuses upon new forms of music and dance. In my view therefore, the key areas of work from an ethnomusicological perspective for performance practice as research might therefore include:

1. **Translational ethnomusicology** (including the key area of musical aesthetics, and our experience of time, pitch, timbre, etc.)
  - **Analytically informed practice as research**
  - **Cross-cultural analysis of musical aesthetics; transmission, communication and education** through the use of metaphor and temporal cognition
  - **Applied or advocacy ethnomusicology** (repatriation performance ethnomusicology from archive back to community)
  - **Historical ethnomusicology** (sound recordings as source for performance, revivals, early traditional music re-made and performed for today)
2. **Artistic Research in Ethnomusicology** (as yet largely unexplored, this area of ethnomusicology holds the possibility for ethnomusicologists working with communities of practice to produce new music and dance performances that flow from insider's values but act as research through the clearly communicated and documented new musical forms and performances in and of themselves. Research is made manifest in the ability to document and communicate to outsiders the cultural and musical value of new music and dance, and is therefore also partly about translational ethnomusicology). We might therefore characterise performance practice that does *not* make any novel or recognised changes to a field of practice or genre of music as simply, vocational practice, and not research.

Using performance practice as a research method in an act of translational ethnomusicology must therefore be a method that results in 'new knowledge'. In relation to traditional musics from around the world, the key aspect separating research from practice must therefore be the ability to produce

new knowledge about a performative tradition that one can communicate beyond the community of practice. This lays the emphasis on translation and by implication, on a sense of intercultural comparativism. In my own tradition of Scottish music, performing songs and tunes cannot simply count as research in a circular argument. The ability to present performance as research depends upon the ability to communicate new knowledge to the research community (which may or may not contain members of the community of practice). When one is working with old material that has been passed on from generation to generation, performance therefore involves an act of negotiating and communicating one's relationship to the symbolic historicism of the material and also to the sense of the individual and novel that one brings out in performance: Performing the millionth rendition of repertorial standard tune or song is difficult to argue as practice research; however, if that is accompanied by an explanation of the artist-researcher's relationship to that musical material and how they have negotiated its historic symbolism in performance, *and* that this can be communicated to an audience beyond those insiders in the community of practice, then that can therefore count as 'new knowledge, effectively shared'.

In this sense therefore, the definition of research is located in both the explanation and communication of the performative material, and as such must include textual as well as audio-visual evidence. This act of translation is therefore critical to assessing practice as research, and ideally, the artist-researcher should be able to explain to those beyond their performing community the internal aesthetics of performance and how they are taking forward the tradition and creating new knowledge. This is in many respects a more complex and multi-faceted task than justifying research through the composition of new music or new sounds, and in this way, ethnomusicologists who work with orally transmitted or orally developed musics around the world with no canonical core repertoire have a tougher job than almost any of those euro-classical researchers whose justification of research is grounded in novelty or complexity. As ethnomusicologists however, we must also acknowledge that for practice research to emerge as a powerful new methodological tool and disciplinary paradigm, it will involve adjusting and *expanding* the notion of what ethnomusicology can offer.

Ethnomusicological approaches to people making music can therefore expand beyond understanding the values, culture and society of musical groups around the world to encompass their musical and

aesthetic values evidenced through performance in a more explicitly comparative and translational field. This work has already begun, certainly amongst a few ethnomusicologists who have been performing explicitly as part of their research trajectory, but in the way that departments of English, Fine Art and Architecture have been doing for some time, it is now possible for us to think of the performative as part of the ethnomusicological domain, if, and only if however, we are clear about how we evidence and discuss the key criteria of new knowledge and communicability of performance across cultures in a translational ethnomusicology.

## References

- Baily, John. 2001. 'Learning to Perform as a Research Technique in Ethnomusicology'. *British Journal of Ethnomusicology* 10 (2): 85–98.
- Berger, Harris M. 2015. 'Phenomenological Approaches in the History of Ethnomusicology', in *Oxford Handbooks Online*, [date accessed 10<sup>th</sup> August 2019, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935321.013.30>].
- Berliner, Paul. 1978. *The Sould of Mbira: Music and Traditions of the Shona People of Zimbabwe*. Berkley: University of California Press.
- Blum, Stephen. 1998. 'Recognizing Improvisation'. In *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, edited by Bruno Nettl and Melinda Russell, 27–45. University of Chicago Press.
- Cook, Nicholas. 2018. *Music as Creative Practice*. Studies in Musical Performance as Creative Practice. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Borgdorff, Henk. 2012. *The Conflict of the Faculties. Perspectives on Artistic Research and Academia*. Leiden University Press. <http://www.oapen.org/search?identifier=595042>.
- Cooley, Timothy J. 2011. 'Playing Together And Solitary Play: Musicking And Surfing'. *Ethnomusicology Ireland*.
- Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 2014. *The Systems Model of Creativity: The Collected Works of Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi*. Springer Netherlands. <https://www.springer.com/gp/book/9789401790840>.
- Fairfield, Benjamin. 2018. 'Ethnic and Village Unity: Symbolized or Enacted? Lahu Music-Dance and Ethnic Participation in Ban Musoe, Thailand'. *Asian Music* 49 (2): 71–105. <https://doi.org/10.1353/amu.2018.0016>.
- Hood, Mantle. 1982. *The Ethnomusicologist*. Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press.
- Jackson, Travis A. 2000. 'Jazz Performance as Ritual: The Blues Aesthetic and the African Diaspora'. In *The African Diaspora: A Musical Perspective*, edited by Ingrid Monson, 23–82. New York: Garland.

- Kirkkopelto, Esa. 2017. “Searching for Depth in the Flat World: Art, Research, and Institutions”. In *Artistic Research in Music: Discipline and Resistance, Artists and Researchers at the Orpheus Institute*, 134–48. Ghent, Orpheus Institute: Leuven University Press.
- Lemmens, Brita. 2012. ‘The Learning Process in Fado through Artistic Research’. *Journal for Artistic Research*, no. 2 (November). <https://www.researchcatalogue.net/view/27893/27894>.
- Lord, Albert B. 1965. *The Singer of Tales* Cambridge, Mass.
- Mantle Hood, Ki. 1960. ‘The Challenge of “Bi-Musicality”’. *Ethnomusicology* 4 (2): 55–59.
- McKerrell, Simon Alasdair. 2005. ‘Scottish Competition Bagpipe Performance : Sound, Mode and Aesthetics’. Ph.D., University of St Andrews. <http://hdl.handle.net/10023/4809>.
- McKerrell, Simon. 2009. ‘The Concept of Mode in Scottish Bagpipe Music’. In *The Highland Bagpipe: Music, History, Tradition*, 279–300. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing Ltd.
- Nettl, Bruno. 1974. ‘Thoughts on Improvisation: A Comparative Approach’. *The Musical Quarterly* 60: 1–19.
- Nettl, Bruno, and Melinda Russell. 1998. *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*. University of Chicago Press.
- Östersjö, Stefan. 2017. ‘Thinking-through-Music, On Knowledge Production, Materiality, Embodiment, and Subjectivity in Artistic Research’. In *Artistic Research in Music: Discipline and Resistance, Artists and Researchers at the Orpheus Institute*, edited by Jonathan Impett, 88–107. Orpheus Institute Series. Leuven: Leuven University Press.
- Powers, Harold S. 1980. ‘Language Models and Musical Analysis’. *Ethnomusicology* 24, no. 1 (January 1980): 1. <https://doi.org/10.2307/851308>.
- . 1958. ‘Mode and Raga’. *Musical Quarterly*, 448–460.
- Racy, Ali Jihad. 1998. ‘Improvisation, Ecstasy, and Performance Dynamics in Arabic Music’. In *In the Course of Performance: Studies in the World of Musical Improvisation*, 95–112.
- Whatley, Sarah. 2019. Goldprac, ‘Sarah Whatley Blog Post’. 15 January 2019. <https://prag-uk.org/2019/01/15/sarah-whatley-blog-post/>.

Witzleben, J. Lawrence. 2010. 'Performing in the Shadows: Learning and Making Music as Ethnomusicological Practice and Theory'. *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 42: 135–66.  
<https://doi.org/10.2307/S0740155800012698>.