

Introduction for interactive presentation/installation @ Ex-Centric Music Studies Harvard Graduate Music Forum Conference

Making Digital Folklore: An Interactive Multimedia Experience

What role does technology play in the construction of cultural identities? This is the central question of my research on digital folklore, an emergent style of popular music from Buenos Aires, Argentina. The practices of digital folklore musicians show one way in which digital technology, electronic music aesthetics, and folk music repertoire are combined with other practices and media to produce new narratives about local, national, regional, and global belonging.

Central to this process is the notion of hybridity. The musicians mix disparate forms into something that is simultaneously imagined as a folkloric and cosmopolitan. Other questions that arise are how the project of place-making intersects with the globalization of the music and the reliance on transnational and global networks to create and sustain a scene? How are these musicians imagining their individual and collective social, cultural, and national identities in relation to hegemonic ideas about Argentine identity and culture? How do digital folklore musicians imagine new ways of being both Argentines and Latin Americans?

For this presentation I will focus on connecting the process of making digital folklore with the process of sharing scholarly work.

Digital folklore exists in both recorded and ‘live’ forms. Most digital folklore musicians are music producers with a background in DJ’ing. The most common DAW used for making digital folklore is Ableton Live, which can be used both in the studio and, as the name implies, in a live setting. For musical material, producers rely on a combination of sampling and re-arranging existing songs, as well as the composition of new melodies and lyrics based on folk styles. The music produced by these processes is then modified again through digital effects on the voice or other instruments. Effects such as reverb, delay, distortion, compression, and filters are generally added via the DAW. Thus there are several levels of mediation between the source materials and the final recording.

The performance of digital folklore normally involves the use of digital technology by a primary performer. This usually consists of a laptop computer, sampler, mixer, and sometimes other analog effects such as loop machines or delay pedals. Additionally, either the primary performer or secondary performers play analog folk instruments like the *charango* or *caja*.

Musicians work with samples and a variety of electronic and analog “folk” instruments to create a hybrid style of music that transposes a rural imaginary into the cosmopolitan city through multimedia including video, audio, and images.

In my presentation of my research, I am drawing on Wayne Marshall's concept of technomusicology, in which he argues that we should use technology to 'music about music.' I extend this concept to a 'live' interactive setting, drawing also from the Cagean idea of indeterminacy. I present samples of audio and video, to be placed together by the participant. I look toward this idea as a way to work against the notion of authorship and linear narrative. While it is impossible to entirely remove my perspective, this format is intended to allow for new possibilities of interpretation. Multiple narratives emerge through each person's interaction with the materials.

Thankfully I am not alone in the field of ethnomusicology in pushing toward alternative modes of presentation. For example, in addition to the presentations of our colleagues in this conference, others such as Leo Cardoso have coordinated alternative presentations like the 2015 exhibit on sound in the city at SEM. While a full sound installation may not always be feasible, we can extend the idea into the space and time that is available.

One question that arose from the process of preparing these materials is why musicologists and ethnomusicologists don't normally engage with ideas about installation and exhibit design? This of course is related to broader questions about the absence of applied ethnomusicology training in the academy. Interactive presentation modes can help us engage in public musicology and open up new pedagogical practices.

Each time we step into a conference room we find before us the most ubiquitous folk instrument of our time: the computer. For many amateur musicians, an old PC is what most lends itself to being re-purposed as an instrument. This is demonstrated in the case of one of the digital folk producers I encountered; Pedro Canale created his first album in the wee hours of the night on his father's work computer.

As music scholars of the 21st century, we should consider the ways we perceive the computers we encounter. They can always become musical instruments, as they have for many musicians in the world.

Now I invite you to play with sound. On the table is a Macbook with Ableton Live and a controller with pre-loaded samples of digital folklore sounds. Some sounds are from the artists' recordings and others are collected from my fieldwork. The presentation mode allows interaction with some of the tools used in making the music. On the table are also fragments of my paper. Each person can read what interests them. There is also a *caja*. This is an instrument from northwest Argentina used for accompanying acapella singing. It is often used in digital folklore and requires no specialized training.

Through this interaction I attempt to bring the process of music production into the practice of scholarship. Like my collaborators, I am presenting a postmodern pastiche, allowing the processes found in my fieldwork to resonate through my work as a scholar.