

## ***Musical Instruments and Material Culture***

Thursday 26<sup>th</sup> March 2015

The Pavilion, Horniman Museum and Gardens, 100 London Road, London, SE23 3PQ

<http://www.horniman.ac.uk>

This conference is held jointly by the Horniman Museum and Gardens and the Royal Anthropological Institute.

### **PROGRAMME**

#### **09:30 Registration and coffee**

10:15 Welcome/ Opening Remarks

Tim Corum, Director of Curatorial and Public Engagement, Horniman Museum

#### **10:30-11:30 Panel 1: Combating Disempowerment**

*Khadija Abbasi, The Graduate Institute, Geneva:* Dambora: The embodiments of sufferings, resistance and identities for Hazaras of Afghanistan

*Veronica Doubleday, Goldsmiths, University of London:* Moving the Spirit: Musical Instruments from Found Objects

#### **11:30-12:30 Keynote Speech**

#### **Materials Matter: Towards a Political Ecology of Musical Instrument Making**

*Professor Kevin Dawe, University of Kent*

#### **12:30 – 13:30 Lunch**

#### **13:30 – 14:30 Panel 2: Spirituality and Enchantment**

*Dr Conor Caldwell, Queen's University, Belfast:* A musical movement: The status of the fiddle in south west Donegal, 1850-2014

*Owen Coggins, The Open University, UK:* Sunn Amps and Smashed Guitars: Drone Metal's Amplifier Cult

#### **14:30-15:30 Panel 3: Meanings in Metal**

*Deidre Morgan, SOAS, University of London:* The Norwegian *munnharpe* revival: A dialogue between material and intangible culture

*Lyndsey Marie Hoh, University of Oxford:* Brass Instruments in Benin: Metal, Meaning, and the Material Turn

#### **15:30 – 16:00 Tea**

#### **16:00 – 17:00 Panel 4: Historic Instruments as Signifiers of Culture**

*Stephen Rees, University of Bangor, and Huw Roberts, independent Scholar:* 'Telyn Cefn Mably' ('The Harp of Cefn Mably'): A Newly-Discovered Triple Harp by Bassett Jones and the Abergavenny Eisteddfod of 1848

*Dr Amanda Villepastour, Cardiff University:* Sacred, Scientific and Political Encounters in the Consecration, Conservation, and Patrimony of a Cuban Drum

#### **17:00 – 17:30 Concluding remarks**

Professor Tim Ingold, University of Aberdeen

#### **17:30 – 19:00 Wine reception**

## **ABSTRACTS**

### **Dambora: The embodiments of sufferings, resistance and identities for Hazaras of Afghanistan**

Khadija Abbasi, The Graduate Institute, Geneva

The paper attempts to cast light on the social relationships Hazaras of Afghanistan have established with the musical instrument Dambora. Although Dambora is widely played in central Asia, it is being recognized as a Hazaragi musical instrument in Afghanistan. Historically a marginalised ethnic and religious group, Hazaras have used their limited musical instrument resources such as Dambora to demonstrate their sufferings, protests and resistance to the oppressive rulers. Nowadays, in the ethnicised society of Afghanistan, Hazaras utilise Dambora as a way to reflect and symbolise their cultural values and identity.

In this paper, I will try to look at the role of Dambora in three major phases of Hazara history and/or memory. In the first part, I will explain how Dambora played with 'Makhta' i.e. lamentation elegies were used in highlands of central Afghanistan to reflect on the historical persecutions Hazaras experienced particularly in late 19<sup>th</sup> century during the reign of Amir Abdur Rahman Khan. The torment has not yet been forgotten and is very much alive on Hazaras' collective memory and Dambora with its 'hidden grief' has a significant role in maintaining these memories alive. The status and position of music at this stage was profoundly overshadowed by religious restrictions topped up with the historical social exclusion.

For the second part, I will reflect on the works of three prominent male Hazara Dambora players: Sarwar Sarkhosh, Dawood Sarkhosh and Safdar Tawakoli (approximately from 1980s to 2001) and indicate the ways in which these men used Dambora not only as a tool to raise voices of Hazaras but also to construct confidence and identity of an ethnic groups wounded by a historical uprooting. They used Dambora for community mobilisation and creating a revolutionary spirit amongst Hazaras in order to stand up for their rights. Nonetheless, a gendered perspective on music of Hazaras designates why presence of female singers and Dambora players such as 'Aghay Dil Aram' has been presented as a myth in these communities.

In last part, I will demonstrate the shift on the themes of the songs played with Dambora as well as the 'modernisation' of Dambora itself in post 2001. I will explain the ways in which Dambora is perceived and regarded in the daily life of Hazaras, particularly young people both in diaspora and Afghanistan. This helps us see the cultural values and beliefs of Hazaras reflected in the lyrics of song accompanied with Dambora. Dambora is now being explored and modernized enthusiastically by young Hazara singers who seek to define a new genre in Afghanistan's music. And whether the experimenting genre is welcomed or not, needs to be studied.

### **Moving the Spirit: Musical Instruments from Found Objects**

Veronica Doubleday, Goldsmiths, University of London

This presentation looks at the creation of instruments by classes of people who for particular reasons are essentially excluded from playing the standard musical instruments of their culture. Circumventing their situations of exclusion, such creators may seek to imitate the instruments they wish to play. Casting about for any available materials, these makers – and players – realise new creations through a procession of "mimetic invention". Their ingenuity and determination serve to imbue their work with an additional power to move the spirit.

The instrument-makers I shall discuss fall into several categories of disadvantage: prisoners and slaves, who through their confinement do not have access to musical instruments; women, who by virtue of their gender are barred from playing certain instruments, and children, who are not expected to play adult instruments (or whose small size prevents them from playing standard instruments).

Among several examples, I shall discuss the "Gamelan Digul" created in 1927 from found objects in the Dutch East Indies prison camp Boven Digul, documented by Margaret Kartomi in 2002. Also relevant are African-American jug bands, making music from ordinary house-hold objects. I shall

argue that the creation of these make-shift instruments may serve to combat oppression and disempowerment.

### **Materials Matter: Towards a Political Ecology of Musical Instrument Making**

Professor Kevin Dawe, University of Kent

What is a musical instrument? Is it a technological result of culture? Is it a product of nature? In this essay, I explore how musical instrument makers relate to their primary materials and, in turn, how musical instruments connect music, nature, and society in particular cultural contexts. Discussion of musical instruments usually revolves around how they are shaped in the minds of those for whom they become emblematic and how makers create them. But increasingly such discussions must also involve the origins of the construction materials. As in other artisanal traditions, discussion of musical instruments must increasingly focus on both the physical impact and symbolic power of the materials themselves. For in these natural resources, “nature” is given new life and form.

Integral to this discussion is the social context of making in relation to the “rhythm and ritual” of the workshop, where makers work *with* (rather than against) resistant materials whilst working *together* with each other (Sennett 2013, 200-208; Ingold 2014). The culture that surrounds musical instrument creation is a culture that both emanates from the workshop and also filters into the shape the workshop; if you will, it is a two-way street. In drawing attention to the role of materials in creating musical instruments, one becomes aware that musical instrument making is a process of and a contribution to place making and economy building. Musical instrument making constructs a culture that furthers the reputation of the maker and helps sustain the makers’ artisanal traditions. As I have discussed elsewhere (Dawe 2001a, Dawe 2011), musical instruments become entangled with peoples and places, times and technologies; but they also have an intrinsic ability to reconnect us to the natural world through the wood, bone, skin, metals, and clay from which they are made. Musical instrument makers are literally “in touch” with the material world. They are agents of a material reality that affects the construction of musical cultures at the most fundamental level.

Musical instrument makers attune to a particular set of naturally sourced materials. As both Sennett (2008) and Ingold (2014) argue, craftsmen work with both resistant and malleable materials. Through the acquisition of a certain skill set, proprioception provides feedback whilst movements are entrained: knowledge of materials is not only memorized and cognitively processed, it is embodied and has tactile and olfactory dimensions. In this scenario we might ask the question: what exactly is a “musical instrument”? I advocate its broader definition here (as I do elsewhere, Dawe 2010): a creation of nature and culture, where knowledge of how to exploit the acoustic and aesthetic properties of materials is developed as part of a “sensual culture” (Howes 2005).

Drawing on my own field research as well as recent literature, I discuss the multifaceted role that materials play in the process of making guitars and the Cretan lyra, which happens both inside and outside of the workshop: from the forest to the fingertips of the performer. Allen (2012) in his discussion of violin making in Italy also draws attention to this process: “These instruments – made from the prized resonance wood of the Paneveggio [slow growth specimens of *Norway spruce*, *Picea abies*], crafted by the consummate skill of luthiers such as Stradivari, played by talented musicians who perform the carefully wrought musical works of famed composers – are cultural commodities that have histories ranging from their originating forest to their ultimate performance stage” (313). As in Allen’s study, I aim to throw into relief the fundamental relationship between nature and culture in making a musical instrument as well as the ways the materials are held in the hands of various makers, whether lumberjack, luthier, lutenist, or *l’audience*.

### **A musical movement: the status of the fiddle in south west Donegal, 1850-2014**

Dr Conor Caldwell, Queen’s University, Belfast:

The fiddle has assumed a unique role in the community of south west Donegal since the mid-eighteenth century. A musical movement, based around the making, teaching and playing of the fiddle dominated the social and cultural landscape of the region until the 1940s, before being revived again in the early 1980s. In the small, rural parish of Glencolmcille alone, over three hundred fiddle players

are known to have been active at the turn of the twentieth century. Fiddles were imported through migrant links with Scotland, fabricated from boxes and biscuit tins, skilfully forged from tin and brass and made from timber in all shapes and sizes. Fiddles were most often observed hanging above the fire place in country cottages where they could be 'caught' or 'lifted down' by anyone to be played. Only a handful of tin or brass fiddles survive today, with most having succumbed to rust with no cases to protect them from the elements. These instruments are iconic in the Donegal fiddle revival as they provide a direct link with the important personalities of the tradition who are now long deceased.

The music and stories from this tradition are best analysed through recordings of the Doherty family, a clan of travelling tinsmiths and musicians who played a key role in carrying repertoire from one parish to the next. Among these recordings are found stories of enchanted fiddles which imbued their owners with vast repertoires of tunes and those which even played themselves. These stories are often pathways for interaction with the world of fairies, spirits and curses, in which the community has retained a strong belief. Fairies and spirits are often reported as the direct sources of tunes by musicians such as John and Mickey Doherty, the two most well-known members of their clan, and Neilly Boyle, a native of Dungloe, who spent much of his life in America.

This paper documents some of the stories and music associated with the belief systems of south west Donegal and evaluates the role of the fiddle as the dominant musical instrument of the region between 1850 and the present day.

## **Sunn Amps and Smashed Guitars: Drone Metal's Amplifier Cult**

Owen Coggins, The Open University, UK

While amplifiers (especially ones that go up to 11) have been widely idolised as a symbol of power and noise in hard rock and heavy metal, rarely have they taken figurative and literal centre stage from the more fetishised electric guitar. In drone metal, an extreme form of heavy metal music emphasising low, monotonous and distorted tones in radically extended repetitive droning riffs, amplifiers take on a more important role than any other item of musical equipment in visual culture, album artwork and titles, musician's rhetoric and listener's discourse.

An influential album was titled *Amplifier Worship* (Boris, 1998), another *Sunn Amps and Smashed Guitars* (Earth, 1995); the best-known drone metal band are named SunnO))) after the defunct amplifier manufacturer Sunn; the band Sleep reportedly spent their final album advance on amplifiers, having placed the call 'If you have Orange amplification for sale contact Sleep through Earache Records' in the sleeve notes of their previous recording (*Sleep, Holy Mountain*, 1992). Concert attendees are much more concerned to find out and discuss the number and type of amplifiers to be used than instruments or even personnel, while on stage amplifiers are set up and described as altars, walls, and henges, more visible and imposing than musicians or other instruments. Based on ethnographic fieldwork at more than 40 drone metal events, analysis of sound recordings, 73 in-depth interviews with listeners, and reading many thousands of reviews and online comments, this presentation examines drone metal's idolisation of amplifiers, and its grounding in the material culture and embodied, physical experience of amplified sound.

Amplifiers represent the overwhelming volume that leads listeners to report such extraordinary physical and mental states, often in a language of transcendence, spirituality and mysticism; but they also mark the conceptual shift away from virtuosic musicianship to the materiality of the sonic signifier in the physical experience of vibrations themselves. I connect the foundations of drone metal sound in amplification to the prevalent descriptions in terms of spirituality and transcendence by drawing on Michel de Certeau's theorisation of mystical language. Certeau understands mystical ways of speaking as modes of communication which emphasise the materiality of signs (rather than semantic or structural 'content') in order to perform or demonstrate the limits of symbolic discourse and to return to physically embodied meaning. In orthodox commitment to amplifying the early heavy metal style of Black Sabbath; in the much-repeated tenet from SunnO))) albums that 'Maximum Volume Yields Maximum Results;' in emphasising physical experience of sound beyond signification or structural meaning: for listeners, drone metal can be a mystical spirituality founded in a cult of amplification.

## **The Norwegian munnharpe revival: a dialogue between material and intangible culture**

Deidre Morgan, SOAS University of London

*Musical instruments [...] have the power to transform not only our surroundings but also our minds and bodies, and our sense of identity and belonging. (Dawe 2005: 59)*

While music revivals have been the subject of some recent ethnomusicological studies (Livingston 1999, Bithell and Hill 2014), the roles of musical instruments and their makers in these revivals remain absent in much of the literature. Arguing for an instrument-centered approach to music revivals, this paper is based on my ethnographic fieldwork on the *munharpe* (jew's harp) revival in Norway. Using the Norwegian case study, I examine the interplay between the material (instruments and design) and the intangible (music and transmission) aspects of the revival. Looking at the dynamic between *munharpe* blacksmiths and the players who use their instruments, I analyze the cultural values that are reflected in the construction of the *munharpe*. Further, I explore how *munharpe* smithing skills are acquired and transmitted amongst smiths of various regions and generations, and how their instruments both shape, and are shaped by, the musical features of the tradition. To what extent are *munharpe* blacksmiths today accessing or referencing older models of *munharpe* found in museums and archives? Which design aspects are passed down, and which are re-imagined? And what motivating factors might prompt someone to become a *munharpe* smith in the digital age? To answer these questions, I will draw upon my fieldwork observing and interviewing blacksmiths in their forges, homes, and at festivals, and participating in the annual *munharpe* forging workshop in Gjøvik, Norway. Building upon a growing body of work on the cultural study of musical instruments (Dawe 2003 & 2005, Bates 2012, Roda 2013), I demonstrate how musical instrument construction is both a technical and a social process, and suggest how it can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of music revival movements.

## **Brass Instruments in Benin: Metal, Meaning, and the Material Turn**

Lyndsey Marie Hoh, University of Oxford

This paper is a preliminary effort to analytically frame the contemporary practice and meaning of brass instruments in Benin within a landscape of indigenous material culture around metal. Scholarship on postcolonial brass instrument practice is often couched within a historical trajectory of colonial military and mission bands, and scholars continue to objectify brass instruments as fixed, static, symbols that are definitively, and objectively, 'European' (Flaes 2000). As a result, contemporary brass instrument practice—even when outside of 'brass band' performance—is easily condensed as either a signifier of European modernity or symbolic resistance to European colonialism (Brucher and Reily 2013:2). By conceptualizing the practice of brass instruments in Benin apart from the European brass band model and instead interrogating the influence of local material culture on the practice and meaning of brass instruments, this paper contributes a different perspective.

Overarching questions framing this paper include: Can brass instruments be understood as West African instruments? Is there an indigenous category for brass instruments that is not the colonial mission or military band? If so, what might that category (or categories) be? Taking a materialist approach, my ethnographic experiences with brass instrumentalists in Cotonou, Benin are considered against a backdrop of West African 'metallic' phenomena ranging from metallurgy and the metallic arts, to the sounding of bells, gongs, and other metal instruments, to the valuation of brass manillas as 'sounding' currencies. This juxtaposition points to parallels between pre-colonial histories of practice and thought around metal and contemporary ones around brass instruments. These resonances encourage my argument that local practice of brass instruments in Benin are not only informed by histories and cultures of European brass bands, but also by indigenous forces and factors, particularly meanings of metal.

## **'Telyn Cefn Mably' ('The Harp of Cefn Mably'): A Newly-Discovered Triple Harp by Bassett Jones and the Abergavenny Eisteddfod of 1848**

Stephen Rees, University of Bangor, and Huw Roberts, Independent Scholar

Both harps and harpers have been accorded high status in Wales since the middle ages. Moreover, the winning harpers at Eisteddfodic competitions have frequently been awarded harps as prizes – sometimes a harp in model form, sometimes an actual instrument. One of the earliest surviving examples of this custom is the silver model harp awarded at the Caerwys Eisteddfod of 1523. The tradition of awarding actual instruments as prizes continues to the modern period, both at the annual National Eisteddfod of Wales and more recently at the quadrennial International Harp Festival held in Caernarfon.

Due its continuing use in Welsh popular culture long after the rise of the pedal harp elsewhere, the triple harp had, by the late eighteenth century, come to be identified as the 'Welsh harp'. In the early nineteenth century, a significant focus for the promotion the instrument developed within the literary and cultural circle associated with Augusta Hall, Lady Llanover (1802-1896), at Llanover near Abergavenny, Monmouthshire. An influential advocate for Welsh culture and the Welsh language, Hall employed harpers at her home, and initiated competitions specifically for the triple harp in the series of Eisteddfodau held at Abergavenny between 1835 and 1853.

In Anglesey during the summer of 2014, Huw Roberts discovered and purchased a triple harp which had been awarded as first prize in the Abergavenny Eisteddfod of 1848. The instrument survives in remarkably good condition. Documentary evidence indicates that it has been in Anglesey since at least the early twentieth century, although the reasons for its journey from south-east Wales to the far north-west are not yet clear. On the neck of the harp is a plaque which records both the maker – Bassett Jones of Cardiff – and the local donor – Charles Kemeys-Tynte, squire of Cefn Mably, a large estate in Glamorganshire. A further inscription indicates that the harp was also subject to the patronage of Queen Victoria, combining the royal crest and the words 'THE GIFT OF HER MAJESTY'. Also recorded on the instrument is the name of the winning harper, Edward Jones.

This newly-discovered harp thus embodies the conference theme in several ways. Both regional and royal patronage of indigenous musical traditions gave rise to the instrument's very existence within a specific period and cultural sphere; and these relationships are – literally – inscribed on the instrument itself, alongside the name of a musician who would have performed upon it. No less important are its symbolic aspects: it is emblematic of the tradition of 'the harp as prize' in Wales; and it represents an important musical aspect of the wider cultural revival instigated by Augusta Hall and those in her circle.

## **Sacred, Scientific and Political Encounters in the Consecration, Conservation, and Patrimony of a Cuban Drum**

Dr Amanda Villepastour, Cardiff University

Ilu Keke ("small town") is the name of a sacred drum ensemble that was rescued from obscurity and eventual destruction by a small group of drummer-priests in the province of Matanzas over the last ten years. This paper outlines an intriguing story within a tradition where sacred *batá* drums—at the heart of an Afro-Cuban religion called Santería—are invested with tremendous spiritual, social and emotional power. Both musical instruments and vessels for a drumming god called Añá, *batá* drums "give birth" and are "born" in a ceremony mimetic of human conception and delivery.

Ilu Keke was born before living memory in a small town called Cidra one hour out of Matanzas City. Elders remember playing the drums in the early 1950s before they disappeared into obscurity. In 2004, a group of younger drummers in Matanzas collaborated with family members in Cidra to rescue the decaying ensemble from a living room wall in a house close to a sugar mill ruin, where some say Ilu Keke was birthed by slaves. Prior to my involvement, a complicated "rescue" operation (resurrection) and ritual restoration (rebirth) ensued. Ilu Keke's current musician-priest caretakers now

play regular ceremonies in Matanzas, generating a modest income from which the Cidra family receives a percentage.

While Ilu Keke and its drummers have garnered considerable ritual and musical prestige in Matanzas, the antiquated drum shells are extremely fragile, simultaneously symbolising and threatening the delicate socio-economic relationships around them. I will describe an intervention-in-process where, in my capacity as ethnomusicologist and former curator, I introduced Ilu Keke's musicians to a conservator, Eduardo Muñoz, in Cuba's National Museum of Music, also a practitioner of Afro-Cuban religion. Anticipating the permission of his own religious elders in Havana, Muñoz has agreed to undergo an initiation ceremony with Ilu Keke's drummers to be "sworn" to Añá, Ilu Keke, and the wider drumming brotherhood, in order to gain the drummers' trust and authority to handle these sacred objects. Muñoz has also gained permission to undergo conservation work on the instruments from managers in the museum, while Ilu Keke's drummers must enter into a more protracted and delicate process with the uneducated and mostly Christian Cidra family.

The Ilu Keke story illustrates the intersection of contrasting registers of knowledge, including the scholarly, spiritual, scientific and the esoteric. A complex of overlapping insider-outsider binaries determined by blood lineage, initiation lineage, race, class, education, region, and in my case, nationality and gender, further complicate Ilu Keke's maintenance. The collaboration raises a web of logistical problems and ethical concerns, including the possibility—already made explicit to the drummers by the conservator—that it may be advisable to cease playing the drums, in which case the museum could claim them for national patrimony. This paper will describe the on-going processes and outcomes as individuals from the different worlds of religion, music, academia, and museum negotiate over the coming months to safeguard the status and multifarious interests of these objects and the people attached to them.