

MUSIC AND ENVIRONMENTALISM IN TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY AMERICAN  
POPULAR CULTURE

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A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF MUSIC

August 2017

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## ABSTRACT

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U.S. environmental policy is currently amid rapid change during a time when overwhelming scientific evidence continues to assert the severity of climate crises as an inescapable part of everyday life on both a local and global scale. These pressing environmental issues, our heightened awareness of them, and changing legislation against them are shaping humanity's relationship with the environment. To better understand the social and political implications of these scientifically quantified crises, a cultural is needed. For such a dimension, this thesis situates popular music as one avenue through which changes in social and political relationships to the environment are being negotiated. Through investigation of sustainability-minded music festivals, analysis of recorded music with activist motivations, and diversification of environmental discourse via nonnormative hearing ecologies, the cases studied in this thesis all suggest that popular music has gained new significance within the country's current social and political climates. Engaging with fore-fronting ecomusicological literature like Mark Pedelty's *A Song to Save the Salish Sea* as well as a diverse range of other scholarly perspectives in sound studies, phenomenological experience, and disability studies, this thesis identifies music as site

from which newly emerging paradigmatic forms of 21st century environmentalism are being produced in American popular culture.

To my nature-loving father, whom my memories of give vitality and life to all that I pursue.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank first and foremost my advisory committee for this thesis, Dr. Katherine Meizel and Dr. Sidra Lawrence, who saw every bit of potential in me throughout my academic career at Bowling Green State University, even when I had failed to see that potential within myself. Their expertise continues to be an incredible inspiration, and this thesis would not have been fully realized without their professional guidance, insight, and persistent support and enthusiasm for my work. Additionally, I would like to thank Dr. Jeremy Wallach, whose own scholarly work and highly informative teaching inspired me to take direction with popular music in my own research. Finally, I give wholehearted thanks to my mother and closest family and friends for giving me endless inspiration and will power to achieve my greatest potential. There is no question that my research was made possible by the incredible love and support I am so fortunate to receive.

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## CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

“There’s a lot of good music in this world and if used right, it may help to save the planet.”

— Pete Seeger

### **Why Music? Why Environmentalism?**

My whole life nature has been a big part of my upbringing, and I’ll admit, I have some very personal motivations for writing this thesis. My father, a self-employed environmental contractor, dedicated his life’s work to the restoration of contaminated land sources. His passion for the environment left me constantly immersed in nature growing up, and after his untimely passing, I’ve searched tirelessly for a way of reconnecting with him through my academic work. Such has fed into a fascination with environmentalist music, and more broadly ecomusicology which rather sufficiently unites my work as a musician and ethnomusicologist with his lifelong commitment to environmentalism. It is perhaps cliché to open with a personal narrative like this, but I believe it sufficiently sets the tone for what follows.

### **The State of Environmental Affairs in the Twenty-First Century**

I write during a period of great political divide and grim environmental outlook within the United States. Newly elected president Donald Trump has managed within a few short months to radically change U.S. environmental policy. With the intent of freeing constraints on the fossil fuel market, the Trump administration has dealt heavy cards against this primary source of climate change and environmental crises from the signing of executive action permitting construction of the heavily protested Dakota Access and Keystone XL pipelines on January 24th to the repealing of Obama-era institutions like the Environmental Protection Agency’s Clean Power Plan on March 28th through executive order. Not even one hundred days into his presidency, the administration as a whole has shown no signs of letting up. Most recently, Cabinet officials still sit in debate over whether the United States should cut ties with

the Paris Agreement.<sup>1</sup> I dare not ask what else is yet to come, but I feel that ecomusicological work will play an important role in understanding the rapidly changing relationships between music, nature, and culture over the next few years. This is not to ignore that music and environmentalism have coexisted for some time, and there has surely been profound environmental work through music in the past. However, current changes unfolding in U.S. environmental policy that stand in opposition against overwhelming scientific evidence of approaching climate crises amplify an urgency to more fully explore these issues through a cultural dimension. For such, I look to popular music as one particular avenue through which humanity's relationship with the environment is changing in response to these critical issues.

### **Methodologies**

First and foremost, I should clarify my use of the term “popular music.” While it bears many definitions, it may be understood in the context of this thesis as any music of mass dissemination that is “readily accessible to large numbers of musically uneducated listeners rather than to an elite.”<sup>2</sup> Taking this as the focal point of its analyses, this thesis is informed most strongly by the field of ecomusicology, a relatively new avenue of study which explores music, culture, and nature in all the complexities of those terms.<sup>3</sup> For each chapter, I construct specialized multi-layered lenses through which to consider new innovations in popular music as they relate to the environmental movement (detailed further in the following chapter overview). The environmental movement as a whole stems from environmental concerns that proliferated in the 1970s, and since, ecomusicology has worked towards marrying scientifically quantifiable

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<sup>1</sup> The Paris Agreement was implemented in 2015 as an international pact to fight climate change. The debate over U.S. involvement at this point in time remains unresolved.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Middleton and Peter Manuel, “Popular Music,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

<sup>3</sup> Aaron S. Allen, “Ecomusicology,” *Grove Music Online, Oxford Music Online* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

ecological phenomena with qualitative fields within the humanities. This has proven to take many forms and such possibilities are continually being explored in greater depth, as exemplified by the 2016 edited volume *Current Directions in Ecomusicology* (ed. Allen and Dawe). It is important to note that while my own work focuses specifically on music and environmentalism (action towards environmental protection and conservation), this is not the only point of study within the field. In the entry by Alice Boyle and Ellen Waterman, “The Ecology of Musical Performance: Towards a Robust Methodology,” the authors point out that ecomusicological study is not always explicitly environmentalist and other perspectives in the field may involve the application of ecological concepts to musical phenomena external to the environmentalist movement. This distinction is an important one to make; however, the work in this thesis *is* concerned with the social and political potential of environmentally-inflected music as a driving force against environmental issues. Additionally, case studies within each chapter were based off of my own ethnographic work, which took form in direct participant observation, one-on-one interview, and virtual investigation via the Internet. I fully recognize that each of these methods bear limitations. In the most ideal scenario, I would have exercised *each* of these practices on *all* the cases studied. There are undoubtedly musicians I would have liked to engage with more had I been completely uninhibited by time and financial constraints. Nevertheless, I offer a collection of my own experiences together with a diverse body of musicians, sound artists, composers, and concert-goers that I did managed to get in touch with to help drive the main goal of this thesis: to demonstrate that popular music is driving new means of concrete political, social, and environmental impact during a time of elevated environmental crises.

## Chapter Overview

Chapter Two sets things in motion by approaching the most prevalent counter-argument to environmentalist music: is it truly effective at driving change, or does it only contradict the environmentalist messages sent through its production and through the lifestyles of its creators? Surely there are cases in which these contradictions do exist—Mark Pedelty in particular has called some of these cases out in his 2011 publication *Ecomusicology*. However, to call out more contradictions is neither productive nor this chapter’s main focus. Instead, I focus on a series of music festivals as temporarily constructed communities whose inner workings have avoided contradiction in terms of environmental sustainability, and who show great potential in positively driving the environmental movement. They employ a range of strategies to negotiate a message of sustainability to its participants. Beardfest, the first festival discussed is a New Jersey-based event with humble rural beginnings that has grown to create a community in which performer-audience dichotomies have been virtually erased and whose environmental aspirations aim to give festival-goers the tools needed to live a more sustainable life beyond the festival. The other two festivals take to the nation’s west and east coasts, and approach sustainability more directly. Sunstock Solar Festival and Destination Moon acknowledge the environmental impact music festivals face and have responded to this pitfall by powering 100% of their music with solar energy. Building upon scholarship of popular music and mass movements—in particular Reebee Garofalo’s work on “mega-events” in *Rockin’ the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*—I explore the production, sponsorship, and sustainability efforts of these festivals, as well as the driving impact of live performance and audience reception unique to the communities these events create. I also acknowledge traits of environmentalist music identified in Pedelty’s most recent work, *A Song to Save the Salish Sea: Music Performance as Environmental Activism*,

which attempts to remedy some of the open-ended contradictions brought up in his previous work. In sum efforts by events like Beardfest, Destination Moon, and Sunstock establish a newly emerging and important role for popular music events in the face of dire environmental crises. They effectively circulate important messages of sustainable living to attendees through the spaces they create, and in doing so, build upon the environmentalist movement through the future action they inspire.

Departing from the phenomena of mass events and live music performance, Chapter Three looks to recorded music as another medium for environmental activism. Such is found in the collaborative anti-fracking CD project *Buy This Fracking Album*, and the debut self-titled album by the activist alternative rock group, Trapdoor Social. Both albums in this chapter are analyzed under an ecocritical lens and directly address environmental messages present in their music through the use of lyrics, instrumentation, and genre. Additionally, I look more holistically at the ways in which each album functions as a singular body of social influence through a constructed lens of sound studies and popular culture. They are each powerful examples of popular music that manage to divert the constraints of capitalist production and express powerful environmental messages in their music. By extension, they provide substantive evidence through a collective of thoughts, perspectives, and musical ideas that further showcase how popular music is effectively driving change in the face of environmental crises.

The concluding chapter stands a bit in contrast from the preceding two in terms of approach towards music and environmentalism. It focuses specifically on another environmental issue—noise pollution. Departing from the work of acoustic ecologists like R. Murray Schafer, I take on an activist approach within Disability Studies to represent the world of anthropogenic noise in a new light. Rather than viewing music as a direct intervention on environmental crises,

the tables are turned. Instead, I situate music as a particular avenue in which noise pollution becomes something other than a harmful environmental pollutant to the nonnormative listener. In this sense, music becomes an entry point through which people may gain access to the environmental movement which, in its current state, bears numerous qualities inaccessible to a nonnormative body. Using Joseph N. Straus's work on nonnormative modes of hearing, I consider the diverse hearing ecologies of composers, musicians, and sound artists whose work becomes informed (not always negatively) by noise pollution. Despite this chapter's diverse approach, it remains aligned with the overarching goal of this thesis. It shows, from an albeit unexpected angle, how music can impact the social understanding of certain environmental issues even in ways that view widely researched problems like noise pollution in a new light.

Whether the music studied in this thesis inspires more environmental activism or challenges the perspectives from which we experience certain ecological issues, I hope above all else to have illuminated the significance of popular music to the evolving social and cultural understandings of environmental crises within the United States. With inevitable political and social implications that will surely complicate the nation's positioning with these crises, we can only benefit from diversifying our understanding of environmentalism and its relationship with popular music.

## CHAPTER II: THE SUMMER MUSIC FESTIVAL AS TEMPORARILY CONSTRUCTED COMMUNITY FOR EFFECTIVE ENVIRONMENTALIST WORK

During the nation's warmest months, the music festival has become practically synonymous with the summer season. With festival goers of all ages, these events instill a shared enthusiasm for live music while providing temporary built communities in which participants often come together for a weekend, camp in the woods, and jam out. The atmosphere is probably a familiar one for many—a woodsy setting flooded with tents and campsites of festival-goers, an outdoor stage (or two, or three) with musical acts rocking out until 4am each night, heady scents of patchouli and burning sage, and an array of body paint and henna tattoos to span the entire visible color spectrum. The music festival, as American popular culture knows it, has been around for several decades and may be traced back to the Woodstock Music and Art Fair of 1969. Recently however, festivals have grown more environmentally conscious as the stakes for environmental crises have heightened.

An increased sense of urgency regarding these crises within the nation's social sphere may be attributed to a growing body of research on climate change, whose overwhelming data points to detrimental change in the world's climate conditions, while citing anthropogenic activity as a leading cause for changes. Putting this further into perspective, the World Climate Research Programme whose mission is to “facilitate the analysis and prediction of Earth system variability and change for use in an increasing range of practical applications of direct relevance, benefit, and value to society,” has tirelessly reviewed the implications of these crises. Most broadly, the sharp increase of greenhouse gas emissions (the majority of which are anthropogenically sourced) has led to environmental crises like the destruction of the Earth's cryosphere (frozen water, ice sheets, glaciers, snow, permafrost, sea ice) leading to sea-level

changes and coastal erosion, as well as extreme shifts in weather leading to drought, storms, heatwaves, and heavier precipitation.<sup>4</sup> While these implications occur on a global scale, recent setbacks within U.S. politics have heightened the need for environmental action on a national level. Within its first few months of operation, the Trump administration has implemented radical changes to U.S. environmental policy. Among some of the most recent and jarring developments made by President Donald Trump include heavy financial cuts to U.S science and environmental agencies like the EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and NOAA (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association) and even more profoundly his signing of the executive order for Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth on March 28th to dismantle work on climate change previously instituted by the Obama administration. The order is a completely polarized contradiction to the root cause of climate change—the burning of fossil fuels. It downplays future costs of carbon emissions, alleviates tracking of the federal government’s carbon emissions, and dissolves Obama-era executive orders aimed at helping the country prepare for climate change’s most detrimental implications to national security.<sup>5</sup> The motivations at work here are heavily business-oriented. Boldly in the face of substantial scientific evidence, the Trump administration seizes fossil fuel dependency as an instantly-gratifying financial opportunity in need of fewer regulations to stimulate economic growth. Perhaps it *will* stimulate economic growth, but at what cost, and for how long? Such actions are simply not at all sustainable in the long-term. These fuel sources are in fact limited, as they only feed into the chronic human dependency and overuse of limited resources. Humanity currently

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<sup>4</sup> World Climate Research Programme, “Our Mission,” <https://www.wcrp-climate.org/about-wcrp/wcrp-overview>.

<sup>5</sup> See the Presidential Executive Order on Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth, (March 28, 2017).

stands at a point in time in which preventative action against the implications brought on by climate change should not be delayed.

Fortunately, despite executive action that goes against concrete scientific evidence, there is hope yet for modes of sustainable living that break fossil fuel dependency that are being negotiated throughout the nation in a variety of ways. Within popular culture, environmentally-conscious music festivals are steadily trending alongside rising public awareness on the need for sustainability. From making conscious efforts towards waste reduction to the production of entire festivals whose main theme encompasses environmentalism through its sponsors and musicians, festivals are clearly aligning with a growing public concern for the environment.

While exciting, it is important to challenge these new implementations and their potential. Are these trends facilitating something genuinely effective in benefiting the environment, or are they simply a fad? I will say upfront that I am optimistic of these efforts and in full support of what they are hoping to accomplish. In pointing out where efforts can go wrong and where they are generally less effective, I only wish to strengthen the developments being made by popular music against environmental crises (specifically in the form of music festivals) through speculation of what works and what does not. In this chapter lies a mixture of some of my own ethnographic experiences with these festivals, and in conversation with festival founders and musicians. Through engagement with recent ecomusicological discourses that explores the ways in which music engages environmental issues and a historical acknowledgement of previous endeavors made by environmentalist music, the following case studies examine several environmentally-conscious music festivals as temporarily constructed communities. I feel each of them demonstrate new ways of negotiating environmental crises through their capacity to propel festival-goers into a more sustainability-oriented mindset and in turn, inspire necessary

environmental action in the long-term. Further, this chapter connects the resulting experiences of festival attendees to broader political, social, and environmental contexts and considers the capability of those experiences to create lasting change on the environmental movement.

In his 2011 publication *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment*, Mark Pedelty highlighted some of the primary pitfalls of popular music and its engagement with environmental issues. In it, he made the distinction that large-scale pop music is “clearly at odds with the environment,” stating that musicians of this kind often bear with them numerous contradictions between their environmental intentions and the actual material effect of their musical lifestyles.<sup>6</sup> He situates U2’s 360° Tour as a particular offender of this contradiction (the very first statement of the book’s introduction is “U2 hates the planet”) and laments even further his own struggles as a musician in a rock band whose power consumption and musical performance seemed to contradict the very message of the events at which they performed. From these assumptions and through his own experiences, Pedelty questions heavily both the material impact and overall aesthetic potential of popular music in terms of effectively creating environmental change, and I would say he is rightful in this skepticism. Yet in spite of this, I would argue that there also exists environmentalist music that is achieving concrete environmental change without falling victim to these contradictions. This chapter situates three music festivals as some of the most recent instances of environmentalist music whose endeavors I believe manage to evade these pitfalls. Through innovation within festival performer-audience ideologies, physical sound production, and energy consumption I believe they set the bar for some of the ways in which popular music is currently delivering concrete environmentalist work.

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<sup>6</sup> Mark Pedelty, *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 2.

Despite Pedelty's skepticism in *Ecomusicology*, there remains a strong foundation in popular music scholarship that supports popular music's potential in driving social change, particularly through mass movements. Reebee Garofalo's *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements* is especially helpful for understanding the impact of mass music events like the festivals studied here and their effect on large-scale movements like environmentalism. In direct opposition to Marxist analysis that claims popular culture is reflective of ideas favoring the ruling class, Garofalo dismantles this notion by demonstrating the potential of popular music as an effective political tool. Through the exploration of "mega-events" or large-scale activist concerts like Farm Aid, Sun City, and Rock Against Racism, *Rockin' the Boat* weighs the delicate elemental struggle of popular music as a voice for rebellion in the face of capitalist cooptation. By extension, I feel that a number of environmentally-conscious music festivals are currently delivering new ways in which environmental crises are dealt with through their potential to subvert ingrained lifestyle habits that are less than sustainable—a parallel to Neal Ullestad's contribution in his chapter "Diverse Rock Rebellions Subvert Mass Media Hegemony."<sup>7</sup> In this chapter, Ullestad argues that large-scale music in the realm of popular culture holds the capacity to significantly activate social consciousness in ways that offer "lessons of difference and similarity that have implications beyond their immediate impact."<sup>8</sup> The music festivals studied in this chapter work similarly by sustaining long term effects that last beyond the confines of the events themselves, acting as the cultural interventions needed for

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<sup>7</sup> Ullestad notes that a similar phenomenon also stems from Walter Benjamin's "shock effects," in which "day-to-day life is expressed in art and serves to stimulate a need to overcome the crises that confront us." Neal Ullestad, "Diverse Rock Rebellions Subvert Mass Media Hegemony," in *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 43.

<sup>8</sup> Neal Ullestad, "Diverse Rock Rebellions Subvert Mass Media Hegemony" in *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 38.

carrying out positive environmental change.<sup>9</sup> More recently, the work of these festivals may be paired with another optimistic framework coincidentally also constructed by Pedelty in his 2016 follow-up work *A Song to Save the Salish Sea: Musical Performance and Environmental Activism*.

In what ways, then, do these festivals manage both to effectively facilitate musical entertainment and remaining environmentally relevant? As Pedelty previously alluded to in *Ecomusicology*, there is much that environmentalist music, particularly in popular culture has to learn. *A Song to Save the Salish Sea*, arriving five years later, is perhaps the answer to the questions *Ecomusicology* raises but does not answer, and is this chapter's primary point of departure for analyzing powerful environmentalist music currently at work in the United States. Picking up where he left off in *Ecomusicology*, Pedelty writes with the goal of sharing new ideas for how musicians, citizens, consumers, activists, organizers, and communities can all work together to make music function more effectively from an ecological standpoint. This is certainly no easy task and requires delicately balanced activist work on both a local and global scale. Thankfully, Pedelty offers some key identifiers with which to measure the success (or lack thereof) of environmentalist music. Further, this chapter is one whose sites are set on exploring the significance and potential of popular music festivals to facilitate social and cultural understandings of environmental problems, particularly in the realms of sustainability.<sup>10</sup>

The following case studies involve a set of music festivals whose ideologies I believe are instilling some of the most profound environmentalist strategies made by popular music to date.

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>10</sup> This thesis is perhaps in parallel with another in-progress personal research project being conducted by Juha Torvinen, Academy Research Fellow and Adjunct professor of musicology at Turku University whose forthcoming research observes relationships with music, nature, and environmentalism in Northern contemporary music. For more information see Torvinen (2014-2019).

Through detailed analyses of endeavors made by the annual New Jersey-based festival, Beardfest, as well as clean-energy festivals Destination Moon and Sunstock Solar Festival, this chapter looks to the East and West coasts of the United States for some of the nation's forefronting demonstrations of how music can assist with the ways in which we confront environmental concerns. In doing so, my hope is to additionally provide clear and accessible knowledge of environmentalist success made by these popular music festivals so that others might be similarly inspired to take similar action, and even build upon these innovations.

Environmental themes have long been represented in music in a wide variety of genres including classical, folk, rock, metal, and even hip hop. In popular culture specifically, there have been numerous environmentally-inflected hits like Joni Mitchell's "Big Yellow Taxi," John Denver's "Rocky Mountain High," and Michael Jackson's "Earth Song" (just to name a very small few) to accompany societal distaste for environmental degradation. However, despite this presence, the musical representation of the environmental movement differs from other social movements in that it has lacked any singular unifying anthem. In *A Song to Save the Salish Sea*, Pedelty gives several possible reasons for this. The first, is that the environmental movement itself is fairly young, dating from the late sixties and early seventies when industrial pollutants were initially problematized. Additionally, he posits that environmental themes are more difficult to fit into popular musical genres in an anthemic way. While acknowledged by the masses, environmental crises themselves are inherently "invisible problems" (again, rising temperatures on a global scale, cryosphere depletion not directly visible) whose blame is more widely shared across the human race. Finally, because the environmental movement consists of a vast body of organizations, issues, and events, it is difficult to prescribe one all-encompassing anthem that accounts for *all* the problems raised by the movement. Instead, songs often associated with

environmental issues occur at a regional or local level. Because of these differences, environmentally-focused music often falls short of success. While perhaps discouraging, I feel that there are other important ways in which music negotiates environmental issues that don't necessarily need to be anthemic to have an impact. I address this notion with a few central questions: In what *new* ways are these festivals contributing to the environmental movement that previous environmentalist music has not attempted? Further, how are these new implementations changing the ways in which environmental issues are represented by music?

To answer these questions, I suggest we look more deeply into the ways in which the temporary communities created by these festivals are catalyzing environmentalist action both by informing their attendees directly with knowledge on environmental sustainability, and more indirectly through consciousness-raising by way of live musical performance. Resulting success for the environmentally-inflected music festival, in this case, closely revolves around four main points identified in *A Song to Save the Salish Sea*: attracting audiences, working with particular environmental movements (there are hundreds, so singling some of them out is key), maintaining some staying power beyond the particular instance in which the musical event occurs, and effectively advocating for biodiversity, healthy ecosystems, or environmental justice.<sup>11</sup> The last of these points is easily the most difficult to quantify, and likely the point from which most skepticism is drawn. As Pedelty says, “we just have to assume, logically, that such musical efforts matter,” and I believe they do.<sup>12</sup> I believe popular music has the capacity to advocate for environmental ideals, adopt a less energy-intensive profile without compromising the sound of its genres, and even avoid some of the contradictions it has fallen victim to in the past. To

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<sup>11</sup> Mark Pedelty, *A Song to Save the Salish Sea: Music Performance as Environmental Activism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 17.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

illustrate this, I first bring into discussion the annual New Jersey-based music festival Beardfest, which creates a fruitful space for the exchange of musical and environmental ideas.

### **Hammonton, New Jersey's Beardfest**

Of the three festivals discussed in this chapter, Beardfest, a summer music festival situated in the rural outskirts of Hammonton, New Jersey, adheres most consistently to a traditional music festival mold in that it is an annually recurring multi-day event in which festival-goers gather to camp in the woods and enjoy music together. At first-glance, Beardfest would seem exactly like the typical summer music festival falling victim to the contradictions Pedelty laments about in *Ecomusicology*. Yet despite this, and after attending this weekend-long event myself to speak with some of its musicians, sponsors, and fellow festival-goers, I can say firsthand that I believe Beardfest is on track to something quite revolutionary in terms of environmentally-conscious music of the 21st century. There are numerous factors that can be attributed to Beardfest's success, and a closer look at the festival's humble beginnings is a great place to start. The festival was founded in 2012 by the seven-person ensemble Out of the Beardspace who self-describes their genre of music as everything from "eclectic space pop" to "highly fused eco rock."<sup>13</sup> In its infantile stages, the festival began simply as a going away party for the band prior to their six-month residency at a remote mountain farm in Landen, Virginia. Though the initial festival might have had little to do with fostering environmental consciousness, it was from their residency at the farm that inspiration really struck. Spending six months in rural isolation together as a band, Out of the Beardspace deepened its connection with nature through exploration of organic farming and outdoor living. To present, those inspirations

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<sup>13</sup> See the "About" section on the Out of the Beardspace Facebook page. Out of the Beardspace, "About," Facebook website, [https://www.facebook.com/pg/beardspace/about/?ref=page\\_internal](https://www.facebook.com/pg/beardspace/about/?ref=page_internal) (accessed May 1, 2017).

remain evident and take shape in the festival through the musicians that play at the event who share similar environmentalist ideals about sustainability as well as through an array of participative workshops designed to educate festival-goers on sustainable living practices like permaculture, organic gardening, and even the construction of earthships—a form of radically sustainable biotecture touted as “the most versatile and economical green building design in the world.”<sup>14</sup>

My own experience was at Beardfest’s fifth annual celebration from June 16 to 18 of 2016. I traveled out to Paradise Lakes Campground in rural Hammonton, New Jersey where the festival was being held that year to get a better sense of the spectator-performer dichotomy the festival claims to breach. I have to say, I was impressed. I’ve attended music festivals in the past in which musicians take the stage, perform, and retreat in a way that, while entertaining in the moment, becomes totally removed from the rest of the festival experience. With Beardfest, many musicians camped among festival-goers, stuck around after their performances to enjoy subsequent acts with the audience, and even led some of the sustainably-minded workshops that were held during the day. I was additionally surprised by the approachability of virtually everyone at the festival. Green Mountain Energy, a sustainable energy company and one of the festival’s sponsors actually approached *me* as a total stranger simply to say “hello” and talk about sustainable living, and ways to slash energy consumption. Some might have taken that as a marketing strategy, but it really didn’t feel that way through the casual conversation we were making. Acknowledging upfront that I lived outside of their business radius, the Green Mountain representative was still eager simply to share ideas for building a sustainable future.<sup>15</sup> Another

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<sup>14</sup>“Radically Sustainable Buildings,” *Earthship Biotecture*, <http://earthship.com/> (accessed April 10, 2017).

<sup>15</sup> Presently, Green Mountain Energy serves households in Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, and Texas.

sponsor tied to the festival's sustainable interests was the Philadelphia Orchard Project (POP), an organization dedicated to expanding community-based food production, environmental benefits, and other opportunities for nature education.<sup>16</sup> With POP representatives engaging with festival-goers throughout the weekend, this particular sponsorship was yet another point through which sustainable knowledge was spread.

But what of the festival's music? Like Out of the Beardspace, many of the musicians featured at the festival shared similar environmental motivations. They ranged from small acoustic solo acts to high-energy booming headliners like Moon Hooch and Cory Henry and the Funk Apostles.<sup>17</sup> Whether the music bore an explicit environmental message or not, experiencing these concerts in the overall environment of the festival seemed to bring a shared sense of being. I had the opportunity to speak with Moon Hooch member Wenzl McGowen outside of the festival community, and during conversation we shared a similar sense of this phenomenon, which he personally referred to as a "collective feedback loop." Asking to elaborate on this concept in musical context, McGowen sees the concerts they perform as heightened forms of this phenomenon. Speaking to live concerts like the ones given at Beardfest he says:

There's so many people focusing on you and what you're doing, and this sort of engages this collective feedback loop of a focus of creative energy, of ecstasy, of bliss, of heightened emotions, and that gives everybody the opportunity to get to a higher level of emotional coherence, right? Or at least, you know, I like to call it. Like heightened emotions, like gratitude and compassion and forgiveness – these kinds of emotions – you're more likely to get them if you raise your vibration, like really express yourself. I think music can help do that for me every night, it's sort of like a crazy journey. Like really stepping out of the way, and letting this energy flow through me and trying to become a vessel for the energy that once had manifested itself once on this planet... the way that performers carry themselves and what emotional state they are in sort of changes what's culturally acceptable in the moment... The energy that the performer brings, modifies the cultural acceptability. And so, people get to explore themselves

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<sup>16</sup> Philadelphia Orchard Project website, <https://www.phillyorchards.org/> (accessed March 22, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> For complete lists of the festival's past three lineups see Beardfest website "past lineups" under "Music," <http://www.beardfest.net/music/past-lineups/> (accessed March 22, 2017).

through a new lense in a new way at shows.<sup>18</sup>

I believe this lense which McGowen is referring to becomes a common theme in all of the music performed at Beardfest, and in festivals like it. Returning to Garofalo, McGowen's "collective feedback loop" is a powerful part of the progressive potential within events like these in which the interactions between performers and audience become mutually responsible for the festival's progressive potential.<sup>19</sup> Through shared feelings of consciousness and creative energy, the moods constructed by live performance in this setting facilitate learning in a way that is transformative for the individual, thereby supplementing the educational features of the festival that occur alongside the music (sustainability workshops, outreach work of sponsors). Collectively, Beardfest manages to become a temporarily constructed community with a thriving and accessible atmosphere of musicians and activists alike who are dedicated to equipping festival-goers with the tools needed to build a more sustainable lifestyle. Bearing all of this in mind, I believe Beardfest is absolutely a successful implementation of present-day environmentalist music and adheres to many of the indicators outlined by Pedelty in *A Song to Save the Salish Sea*—it attracts a substantial audience, works with particular environmental concerns (sustainable living), and maintains staying power through its annual recurrence. These factors are likely responsible for Beardfest's substantial growth from its first year as an impromptu going away party in a relatively short amount of time with attendance rising steadily with each passing year. Additionally, Beardfest's collaboration with sustainability efforts through its sponsors and workshop lecturers works together with the collective enthusiasm ignited already by the music itself to create a particularly stimulating and engaging environment

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<sup>18</sup> Wenzl McGowen, personal interview, April 2017.

<sup>19</sup> Reebee Garofalo, "Understanding Mega-Events: If We Are the World, Then How Do We CHange It?" in *Rockin' the Boat: Mass Music and Mass Movements*, ed. Reebee Garofalo (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 19.

for exchanging environmentally relevant ideas. While profound, this raises a more pressing question: is all of this engagement with festival-goers enough to sustain enthusiasm beyond the event itself? Additionally, if it is, will it assist in mobilizing the regional public towards more sustainable living practices as a whole? Again, while it is nearly impossible to quantify an exact answer, after experiencing it myself and speaking with a number of individuals involved, I feel there is plenty evidence to make a logical assumption: that the musical and sustainable efforts of Beardfest matter in their potential to drive the environmentalist movement forward in the face of current climate crises.

### **Rise of the Solar Festival**

Sustainability is becoming increasingly vital in the wake of climate crises. Just about everywhere you turn, you see modern-day conventions “going green,” including cars, household appliances, clothing, food, and more. It is then no surprise that similar “greening” attitudes have been gaining popularity with the summer music festival. More specifically solar powered music festivals themselves are becoming a growing trend all their own, and for good reason. Not surprisingly, these trends parallel an overall increase in solar energy use on a national, and even global scale. In the face of climate change and fossil fuel dependency, solar power is a coveted weapon in the fight against environmental crises as it is one of three primary sources of renewable energy (the others being wind and hydro power). Historically, solar energy has been used to power satellites like the U.S. Vanguard 1 and Russian Sputnik-3 since 1958, and today it is the power source for all satellites responsible for weather transmission, direct TV, radio, and GPS.<sup>20</sup> Additionally solar energy has increased gradually on a commercial scale during the last three decades of the 20th century in response to oil crises of the 1970s. Yet, it was not until the

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<sup>20</sup> Paul Breeze, *Solar Power Generation* (Saint Louis, GB: Academic Press, 2016), 5.

first decade of the 21st century that solar energy costs saw a dramatic drop in overall costs for construction and installation, making it more domestically accessible.<sup>21</sup> Currently, sunlight is harnessed directly in two ways: through solar thermal energy which derives heat directly from solar radiation, and photovoltaic cells which turn sunlight into electrical energy. Photovoltaics (PV) are most commonly what we think of in terms of solar power and are the source of energy for the festivals following suit with this sustainable energy trend. In general, there seems to be widespread hope for low-impact music festivals as a new environmental standard, and as solar technology continues to evolve into a cost-effective option for renewable energy, it makes sense why electricity-dependent festivals are investing in PV as a viable source with which to power their music. Such a trend has even breached some of the largest-scale events like the annual Manchester, Tennessee-based music and arts festival Bonnaroo which in 2013, permanently installed solar panels on some of its staging and reduced its overall energy consumption of performances by twenty percent.<sup>22</sup> In an article published by Sunworks Solar Power, the reasoning behind this growth in solar powered festivals is three-fold as solar energy maintains long-term financial value, diminishes environmental impact, and resonates emotionally with the ideals of environmentally-conscious festival-goers (of which there are increasingly many).<sup>23</sup> Though there are still skeptics wary of the reliability of solar power (especially to sustain hours upon hours of live musical performance), many organizations across the country are seeing

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the panels were financed by a mere \$1 increase in ticket sales. Jason Koebler, *US News*, “Sun, Drugs, and Rock N’ Roll: Bonnaroo Goes Solar,” June 2013, <https://www.usnews.com/news/articles/2013/06/13/bonnaroo-to-use-solar-power-for-first-time-in-festival-history> (accessed April 15 2017). Additionally, it should be noted that Bonnaroo has since added a “sustainability” tab to its website, detailing the sustainability efforts of the festival and encouraging festival goers to do the same. See Bonnaroo Music and Arts Festival website, <https://www.bonnaroo.com/experience/sustainability/> (accessed April 15, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Seth Atchue, March 1, 2016, “Solar Powered Music Festivals,” Sunworks Solar Power website, <https://sunworksusa.com/blog/solar-powered-music-festivals/> (accessed April 15, 2017).

success with solar power, and are slowly breaking the mold.<sup>24</sup> To further explore the current rise in solar-powered music sweeping the nation, I take to cases from the country's West and East coasts.

### **The West Coast: L.A.'s Sunstock Solar Festival**

Though incredibly young, the Sunstock Solar Festival is one of two festivals I feel are at the forefront of successfully marrying music with sustainability through the use of solar energy. The Los Angeles-based festival was founded in 2015 by local band Trapdoor Social, and made its debut on June 18 of 2016—a fitting date, just two days prior to the summer solstice. Towards its mission to “unite community around sustainable solutions,” Sunstock fosters an all-or-nothing mentality with its environmental efforts, generating 100% of its energy needs from solar power, not only in terms of sound production, but also for its lighting, vendors, and food trucks—a truly sustainable “zero-waste” event. Additionally, *all* proceeds from the event are donated to help fund local solar charity projects.<sup>25</sup> With a variety of musical acts like Cults, Wavves, Kaki King, and Trapdoor Social themselves, the festival showcases a variety of mainstream indie rock suitable for all ages. The festival's motivations even reach beyond the event itself. Sunstock's founders, Trapdoor Social continue their drive for environmental action with their most recent album debut (which will be discussed in the following chapter in greater detail) and 2017 tour in which the band is actively putting on concerts at universities and outdoor venues across the country all the while traveling in their solar paneled trailer.<sup>26</sup> Returning to Pedelty's “success

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<sup>24</sup> Similar trends are also occurring on a global scale; Weayaya Festival in Alberta, Canada and Off the Grid in Melbourne, Australia are other solar powered music festivals gaining magnitude.

<sup>25</sup> As listed on the festival's website under the “Mission” page, proceeds go to partner GRID Alternatives who will use generated funds to install new rooftop solar power for Kids Cancer Connection, virtually eliminating electricity bills. See “Mission,” Sunstock Solar Festival website, <http://sunstocksolarfestival.com/mission> (accessed April 2015, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> See “About,” Trapdoor Social website, <http://www.trapdoorsocial.com/about/> (accessed April 17, 2017).

model” of environmentalist music, the Sunstock Solar Festival is a fantastic representation of effective environmentalism in that it has proved itself successful in attracting a local audience in its first year. Additionally, it collaborates with specific environmental organizations of the surrounding area and achieves staying-power as it educates festival-goers about other local environmentally-conscious non-profits. This may all be taken as evidence to logically assume that the festival, together with its artists, concert-goers, partners, and sponsors, effectively works to advocate for the importance and potential of solar energy and sustainable living as a whole. Through engaging festival-goers with some of the festival’s other nonprofit partners like Sierra Club (Angeles Chapter), Food and Water Watch, and So Cal 350, Sunstock is surely proof of strength in numbers and a model for how successful environmentalist music is taking shape in the twenty-first century.<sup>27</sup>

### **More Music From the Sun: The East Coast’s Destination Moon**

Similarly active on the East coast is Destination Moon, a New York City-based production company dedicated to coordinating music festivals and other large-scale events while simultaneously minimizing overall energy consumption and waste production. Chiefly, Destination Moon’s claim-to-fame lies in its provision of solar energy to power all stages, music, and art installations associated with its events. With humble origins, Destination Moon began merely as a series of house parties in Brooklyn’s Crown Heights whose co-founders shared a common interest in supporting the local music scene. While these parties were generally well-attended, Destination Moon noticed in its early development a clashing of interest between the large-scale music events they frequented and their own environmentalist ideologies. In

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<sup>27</sup> For a complete list of Sunstock’s partners see “Partners,” Sunstock Solar Festival website, <http://sunstocksolarfestival.com/partners> (accessed April 17, 2017).

particular, they noticed the high prevalence of summer music festivals to produce large amounts of waste and to misuse energy consumption—an additional conflict of interest of both musicians and festival goers alike. From this, Destination Moon took to a goal towards truly balancing large-scale musical productions with environmental awareness, utilizing a combination of solar power and carefully planned waste management in effort to change the sustainable pitfalls common with music festivals.<sup>28</sup> In regards to attracting a substantial audience, Destination Moon has grown significantly from its launch party in 2013 to its present form. I take particular interest in its most recent event, which was monumental in that it was the company's first multi-day production—the Destination Moon Festival held at Camp Lakota in Wurtsboro, New York. Taking a break from its typical urban roots in New York City, the event took to a more rural setting to the City's northwest—perhaps its most monumental environmental move to date. Within a rural campground setting, Destination Moon becomes placed-based in a way that connects concert-goers more directly to nature. Yet they state upfront that their overall intentions as a production company are more than just throwing an annual music festival. Destination Moon attempts to break the standard festival mold in favor of more ephemeral annual production. This is demonstrated by the company's history, as none of its previous events have been identical in location, breadth, nor composition. Rather, Destination Moon evolves based on the resources available and on the current interests and endeavors of its founding members at the time. What makes Destination Moon a particularly strong company as a whole is that its environmental endeavors are not just a fleeting side project, but are instead at its very foundation

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<sup>28</sup> Solar power derived from DC Solar Solutions Model SCT20 portable generator which produces up to 20 kilowatts. Waste management enlisted company Zero to Go. See DJ Pangburn, "How to Build a Greener, Solar-Powered Music Festival," June 3, 2014, Motherboard website, [https://motherboard.vice.com/en\\_us/article/how-to-build-a-greener-more-sustainable-music-festival](https://motherboard.vice.com/en_us/article/how-to-build-a-greener-more-sustainable-music-festival) (accessed April 17, 2017).

as the vast majority of its productions are entirely solar powered. With a diverse body of musical acts ranging from the afrobeat of Antibalas to the contemporary percussion of TIGUE, Destination Moon helps to environmentally inflect the performances featured at its events with its commitment to solar energy. Through the words of one of its three founders Jonah Trager, “with the best live acts in New York on a fully solar stage, immersive large scale art, swimming and camping all in a beautiful sprawling setting you can’t go wrong. Destination Moon proves you can party hard with minimal effect on your environment,” and so I feel we can expect the trend of the solar festival to remain strong for years to come.<sup>29</sup>

Returning once more to *A Song to Save the Salish Sea*, exactly what does Destination Moon have that makes it successful? For starters, through its enthusiasm with actively organizing musical functions and carrying out sustainable music production with solar energy, its effort as an environmentally-conscious production company become more than just an act of “greenwashing.” Destination Moon connects with its surrounding communities and local artists to bolster a simultaneous appreciation of music and facilitation of clean energy. Since Destination Moon is neither consistent in its location, size, or length from year to year like Sunstock or Beardfest, it becomes more of an intangible endeavor while at the very core of its values lies a shared interest among its founders to push the bar for music events that are truly sustainable. It is not necessarily a political outcry in direct opposition against a specific environmental issue, but instead a method behind the music which aligns both performers and audience members more closely with the environmentalist values to which they often subscribe.

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<sup>29</sup> Interview with ToddStar Photography. See “NEWS: Destination Moon Music & Arts Festival Set to Take Place From 6/17 - 6/19, May 13, 2016, Toddstar Photography website, <http://www.toddstarphotography.com/blog/2016/5/news-destination-moon-music-arts-festival-set-to-take-place-from-6/17---6/19> (accessed April 20, 2017).

Still, while solar-powered music festivals are growing in numbers and attracting audiences with their innovation, many will question whether or not they are truly making an impact. Perhaps a more vital way of measuring their effectiveness is to address the audiences of these events more directly. Noisey, the music channel of popular culture magazine *Vice* sought out to do just that, asking festival-goers in Melbourne, Australia at a similar event called Off the Grid if they thought solar festivals of this kind might have any sort of staying power, and if the events made them more conscious of their own impact on the environment. While those interviewed in this article were attendees of Australia's Off the Grid, the overarching question was inflected towards solar festivals in a broader sense. I believe it translates well to the Sunstock and Destination Moon festivals. Overall, the responses were optimistic and suggestive of success. Here are some of the responses:

Yes, it will work. It's the responsibility of all festivals to be as environmentally sustainable as possible, especially if they're going to have any longevity. It would be nice if we could have low-impact festivals as the new standard.

-Katy

One hundred percent. People need to be smarter with what they're doing, and the materials used for this festival are accessible – though it's probably more expensive – but it's something that people appreciate now, especially the generation below me.

-CC Disco

Prior to this I've never really thought about my individual impact on the environment through a festival. Festivals contribute to a lot of waste, and for the most part, it'd depend on what they're doing with that – which we're not really told about. So it's hard because you get stuck into habits. I know I've left stuff around festival grounds before.

-Liv

I think it'd be difficult for this festival to survive because it's so niche. So instead of creating an entirely new festival, they could tag-team with bigger festivals to provide this completely sustainable stage. And right now, this looks really cool, but it's not really infiltrating the wider music festival market, so you're preaching to the converted.

-Lachy<sup>30</sup>

These responses surely suggest that solar music festivals are sites of popular music where fruitful environmentalist action can occur, but what makes all the festivals studied in this chapter effective as a whole? Surely their place in society can be taken as a sign that environmental crises are growing increasingly urgent. Additionally, their place in environmentalist work will likely only grow as the need for environmentalism rises in the nation's current political climate. Yet above all else, these three case studies share a common thread largely responsible for their environmental progressiveness: they express an understanding of social, political, and environmental contexts. Through this mutual understanding and in the context of these temporarily constructed communities, they instill accessible settings through which music, society, and environment can circulate. They provide a hunger for environmental action in conjunction with the musical entertainment they provide, and I believe the festivals analyzed in this chapter hold significant potential as effective environmentalist tools whose capacity for facilitating environmentally-inflected social change has only just begun to be utilized in full.

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<sup>30</sup> Only first names were provided with the article. See Alan Weedon, "We Asked People at a Solar Powered Music Festival If They Thought It Was Workable?" Noisy website, [https://noisy.vice.com/en\\_au/article/we-asked-people-at-a-solar-powered-music-festivals-if-they-thought-it-was-workable](https://noisy.vice.com/en_au/article/we-asked-people-at-a-solar-powered-music-festivals-if-they-thought-it-was-workable) (accessed April 15, 2017).

CHAPTER III: ENVIRONMENTALIST MUSIC PRODUCTION: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS  
OF *BUY THIS FRACKING ALBUM* AND THE MUSIC OF TRAPDOOR SOCIAL

Where social conflict has existed alongside humankind, music has been close behind to sound out hardships as a sort of archival outlet for feelings of dissatisfaction, outrage, and hope for improvement, whatever the troubles may be. Because music has driven pivotal points throughout history like the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 60s (“We Shall Overcome”), the work of peace activists in the 1970s (“Give Peace a Chance”), and the Global Human Rights Movement of the 1980s (again, Garofalo’s “mega-events” in rock), we cannot argue that music has historically sounded social struggles throughout human life. Despite this, whether music can actually be used as a viable tool for creating social change, and in this chapter more specifically *environmental* change, is hotly debated and an often-critiqued area of ecomusicological study.<sup>31</sup> This chapter continues to explore the negotiation of environmental crises through popular music by examining new ways in which it is being used as a vehicle for substantive environmental change. However, this chapter shifts its focus from the temporary communities of mass music events to a more critical analysis of two musical sources: Movement Music Record’s anti-fracking CD Project, *Buy This Fracking Album* and the L.A.-based alternative rock group Trapdoor Social with their recently debuted self-titled album. I will be looking at each album’s production and promotion, as well as some of each album’s key tracks to observe the ways in which they are musically negotiating certain environmental issues. Through these analyses, I argue that the musical techniques employed are an additional means of driving social and political force within the environmental movement, thereby further

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<sup>31</sup> Most notable and recent skepticism in Pedelty (2011),, but can be traced back historically to well-known critics of popular music like Theodor Adorno who saw popular music as little more than a hub for capitalist gain.

demonstrating some of the innovative ways in which popular music is effectively fighting environmental crises.

Even in today's diverse sphere of popular music, these albums take a unique turn with their production, music, and overarching environmental purpose. They intentionally remove themselves almost completely from the capitalist market of the popular culture mainstream in effort to purely self-sustain and move social consciousness against certain environmental issues.<sup>32</sup> Movement Music Records, an activist record company based in Glen Cove, New York, lends a term to those in this line of musical production. It designates *Buy this Fracking Album's* collaborators as "artists," or "people who push political agendas by the means of art."<sup>33</sup> The same description could very easily speak for the members of Trapdoor social. Yet, even within this optimistic mindset, many still question whether the significance of these albums truly manages to go beyond novelty. This argument can be traced back to conflicting viewpoints on popular music within the Frankfurt School of the early 1920s between Theodor W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin. Adorno is widely known for his his critique on music and popular culture, while Benjamin argued that popular music actually held the potential to advance radical politics.<sup>34</sup>

This still leaves us hungry for a tighter fit—a framework (or perhaps, multiple frameworks) more finely tailored to each album's intentions and to the current dynamic of music in popular culture. For this I turn to two highly interdisciplinary fields: sound studies and ecomusicology. In what follows, I observe in detail the contributions each album and their

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<sup>32</sup> While this is a broad assessment, it is only by coincidence that Movement Music Records and Trapdoor Social share opposition against the fracking regime in some of their most current work.

<sup>33</sup> Movement Music Records, "About Buy This Fracking Album," 2014, Movement Music Records website, <http://www.movementmusicrecords.com/#!/the-fracking-album/cmuv> (accessed February 24, 2017).

<sup>34</sup> These viewpoints are expressed in works like Adorno's "On Popular Music," (1941) and Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility,"(1936).

corresponding artists have to offer, through both an ethnomusicological and ecomusicological lens. Additionally, I will look holistically at the ways in which each album functions as a singular body of social influence by way of sound studies and popular culture.

Ethnomusicology often adopts the use of many literary frameworks around which to shape its own specialized musical discourses. While the preceding chapter focused more intently on the cultural impact of music festivals as temporarily constructed communities, this chapter's analyses stem more heavily from literary ecocriticism, which observes how cultural products (text, film, and now more recently music) portray human interaction with the natural environment from multiple viewpoints which include that of the scholar, politician, activist, and beyond. It is worth noting that this field of inquiry has only recently been applied to music and prevails most heavily in white Euro-American culture. Yet they need not be confined under these limits, as they are telling forms of political analysis focused on synthesizing environmental and social concerns in *any* culture. However, in effort to refine the wide geographical scope that this implies, this chapter (and thesis as a whole) focus its case studies primarily within the United States. In what follows, I position the albums of Movement Music Records and Trapdoor Social as cultural products bearing crucial contributions to modern politics, culture, and nature that serve as points through which to analyze human-environment interaction as well as a vehicles for social change.

Before further elaboration it is vital to point out binaries that undoubtedly exist between scientifically-driven ecologies and ecocriticism within the humanities. Greg Garrard aids us in identifying these binaries through his introductory work, *Ecocriticism*. While the two are inherently separate, Garrard elevates a crucial point—ecocriticism maintains that “ecological

problems are scientific problems rather than objects of cultural analysis.”<sup>35</sup> Rather, the cultural component of ecocritical analysis exists when we argue for a moral case of what *should* or *should not* be, in terms of environmental phenomena. In other words, this approach turns scientifically-grounded ecological concerns into something more digestible and widely perceivable to be contested politically, legally, and in popular culture.<sup>36</sup> But this is easier said than done, and while distinction is important, one must set sites on collaboration between what is scientific and what is political. Ecocritical research must stay humble in all it seeks to prove in recognizing that it cannot really contribute *quantitatively* to the ecological debate, but can instead “help to define, explore, and even resolve ecological problems” in a *qualitative*, humanistic sense.<sup>37</sup> Despite this binary, ecocriticism recognizes that nature is always, in some ways, culturally constructed. I take particular liking to these albums as cultural products of human-environment interaction because they so carefully ground themselves in raising awareness and encouraging action against prevailing social and environmental issues, while at the same time stay quick to recognize that the music alone will not amend all that is wrong with human-environment relationships.

The broad spectrum of discourse surrounding ecocriticism, and in particular ecomusicology, creates a communal site for engagement between numerous disciplines and uncoincidentally, like ecology’s reliance on biodiversity for health and survival, requires a diverse body of inquiry to thrive as a field of study in its own right. Forefronting ecomusicologists Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe have done substantial work in laying the groundwork for such study with their co-edited publication, *Current Directions in*

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<sup>35</sup> Greg Garrard, *Ecocriticism: The New Critical Idiom* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012), 5.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

*Ecomusicology*. In its introduction, Allen points out that ecomusicology extends upon ecocriticism in recognizing that “music and sound can be further media to communicate important ecological ideas and encourage action regarding environmental and sustainability issues.”<sup>38</sup> By extension, this chapter looks to the music within these albums, focusing on a key selection of what I feel are some of their most influential tracks. I also wish to make clear that I, nor the artists behind these albums, claim them to be a direct solution to scientifically quantified ecological problems. I see them instead as a synthesis between the sciences and humanities that unite community-level issues and project them onto a wider audience via media to work against prevailing environmental problems for the greater good of human society as a whole.

**Movement Music Record’s Anti-Fracking CD Project: *Buy This Fracking Album***

Prior to discussing this album, a brief explanation of the hydrofracking process is helpful in further contextualizing its music. Fracking itself is a process designed for gaining access to geological sites rich with large quantities of oil and natural gas that would have been otherwise inaccessible. Collectively, the process is well-intended enough in that it is designed to create new profitable sites for natural gas extraction in areas where this was not previously feasible. However, the process still perpetuates dependency on fossil fuels which is not sustainable over time. Further, the process involves the injection of man-made “fracking fluids” into these underground structural sites, which leads to physical fracture (hence the name). While a portion of this fracturing fluid resurfaces after injection, ceramic proppants that are also used within the fluid linger to hold the fractures open. It is estimated that approximately ninety percent of fracturing fluids remain underground. These remnants result in a host of environmental issues

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<sup>38</sup> Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe eds., *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 4.

spanning a broad spectrum, including (but not limited to) complications with water use, adverse effects on human health, surface water and soil contamination, reduction in air quality, improper waste disposal, and chemical disclosure.<sup>39</sup> For these reasons, many refuse to tolerate the negative implications of fracking that seem to outweigh any level of convenience or financial gain.

It is not surprising then, that an entire collaborative album of sustainably- and environmentally-minded music has been rectified specifically in protest of this process. What I humbly offer is a critical analysis of *Buy This Fracking Album* in which I explain elements of certain tracks by Jason Samel, the John Butler Trio, Moon Hooch, and Pete Seeger through their use of lyrics, instrumentation, and musical genre—all through an ecocritical, and more specifically ecomusicological, lens. Together, all of the artists featured on the album situate themselves under one unified stance: to reject fracking as a method of corporate advancement and to place value on the life of the everyday individual in the present and future.<sup>40</sup> With that, I feel these tracks work especially well for demonstrating new ways in which musical expression may convey environmental ideologies, making them indispensable examples of some of the most recent and most effective environmentalist music to date.

### **Jason Samel's "Activist"**

By collaborating not only with each other but with the anticipated audience of the album, the artists of *Buy This Fracking Album* create a communicative environment between artist and listener, which utilizes ecological sustainability in its most active form. This comes largely from recognizing environmental issues (in this case, fracking) while at the same time proposing

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<sup>39</sup>“Hydraulic Fracking 101,” 2015, Earthworks website, [http://www.earthworksaction.org/issues/detail/hydraulic\\_fracturing\\_101#.VUujC1U4nTY](http://www.earthworksaction.org/issues/detail/hydraulic_fracturing_101#.VUujC1U4nTY) (accessed March 23).

<sup>40</sup> Movement Music Records, “About Buy This Fracking Album,” 2014, Movement Music Records website, <http://www.movementmusicrecords.com/#!the-fracking-album/cmuv> (accessed February 24, 2017).

possible solutions. We see this exercised through the very core of *Buy This Fracking Album* and from the album's production company, Movement Music Records. Its president, Jason Samel took it upon himself to travel to notoriously harmful fracking sites within the state of Pennsylvania in order to first-handedly experience the object of protest. In an interview with *The Aquarian Weekly* he says, "I went to Dimock, Pennsylvania where the water supply was killed. A woman's daughter was throwing up every night after fracking because of ridiculous amounts of methane that poured into their sinks. People say that only happens in rural areas, small towns. I don't care if *one* person gets affected. But it's in so many places and thousands upon thousands of people have been affected."<sup>41</sup> Samel goes on to confirm that the purpose of the album is in fact to, "give voice to the voiceless, compete in some way with the multi-billion dollar corporate megaphones, and give support to those activists who have been strong enough to stand up and exercise their First Amendment rights."<sup>42</sup> *Buy This Fracking Album* is, in other words, an extension of the communities most affected by fracking, and an amplified cry for help.

These factors are all further solidified by Samel's own musical contribution to the album. His track, "Activist," featuring D.J. Logic, utilizes rhythms from notoriously political reggae genres akin to hallmarks like Bob Marley's "Get Up, Stand Up," particularly in its bass line grooves.<sup>43</sup> Samel's collective of artists and samples on his own track are especially powerful ways of illustrating his own deep-seeded personal desire for a sense of communal uprising

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<sup>41</sup> Bob Makin, "An Interview With Movement Music Records Founder Jason Samel: Buy This Fracking Album," 2015, *The Aquarian Weekly* website, <http://www.theaquarian.com/2015/06/17/an-interview-with-movement-music-records-founder-jason-samel-buy-this-fracking-album/> (accessed March 23, 2017).

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>43</sup> A comparison can be made between the two tracks following these links to Samel's "Activist," and Marley's "Get Up, Stand Up" respectively. See YouTube, August 17, 2015, "Official Anti-Fracking Song 'Activist' by Jay Samel W/DJ Logic and Friends - Ban Fracking Now," YouTube website, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jpuISYHDMoY> (accessed March 23, 2017). YouTube, September 5, 2015, "Get Up, Stand Up," YouTube website, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OAHdy2d2OoI> (accessed March 23, 2017).

against fracking corporations—a common theme throughout the album as a whole. The track as a whole mirrors Samel’s emotional wavering between the severity of the fracking situation in Pennsylvania and across the United States as well as the potential joy that can result from mass cooperation working towards a greater good for all.

### **John Butler Trio and “Revolution”**

I turn next to the John Butler Trio, an Australian roots band.<sup>44</sup> While founded outside of the U.S. the members of the trio are no strangers to the woes of hydro-fracking, as these same issues prevail in their home country as well. Their track, “Revolution,” was originally featured on their own 2010 album release *April Uprising*. Five years later, the song took on a form quite different from the original in a way that is quite fitting for *Buy This Fracking Album*’s overall message. Unlike the original “Revolution,” the one heard on this album is sung completely *a cappella*. In a word, it is a total acoustification of the original song, produced exclusively by and directly from the human body. While other tracks follow a similar theme of acoustification, none do it quite as dramatically as “Revolution.”<sup>45</sup> In choosing to neglect their conventional sound, the John Butler Trio is, in a sense, embodying sustainability, making a dramatic musical expression of environmental activism in their performance of entirely human-produced sound. The intimacy this creates as a live recording, being completely stripped of any musical instruments beyond the human voice, pulls the audience into the performance and rather effectively provokes thought over the overarching themes of the album as a whole.

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<sup>44</sup> Issues with fracking are also pervasive in Australia, see politician Jeremy Buckingham’s viral video of the now flammable Condamine River, Queensland. YouTube, April 22, 2016, “RIVER ON FIRE! Gas explodes from Australian river near fracking site,” YouTube website, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvJAKVnK4qM> (accessed March 23, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> For John Butler Trio’s live solo recording featured on the album see YouTube June 24, 2015, “Revolution (Solo Live),” YouTube website, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0BvZjNrEhaM> (accessed March 23, 2017).

### **Moon Hooch and “Russell Crowe”**

The contribution of jazz-rock trio, Moon Hooch stands in rather stark contrast from the album’s other tracks with its high-energy and carnal sound. Their track, “Russell Crowe,” is an unchained, feral performance of unapologetic lyrics accompanied by heavy metal-esque drum beats and animalistic, shrieking saxophone.<sup>46</sup> The essence of sustainability pervading this track lends itself especially well to emotions of outrage and disgust, an appropriate response to essentially any environmental injustice, and fitting for what *Buy This Fracking Album* is fighting against. Of all the tracks on the album, “Russell Crowe” is by far the most aggressive contribution, making it no coincidence that it is the album’s only lyrically explicit track. A near literal slap in the face, it serves as a wake-up call to the public that very directly delivers its message, making it a notably viable tool for expressing opposition towards environmental issues like fracking. However, apart from other tracks on the album, “Russell Crowe” does not mention fracking directly. Its lyrical content is tied more directly to the band’s core philosophies of elevating consciousness surrounding environmental issues and the societal structures enforcing them, as evidenced in lyrical lines like “it’s an illusion of the bullshit that we keep pursuing,” and “open up your eyes and feel the lies that they keep feeding.”

I was curious to know more of how environmental ideals could tie into music in a more philosophical way like this. In the same interview with horn player Wenzl McGowen cited in the previous chapter, we engaged further into some of the philosophy behind influential environmentalist performance that approaches a drive for change in this way. Rather than directly targeting environmental issues through specific lyrical or musical content outright, Moon

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<sup>46</sup> For Moon Hooch’s contribution see YouTube, June 24, 2015, “Russell Crowe,” YouTube website, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=370IFMuOuzA> (accessed March 23, 2017).

Hooch sees “Russell Crowe” and their overall sound more as a vehicle for consciousness raising on a much deeper level. A level that would prompt one to act in the world through a more holistic mindset. I asked McGowen of how one might look to music as a means for driving change in this way. His answer was rather profound:

There are many different ways you can measure progress, and I think lately I’ve been measuring progress differently than I have the last couple years. I always thought that we need to create first a new infrastructure and create more sustainable ways of being on the physical reality, but then I realized that can’t really happen until we change our consciousness and we all engage in an inter-collective act of creating a new society, or a new infrastructure... So lately I am focusing more on bringing energy out of people to transform themselves, because that way they can overcome those fear-based tendencies that have essentially led to the destruction of our planet.<sup>47</sup>

By stripping back inhibitive societal layers, Moon Hooch looks to crack common surface-level consciousness that feeds into a habitually unsustainable lifestyle. “Russell Crowe” is profound in this way because of its animalistic nature that invites the listener into a more basic level of consciousness, helping to enlighten and inspire action towards fracking and environmental degradation as a whole.

### **Pete Seeger’s Rendition of “This Land is Your Land”**

Finally, it seems appropriate to finish this ecomusicological analysis with what is arguably the most heart-felt track on the album. It is Pete Seeger’s final rendition of Woody Guthrie’s “This Land is Your Land.” Having passed away on January 27 of 2014 at age ninety-four, Seeger’s performance was not initially intended for Movement Music Record’s anti-fracking project. “This Land is Your Land,” as it appears on the album is the last live recording of Seeger from a Farm Aid benefit concert in 2013. Known for his exhaustive commitment to the environment, activism pervaded Seeger’s entire musical career. His final live recording is no

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<sup>47</sup> Wenzl McGowen, personal interview, April 20, 2017.

exception. Almost literally until his very last breath he was addressing environmental issues in American society. Fittingly, he even calls out fracking in the middle of the performance when he suddenly announces, “I got a verse you’ve never heard before.”<sup>48</sup> The audience cheers with delight and Seeger chants out the new lyrics:

New York is my home,  
 New York is your home  
 From the upstate mountains,  
 Down to the ocean foam  
 With all kinds of people,  
 Yes, we’re polychrome  
*New York was meant to be frack-free*

The verse is met with thunderous applause. Having his audience sing, cry, and laugh together, Pete Seeger’s live performance totally embodies the heart of the anti-fracking movement and is, in a sense, the essence of what both *Buy This Fracking Album* and ecomusicology stand for—a sense of shared concern for the environment and the drive to shift destructive societal norms through communicating innovative ideas and information through music.

Finally, to peel back yet another layer of observation, it is beneficial to take a step back from the album’s musical content. That is, we might also benefit from an analysis of the album as a holistic object functioning within in popular culture. A carrier, literally of music, and of archival social meaning and influence. The tracks of all twenty-three different artists on this album inevitably share a *collective* idea that forms another part of the album’s identity and function as a whole. In departure from the preceding ecomusicological analyses of the music

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<sup>48</sup> For the live recording of Seeger’s performance see YouTube, June 24, 2015, “This Land Is Your Land (Live at Farm Aid 2013), YouTube website, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4o8Tu1oMBQ&index=13&list=PLuEFOLTzgDiPWbe6WIEIbER2bBnmkeYjg> (accessed March 23, 2017). The amended verse occurs at approximately 2:27. The amended verse occurs at approximately 2:27.

specifically, it is additionally helpful to take a step back and observe the social influence and activity of the album.

For such a task, I turn first to leading sound studies scholar and editor of *The Sound Studies Reader*, Jonathan Sterne. To lay the groundwork for application of sound studies to this album, it is helpful to understand sound studies under the terms of Sterne himself—as an “interdisciplinary ferment in the human sciences that takes sound as its analytical point of departure or arrival.”<sup>49</sup> Further, sound studies observes the collective, “intellectual reaction to changes in culture and technology,” and it is under these terms that we are to interpret *Buy This Fracking Album*, not only track-for-track as previously explored, but also more specifically as a collective body of sound and ideas packaged within one unified anti-fracking message specifically intended to disrupt and inform current mainstream dialogues in popular music and culture. In other words, the sorts of social impact that may lie in the album’s wake.

This may be further understood by world-renowned social theorist, Jacques Attali and his monumental work *Noise*, in which his central assertion elicits music as prophetic of new and emerging social forms—specifically through processes of musical production involving sacrifice, representation, repetition, and composition. In further understanding the collective of the recording industry and the musical market of popular culture under these terms, Attali extends his ideas to the political economy of music in *The Sound Studies Reader*, suggesting that “more than colors and forms, it is sounds and their arrangements that fashion societies.”<sup>50</sup> In reference to the album directly, I propose *Buy This Fracking Album*’s existence and function as an instance in which such arrangements of sound gain the potential to fashion society through its collective

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<sup>49</sup> Jonathan Sterne, ed., *The Sound Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 2.

<sup>50</sup> Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 9.

effort to shift the public consciousness toward a greater environmental good. Further, I believe *Buy This Fracking Album* interacts and tests Attali's four prescribed dimensions of human work (sacrifice, representation, repetition, composition) in the form of music. More specifically, it may be understood as a simultaneous collection of science, message, and time and thus, "by its very presence, a mode of communication between man and his environment, a mode of social expression, and duration of itself."<sup>51</sup> But in returning to Attali's four aforementioned stages of musical production we might consider the three most troubling power systems that may exist by way of music within societies: music produced to make people *forget* violence, music produced to urge people to *believe* in harmony, and music intended to *silence* the public voice through mass production (powers of ritual-sacrifice, representation, and repetition respectively).<sup>52</sup> As a form of musical power, *Buy This Fracking Album* functions with and against Attali's defined stages in a variety of ways, and is a promising embodiment of the fourth point of musical production—composition—as Attali's hopeful replacement of mass-market repetition since it cannot exist hierarchically with monetary gain as a primary concern. On one hand, the album urges unity in political action against an environmentally harmful corporation (belief in harmony), and on another it works *against* the silence wrought by mass production in its self-generated, nonprofit message and existence. Yet more than anything else, it is a mass-produced collective created for the benefit of anti-fracking corporations that go beyond personal monetary gain. It is by no means intended as an instantaneous fix in the ongoing fracking epidemic (and I believe the artists behind the album recognize that), but it is a break in the typical dialect of

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 12-13.

popular music, and a very direct point of environmental activism packaged in an extensive album for simultaneous enjoyment awareness.

Through their use of lyrics, instrumental acoustification, and musical sound overall, the artists (or perhaps returning to Movement Music Record's term, "artivists") of *Buy This Fracking Album* each create their own unique strategies in addressing a prevailing ecological issue readable in a social sphere. I am optimistic that the overarching unity *Buy This Fracking Album* brings, through the lenses of ecomusicology and sound studies, has the potential to create new ways of negotiating relationships between natural environment and human culture that will hopefully aid us in tracking changes in environmental ideas and representations whenever (and wherever) they appear. As environmental issues come and go in public consciousness, ecomusicologies of popular music as seen with *Buy This Fracking Album* are telling of how we perceive nature and environment in and through culture and hopefully in recognizing these methods, will gift us with more powerful means of handling environmental change for the greater good.

**Trapdoor Social: The Alternative-Rock Approach to Fighting Exxon, Climate Change, and the Dakota Access Pipeline**

While Movement Music Records sits at the forefront of activist music as a record company, on similar grounds Trapdoor Social stands as the band-equivalent. The L.A.-based alternative rock group started originally as a duo between Skylar Funk and Merritt Graves who met at Pomona College while pursuing study in an Environmental Analysis program. They have since expanded to a five-piece ensemble upon the debut of their first full-length, self-titled album in August of 2016. The band describes the album as an "anthemic environmental call to action," and upon observing several of the album's key tracks, it becomes immediately clear that their

music is exactly as described. On top of that, since its early beginnings the band has been committed to environmental activism. From its founding moments, Funk and Graves felt the urge early on to use music as a vehicle for environmental initiative within their community. The duo partnered with several local nonprofits like the Sierra Club, Everybody Solar, and GRID Alternatives and used the pre-release of their second EP to raise over thirty thousand dollars to be donated to Homeboy Industries for the installation of solar roofing.<sup>53</sup> Since then, the band has also pioneered the 100% solar-powered and completely nonprofit Sunstock Solar Festival discussed in the previous chapter. Following their most recent album release, the band also began touring February of 2017 via their solar-powered equipment trailer to power their live shows across the country, and continues to do so as this is written. As its most powerful and outright call-to-action, I focus the following on three specific tracks of their new album which deal directly with climate change and environmental activism.

### **“Sunshine”**

It seems appropriate to start with the album’s hit single, “Sunshine.” With its hummable guitar riffs, the track instantly paints a mental portrait of the band’s sunny California locale. Additionally, the song’s overall message may be taken quite literally from its catchy chorus line, “you gotta fill it up with sunshine, you gotta make up your mind, and get on with your life,” which makes a fitting anthem for the band’s exhaustive charity work through solar energy. With solar power at the heart of much of their activism, it is extremely fitting that their aptly titled single has achieved national success and radio airplay across the country, while even earning “Hall of Fame” status on Las Vegas’s X107.5 “The Beatdown,” and maintaining a position in

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<sup>53</sup> For more on this project see Tom Valtin, “Alt Rockers and Sierra Club Team Up for Clean Energy,” December 16, 2013, Sierra Club website, <http://blogs.sierraclub.org/planet/2013/12/alt-rockers-and-sierra-club-team-up-for-clean-energy.html> (accessed April 20, 2017).

KROQ's "Locals Only" "Top 5" for over a month.<sup>54</sup> With its instant appeal and infectious melodies, "Sunshine" is the perfect gateway into Trapdoor Social and the exhaustive environmentalist work they stand for.

### **"Winning As Truth"**

Another hit on the album, "Winning As Truth," is a more straight-forward shot at climate change. It takes a direct hit at corporate gasoline giant ExxonMobil, one of the world's largest oil and gas companies, for obscuring facts about the implications of fossil fuels and climate change to protect their own profits. The message could not be clearer with lyrics like "Inspection by Exxon found seas were gonna rise, they knew but they still went through with dollar signs for eyes," and "this silence is violent, the elephant's in the sky." This shot at Exxon was motivated by an investigation led by InsideClimate News in 2015 who published an article built on archival documents and interviews with former Exxon employees. The article shockingly revealed the company was well aware of the scientific implications of climate change almost a decade before it became a public issue.<sup>55</sup> Recently, the song has taken on an even more profound meaning since former ExxonMobil CEO Rex Tillerson was confirmed United States Secretary of State. "Winning As Truth" is a blatant cry against the pervasive misinformation plaguing public knowledge about climate change. Trapdoor Social makes a valiant effort to further vocalize through music what has been discovered, tearing an even bigger hole in the fabric covering the hidden truths of the world's richest oil corporations.

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<sup>54</sup> Ashley Winward, "Trapdoor Social give Candid Look at DAPL with New Video," February 20, 2017, The LP Collective website, <https://thelpcollective.com/2017/02/20/trapdoor-social-give-candid-look-at-dapl-with-new-video/> (accessed April 20, 2017).

<sup>55</sup> Neela Banerjee, Lisa Song, and David Hasemyer, *Exxon: The Road Not Taken* (CreateSpace Publishing, 2015).

### “Never Stop Listening”

While each of these tracks have surely been imperative to Trapdoor Social’s rising success, the band makes a home-run with their activism through “Never Stop Listening.” The song and its corresponding music video, document their time spent assisting protesters against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Together with filmmaker Alexandra Velasco, the group embarked on a ten-day journey separate from their tour to the Oceti Sakowin campsite at Standing Rock via their solar powered trailer. In addition to lending their clean electricity to the camp, the group spent their time assisting in various ways. Skylar Funk describes in greater detail the band’s experience:

Last fall I helped organize a donation drive and trip to North Dakota from L.A. to support the water protectors in the Oceti Sakowin camp, at the center of the Dakota Access Pipeline protests. We spent a week there working in construction, in the kitchens, and chopping wood and shoveling snow, and felt incredibly welcomed and honored for the chance to participate in something so powerful and historic. One thing they asked of us in orientation was to “bring it home” – to share what we learned at camp and to make sure folks back in the communities we’d return to were aware that the struggle to protect that land and water continues. Of course, with the recent executive order, the challenge is even more urgent... So we created a video about the people we met at camp paired up with a song I wrote and released with Trapdoor Social last year to share what we saw and hopefully inspire more action.<sup>56</sup>

Thus, the video for “Never Stop Listening” was created to drive the “Bring It Home” message and insist that struggle, like that which continues at Standing Rock, need not be confined to its origins.<sup>57</sup> The song is at first both visually and musically calm and reflective with imagery of protesters smiling, but with determination in their eyes. Imagery of tribe flags and protest art flash by as the overall momentum of the song builds to drive its overall message: to

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<sup>56</sup> From Skylar Funk news source interview. Kevin Bronson, “Video: Trapdoor Social, ‘Never Stop Listening,’” February 11, 2017, Buzzbands.LA website, <http://buzzbands.la/2017/02/11/video-trapdoor-social-never-stop-listening/> (accessed April 20, 2017).

<sup>57</sup> For full video see YouTube, February 8, 2017, “Trapdoor Social - Never Stop Listening (Official Video),” YouTube website, <http://blogs.sierraclub.org/planet/2013/12/alt-rockers-and-sierra-club-team-up-for-clean-energy.html> (accessed April 20, 2017).

fight for what you believe in, even when it hurts.<sup>58</sup> For Trapdoor Social, that fight permeates through essentially everything they set out to do. Through their direct punches in song lyrics, concurring charity work with their solar-powered touring, and pioneering of their own environmentally-conscious music festival, Trapdoor Social are certainly leading a force of musicians who are forefronting some of the new ways in which environmentalism is being negotiated through music in the 21st century.

Between the collective of artists featured on *Buy This Fracking Album* and the environmentalist anthems of Trapdoor Social's debut album, each instill motivational attitudes that come specifically from within the music. As mentioned by Pedelty and his concluding remarks in *A Song to Save the Salish Sea*, all of the music explored in this chapter acts as a form of "local entry into the global problem of climate change [and more specific environmental issues like fracking], not by presenting it as an abstract, global problem, but by putting the complex matter into a vernacular story form to which people in that region can readily relate."<sup>59</sup> I feel all the points of study in this chapter do just that. To some degree, the music and artists featured in this chapter touch the listener in a way that instills awareness to one's immediate surrounding environment. Whether they keep environmental problems on our mind through catchy lyrics, go deep into our subconscious with philosophies that inspire lifestyle change, or are simply the resulting act of "bringing it home," per request of the water protectors, I hope to have brought with this chapter and the one preceding it, substantive evidence through a collective of thoughts, perspectives, and musical ideas that together prove popular music is

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<sup>58</sup> Mentioned by Skylar Funk in interview with Liz Calvario. See Liz Calvario, "Music Video Supports Water Protectors," February 8, 2017, IndieWire website, <http://www.indiewire.com/2017/02/standing-rock-protest-trapdoor-social-never-stop-listening-music-video-watch-1201780045/> (accessed April 20, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> Mark Pedelty, "Conclusion: Common Themes and Connections" in *A Song to Save the Salish Sea: Musical Performance as Environmental Activism* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 242.

effectively driving change in new ways in the face of environmental crises. May the musicians observed inspire more successful music-making as driving force for environmental awareness.

#### CHAPTER IV: DISABILITY IN ENVIRONMENTAL SPACES: NOISE POLLUTION AND NONNORMATIVE HEARING

In nature, what denotes a healthy and thriving ecosystem? If I close my eyes, I imagine lush landscapes with a myriad of *diverse* wildlife, all entangled in a complex and delicately balanced web of interconnectedness and all of equal importance. *Sustainable Music*, an online music blog authored by ethnomusicologist Jeff Titon, invokes a similar conception of the ecological, using it as a metaphor for thinking about musical cultures. Particularly, in his entry “Biodiversity, the Sound Commons, and the Great Chain of Being,” he brings to light a near-universally accepted concept of biodiversity, claiming, “it has become axiomatic that biodiversity is an index to ecosystem health; the greater the diversity, the healthier the ecosystem.” He notes further that these commonsense advantages of biodiversity have in fact been known for centuries, if not millennia. Rather than holding the production and performance of popular music as an act against environmental crises like in the preceding chapters, this particular chapter shifts focus upon diversity as a quintessential component for thriving ecologies in both the sciences and humanities by appointing music and sound as means for diversifying, and thereby reshaping and strengthening, human relationships with a particular ecological issue—noise pollution. More specifically, I look to disability studies in music to help counter some of the normalizing tendencies of current noise pollution discourse in which its effect on humans has been quantified solely from the perspective of nondisabled hearers. In doing so, my primary goal is to facilitate an intervention into current understandings of noise pollution calling for an expanded consideration of its impact on human life that accommodates individuals of *all* hearing abilities. In diversifying our knowledge of how noise pollution is perceived, I turn to the musical experiences of four individuals who experience neurological, auditory, visual, and mobility-inflected differences in the ways they hear to re-negotiate and strengthening common

understandings of how noise pollution impacts both music and daily human life in ways that can be more than just disabling.

### **Neglected Perspectives in Environmentalist Discourse**

This chapter's main focus is on demonstrating how environmental issues like noise pollution that are often viewed as having only negative implications, may be perceived in ways that can actually inform and inspire musical composition. In other words, music becomes a site for negotiating environmental issues in ways other than just forms of activism for environmental justice and is an avenue through which one can gain access to the often inaccessible, normalizing qualities of the environmental movement. Underlying motivations for this work stem from the current neglect of perspectives of those with disabilities by current environmentalist discourse as a whole. I feel there is much that could strengthen environmentalism in considering a more diverse body of human experience, and I am far from the first to sense this. In their 2004 article, "The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming Politics in a Post-Environmental World," co-founders of Breakthrough Institute Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus posit that the environmental movement in its current standing is dated and no longer able to effectively negotiate change. Though the article was met with much controversy, its overall motives were not to suggest that all hope has been lost. What Shellenberger and Nordhaus had suggested was a modernized reconstruction of environmentalism—one that includes a more diverse social demographic. Historically, given the era from which it came (1960s and 1970s), the environmental movement has been predominantly white, middle-class, college-educated, and male. This limit in social diversity by the environmental movement has strictly marginalized what is defined as "the environment," and consequently what should and should not be

considered an environmental issue.<sup>60</sup> Shellenberger and Nordhaus offer the perspective of Susan Clark, Executive Director of the Columbia Foundation, who addresses this marginalization, suggesting that the primary problem is not external to the human race, but rather humans themselves. In her words, “it’s a human problem having to do with how we organize our society. This old way of thinking isn’t anyone’s fault, but it is all of our responsibility to change.”<sup>61</sup> Recognizing that the environmentalist movement has omitted valuable perspectives, and working to counter its tendencies towards marginalization more broadly, I feel we must expand society within environmentalism to include perspectives from a variety of genders, races, and abilities. Such may be a rather ambitious task, and so within this chapter, I focus on diversifying current discourse of noise pollution through the addition of various modes of human hearing which, at least from a musical standpoint, suggest relationships with excessive anthropogenic noise that are not always negative.

In constructing a greater level of inclusion in environmentalism, it is important to grasp a deeper understanding of which voices have been historically excluded from the movement itself. To this I ask, in what ways can the environmental movement be reconciled in expanding to embrace these previously silenced viewpoints? I believe the answer is overwhelmingly complex. The lived experiences of any and all social groups—even individuals—offer their own unique perspectives and insights. While profound, these exclusions have not gone fully unnoticed. One particularly absent voice in the environmental movement, and this chapter’s main focus, are individuals with any and all forms of disability. Sarah Jaquette Ray, assistant professor of English and coordinator of the Geography and Environmental Studies program at the University

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<sup>60</sup> Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus, “The Death of Environmentalism: Global Warming in a Post-Environmental World,” (Breakthrough Institute, 2004), 11-12.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

of Alaska Southeast Juneau, draws upon disability studies in her work *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* to demonstrate the othering effects often imposed by environmentalism. To detail such impositions placed upon the disabled body, Ray uses the social construction of “wilderness” as an example. Through the constructed standard for what is considered closest to nature, we actually create forms of disability by othering bodies that cannot meet this standard. Further, Ray offers that the social construction of disability and the social construction of wilderness are in fact mutually reinforcing.<sup>62</sup> Thus we are led to wonder, exactly why a connectedness with nature and the cultivation of environmental ethic require having a physically fit, normative body. For Ray and numerous other disability studies researchers, it is all a product of restrictive societal constructions. To this, it is necessary to continue raising awareness of such divides within the social sphere so as to relieve environmentalism of its exclusionary tendencies.

Issues similar to those raised in *The Ecological Other* are very currently being discussed through hosts of online blogs that address a wide variety of personal experiences. To name a particular instance, a recent Twitter tweet (to which the name of the original account has been withheld) reprimanded Whole Foods Market for retailing pre-peeled oranges packaged in disposable plastic containers. The post sarcastically read, “if only nature would find a way to cover these oranges so we didn’t need to waste so much plastic on them.”<sup>63</sup> This quickly went viral as many expressed outrage over what seemed like blatant wastefulness by Whole Foods, but interestingly it also sparked debate among individuals with dexterity impairments who

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<sup>62</sup> Sarah Jaquette Ray, “‘Maimed Away from Mother Earth’: The Disabled Body in Environmental Thought and Literature, in *The Ecological Other: Environmental Exclusion in American Culture* (Tuscon, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2013), 36.

<sup>63</sup> Crippledscholar, “When Accessibility Gets Labeled Wasteful,” March 4 2016, <https://crippledscholar.wordpress.com/2016/03/04/when-accessibility-gets-labeled-wasteful/> (accessed March 13, 2017).

challenged those claiming to be environmentally friendly who saw the product as both wasteful and lazy. A disability blog by author and PhD candidate in Critical Disability Studies writing under the name, “crippledscholar,” directly addressed this divide in an entry entitled “When Accessibility Gets Labeled Wasteful.” In it she not only recognizes this opposition, but elevates the very perspectives that sparked the debate in the first place. In her words, “the problem is that this discourse completely ignores how prepared food impacts people with disabilities. The most common complaints about the sale of these oranges is either the wastefulness of the additional packaging...or that anyone who buys this must be incomprehensibly lazy.”<sup>64</sup> This explicitly demonstrates the ecological othering described by Ray and is a living, breathing example of how such divisions are still very much alive in present environmentalist discourse within American (and more broadly Western) culture. Parallels to these exclusions are actively being pinpointed in various scholarly publications. As evidenced in a collaborative study by Andrew Charles and Huw Thomas of Cardiff University, “Deafness and Disability—Forgotten Components of Environmental Justice: Illustrated by the Case of Local Agenda 21 in South Wales,” we see another instance of in which certain minority groups (in this case, those who identify as Deaf) have lacked representation. Charles and Thomas emphasize the tendency for disability to be constrained by biological modes of understanding (more specifically, medicalized normativity) when in fact it is very much a social construction (the leading agenda in the Disability Rights movement). While certain physical and biological characteristics render the cause or even prompt clinical categorization, cultural majority groups often fail to recognize disability by its *social* elements. Charles and Thomas focus specifically on people in Deaf culture, recognizing them as a group with a strong sense of social identity and very rightfully pointing out the

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

exclusion of the Deaf voice in environmental policy-making. More specifically, they seek out the extent to which the Deaf have been excluded by these terms and processes and strive to explore how those who are Deaf actually view environmental issues.<sup>65</sup> This study attempts to illuminate disability and its current lack of representation within environmentalism and like this chapter, asserts the need for its inclusion in environmentalist discourse—failure to do so only perpetuates a limited understanding of environmental issues and their impact on human life, leaving invaluable viewpoints and perspectives underrepresented.

My primary focus in writing this chapter is twofold: it is first to continue pushing for greater inclusion of those with disabilities in environmentalist discourse, and then it is also to look more holistically at the relationships between more individualized hearing ecologies and noise pollution. Through the creative action in music and sound art (products of noise pollution that are quite different from the numerous health problems commonly associated with it) that these relationships inspire, music becomes a point of accessibility to the environmental movement otherwise known for its inaccessibility to the nonnormative bodily experience.

### **Sound Studies, Noise Pollution, and the Coveted Return to Nature**

As far as sound studies are concerned, noise pollution is not a particularly recent environmental issue. Often considered the “father of acoustic ecology,” R. Murray Schafer was among the first to contest anthropogenic noise as a form of environmental pollutant during 1960s and into the 1970s when he established the World Soundscape Project at Simon Fraser University. The project itself reflected Schafer’s distaste for Vancouver’s increasingly urbanized soundscapes and resulted in the culmination of several shorter publications including *Ear*

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<sup>65</sup> Andrew Charles and Huw Thomas, “Deafness and Disability: Forgotten Components of Environmental Justice: Illustrated by the Case of Local Agenda 21 in South Whales,” *Local Environment* 12 no. 3 (June 2007), 211.

*Cleaning* (1967), *The New Soundscape* (1968), *The Book of Noise* (1970), and *The Music of the Environment* (1973)—all imposing forms of anti-noise legislation in attempt to help purify Vancouver’s natural soundscapes. It is this quest for purity—a desire for a *return* back to a nature untainted by human influence—that was at the core of Schafer’s work, and is jointly what drives the quantitative study of noise pollution today. As a more current example of these sorts of perspectives, I turn to bioacoustical scientists Scott McFarland and Kurt Fristrup alongside several other recent case studies which perpetuate the notion of noise pollution as a physical ailment.

In what has perhaps been the most recent and far-reaching project regarding the ill-effects of noise pollution to date, McFarland has constructed a year-long recording project as part of the Great Smoky Mountains, National Park Natural Sounds and Night Skies (NSNS) Division. The project itself aims to compare soundscapes recorded in 2006 of seven park locations with new recordings currently in development by McFarland a decade later. Each newly implemented sound recording unit within the park locations is intended to record its surrounding environment continuously for one year. At the end of the cycle McFarland plans on publishing more conclusive data on the recordings in late 2017 to early 2018 by way of community outreach in the form of public presentation and conversation with local officials and citizens alike.<sup>66</sup> While this particular soundscape project has not yet reached completion, the anticipated outcome of such an experiment is to reveal an influx in anthropogenic noise as a direct result of growth in human population. With its predicted outcomes, this project attempts to not only expose that natural landscapes are becoming increasingly saturated with anthropogenic noise, but also to

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<sup>66</sup> Élan Young, “Protecting the National Sounds and Night Skies of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” June 29, 2016, Knoxville Mercury website, <http://www.knoxmercury.com/2016/06/29/protecting-natural-sounds-night-skies-great-smoky-mountains-national-park/> (accessed March 13, 2017).

warn of the *negative* implications that this saturation might have on wildlife and human health. Élan Young, freelance writer and author of one particular examination of NSNS Division project, “Protecting National Sounds and Night Skies of the Great Smoky Mountains National Park,” also cites Jeff Titon’s views on the sustainability of soundscapes to reinforce the problematic nature of noise pollution reciting that, “noise interference from airplanes, trucks and other vehicles, chainsaws and construction, adversely impacts the way all creatures (humans included) communicate with each other in that environment. Sounds are directly related to ecosystem health.”<sup>67</sup> While still acknowledging this particular perspective, this chapter would further suspect that these relations with sound might be even more complex than previously thought (and even perhaps not always negative) when considering the depth and diversity of human sonic experience.

Similarly, another study headed by Kurt Fristrup, positioned in the natural sounds and night sky division of the National Park Services in Fort Collins, Colorado, centers its research around raising awareness towards environmental issues accompanied by both human-made noise and light pollution (again more specifically, anthropogenic noise and light). For many, these pollutants pose little more threat than a day-to-day nuisance. However, Fristrup argues that the problems they present are much more deeply rooted and profound than we might expect, and the setbacks of these forms of pollution could bear both physical and cultural implications. As a direct physical hindrance to wildlife, excessive industrial noise is currently known to create detrimental phenomena in nature that can be identified in two ways. The first Fristrup labels as “masking,” which poses a significant problem for the perception of adventitious sounds, such as footfalls and other byproducts of motion. Further he claims, “these sounds are not intentionally

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

produced and natural selection will typically favor individuals that minimize their production.” The other is anthropogenic noise that creates alterations to animal behavior patterns, potentially leading to reduction in population.<sup>68</sup> In addition to its interference with wildlife, noise pollution also poses multiple risks to human health and has been linked to increased risk of elevated blood pressure, stroke, and heart attack.<sup>69</sup> Yet these identified risks to human health have only recently been studied in depth with the majority of studies being less than a decade old whose data is collected from a very normative pool of constituents. I suspect that various modes human hearing might hold a different set of implications on the effects of noise pollution, especially when placed in musical context. However, such has not yet been explored by quantitative research on the implications of noise pollution and human health.

### **Quantitative Study of Noise Pollution Imposes Cultural Deafness Upon Normative Listeners**

To better understand *why* it is important to diversify current conceptions of noise pollution, it is helpful first to further establish how it is most commonly defined. Again, noise pollution is broadly understood as excessive anthropogenic noise leading to *negative* implications on human health and disruption of daily life. Among the most recent research regarding the effects of noise pollution on human health comes a study from Tehran University of Medical Sciences. The study was developed June through September of 2015, and enlisted the participation of ten volunteers, each of whom had no history of auditory or neurological disability. Though collecting data from a normative pool of constituents in this case was likely

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<sup>68</sup> Kurt Fristrup, Jesse R. Barber, and Kevin R. Crooks, “The Costs of Chronic Noise Exposure for Terrestrial Organisms,” *Trends in Ecology & Evolution* 25 no.3 (2010), 180-181.

<sup>69</sup> Leslie Willoughby, “Kurt Fristrup, Bioacoustical Scientist,” April 7, 2015, University of California Science Communication Program website, <http://scicom.ucsc.edu/publications/QandA/2015/fristrup.html> (accessed March 13, 2017).

intentional and made in attempt to speak for the widest majority, it is ironic that little is inherently natural about the “normal” hearing situations placed upon participants in this sort of research. In the case of the Tehran University study, volunteers were placed in isolation and asked to close their eyes upon exposure to a series of seven pure-tone noise pollution frequencies. Brain activity was then monitored in response to each frequency via electroencephalogram. Like this study, it is all too often that normal hearing becomes a sort of laboratory-built phenomenon in which student volunteers are tested in isolation and whose bodies are associated with a medical model of normativity (both physically and cognitively). Under such conditions, our assumptions of how people hear become culturally cultivated as they assume normative standards upon the human population. That is not to say these assumptions are incapable of shedding insight upon the implications of noise pollution, but it does suggest a need for a wider understanding of how humans experience sound. Thus we return to this chapter’s main question—if from current research we may gather that noise pollution is disabling to those who listen and experience their surroundings in a *normative way*, what might effects be on those who perceive the world *outside* of these cultivated norms? In musical context especially, is the result equally negative, more negative, or does it become manifested as completely something different?

Again, all things considered, I recognize the need to represent the experience of a normative majority in scientific research. Including other modes of sonic experience and cognition would surely complicate results, however it is from within these complexities that we might gain a diverse body of perspectives pertinent to strengthening our understanding of human relationships with noise pollution in ways different from common conceptions. From this research we may gather that noise pollution is disabling to those who listen and experience their

surroundings in a normative way, which is important information. Returning to Fristrup, in an interview with Leslie Willoughby of the UCLA Santa Cruz Science Communication Program, he goes on to allude to some of the disabling implications tied to noise pollution for normative hearers:

Something like 60 to 70 percent of the people in the U.S. live in environments where they really can't see the Milky Way. I think that poses a real risk of generational amnesia where these things are not immediately accessible to families. There's a risk that this shifting baseline will affect parks as well. Visitors will come to parks that may be degraded by sound, yet it will sound so quiet to them compared to their communities. They'll think, 'Oh, our parks are in great shape. We don't need to take action.'<sup>70</sup>

In speaking of this “generational amnesia,” Fristrup is suggesting a form of cultural deafening that would ironically apply only to those whose sonic experiences are formed under dominating normative modes of hearing. However, what might the effects be on those who perceive the world outside of these cultivated norms? More specifically, what can musical production tell us about these perceptions? While these perspectives have yet to see representation in scientific study, disability as a social construction has been acknowledged by the humanities for decades. For this reason, music becomes an insightful demonstrator of some of the non medicalized effects of noise pollution and its relationship with nonnormative modes of human hearing,

It is at this point that I draw especially from music theorist Joseph Straus whose recent work investigates disability as “any culturally stigmatized bodily difference,” and how those bodily differences inflect musical cognition. Through consideration of four modes of hearing identified by Straus in his book *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* I attempt to better illustrate more specifically *who* has been neglected from the dialogue surrounding noise

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

pollution and, as evidenced by their forms of musical production, *how* each of these perspectives might be affected, thereby diversifying and enriching current understandings of noise pollution. Under this lens, music becomes an avenue through which human relationships with noise pollution may be negotiated as well as a precursory understanding to how individuals hearing within each respective mode might be impacted by noise pollution in ways not yet considered. Through these descriptions of musical cognition, my primary goal is not to prescribe a solution to noise pollution by one particular mode of hearing, nor is it to imply that one mode is inherently better than another. As Straus might put it, exploring variance in musical cognition attempts neither therapeutic intervention nor isolation. Rather, it is to consider that sound is experienced by humans in a variety ways, and that music is one particular means through which noise pollution might impact individuals in a more diverse manner than is currently known. Thus, follows four modes of hearing to posit what those unknown effects might be, and how they are incorporated in music.

### **Autistic Hearing: Musical Works of Anya Ustaszewski**

The first, termed “autistic hearing,” draws from a nonmedical counter narrative headed by the neurodiversity movement which views autism as a cognitive style or worldview. Features of this form of sound cognition are three-fold and favor detail-focused processing based on local coherence, private associative networks, and imitation. For those who experience music in this way, prodigious listening capabilities like absolute pitch are not unusual. To illustrate this further in musical terms, I offer freelance composer, musician, and autism activist Anya Ustaszewski. Openly identifying on the autism spectrum, Ustaszewski composes in both modernist classical and experimental electroacoustic genres, utilizing her compositions to explore her own personal obsessions over who she is and what she is passionate about. Further, as part of her autism,

Ustaszewski experiences hyperacusis, which dramatically influences her perception of the surrounding environment. In her own words, she paints a description of her personal experience of the surrounding world as such:

For me, the volume of noises can be magnified and surrounding sounds distorted and muddled. I have an inability to cut out particular sounds and a lower hearing threshold, which makes me particularly sensitive to auditory stimuli, to the extent that it can cause me severe and excruciating pain.<sup>71</sup>

Yet despite what would seem highly inhibiting, she also notes how her hyperacusis actually *informs* her music, mentioning that it enables her to notice sounds that others might not perceive at all, which in turn allows her to find beauty and detail in observing sonic qualities that others might completely overlook. As she puts it, “the smallest and seemingly most insignificant of sounds can present limitless creative and expressive possibilities.” An analysis of some of her musical work is highly indicative of such possibilities explored. *Hypnosis*, an electroacoustic work, was composed as an outdoor installation for six speakers. Throughout, Ustaszewski manipulates everyday sounds, ranging from natural to industrial, incorporating sound sources of flowing water, birdsong, trains, and recordings gathered at a scrap metal facility. They are arranged within the installation in such a way to situate the listener within a soundscape sculpted by Ustaszewski’s own interpretation of the surrounding world placing particular emphasis on themes of repetition as well as beauty in the everyday. Returning to the question of *why* these cognitive differences are important in how we understand noise pollution, it is perhaps surprising to learn that Ustaszewski’s hyperacusis yields a highly influential component to her experience in a world growing increasingly polluted with noise as illustrated by her musical compositions. Further, the musical work of someone like Ustaszewski may be precursory evidence that

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<sup>71</sup> See autobiography on composer website, Anya Ustaszewski, <http://www.anyasmusic.co.uk/> (accessed March 13, 2017).

individuals whose hearing is inflected by autism may actually experience anthropogenic noise in diverse ways. Sounds that might normally be annoying or damaging to the normative listener gain the capacity to be constructive and even beneficial within this mode of hearing and in particular are capable of informing musical production.

### **Deaf Hearing: Christine Sun Kim and the Urban Soundscape**

To further speculate the effects of anthropogenic noise unknown, we might also consider Straus's definition of "deaf hearing." Categorized as being both visual and tactile listeners, those who function within this mode of hearing perceive sound as multi-sensory experience, which counters prevailing normative assumptions that deafness may be equated with a life of total silence. This, however, could not be further from the truth. Some of the most powerful ways of explaining and understanding deaf modes of hearing, both from outside and within Deaf culture are actually well illustrated through music and certain forms of abstract sound art. For such, I look to Korean-American sound artist and activist, Christine Sun Kim who commits much of her work to reshaping the way people think about sound. For Kim and numerous others who identify as Deaf, sound is still very much a part of daily life. Rather, visual movement becomes sound and sound consequently becomes a form of currency in that it contains power, control, and social weight—a form of etiquette. When asked to elaborate on such concepts as sound etiquette in an interview with Sandra Song, editor of *Paper Magazine*, Kim explains:

It's almost like the concept of sound etiquette has been built into society right from the beginning – for hearing people that is. It's not something that hearing people even think about, but there are rules to sound etiquette that you follow. For example, if you are watching a play and you hear people laughing, you're thinking about your laugh in relation to theirs, making sure that your laugh is not too loud, or too low, or that it's a giggle instead of a belly laugh. And there are all these rules that govern laughing that you are probably unaware of but actually contribute and adhere to...and as a deaf person, I rely on you hearing people to relay those rules to me. Based on your reaction, I respond and behave differently. For example, I could be a loud eater – could slam my fork on the plate unknowingly, or I could slam a door, and those things don't bother me because I

don't hear it, but I notice that if I bang my fork on a plate, all of a sudden all the hearing people at the table are looking at me. So I know that I've violated a rule of sound, and because of that I've manipulated my behavior to be more quiet. For example, when I was at school I learned not to tap on the desk and things like that. Another example might be stuff that I've included in my artwork, and I've kind of thought about making these rules of sound etiquette exposed and sometimes the rules of sound etiquette, being how they are, make me feel like I have no place in society because sound is so valuable and so powerful.<sup>72</sup>

A look at some of her most recent work further details these experiences. On October 29th and 30th of 2016, and on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of sound artist Max Neuhaus's interactive non-verbal lecture *LISTEN* (1966), Kim led an adapted version, in which she led a soundwalk through The Lower East Side in New York City. Some of her adaptations can be seen in her own title, "(LISTEN)." Originally only all caps, the new title is used to emphasize layers of subjective, interpersonal, and technical mediation involved in nonverbal communication).<sup>73</sup> While focusing on Neuhaus's original demonstration of city soundscapes as a form of collective music-making, Kim expands upon Neuhaus's original work to further express a wider understanding of sound and perception of the everyday. Throughout the walk, Kim led participants to local neighborhood sites to share personal memories in the form of textual nonverbal prompts using a combination of American Sign Language and an iPad. With "(LISTEN)", Kim probes our understanding of sound urging us to listen beyond a sonic experience dependent on auditory hearing alone, while reaching into a mode of hearing that considers sound as something *more* than just noise—something with textures, movements, and emotional states that inflects our perception of daily life. As someone born deaf, Kim's

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<sup>72</sup> Sandra Song, "Artist Christine Sun Kim Talks Sound Etiquette, Being Asian-American, and Navigating Her Own Identity," February 26, 2016, Paper Magazine website, <http://www.papermag.com/playing-games-meet-sound-artist-christine-sun-kim-1627159116.html> (accessed March 13, 2017).

<sup>73</sup> For press release of "(LISTEN)" see Claire Voon, "A Silent Soundwalk, Noisy With Abstract Composition," November 4, 2016, Hyperallergic website, <https://hyperallergic.com/335030/a-silent-soundwalk-noisy-with-abstract-compositions/> (accessed March 13, 2017).

understanding of sound as a whole is radically different from what has been considered by noise pollution discourse. Her work with “(LISTEN)” as well as her other compositions push sound beyond an experience dependent from normative hearing and from this, it may be suspected that those like Kim who find things like form and meaning within an ever-evolving acoustic environment will adapt and change those meanings as such surrounding environments grow more affected by noise pollution. In this sense, anthropogenic noise becomes an influential component to how deaf modes of hearing are shaped by surroundings from which sonic meaning is derived, again bringing another important point of diversification as noise pollution in this case is not necessarily disabling, but instead *complexifies* the d/Deaf experience.

#### **Aifoon’s Blind Date: A Representation of Directional Blind Hearing**

Conversely, “blind hearing” would bear the exact opposite set of implications as “deaf hearing,” and is commonly associated with sharpened sonic perception as a form of compensation for any visual deficit. Yet despite popular beliefs, such may only be partially true. Recent studies on blindness and human hearing have suggested that those with visual impairments experience *selective* forms of enhancement, particularly in areas of pitch and peripheral sound localization. In a musical sense, a deeper explanation as Straus would suggest, is that perhaps those who have no visual component to musical experience are more sensitive to certain aspects of music not conveyed by traditional musical notation rather than an all-encompassing enhancement of hearing broadly. Theoretically, this might make an individual more sensitive to articulation, dynamics, tuning, and timbre—musical components which Straus terms “microstructures.”<sup>74</sup> Under this assumption, one might be led to believe that those who are

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<sup>74</sup> For more on “microstructures,” see Joseph N. Straus, “Prodigious Hearing, Normal Hearing, and Disablist Hearing,” in *Extraordinary Measures: Disability in Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 172.

blind are especially sensitive to noise pollution and general sonic experience of everyday life, as many of these sound sources are both pitch-related and peripheral, thereby obscuring sounds which blind individuals are accustomed to hearing and may depend upon in navigating daily life. However, like other modes of hearing, it is one that is not specifically blind, but is rather a learned quality. Collectively, it elicits a viable and unique mode of sonic perception and experience yet again worthy of more attention and consideration. Aifoon, an educational art foundation based in Ghent, Belgium explores and challenges the act of normative listening by providing artistic alternatives to visually-dominated perceptions of everyday sonic environments. One particular project titled *Blind Date*, made its debut in 2012 and was developed to engage its participants in an unfamiliar mode of sonic perception throughout the city. Aifoon members donned volunteers with a helmet, headphones, directional microphone, and goggles and led them on a guided soundwalk through familiar urban territory, while at the same time barring them from all visual impulses and enhancing the user's directional hearing. In doing so, participants' default modes of sonic perception were altered, enabling them to perceive their surrounding environment in new ways. While such a contraption is not entirely intended to perfectly replicate the experiences of those who are blind, it *is* meant to challenge dominating assumptions of human experience and sound cognition. In this case, Aifoon utilizes sound art to illustrate variance in sonic perception thereby highlighting some of the ways noise pollution obscures dominating sound qualities perceived by the blind. From this we may assume that certain sound sources once vital to the blind experience become compromised in wake of noise pollution and further may lead individuals who hear in this way to adapt the sound sources upon which they depend.

### Hearing Mobility-Inflections in Musical Performance

Finally, we might consider one more mode of hearing described by Straus known as “mobility-inflected hearing.” We almost exclusively situate hearing in relation to the body’s five senses, and often neglect to consider sound perception in relation to *collective* bodily movement. Additionally, a bodily experience of both “balance” and “verticality” is often assumed to be universal. Like the other modes of hearing described, these bodily differences may lead to subtle, though equally important, shifts in perception and cognition of our sonic environments, thus illuminating a unique world perspective in its own right. This difference is strongly represented in musical context by Stefan Honisch; active pianist, composer, and PhD researcher in music and disability studies, who describes how the mind’s interpretive view of musical cognition is inflected by bodily mobility:

I find that the sensation of ‘rolling’ along the ground on wheels shapes the circular motions which my hands describe at the keyboard in search for legato sound...the fluidity of movement in a wheelchair significantly informs my understanding of tempo rubato. Knowing that physical movement is not necessarily painfully laborious, I can draw on my embodied experience of flexible pacing in a wheelchair, to inform the way in which I rhythmically inflect the music I perform.<sup>75</sup>

I take this as further evidence that variance in mobility influences hearing and in turn creates variance in sonic experience. Further, Straus speculates that musical experiences like Honisch’s are profound and shed light upon a mode of perception in which music tends to be perceived as a continuous flow, rather than a sense of punctuated events. From this perspective, excessive anthropogenic noise might also be perceived similarly as a continuous flow of sound. While this may not apply to everyone who uses a wheelchair, and certainly not to everyone whose physical mobility deviates from normative standards, it is no less Honisch’s own

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 175-6.

experience, beyond which there are surely numerous and varying others. His own perspective merely grazes the surface of a very deep and complex body of how human mobility also becomes influenced by surrounding sonic environment, thereby diversifying and expanding how noise pollution might be perceived.

Again, while the experiences described above are not intended to speak for all listeners of varying ability, they do get the mind thinking. In acknowledging that the experience of inhabiting an extraordinary body can inflect perception and cognition of music, similar inflections may also influence an individual's experience of noise pollution in ways that are not necessarily disabling. It is difficult to say if or when quantitative study of noise pollution will adhere to a more inclusive model in its constituents, but as inclusive dialogue continues to make its presence known in social and cultural spheres, I am hopeful. Upon recognizing forms of exclusion which both normative accounts of musical experience and current noise pollution discourse often depend, we stand only to gain a strengthened understanding of how a world growing increasingly saturated with noise effects a highly diverse body of human experience. Nodding once more to the fundamentals of biodiversity, ecosystems composed of the most dynamic and diverse bodies are indeed the strongest and most beautiful.

## CHAPTER V: CONCLUSIONS

Through the cases studied in this thesis, I hope to have made arguments accessible to the widest possible audience in effort to strengthen future musical action within environmentalist movement. I have aligned instances of popular music with current environmental concerns over the need for sustainable energy sources, as well as addressed the engagement of music with more specific issues like hydrofracking and noise pollution. By extension, the work here is intended to prove that effective activism is possible through music, and will hopefully inspire an even more diverse body of environmentalist work through music in the future.

I suspect there will be an increasing number of music festivals, tours, albums, and compositions that target environmental affairs in a myriad of ways in years to come, and I am enthusiastic for what new innovations will follow. This research now becomes a point of departure towards future applied ecomusicological work. Extending from applied ethnomusicology which seeks solutions for social problems in studying music in cultural context, applied work in ecomusicology uses “real-world examples in order to provide musicians, organizers, students, music researchers, and other citizens with new ideas regarding how we might advocate for more effective environmental policies, institutions, and actions.”<sup>76</sup> I see this as becoming manifested in a number of ways. Personally, conducting this research has certainly made me consider the ways in which I might confront environmental crises through my own work as a musician. Perhaps the music here will inspire readers to perform new musical forms of environmental work within their own communities, or to challenge their own perceptions of the world around them. The festivals, recorded music, and diverse hearing perspectives studied here

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<sup>76</sup> Mark Pedelty, “Conclusion: Common Themes and Connections” in *A Song to Save the Salish Sea: Musical Performance as Environmental Activism*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2016), 257.

may be taken as platforms for one to develop their own environmentalist work. Although, future contributions need not be confined to these terms. May the work here merely be the beginning for continued production of popular music with powerful environmental implications. The more we are able to identify instances of successful innovation, the more we may use music as a means of catalyzing environmental action that is increasingly powerful.

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