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# Sharing Songs, Shaping Community

Revitalizing time-honored  
pedagogies at Ethno USA



Author: **Huib Schippers**

**ETHNO**  
RESEARCH

  
International  
Centre for  
Community  
Music

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## What is Ethno?

Ethno is JM International's program for folk, world and traditional music. Founded in 1990, it is aimed at young musicians (up to the age of 30) with a mission to revive and keep alive global cultural heritage. Present today in over 30 countries, Ethno engages young people through a series of annual international music gatherings as well as workshops, concerts and tours, working together with schools, conservatories and other groups of youth to promote peace, tolerance and understanding. (<https://ethno.world/about/>)

## What is Ethno Research?

Ethno Research has sought to study the value and impact of the Ethno pedagogy and the related social process on the lives of the participating musicians, and its impact on the society at large, over the last 30 years. Following the initial pilot studies and framing document released in early 2020, and the impact COVID-19 had on the data collection sites, Ethno Research began working within 8 focused areas: (1) Arts and Culture, (2) History, (3) Pedagogy and Professional Development, (4) Trauma-Informed Practice, (5) Ethno Organizers, (6) Sustainability/Covid-19, (7) Ethno USA, (8) Majority World.

Ethno Research exists to develop our knowledge and understanding of the Ethno programme. It provides a critical tool to help navigate the complexity of human engagement in 'non-formal' peer-to-peer learning, 'intercultural exchange' and 'traditional' music-making. Our purpose is to illuminate new understandings of what Ethno does to support future growth and development.

## What Next?

As a collection, the reports from this phase of the research are multifaceted and rich in data reflecting the complexity and diversity of the Ethno programme. Paramount for the next phase is to ensure that the research touches those that are invested in its programmes, from participants to organizers. Following the publication of these reports we will be working on a range of dynamic dissemination points resulting in focused outputs that respond to this collection of reports.

The 3-year Ethno Research project, led by the International Centre for Community Music (ICCM) at York St John University in collaboration with JM International (JMI), is made possible through a grant from Margaret A. Cargill Philanthropies.



Research participants have been anonymised in this report, with the exception of the event coordinators.

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Third, I would like to acknowledge Aengus Finnan and Jennifer Roe of Folk Alliance, who passionately and bravely faced the challenges of producing Ethno USA during a pandemic, and guarded like eagles over the health and safety of the participants (I still see in my mind the forest of COVID tests every few days on the table in the dining room -thankfully all of them negative).

From the point of view of this report, the greatest credit for making this gathering what it was in my mind goes to Julie Moore: ensuring that there was a truly inspiring mix of participants and artistic mentors from different cultures within the US and beyond, that there was superb accommodation, excellent food, and —very importantly— a sense of safety among all involved: essential ingredients for a successful gathering of this kind. The conversations we have had before, during and since October 2021 have greatly helped my insights.

I'd also like to thank videographer John Laww for jointly doing the interviews with all participants, fragments of which found a place in his documentary ([ethno.world/ethno-media/ethno-usa-2021](#)), which probably reflects the spirit of the first Ethno USA more effectively than any words ever can (Laww, 2022).

Finally, my deepest gratitude goes to all the participants and artistic mentors who so warmly and graciously welcomed me in their midst. There is always the risk that a foreign professor in the autumn of his life stands out or feels isolated in a group of young musicians. Nothing could be further from the truth with the welcoming, engaged, curious, inspired and openminded individuals and instant community that was Ethno USA. Thank you all; I can't wait to see where your myriad musical paths will lead.

# Executive Summary

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While learning from each other without notation within communities and being inspired by meetings between cultures have been characteristics of much of the musical history of humankind, these have largely been forgotten with the rise and dominance of institutionalized Western formal music education in the 19th and 20th century. Born of the European folk music revival during the second half of the 20th century, Ethno -a program of Jeunesses Musicales International- recreates intense experiences based on cultural encounters and aural peer-to-peer learning to broaden the development of openminded musicians in their twenties from across the world.

With a history of over thirty years involving participants from 80 different countries, the “Ethno approach” was already quite refined when it came to the United States for the first time in October 2021. Bringing together a highly diverse group of 30 participants guided by 3 artistic mentors in an idyllic mountain setting in North Carolina, participants shared and learned songs from twelve different cultural backgrounds over a period of twelve days, culminating in two festival performances and an album recording in a professional local studio.

This report examines in some depth the pedagogy -arguably the most defining characteristic of Ethno- as witnessed at the first Ethno USA, using a framework developed for nuanced understanding of intercultural processes of learning and teaching music (Schippers 2010).

Based on data gathered from participant observation, interviews with all participants and external stakeholders, and set against a brief history of culturally diverse music learning in the USA, a picture emerges of a vibrant and thoroughly engaging “total immersion” program that resonates strongly with traditional modes of transmission in many music cultures.

At the same time, it emphatically connects to the possibilities and the concerns of cultural diversity today. In that pursuit, Ethno USA stands up to scrutiny of its global objectives: engaging young musicians in learning new skills, developing their creativity, and making new connections across cultures, so that Ethno USA represents an intense and powerful recreation of “organic” music learning and creativity that is at once traditional and contemporary.

In that way, the pedagogy of Ethno USA may serve as an inspiration for similar initiatives across the world, as well as for other music learning platforms: community music activities, music in schools, and the training of music professionals.

# Introduction

This report investigates the oral peer-to-peer pedagogy of the first Ethno USA in Black Mountain, North Carolina (October 9–20, 2021). It is based on participant observation of all song-sharing sessions at Ethno USA and interviews with participants and artistic mentors, as well as insights from the local and international organizers: coordinator Julie Moore; producers Aengus Finnan and Jennifer Roe from Folk Alliance International; and Suchet Malhotra from Jeunesses Musicales International.

To contextualize the findings, I will briefly discuss the history of approaches to culturally diverse music learning in the US and beyond, before focusing on the pedagogy as witnessed during the gathering in North Carolina, probably the most distinctive element of the “Ethno method” (cf Mantie & Risk, 2020, pp. 21–44). To structure the latter, I will use the Twelve Continuum Transmission Framework (Schipper, 2010), which provides a useful tool to create a nuanced perspective on aspects that are often glossed over in describing learning music across cultures: issues of context; modes of transmission; dimensions of interaction; and approaches to cultural diversity, all of which are highly relevant to this project. The richest source for this analysis are the 12 sessions (plus two songs by mentors), during which musicians from highly diverse cultural backgrounds first shared their songs with the entire group through peer-to-peer learning over an intense three-day period:

Song sharer	Main instrument(s)	Song	Culture/composer
<b>Ahote</b>	Vocals (hand percussion)	Morning Song	Traditional Hopi
<b>Will</b>	Accordeon (fiddle)	The Loopy Paddlers	Irish/Will
<b>Sophia</b>	Vocals, guitar	Arbol Azul	Latin/Gisun
<b>Rosemary/Julio</b>	Vocals, accordeon	Aire, Tierra, Fuego, Agua	Lyrics: Rosemary. Music/lyrics: Julio.
<b>Robbie</b>	Cello (percussion)	Hijaz Mander	Turkish traditional
<b>Mika</b>	Vocals, guitar	Circadia	Funk/Mika
<b>Serena</b>	Vocals, ukelele	I Love to Praise His Name	Gospel/traditional
<b>Amarjit</b>	Vocals	Sobhillu Saptaswara	Carnatic/Thyagajara
<b>Jane/Stephen</b>	Banjo, fiddle, vocals	Red Rocking Chair	Old time US
<b>Karim</b>	Vocals, guitar	St. Joan	Americana/Karim
<b>Nadia/Maryam</b>	Vocals, ud	Reedaha/Wein A Ramallah	Jordan / traditional
<b>Ines/Arya/Lauren</b>	Fiddle, vocals	Slängpolska efter Ola Olsson Fewer from Lövestad, Skåne	Swedish traditional (Ola Olsson Fewer)
<b>Mateo</b>	Guitar, vocals	I Hate When She Calls	Piedmont/Mateo
<b>Olivia</b>	Latin percussion	Mi Bomba	Latin/Olivia

(See appendix 1 for a full list of participants and their musical backgrounds.)

In the final section, I will present my findings in the light of ten objectives that Ethno has set for itself, which include creating a democratic space for the creation and performance of music; providing equal opportunities to musicians of all genders; fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding; promoting non formal music education through peer-to-peer learning; facilitating the mobility of young musicians; building confidence and mutual respect in young people; promoting learning and teaching methodologies by ear, making music learning accessible to all; and preserving and promoting cultural heritage amongst youth ([www.ethno.world](http://www.ethno.world); cf Mantie and Risk, 2020).

The conclusions will draw together the findings from the three sections (history, pedagogy, and objectives), outlining how they align. Many of my findings align with the insights from the recent Ethno Research reports by Mantie and Risk (2020) and Creech, Varvarigou, Lorenzino, and Čorić (2021): in several ways, this report can be considered a case study to test and illustrate many of their ideas and insights without fieldwork -due to COVID- against a live Ethno in a new territory.



# Framing the experience: Approaches to cultural diversity in music education

With its genesis in the Swedish folk music revival and an open attitude to cultural diversity in the 1990s, Ethno in 2021 is a well-defined organisation, formula, and approach, which has been replicated in 40 countries worldwide (cf Reis et al, 2021). In its brochure and on the website, the essence of the “Ethno method” is described thus: “Ethno is based on peer-to-peer workshops wherein participants from around the world teach each other music from their respective cultures” (Ethno USA, 2021). As key success factors, JMI/Ethno USA identifies: no hierarchy; respect; youthful can-do spirit; breakdown of barriers; common identity on stage; and real-world integration (2021; cf Mantie & Risk, 2020).

In this sense, it resonates with three major shifts in music education that evolved over the past six decades: the learning and teaching of music from other cultures from culture bearers in the countries of origin (e.g. Neuman, 1980, Rice, 1994; Saether, 2003 – see also below); the teaching of music outside of context by culture-bearers (e.g. Campbell, 1998), and the learning of more than one musical idiom (e.g. Hood, 1960, 1995; Solis, 2004).

From the middle of the last century, there have been frequently recorded instances of people learning the music from other cultures. This is likely to correlate with the steady decline of colonial empires and constructs, greater opportunity and ease of travel, and new recording/dissemination technologies. According to leading ethnomusicologist Ki Mantle Hood, his teacher Jaap Kunst —who was a widely recognized expert on Javanese and Balinese gamelan (e.g. Kunst, 1934/1949) — probably never even touched a gamelan instrument, let alone that he would have sat down with the “natives” to experience what it is like to be part of this intensely communal way of music making (personal communication, 1993). Hood himself was one of the first to engage his ethnomusicology students in playing gamelan in the 1950s, but was characterised by colleagues as “the mad professor who sits students on the floor and has them beating on pots and pans in the name of music” (Hood, 1995, p. 56).

Meanwhile, travellers developed a fascination with the music practices they encountered in other cultures, and engaged with them in various ways. This was also the time that music from Europe and the USA seriously started crossing ethnic boundaries: Latino and white musicians had been playing jazz since the 1930s, and instrumentalists of Asian descent became a common presence in symphony orchestras. One of the first US individuals who dedicated his life to learning a tradition away from his own was Jon Higgins (1939–1984), who became a recognized master of Carnatic (South Indian) music. Many others followed, mostly focusing on the musics of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

From the 1980s (arguably building on Blacking's 1973 seminal work *How musical is man*), some of the experiences of learning music outside one's own culture have been documented in some detail. Probably the most well known of these is Tim Rice's *May it fill your soul* (1994), but Daniel Neuman's *The life of music in North India* (1980) and Eva Saether's *The oral university* (2003) are also worth mentioning here.

In addition, there are numerous accounts of students learning music from other cultures as part of ethnomusicology courses in university, the legacy of scholar/pedagogues like Hood (1995) and Brown (1995). These start from the astute observations by Ricardo Trimillos (1989) and extend to the present via the more in-depth accounts of world music ensembles at universities in *Performing Ethnomusicology* (Solis, 2004).

These practices inspired thinking about the concept of bi-musicality (or multi-musicality), introduced by Hood in 1960, and expanded by Rice (2018): the idea that humans are capable of working within more than a single musical frame of reference. Awareness of this started with musicians switching from classical to folk to pop to jazz, but extended into music practices based on entirely different sonic and conceptual precepts.

Meanwhile, there had been a groundswell of thinking and practice focusing on teaching children music from other cultures in school. While there have been some thoughts and efforts in this direction as early as the interbellum (Volk, 1998, pp. 48–49), a convenient starting point for this openness is the influential 1967 Tanglewood Declaration, which explicitly stated

**Music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belongs in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to involve music of our time in its rich variety, including currently popular teenage music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures. (Choate, 1968)**

This work took a flight in the 1990s, with the work of scholar/practitioners like Teresa Volk (1998), Estelle Jorgensen (2003), Patricia Shehan Campbell (e.g. 1998, 2005) and many others. One of the phenomena that Campbell documented and advocated was “Culture bearers in the classroom” (1998). This broke with the idea that music from other cultures could be adequately—or even sensibly—introduced through staff notation or recordings by teachers who were not themselves well-versed in the music practice they taught. This in turn was related to the awareness that music was more than the sound alone, and represented an entire culture of thinking about sound, beauty, community, and the universe.

In addition to its practical challenges, this approach had one major practical drawback: while the culture bearers were mostly competent or even excellent in the tradition they represented, they were often not sufficiently skilled in transferring their knowledge in the specific European 19th century construct that is K-12 education (for 5/6 to 17/18 year olds). As a result, some of these experiments backfired, creating more prejudice about the cultures that were supposed to be promoted than enlightenment among young learners. This was an even greater risk with teenage learners, who tend to have less open ears and minds than K-6 learners (5–12 year olds), as prejudice settles in the early teens.

Meanwhile, inspired by progressing insight into the merits of other cultures and communities, many people re-evaluated their approach to other cultures -whether far-flung or in their own backyard- and started engaging with them. World music acts at major pop festivals and dedicated folk and world music festivals developed rapidly, as well as independent world music record labels, finding an audience ready for aural adventures. This is the context in which Ethno was conceived by the iconic Falun Folk Music Festival.

Coming from a folk music environment, Ethno did not have to shake off the yoke of many “world music initiatives” that came from the shadows of western festivals and institutions. In folk, there is already an appreciation of aural transmission, improvisation, and musical flexibility and change, all of which are key characteristics of the Ethno approach. Ethno founder Magnus Bäckström cited “uniting young musicians around the world” to include folk music, and supporting “individuals and cultures . . . thriving and finding their own identity” as motivation, but also bringing “folk musicians together in order for them to get to know each other,” and to “create international connections and networks for [a] professional future” (Roosioja, 2018, pp. 56–57, quoted in Mantie and Risk, 2021).

# Four aspects of intercultural learning

Pedagogy and professional development of Ethno globally and historically have already been described in considerable detail by Creech et al (2021), who found many of the same key factors I will discuss. In this report focusing on Ethno USA, I will use a theoretical framework particularly suitable to investigate the myriad aspects of pedagogy as a lived experience by participants at that gathering. The twelve-continuum transmission framework (TCTF) was developed to analyse complex music transmission processes within and between cultures (Schippers, 2010). In one of the other Ethno Research reports, this was kindly characterised as a framework that “may be one of the most useful frameworks for understanding [. . .] music transmission in culturally diverse environments” (Mantie and Risk, 2020, p. 23). I hope it will prove to be here.

TCTF is based on fifty years of literature and twenty years of observing, participating in and organising projects focusing on cultural diversity in music education. The framework focuses on four domains that have proven important in shaping successful learning experiences across cultures. They are: modes of transmission; dimensions of interaction; issues of context; and approaches to cultural diversity. Within each of these domains, there are one or more continuums focusing on specific aspects relevant to that realm.

In **modes of transmission**, the framework considers not only whether learning occurs more aurally or notation-based, but also to which degree the music transmission is holistic or atomistic in nature, and whether it emphasises tangible or intangible elements of music making. In these and all other dimensions the framework examines, these are not either-or choices, but rather places on a continuum. For example: All notation-based music practices use at least some aurality in their pedagogies, and many oral traditions use some form of notation or graphic representation.

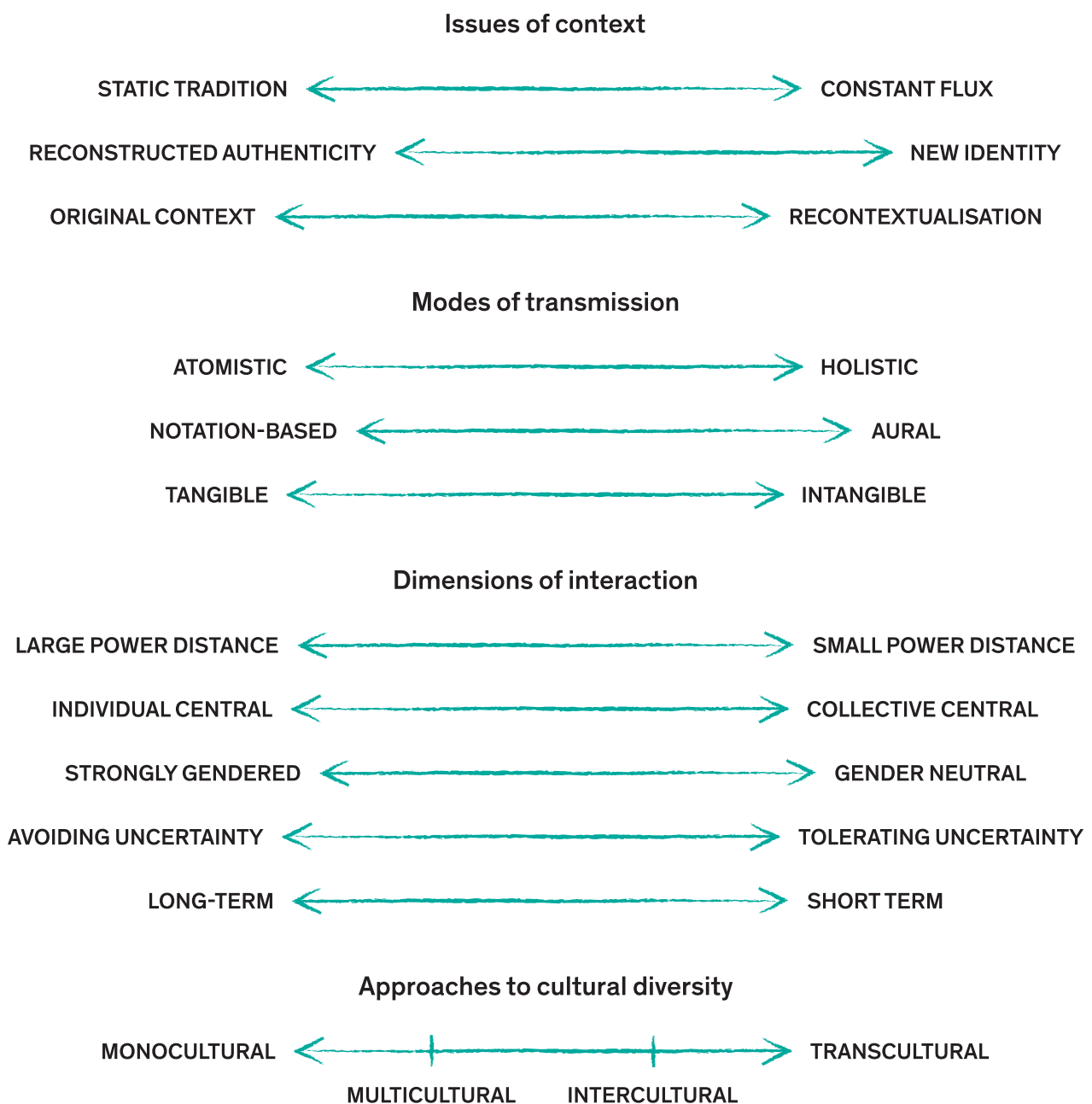
In **dimension of interaction**, the framework considers the power distance between learner and teacher/facilitator, the centrality of the individual or the group, the degree to which learning and playing the music is gendered, long- or short-term orientation, and the degree of tolerance towards uncertainty in the learning interaction. These continuums are derived from the influential work of Hofstede (1985) based on his study of corporate environments. They reveal highly relevant aspects of music learning and teaching that are often ignored in assessing the nature and success of transmission processes.

**Issues of context** considers the degree of fluidity in traditions, constructs regarding authenticity, and the degree of emphasis on —real or imagined— contexts of the music practice. Thinking about these aspects has been strongly influenced by ethnomusicology, which has raised awareness among music teachers to think beyond the sound, but at times has also stifled practice by instilling fear that a non-expert can never do justice to context.

**Approaches to cultural diversity** range from monocultural to transcultural via multicultural and intercultural. In a monocultural environment, a single dominant culture is the only frame of reference. In a multicultural environment, different cultures are acknowledged but they have minimal interaction. In an intercultural environment, conscious efforts are made to enable cultural meetings and mixing. In a transcultural environment, different cultures mix to the degree that their individual features are indistinguishable. The underlying constructs and visions of learning environments are often decisive for how music is taught.

That leads to the following graphic representation:

**Figure 1:** The Twelve-continuum Transmission Framework (Schippers, 2010, p. 124)



Importantly, as mentioned before, each of these fields of tensions are regarded as continuums rather than opposites: where teachers/facilitators and (groups of) learners position themselves may shift from month to month, day to day, session to session, and even within a single session. In general, formal music education tends to gravitate towards the left of the continuum: static approaches to tradition, authenticity and context, atomistic, notation-based, emphasis on tangible aspects of music, clear hierarchies and gender roles, individually focused, avoiding uncertainty, with long-term orientation.

Community-based learning tends to gravitate to the right of the continuums, with a more fluid idea of musical material, readiness to prioritise a sense of authenticity among the participants over striving for historical authenticity, and being comfortable with creating new contexts for making music. Learning tends to be more aural and holistic, often with more intangible goals (e.g. a sense of community over musical flawlessness). In terms of interaction, community music tends to favour small power distances, focus on the collective over the individual, embrace genderfluidity, tolerate uncertainty, and work towards short-term goals (like a performance). While there are many monocultural community music activities, there is often an openness or active embracing of cultural diversity.

However, a priori there are no right or wrong positions on any of these continuums. Research shows that successful transmission processes depend on intelligent -or intuitive- alignment between tradition, institution, facilitator, and learner in each specific situation and at any moment in time (cf Schippers, 2010, pp. 125–136).

In the following pages, I will closely consider the learning experiences at Ethno USA 2021 from the perspective of each of these continuums, noticing alignments, discrepancies, synergies and challenges, taking the observed and related experiences of the participants as the basis, with additional input from mentors, the coordinator, and the responsible organizations. (See Appendix 1 for a full list of participants and their musical backgrounds.)

## **MODES OF TRANSMISSION**

### **Holistic learning**

Music teaching in western institutions is largely organised in what I have referred to as an “atomistic” way: breaking down the music into its constituent elements or small parts, introducing learners to these “bite-size chunks,” and then later reconstructing them into a whole. However, it is important to realise that most music learning in the world is much more holistic: learners are exposed to a musical whole —maybe a pop song through Spotify, or an ewe-rhythm in a Ghanaian village— and use the striking capacity that almost every human brain possesses to process music (cf Blacking, 1973; Sacks, 2007) to make the music their own.

Many of the song sharers at Ethno USA actively considered the advantages and drawbacks of holistic and aural transmission in their choice of repertoire. Great examples of this are songs conducive to quick memorisation, like the old time classic Red Rocking Chair, the gospel Hallelujah, and the refrains of songs like Circadia and Ridaha. Greater challenges for holistic learning were the songs where melody and structure were furthest removed from the musical experience of most participants, like the Turkish Hijaz and the South Indian composition. Such confrontations with musical structures out of most participants' comfort zone tend to cause cognitive dissonance, which can be an obstacle to learning, but also as a stimulus. Most participants embraced the challenges of holistic learning wholeheartedly:

**The fact that we have this more open way of teaching from peer to peer through just doing and through sharing and showing for me is actually an incredible way to make music a bit more openly accessible without the language of theory of westernized theory. I think going through this world tour of music is actually a beautiful experience to travel sonically and have this open-mindedness about, you know, taking down any barriers, any preconceptions or notions, and just getting into the music, in whatever language or style" (Sophia).**

In addition, there was the sheer quantity of musical material that had to be retained in the mind over a very short time. This inevitably led to confusion at times: "It's definitely a challenge. When I try to think about the tunes in my head, they kind of blur together" (Jane). This led to very practical coping strategies: "I think something that's so beautiful about being a part of a large ensemble is the way that you can lean on people" (Jane).

In terms of the framework, most songs are presented as a whole, and then broken down somewhat. Thus, the workshops at Ethno USA oscillate between atomistic and holistic, with the balance firmly toward the latter:

**Figure 2:** Balance between atomistic and holistic transmission within Ethno USA



## Aural learning

The way of learning music at Ethno USA is not only predominantly holistic, but also almost exclusively aural (I prefer using aural —by ear— rather than oral —by mouth— as much of the music was instrumental). Most of the song-sharers took this into account when choosing the songs they brought in: many of them were based on simple rhythms and short melodies that are easy to remember, or repetitive, or both. As discussed in the previous paragraph, the ones that were not as easily digestible posed much greater challenges for the group learning, notably the complex melody from South India and the Turkish melody with quarter notes, set in a seven-beat cycle.

For some of the participants, aural learning was the way they learned music in the first place:

**For me, it's working very well because it was how I learned music, you know, mostly by ear. We didn't really get chance to be in schools of music ..., back then. I mean, we learned from France and we can read some sheet music and stuff like that, but most of the time our music was transmitted by ear from generation to generation. (Samir)**

Others were trained in the West but had been exposed to aural traditions for a long time:

**Middle Eastern music can be notated, but a lot of it is passed orally, the songs and the folk songs and the rhythms, it's an oral art. You're not handed a piece of paper and then telling you which notes to play. You know, it's more about interpretation through learning aurally this way. Indian music is very much the same way: this aural method. I studied tabla [a percussion instrument for which each stroke is represented by a syllable which students learn to speak] for eight years, so I'm very familiar with 'if you can't say it, you can't play it,' and I think it's fantastic learning each piece measure by measure by call and response. (Robbie)**

Many of those trained in formal settings relished the opportunity to see “what happens when you put down the sheet music and you step away from the studio and you simply interact” (Marie). Yet lyrics —particularly those in languages other than English, such as Hopi and Arabic— were notated, and in most cases taught by reciting them line by line. While the group engaged with this very seriously, the effectiveness of presenting the lyrics with the melody from the beginning proved much more effective than separating out the two.

In the Carnatic melody, sargam (Indian solfège) notation was used, but it did not offer much of support as none of the participants were familiar with it. More significantly, many of the songs were presented with chord progressions. This sped up the process for those familiar with the system, but it also took away from the aural immersion, and caused a dichotomy in the group of those who were and those who weren't familiar with working in western chords.

Many seemed to echo the comment by one of the participants: I love learning stuff by ear. I think it feels really correct in my body and the way that I do music” (Danielle). Like in many traditional communities, informal aural learning continues after hours: “outside of the formal workshops, we're just gathering on the porch in the evening and jamming and running through things. And that's just as much part of the learning experience” (Marie). On the whole, learning at Ethno USA very strongly tended towards aural transmission, which felt comfortable to most.



**Figure 3:** Balance between notation-based and aural transmission within Ethno USA



### Tangible/intangible

Emphasis in the learning experience of Ethno USA is on tangible aspects of the music: the melody, the rhythm, the words. This is closely related to the product-oriented nature of Ethno. As Ethno Global Coordinator Suchet Malhotra points out, Ethno may be primarily process-oriented for the participants, but it is quite product-oriented for the artistic mentors and coordinators, as well as for external sponsors, who wish to see concrete and demonstrable impact of the project. Consequently, relatively little significance is attached to the spiritual roots of specific songs or the music, or to aesthetics, or to improvisatory structures.

A less obvious aspect of cultural diversity at Ethno USA is religious/spiritual diversity. There are songs that are emphatically from particular spiritual traditions, such as the Hopi morning song, the South Indian song by Saint poet Thyagaraja, and the gospel song “Hallelujah, I want to praise his name.” About the latter, song sharer Serena learned that gospel and its spirituality were not known to all:

**I was speaking to the sisters from Jordan and they were like “Gospel? No, I don’t know.” I find that so crazy because of course it’s commonplace here. Even if they heard the word gospel before they may not necessarily know what that means, so then I explained that not only is it something that sung in a church, but something that’s sung in a black church specifically. And like what that means for me and my heritage and my culture. It’s really interesting to try to explain. And then make sure that I’m doing it in a way that feels authentic. (Serena)**

In some instances, there was an explanation of the background of the song, from the obvious emotional basis of love songs like “I hope that she calls” and “Arbol Azul” to the Indigenous significance of the Hopi “Morning Song” and “Ayre, Tierra, Fuego, Agua.” A number of participants obliquely referred to more intangible aspects of the songs they were learning, but it was rarely the focus over the melodic and rhythmic material.

Perhaps the spiritual nature of music and performance was most clearly embodied by artistic mentor Ahote, who brought his native American background to Ethno, which permeated the music making, as well as the interaction with all participants through learning, rehearsing, and performing. Every day, the first session was devoted to his “Morning Song,” which to him represented a valuing of indigenous culture beyond tokenism:

**I was very humbled when I was first asked to do this ... I just wasn’t expecting to be at the forefront first thing in the morning. And as you said, the whole, the whole token Indian kind of exposure kind**

**of thing, like it doesn't feel very real, [here] I actually feel. I think that's the very big difference. Bluntly, I feel valued. And I feel that my culture has a place here and that people are taking it seriously, to learn it. (Ahote)**

Ahote also performed smoking ceremonies before the festival performances, which imbued the participants with a sense of the sacred in music and performance. But with two performances and three days of professional recording on the program, tangible aims prevailed.

**Figure 4:** Balance between tangible and intangible aspects of transmission within Ethno USA



## DIMENSIONS OF INTERACTION

### Power distance

Peer-to-peer learning suggests a very small power distance between learner and teacher. Inevitably, in each of the 12 sessions where the young musicians shared their songs, the song-sharers are in a position of power as they are the only ones who know the songs and lead the session, but as it rotates, this does not really cause a disruptive power dynamic. In fact, throughout the workshops, there was a strikingly equal balance of power. This was one of the aspects of Ethno most commented on by the participants, who spoke of the “level playing field” (Robbie) as “my favorite thing” (Jane), and “peer-to-peer learning is what makes it really different here: Everyone just wants to share it as much as they can of what their culture is” (Maryam). Another comments: “I think it’s empowering for most folks to be able to teach. And a lot of people are teaching their own works too, which is really special and really cool” (Carla); and finally: “You’re learning both how to teach both while you’re learning it, and while you’re teaching. You’re always thinking in the back of your mind while you’re in a workshop, oh, that’s a good idea. I should do that when I run workshops as well” (Will).

A number of participants had learned music without authority figures:

**I was never around people who were master musicians per se. It's people who just maybe have learned their guitar from someone they knew, or a friend like this: 'here's how you play this song.' And I can really relate to that because I never learned how to read music or anything, but just learning basic theory and just understanding enough chords to learn how to put them all together and tie them all together. (Mika)**

Others, however, contrasted it with their earlier learning experiences in formal environments: “I have a background in arts, but like acting, performing arts. At some point it was not fun anymore to learn like school” (Rosemary). This sentiment is shared by other participants: “When you have a professor or a doctor, you will always fear to play something in front of him because he will catch your faults maybe” (Nadia). Another expresses it more graphically: “there’s no master that teaches everything; everybody teaches each other” (Julio). And finally, with a little more detail:

**There’s something about other music learning environments. You’re given a song by someone who you assume is the professional in that type of music, or who at least holds some sort of a degree or a badge to show “I can teach this music.” Stepping away from that and personally feeling the agency to step into that teaching position is really difficult, but also cool. [...]: Seeing everybody find their own agency and teaching, feeling and acting and teaching as they are and with all of the experience that they have, without this power dynamic that comes from maybe the more traditional ways of teaching. (Lauren)**

As the days went by, people got more familiar with each other, and production (of the festival performance and the album) became the focus rather than the learning experience. There was a noticeable shift in power dynamics, with those feeling most experienced in arranging and producing becoming more pronounced than many others. This caused some friction, to the point where one of the mentors intervened by starting a recording session with emphatic advice to the entire group to continue to ensure all voices are heard.

On the whole, the three artistic mentors -justifiably renamed from the previous “artistic leaders” in all Ethnos as Suchet pointed out- played a key role in creating an atmosphere of low power distance by deliberately remaining in the background during virtually all artistic and pedagogical interactions; only intervening subtly or when there were concerns only they can deal with: “within the peer to peer process, I personally like to take a step back in some instances, just to allow natural leaders to show themselves” (Ahote). The mentor overseeing the percussion -who effortlessly fits clave patterns to Scottish reels- identifies more as a participant than as a mentor: “I love the fact that I can be learning from other cultures so I can basically adapt, you know, and actually show what I can bring from my country too and blend it in a great way” (Olivia). This hands-off approach was quite organic:

**The mentors didn’t have a lot of planning time, but seemed to work with one another on intuition, trusting each other to bring forth and use liberally their own gifts. With Megan, it was organization, with Ahote it was nurturing, unification, and deep authentic expression. With Olivia it was the rhythmic flavor created in the percussion session which led heavily to the unique sound of the Ethno USA folkestra. (Julie)**

The mentor with the most experience in leading musical groups feels Ethno resonates with what she prefers to do in the first place:

**One thing I've been trying to do as a teacher is to step back and not do something, either not speak or not play or not teach or something like that. And that's always a balance. I think that in teaching I have done in the past, I have always looked for elements of peer-to-peer learning and ways to ignite a little fire to make things go. [But] it's really fun being able to sometimes not have to light the fire, just step away and, and watch the cool thing that's going on and try to be one of the people who's learning from whoever's sharing in the moment. (Megan)**

With this remarkable restraint, and in line with how Ethno approaches this globally, the power distance stayed strikingly small throughout Ethno USA.

**Figure 5:** Degree of power distance within Ethno USA

LARGE POWER DISTANCE ←————— X —————→ SMALL POWER DISTANCE

### Individual vs collective

While much music making -particularly in the West- has a strong individual focus, valuing individual excellence and striving to be better than others, the ethos of Ethno USA is very much towards the collective. In that sense, it echoes many traditions from across the world where the collective spirit supersedes individual brilliance. This can be found in the concept of Ubuntu in music from Africa below the Sahara, in the practice of gamelan in Bali and Java, and in the music of many Indigenous peoples from Australia to Canada.

Most participants revelled in the group spirit: “the amount of focus that everyone has, and creativity and willingness to share music and experiences is amazing. Having people gathered together and being so willing to put in just in so much energy to sharing music and to creating music together when we didn't know each other three days ago is, is pretty incredible” (Lauren); “there's no pressure to do it one way or another. You know, we worked together as a group” (Amarjit); and “We're both teachers and students, so it feels really [like a] collaborative learning process. It's not like ‘You do that.’ It's like ‘Well, what do you think of that? . . . I'm gonna teach you this melody, and then we're going to figure out how to put it together” (Stephen).

Several participants identified this as their favorite aspect of Ethno USA:

**I can say my favorite part of this whole thing is just the chemistry of the people that are around. It's great chemistry, because everybody has come to the table with such an open mind. And everybody's so humble. So it's just so warm. It's loving,**

it's inviting, it's welcoming. There's not a moment I've felt like an outcast or anything just because I came from a different place and no one knows me. Like, it's just all like family, the moment you set foot on these grounds together with that band, you're a family. [...] My friend said something so beautiful the other night: "You don't take from ethno. You give to ethno." And you know, I would tell someone, yeah, go and give your gift to ethno because you're going to get a lot more than you give ... that's the beautiful thing of giving because it all comes back. It's just the circle of flowing love and music and culture. And it just makes us all better. (Sam)

In the end, virtually everybody voiced in one way or another how comfortable the peer-to-peer learning and group arranging felt to them:

It's a group effort, so I see us all kind of working together. If someone is struggling with something, I've been more than happy to help think at any point, if someone's working on it, I'll just go grab my guitar and we'll work on it really quick. And I see that everyone's kind of working together, which is really, really awesome, instead of it being like everyone's an individual and you have to get it right. (Danielle)

Almost all expressed in some way that "it's really not about ego or yourself or personal or financial gain. It's about coming together" (Stephen). This extends beyond the music making: "you have this connection and we're working together for like, who's getting the chairs, who's going to wake people up: we're becoming this team slash family slash working peer group" (James). A delightful feature of Ethno is that every night, three participants are asked to assist the caterer with washing up: two to do the dishes, and one to provide music while they do so. The spirit of collectivity pervades all aspects of Ethno.

**Figure 6:** Balance between individual and collective at Ethno USA



## Gender

The gender balance at Ethno USA is quite even in terms of male and female participants. "My focus in recruitment was cultural diversity, but I also worked on retaining gender balance. That worked out pretty naturally with most participants" (Julie). There were three female overseas participants from regions where there is a perceived or implied or historic gender imbalance, who were enabled to participate with considerable additional effort: "When I was contacted by Maryam in Jordan and found she wanted to travel with her sister, I did give substantial time making sure they were both able to attend, working with my colleagues and friends at Petra National Trust. I worked very hard together to obtain visas

for these women, working closely with embassy officials to ensure that this happened. Likewise for Tendai from Zimbabwe” (Julie). A number of instrument groups are slightly gendered: there were more women who play the violin and more men drumming. Some of the lyrical content is also gendered, but none of it is overtly sexist. All participants seem to be aware and respectful of Ethno’s insistence of embracing LGBTQI+.

“With the mentors, there was a female-focus in recruitment, but in total the mentor positions were offered to 3 males and 2 females. Megan and Ahote were secured first, then three black males declined the 3rd spot before I finally found Olivia” (Julie). With three women and one man (plus Roger as a more informal mentor for the album recording), the leader/mentorship ended up balanced, so that no issues of gender arose perceptibly, with the possible exception of a few of the male participants becoming a little more dominant in the process towards performance and recording, which was addressed by one of the -female- mentors, as mentioned above.

**Figure 7:** Balance between strongly gendered and gender neutral at Ethno USA



### Welcoming uncertainty

The very formula of Ethno invites embracing uncertainty. The young musicians come to the gathering with a deliberate desire to be confronted with music, words and ideas that they are not familiar with. That extends to the learning process—which is removed from the comfort zones of some of the participants—and the process of jointly arranging the songs for performance and recording.

This group tolerance towards uncertainty was perhaps most readily noticeable with the songs that were furthest from the other participants’ comfort zone. One participant commented that during “the Jordanian song [set in maqam Hijaz], everybody was just coming up [against] this scale. We’ve never heard this language before, and we’re just going to nail it, which is so amazing” (Karim). The participants who shared the song felt the same: “I looked at their faces when I told them about the quarter tone [a characteristic of much Middle Eastern music]. It’s something new to them . . . they are not familiar with this tuning” (Nadia). However, Maryam continues, “they’re very receptive and they just picked it up. They were welcoming to learn my song, my culture, and how the maqams [Arabic tonal structures] are different from what they’re used to. So it was easier than what I had in mind or what I anticipated” (Maryam).

The state of mind required for making that possible pervaded comments from many of the participants: “push yourself out of your comfort zone” (Karim). One participant emphasized the need to “be open to all the possibilities and show up with my full self, because if I hold anything back, um, then I’m not going to get as full of an experience and not going to share as deeply” (Jane).

**This situation itself is like a surprise box, you know: sometimes you open the box and then you have a certain tune and then five minutes later, or 10 minutes later, you are playing another song from another part of the world, with different feelings, connections, ... and that's really impressive, to be able to rehearse so many kinds of music in such a short period of time. It opens your head. (Julio)**

One participant considered his Ethno experience “learning music in one of the truest ways: someone plays or sings a piece for you and you learn it by ear and you go back and forth and you try and you make mistakes and you go through it and there’s no judgment. And there’s no preconceived notions about what it might end up sounding like. We’re all just there to learn” (Amarjit). Embracing uncertainty to that extent requires a great amount of trust in a group and an environment that makes it feel safe to take risk and explore untrodden paths:

**Figure 8:** Degree of embracing uncertainty at Ethno USA

AVOIDING UNCERTAINTY ←—————✕————→ TOLERATING UNCERTAINTY

### Short-term orientation

The intensity of the program and the expectations in terms of short-term sonic outcomes create a pressure cooker effect on processes and participants: “the first few days have felt like a few weeks. They’ve been so full. I mean it’s wonderful. The way that the community has, has come together so quickly, and already feels like a family, is so wonderful” (Karim). The intensity increases with the diversity and expected format of the songs: “people from all these different cultures are coming together and actually putting in. To make one fantastic song or orchestral song, you know, so that, that’s what I’ve taken from it” (Jesse).

While there is considerable emphasis on the long-term results of Ethno in terms of deeply embracing other cultures, as the days go by, the focus of the gathering is more and more on short term results, in this case the festival performances and the album recording. There is a real sense of urgency regarding learning the different songs and creating arrangements that will work on stage and in the studio. That creates a shift in dynamics as well: while in the first five days there was ample time for creative ideas that may or may not work, discussions and rehearsals focused more on how each of the songs would sound with the entire orchestra involved at the performances and in the recording during the second part of the gathering. Particularly a professional recording with the need to lay down tracks which will be heard in perpetuity necessitated focus. Fourth mentor Roger —an experienced producer— admirably tried to keep the flow of the recording sessions natural and most of the decisions making processes with the participants, but in the end inevitably organisation needed to be tightened in order to get all elements of all tracks down.

Overall, the output oriented second half of the gathering was beneficial in keeping the level of focus high among the participants, but perhaps something was lost in the potential of freely exploring creativity without an immediate application or purpose beyond the musical experience. This idea also emerged strongly from the survey of the participants. So, while there are demonstrable long-term effects of Ethno at large in terms of networks and attitudes, the actual program at Ethno USA and the way it was experienced by the participants strongly gravitated towards short-term outcomes.

**Figure 9:** Long-term versus short-term orientation at Ethno USA



## ISSUES OF CONTEXT

### Tradition

While many of the songs derive from traditions going back decades or even centuries, the way they are adapted and performed shows a very flexible approach to tradition: Songs, performance formats and even musical structure are changed so that each song fits in the Ethno sound and format. While the Ethno leadership speaks of sustaining traditions, it is a little difficult to see how this works in practice. The songs as they are adapted for Ethno do not fit “back” in the tradition, and are unlikely to become part of the fiber of those traditions.

The participants reflect on tradition in various ways. Some truly value their heritage, even if it is not prominent in one’s own awareness or musical life:

**[Sharing] your culture and your culture and your heritage is actually really important. And if you don’t know it really, it [Ethno] actually makes you want to know it better because it’s something that we should all have to share. Singing gospel music is an American art form. Singing blues, that’s an American art form. And it comes from the way that this country started and all of that is important. [...] We can always bring that to the forefront and learning about our heritage and just asking questions to our elders is really important [especially] if you don’t have elders that are in your life all the time. (Serena)**



Others express awareness of the narrow perspective musicking in a single tradition can bring:

**We often think in genre, and within tradition. I'm realizing that people who play traditional music around the world are linked. And I hadn't, to be honest, thought about that. I knew that tradition was powerful and it was passed down and, that there was something special about traditional music, but thinking about them as part of the same story and part of a common ground, I think has been a big development for me. (Stephen)**

As the song sharing sessions are very intense and focused on getting the music across, some use the time between and after sessions to learn more about traditions by “talking to the musicians after hours, trying to learn the tunes as much as we can during the rehearsals. And then just having that time later to speak with them and talk about, you know, some more of the intricacies of what should we be doing here? How is your music different from their music?” (Danielle). One participant specifically brings up sustainability: “Preserving music and having that come up through a next generation, that’s such an important piece of Ethno: the young folks, the young people learning their music and passing it on to others” (Marie). Overall, however, tradition was approached as highly dynamic at Ethno USA: there was little emphasis on sustaining music traditions as they were, but a great deal of effort towards creating new music based on those traditions.

**Figure 10:** Approach to tradition at Ethno USA

STATIC TRADITION  CONSTANT FLUX

## Authenticity

Ethno is not an initiative which aims at perpetuating specific traditions ways they were performed for tens or hundreds of years. In none of the songs, with the possible exception of the Hopi morning song, is there a desire to be authentic in the sense of “the way it was when the song as created.” It is clear to all that the purpose of Ethno USA is mixing rather than perpetuating traditions in an authentic way (whatever the reference for authentic may be):

**Learning about the culture is not just through the music, but also the rest of the culture. It gives you more insight into the world, which you wouldn't be able to get if you played with people from your own culture or stayed in your own country. Coming to an Ethno[USA] is like traveling to 20 different countries and experiencing all that culture. I think having this fantastic mix of cultures is a real treat, both in terms of the chance to try out all these music from all around the world and experience their music and learn about their music and their culture, but specifically for the mixing as well. (Will)**

No particular value is attached to authenticity in the sense of how (some expert says) it once was. This static (and often superimposed) approach to authenticity —which has been an obstacle to many initiatives involving music from different cultures— is not at all the focus of Ethno USA. Coordinator Julie celebrates the inauthenticity at Ethno and similar projects:

**This inauthenticity is part of the integration process —first people have to come together to joyfully share— even if the recipients inevitably put an accent on it. Through the joyful sharing comes the love of a new music, and then a new love for the people sharing it, and then a true interest in and compassion for the culture from whence the music came. It can take years to pull back those layers, but over time the effect is tremendous. (Julie)**

Therefore, a strong argument can be made for a new identity (Schippers, 2010), “strategic inauthenticity,” as Taylor (2007) calls in the context of West African popular music, or even a new tradition, as the songs become Ethno songs, which can be seen as their own tradition with their own authenticity in many senses.

**Figure 11:** Approach to authenticity in Ethno USA

RECONSTRUCTED AUTHENTICITY  NEW IDENTITY

## Recontextualization

Certainly there is interest in the -real or reconstructed- context of each tradition among the participants: “it’s been really cool to learn not only the actual tunes themselves, but learn, you know, about where everyone’s coming from and the context of this music as well” (Marie). However, ultimately all of the songs are drastically recontextualized. Ethno is a magical but profoundly “inauthentic” setting for the musics being performed. But the very setting of Ethno becomes a new context, with a well-defined process:

**Sometimes people have really defined vision for what their song and trying to allow us to fulfil their vision. That’s really interesting. And then other people, they kind of want us to help them create the vision of the songs and it’s also really exciting. So I guess what’s been really interesting about that is just seeing how we can fit all the pieces of the puzzle. (Ines)**

Participants naturally incorporate recontextualization in their activities at Ethno USA and the creativity that implies: “There’s a lot of really good work happening, and it’s been really cool to kind of come up with arrangements for tunes that I’ve never heard before. Kind of in real time with the musicians that either wrote them or are showing them to us from their cultures” (Danielle). This great flexibility with new identity and recontextualisation characterises Ethno:

**Figure 12:** Approach to context at Ethno USA

ORIGINAL CONTEXT  RECONTEXTUALISATION

## APPROACHES TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY

The realization that there are many different worthwhile music cultures on planet earth was not so much a lesson participants took from Ethno USA, but rather a key reason why they took part:

**All the reason I came here was to experience other cultures and learn something completely different than my own. I'm just stuck in the Americana land, you know, and I just wanted to know what everybody else was doing. It makes your mind hurt a little bit to learn in so many languages at once, but they're all vowels and notes and beats. (Carla)**

Others came from diverse cultural backgrounds:

**I come from so many different cultures and backgrounds and actually, I was kind of uncertain coming to Ethno, like, should I share something Canadian or something from some of my other [Latin] culture. I think it's so interesting to explore. So many different parts of our heritage, our identity, our language, our styles of music, our interpretations. And so I think going through this world tour of music is actually a beautiful experience to travel sonically and actually have this open-mindedness about taking down any barriers, any preconceptions or notions, and just getting into the music, in whatever language or style. (Sophia)**

An important aspect was the representation of cultural diversity in the USA:

**I have been loving the diversity within the American -like USA-representation: to experience [that] in terms of the feel of the different songs. We have different cultures of the US represented like the Hopi song and gospel. We have Mika's indigenous blues funk type of thing. And then we have Mateo's Piedmont blues. And is there another one? Oh, and shoot, we have the old-time song. And then we also have Americana. So we got six. We got the country. (James)**

This was carefully curated and stimulated through travel grants by the coordinator of Ethno USA: “I’ve tried the hardest . . . looking into the black American community and specifically I wanted blues represented or gospel, and I ended up getting both, which was really beautiful and super important to all of us for launching the first US Ethno” (Julie). In line with the wishes of Jeunesses Musicales International, she also ensured that there was sufficient indigenous representation (one participant and one mentor; the latter a first for Ethno worldwide), Latino presence (one participant and one mentor), as well as participants with African, Asian and Middle Eastern national and musical backgrounds.

While all celebrated the diversity of sounds that arose from this pro-active drafting of participants, some sought similarities in the music practices they encountered: “in the workshops, we’ll go from a Jordanian tune to an old-time tune to a Scottish tune. And it’s this kind of musical whiplash that feels delightful, because I’m realizing not only how all the traditions are unique, but also how they’re connected in this” (Stephen).

**I’ve loved hearing the echoes between melodies between different cultures. I mean, it’s obvious: I’m not the first one to say that obviously, but it’s still really cool to hear a similarity between melodic structures and scales between Indian classical music and a Swedish fiddle tune and the Hopi morning song. I mean, we’re all more similar than we are different. I knew that coming in, but it’s just validating. It’s very special. (Karim)**

Others felt a little apprehensive at first:

**How do I feel that mixing of so many different cultures works? It seems to be working really well. But I was a little nervous at first, knowing that there were going to be so many different types of music, especially some that people might not have heard before or even heard of. So I think I was a little in my head about it. And then I realized that, you know, there’s like a baseline of what ties a lot of music together. (Amarjit)**

This raises the question of music as a universal language. Some participants subscribed to this idea: “music is an equalizer of sorts, a universal language” (Carla), or “I’ve been really excited personally to sing in Arabic and learn some Indian songs, and Turkish, something like that I’ve never experienced myself [. . .] you have the opportunity to spend lots of time with people from different cultures and soak it up and you see that we’re mostly pretty similar” (Mateo). Another added: “it really just goes to show that music transcends all languages, all borders, all barriers, and really connects us to one another” (Sophia).

However, others challenged the notion that music stands as a universal language by itself:

**I struggle with this idea that music is everyone's language or that music is the universal language, because I don't really think that's true. I think we've all found ourselves in jam sessions where you're like: "I know none of these tunes, and then it doesn't really feel like it's the same thing. But being here and being able to hear all of those things and then have them translated for you (or to be walked through the translation so that you can understand) is really impactful because it gets rid of this assumption that everyone's music is easy for everyone else. And it gets at this idea that even though all of our musics are different and they're not in the same language, musically or lyric wise, that there's still a way to translate and communicate. (Lauren)**

A few participants commented explicitly on an underlying sense of making the world a better place through Ethno: "I think this is the whole thing of this program: build bridges between countries. We're saying no borders. We need to open the borders and build more bridges between countries and cultures and spread peace in the world" (Robbie). And: "this thing right here, that we are all doing, changes the world because you learn about culture and can then pass that on. And hopefully at some point, it trickles down or trickles up if you will, to the rest of the world, you know, including presidents and things like that. If we could all do it, I think the government can do this too." (Sam)

Such sentiments are also evident in the leadership of the two organizations that were responsible for Ethno USA: JM International and Folk Alliance International. The latter speaks of:

**The dream of Ethno, which ultimately in my view is about peace and international development, more than it is about music. Music is the thread of the fabric, but it's people falling in love with the idea of connection, global connection and going back home and not thinking places, but thinking about people from places. I see this as much deeper than a music enterprise. It is about peace and international development. These are people who will go home changed by the experience with the news on, and hearing about a person that they know [first], not the politics of the day. (Aengus)**

These sentiments are echoed by Ethno Global Coordinator Suchet, who is careful to point out that Ethno does not make any grand claims on combatting racism, but does believe that prejudice comes from what one is fed. And with its rich and well-structured musical menu, Ethno at least sparks cultural curiosity.

Interestingly, in the arranging process by the group, there is a tendency to shape every melody into the format of a western style "track": a main melody sung or played by a one or two participants, then a refrain in which everybody participates, and space for improvisations against a background of chord progressions. This leads to the quite

characteristic and compelling “Ethno Sound” that is also evident from the online material of previous Ethnos across the world, and from the world music orchestra Världens Band that emanated from it (cf Gibson, 2020). Still, it is useful to reflect on the implications of this process: negatively, it can be seen as a form of Eurocentric colonization of the project; more positively, as a natural process in which music develops as time and circumstances change.

The “Ethnification” of the songs does have implications for the degree to which Ethno contributes to the preservation of specific traditions. Most of the final songs as they appear on stage, the web and the forthcoming CD are quite removed from the original song. This is by design, and there is nothing wrong with it. However, as mentioned before, it is unlikely that these altered songs will contribute substantially to the sustainability of the traditions from which they came, although they may pique interest in the underlying traditions.

In the end, it may not be very useful to consider whether Ethno USA helps sustain individual traditions. Rather, it seems to me that it should be seen as an “instant community,” where participants buy in to a particular ethos in terms of approach, working together, and sound, much like long-established “organic communities” (cf Schippers, 2018) do. Membership of this community is not exclusive —all the participants belong to several other communities, like most of us- but it is also not limited to the ten days and particular place where they gather.

Several participants comment on expecting their experiences to resonate in their future music making: “different countries bring different sounds and different vibes and stuff, which I can definitely utilize in my own personal work” (Elijah); “I feel like I’m collecting all these pieces in my brain and that will feed a lot of more creativity in the future as well” (Marie); and “I think the main shift I’ve had so far is sitting there and thinking I’d really like to have an ud someday in my string band or to kind of cross boundaries a little more: not in a corny, but in a deep and meaningful way” (Stephen).

Overall, it is safe to say that cultural meeting and interaction are at the heart of Ethno. It does not take a monocultural approach in the sense that a single culture is the central reference. Nor can it be characterised as multicultural, where cultures exist next to but separate from each other. Probably the strongest case can be made for intercultural, as a voluntary meeting of cultures. To some extent, some of the outcomes could be seen as transcultural, where there is an in-depth adoption of ideas from different cultures to the point that it is hard to tell them apart.

**Figure 13:** Approaches to cultural diversity at Ethno USA



# Pedagogy at Ethno USA and the objectives of Ethno worldwide

After careful analysis focusing on the participants' experience, the Twelve Continuum Transmission Framework for Ethno USA looks like this:

## Issues of context



## Modes of transmission



## Dimensions of interaction



## Approaches to cultural diversity



That is a striking picture: virtually all places on the continuum are much towards the right: an indication that the carefully crafted and honed Ethno approach succeeds in creating an intense and safe and creative community experience for young musicians (cf p. 14). Very few music transmission settings show this combination of qualities across the 12 continuums. Such observations invite reflections on whether and to what extent the experiences at Ethno USA and the pedagogical practices encountered there align with the ethos of the international social enterprise it has become. On its website [www.ethno.world](http://www.ethno.world), Ethno makes explicit ten objectives of the organization:

1. Preserve and promote cultural heritage amongst youth
2. Foster intercultural dialogue and understanding
3. Promote non formal music education through peer-to-peer and experiential learning
4. Facilitate the mobility of young musicians and emerging talent, locally and abroad
5. Build confidence in young people's talents and inspire them to further their musical and creative development
6. Grow self-respect, self-awareness, and respect for others
7. Create a democratic space for the creation and performance of music
8. Provide equal opportunities to musicians of all genders
9. Celebrate young talent in an inclusive environment
10. Utilise, develop, and promote learning and teaching methodologies by ear, making music learning accessible to all.

As discussed above, preserving and promoting cultural heritage amongst youth seems to be one of the more marginal outcomes of Ethno USA, with effects that are largely indirect or oblique. A claim can certainly be made for empowering young musicians who almost invariably have a background in diverse cultural heritages. However, the sonic material gets transformed so drastically, that it would be hard to claim that the underlying music practice directly benefits from Ethno USA.

Fostering intercultural dialogue and understanding is a more pronounced outcome of Ethno USA. Young people from a wide range of backgrounds spend 10 days in close quarters with each other. While the very nature of Ethno USA implies that most participants had an open attitude towards cultural and musical diversity from the start, the "Ethno method" will have deepened that considerably.

As stated in the introductory remarks of this report, to "Promote non formal music education through peer-to-peer and experiential learning" seems like a revolutionary idea to those anchored in primary/secondary or conservatory/school of music teaching, but it is in fact the most common way in which people learn music throughout the world. From times immemorial to today, young people have learned music from simply hearing and imitating tunes and rhythms and songs that speak to them. But bringing back that awareness is certainly a worthy mission.



While there is a great deal of support for the idea to “Facilitate the mobility of young musicians and emerging talent, locally and abroad,” there are many practical obstacles, particularly for young musicians from developing countries. These are economic, but often also political. Immigration regulations make mobility hard for many young musicians. Ethno USA proved exemplary in persisting to find ways of gathering musicians from all over the globe, with COVID restrictions and requirements—which in the end prevented a number of young musicians from participating— as an additional barrier in 2021.

From the words of the participants, there is ample evidence that Ethno USA contributes to “build confidence in young people’s talents and inspire them to further their musical and creative development” in myriad ways. It is also a space that is conducive to “Grow self-respect, self-awareness, and respect for others.” With its very small power distances and emphasis on the collective, Ethno USA was a strong platform to “Create a democratic space for the creation and performance of music” while providing “equal opportunities to musicians of all genders,” enabling the project to “Celebrate young talent in an inclusive environment.”

Perhaps most strikingly, Ethno USA succeeded in its mission to “Utilise, develop, and promote learning and teaching methodologies by ear, making music learning accessible to all” through its choice of mentors and participants. By creating a platform for age-old practices of music transmission and creativity compatible with contemporary needs and possibilities, Ethno USA has been highly successful in creating a learning environment that provides a stimulating, often even transformational experience for young musicians from different cultures. Its insistence on diversity in participants, pedagogies, and materials—and to some extent arrangements— make it exemplary in demonstrating viable alternatives or additions to formal music education for both professional and amateur musicians, and possibly -with some adaptations- from Kindergarten to secondary schools (K-12).

The organization seems to be able to coordinate many Ethnos around the world every year, without the risk of becoming too tight in controlling its franchises on one hand, or on the other allowing them to be so loose or distant from its key principles that the essence of the approach is lost. Judging from conversations with fellow researchers and participants of other Ethno gatherings, Ethno USA stood out in its profoundly culturally diverse pool of participants, the intense interaction between all participants (which is easier to achieve with 30 than with 100 participants), and its very ambitious goals in terms of outputs (two festival performances and a professionally produced album). While some aspects of Ethno USA invite continued watchfulness and close scrutiny in terms of representation, inclusivity, and artistic outcomes, overall it stands out as a shining example of learning music from a truly global perspective, which deserves to be continued in its present form, and expanded in its reach to other settings of music making and learning across the world.

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## APPENDIX 1: PARTICIPANTS AND MUSICAL EXPERTISE ETHNO USA 2021

Julio	Chilean German	Electric Acorddeon:
Sam	Dallas, TX	percussion
Stephen	Durham, NC	fiddle, banjo, guitar, mandolin, vocal
Samir	Florida/ Algeria	mandole/banjo/vocal
Nadia	Jordan	ud, electric oud, vocals
Maryam	Jordan	vocal
Danielle	Kansas City, MO	Acoustic Guitar, Cajon, Vocal
Arya	Minneapolis	cello, vocal
Carla	Minneapolis	Guitar and Vocal (these are my main instruments. I can also play banjo, uke, mandolin, and keys)
Jane	Minnesota, USA	vocal, banjo, accordion
Megan	NC	fiddle/ clawhammer
Mika	NC, US	Guitar, Vocal, Bass, Mandolin, Native Flute
James	NM	
Ahote	NM/AZ	guitar, percussion, vocals
Sophia	Ontario, CA	vocal (guitar?)
Sally	Oregon, USA	vocal, ukulele
Olivia	Puerto Rico/ MA	percussion
Mateo	Richmond, VA	Guitar, vocal
Will	Scotland	fiddle, vocal, piano *accordion
Jesse	US	Djembe, Dunun family, tuba
Marie	US – Asheville	voice, body percussion?
Ines	US – Minneapolis	violin
Karim	US – San Diego	guitar/harmonica/vocal
Elijah	USA (born in Haiti)	vocals (a little guitar)
Lauren	Wisconsin, USA	Hardanger d'amore, Vocal

## APPENDIX 2: ETHNO USA 2021 SCHEDULE

	08:30	09:30	10:00	11:15	12:30	13:30	15:00	16:15	17:30	19:00	20:00
<b>Sat Oct 9</b>		Arrival of participants								Dinner	Evening Welcome Gathering
<b>Sun Oct 10</b>	Breakfast	Morning gathering + morning tune	WS 1	WS 2	Lunch	Downtime	WS 3	WS 4	All Together	Dinner	Dance Evening
<b>Mon Oct 11</b>	Breakfast	Morning gathering	WS 5	WS 6	Lunch	Downtime	WS 7	WS 8	All Together	Dinner	TBA
<b>Tue Oct 12</b>	Breakfast	Morning gathering	WS 9	WS 10	Lunch	Downtime	WS 11	WS 12	All Together	Dinner	TBA
<b>Wed Oct 13</b>	Breakfast	Morning gathering	School Visits		Lunch	Downtime	Rehearsals			Dinner	TBA
<b>Thu Oct 14</b>	Breakfast	Morning gathering	Rehearsals		Lunch	Downtime	Community performance			Dinner	TBA
<b>Fri Oct 15</b>	Breakfast	Morning gathering	Run Through		Lunch	Departure for LEAF	LEAF Soundcheck	LEAF Concert 1 @ 5 pm		Dinner @ LEAF	Departures
<b>Sat Oct 16</b>	Breakfast	Morning gathering	Run Through	Departure for LEAF	Lunch @ LEAF	LEAF Concert 2 @ 2pm		LEAF Hangout		Dinner @ LEAF	LEAF Hangout, Departures for the Y from LEAF staggered throughout the evening
<b>Sun Oct 17</b>	Breakfast	Time Off	Departure for Studio + Setup		Lunch @ Studio	Recording Session #1		Closing Ceremony LEAF		Dinner @ LEAF	LEAF Hangout
<b>Mon Oct 18</b>	Breakfast	Recording session # 2			Lunch to go	Recording session # 3				Dinner	Ethno USA Sharing Circle
<b>Tue Oct 19</b>	Breakfast	Recording session # 4			Lunch	Departure for Fr8Yard	Fr8Yard Closing Party + Performances in small groups + Meet & Greet with Stakeholders				
<b>Wed Oct 20</b>	Breakfast	Departures for participants not attending the Ethno USA Tour + Ethno USA On The Road Tour begins									

MEALS (total #fed, including chefs)

REHEARSALS

FULL GROUP AND/OR SECTIONAL REHEARSALS

ACTIVITIES

PERFORMANCES

OUTREACH

\*\* Quality over quantity – better to learn 1–3 fewer songs if necessary but spend time culturally contextualizing, and building intercultural engagement etc

\*\* Using open mics and jams as a way to vet music that doesn't have time to be taught in the full group

\*\* Some music can be recorded with duos, trios, or small portions of the ensemble, rather than the full ensemble

## APPENDIX 3: ETHNO USA 2021 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

October 12	October 13	October 14	October 16
14:00 Jane	10:00 Amarjit	08:45 Megan	10:30 Mika
14:20 Robbie	10:15 Mateo	09:00 Ahote	10:15 Tendai
14:40 Julio	10:30 Lauren	09:15 James	09:45 Aengus (FAI)
	10:45 Jesse	13:15 Olivia	09:30 Jennifer (FAI)
	11:00 Karim	13:30 Will	
	11:15 Elijah	13:45 Arya	
	11:30 Samir	14:00 Danielle	
	11:45 Anaishe	14:30 Ines	
	12:00 Sam	14:45 Marie	
	12:15 Sophia	15:00 Roger	
	12:30 Stephen		
	14:00 Serena		
	14:15 Rosemary		
	14:30 Maryam		
	14:45 Nadia		
	16:30 Julie		

March 15, 2022: Suchet Malhotra

Names of research participants have been anonymised, with the exception of the event coordinators.



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