

Nazir Ali Jairazbhoy Colloquium Series:

ABSTRACTS

November 6, 2009 SEM Student Paper Presentations

4:00 pm Kate Wiens

Los Peregrinos [The Pilgrims]: Economy, Culture, and Spirituality in Music of Transmigrant Mennonites

The presentation looks at CD production among transmigrant Mennonites, an Anabaptist Christian population. For nearly a century, Mennonites have migrated between Canada and Latin American countries (specifically, Paraguay and Mexico) for religious and economic reasons. Patterns of movement are often cyclical between north and south every few months or years; most people eventually choose to settle in one location or another. Mennonites born in Paraguay and Mexico are often viewed by North American Mennonites as “traditional,” conservative, or “set apart” from the world. Recent music production suggests otherwise, as emerging musics indicate cultural integration and an embrace of modern technology. In the last five years, CDs recorded and produced in Mexico, Paraguay, and Canada have become a popular form of expression among family and church bands from Mexico and Paraguay. A transnational Mennonite culture has emerged, blending aspects of Canadian and Latin American culture. CDs tend to include music with religious content, either traditional hymns or newly composed songs with biblical or spiritual themes, in keeping with perceptions of Paraguayan and Mexican Mennonite adherence traditional or conservative culture rooted in religious life. However, aspects of CD content indicate integration with secular forms of Paraguayan and Mexican culture, including; Spanish-language translations of German Mennonite hymns, musicians adapting Mexican and Paraguayan styles of dress for CD cover art, incorporating Mexican and Paraguayan instruments, religious lyric-content, and adopting popular song forms such as corrido, polka, and chamamé. CD production also shows an embrace of technology through the inclusion of electronic and amplified instruments, and contemporary production techniques. A significant dimension of these CDs is that the music expresses an understanding of migration on earth as a part of longer, more profound journeys to heaven. The project looks at how economic and cultural activities influence music production, and how economic and music activities are viewed by the musicians as of secondary importance to their migration through life on earth towards heaven.

4:30 Michael Iyanaga

**International Politics and Intangible Heritage:
UNESCO, Religion, and the Brazilian *samba de roda***

This paper addresses the effect of UNESCO policy on the Brazilian *samba de roda* music and dance tradition. In 2005, *samba de roda* was proclaimed a UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity. The ethnomusicologists who prepared the dossier submitted to UNESCO defined *samba de roda* as an Afro-Brazilian musical, choreographic, poetic, and festive folk expression. This definition neglects one of the tradition's fundamental aspects: the religious. *Samba de roda* is indispensable in certain religious folk Catholic rituals practiced in the maritime region of the Recôncavo, Bahia. Furthermore, in some of these Catholic rituals, *samba de roda* is requisite for Afro-Brazilian *caboclo* deity possession. Rather than acknowledging the necessity of this music in local religious practice, the dossier and other scholarship imply only an association between *samba de roda* and religious events. *Samba de roda's* religious function is overshadowed by concerns about preserving traditional instruments and performance practices. I contend that this "de-emphasis" is due in part to the effect of institutional secularism in UNESCO's decision-making process regarding intangible heritage. This paper draws on relevant literature, analysis of folk Catholic celebrations for Saint Roch and the Virgin Mary, and nearly six months of fieldwork in the Recôncavo. I suggest that UNESCO policy influences the presentation of intangible heritage to outsiders and how cultural actors reproduce their own heritage. The concerns this case study raises about UNESCO's influence on intangible heritage are applicable to other Latin American cultures as well as all cultural traditions around the world.

5:00 Nolan Warden

Crossing Diaspora's Borders: Musical Roots Experiences and the Euro-American Presence in Afro-Cuban Religious Music

Over the past two decades, Euro-American (i.e., "white") men have become a growing percentage of musicians hired to perform Afro-Cuban religious ceremonies in the United States. Understanding such a phenomenon is obstructed if we are overly dependent upon the concept of the African diaspora. Though conceptualizations of the African diaspora have changed as a result of anti-essentialist and constructivist formulations, they remain grounded in the concept of race. For practitioners of Afro-Cuban religion, however, what matters more than a drum ensemble's racial identity is its ability to create an atmosphere conducive to possession. Because of this, Euro-Americans in Afro-Cuban music are becoming less novel for practitioners and, in some U.S. locations, necessary in order to meet the demand for competent musicians.

In order to circumvent the conceptual border related to race in the African diaspora, I draw from extensive interviews and personal experience to suggest an alternative way to understand the presence of Euro-Americans in Afro-Cuban religious music. By introducing the concept of a 'musical roots experience,' I argue that this presence is a logical result of a search for musical sincerity, self-realization, and a historicizing of ones own musical upbringing. Paradoxically, it is not unlike the musical experience of African-Americans who, a generation earlier, took up Afro-Cuban drumming as their own roots experience. The concept of a musical roots experience may allow us to understand the presence of anyone, regardless of racial or ethnic identifiers, in the music and culture of the African diaspora.