Introduction to Special Issue: “Sound, Environment, and Action”

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Amid the daunting realities of our time, the work of artists may prove to be more important than ever.

—John Luther Adams, “Global Warming and Art”¹

As I write in Vancouver, Canada, several news items in British Columbia are relevant to this special issue of *Music & Politics*. There are proposals to construct new fossil fuel projects, such as the Northern Gateway pipeline and the Woodfibre LNG (liquid natural gas) export facility, as well as to expand existing infrastructure, including the Trans Mountain pipeline and the Fraser Surrey Docks, Roberts Bank, and Texada Island coal-handling facilities.² Other projects pertain to outdoor tourism, like the new Sea to Sky Gondola and the Jumbo Glacier Resort.³ In addition to economic initiatives, there is recent change to the status of an iconic species, the humpback whale,⁴ and regulations concerning the management of agricultural land, fish habitat, and provincial parks.⁵ For the bidding companies, the provincial and federal governments, and a percentage of the general population, these business proposals tout economic opportunities and a secure natural environment.⁶ Yet some British Columbia residents, including First

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¹ John Luther Adams, “Global Warming and Art,” *Musicworks* 86 (Summer 2003): 9.

² “Northern Gateway Project,” accessed May 9, 2014, <http://www.enbridge.com/NorthernGatewayProject.aspx>; Brent Jang, “B.C. on track to have Woodfibre LNG project running by 2017: Clark,” *The Globe and Mail*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/british-columbia/woodfibre-lng-project-to-be-running-by-2017-premier-clark/article18503077/>; “Trans Mountain pipeline ULC – Trans Mountain Expansion,” accessed May 9, 2014, <http://www.neb.gc.ca/clf-nsi/rthnb/pplctnsbfrthnb/trnsmntnpxpsn/trnsmntnpxpsn-eng.html>; “Fraser Surrey Docks | Direct Transfer Coal Facility,” accessed May 9, 2014, <http://portmetrovanvancouver.com/en/projects/OngoingProjects/Tenant-Led-Projects/FraserSurreyDocks.aspx>; “Roberts Bank Terminal 2,” accessed May 9, 2014, <http://www.robertsbankterminal2.com/>; Gordon Hoekstra, “Victoria approves major coal terminal expansion on Texada Island,” *Vancouver Sun*, April 18, 2014, <http://www.vancouversun.com/Victoria+approves+major+coal+terminal+expansion+Texada+Island/9750658/story.html>.

³ “Sea to Sky Gondola official opening,” accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ksCAxZj7dcY>; “Jumbo Glacier Resort,” accessed May 12, 2014, <http://jumboglacierresort.com/>.

⁴ The humpback whale was recently downgraded from “threatened” to “special concern” under the Species at Risk Act. “COSEWIC Species Database: Whale, Humpback,” accessed May 2, 2014, http://www.cosewic.gc.ca/eng/sct1/searchdetail_e.cfm?id=148&StartRow=1&boxStatus=All&boxTaxonomic=All&location=All&change=All&board=All&commonName=humpback%20whale&scienceName=&returnFlag=0&Page.

⁵ “Changes to the *Fisheries Act*,” accessed May 11, 2014, <http://www.dfo-mpo.gc.ca/pnw-ppe/changes-changements/index-eng.html>; Bill 24 – 2014: Agricultural Land Commission Amendment Act, 2014, http://www.leg.bc.ca/40th2nd/1st_read/gov24-1.htm; Bill 4 – 2014: Park Amendment Act, 2014, http://www.leg.bc.ca/40th2nd/1st_read/gov04-1.htm. This is not to overlook sustainability initiatives at the provincial and municipal levels, such as British Columbia’s Water Sustainability Act (<http://engage.gov.bc.ca/watersustainabilityact/>), Vancouver’s Greenest City 2020 Action Plan (<http://vancouver.ca/greenest-vancouver/greenest-city-2020-action-plan.aspx>), and Surrey’s Operation Save H2O (<http://www.surrey.ca/city-services/3643.aspx>).

⁶ For example, British Columbians for Prosperity pronounce that shipment of oil by pipeline is safer and also yields higher profit than transport by rail. “Pipelines are better than the alternatives,” accessed May 20, 2014, <http://www.bcprosperity.ca/pipelines-are-better/>. Recent Enbridge advertisements on both major television networks and video streaming websites assure viewers that the proposed Northern Gateway pipeline will meet the 209 conditions set by the

Nations, are skeptical of the public's benefit from the aforementioned proposals and are concerned with the potential damage that these projects may cause to ecosystems and communities.⁷ Proposals for development and skepticism regarding such projects are, of course, not unique to British Columbia.

Artists often engage with such socio-environmental issues. Composers are among those confronting corporate interests and other forces affecting the natural environment. For example, Paul Walde's installation and outdoor oratorio *Requiem for a Glacier* (2013) brings attention to the impact of climate change and a proposed resort on the Jumbo Glacier area—the work was premiered on Farnham Glacier.⁸ Another environmental composition, Scott Smallwood's chamber work *given to earth in dark blood* (2007), comments on the complexities of oil extraction and use through both its source material (the instrumental parts are transcriptions of field recordings of oil pumpjacks) and the location of its 2014 Canadian premiere at the Centre for Research on Sustainability at the University of British Columbia.⁹ Arts organizations, museums, and research institutes are also engaging environmental topics and issues, namely through exhibition themes and by commissioning new works. The Western Front's production *Music from the New Wilderness* (February 11–15, 2014) consisted of new compositions that integrated prerecorded materials from the Okanagan and the Broughton Archipelago—places in British Columbia that have witnessed notable environmental and socio-economic change.¹⁰

The current situation in British Columbia (and elsewhere) exemplifies the power of the twenty-first-century global economy to shape the environment in the service of human interests. (Ethno)musicology, acoustic ecology, and sound studies play important roles in addressing the impact of the global economy by aspiring to understand and raise awareness of the interconnections between humans and the environment. While humanities research on humans and the physical world is not new,¹¹ the emerging field of ecomusicology seeks to develop discursive tools for the study of music during a time

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Joint Review Panel. See, for example, "JRP Conditions | #50 Marine Mammal Protection Plan development," accessed May 11, 2014, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R4SIQVE9-YE>.

⁷ Two recent anti-Northern Gateway pipeline rallies in Vancouver exemplify these efforts. See Tiffany Crawford, "Thousands rally to protest Enbridge, climate change," *Vancouver Sun*, November 16, 2013, <http://www.vancouversun.com/technology/Thousands+rally+protest+Enbridge+climate+change/9175775/story.html>; and Crawford, "More than a thousand protesters rally against Northern Gateway pipeline in Vancouver," *Vancouver Sun*, May 10, 2014, <http://www.vancouversun.com/news/More+than+thousand+protesters+rally+against+Northern+Gateway+pipeline+Vancouver/9827485/story.html>.

⁸ For more information on *Requiem for a Glacier*, see <http://www.paulwalde.com/index.php?requiem/requiem-for-a-glacier/>.

⁹ For more information on *given to earth in dark blood*, see <http://www.scott-smallwood.com/works.html>.

¹⁰ "Music from the New Wilderness," accessed May 21, 2014, <http://front.bc.ca/events/music-from-the-new-wilderness-3/>. Other events and exhibitions include the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies' "Arts-Based Competition on Water" (Fall 2013), the Museum of Vancouver's "Rewilding Vancouver" exhibition (February 27–September 1, 2014), and the upcoming Vancouver New Music festival "Sonic Topographies – Sound, Music and Sustainability" (October 16–19, 2014). Here lies a noted paradox: artists, organizations, and institutions that engage environmental topics typically depend on the same natural resources, environments, and industries to which their aesthetic message and/or research focus speaks. This includes transportation, materials for instruments and exhibitions, and at times, as exemplified by the Western Front production, funding: *Music from the New Wilderness* was the winner of the Rio Tinto Alcan Performing Arts Award, Music 2014—Rio Tinto Alcan is a mining company. For more on music making and sustainability consult Aaron S. Allen, "Fatto di Fiemme": Stradivari's Violins and the Musical Trees of the Paneveggio," in *Invaluable Trees: Cultures of Nature, 1660-1830*, ed. Laura Auricchio, Elizabeth Heckendorn Cook, and Giulia Pacini, 301–15 (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2012); Mark Pedelty, *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012); and Aaron S. Allen, Kevin N. Dawe, and Jennifer C. Post, *The Tree that became a Lute: Musical Instruments, Sustainability and the Politics of Natural Resource Use* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, forthcoming).

¹¹ See Jay Parini, "The Greening of the Humanities," *New York Times*, October 29, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/29/magazine/the-greening-of-the-humanities.html>; and Cheryll Glotfelty, "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, xv–xxxvii (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996).

of rapid environmental change.¹² Only recently has "politics" received critical attention in ecomusicological scholarship.¹³ Alexander Rehding asserts: "The task of the immediate future is for ecomusicology not only to hone its guiding questions, but also to work out its political leanings and define the nature of the tasks that it hopes to pursue."¹⁴ The aim of this special issue of *Music & Politics* is to move in the direction of identifying some of these orientations and tasks. The contributors stimulate discussion around the political facets of musical works, communities, and practices with strong ties to the environment. These articles differ in focus and methodology, yet each explores a politically charged environment—locales where the conditions of the land are related (directly or indirectly) to politically and/or economically motivated human action.

In the first essay, Travis Stimeling considers the role of music in BP's efforts to rejuvenate Gulf Coast tourism while also salvaging their corporate image following the 2010 *Deepwater Horizon* spill. Stimeling investigates the complexities of corporate sponsorship and music tourism on the Gulf Coast. In an effort to bring economic capital to the region, both BP and local tourism boards maintained romanticized ideas of the Gulf Coast in advertisements and cultural events. While the aim of stimulating the local economy may seem apolitical, the target demographic makes such efforts political: many residents affected by the spill were excluded from cultural events due to the cost of tickets, transportation, and accommodations. The second essay presents Rebekah Farrugia and Kellie Hay's ethnographic research on a women's hip hop collective in Detroit. Farrugia and Hay illustrate some of the ways in which music can be used as a tool of resistance against the hegemonic treatment of the urban environment. Building on work by Adam Krims,¹⁵ Farrugia and Hay address the politics of urban renewal, marginalization, community building, and back-to-the-land sensibilities. Where the first two essays address contemporary environments and popular music in North America, the third essay, by Louis Epstein, offers a critical reading of Darius Milhaud's *Machines agricoles* (1919). Though scholars have recognized the mechanistic qualities of the song cycle for voice and seven instruments, the connection between *Machines agricoles* and the pastoral tradition has remained secondary. Epstein aligns Milhaud's aesthetic with post-pastoralism, bringing to light the work's critique of the pastoral tradition and its commentary on rural France following the First World War. Through score study and iconography, Epstein concludes that agricultural fields in rural France were, for Milhaud, sites of political and historic tensions.

This special issue closes with an edited transcription of a 75-minute plenary session at the 2013 conference of the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education in Nashville, Tennessee, titled "Sustainability and Sound: Ecomusicology Inside and Outside the Academy." Aaron Allen began the session with an introduction to the field of ecomusicology, after which Denise Von Glahn and Jeff Todd Titon spoke about how their lives and work involve sound and sustainability within an

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¹² For more on this field see Aaron S. Allen, "Ecomusicology," in *The Grove Dictionary of American Music*, 2nd ed., ed. Charles Hiroshi Garrett (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); and Allen's introduction to the edited transcription in this special issue. For a comprehensive list of research on music and the environment see the Ecomusicology Bibliography at <http://www.ecomusicology.info/resources/bibliography/>.

¹³ Past journal issues and conferences exploring politics, music/sound, and the environment include the "Art, Science, Environment, Activism" issue of *Soundscape: The Journal of Acoustic Ecology* 7, no. 1 (Fall/Winter 2007); the "Sound, Listening and Place" double special issue of *Organised Sound* 16, no. 3 (December 2011) and 17, no. 3 (December 2012); the *Ecomusicology Newsletter* 1–3 (January 2012–April 2014); the 2011 British Forum for Ethnomusicology conference "Listening for a Change: Environment, Music, Action"; the 2011 IASPM-Canada conference "Music and Environment: Place, Context, Conjuncture"; and the 2012 and 2013 Ecomusicologies conferences.

¹⁴ Alexander Rehding, "Ecomusicology between Apocalypse and Nostalgia," *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 410.

¹⁵ Adam Krims, *Music and Urban Geography* (London: Routledge, 2007).

ecomusicological context. Allen then moderated a 30-minute discussion, where the speakers identified important links between the fields of sound and sustainability. Topics discussed included music, sound, noise, listening, nature, culture and technology, cultural policy, institutions, politics, economics, interdisciplinary research, and particularly important given the context of the session, the role of the arts and humanities in campus sustainability. The session concluded with a 15-minute question-and-answer period with the audience. The panelists called for the relevance of sustainability issues bearing on politics within music and sound studies in higher education and the public arena beyond.

The contributors to this special issue demonstrate not only interest in furthering an understanding of music and the environment but also dedication to helping find means for creating a more sustainable and just world. Given that ecomusicology (and musicology more broadly) is inherently political,¹⁶ if a particular type of dedication exists in this emerging field, it may be akin to what art critic Jan Verwoert calls a “politics of dedication.” Writing about “performance” in postindustrial society, Verwoert claims: “to practice a politics of dedication and recognise an indebtedness to the other as a condition of your own ability to perform means to acknowledge the importance of care. You perform because you care for someone or something. This care gives you the strength to act, not least because to *not* act is out of the question when someone or something you really care for or about requires that you should act.”¹⁷ In the context of ecomusicology, it is plausible that such dedication is fueled in part by our conceptions of the environment—that we may not continue to categorize nature in ways that perpetuate ideological tensions.¹⁸ Here in British Columbia, music is stimulating discourse around current environmental concerns, and time will tell the efficacy of these local efforts. Can the values and politics of profit-oriented industries successfully benefit humans without major environmental repercussions? Will art help transform scientific findings into societal values?

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¹⁶ See Philip V. Bohlman, “Musicology as a Political Act,” *The Journal of Musicology* 11, no. 4 (Fall 1993): 411–36; and Aaron S. Allen, “Ecomusicology: Ecocriticism and Musicology,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 64, no. 2 (Summer 2011): 391–94.

¹⁷ Jan Verwoert, “Exhaustion & Exuberance: Ways to Defy the Pressure to Perform,” *Dot Dot Dot* 15 (Winter 2007): 102, *italics in original*.

¹⁸ See Alexander Wilson, *The Culture of Nature: North American Landscape from Disney to the Exxon Valdez* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 1991); William Cronon, “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” in *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*, ed. William Cronon, 69–90 (New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996); Kate Soper, *What is Nature? Culture, Politics, and the Non-Human* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1998); Timothy Morton, *Ecology without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007); and Jeff Todd Titon, “The Nature of Ecomusicology,” *Música e Cultura: revista da ABET* 8, no. 1 (2013): 8–18.

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