

CHRISTOPHER J SMITH, MANAGING EDITOR
INTRODUCING THE CENTER AND THE JOURNAL [rev06]

The [mission](#) of the TTU [Vernacular Music Center](#) is to provide a home for in-depth interdisciplinary research, study, teaching and advocacy on behalf of the world's vernacular musics and dance—their construction, history and role in defining cultural life in human communities—in all cultures and historical periods, and the contributions they can make in the modern world.¹

By “vernacular” we connote those particular communicative processes through which knowledge is learned, taught, and passed on by observation, imitation, and in the memory.² Such knowledge systems, embracing everything from religion, history, and medicine to music, dance, and theater, have enhanced human communities with aesthetic acuity and intellectual sophistication for millennia—often parallel to, predating, or enriching “cultivated”, literate, and/or contemplative art forms.¹ Yet they have typically been neglected in university and conservatory contexts, which have historically tended to favor literate and elite art forms.³ Within our VMC rubric we recognize both “traditional” idioms and also new works (compositions, events, improvisations, and stylistic innovations) created through the use of vernacular vocabularies and processes.

A central part of the VMC's core mission is the training of [young arts professionals](#): singers, dancers, players, teachers, and organizers who, through their VMC experiences, are empowered to advocate for and lead vernacular art initiatives in their own campuses, communities, and future activities. Our students apprentice in the skills of combining speaking, playing, singing, dancing, and teaching on behalf of participatory community arts. We offer courses and a [Certificate in Community Arts Entrepreneurship](#), as well as Certificates in [World Music](#) and [Historical Performance Practice](#), with precisely this sort of professional opportunity and engagement in mind.

The *Journal of the Vernacular Music Center* is envisioned as a peer-reviewed publication likewise dedicated to research, teaching, and advocacy in vernacular music, dance, and related traditions. Published twice-yearly, each themed issue of the Journal will be assembled by an

¹ For the distinction between “cultivated” versus “vernacular” musical traditions, now a widely employed locution, see H. Wiley Hitchcock, *Music in the United States: A Historical Introduction* (New York: Prentice Hall, 2000).

² “1 ver-nac-u-lar [adjective]: of, relating to, or using the language of ordinary speech rather than formal writing : of or relating to the common style of a particular time, place, or group... 1a : using a language or dialect native to a region or country rather than a literary, cultured, or foreign language... 3: of, relating to, or characteristic of a period, place, or group; especially : of, relating to, or being the common building style of a period or place <vernacular architecture>.” Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online, accessed 10/15/14.

³ The integration of vernacular idioms, pedagogies, venues, objects, and experiences within university settings has often entailed resistance to or significant mutation of those idioms in order to “legitimize” such inclusion. See Austin B. Caswell and Christopher Smith, “Into the Ivory Tower: Vernacular Music and the American Academy,” *Contemporary Music Review* Special Issue “Traditions, Institutions and American Popular Music” 19/1 (2000), 89-111.

area-expert Guest Editor, drawing upon a range of scholarship, exploiting the digital possibilities unique to online publication, deploying a range of interdisciplinary methods to investigate disparate idioms linked by shared "vernacular" processes--not only art objects or events, but also the creative, communicative, and collaborative dynamics by which these come into existence.

Our Editorial Board [[link to Board](#)] consists of specialists in vernacular arts practices, their scholarship, and their indigenous pedagogies.⁴ We are contributors to international conversations investigating the emplacement of vernacular art forms within educational institutions. We sponsor a [Conference](#) and identify with Arts Practice / Practice-Based Research, believing that it is possible for the jobs of creation and of critical analysis to be united in individuals; such integration has in fact been a common characteristic of vernacular arts practice in many historical and cultural contexts. We are likewise united by a philosophical stance which sees "the vernacular" as a process, rather a group of objects or a checklist of idioms.

In addition to original research and advocacy, as part of our university's mission to "[enhance communication in a global society](#)," we also develop learning environments which permit 21st century student populations to learn from diverse experiences and grow as global citizens. We believe that learning is enhanced by situating these art forms as part of contemporary education's call for inclusive excellence and transnational critical understanding.

We recognize challenges for educators engaging vernacular processes and pedagogies within university settings; most notably the procedural, aesthetic, functional and/or aesthetic influences which university settings can impose. Yet we believe it is possible to situate these art forms within university curricula in a fashion which honors and centralizes their unique expressive, emotional, functional, communal and educational capacities.

There was a time, in North American conservatories, when rigid distinctions were drawn between music academics and music performance. In the archetypal conservatory environment, music performance was the domain of faculty holding DMA's or comparable professional experience ("a major career in orchestra halls or opera theatres of the world"). Music scholarship, on the other hand, was the province of individuals holding PhD's, most commonly in Musicology (German: *Musikwissenschaft*), whose duty was to analyze the function and situate the influence of discrete pieces of (mostly orchestral and chamber) repertoires within the historical tradition of Euro-American "serious" concert music.

The social revolutions of the 1960s led to a realization that not only university student populations but also faculty cadres, not only repertoire but entire bodies of and approaches to scholarship, suffered from such hierarchical and privileged perspectives.

⁴ See Board Profiles here ([link](#)).

“World music,” then so-called, was perceived as one avenue by which Western faculties and curricula might move toward a more inclusive set of models. Ethnomusicologists brought perspectives from anthropology and ethnography (and Mantle Hood’s model of “bi-musicality”), which led to interest in the foundation of “world music” ensembles housed at music conservatories.⁵ Particularly favored were those genres which could occupy relatively large numbers of students in ensemble work—as, for example, Balinese gamelan or Ghanaian drumming—under the guidance of a master-player/teacher whose singular appointment to the faculty could “help with the ‘problem’” of representation. This model was effective, but it did implicate some challenges, particularly as retirements among the first generations of recruited master-players brought questions about sustainability. Other models for the incorporation of global music traditions have included, for example, the hiring of specialist adjuncts (when budgets and available competent personnel were in place), load-credit for tenure-stream faculty willing to share secondary specializations in these genres, the funded recruitment of graduate students with the necessary skills, and so forth.

At the same time, there have been bureaucratic difficulties, as for example with weighting “creative activity”—concerts or recordings—versus “research”—historically, various forms of print publication. Likewise, because in most conservatories global music study tends to be only one component, not the focus, of a complete 4-year degree plan, full-time faculty who teach these musics must typically complement such efforts with duties in other areas: studio teaching within the Euro-American “classical” tradition, or academic teaching in music theory, music education, ethnomusicology, or historical musicology.⁶ Most of us, then, are (as at the TTU Vernacular Music Center) “doubblers”, with instruction in global music styles only being part of our loads.

Despite the stereotypical division between “music scholarship” and “music performance,” there is a respectable history for the performing scholar within the North American university context, most commonly in areas of activity outside the mainstream of concert-hall repertoires. In the twentieth century, such scholar/performers included, for example, specialists in historical performance practice (from [Arnold Dolmetsch](#) and [Noah Greenberg](#) to [Thomas Binkley](#)) and jazz ([Gunther Schuller](#), [Ran Blake](#), [David Baker](#)), and of course there is a long tradition of new music composers engaging as conductors or players in performances of their own work, from Henry Cowell, Harry Partch, and Meredith Monk to Lou Harrison, Steve Reich, and Phillip Glass. Nevertheless, when vernacular music enters the academy, and encounters the academy’s entrenched methods for generating, performing, teaching, and reporting upon artistic success, there are both logistical and philosophical challenges. Divisions between music research, music pedagogy, and music performance, and the artificial distinctions dividing “research, teaching, and service” in tenure and promotion decisions, can be remarkably resistant to change.

⁵ See Mantle Hood, “The Challenge of ‘Bi-Musicality’,” *Ethnomusicology* 4/2 (May, 1960), 55-59.
<http://www.ethnomusic.ucla.edu/the-challenge-of-bi-musicality>

⁶ Though it should be acknowledged that 4-year undergraduate degrees concentrating on vernacular music do exist at a growing number of institutions, including TTU’s “Bachelor of Arts in Music (Traditional Music concentration).”

It happens that, at Texas Tech, we are facilitated in this respect through the housing of the VMC within a [School of Music](#), itself within a [College of Visual and Performing Arts](#): we thus have the resources—and the tenure and promotion expectations—of a Fine Arts college organization. Moreover, as TTU School of Music faculty we are actively encouraged to break down the barriers which in some situations would divide “research” from “creative activity”—an awkward and artificial distinction for scholar-performers who deserve recognition and reward for both sides of their professional activity. In our College, we are rewarded on the basis of the category of “research *and* creative activity”, and “performance *AS* research.” We can therefore insist that distinctions opposing the “performer” versus the “scholar” are antiquated, unnecessary and, especially in the case of global musics, an active impediment to excellence.⁷ Uniting the role of the performer and the scholar, we likewise collaborate across our campus and across disciplines, in a series of partnerships with colleagues both local and international which have yielded award-winning [theatrical dance shows](#), projects uniting [music and theater](#) and [music and modern dance](#), [academic conferences](#), and [peer-reviewed publications](#).

As Editors, we all come to the table with disparate prior experience and combinations of skill-sets.⁸ We are facilitated by our cross-disciplinary training: not only as performers and teachers as well as scholars, but as ethnomusicologists, musicologists, and (especially significant) practitioners of historical performance. As a group, we reject artificial boundaries based upon discrete repertoires or historical time periods, in favor of a more inclusive methodological model which integrates diverse analytical tools and pedagogical strategies.

We are dedicated not only to indigenous repertoires and performance practices, but also to indigenous *pedagogies*—the latter representing a significant challenge to the metrics of incrementalized and object-oriented learning of conservatories. As “performing scholars”, each in her or his own areas of activity (which range from Near Eastern *maqamat* to North European bagpiping, Irish traditional music to Mississippi Delta blues, Japanese *taiko* to Renaissance ballads, medieval monody to music as contemplative practice, Baroque keyboard music to Southwestern USA mariachi), the central trope, the activity that ties together our experience and situates JOVMC firmly within academic publishing, is *pedagogy*.

[Stacey Jocoy](#), Shakespearian ballad scholar and a vocalist with the TTU World Music Ensemble, provides a narrative describing the process by which the group prepared a particular program of Cajun and Zydeco repertoire, and the particular challenges presented by unfamiliar language, performance practice, and cultural references. Her essay situates vernacular music performance and pedagogy in fruitful collaboration with historiography and literature. [Roger](#)

⁷ It is important to acknowledge that we speak from the perspective of educators operating in North American colleges, conservatories, and universities. Though several members of our Board have extensive experience with overseas approaches to these pedagogical issues, we recognize that we are North Americans teaching in tertiary institutions and that we speak most effectively from and to that experience.

⁸ It should also be reiterated that we are speaking of *North American* contexts: we recognize that, in university systems elsewhere (as for example Ireland and the UK, Finland and Sweden), the integration of new music, folk music, and music skills is handled in unique and valuable ways.

[Landes](#), founding director of [Zoukfest World Music Camp](#) and the [TTU Balkan Ensemble](#), presents a practical perspective on the ways in which students' guided experience of Balkan repertoires' style specifics can provide direct and engaging responses to [NASM standards and guidelines](#) regarding improvisation, group playing, ear-training, and playing from memory—as well as more philosophical values of collaboration, personal responsibility, and group creativity. [Angela Mariani](#), director of the [TTU Early Music Ensemble](#), host of the syndicated radio program [Harmonia](#), and a pedagogical specialist in both diverse repertoires and contemplative education, situates medieval performance practice within vernacular processes of memory, oral transmission, performer agency, and improvisation. [Lauryn Salazar](#), director of TTU's [Mariachi Los Matadores](#) and a nationally-recognized expert on mariachi in secondary and tertiary education, examines this music's status as UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage and as a tool for recruitment and retention of Latino/a students in college programs.

We have all individually learned our performance skills and aesthetics through unique combination of conservatory (“cultivated”) and practice-based (“vernacular”) experience. But as tenure-stream professors in a major conservatory—and as part of a small research center within that large conservatory—we are charged to *educate*. We agree that, as professors of “vernacular” musics, it is not enough to simply familiarize with repertoires, or even to replicate repertoires. We are also responsible for accurate and sensitive transmission of the musicianship, performance practices, and cultural values carried by these musics. What, then, in our North American university context, are the most appropriate and efficacious philosophies and practical pedagogies of performance?

Hence the theme of this first issue of the *Journal of the Vernacular Music Center*.

What are appropriate pedagogies for scholars teaching vernacular music traditions? Without any exclusive dictates or mandates for a single unified method—which would be to infringe upon pedagogical individuality—we at the VMC have found that we tend to operate from compatible perspectives. As scholars, students, and practitioners of the vernacular idioms, we are committed not only to the beauty and communicative efficacy of the repertoires we teach, but also to the pedagogical methods which the idioms have evolved to transmit the musical information *they themselves* believe to be important. Philosophically, we believe in the value of the pedagogical methods as much as we do the beauty that results from their sensitive application. The efficacy of these “vernacular pedagogies” is confirmed by the very fact of the idioms' continuation: why would we fail to trust them?

Thus, in the approach that we have mutually evolved here at the VMC, “vernacular performance” is moved away from a focus upon canonic repertoires and toward an emphasis upon processes of cognition and bodily responses. In our locution, a performance, performance practice, or new composition—and even our evolved methods for teaching these musics within the university—are legitimately to be regarded as “within the tradition” if the *process of their creation* is consistent with the tradition's existing body of practices. These include, very crucially, the processes of the idiom's own indigenous pedagogy.

Yet an emphasis upon vernacular processes and pedagogies, as well as repertoires, can present challenges within university settings. Especially in North America—and especially at large-sized public research institutions like Texas Tech—an emphasis upon outcomes, assessments, metrics, and reporting pushes faculty toward incrementalized, linear, articulated, and measurable teaching methods. These can conflict with vernacular pedagogies' frequent preferences for more non-linear, kinesthetic, subjective, and gestalt-oriented learning methods. Thus we have had to become skillful at performing and teaching these styles, but also at advocating for the validity of not only their *aesthetics* but also their *pedagogical practices*.

Ultimately, then, we at the VMC, and our brothers and sisters in similar situations at universities, colleges, and conservatories across North America, are engaged in a vast, complex, decades-long process of experiment and invention. We are not playing or teaching global music idioms “just as they have been taught within the traditions”: teaching and learning situations, the sociological experience of teachers and learners, and wider cultural contexts have all shifted. We are *inventing* roles, each in our own way, for such musics and musical values to exist within the university.

In this sense, our quest to carve out appropriate, respectful, rigorous, insightful, and empathetic space for vernacular musics within the academy is anything but conservative or canonic in intention. It is rather an adventure, seeking to discover new worlds of syncretic experience, engagement, and human interaction for these venerable and valuable idioms. And, in so doing, to transform the university.

We hope you will join us.

Selected bibliography:

Frisch, Michael. "Notes on the Teaching and Learning of Old-Time Fiddle." *Ethnomusicology* 31/1 (Winter, 1987), 87-102.

Smith, Christopher. "Holding the Lotus to the Rock: Building Participatory Dance Communities in Red-State America," *International Journal of Community Music* (Fall 2012).

Smith, Christopher. "Reclaiming the Commons One Tune at a Time: Teaching Irish Traditional Music as Culture and Community," *New Hibernia Review* (Winter 2007).

Smith, Christopher. "Teaching Sound(ly): Approaches to World Music in an Undergraduate Classroom," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 9/10 (2000): 25-36.

Smith, Christopher. "Trusting the Tradition: The Meaning of the Irish Session Workshop," in *Proceedings of the VIIth International Symposium on Cultural Diversity in Music Education: The Local and the Global* (Brisbane, Australia, 2004).

i

Smith, Christopher, with Austin B. Caswell, "Into the Ivory Tower: Vernacular Musics and the American Academy." *Contemporary Music Review*. 19/1 (2000): 89-111.

Solis, Ted, ed. *Performing Ethnomusicology: Teaching and Representation in World Music Ensembles*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004.

i