

Learning to Arrive: Approaching Ethnomusicology through Community-Driven Documentation

Emily Silks

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Reading Committee:

Christina Sunardi, Chair

Shannon Dudley

Sonnet Retman

Program Authorized to Offer Degree:

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Emily Silks

University of Washington

Abstract

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Emily Silks

Chair of Supervisory Committee:

Christina Sunardi

School of Music

In this dissertation, I explore how practitioners engage with recorded sound technologies and the role of the ethnomusicologist within those practices across two vastly different but locally situated case studies in Seattle, Washington. The first case study involves the production of *Carangolo*, an album recorded with *Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola* (FICA), otherwise known as the International Capoeira Angola Foundation (ICAF), a community group led by Silvio dos Reis, known in the Seattle capoeira community as Mestre Silvinho. The second case study involves revitalization of the Northwest Folklife Archive, a 54-year-old community heritage collection. At the heart of my dissertation are two questions. First, how is recorded sound, whether institutional and vast like the Northwest Folklife collections or single album productions such as *Carangolo*, connected to practices of listening, processes of relationality, and cultural arts sustainability? Second, how has an ethnomusicologist functioned within these practices? I argue that recordings and archives are both repositories of cultural knowledge and markers of relationships. Whether a recording takes the form of a capoeira album or an archival

sound collection, its significance lies not only in what it documents but also in the social relationships, responsibilities, and histories through which it was created, circulated, and remembered. Through historical research, ethnography, and applied ethnomusicological practice, I show how recordings can serve as sites of pedagogy, memory, and community formation when they remain connected to the people and cultural traditions from which they emerge.

Through a comparative analysis of two case studies, I further argue that documentary projects contribute most meaningfully to cultural sustainability when they are community driven. In the case of *Carangolo*, the recording process became a collaborative act of cultural transmission and creativity that remains part and parcel to the practice of Capoeira Angola at FICA Seattle. At Northwest Folklife, I opened opportunities for community members to reconnect with recordings, reflect upon their significance, and help shape future stewardship practices. These projects demonstrate that recordings alone do not sustain cultural traditions; rather, it is the relationships surrounding their creation, circulation, and activation that give them enduring value.

To study and participate in these relationships, I employed "Learning to Arrive," a methodology adapted from participatory arts practitioners in Boyle Heights and expanded by scholars of community-engaged cultural work (Lipsitz 2024, Power-Sotomayor 2024). Learning to arrive orients ethnographic practice toward community-defined protocols of engagement through relationship-building, lineage mapping, collaborative decision-making, and ongoing accountability. Tying this approach with Kim Christen's concept of "slow archiving" (2019), I propose a model of ethnomusicological practice that prioritizes the process of conversation and community stewardship within archival projects, however variably defined. In doing so, this

dissertation contributes to conversations about cultural sustainability, sound recording, archives, and the evolving role of ethnomusicology in community-based cultural work.

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Chapter 1 - Introduction

Canadian ethnomusicologist Beverly Diamond asks: “What work does a recording do? For what social action might it be intended?” (Porcello, T., & Greene, 2004, 130). For Diamond and her various recording projects with First Nations peoples across Canada, musicians specifically invoke social interactions as a structural part in the process of recording sound. Sadie Buck, from the Mik’maq nation spoke to the role of recordings as a “documentation of our process of working together” where the recording session itself was an exploration of “how individuals or social collectives come to relate to one another through music production itself” (2004, 134). In this dissertation, I explore this trace of sociality found in recorded sound across two vastly different but locally situated case studies in Seattle, Washington, and mark the role of the ethnomusicologist in those traces. Building on a framework developed by activists in Boyle Heights and expanded by scholars of participatory arts, I also explore “learning to arrive” as a relational methodology in public ethnomusicology that orients fieldwork toward community-defined protocols of engagement. Grounded in an acknowledgment that cultural arts carry their own theories of engagement, learning to arrive asks the ethnomusicologist to become attuned to what a community's practices already know about how to enter, engage, and collaborate.

The first case study focuses on the production of an album of Capoeira Angola music titled *Carangolo* (Friend). It was recorded in collaboration with Mestre Silvinho, a master teacher of capoeira, and the Seattle chapter of Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola (FICA), otherwise known as the International Capoeira Angola Foundation (ICAF). This group trains at the Union Cultural Center (UCC), a non-profit organization that hosts classes, workshops, and events focusing on diverse cultural arts. The second case study focuses on my work as archivist at Northwest Folklife (NWFL), a cultural heritage non-profit, documenting 54

years of diverse and varied Pacific Northwest expressive arts traditions. My work at NWFL involves managing an online, streamable digital archive database spanning decades of audio, video, and photographic media in addition to writing grants and leading a preservation project that aims to connect cultural practitioners to archival recordings.

At the heart of my dissertation are two questions. First, how is recorded sound, whether institutional and vast like the Northwest Folklife collections or single album productions such as *Carangolo*, connected to practices of listening, processes of relationality, and cultural arts sustainability? Second, how has an ethnomusicologist functioned within these sonic environments? I argue that recordings and archives are both repositories of cultural knowledge and markers of relationships. Whether a recording takes the form of a capoeira album or an archival sound collection, its significance lies not only in what it documents but also in the social relationships, responsibilities, and histories through which it was created, circulated, and remembered. Through historical research, ethnography, and applied ethnomusicological practice, I show how recordings can serve as sites of pedagogy, memory, and community formation when they remain connected to the people and cultural traditions from which they emerge.

Through a comparative analysis of case studies, I further argue that documentary projects contribute most meaningfully to cultural sustainability when they are community driven.

Carangolo was made by and for FICA Seattle, initiated within the community's own ongoing practice, shaped by the tradition's own philosophical frameworks, and released as a resource the community continues to use in training classes. The album is an extension of the community's own work, a form of self-documentation that expands the lineage and canon of Capoeira Angola through an album production by Mestre Silvinho and his students in the Pacific Northwest. The process of recording at Northwest Folklife, by contrast, often occurred without deep community

intention, and has lost connection to the people whose traditions the collection preserves. My work, then, involved opening opportunities for community members to reconnect with recordings, reflect upon their significance, and help shape future stewardship practices.

Examining the structural differences between the two case studies drives this dissertation. These projects demonstrate that recordings alone do not often sustain cultural traditions; rather, it is the relationships surrounding their creation, circulation, and activation that give them enduring value. In the chapters that follow, I explore the nature of collaboration in each context, the relationship between media recordings and practices of listening, and the specific ways that "learning to arrive" could and could not function as a methodology of applied ethnomusicology and community-driven archival projects.

At FICA Seattle, the practice of capoeira itself taught me how to show up, and my participation in classes shaped how the entire recording project unfolded. My job was primarily to read and follow protocols already in place. At Northwest Folklife (NWFL), I arrived at an institution where those embedded protocols did not exist in the same way. NWFL is a cultural heritage nonprofit with an archival collection of over 54 years of Pacific Northwest expressive arts traditions. I had to construct conditions for community engagement rather than apprentice myself to conditions already in place. It was a matter of trying to rebuild connective tissue between recordings and arts communities. Northwest Folklife also organizes one of the largest community-powered festivals in the country and this event, in and of itself, is vastly different from that of a singular cultural art or even a festival with a singular focus.

As a paid archivist at Northwest Folklife, a graduate student at the University of Washington, and a community member at the Union Cultural Center, I was never fully located in any single institutional or community space. I was always in between and moving across what I

have come to understand as a living ecosystem of cultural arts work in Seattle. That ecology is not incidental to the argument. The pipeline I participated in and helped to extend involved UW visiting artists performing at the NWFL festival ethnomusicologist employment at NWFL across decades. My own position as archivist-researcher and that of my intern Juan, a UW ethnomusicology undergraduate student, continues that trajectory and represents a long-standing but undertheorized infrastructure of exchange between the university and Seattle's cultural communities. One of the goals of this dissertation is to make that infrastructure visible. Working from within the creative and cultural arts sector is what ethnomusicologists in Seattle have long done.

This dissertation proceeds through capoeira first (Chapters 2-3), followed by Northwest Folklife (Chapters 4-5), before synthesizing them in Chapter 6. This structure mirrors my own learning. Embodied practice with capoeira taught me what 'learning to arrive' meant while archival work at NWFL tested whether I could adapt that methodology to an institutional context without deep participant observation.

Learning to Arrive as Methodology

In 2024, the University of Washington hosted the first Seattle Participatory Arts Network (SPAN) conference, exploring diverse participatory arts practices and the possibilities for collaboration between community arts movements and universities. Musician and activist Quetzal Flores used the term *saber llegar* (knowing how to arrive) in one of the Zoom planning meetings to describe the process of entering into and engaging with community spaces. This term emerged from *artivistas* in the Boyle Heights barrio of East Los Angeles, specifically in relation to the Alliance for California Traditional Arts (ACTA). As George Lipsitz explains, it

came out of the ACTA Toolkit for Building Healthy Communities and describes a "method of preparing participants for collective work and spontaneous interactions" where there is an intentional effort to establish mutually held *acuerdos* (agreements) "about the work to be done and the ways to do it" (2024, 111). At the same conference, Jade Power-Sotomayor extended this concept during a presentation to argue that expressive practices themselves carry their own protocols of engagement, learned only through the act of participation. Her example was Bomba, a centuries-old Afro Puerto Rican tradition in which the dancer circles the *batey* (dance floor), offers a *saludo* (salutation) to the lead drummer, and waits for acknowledgment before continuing. This is a protocol grounded in respect, relational awareness, and the philosophical commitments of the tradition itself. In Power-Sotomayor's words, "these practices take shape as values," extending beyond the performance and into how practitioners move through the world (public presentation, November 21, 2024).

Community-based, locally situated ethnomusicology is an inherently context-specific process, and what works in a community built around a cultural art is different from what works in an institutional organization (whether a university or nonprofit) that supports cultural arts. As such, I extend the concept "learning to arrive" to specifically address how an ethnomusicologist prepares for and sustains collaborative work across different community and institutional contexts. At FICA Seattle, I learned to arrive by doing capoeira. At NWFL, I learned to arrive by listening to current and former staff alongside community members, volunteers, and artists engaged in Northwest Folklife. In this way, my orientation as an ethnomusicologist shifted from the relational and embodied practice of capoeira to the administrative, technical, and curatorial work of an archivist. Each area of work informed the other: relationships built through community practice of capoeira shaped my commitment to care within institutional partnerships

with diverse artists. Likewise, the non-profit sphere of collaborative, community driven programming at Northwest Folklife revealed to me new and creative ways in sustaining arts and cultural heritage through recorded media.

While my two case studies demonstrate the multivalent nature of the term, I use “learning to arrive” as a relational methodology that orients ethnomusicological practice toward community-defined protocols of engagement. If the broader aim of this dissertation is to understand how recordings and archives emerge from, document, and sustain social relationships, then learning to arrive provides a framework for entering those relationships with care and accountability. Rather than prescribing a fixed set of procedures, it offers an orientation toward collaborative work that is responsive to the specific values, histories, and expectations of the communities involved.

Several recurring practices emerged across both case studies. First, learning to arrive requires establishing agreements with collaborators to determine what is valued, what outcomes are desired, and what responsibilities are shared. This approach extends from the *acuerdos* developed by the Boyle Heights artistas described by George Lipsitz (2024), wherein participants collectively established expectations for working together. Similar principles can be found in Kim Christen's archival work, which enables Indigenous communities to define their own protocols of access to and circulation of cultural materials (2019). In both cases, the emphasis is placed on communities articulating the terms under which collaboration unfolds.

Second, learning to arrive requires attention to lineage and positionality. Throughout this dissertation, I engage in what I call lineage mapping: an effort to understand the social, historical, and relational networks that shape a project before intervening in it. This practice emerged through my training in Capoeira Angola, where lineage is a central organizing

principle, but it is equally relevant to archival and institutional settings. Understanding who came before, who holds authority, who maintains relationships, and how knowledge has circulated provides a foundation for ethical collaboration. Lineage mapping therefore becomes a practical means of understanding how one arrives into an existing web of relationships.

Third, learning to arrive requires a willingness to improvise. As Lipsitz cautions, “improvisation is not a magic potion that makes problems disappear, but it is an infinitely renewable practice of experiment and error, of envisioning and enacting that engenders and enables new possibilities” (2024, 120). Improvisation was essential in both of my case studies. Within the recording of *Carangolo*, it shaped the creative and collaborative process of recording music together. At Northwest Folklife, improvisation emerged through co-stewardship initiatives, community convenings, and the continual adaptation of archival plans in response to community feedback. In both contexts, learning to arrive invited flexibility and transformation amid changing circumstances and unexpected outcomes.

These practices resonate closely with Christen's concept of "slow archiving," which "creates a necessary space for emphasizing how knowledge is produced, circulated, and exchanged through relationships" (2019, 86). Slow archiving privileges restorative and reparative work and allows for changing course, shifts in direction, and unexpected endings (90). Rather than treating archival work as a technical process of preservation, it foregrounds the relationships through which knowledge acquires meaning. This perspective aligns closely with learning to arrive because both approaches prioritize process over efficiency and accountability over extraction.

Taken together, these practices—establishing agreements, lineage mapping, improvisation, and slow stewardship—constitute the primary ways learning to arrive operated

throughout this dissertation. They are not discrete methods so much as recurring tactics that helped orient my work toward community-defined priorities and responsibilities. Whether producing an album with *capoeiristas* (people who practice capoeira) or facilitating conversations around a community archive, learning to arrive served as a framework for recognizing that recordings and archives are not simply cultural objects. They are traces of relationships, and the work of ethnomusicology is, in part, learning how to take part in those relationships.

I am also transparent that the concept has limits and encountered friction at Northwest Folklife, where the archive held decades of recordings without the relational infrastructure needed to make them meaningful to the communities they documented without significant intervention. Reading that absence was as instructive as reading capoeira's protocols of presence. In an institutional archival context without deep participant observation, "learning to arrive" cannot do the same work it does within a singular cultural art. That is not a weakness of the methodology but rather an acknowledgement that context-specific ethnomusicology actually requires accompaniment that must be remade differently in each new situation.

A Note on Positionality

Before turning to the case studies themselves, I will first position myself within this work to reflect on the ways my perspectives and positions shape how the projects unfolded. My interest in recordings emerged not from my graduate training but from my practice of listening to music as a working musician throughout my early adult life. This background shaped both what I heard and what I valued in audio visual recordings. While I had not given much thought to archiving as a potential research topic going into my degree program at the University of

Washington, I had been deeply interested in collecting music—whether it be vinyl, cassette tapes, CDs, albums on streaming platforms, or bootleg rehearsal phone recordings. I understood that the value of these recordings had to do with the stories inside of them, how they fit into a lineage of sounds emerging from a web of human relationships, and the potential they had to help me better understand myself.

As a percussionist and jazz enthusiast, I took care to absorb the articulate differences in drumming styles between musicians. Jazz drummers Elvin Jones and Tony Williams, for example, have widely contrasting approaches to drumset musicality. Jones's swing pushes and pulls away from the pulse as if it were a swaying ship held by an anchor to the ocean floor. His playing never broke from the underlying beat per se, but it challenged the smooth waters of metronomic time. Williams, on the other hand, had flair and conciseness in his playing that is undeniably clever, sharp, and at times aggressive. If Jones's swing rocks the boat, Williams' finesse is like the bold embellishments on the wood of the boat itself.

With enough contextual awareness, I learned that records more broadly have stories to tell once they are put in relationship to each other. For example, upon my first full listening of Miles Davis' album *Kind of Blue* (1959), I had no idea that it could offer me a starting point in mapping out the iconic musicians of bebop. Yet as I journeyed further in my listening, I began to also hear the difference in comping style between pianist Wynton Kelly and Bill Evans. These differences soon were cemented in my memory after I explored the individual albums and performances by Kelly and Evans outside of their work with Miles Davis. I watched YouTube videos of Bill Evans in particular, saw how he hunched over the keys, with his slim figure and fitted 1950s suit and tie. I heard and valued these things because I learned to embody the ethos of jazz pedagogy, itself steeped in oral tradition, record production, and a necessary practice of

listening, both on and off the bandstand. This is the frame I bring to this dissertation, wherein my listening practices prepared me to pay attention to social relationships through sound. Through the slow and deliberate practice of listening and observing, I learned what it meant to show up in the studio, on the bandstand, and the protocols around my participation therein, including the tensions that surfaced around me. This learning shows up in me as a conviction that cultural practices carry context specific theories of engagement.

More practically, my positionality as an academic, employee, and community member in various spaces across my field work presents opportunities and constraints that shape my analysis in the proceeding chapters. For example, as an employee at Northwest Folklife, I had access to internal documents, staff conversations, and decision-making processes that would be difficult for an outside researcher to observe. At the same time, I am also an ethnomusicologist myself, interviewing other ethnomusicologists doing applied work in the public sector. While this gives me a somewhat insider perspective about what it means to do this work and the training an ethnomusicologist has, I attempt to maintain a critical eye towards our impact in the public sector despite my inevitable bias. Taken together, my various positions blurred across time and space invariably create blind spots and biases that have influenced my interpretation of events.

No less important, my involvement in each of these projects came about through connections to the University of Washington (UW). Specifically, it was through the UW Ethnomusicology Visiting Artist program that I met local teaching artists Mestre Silvinho, co-guardian of the Union Cultural Center (UCC) and Benjamin Hunter, artistic director at NWFL, which opened the door to each of my case studies for this dissertation. In this way, being a University of Washington graduate student afforded me a certain amount of privilege in the

opportunity to pursue these projects. It was in the social network of people built through my tenure as a graduate student that helped me reach people involved in cultural heritage work as practitioners and/or as staffed employees of non-profit organizations.

Terminology

In this dissertation, I explore how arts practitioners and culture workers alike actively engage with recorded sound whether it be audio/visual archives or single album productions. In this way, I use the term recorded sound to refer to documentary projects, field recordings, live performances, bootleg recordings, and studio produced album recordings. In each chapter I will further define what I mean by recorded sound as it pertains to the subject matter and topic of each chapter.

I also pay particular attention to “sustainability” as a two-fold concept that encapsulates the work that sustains arts communities, however variously understood, in addition to the work that sustains the livelihood of the ethnomusicologist. Sustaining arts communities involves supporting their cultural priorities, memories, and creative futures. Sustaining ethnomusicological futures involves making it possible to build a career even when academic pathways are insecure. These concerns around sustainability are inevitably linked. The ways ethnomusicologists sustain communities and sustain themselves are not separate problems but interconnected challenges requiring new approaches to scholarship. Ethnomusicology scholar Jeff Todd Titon writes extensively about cultural sustainability arising from partnerships among scholars and cultural insiders (2009). He refers specifically to the idea that sustainability must be understood through the ecological rather than economical perspective wherein parameters of diversity, limits to growth, interconnectedness, and stewardship should remain central guideposts

in ethnomusicological work (ibid). Huib Schippers echoes these ideas in his own exploration of sustainability, advocating for thinking of music and culture as an organism that evolves rather than an artifact that should be preserved and unchanged (2015). In his opinion, ethnomusicologists are part of this ecosystem and affect and are affected by other elements in the environment. Thus, the nestling of advocacy and allyship, paired with an understanding of interconnectedness in community-based work, are a necessity for sustained relationships with community interlocutors but also more sustained careers in ethnomusicology writ large, given the changing realities of academia and looming precarity of funding and tenure-track teaching positions.

In my work with the Union Cultural Center and Northwest Folklife, I grapple with the distinctions between institutional and community groups. The terms themselves connote difference and conjure imbalances of power where, historically, institution often refers to formalized and legitimizing structures of knowledge or cultural production such as universities, archives, museums, funding bodies, non-profits, etc. These institutions are governed by policies, hierarchy, and accountability to boards or funders. They carry forward sets of rules and protocols upheld indefinitely over time. In one sense, it is a formalization of culture bound to hierarchical power schemes which often are influenced by monetary investments. The term “community,” however, points to more informal, lived networks of people organized around shared identity, practice, place, or purpose.

And, as I will show in my case studies, productive dialogue between community and institutional groups shows how these groups have grown to depend on each other. Many institutions like Northwest Folklife operate with community-oriented missions to maintain active conversations with and opportunities for community groups and/or other non-profits that support

specific cultural arts. Northwest Folklife's emergence came from a self-made community curated by festival programmers and enlivened by audience members. Many community groups that perform various expressive arts may also act in institutional ways, where the group itself is structured, rule-bound, with hierarchies and governing philosophies. This is clear with capoeira communities where the decision making and protocols for engagement are set by the mestre and senior *capoeiristas* in the group. For FICA as an institution, there are uniforms and tacit and explicit rules for engaging with each other.

I approach the terms “institution” and “community” not as fixed or opposing categories but rather as relational poles that continually shape how ethnomusicological work unfolds. An institutional orientation is structured by professional protocols, timelines, and a governing body. This shapes how collaboration can be enacted, as my role as an archivist at Northwest Folklife and my graduate student status in the ethnomusicology program at the University of Washington revealed. A community orientation, by contrast, emerges from sustained relationships and practices of shared accountability, exemplified by my training as a *capoeirista* at the Union Cultural Center. However, a community orientation within institutions such as the University of Washington or Northwest Folklife do also exist and remain an important part of work within those systems. Likewise, even inside sustained relationships through shared cultural arts like capoeira, there are also governing bodies that define and delimit choices and rules for how the community operates.

In this dissertation, I trouble the divide between institutional and community work. As a paid archivist at Northwest Folklife, a graduate student at the University of Washington, and a community member at the Union Cultural Center, my positionality was neither “here” nor “there” but always in between these spaces. I dialogically approached work with people, artists,

and musicians living in Seattle and the greater Pacific Northwest as we engaged with recordings and recording technology. From these experiences, I argue that “learning to arrive” offers ethnomusicology a methodology of orientation that guides the process of collaborative research.

Fieldwork Site #1 - The Union Cultural Center and FICA Seattle

This dissertation draws on two years of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Seattle, Washington across two fieldsites. First, I worked with Silvio dos Reis, known as Mestre Silvinho, and his Capoeira studio at the Union Cultural Center (UCC), a non-profit organization. Capoeira Angola is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that combines music, movement and philosophy. Mestre Silvinho’s studio is part of the Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola (FICA) which was founded in 1996 under the vision of Mestre Jurandir, Mestre Cobra Mansa and Mestre Valmir in Washington, DC. The Seattle chapter is one of 29 FICA groups around the world. Today, the Union Cultural Center (UCC) houses FICA Seattle along with other cultural arts of the African diaspora such as Western African Dance, Samba, Fandango, Bomba, Afro-Peruvian ensembles, and more.

At FICA Seattle, my methodological approach was based on participant observation. I was learning to be a practitioner in capoeira while maintaining analytical awareness of music, sound, recordings, and memory and how ideas around these elements emerged. Starting in January of 2024, I took capoeira classes weekly and attended monthly Sunday *rodas* (a traditional Capoeira Angola performance). From the very beginning stages of the recording project for *Carangolo*, my limited knowledge of capoeira as a cultural art as well as my identity as a white scholar in an Afro-diasporic community space influenced my relationships. With each class, there was always acknowledgement of capoeira as a Black cultural art form. I thus contended with my presence and status as a visitor as I studied capoeira. For the logistics of the

album production, I deferred to the opinions and perspectives of Mestre Silvinho and the *capoeiristas* in his studio as we began to draw meaning out of this project. Mestre Silvinho and his students chose the songs and assigned ensemble instrumentalists.

As the recording session drew near, the classes gradually shifted more into rehearsals during which we focused mainly on preparing the music for the album. We had two Sunday classes strictly dedicated to preparing for the recording project. The attendance at the classes and rehearsals often fluctuated, ranging from 7 to 15 people on any given day. The bulk of my fieldwork came from these classes in addition to meetings, discussions, and gatherings at the UCC or Sage Arts Studios, the recording studio where we produced the majority of the albums music. After these classes, I often wrote jottings and notes. Given the nature of the class, which includes hands-on music making and movement, I found it hard to write any notes during the class itself. Sometimes I took recordings of rehearsal songs and conversation, but otherwise, most of my ethnographic fieldnotes were documented outside of class.

While I stopped taking jottings after the release of *Carangolo*, I remained an active participant and *capoeirista* attending weekly classes and monthly *rodas*. During the period of my fieldwork and beyond, I attended many gatherings and celebrations with the capoeira community, many of whom I consider my friends. In addition, I conducted formal, semi-structured interviews with FICA Seattle community members, including Mestre Silvinho, capoeira students, and the sound engineer Jordan Cunningham during and after the recording project. Through these interviews, class discussions, meetings with Mestre Silvinho and Jordan, I was involved in suggesting edits on audio tracks, collecting oral histories about the songs, and co-authoring written liner notes. I communicated through WhatsApp conversations, phone calls, virtual meetings, and in-person meetings. I also worked with the UCC's marketing manager,

Eric, to create an online webpage giving context to the album. This webpage emerged from our original idea for a companion booklet to accompany the album; due to monetary, time, and environmental concerns, we decided to move to a digital format.

My position leading up to the recording session was consistently acknowledged by Mestre Silvinho as we openly discussed plans with students at the end of class and in WhatsApp messages. I had a distinctly different and perhaps closer relationship with Mestre Silvinho than other members of FICA Seattle. George Lipstiz addresses this phenomenon, recognizing that

Academics and professionals of all kinds can cross borders that are closed to others. The demographics of our profession do not resemble the demographics of the communities we study: a sign of inequalities and exclusions close to home that we need to address in order to create a field capable of doing better work.

(2011, 198)

My identity as both a musician outside of academia and a graduate student at the University of Washington afforded me a privileged position that bypassed typical capoeira protocols for building relationships with mestres (master teachers) after years of practice and training. Yet my facilitation still mattered: connecting Mestre Silvinho with the studio, keeping the project moving, and offering the framework of my dissertation all helped to create momentum leading to the success of the project.

Fieldwork site #2 - Northwest Folklife

My second fieldsite occurred at Northwest Folklife (NWFL), a 501(c)(3) heritage organization formed in 1971, where I conducted archival research as an intern and eventually as an employee. NWFL is most known for its annual four day festival over the Memorial Day

weekend that remains one of the largest non-ticketed, community-powered festivals in the nation. The festival provides a platform for thousands of performers and has become a focal point for many cultural arts groups and communities in the Pacific Northwest. The Northwest Folklife Festival aims to support local artists first and foremost, but the festival has also hosted a number of well-known national and international artists over the years.

My work at Northwest Folklife required navigating institutional structures without the embodied learning that grounded my capoeira work. Here, methodology emerged through professional collaboration rather than participant observation. In April of 2024, I began working at Northwest Folklife as the Archive and Digital Experience intern. Throughout that year, my responsibilities often included tasks that expanded into digital audio/visual production, database management, data analysis, and social media marketing. During that time, I occasionally interviewed staff and spoke informally with artists and volunteers about their experiences and opinions about the Northwest Folklife archive. Moreover, my ethnographic approach was on pause while I worked largely in isolation, trying to organize the collections.

For the first seven months, I cultivated ideas about where the archive could go and what usefulness it might have through extensive conversations with the directors. I did this in several ways. First, I did extensive research into similar cultural festival organizations and other folklore-based digital archives. I also drew on the writings of archivists within ethnomusicology as a model and spoke with the executive and artistic directors on the scope and potential of the NWFL archives. I conducted a largely quantitative preliminary survey sent to hundreds of artists who performed at the festival to gauge their interest in the archives and assess accessibility needs. This approach uses insights from this data to gather a needs assessment of the people involved, which I will explore in more detail in chapter 5.

This ideation and iteration period culminated in a number of co-authored grant proposals which allowed myself and the directors to narrow down our focus and direction. In 2025, when I was hired as a part-time archivist, I took on more of a project management role and began in earnest to think about how my work might fit into some of my larger research interests for this dissertation. I spoke to several ethnomusicologists and folklorists who were at one point employed at Northwest Folklife. I sought their perspectives on entering into ethnomusicological work outside of academia and their approaches to collaborative community based projects during the festival and yearlong programming. I learned that Northwest Folklife historically set a precedent for applied ethnomusicological work in Seattle. For decades, the organization has recruited ethnomusicologists as staff in program managers and artistic directors.

In addition to these interviews, I also conducted case-by-case interviews with various artists who were interested in collaborating on issues around stewardship and meta-data descriptions about specific recordings. These interviews were multi-purposed: they were both a part of my research and part of NWFL's year-long archive and heritage preservation project funded by the Seattle Department of Neighborhoods matching grant. Within the projects described thus far, scholarship from four interconnected disciplines anchored my approach and ethnographic analysis: archival studies, decolonial studies, sound studies, and collaborative ethnomusicology.

Literature Review

Archival Scholarship

The various ways people create, store, use, and make meaning of records is central to the theories emerging in archival research that have inspired my own work. There are two distinctive

ways that scholars tend to approach archival study, either from the humanistic perspective or the archival studies perspective as defined by scholar Michelle Caswell (2021). The humanistic approach tends to treat the archive as a metaphor in order to discuss power, inequity, and representation. Such a perspective, largely influenced by the reflexive turn in anthropology and related fields during the 1980s, pushed understandings of an archive beyond that of an institutional space. Instead, scholars such as Diane Taylor saw artists themselves as repositories of knowledge, history, songs, and stories and performance itself as a living archive. In *The Archive and The Repertoire* (2003), Taylor understands archives as a place where “memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change ... [and] succeeds in separating the source of ‘knowledge’ from the knower” (19). Furthermore, Taylor argues that repertoires, or performed and embodied practices, are important “acts of transfer,” or systems of learning, storing, and transmitting knowledge. These practices are a means of intervening in the world in a way that moves beyond what is written in books or held in institutional archives alone. Taylor argues that performance does more than reiterate written culture and that analyzing performance offers a way of revising what can count as an archive. In this way, Taylor suggests, performance studies as a discipline raises concerns about the colonial logic that legitimizes writing over other forms of nonverbal practices such as dance, ritual, and cooking (18). The implication of this oversight is that “to denounce repertoire as devoid of meaning is to make invisible communities and peoples whose acts of transfer rely on performance” (33). Through my own work with FICA Seattle and Northwest Folklife, I aim to highlight repertoire as a necessary form of memory and transmission while recognizing the tensions that surface between performance as preservation and audio/visual recordings as preservation.

The archival approach, while also influenced by the reflexive turn in the academy, is more specifically concerned with “understanding the nature, management, and uses of records” (Caswell, 2016, 6). The field is situated in western disciplines of history, library science, and information studies. What began as a field of study dedicated to government and institutional records now invites a more pluralist idea of what an archive includes: personal collections, cultural artifacts, songs, and stories, for example. Students in library and information science departments train to be professional archivists while also developing archival theories that explore the social, cultural, political, personal and scientific aspects of records.

Michelle Caswell argues that these two streams of thought, the humanistic approach and the archival sciences approach, are “happening on parallel tracks in which scholars in both disciplines are largely not taking part in the same conversation, and not speaking the same conceptual languages, and not benefiting from each other’s insights” (2016, 4). In essence, Caswell advocates for a more holistic understanding of an archivist’s role in the university, beyond their professional services within library and information science. Caswell also attempts to put “critical theory from the humanities into conversations with archival theory from information studies [in order to] bridge the two disciplines and heal what has been an unproductive rift” (2021, 11). As I read her work, I began to think of ethnomusicology and my case studies in this dissertation as generative taking-off points to explore this more holistic archival framework.

In the way that Caswell argues that archives have the potential to empower people to see themselves in a “new light across space and time and catalyze this new self-reflection into action” (2021, 6), I sought to understand how this might come into play in the listening practices of *capoeiristas*, the production of a capoeira album with a local community, and through the re-

engagement of forgotten archival recordings from Northwest Folklife. Caswell theorizes that when records travel through time they get activated and reactivated, contextualized and recontextualized, “creating a new record with each viewing” (6). What might this look like through the lens of my two case studies?

Historically, the legacy of institutional archives within the field of ethnomusicology have long been a critical topic of debate, especially regarding ownership and access to sound recordings and other artifacts extracted from communities across the globe. Numerous articles have been written on the use and function of a material archive. Not only was there a precedent for “capturing the sounds of ‘dying cultures’ before they disappeared” (Grant, 2015, 629), there was also concern about the ways western civilization taints the so-called purity and musical value of ‘traditional music’ even within a field worker's own country. Alan Lomax, for example, warned against the dangers of cultural grey-out threatening local cultural expressions of music, art, and language (1977). While research projects involved in collecting and re-valuing folk and vernacular traditions in the U.S. has had beneficial results for the communities involved, especially in promoting and celebrating cultural heritage (Davis 1992, Fenn 2003, Seeger 1986, Hawes 1992, Dirksen 2012), the scholarship that has come from these efforts continued to reinscribe distinctions that separate scholars from the people they study, often under the guise of objective, neutral research and an unmarked white racial framework. The work, then, as Landau and Topp Fargion rightly assert is in building equitable ethnomusicological practices that include procuring permission from interlocutors about methods of documenting and archiving (2012).

By the turn of the twenty-first century, scholars in the field of archive sciences began using the term “post-custodial” to describe a “new paradigm for archives that replaces the profession's traditional intellectual focus on the physical record [...] with a renewed focus on the

context, purpose, intent, and interrelationships” emerging from the record (Cook, 1997). In this dissertation, I aim to show the generative potential of integrating post-custodial frameworks into archival projects and ethnomusicological research more generally. I apply this framework to my two case studies to highlight the extent to which community archives support the specific needs of their communities.

There are a number of different scholars who have taken up the task of defining a post-custodial framework through the years. One of the first was archivist Gerald Ham who wrote,

our work is determined by the way our society records, uses, stores, and disposes of information. We see that the current revolution in information processing is inexorably changing our world and our work, pushing us into a new period in archival history I call the *post-custodial era* (1981: 53).

The archivist acting within a post-custodial frame moves from being a passive keeper of records to becoming an active agent in re-imagining the meaning and context of archival guardianship. This shift reshapes archival practices from an object focused activity to a process-oriented activity, rooted in social relationships.

While this framework has been theorized in the field of archival studies since the 1980s, its implications for ethnomusicology has yet to be largely addressed. Janet Topp Fargion is one of the first ethnomusicologists who writes about how we can apply this model to our field. She describes a post-custodial framework as an equitable model that allows for physical items to remain in their places of origin while the researcher forms “capacity-building partnerships to fund and train for digitisation, cataloging, and accessibility” (2019). This approach signals the importance of public-facing archival processes based on social relationships and the democratization of record collections. While the considerations I have described thus far are

aimed squarely at institutional archives, those collections held within universities and governmental or state libraries, my work with Northwest Folklife sits at a crossroad between institution and community. Northwest Folklife is a non-profit organization and thus an institution but it emerged from and continues to thrive through volunteers and community program coordinators, explored in more detail in Chapter 4. Thus, scholarship that considers the nature of community-based archives offers important methodological and theoretical frameworks as I will now describe.

Community Archives

Community archives first appeared in the U.S. in the mid-twentieth century (Pool, 2020, 658) and developed broader traction in response to the social movements of the 1960s and 70s. The creation of these archives often challenged the narrative from mainstream institutions and “the exclusions and falsifications therein” (Gilliland and Flinn, 2013, 5). From the field of archival studies, community-based archives are unquestionably difficult to define because of the myriad approaches to scope, preservation, documentation, and its overall goals. As Anne Gilliland and Andrew Flinn state,

the diversity, fluidity and lack of fixity which makes the community archive sector so dynamic and vibrant, also means that attempts at providing usable yet inclusive definitions are destined to be unsatisfactory and more importantly misunderstand the point of such activity.” (2013, 2)

On the one hand, this difficulty around defining community archives affords the opportunity for creativity and improvisation. On the other hand, it also means that no one system or methodology will fit each archive.

Often, the distinction of community archives comes from their intentional shared stewardship. Catherine Mullen's dissertation research on the Manchester Digital Music Archive (MDMA) offers a productive case study with which we can understand both community-based and post-custodial archives. MDMA is an entirely digital archive that is community-driven and volunteer run. Its purpose is to create a repository of popular music and history in the Manchester area to "celebrate the hidden chapters and under-represented communities [and to] provide a platform for multiple versions of history to be shared" (Manchester Digital Music Archive n.d.). While scans of materials or copies of audio/visual recordings are all housed on a single website owned by the non-profit organization, the objects themselves remain in their location of origin.

MDMA is distinctive in its community building capacity and its organization, which pivots archival processes away from the sole preservation of an artifact and towards the stories that emerge from it. According to Mullen, the archives' "intentional foregrounding of alternative and minoritized voices through discrete events demonstrates the equitable capabilities of partnership between an online platform and in-person programming" (2022, 11). This type of organization shows the potential of an online presence maintaining a deep connection with communities of origin and as such, remains an important example of impactful digital archiving.

Moreover, as Mullen suggests, "many archives do not call themselves archives or use the term community at all. Rather, alignment of archive initiatives with the term 'community' comes as a result of the archival gaze" (2022, 27). In this way, the term suggests an 'other' distinct from the more privileged perspectives from scholars and archivists within institutions. In 2014, Anne Gilliland, professor and Director of the Archival Studies at UCLA, along with Andrew Flinn, a professor in the Department of Information Studies at the University College London, traced the

development of community archives in order to 1) identify common characteristics between projects, 2) understand how people and communities involved in archival activities describe and understand what they do, and 3) explore the impact of technology on the practice and relationship of community archives. “The defining characteristic of community archives,” according to Michelle Caswell, “is the active participation of a community in documenting and making accessible their history of their particular group and/or locality on their own terms” (2021, 15). Both my case studies emulate this characteristic, as the following chapters will describe in more detail.

Decolonial Scholarship

I also draw from decolonial scholarship to ground my understanding of how legacies of colonialism impact scholarship. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s book *Decolonizing Methodologies* explores approaches to decolonizing institutions, education systems, and university curriculum. For example, the impulse that drives colonialism is tied to Enlightenment philosophies that value quests for discovery, conquest, exploitation, distribution and appropriation (2021, 20). Much of the early scholarly work in ethnomusicology had much to do with this curiosity for new worlds and new possessions. This approach to scholarship and pedagogy, guided by unmarked colonial structures, impact the work ethnomusicologists do and inform a type of “deficit discourse” about “traditional cultures” and other community-based expressive arts. As Smith writes,

the imperial imagination enabled European nations to imagine the possibility that new worlds, new wealth and new possessions existed that could be discovered and controlled. This imagination was realized through the promotion of science, economic expansion and political practice. (2021, 24)

This approach characterized much of early ethnomusicological research where scholars from Europe and the U.S. would collect music from abroad and deposit their recordings into an institutional archive for future research as well as securing their own career success.

Working through a decolonial lens, I ground the concept of learning to arrive in an acknowledgement that scholarly frameworks have the potential to maintain a hierarchy of power of how and why theory is created. It also potentially diminishes and devalues the work already being done by practitioners, perpetuating a narrative of deficit wherein the scholar is needed to explain, describe, and create knowledge production. Ethnomusicologist Sally Treloyn speaks to this narrative as a “deficit discourse” and invites us to understand our work and research as a process of co-creation of cultures of music that “inform intercultural relations more broadly” (2016, 13). She goes on to write that “we seek a view of music not just as culture, but through the process of intercultural understanding” (2016, 13). Learning to arrive, as I employ the term, moves the loci of knowledge creation into the localized dialogue within communities whose cultural practices are recorded.

Exemplifying a decolonial approach, Jocelyn Mory’s dissertation involved a multi-year, collaborative project that included the repatriation of “over 150 music recordings and 250 photographs of *matepe* music,” a marginalized music tradition from the northeastern borderlands of Zimbabwe and central Mozambique, “from the International Library of African Music (ILAM)” (2021, 4). Mory specifically responds to Jeff Todd Titon’s concept of music sustainability and resilience, which frames music cultures as “adaptive living systems that are continuously changing through processes of innovation” (2015, 15). Mory traces an otherwise unwritten account of the history of *matepe* performance practice, through critical ethnography and archival research. An important aspect to their research challenges a deficit discourse around

musical forms such as *matepe*, by reorienting “localized understandings of music sustainability, adaption and cultural loss” (4) at the center of historical narratives. Decolonizing the archive in this way moves the ethnomusicologist into a supportive role that listens, absorbs, and responds to local communities but does not render the archive, nor its artifacts, obsolete.

In fact, according to Mory, the recordings and photographs they repatriated “serve[d] a specific purpose as part of the living archive in the form of exchanges between generations of research and musicians” (244). What is most important in this type of decolonial research is the process of orienting scholarship to highlight the ways in which communities reclaim their recordings rather than how institutions or researchers think about their repatriation. “This approach,” Mory states, “helps to stress the importance of understanding the meaning, value, and use of these resources from many perspectives” (250). Mory further suggests that shifting from repatriation to reclamation opens new pathways into theoretical discussions about archival materials in the context of culture bearers' lives, what Mory calls the living archive (2022, 212). For my work with Northwest Folklife, this reframing has helped me to move the question away from what the institution is giving back and toward what communities might actually want to do with these recordings on their own terms.

In the same way, Kim Christen, scholar in English and digital culture, writes that in considering archival processes through a decolonial lens, scholars and archivists “must make a radical shift away from preservation as the main reason for archival work” (2019, 100), given the colonial legacy of collecting which centers temporalities and relationships inside the logic, culture, and structure of the modern world system. Instead, she and her colleagues and collaborators insist on a slow archival approach to focus that calls attention to the

Multiplicity and plurality of knowledge, storying, placedness, and relational events without reducing practices or systems to binary logics of control or submission, past or present, authority or victim. At the same time, an ethical view of slow archives calls attention to ongoing relations of respect and reciprocity—in practice and in the processes that allow for alternative distributions of control (98).

Kim Christen’s concept of “slow archiving” offers a vocabulary for thinking through archival work not as a product, but as an ongoing practice shaped by care (2019).

Given that Northwest Folklife as an organization is constantly evolving, as discussed in Chapter 4, accounting for and adapting to changing circumstances is key to this type of work. Slow archiving, Christen also emphasizes, “calls attention to the multiplicity and plurality of knowledge, storying, placedness, and relational events—without reducing practices or systems to binary logics [...] past or present, authority or victim” (2019, 99). In listening to Christen’s process, I temper my own needs from the archive at Northwest Folklife and remind myself of the slow work of unraveling such a plurality of knowledge and placedness with a vast, varied, and dynamic group of artists represented in the collections. I will now turn to a different field of study that also orbits around similar issues of ethics and reciprocity but from a humanistic perspective of archives.

Sound Studies, American Studies, and Speculative Theory

The way I approach archival work stems not only from the lineage of scholars I have written about thus far but also from the discipline of speculative theory and critical archival research. In particular Saidiya Hartman’s work around critical fabulation (2008, 2019) has been an important contextual framework for enacting an “ethics of care” within archival research where she put care into honoring people, their anonymity, and breaking cycles of tired narratives

around ideas of preservation. She argued for the supposition that perhaps there are people who do not want to be found in the archive so as to control their own narrative. This understanding is pivotal as I approached my work with FICA Seattle and Northwest Folklife and sought for people to control their stories and representations of their cultural art.

According to Jonathan Sterne, sound studies scholars explore what “sound does in the human world and what humans do in the sonic world” (2012, 2). Scholars in this field understand sound as fundamentally built on social relationships between the sound and the listener. Sterne asserts that “every field of sonic practice is partially shaped by a set of knowledge of sound that it motivates, utilizes, and operationalizes” (ibid, 9). In this way, there is a clear acknowledgement that there is more than one way of knowing but that the weight of politics and history affects how we study and what we may deem to be more true than another, based on “normalized hegemonic cultural practices” (ibid, 8). Furthermore, Nina Eidsheim suggests that “we must listen to how we listen” to deconstruct situations that reinforce structures of power (2019, 58). In my two case studies, there were various approaches to listening that shaped how and what meaning emerged.

Daphne Brooks, whose work taps interdisciplinary realms of popular music, sound studies, African American, and archival research, emphasizes the importance of archives as a place to hold materials rooted in history, as well as the importance of artists and thinkers to maintain an ethics of care in archival work. In the introduction to her now widely influential book *Liner Notes for the Revolution: The Intellectual Life of Black Feminist Sound*, Brooks is interested in musicians and listeners, those who are archived and the archivists themselves, as working “in concert with each other to rethink the ensemble through a black feminist conceptual lens – forging their own meanings and ideas about things that are important to them” (2021, 10).

This foregrounding of care and plurality of meaning anchors my own research and relationship with recordings and archives.

In line with Daphne Brooks, I draw from the work of Gayle Wald in her theorizing around how knowledge held in recorded sound and digital media is constructed and circulated. She speaks to a “radical politics of remembering” regarding the circulation of media, in this case a meme about Sister Rosetta Tharpe featuring text that read a “Queer Black Woman Invented Rock-and-Roll.” This meme brought forth dialogue about the erasure, appropriation, and commodification of rock-and-roll (2023). Wald says that digital media can serve as a “repository for counter memory,” expanding George Lipsitz’s assertion that music, film, and other artistic expressions function as a vessel of cultural memory for minoritized subjects. I see parallels in my research on the way recorded sound in the lineage of Capoeira Angola served to construct a counter-knowledge opposing white-washed national narratives as well as how circulation in contemporary times plays an important role in enlivening the practice itself as a repository of memory.

Collaborative Ethnomusicology

By the end of the twentieth century, in part galvanized by the formation of social sciences and cultural studies after WWII, there came an effort to better understand the ethical implications of sound archive, addressing issues of accessibility and representation (Landau, 2012, 128). This reflexive turn, carried forth by Tony Seeger and others, considers the impact of research on the communities wherein the research is carried forth. At the onset of my fieldwork, I drew from many scholars who had done applied archival or ethnomusicological work to guide my process. One key figure I found later on in my research was George Lipsitz, who writes that, “working

together entails a sometimes painfully slow process of learning from each other, of working hard to forge mutually beneficial relations and relationships” (2013, 11). He speaks to the idea of “accompaniment” as a way to forge connections between American Studies scholars and those who are systemically excluded from the academic institutions. Lipsitz goes on to write,

Accompaniment is one of those many musical terms that have much to teach scholars about how we conduct our scholarly and civic work [...] musicians know that every player has important work to do, that when music sounds good it is because of the many people who are doing different kinds of jobs well (12).

This type of framework is a reminder that the work of collective action involves both leading and listening and that “accompaniment” can be a useful cue in positioning oneself in collaborative projects.

Similarly, John Vallier in his article “Preserving the Past, Activating the Future: Collaborative Archiving in Ethnomusicology” explores recent archival initiatives involving repatriation and community collaboration, both from his colleagues and his own research. Vallier discusses the challenges and successes of current archival projects, including two projects in Southern California: AFAMILA, a multi-sited documentation of LA Filipino American musical events over the course of the year and added the recordings to the UCLA archive with culminating events and festivals at the end, and GALA, a project that documented multiple Gospel performances at Greater New Bethel Baptist Church in Inglewood which culminated in events and concluding festival. Such collaborative initiatives can, according to Vallier, empower community partners to “shape the ways in which they are represented in the archives” and ensure that those “representations are preserved and accessible for future generations” (2018, 316). This approach is central to my work with the Northwest Folklife archive.

Tony Seeger has looked at the challenges, successes, and failures in applied anthropology (more commonly referred to as public anthropology) in the U.S. and Brazil to share important insights from this sister discipline to applied or public ethnomusicology. Seeger importantly defined praxis as “the way research and theories are turned into action through activism and social engagement” (2021, 36). Such interweaving of advocacy and scholarship was curtailed in U.S. environments during that time due to cold war politics that suppressed political activism in many realms of university life (ibid., 28). He also notes that more than half of anthropology PhDs since 1985 are working outside of academic departments and encourages ethnomusicology curriculum developments including building specialized courses to critically examine and engage in applied projects and include opportunities to learn about arts management, library science, statistics, or a coordinated business degree (ibid., 27).

Eric Lassiter’s work in defining and exploring approaches to collaborative ethnography has also been an important anchor in my approach to fieldwork. He writes,

collaborative ethnography invites commentary from our consultants and seeks to make that commentary overtly part of the ethnographic text as it develops. In turn, this negotiation is reintegrated back into the fieldwork process itself. (2005, 16)

This methodology, he argues, opens up a more critical and complex understanding of both collaborations and collaborative research. Most outstandingly, Lassiter argues that contemporary research using this methodology pays more attention to the complicated historical context and acknowledges that collaborative research should encourage working across differences and de-emphasize “metaphors of agreement and accord” (2021, 66). Lassiter calls for future scholarship to pay attention to various modes, meaning, and practices of collaboration and bring more

nuance to complications that arise because they have potential to shed light on new approaches to learning, action, and activism (ibid., 71). Following this collaborative knowledge production model, I shared drafts of this writing with as many community members as I could and hosted public discussion of my capoeira chapters with FICA members at the Union Cultural Center. These conversations productively helped shape the ideas emerging from this project.

I also pull from Kemmis and McTaggart's definition of Participatory Action-Research (PAR) to clearly mark the close interaction between scholarly research and the creative process. PAR is a method that enables individuals to work collectively in a process of:

systematic collection and analysis of information, of data, with the goal of taking action and informing action throughout the process, leading to awareness. PAR is realized in, through and by a collaborative practice that is aimed at modifying the research as much as the action of the participants, while also adjusting the methods of interacting in a shared social space. Thus, this is a process where one learns by doing, and where one learns with others. (2014, 6-7)

This approach informed my conceptualization of 'learning to arrive' as a method that "questions elitist control of knowledge production," focusing instead on what is "formulated by communities themselves" (Diamond, et. al., 2021, 8).

Chapter Overview

Throughout the following chapters, I explore how practitioners engage with recorded sound technologies and the role of the ethnomusicologist within those practices. In Chapter 2, I think through listening practices within capoeira angola, specifically drawing on ethnographic and historiographic research concerned with the significance of field recordings and studio produced

albums made by mestres since the 1940s. By tracing a canon of capoeira recordings from Mestre Pastinha (1969) to more contemporary practitioners such as Mestre Moraes, I analyze the extent to which these albums serve as pedagogical tools and ongoing political and philosophical statements, especially for capoeiristas training outside of Brazil. In this mapping, I also assess the relationship between folklorists and ethnomusicologists in the production of these albums. This chapter shows how listening itself is an embodied practice of “learning to arrive” where the music reveals lineage and distinct dialects of instrumental and vocal technique. In this way, the recordings maintain a living energy, beyond the fixed nature of materiality because it was generated within the capoeira community.

Building on the listening practice and the collaborative processes discussed in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3 I chronicle the six-month production process of *Carangolo*, an album of Capoeira Angola created by Mestre Silvinho and his students, who are a part of the Seattle chapter of the Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola (FICA). In this chapter, I analyze the song selections, recording decisions, and community dynamics as they unfolded through the rehearsal and recording process. Through *Carangolo*, what I term a distinctive “expressive dialect” emerges as a sonic emblem of the way FICA Seattle performs capoeira. I also pay particular attention to the tensions inherent to recording an expressive art based in oral tradition. *Carangolo* pushes against the binary of preservation versus innovation and points instead toward a “both/and” situation: recordings do risk fixity, but they also spark new creativity. The album freezes a moment in FICA Seattle’s history while also circulating as a resource that teaches and inspires.

Ultimately, I frame the recording as not just a singular product but a methodological approach that generated new knowledge through praxis. In doing so, I argue that *Carangolo*

enacted the very ethos of capoeira philosophy in addition to offering a creative platform for practitioners to engage in re-storying their history in the lineage of Capoeira Angola. In this sense, recording is not just a product of ethnomusicology but also a way of generating knowledge through doing. The tensions that surfaced between tradition and innovation are not unique to capoeira. They are the terrain of collaborative ethnomusicology writ large. As such, I use this case study to show the work of a community-driven recording project and my role as a participant in the community.

If Chapter 3 exemplifies embodied learning through deep participation in Capoeira Angola, Chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate an institutional context that exemplifies a different kind of arrival, offering a contrasting approach to community-based ethnomusicology through my archival work at Northwest Folklife. I first trace the development of Northwest Folklife as a multi-cultural heritage organization in Chapter 4 from its origins in the folk revival movement in the 1970s to its standing in 2025. I examine how Northwest Folklife historically sets a precedent for applied ethnomusicological work in Seattle. For decades, the organization has recruited ethnomusicologists as staff, program directors, and “culture brokers” as Jeff Todd Titon and John Fenn define it (2003). Ethnomusicologists’ presence expanded programming beyond Anglo-American folk music, brought in sensitive programming around Indigenous, diasporic, and global traditions, and shaped how performances were contextualized. These roles gave early-career scholars applied training, opportunities to experiment with ethnographic ideas in practice, and in some cases, they stepped into other work in the creative economy after their time at NWFL. The projects explored in this chapter outline a specific approach to community-based, locally situated ethnomusicology in Seattle that differ from that of my experiences with FICA Seattle.

Understanding NWFL's history is essential for Chapter 5's archival methodology where institutional histories shape collaborative possibilities and protocols for engagement. As a person in a professional archival position, arriving in a community in a Geertzian "deep hang" type of ethnography was logistically impossible. As such, Chapter 5 explores the work of re-engaging communities to the Northwest Folklife's collection of recorded media generated largely at the behest of those outside of the communities whose traditions are represented. Because I was dealing with a vast archive with a huge number of expressive arts represented, I could not step into community practices in the way that I did with FICA Seattle. This chapter addresses the growing concerns around access and stewardship paired with an ever-increasing interest in online accessibility to recorded assets. While developing an online database tailored to the needs of a multi-cultural heritage nonprofit, I also address the ways NWFL's archival initiatives involve dialogic processes through in-person viewing and stewardship sessions with a number of cultural artists in the Seattle area. In these sessions, the goal was to assess action steps for the recordings at hand, contextualize the recordings, and decide on how best to circulate the assets for the local community and, secondarily, the general public.

The concluding chapter returns to the opening questions of the dissertation: First, how are documentation projects connected to practices of listening and cultural arts sustainability? Second, how does an ethnomusicologist learn to arrive in community spaces and what happens when those spaces require fundamentally different orientations? Through synthesizing the lessons from the projects in chapters 2-5, I articulate the methodological shifts "learning to arrive" requires of an ethnomusicologist in the differing contexts of my case studies. I also reflect on the nature of recorded sound and its usefulness to cultural arts communities in the Pacific Northwest. Ultimately, this chapter thinks through ethnomusicology in our current

moment, where scholarship might draw upon institutional resources to center around community- based, participatory practice, inquiry, and knowledge production. Finally, this chapter concludes by addressing career sustainability for emerging scholars in ethnomusicology and folklore.

Throughout the following chapters, I also hope to shine a light on the delicate dance between fixity and fluidity inherent to recordings of cultural arts. In both the capoeira and Folklife projects, successful partnerships meant more than sharing my research or sharing recordings, but also about redistributing access and authorship in order to sustain the archives' connections to the communities whose practices are being preserved. The projects were contrasting in scope, arguably on opposing ends of the spectrum of collaborative work, yet thinking about a recording's relationship to a community offered me a way to look at these differences productively. Through exploring the usefulness of archives and recorded sound as tools of transmission and a container for memory, I advocate for relationship building as a pathway toward mutually beneficial projects between institutions and communities. In this sense, the following chapters show how practices of accompaniment work to sustain the social and relational worlds that make musical culture possible.

Chapter 2 - Listening and Remembering in Capoeira Music

Capoeira Angola is an Afro-Brazilian martial art that combines music, movement, and philosophy. The canon of songs passed down through generations of mestres (recognized master teachers) circulates stories about *capoeiristas* (people who practice capoeira), African ancestry, and Black resistance to systemic oppression. While the *roda*, the ritualistic event where capoeira is played, becomes a space where these histories are felt and renewed, audio recordings made by mestres within the lineage of Capoeira Angola also hold an important place in the cultural tradition in the ways that they preserve voices and songs, teach about history, and enact cultural strategies that center Black memory and creative processes.

Drawing on landmark recordings from Mestre Pastinha to Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP), this chapter positions capoeira record production as both a political and pedagogical act. In doing so, I follow Juan Diego Diaz's assertion that musical sound is a form of discourse that contributes to the construction of tradition within an ever-expanding transnational capoeira landscape (2021). Through an analysis of music, accompanying liner notes, and ethnographic interviews with members of the Seattle chapter of the Fundação Internacional de Capoeira de Angola (FICA Seattle), I explore how *capoeiristas* utilize recordings to serve specific pedagogical and political ends. In particular, I show how practitioners outside of Brazil rely on albums to practice what I call "learning to arrive" by orienting themselves to protocols, histories, and ways of being that might otherwise remain inaccessible. For practitioners living outside of Brazil, albums become the primary connective tissue. They carry mestres' voices across time and space, and model vocal and instrumental style that might otherwise be inaccessible.

In exploring how practitioners engage with recorded sound, this chapter argues that album-produced capoeira music functions as an alternative archive to embodied knowledge built in accord with Black resistance and empowerment. Capoeira albums produced by mestres extend the embodied and oral traditions of Capoeira Angola into new transnational contexts, often in partnership with ethnomusicologists, anthropologists, and other cultural outsiders. I argue that the long-lasting impact of the music and album production explored in this chapter contributes to the vitality of capoeira because they are oriented toward the wants of those within the practice itself, in addition to the fact that the impetus to record in the first place arose from the mestre themselves. No less important, this chapter highlights how field recordings from the 1940s and 1950s, produced by researchers with outside agendas, have proven meaningful in transmitting knowledge and sustaining capoeira as a cultural art when they are re-engaged by practitioners. I support this claim through an analysis of the capoeira album *Coco Moduro* produced by Mestre Iuri Santos in FICA Indiana, a unique record that uses field recordings from the 1940s as inspiration. Ultimately, this chapter shows that recorded sound can sustain, extract, and/or do both, depending on whether the orientation is towards community needs.

I begin by outlining a brief history of capoeira and its routes of transmission before exploring early field recordings and the repercussions of the scholar's ethnographic gaze. I then situate the emergence of commercial albums in the 1960s within capoeira's fraught relationship with state power and folklorization, showing how mestres from Pastinha to Moraes used recording technology to assert Afrocentric historical narratives. I then turn to the local listening practices at FICA Seattle to show how contemporary *capoeiristas* engage recordings as pedagogical and affective resources for remembering, learning, and creating a sense of belonging across distance. The chapter concludes by examining how these historical precedents inform

contemporary recording projects, including the making of *Carangolo* in Seattle that will be discussed in Chapter 3.

Brief History of Capoeira

While this dissertation focuses on the application of recordings and sound technology across the spectrum of performing arts, I do pay particular attention to its role in Capoeira Angola. In order to ground this and the following chapter, I offer a brief history of this cultural art form. Capoeira Angola is an Afro-Brazilian martial art born from enslaved Africans' resistance to oppression during Portuguese colonization. It emerged as both disguised combat training and a vessel for maintaining African cultural practices, music, and moral teachings (Diaz 2006, 147). The martial art is performed in a ritual *roda*, a circle where two *capoeiristas* engage in an improvisational "game" accompanied by a *bateria* of musicians and surrounded by singing participants. The *bateria* generally consists of three berimbaus (single stringed musical bows connected to gourd resonators), two *pandeiros* (tambourines), one *agogo* (double bell), a *reco-reco* (scraper), and *atabaque* (tall, single headed drum).

Much of capoeira's philosophy and aesthetics draw from Kongo-Angolan principles and African religions from the Bantu region (as opposed to the Yoruban region) adapted and transformed into a distinctly Brazilian form (Marks 2003, 8). According to Mestre Cobra Mansa, the Bakongo worldview underlies much of Afro Brazilian thought and discourse and is “inherited in capoeira” (Diaz and Paçanha, 2024, 155). Mansa goes on to write that the Bakongo people, from the geographical region of what is now the Republic of Congo,

“believe that the world of the living is shared with both the living and the ancestors. People can thus invoke ancestors at any time, in a time of difficulty, pleasure, or celebration. The line that both divides and unites these worlds is called Kalunga” (ibid) As such, the concept of ancestrality remains a central principle within Capoeira Angola. “The ancestral *mestres* who have crossed the Kalunga line are invoked all the time through songs, through stories, through *ritmos* played by the *berimbau*” asserts Cobra Mansa (157). As I will later discuss, many of the recorded songs sung by *mestres* refer to the importance of ancestrality and the Afrocentric origins of capoeira.

And yet, scholars and practitioners continue to debate whether capoeira originated in rural or urban Brazil and the extent to which it derives from Central African practices, particularly Angolan combat rituals such as *n'golo* (Assunção, 2005). Regardless of origins, much of the historical record surrounding the development of capoeira comes from urban centers such as Rio de Janeiro and Bahia. “It seems likely,” writes Lowell Lewis, “that the gradual movement of ex-slaves into the free labor market, coinciding largely with the gradual movement of Brazilians from country to city, also provided stimuli for new developments in capoeira” (1992, 51). Furthermore, Lewis goes on to write that the oral traditions show evidence that Bahia and Salvador were central to the urban development of capoeira where “regular capoeira games were held on the streets and in the plazas” (56).

Officially outlawed in 1890—just two years after Brazilian abolition—capoeira was driven underground as the white Brazilian state feared it could unite Black populations through discipline and solidarity. “The struggles between police and *capoeiristas* in imperial Rio De Janeiro,” writes Lewis, “were symptomatic of a new Brazilian urbanism, forecasting new types of class and racial strife” (1992, 51). The ban was lifted in the 1930s when Mestre Bimba (1900-

1974) formalized capoeira as physical education, moving training indoors and attracting wealthier, and often whiter students. Born Manoel dos Reis Machado in 1900, Bimba was a longshoreman and champion of both capoeira and batuque (a related Afro-Brazilian fighting form) who strategically repositioned capoeira as "Brazilian gymnastics" to gain state approval. By the 1940s and 50s, Bimba's style of capoeira became known as *capoeira regional*. While securing state recognition and opening capoeira's first legal academy in 1932, these changes downplayed the practice's African roots and ritual dimensions and introduced belt ranking systems and minimized the emphasis on music. Ana Hofling notes that for many years,

Bimba was blamed for going too far in codifying and sportifying (and therefore 'whitening' capoeira), today several practitioners and scholars have acknowledged Bimba's contributions to capoeira as a "black modernization" of the practice, shifting the blame for capoeira's "descaracterização" (loss of character) either to early twentieth-century national gymnastics or late twentieth-century capoeira shows for tourists (2019, 3).

During this time, the practice of capoeira which was once associated with *maladragem*, or "a Bohemian lifestyle associated with idleness and hustling" soon transformed into a state sanctioned tourist attraction (Brito, 2012) and a vehicle to promote a nationalistic agenda as the national sport of Brazil (Díaz, 2021). The folklorization efforts began in earnest during the 1950s, after Mestre Bimba led the movement to de-criminalize capoeira. Ensembles featuring capoeira amongst other folk traditions, such as *maculelê*, *samba de roda*, and *Candomblé* performed in the growing market and tourist industry (ibid). Many well-known Mestres across *angola* and *regional* styles participated in these performances, including Mestre Bimba, Mestre

Canjiquinha (Washington Bruno Da Silva, 1925-1994), and Mestre Acordeon (Ubirajara Almeida, b. 1943). “In these groups,” writes Díaz,

capoeiristas adapted their music and movements for street or highbrow audiences eager to experience Bahia's ‘primitive’ folklore. One of these adaptations included using the berimbau in new ways: playing extended solos decoupled from physical action and inventing new grooves to accompany genres other than capoeira. (2021, 173)

While explicitly taken out of context, archival artifacts concerning these performances are important markers to show how *capoeiristas* were willing to adapt their practices, especially if gains social capital and/or monetary support were potential possibilities. The berimbau itself became an important vessel with which Brazil, on a national level, could connect to—or exploit—African heritage. This is especially true in the state of Bahia where the berimbau was a distinct part of the “re-Africanization of Bahian carnival of the 1970s and 1980s,” and where “a quick stroll through the touristic district of Salvador suffices to reveal T-shirts stamped with berimbau designs, berimbau jewelry, and even berimbau-shaped public telephone booths” (Díaz, 2021, 166). Many saw these transformations, both within *capoeira regional* and through folklorization, as de-Africanizing capoeira even as they ensured its survival.

Mestre Pastinha countered this trajectory. Born Vicente Ferreira Pastinha in 1889 in Salvador, Bahia, he learned capoeira as a child from an African-born master named Benedito. In 1941 he founded the Centro Esportivo de Capoeira Angola, which became a prominent school that trained influential mestres including João Grande and João Pequeno who are well respected in the lineage of Capoeira Angola to this day. Even though transferring capoeira from “the informal context of streets, backyards, and city squares to the closed space of academies implied a certain amount of systematization of the ways it was taught, learned, and practiced,” as Díaz

states, Pastinha maintained capoeira as a philosophy of life grounded in ritual, music, and memory (2024, 143). As I will later discuss, Pastinha also recognized recording technology as a tool to preserve this vision. Though he died blind and impoverished in 1981, Pastinha's insistence on capoeira's African heritage and philosophical depth established the foundation for contemporary Capoeira Angola lineages worldwide.

Capoeira is now honored as a symbol of national pride in Brazil (Gonzalez, 2019, pg. 9). In 2014, the Brazilian government registered capoeira in UNESCO's protected intangible cultural heritage program allowing for broader audiences to recognize capoeira's value. It is currently practiced and taught both in institutions and within the community and performed for tourists as well as maintained as an oral tradition within Brazil and abroad.

Capoeira and Transmission

The central mode of transmission in capoeira is oral/aural, including observation, listening, and imitation of embodied practices within the training classes and the *roda*. Greg Downey, an influential scholar in the academic capoeira literature, argues that capoeira must be learned through gradual enculturation: "Culture does not stop at the skin, nor does it reside solely in the mind," but is felt through "different ways of standing, moving, and acting that animate us, inform our perceptions, and enliven our sense of ourselves" (2005, 21). This place-based, embodied pedagogy would seem to resist technological mediation. Yet *capoeiristas* have been making albums since the 1940s, and these recordings have developed rich social lives within capoeira communities both in Brazil and abroad. This suggests a need to reconcile capoeira's emphasis on embodied, place-based knowledge with the proliferation of recorded sound as a pedagogical and cultural resource.

Part of the answer lies in understanding what capoeira music carries beyond technique. As George Lipsitz argues, music has unique power to address "the long and still unresolved legacies of slavery, conquest, and genocide" (2011, 187). This is a capacity particularly vital for capoeira, whose songs carry stories of African ancestry, Black resistance, and survival. "Capoeira songs, when used properly," writes Juan Diego Díaz, "have great influence on the *roda* and furthermore are a vehicle for understanding the history of capoeira and important elements of Afro-Brazilian culture" (2006, 146). James Baldwin reminds us that history's importance comes not from its pastness but from "the fact that we carry it within us [...] History is literally *present* in all we do" (2002, ix, emphasis in original). For *capoeiristas*, songs are not solely accompaniment to movement but collective memory transmitted through voices, berimbau rhythms, and song repertoire.

When this music is preserved on recordings, it moves differently through time and space but continues to do the cultural work aforementioned. Album productions extend capoeira's oral and embodied traditions into new contexts, creating alternative archives that operate subversively through institutional and colonial frameworks. Field recordings, as I will now describe, tend to serve external agendas and impact the extent to which recordings contribute to the vitality of capoeira as a cultural art.

Early Field Recordings: The Ethnographic Gaze

According to Juan Diego Díaz and Alex Rossi, the period between 1940-1969 "was marked by the appearance of eight sets of field recordings: foreign researchers who visited Bahia recorded six of them and the other two are of unknown origins" (2024, 21). The earliest known audio documentation of capoeira emerged through the research agendas of visiting scholars,

primarily from the United States and Europe who arrived in Brazil in pursuit of their own academic or ethnographic interests. These field trips depended on a network of U.S. American scholars and Brazilian scholars as well as the support from “funding organizations like the Rockefeller Foundation [...] and the nationalist cultural politics of Brazilian dictator-president Getúlio Vargas” (Yelvington, 2024, 419). The enactment of President Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy in the 1930s supported the ability of U.S. scholars to study abroad, especially in South America. This legislation sponsored and supported cultural exchanges between the U.S. and Central and South American countries. Sociologists and ethnomusicologists such as Lorenzo Turner and Melville Herskovits played an important role in collaborating with cultural artists across the continent, even while maintaining an ethnocentric view of U.S. society as a superior hierarchical model (Hess, 2013).

Seven of the eight sets of field recordings of *capoeiristas* made between 1940-1969 were made in Bahia, with the outlier produced in Rio de Janeiro (ibid). Ironically, none of the researchers traveled to Brazil with the primary intention of studying capoeira. Rather, capoeira performances appeared within these collections as supplemental material to broader investigations of Afro-Brazilian cultural practices. This meant that capoeira was documented through varying research priorities and foreign interpretive frameworks. The fact that the majority of recordings were made in Bahia speaks to how important this city was and how central it was as a locus of Afro-Brazilian culture. While a small percentage of white elites held power in the city of Salvador, “many observers perceived the political and cultural life as being an almost African city” where “numerous African languages heard in the streets of the city invariably impressed foreign observers” (Assunção, 2003, pg. 99).

As would be expected given academic protocols of the 1940s-1960s, many of the collections now reside in institutions. The collections of Lorenzo Dow Turner, Anthony Leeds, and Janice Marie Smith, for example, are held at Indiana University, while two others sit in European museums and archival repositories. This process of extraction is linked to a wider colonial audiovisual history in which recordings of Black expressive culture circulated through academic and museum institutions, gaining scholarly capital and sustaining the researchers' careers while remaining materially and narratively distant from the performers who were recorded.

The content of the recordings further shows how protocols for engagement with capoeira music aligned primarily with the priorities of foreign institutions. Many of the sessions documented capoeira as a demonstration rather than a live practice, producing songs and rhythms isolated from their cultural context. While half of the field recordings did include segments from live *rodas*, only one researcher—Simone Dreyfus-Roche—recorded an uninterrupted *roda* as the primary field document. The other field recordings generally captured a small group of instrumentalists and singers as well as interviews with various mestres. Notably, Finnish ethnographer Helina Rauvataara traveled to Brazil and conducted a short interview with Mestre Pastinha, which is currently held at a museum in Europe, according to Jorge Mauricio Herrera Acuna (2017).

Black American linguist Lorenzo Dow Turner was the first to make field recordings of capoeira in Bahia between 1940 and 1941, recording over 300 aluminum discs of Afro-diasporic practices including a small selection of early capoeira performances. Turner was among other scholars travelling to Brazil, including Franklin Frazier and Melville Herskovits. He selected Bahia as an important field site to “study vestiges of African cultures” (Diaz 2024) and much of

his scholarship advocated for the retention of African cultural elements in diasporic communities. Through his research, Turner challenged the more common theorizing of African American culture as “derivative of white American culture,” according to the Dow Turner Collection description on the Indiana University Library website. Turner conducted field work largely with the Gullah people in the southern U.S. Georgia Sea Islands in addition to Caribbean, Brazilian, and West African communities to search for ethnographic evidence of African cultural retention, which he found. According to Caio de Souza, Turner “sought to understand how African practices, words, and customs had survived the transatlantic diaspora and became embedded in everyday life throughout the Americas” (2024, 164). In Brazil, Turner recorded what many believe to be the first known recordings of capoeira (Diaz 2024).

Turner’s field recordings were the first known markers of audio recording technology used in capoeira. Turner recorded Mestre Bimba performing now iconic *toques*, or rhythms, including *cavalaria*, *são bento pequeno*, *são bento grande*, and *iuna* (Turner Collection, Indiana University Archives of Traditional Music). These rhythms remain important in the practice of capoeira and are consistently taught in classes in FICA Seattle. He also recorded two other mestres demonstrating capoeira music: Juvenal and Cabecinha who were all located in Salvador, Brazil. All 30-minute recording sessions took place within the same two days in 1940, presumably at Radio Sociedade, a local recording studio (Diaz 2023, Souza 2024).

Turner’s collecting is marked by a somewhat insider perspective, being a Black person studying Black musical and linguistic forms. At the same time, his position as a scholar from the U.S. contributed to complicated power relations that privileged his goals as a researcher even when his work challenged dominant theories by adamantly calling for the recognition of African forms in the various diasporic communities across the Americas. Turner’s recordings served the

immediate goals of his scholarly work but did not necessarily align with how the *capoeiristas* play the music contextually, either within training sessions or in a *roda*, and it is not clear whether they had the chance to express the meaning behind the songs they performed.

Turner's field recordings remained inaccessible to most *capoeiristas* until the 1990s when they were discovered by *capoeirista* Vincent Brown and shared within his community, including the eminent capoeira historian Matthias Röhrig Assunção (Diaz, 2024, 21). In the 2000s, the recordings were made publicly available and streamable on YouTube and elsewhere (ibid). These recordings featured musical demonstrations with one or two berimbaus and pandeiros (tambourines) in addition to a small group of singers, some leading *corridos* and *ladainhas* and others participating in the chorus response.

Turner's work in Brazil thus sits at a critical intersection. The recordings he made represent invaluable historical documents, preserving the sound of capoeira at a time when commercial recordings were nearly nonexistent. Yet they also reveal a historical pattern in which Afro-Brazilian cultural memory was filtered through external ownership, interpretation, and frameworks of value. Turner worked within a hierarchical and colonial system in which recordings were made and then removed from their original context, yet served as a singular representation of early capoeira and its music. These field recordings preserved sonic snapshots of capoeira practice and remained controlled by both Turner and what was then called Archives of Traditional Music at Indiana University. The recording process itself was framed by Turner's research goals that sought to produce "sonic testimony" of African retention (Souza, 2025). Scholar Livio Sansone shows how Turner's fieldwork experiences expose the "coloniality in academic life and practice" for those "at the receiving end of global anthropological flows" (2023, 8). Contending directly with the intellectual exchange between the local and global

figures and knowledge creation, Sansone shows that the benefit local practitioners received from these collaborations often amounted to converting “social capital to enhance their careers” (Yelvington, 2024, pg. 420).

Tony Seeger writes that “the material researchers collected, the descriptions they made, and the examples they recorded on early cylinder machines are often still thought important by both the descendants of the people recorded and scholars” (1986, 266). He argues that archived recordings, such as Turner’s, are used by people other than scholars and that they care much more about the transcriptions and songs that were captured, rather than the theories that accompanied them. In recent years there has been an outpouring of creative ways practitioners are re-engaging with the field recordings I have discussed so far. In FICA Seattle, information about the recordings are offered during class and explored by students on their own time. The following section will outline one specific example of a group based in Indiana creatively using Turner’s field recordings as inspiration for a new album production.

Contemporary Uses of Capoeira Field Recordings

In 2023, Turner’s recordings became the starting point for *Coco Maduro*, an album by Mestre Iuni and the Grupo de Capoeira Angola Estrela do Norte, Mestre Iuni’s capoeira studio in Bloomington, Indiana. This project was spearheaded by ethnomusicologist Caio de Souza and was a “collaborative, participatory, and reciprocal perspective, with active voice from its members” (Souza, 2025, 164), contrasting with the colonial methodology underlying the production of the field recordings from the 1940s by Lorenzo Turner. In this way, Souza went against the “hegemonic hoarding of knowledge” and sought to “co-create spaces of knowledge that not only tell the entangled histories of these colonial sound recordings, but also allow a dialogue across traditions and epistemologies” (Hilden, I., et al. 2021, 18). As such, Souza broke

with the historic ethnographic protocols of engagement and instead chose to focus his research on the way *Coco Maduro* is not merely a technical feat of audio production but a culturally situated act that is rooted in spiritual energy and ancestrality.

The utility of the archival recordings for contemporary practitioners such as Mestre Iuni show how practitioners are creatively connecting to the past beyond the *roda*. Even within its coloniality, the songs from field recordings still maintain knowledge, lineage, and memory that can be re-activated and circulated into community spaces. It also shows how colonial archives reintroduced to cultural artists offer the opportunity to investigate academic authority and unequal access to representation. Souza's work with Mestre Iuni, and my own project with Mestre Silvinho discussed in Chapter 3, responds to this history of extraction through an intentional reversal of the power structure that privileges the researcher's scholarly aims over those of the practitioners being recorded.

In an entirely different vein, field recordings are also a site for scholars and *capoeiristas* to study the extent to which elements of capoeira have transformed over time. Notably, Juan Diego Diaz has conducted in-depth analysis of song repertoire within capoeira as well as berimbau tuning techniques using field recordings (2024). This research consolidates information about field recordings and what they can tell us about the historical performance of capoeira. Through musical analysis, Díaz proposed a division of capoeira song repertoire to “contribute to a better understanding of the capoeira universe through its music” (2024, 147) and systematically theorize common berimbau tuning practices in the earliest musical materials in capoeira. He built on the work of research-practitioners Bárbara Kristensen and C.R. Santos, who explored berimbau tuning in their book *Capoeira Afinada* (2020), which analyzed field recordings by Turner and Dreyfus-Roche. From their musical analysis Díaz and Rossi

hypothesized that tuning approaches differed depending on the context, for example, whether or not they were recording in a studio or producing a commercial album, participating in a *roda*, or being recorded for documentaries or field recordings. Tuning their voices to the berimbau occurred more often in groups performing in controlled studio settings than for field recordings and “overall, singers tend to sing in the major mode” as a stylistic preference (Diaz, 2024, 65-66).

While all of this work has been constructive in compiling the lineage of field recordings within the practice of capoeira over time, there is still much to be studied in terms of contemporary practitioners’ usages of field recordings in addition to the exploration of songs, content, and cultural contexts. Both Diaz and Rossi insist that much more ethnographic work with contemporary practitioners is needed to solidify and expand these claims. The implications of these differences in berimbau tuning in studio settings versus field recordings remain in question, but as Chapter 3 will show, in some contemporary capoeira studios such as Mestre Silvinho’s FICA chapter, careful tuning is important in both contexts. Whether or not recorded albums influenced what sounds “right” to *capoeiristas* remains to be determined.

The early field recordings of capoeira underscore why community-driven approaches to documentation are essential. These projects—largely produced by foreign researchers with their own objectives—captured sound but not the relationships, protocols, or lived contexts that give capoeira its meanings. As a result, they generated an archive that is historically valuable yet fundamentally detached from the communities it purports to represent. Recognizing this gap clarifies the stakes of my broader argument: documentation becomes naturally culturally sustaining when it is shaped by those who inhabit the practice, and ethnomusicologists must

learn to “arrive” with an orientation toward protocols of engagement embedded within the practice.

In the following section, I transition to a discussion concerning commercial albums produced by mestres from the 1960s onward. These creations represent strategic interventions that use recording technology to assert Black historical authority and preserve Afrocentric philosophy. In so doing, mestres created pedagogical tools for diasporic practitioners decades later, shaping a sonic canon through which *capoeiristas* learn to listen, recognize, and embody tradition. This reinforces Paul Gilroy’s argument that Black diasporic cultures have long used technology to maintain cultural connections throughout the Black Atlantic (1993).

Commercial Albums

By the 1960s, Mestres began releasing commercial albums. “Because the number of albums in this decade is limited,” writes Diaz, “most of them became seminal for subsequent groups of Capoeira Angola and regional styles” (2024, 23). Mestre Bimba recorded one of the earliest albums (1962) where there was a “specific ensemble for his style with a single berimbau and two accompanying pandeiros (tambourines) [...] and this has been emblematic of the capoeira regional style ever since” (Diaz, 2021, 169). On his album, Bimba’s track list includes traditional berimbau toques (rhythms) such as *são bento grande*, *cavalaria*, *iuna* and others as well as capoeira *quadras* (a ladainha with a four verse song lyric structure, used to start the *roda*) and *corridos* (short call-and-response songs sung during a *roda*) accompanied by his particular regional ensemble, as mentioned above.

While Mestre Bimba’s 1962 release of *Curso de Capoeira Regional* served as a pedagogical resource of musical technique, standardizing the instrumentation of the ensemble

and the performance style of various *toques* (rhythms), it was also accompanied by an illustrated booklet explaining the sequences of training. This addition made clear the intentions of the album: that Mestre Bimba wanted the record to be a pedagogical resource. It mattered to him that the body movements were codified and written down. In this way, Bimba's LP marked another strategy to legitimize capoeira within Brazilian society. These recordings allowed learners to access musical and embodied elements previously transmitted only in person. Such written sources tap into practices of subversive means to preserve capoeira traditions.

In contrast to Mestre Bimba's codifying the *regional* capoeira style (a school of capoeira emphasizing acrobatics and athleticism), Mestre Traíra's album *Capoeira da Bahia* (1963) set an enduring precedent for Capoeira Angola commercial albums through his choice of repertoire: a mix of songs with a full *bateria* and solo berimbau toques. For many practitioners outside Brazil—including members of FICA Seattle—Traíra's album remains foundational. In Mestre Silvinho's album *Carangolo*, for example, student and Treniel Matteo (the term "Treniel" denotes an advanced student) referenced Traíra's famous *corrido* "Paranaê," demonstrating how such recordings continue to circulate in transnational practice.

Expanded analysis of Capoeira Angola (1969) by Mestre Pastinha

Alternatively, Mestre Pastinha's 1969 LP *Capoeira Angola* canonized the ensemble within this style: three berimbaus of different size and frequency range, two pandeiros, one *agogô* (double bell), one *reco-reco* (scraper), and one *atabaque* (large, single headed drum). Pastinha's record also stands as a landmark example of a recording as a counter-archive. Where Bimba's recordings emphasized musicality without historiographical components beyond the music and movements themselves, Pastinha's album insisted on capoeira's African heritage, ritual

depth, philosophical continuity, and his own place amongst those elements. As such, the record merits a more expanded analysis here to showcase these points.

The album opens with Pastinha himself singing a *ladainha*, accompanied only by a single berimbau:

Ie, Maior é Deus,

pequeno sou eu.

Tudo o que tenho

foi Deus que me deu.

Na roda da capoeira, ha ha

Grande e pequenos sou eu

("God is greater, I am small.

All I have was given to me by God.

In the *roda*,

I am both great and small")

This opening assertion of humility positions capoeira within a cosmology wherein divine forces, not individual mastery, guide practice. Pastinha then does not sing, but speaks into the microphone about his own life, a rare moment of the mestre's voice addressing listeners directly:

Eu me chamo Vicente Ferreira Pastinha. Eu nasci pra capoeira, só deixo a capoeira quando eu morrer. Eu amo o jogo da capoeira. E não há outra coisa melhor na minha vida, no resto da minha vida, do que a capoeira.

(“My name is Vicente Ferreira Pastinha. I was born for capoeira, and I'll only leave capoeira when I die. I love the game of capoeira. And there's nothing better in my life, for the rest of my life, than capoeira.”)

Mestre Pastinha intentionally chooses to narrate his life and preserve his story in his own words. Throughout the entirety of the album, he inserts speaking interludes describing his life, stories about capoeira, and the importance of the berimbau. An interesting moment occurs in the second interlude where Pastinha seems open to believing anyone's memory of him and his life as true except for his assertion of his skills in capoeira, saying:

“...Hoje eu estou com 79. Olha, a minha vida é uma vida muito atrapalhada pra eu contar mas tem centenas, milhares de pessoas que me conhecem, que já me acompanharam na infância e que vem me acompanhando, poderá dizer alguma coisa. Todos aqueles que quiserem dizer alguma coisa sobre a minha biografia, podem dizer qualquer coisa. Eu aceito tudo e qualquer. Agora tem uma coisa, não fui bobo na roda da capoeira, não fui bobo...”

(...Today I am 79. Look, my life is too chaotic for me to recount, but there are hundreds, thousands of people who know me, who have been with me since childhood and who continue to be with me, who can say something. Anyone who wants to say something about my biography can say anything. I accept everything and anything. Now, there's one thing: I wasn't a fool in the *roda*, I wasn't a fool.)

This seemingly proud exclamation about the number of people who know him and his acceptance of their claims about his life and achievements are tempered by this one caveat: he was not a fool when he played capoeira. In other words, Pastinha remained open to the multiple perspectives about who he was except when it came to his prowess in the *roda*. He also used the

platform of this album to defend *capoeiristas*, saying that the violence was often provoked by police who overstepped their authority by confiscating instruments, such as a berimbau, which angered practitioners (Acuna, 2017, pg. 91).

According to Bruno Ferreira, a communications professor at the Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro and Universidade Federal Do Maranhão,

Mestra Pastinha initiated a lineage of recordings in capoeira that present the narratives of the mestre in a more autobiographical and documentary style, alternating and overlapping musicality and testimonies of their life experiences with capoeira. This form used by Pastinha became a model and was used by other mestres to describe their experiences in capoeira [...] as a way of recording their knowledge. (2019, 224)

For Ferreira, this method of recording is an “audio-visual writing of the self,” where capoeira mestres, whose practice is based in embodied knowledge, preserve aspects of their orality (ibid). From a lineage of repression, Pastinha set the precedent for marking and preserving orality through sound technology. Perhaps the meaning in these recordings lies in the transformative potential of documenting for themselves the legacy of capoeira when it was once dangerous to even be known as a *capoeirista*.

In the days when capoeira was outlawed, the written artifacts left behind were largely police reports. These reports interwove criminality into the very nature of *capoeiristas*. If these were the fragments left behind until the introduction of recording technology to the mestres, it makes sense that *capoeiristas* looked to sound recordings as a means to re-write the narrative of capoeira – even when the recordings themselves were framed by colonial hegemonies of conquest and extraction. Pastinha's album demonstrates how recordings can function as counter-

archives and serve as active interventions against state narratives that criminalized capoeira or efforts to folklorize it as national heritage in ways that erased or downplayed its African heritage. Pastinha used recording technology to assert African lineages, spirituality, and histories of resistance. Sung lyrics, spoken word, and instrumentation all shed light on capoeira's roots in African philosophy and practice. For example, in the second ladainha, sung by one of Pastinha's students, the words make explicit claims about lineage and place:

Bahia nossa Bahia

Capital é Salvador

Quem não conhece a capoeira

Não pode dar seu valor

Capoeira veio da África

Africano quem a trouxe

Todos podem aprender

General e também Doutor

Quem desejar aprender

Venha aqui em Salvador

Procure o Mestre Pastinha,

Ele é professor

Bahia, our Bahia,

The capital is Salvador.

Those who don't know capoeira

Cannot appreciate its value.

Capoeira came from Africa,
 brought by Africans.
 Everyone can learn,
 from General to Doctor.
 Whoever wishes to learn,
 Come here to Salvador,
 Look for Mestre Pastinha,
 He is the teacher

This *ladainha* performs multiple functions simultaneously: it asserts capoeira's African origins countering narratives that positioned it as a Brazilian invention divorced from African roots, it democratizes access ("everyone can learn"), and it establishes Pastinha's academy in Salvador as the authoritative institution. The recording thus functions as a historical claim declaring what capoeira is while positioning Pastinha as its rightful interpreter.

Many of the album's *corridos* extend this pedagogical and philosophical work through metaphor and coded knowledge. "Valha-me Deus, Senhor São Bento," for example, invokes divine protection while referencing São Bento (Saint Benedict), syncretized with the Candomblé *orixá* (deity) Omolu and venerated as protector against snakes—a common metaphor in capoeira for treacherous opponents. The lyrics warn:

Buraco velho tem cobra dentro
Com uma e duas o três eu aguento

("Old holes have snakes inside.

I can handle one, two, or three.")

This corrido teaches *capoeiristas* to expect deception and danger while asserting confidence in one's ability to navigate them. The reference to São Bento also connects capoeira to Afro-Brazilian religious traditions, reinforcing its spiritual dimensions against efforts to reduce it to mere sport. Other *corridos* on the album reference legendary figures such as Dona Maria do Camboatá, a formidable female *capoeirista* who allegedly knocked down three police officers in Pelourinho Square, and Besouro Mangangá, the mythical *capoeirista* whose death is mourned in the *corrido* "Quando eu morrer." By including these songs, Pastinha archives oral histories of resistance and Black heroism that rarely appeared in official records.

In a larger historical context, the album's 1969 release came at a crucial moment. Pastinha was aging and Capoeira Angola risked being overshadowed by capoeira Regional's institutional success. The recording preserved not just songs but a way of understanding capoeira as African heritage and as collective wisdom. "These first albums set a tradition of capoeira groups recording their own albums" continued Diaz, "which has continued until today" (2006, 9). For contemporary *capoeiristas*, especially those training outside Brazil, Pastinha's album remains foundational precisely because it captured this Afrocentric vision on record and exemplifies how mestres could use recordings as archives of Black knowledge and self-determined history. When practitioners listen to Pastinha's voice opening the album, for example, they access not just historical documentation but a way of understanding capoeira as born from resistance. Though he died blind and impoverished in 1981, Pastinha's insistence on capoeira's African heritage and philosophical depth established the foundation for contemporary Capoeira Angola lineages worldwide.

Pastinha's 1969 LP ultimately reinforces the broader argument of this dissertation: documentation sustains a cultural practice only when it emerges from and circulates within the community of practice itself. Pastinha models an early form of community-driven documentation long before that language existed. His album teaches listeners, especially those outside Brazil, as I will explain in a later section, how to "arrive" into the Capoeira Angola tradition through understanding history and respecting lineage. In this sense, Pastinha uses recording not as preservation for preservation's sake but as a relational act aimed at guiding future *capoeiristas* into the practice.

Expanded Analysis Mestre Moraes' GCAP Albums

From Pastinha's school came important students and later mestres, such as Mestre João Grande and Mestre Moraes. Moraes, in particular, extended the philosophy of Pastinha by positioning capoeira as "the history of the political and cultural resistance of Afro-Brazilians" (Marks 2003, 10). In the 1980s, he founded Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP) during Brazil's Movimento Negro, aligning his work with Black empowerment movements and creating educational programs for youth in Salvador. Mestre Moraes and his students have continued to found *capoeira* schools internationally.

Albums were central to this Afrocentric revival and creatively used recorded sound to formulate an alternative archive in addition to their accompanying liner notes. GCAP's 1996 release *Capoeira Angola from Salvador, Brazil*, produced in collaboration with Anthony Seeger of Smithsonian Folkways as well as a number of other ethnomusicologists and anthropologists such as Greg Downey and Daniel Dawson, remains a highly influential recording to many contemporary practitioners. With 39 tracks and an extensive written companion book, the album

not only showcased the artistry of the musicians but also articulated capoeira's cultural stakes. Seeger described it as presenting both "the beautiful sounds and the complex social and political context of capoeira today" where practitioners are "re-thinking their historical ties to African traditions, their place in the African diaspora, and their roles in contemporary Brazil and beyond" (1996, 3). In deliberate choices of repertoire and the accompanying liner notes, GCAP asserted capoeira's African lineage and philosophical depth on an international stage.

As stated in the liner notes, the recording was inspired by the First International Encounter of Capoeira Angola held in August 1994 where members of the Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP) from throughout Brazil and the United States gathered at the group's headquarters in Salvador, Bahia, to share the experience of training in and playing capoeira (1996, 5). Aside from the closing *roda* recording, the album is split into five other parts with the first four parts a collection of four song cycles typically heard in the *roda*. Each song cycle has a theme which the songs reference and all of the themes address Afrocentric topics related to place, spirituality, and resistance. For example, in Part 1, Mestre Moraes sings a *ladainha* telling the story of "King Zumbi," a well-known African warrior and leader of the *quilombo* of Palmares, a free community of marooners built in the Pernambuco region of Brazil formed in the early 17th century. *Quilombos* varied in size, but Palmares is known to be one of the largest and resisted conquests for nearly eighty years. According to Lowell Lewis, "there is a persistent oral tradition connecting capoeira with the *quilombo* of Palmares. One version of the story has it that Zumbi, the last 'king' of Palmares, was himself a capoeira master" (1992, 38). He goes on to refute this narrative as actual fact, given that the method of resistance and defense often relied on access to guns and other weapons more so than martial arts. The myth of Zumbi, though, and of *quilombos* in general, aligns with the values of liberation and resistance moving into central

focus during Brazil's Movimento Negro in the 1980s and onward. During this era, *capoeiristas* identified themselves and the martial art as a practice in resistance, so it makes sense that Palmares, one of the largest and longest lived *quilombos*, is a strong symbol of successful resistance and liberation against dominating forces.

Interestingly, Lewis later states that “none of the older songs refer, as far as I can discover, to life on the *quilombos* or to Zumbi of Palmares” and “the hero worship accorded to Zumbi and the denizens of the *quilombos* is not generally found in oral texts until the mid-twentieth century” (177). In this light, we can see how the larger sociocultural environment of the late 20th century reified the importance of the myth of Zumbi within capoeira. Assunção supports this perspective, saying that “romanticized image of maroons practising capoeira has dominated historical accounts of the art for the last half century” (2005, 7). And yet, the inclusion of a *ladainha* in GCAPs album says more about how Zumbi serves as a symbol of liberation rather than as a mythical capoeira warrior. This is evidenced by Mestre Moraes' homage to Zumbi in the liner notes:

Zumbi symbolized the struggle for the rights of all people, already due to the Afro-Brazilian people, for their contribution to the construction of Brazil. For GCAP, Zumbi lives on, just as do all who have joined in this struggle, like the capoeira mestres. (1996, 10)

Another facet of capoeira worldviews connected to the celebration of Zumbi involves respecting elders within capoeira and remembering their life's work. This is often done by singing praises to the mestres of the past through *ladainhas* and telling stories about them in training sessions. As such, the second song cycle in this album is a tribute to Mestre Pastinha. This practice of naming is made explicit in the liner notes, stating that:

“GCAP traces its origins back to Africa. It represents the continuation of ideas as taught by an Angolan named Mestre Benedito, also known as Africano. Benedito taught Mestre Pastinha [...] Pastinha in turn taught Mestre João Grande [...] who produced his finest student, Mestre Moraes, who in turn created GCAP and a new generation of young masters of Capoeira Angola such as Cobra Mansa, Braga, Neco, and Ze Carlo” (1996, 4).

Remembering and understanding this lineage remains central in Capoeira Angola, given how mestres fought to preserve and spread the art form. I refer to Ferreira’s theorizing that capoeira mestres, whose practice is based in embodied knowledge, preserve aspects of their orality within album productions utilizing both sound and the written word. Equally important, it is clear from the album liner notes that what was at the heart of transmission is the orality of the tradition. The oral/aural history of Capoeira Angola is, as the liner notes to the aforementioned album attest, “crucial in the continuation of the cultural and socio-political resistance that has sustained the art in the face of persecution” (1996, 6). In this framework, not only does it foreclose any idea that recordings themselves are the primary strategy of preservation within capoeira, but it also celebrates GCAP as a community of critically engaged researchers and advocates in the greater project of social and cultural awareness.

Along those lines, the accompanying text to the album makes clear that this project is as much about capturing and preserving sound and story as it is about teaching and educating the broader public about Capoeira Angola. Throughout the liner notes there are translations of song texts and descriptions of important people, places, objects, and deities. While unclear whether the liner notes had a particular purpose or audience in mind, it has now become a staple musical selection for *capoeiristas* studying outside of Brazil. Considering that the music is often listened to either on CDs in class or on streaming platforms such as YouTube or Spotify, the extent to

which the liner notes are referenced and used as an educational tool deserves further research and is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In terms of the recording process, the music was largely recorded live in a place where capoeiristas practice and participate in *rodas* (O'Connor, 1997). O'Connor is clear in her opinion that "no recording can reproduce the experience of being in that huge room, crowded with people from the neighborhood and from abroad, singing the choral responses along with the *capoeira* players as they performed on instruments or played in the *roda*" (320). She furthers this sentiment of what the album of recorded sound cannot do by saying that "it is difficult to comprehend or even imagine *capoeira* through the written word—watching a game is better, and playing in the game oneself best of all" (322). The liner notes attest to this challenge, saying that "the demands of the recording medium have altered the structure of the music, or recordings have lacked a study of the contents and significance of song texts" (1996, 5). And yet, the music recorded remains an important tribute to GCAP's work as a cultural emblem of Capoeira Angola.

Mestre Moraes released a second album in 2003 entitled *Capoeira Angola 2: Brincando na Roda with Smithsonian Folkways* that was nominated for the 2004 Grammy award for the Best Traditional World Music Album. In this album, there is more consistent studio production and follows Mestre Pastinha's standard *bateria* ensemble of three *berimbaus*, two *pandeiros*, an *agogô*, a single *reco-reco*, and an *atabaque* (a large single headed drum). Moraes' singing and improvisational skills are front and center and no longer have the same live energy as the first recording project. Rather, the album is separated into themes featuring a *ladainha*, *lovacao*, and a single *corrido*. As compared to the previous album, these selections are shorter and more produced. Each track encapsulates the topic of each song, with titles including "Bricando na

roda” (playing in the ring), “Tradição” (tradition), “Cascavel” (rattlesnake), and “Camaleão” (chameleon).

Worth noting is that the liner notes for this album are much less explanatory, with fewer translations of entire songs while still giving context for the songs on the album. The bulk of the introductory text includes a brief history of capoeira, the African origins of instruments and movement, the separation between Capoeira Angola and capoeira regional, and Bantu-based cosmology. Aside from the album cover showing Mestre Moraes, the only other picture in the liner notes is of Mestre Moraes kneeling down to shepherd and teach a young child with a *bateria* behind them.

The GCAP albums extend this same community-centered ethos into a new political moment. Produced within a collective project grounded in Black consciousness, education, and movement-building, these recordings show how documentation becomes culturally meaningful only when shaped by practitioners’ own agendas. Their carefully crafted musical cycles, liner notes, and historical framing offer diasporic listeners a blueprint for how to listen, interpret, and orient themselves to the philosophical commitments of the cultural art. GCAP’s is one avenue towards *capoeiristas* themselves “learning to arrive.” In this way, the methodology I use in this dissertation manifests not only in my own ethnographic practice but also in the recordings themselves, which model the protocols and relationships that sustain capoeira across time and distance.

Listening Practices of FICA Seattle

If the early field recordings reveal how capoeira’s sound was extracted into institutional archives and commercial albums reveal how mestres reasserted narrative control, contemporary

listening practices show how these sonic materials circulate in community contexts far beyond Salvador, Bahia. Through my ethnographic work with the FICA Seattle Chapter, capoeira recordings from the earliest field recordings in the 1940s are used to teach, shape identity, and anchor diasporic belonging. Mestre Silvinho shared with me during an interview that while he was training in Brazil, recordings were not used extensively in class. Occasionally, teachers played music in class simply to “tell a story.” For example, when Silvinho first began training in Minas Gerais, vinyl records were the primary source of recording media for capoeira classes in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Nearly all of the *capoeiristas* I interviewed spoke to some degree about the power of listening to capoeira songs, not only in live performances but also listening to a CD in class or on their own. Contra-mestre Caxambu noted that when he was training with Mestre Jurandir, they only listened to one CD: Mestre Moraes’ 2003 GCAP release on the Smithsonian Folkways label. After listening to this CD numerous times over the years, “Mestre Moraes’s style is always in the back of my head” he said, “and so whenever I sing, his vocal style and some of his lyric treatments are still in there” (Personal communication, Winter 2024). This embeddedness of a particular style and technique through years of careful listening and training shows the impact CDs have to carry a mestre’s voice from a place like Salvador, Bahia to Seattle, Washington. Contra-mestre Caxambu’s account demonstrates what it means for an individual in a capoeira school to train to the albums left by mestres in Brazil.

It is not only their voices, though, that leave a mark on a *capoeirista* but also their instrumental technique. One day after class, Contra-mestre Caxambu pointed me to an album by Mestre Jogo de Dentro because he plays with a notably low tuned berimbau. When I listened, the *medio* that Mestre Jogo de Dentro played sounded, without a doubt, almost like a gunga. This

type of informal learning was also part of the picture, where a more senior member of the group may pass on kernels of knowledge to follow.

Other students advocated for the need to learn about notable mestres through listening. “You *had* to know who the mestres were and what their voices sounded like” Deepa, a member of FICA Seattle told me. “It was almost like a canon” (personal communication, October 30th, 2024). Deepa also pointed to Mestre Moraes’s CDs as one of the more defining albums for their sonic elements. “The original GCAP album” Deepa explained, “was where I learned the music, really. I used to listen to the instrumental tracks and play outside of class - that’s how I learned my *toques*” (ibid). Deepa expanded on the importance of capoeira CDs as tools for mastery, saying that while capoeira is an oral history,

“we are not around many people who are holding that history. We are separated from them so we must work harder to reconnect to that. And one of the ways we can do that is by listening to the recordings and getting to know the person's voice, the mestres’s names, what cities they lived in, and what songs mattered to them.”

While not directly referencing the liner notes to this recording, she reflects on an important value embedded into capoeira philosophy: listening to learn how to play while also listening to learn about history. For Deepa, learning about mestres through their music felt important and offered an avenue to understand herself in relation to the art-form. She invoked the term Portuguese *referencia*, a Portuguese word often used to describe a mestre who is inspirational to a practitioner's approach to capoeira performance. “*Mia referencia ina capoeira*,” said Deepa, “meaning, that person was part of the ecosystem that allowed me to understand who I am in relation to capoeira” (ibid).

To get “inside” of a sound, whether it is a way of playing Berimbau or the nuance of a person's interpretation of a *ladainha* takes time and those committed to capoeira have a good understanding and respect for that type of slow learning. The more the person learns through class discussions and personal research, the more the songs reveal about the cultural context of capoeira and the long history of resistance and Black empowerment. Daphne Brooks, a Black studies scholar at Yale University, thinks about this type of listening as “exploring the insurgency of black sound. While her work focuses on “excavating a counterhistory of popular music” (2021, 4), there are important parallels between the way Black women “narrated their radical triumphs and their lifelong labors in sound” (ibid) and how Afro-Brazilians expressed their own acts of resistance and liberation through sound.

“Getting to hear different records and albums from various mestres is really insightful because it spans such a wide timeline,” Roxanne, another FICA Seattle member, pointed out to me during an interview. “Knowing who the mestre is is really important for context, and also for understanding the lineage of Capoeira Angola. So it adds context and also appreciation” (personal communication, August 2024). She went on to say these CDs spark discussion about how all the mestres are connected. By listening to these CDs, the lineage of mestres is a kind of web that “slowly becomes more visible” says Roxanne, “but to hear the voices that are there and to receive the messages on the different CDs, they all tell different stories and they create different feelings” (ibid). Here, she is referencing the affective potential of recorded sound to cross temporal barriers and the importance of citational practices built by unfurling a complicated web of relationships between *capoeiristas* in Brazil over the last century. There is a recognition from Roxanne about the need to digest the lineage of mestres in Capoeira Angola and that recordings provide an entryway into doing so. This connects to John-Carlos Perea’s

assertion that, within an Indigenous framework, there is a weight to carry in order to know “what and who constituted part of a musical tradition” (2017, 55).

Jordan, a FICA Seattle member, described how learning capoeira music occurs in layers: At first the songs are just sounds, where in the beginning, you don’t speak Portuguese [...] you don’t know what the songs mean. Later on, you learn the words to a couple songs and look them up online. And then you might realize that some of these songs are religious or some have deeper meanings about slavery even though it’s talking literally about birds. And then there’s the even *deeper* meaning where I’m playing this song right now [in the *roda*] for this specific reason, because of the metaphor and who’s playing and who’s here. You don’t get that when you first start” (personal communication, August 2024).

His theorizing, like Deepa’s, also attests to this slow learning process saying that “you should not even expect to know everything right away, but you should understand that that is part of the learning, too” (personal communication, October 30th, 2024).

For practitioners who have not been to Brazil, recordings offer a snapshot into the way that music feels, even if studio recordings do not offer the same experience as a live *roda*. While many of the people I spoke to center the experience of hearing music live in class or in a *roda*, Jordan extends this to recordings saying that “part of the learning is the same when you’re listening to CDs and you can understand some of the history, where people are coming from, and what their style is” (ibid).

What is clear to me is that albums offer an additional arm of study but they cannot replace the experience of creating music during class or in a *roda*. CDs should be in service of how the *capoeirista* shows up in the community. Deepa makes this clear in how she described

that albums and songs on YouTube offer something of use, but “who you really are as an *angoleiro*—to really be a *capoeirista* is to be part of the community” (personal communication, October 30th, 2024). Mestre Silvinho affirms this in many training classes saying that, “You don’t train to train. You train to play in the *roda*.” Developing as a *capoeirista*, then, involved learning *corridos* and *ladainhas* from the canon of classic albums, but more importantly, it also means extending beyond them, and using creativity and improvisation to respond to what is happening in the *roda* in real time. “Improvising shows mastery” Deepa said, “it shows your dedication, your knowledge, and the beauty of the art form. When you develop mastery, you begin to make things your own” (personal communication, October 30th, 2024).

The way a person shows up and participates in the *roda* has as much to do with the ritualistic process and movements of the players as it does with how the practitioner chooses to play the music. Beyond the lyrics, the leader and the chorus, the expressive and improvisational choices made by the *capoeirista* have a purpose. When the music is on point, as some *capoeiristas* who have been to Salvador or Rio de Janeiro or Minas Gerais can attest, there is something different that happens to people. “When the music is good,” says Deepa, “you play a different game” (personal communication, October 30th, 2024).

For *capoeiristas* who have been to Brazil and met mestres from the Angola lineage, hearing CDs from those same mestres has a particular resonance, especially training to them in class. Amalia attests to this, saying:

I feel an uplifting energy when listening to recordings of mestres that I’ve met or have had exposure to in person, where it was being in a *roda* with them or in classes. I feel like those albums bring me to a certain space and I feel the spirit of that mestre when I hear those recordings (personal communication, October 5th 2024).

Similarly, many of the people I interviewed spoke to this type of personal connection to various CDs. Contra-mestra Leika, for example, told me about the first capoeira album she could find when she first started in training. It was by Mestre Roberval and she would train to it in her living room. “Its the only CD that I remember having physically, and I listened to it repeatedly” (personal communication, November 8th, 2024).

This ethnographic research reaffirms that the work of recorded sound in capoeira becomes pedagogically meaningful when they circulate within relationships of trust, accountability, and shared purpose. What mattered to the *capoeiristas* I worked with was not simply access to albums, but how those recordings were introduced, contextualized, and listened to together, often under the guidance of a mestre or knowledgeable peer, or for individual practice. In these moments, listening was a community-driven practice, one that transformed recordings from static objects into dynamic vessels of memory, lineage, and ethical orientation. This demonstrates the core of my larger argument: documentary media gain cultural force not through their existence but through the protocols of engagement that surround them, and ethnomusicologists must learn to arrive in ways that support the communities who animate these archives in the first place.

Conclusion

The historical and contemporary recordings traced in this chapter show that albums occupy a paradoxical but generative place within Capoeira Angola. Although capoeira has long privileged embodied, place-based, and relational modes of transmission, recordings have become crucial tools through which mestres assert historical meaning and sustain Afrocentric memory. Far from contradicting capoeira’s oral tradition, the earliest mestre-produced albums in the 1960s

emerged precisely to accentuate elements already preserved and continuing to be transmitted. The albums emerged at a time when folklorization, state appropriation, and the flattening forces of nationalist cultural projects were in full force. By recording in their own voices and on their own terms, *mestres* created counter-narratives that preserved the political, philosophical, and historical dimensions of capoeira that foreign field recordings and tourist performances stripped from many elements of the actual cultural art and could not meaningfully represent.

Throughout this chapter, I have argued that albums and recorded capoeira music are a part of a canon that are in constant circulation within capoeira groups. These albums are not static documents but active agents in transmitting embodied knowledge, even as they cannot replace the irreducible experience of the *roda* itself. Archival scholar Michelle Caswell writes that a record is a “springboard for memory” and is “always in a process of becoming” (2016, 8-9). In the same way, I began from a place that understands the recordings discussed in this chapter as containers for memory that continually serve as reference points in the collective memory of the music within Capoeira Angola. Not only in the stories held in words and sung in the *roda* and training classes, but also in the sonic gestures of the *capoeiristas* which mark stylistic vocal and instrumental technique that continually serve as reference points in the collective memory of the music within Capoeira Angola. These reference points are reactivated as anchors for the *capoeirista*, where, with each listening, the record brings about limitless creative responses in return. Through historic field recordings and commercial albums, documenting capoeira music is an important link to cultural sustainability of the art form, particularly for transnational groups and practitioners studying away from Brazil.

In his closing chapter of the seminal book *Capoeira: The History of An Afro-Brazilian Martial Art*, Matthias Röhrig Assunção writes that a core question still needing to be addressed is

“to what extent the meaning of capoeira changes when the art is exported and further removed from its original context” (2005, 194). As these albums circulate through translocal and transnational communities, they acquire new pedagogical functions. For *capoeiristas* outside Brazil—such as those at FICA Seattle—recordings become a means of “learning to arrive” in the tradition. Through repeated listening, practitioners begin to recognize dialects of singing, subtle variations of berimbau toques, and the affective intensity that carries ancestral memory forward. The albums are part of an informal archive that document the past while actively animate relationships to lineage, belonging, and represent many aspects of ethics within capoeira practice. They help practitioners “hear” their capoeira elders even from afar, offering a sonic proximity that bridges cultural and geographic distance.

At the same time, these recordings illuminate capoeira’s long and complicated relationship with institutions, archives, and technologies of capture. Early field recordings, produced by outsiders with distinct research agendas, fixed capoeira within archival logics that separated sound from its social world. Mestre-produced albums, in contrast, reassert the inseparability of sound, history, and Black political life, offering a model for how Afro-Brazilian communities have used recording technology to author their own historical narratives both by music and written liner notes.

Regarding the framework of learning to arrive, my ethnographic research suggests that capoeira practitioners outside of Brazil rely on albums such as the ones discussed in this chapter to orient themselves to the protocols of engagement and the lineage of Capoeira Angola writ large heard in the recordings and shared across time and space. In this way, learning to arrive is not just a scholarly method, but also something practiced within capoeira communities. Furthermore, my analysis of liner notes and scholarly publications concerning seminal Capoeira

Angola albums of the 1970s-1980s has demonstrated an organic collaborative process that is similar to the methodology of learning to arrive.

Together, the recordings of Mestre Pastinha and the later GCAP albums reveal that documentation is culturally sustaining only when it emerges from within the community itself. Pastinha's 1969 LP models an early form of community-driven documentation in which the mestre determines the terms of representation, narrating his own history, philosophy, and lineage. Decades later, GCAP extends this ethos by producing albums embedded in Black consciousness movements, collective education, and Afrocentric political organizing. These projects demonstrate that recordings carry cultural force not because they capture sound but because they encode protocols, values, and histories that guide practitioners in learning how to arrive into the tradition. In both cases, documentation becomes meaningful only when oriented toward practitioners' needs, and when researchers or collaborators approach the work with the humility and accountability that my dissertation terms "learning to arrive."

This chapter traced both the historical emergence of capoeira recordings as well as their contemporary uses to argue that capoeira recordings function as both an alternative archive and a pedagogical tool for transmitting Afro-Brazilian knowledge across transnational contexts. Through their social life, albums continue to shape how *capoeiristas* learn, remember, and imagine themselves within an expanding global community. Through the mapping of albums within the lineage of Capoeira Angola, I sought to contextualize my work with FICA Seattle and our production of *Carangolo*, an album specific to Mestre Silvinho, his students, and the Union Cultural Center.

Throughout this chapter, I further suggest that there is a legacy of collaboration between capoeira practitioners and scholarly researchers that plays an important role in the production,

circulation, and ultimate preservation of archival field recordings and commercial albums involving Capoeira Angola. The next chapter extends this argument by examining the collaborative making of *Carangolo* with Mestre Silvinho. While the present chapter has shown how recordings function across time and space, Chapter 3 turns to the process of creating such an album, exploring what can happen when ethnomusicological practice is entangled with community recording projects.

Chapter 3 - The Making of *Carangolo*

Introduction

Our first recording day at Sage Arts studios took place on a Saturday in late June of 2024. Mestre Silvinho's capoeira students from all over the Pacific Northwest drove in for the day's session, some traveling all the way from Bellingham and Portland. We were set to start at 9:00 a.m. but folks continued to trickle in until 10:00. A handful of people arrived earlier than myself and my partner Jocelyn. They seemed to be in good spirits, eyeing the studio facility and walking around outside. After saying hello to Mestre Silvinho and a few other students in the studio area, I focused on helping Jocelyn set up the eating area in the kitchen before we began. Soon after most people arrived, we congregated in the large hall where we would be recording. Many of us sat on comfortable leather couches or chairs that lined one side of the room. Several microphones were already prepared, strung up by large boomstands over our heads or on additional microphone stands lined up at the far side of the room. The berimbaus were armed and tuned, placed in a neat line at the far side of the hall, along with a pile of caxixi (shakers), baquetes (sticks), dobrãos (coins), and other percussion instruments.

Roxanne, a member of the Seattle chapter of Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola (FICA) that Mestre Silvinho leads, opened our session with breathing exercises as we all stood in a circle. "Coffee is tempting but it is also de-hydrating" she said while guiding us through strategies to keep our voices from straining since the first half of the day would heavily rely on the group singing in a chorus during five iterations of a bateria, the orchestra used in Capoeira Angola during a traditional roda. In addition to the hours of singing ahead of us, a rotating cast of musicians would also perform on the following instruments: three berimbaus tuned low, medium, and high, two pandeiros (tambourines), one agogo (double bell), a reco-reco

(scraper), and atabaque (tall, single headed drum). The musicians set up in a line and everyone else created a loose arch in front of them. The formation felt at once familiar and also hollow – missing the central movement of two players in the center of the roda engaging in a game of capoeira. In their place, we had microphone stands lined up in the center of the ‘would-be’ roda.

Understandably, I sensed right away that we weren't completely comfortable in the music studio and that the protocol for recording was unclear. Unlike a roda or a class at the Union Cultural Center, where we could effortlessly participate, Sage Arts was unfamiliar territory. It



Figure 3.1 Capoeira Bateria at Sage Arts Studios (picture taken by the author)

was a large, spacious building and yet full of obstacles: cables, mics hugging the side of the berimbau players, a huge control room, and studio engineers managing expensive equipment. There were palpable nerves emanating through the room as we realized that a single take of one song requires much more time than we anticipated. “How on earth are we going to get through our full list of songs by 5pm?” I thought to myself a couple hours into the session.

During our second bateria, we started recording in the normal course of musical events: first the ladainha, an opening song performed by a solo singer that often speaks to a lesson or figure integral to capoeira history, and then the louvação, a series of responsorial phrases that honours mestres, asks for protection, or invokes important phrases, and lastly a series of corridos, short songs sung in a call and response format. We were having trouble singing at the right time for the corrido loosely called “Adão, Adão, Cade Salome, Adão.” Capoeiristas in the ensemble had differing understandings of when to start singing as well as the length of the responsorial phrase. We had to stop the recording many times because we were not in unison. Mestre Silvinho began talking about the importance of timing, with a tinge of frustration: “Listen. This is how we should sing it. This is how it has traditionally been sung and it is important to keep it this way.” Many mestres within Capoeira Angola have differing opinions about song structure in the roda and capoeiristas learn many different versions of a song. And yet, as is commonly true of cultural arts based in an oral tradition, many opinions are often considered correct. Yet, because the goal was to record a cohesive sound on the album, Mestre Silvinho had to make clear the way in which he wanted the chorus to enter.

We were trying our best during that particular bateria but the axé (a Yoruban word signifying life force or living energy) usually present in the roda was muddled by the importance of keeping the quality and structure of the music in line with Mestre Silvinho's vision for the album. We ended up having Jordan, another FICA Seattle capoeirista, conduct us like an orchestra so that we could stay on track. This was an atypical sight, counter to most of the practices developed within capoeira¹. When we were supposed to be replicating the sounds of a

¹ A notable exception to this is the berimbau orchestra, which is often led by a conductor. However, this ensemble is a new innovation within Capoeira as I will explain in a later part of this chapter. It still remains true that within the traditional *roda*, there is no formal conductor.

roda, a deeply ritualistic event, we were instead breaking out of the familiar routes of performance and behavior for the sake of a quality performance and a precisely defined song structure.

In this chapter, I use the framework of learning to arrive to explore both my emergence as a scholar, producer, and *capoeirista* (a person who practices capoeira) as well as FICA Seattle's process of recording and releasing their first album, *Carangolo*. Participating in classes, learning how to play capoeira, and building relationships with the FICA Seattle community offered me pathways toward a grounded approach to album production and collaboration across difference. At the same time, learning to arrive in a professional studio, as a capoeira community, showed the flexibility of this particular art form.

The experience of bringing capoeira into a studio reveals not only the material difficulties of navigating an unfamiliar recording environment, but also the deeper tension between a practice rooted in oral tradition and the fixity of recording technology. When the goal is to create an album, variations in phrasing and differences in timing can be at odds with the creative choices required to unify the album. Beverly Diamond describes this phenomenon, saying that when sound becomes fixed "on record" it becomes a tool for "negotiating and potentially redefining [musical] concepts" (2021, 4). In our session, the concepts negotiated were the song phrases, instrumental techniques, and *toques* (rhythms). The repeated false starts around the corrido "Adão, Adão," as shared in the vignette that opened this chapter, made explicit what is usually left tacit in the *roda*: multiple valid ways of singing and the authority of a mestre to define the particulars. When the groups aligned to Mestre Silvinho's way of singing "Adão,

Adão,” we fixed a definitive version of the song to our album. In this instance, recording technology guided the way we performed.

Through the process of making *Carangolo*, Mestre Silvinho and his students both enacted and put on record what I call an “expressive dialect” of capoeira, developed over years of training and practicing together. I define an expressive dialect as a learned articulation of movement, musical style, and philosophy evolved through the practice of Capoeira Angola over time. For FICA Seattle, this way of practicing capoeira includes an orbit of chosen songs that built a standard repertoire as well as the tacit and more explicit ways to behave and engage in the *roda*. As I will show in the following sections, *Carangolo* features both a studio session and a live *roda* at the Union Cultural Center, where Silvinho teaches. The live *roda* in particular deepens the representation of this expressive dialect by capturing the sound of capoeira in practice: the call of the *berimbaus*, the movements of the game, and the way Silvinho shaped the *roda* from beginning to end. Fixing this expressive dialect on record matters because capoeira is inherently polyvalent in form, shaped by the local repertoires, vocabularies, and pedagogies of each mestre’s teaching style. Recorded sound, then, can serve as a tool of transmission not only of capoeira lineage but also of a specific local identity within the larger transnational FICA community.

Carangolo is the culmination of years of work in Seattle building community networks and expanding the reach of Capoeira Angola around the Pacific Northwest. The success of *Carangolo* is the result of a years-long process of trial and error, experimentation, and persistence in attempting to record an album. Read through the lens of this dissertation’s broader framework, my role in the production of *Carangolo* demonstrates that learning to arrive is about attending to misalignments between institutional expectations and community practices, between

the fixity of recording technologies and the fluidity of oral tradition, and between ideals of inclusion and the realities of hierarchical experiences. These tensions do not disappear through better planning or clearer protocols; they persist as structural features of collaborative cultural work. What this case study suggests for ethnomusicology more broadly is that collaborative projects dealing with cultural arts work well when they embrace a process of attunement and flexibility.

In this chapter, I make two arguments. First, I argue that recorded sound can simultaneously fragment the elements of an oral tradition such as capoeira while also affording new possibilities for musical expression. For Mestre Silvinho, the decision to record served several purposes, but most prominently it served as a “way to recognize the work I have been doing here for the past 20 years,” and as a pedagogical resource for his and Contra-mestra Leika’s students (personal communication, November 8, 2024). Thus, even in a space where the elements of capoeira were fragmented, the act of recording became a site where pedagogy, creative expression, and legacy could be realized. This album serves to celebrate and recognize the flourishing of Capoeira Angola in the Pacific Northwest.

This chapter demonstrates that the success of *Carangolo* lies not in resolving the tension between oral tradition and fixed recordings, but in creatively navigating it in a way that activates the transmission of knowledge and continues the cultural work of capoeira albums as discussed in Chapter 2. Through analysis of interviews and observations, I show how participants used the skills they learned from their training as *capoeiristas* in the recording process for *Carangolo*. In this way, participants extended skills learned from training as *capoeiristas* into the recording process for *Carangolo*.

Secondarily, I also argue that *Carangolo*, through our methodology and through the narratives interwoven in the song selections, represents the Union Cultural Center's orientation toward social justice and community health that is a foundational drive behind Mestre Silvinho and the UCC's work in Seattle more broadly and a principle value within the practice of Capoeira Angola writ large. As evidenced by Assunção's research,

despite its use as an African or Afro-Brazilian symbol, its globalized practice is, in most cases, no longer linked to a specific class or ethnic group but rather to the feeling of encompassing resistance against oppression, or "the system" [...] Capoeira has thus become not only a globalized style, but also part of a globalized subculture of protest. (2005, 95)

These subcultures of protest within the arts, including salsa, soca, and R&B, emerged separately through varied cultural expressions of the Black Atlantic, but soon overlapped and have connected through translocal communities. The Union Cultural Center is an example of a physical space that allows for the overlapping and shared community values between these Afro-diasporic art forms. In a later section describing the album release for *Carangolo*, this overlap will become clearer in the ways that the album offered a platform and opportunity for group discussion and practices of solidarity.

For ethnomusicology, *Carangolo* offers a case study in how record production lives within the paradox of capturing a single collection of performances within a fluid and ever-changing cultural art. It demonstrates the potential for ethnomusicologists to engage in community-based work that fosters long-term relationships of accountability and strengthens networks of cultural workers, scholars, and practitioners on a local level. Just as *capoeiristas* in FICA Seattle rely on albums from the past 60 years as a resource to reveal protocols of

engagement, I, too, learned to arrive as a *capoeirista* and researcher through similar means but in real time through the album production of *Carangolo*.

In the following sections, I explore how members of FICA Seattle navigated the challenges of recording a capoeira album, from previous attempts to record to the preparation and rehearsals with me and ultimately to the recording session at Sage Arts Studios. Through these sections, I aim to show how *Carangolo* balances tradition, ancestry, embodied knowledge, and innovative creative expression through community driven approaches. I then develop an analysis of song selections and lyrics to how Mestre Silvinho and his students expand historical narratives around capoeira. Silvinho and my interlocutors provided many of the translations of Portuguese lyrics in this chapter but some, as will be indicated, are my own. Finally, I close with a reflection on learning to arrive in the practice of capoeira both from my own perspective as a scholar and practitioner in addition to how I saw it emerge from interviews with other members of FICA Seattle.

***Carangolo*: Overview**

Carangolo culminated from over six months of preparation and two sessions with Fundação Internacional de Capoeira Angola (FICA) Seattle led by Mestre Silvinho and the Berimbau Orchestra, an offshoot project led by Contra-mestra Leika. The first session, described in the introduction, took place on June 29, 2024, at Sage Arts Studios in Arlington, Washington, with engineer Jordan C. managing the space. During that day, we recorded new and traditional *corridos* and *ladainhas*. We also recorded a number of tracks performed by the berimbau orchestra to highlight the musical dimension of capoeira and the creative aspects of the ensemble, including a track that brought in elements of African American hip hop. In addition, Contra-mestra Leika invited her elementary school students to sing *corridos* during a “Kids

Bateria.” While the addition of children is notable, I chose to engage with this aspect minimally in order to maintain their anonymity and honor my IRB protocols. We sought out Sage Arts to record these songs in order to more fully capture the sounds of the berimbau while balancing the sonic frequencies of the entire *bateria*—something we believed we could only do with hi-fidelity microphones and the control permitted in a studio setting as opposed to in the unpredictable acoustic environment of live contexts.

Even though we cared about ensuring that the sound of the berimbau and *bateria* maintained clarity, we also wanted to capture the sound of the orchestra as closely as possible to the sound we might hear with our own ears during a live *roda* in a community setting. It was a tricky balancing act, but in the end, Mestre Silvinho had more flexibility in his mixing choices from the professional studio because almost every instrument had its own microphone. This allowed him to choose whether one berimbau needed to be louder than the other and how to blend all the sounds to his liking. These are choices that, often lie outside the normal protocols of teaching capoeira as a mestre. During some listening sessions, Silvinho often double checked with me about what he heard or what was needed.

This was a particularly significant moment from an ethnographic perspective wherein Silvinho placed trust in my judgement. On the one hand, I do have experience with and an understanding of audio mixing to the point where I can hear if one instrument is overshadowing another or if the singing is muddy. On the other hand, I was still new to capoeira and felt that it was not necessarily my place as a student of this form and of Silvinho to make a judgement call about the choices made for the album. I did give small suggestions when I heard that one *berimbau* was louder than another, but I generally just confirmed whether or not I heard what Mestre Silvinho heard as we listened together at the UCC. In this way, my role as researcher

impacted the research itself being an integrated member in the decision making even when my status as a newcomer may not have warranted that power.

The second session took place on October 27, 2024, at the Union Cultural Center, in the heart of the International District in Seattle, WA, where we recorded a live *roda*. Rather than being in a controlled studio setting, we gathered in a place where participants trained regularly and felt most comfortable. The familiar space cultivated a noticeably different energy than Sage Arts. Here participants moved with ease around the studio to set up berimbaus, mingle, and drop food off at the tables for the potluck after the *roda*. Much like the Sage Arts recording, Mestre Silvinho asked students from all over Washington state to join in the event, hoping to create an ideal community of Pacific Northwest *capoeiristas*. Because of scheduling complications, however, not all the *capoeiristas* who were invited were able to participate. In this recording session, we used fewer microphones and minimal set up to be out of the way of the *roda*. This also meant that the sounds we captured were more fixed and could not be manipulated through post-production processing in the same way as the studio recordings. The resulting audio recording sounds very different from the recordings made at Sage Arts; with echoes, background noise, and much less distinction between instruments.

A number of students in attendance during this session were relatively new to capoeira, which impacted the *roda* and subsequent recording in several ways. In Capoeira Angola, the *roda* serves as a space where Afro-Brazilian historical memory and embodied wisdom circulate through music, movement, and ritual interaction. Surfacing this cultural knowledge requires not only individual skill, but also collective familiarity with song meanings, musical cues, and subtle energetic negotiations that experienced players develop over their lifetime. When Mestre Silvinho speaks of the *roda* as a "microcosm for the larger world," something mentioned in

multiple classes at the UCC, he is referencing this complex web of cultural knowledge that participants create within the *roda*. In this way, *capoeiristas* in the *roda* engage in what Diana Taylor refers to as ‘acts of transfer’ that transmit “social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity through reiterated [behavior]” (2003, 2 -3). While newer students can participate in the basic structure of the *roda*, the deeper currents of meaning remained less accessible.

And yet, the *capoeiristas* that participated in the *roda* arguably did succeed in capturing the sounds of FICA Seattle, a community where students with different backgrounds and experience levels come together to sustain this tradition far from its origins in Brazil. It was a very intentional choice to be inclusive of the entire community in the making of *Carangolo*. Several participants highlighted how rare it was for an album to feature not only mestres and advanced players, but “purposefully invit[ed] women and children to sing and be featured” (Trienal Matteo, personal conversation, 2024). This may serve to contrast the intentions of other capoeira albums where mestres, men, and experienced players are specifically featured.

Mestre Silvinho himself believes in the beauty of co-creating music regardless of skill level saying that “you don’t need to be an expert... if you have the willingness to participate and bring good energy, we can make something beautiful” (personal communication, November 8, 2024). In this way, the album both fixes a local expressive dialect of capoeira language and expands the circle of who is allowed to define it. Rather than narrowing the represented voices to a few authorized interpreters, *Carangolo* amplified the collective sound of FICA Seattle, affirming the community as co-authors of its manifestation.

This balancing act between community inclusion and the quality of musicality complicates the question of what “success” means in a project like *Carangolo*. Jordan spoke to this tension when he reflected: “I think an accurate representation of something is layered [...] so

in one sense, we tried to put our best foot forward and create something of high musicality,” he said referring to the Sage Arts session. “But on the other hand,” he continued, “it was also a community event. Did people grow together a little bit? Did something funny happen? Do we have memories now? Like, either way, it’s successful, even if there was a mistake” (personal communication, August 23rd, 2024). He recalled traveling for over an hour, others even longer, to a secluded place in an old growth forest, to gather everyone together - students from Contra-mestra Leika’s elementary school, *capoeiristas* from Bellingham, Tacoma, and Portland, and Mestre Silvinho and Contra-mestra Leika’s children. “It reminded me a lot of the Thanksgivings that I used to have when my family was younger and bigger. You don’t miss those” he said, “so I think there was more than just music going on.” This resonates with Thomas Turino’s insight that participatory arts function as “fulcrums of identity, allowing people to feel themselves part of the community through the realization of shared cultural knowledge and style and through the very act of participating together in performance” (2008, 2). However, the inclusion of new students is importantly balanced by a respect for history, lineage, and tradition from senior *capoeiristas* present for the recordings.

FICA Seattle’s recording journey

Carangolo was not Mestre Silvinho’s and his students’ first attempt to record an album, but their fourth. While sound engineers have perfected methods for producing records that capture the essential qualities of various popular music styles, it is far more difficult to adequately record art forms such as capoeira, which integrate music and improvised dance-like movement. Because of the diverse frequency range between percussion instruments in the *bateria* and the size and shape of the berimbau, recording requires careful choices about microphone selection, microphone placement, and acoustics. These challenges became visible

(and audible) in FICA Seattle’s earlier recording experiments, which, while meaningful, ultimately remained unfinished.

The first project occurred in Mestre Silvinho and Contra-mestra Leika’s home with a friend involved at Totem Star Records, a Seattle-based studio that supports and educates young recording artists. The session involved about ten people with everyone taking turns singing. According to Leika, “We just did a couple songs, just to feel it out, and for whatever reason, the end result didn’t go anywhere beyond that one recording” (personal communication, January 31st, 2025). A second project followed in 2013 at the University of British Columbia, led by a Vancouver FICA member studying sound engineering. This time, Mestre Silvinho brought in guest mestres from around the U.S. and Brazil as well as elementary students from their children’s classes. The weekend event produced four tracks, including a *corrido* that served as a land acknowledgement written by Treinel Matteo (the term “treinel” denotes a *capoeirista*’s rank as a senior student holding responsibility within the community), but mixing and technical inexperience prevented completion of the recording. A third effort, coinciding with Silvinho’s 30-year capoeira celebration, brought together mestres and longtime students and made it as far as a Dropbox release, but again, the project never reached full production.

Each of these attempts offered Mestre Silvinho and his students the chance to experiment with repertoire, performance styles, and the demands of recording technology. Although none of these attempts produced a finished album, they created the foundations that later shaped decisions about song selection, featured voices, and recording methods. More importantly, this history shows that capoeira recording projects do not rely on technical expertise alone—they emerge through networks of relationships that bridge institutional resources such as equipment,

studio space, and engineering knowledge with the persistence and creativity of community efforts.

The making of *Carangolo* began as a side conversation between Mestre Silvinho and myself during his time as a visiting artist in the University of Washington's Ethnomusicology Program in the Spring Quarter of 2022. That quarter, Silvinho taught capoeira's historical and cultural contexts while also introducing students to the berimbau orchestra, an ensemble that expands traditional Capoeira Angola repertoire through both collective performance and new compositions. I would later learn how the Berimbau Orchestra was not just an extension of the capoeira ensemble, deeply influenced by other Brazilian-based music styles, but also flexible enough to adapt to other styles such as African American hip-hop.

One day before class, Mestre Silvinho and I started talking about music. He talked about how he had wanted to record the Berimbau Orchestra and off-handedly asked if I wanted to collaborate with him and the group on a recording project. He mentioned that previous inquiries with producers had proven discouraging because costs were prohibitive and the technical approaches suggested (such as isolating instruments in different tracks) clashed with capoeira's participatory nature. I had begun to consider whether the Union Cultural Center itself, despite its imperfect acoustics, might serve as an appropriate space for a live recording. At the time, though, the idea was set aside as other responsibilities took over. Nearly a year later, Silvinho unexpectedly called me, which prompted me once again to think through the idea to record an album. I called him back the next day and offered up the possibility. When we met soon after at the University of Washington, I proposed that this project could serve as both my dissertation focus as well as a collaborative recording project shaped by and made for FICA Seattle. From that point forward, the path toward *Carangolo* began to take shape.

In July 2023 I introduced Jordan, the engineer, to Mestre Silvinho to talk about project details and designate roles for each person. And then in September of 2023 Mestre Silvinho walked through Sage Arts Studio to get a sense of the area and develop a larger vision for the project. Through the rest of 2023 I corresponded with both Mestre Silvinho and Jordan via email and in January of 2024 I began to attend capoeira classes regularly, as well as other events at the UCC in order to connect with the FICA Seattle community. During that time, I learned how to play the berimbau, play in the *roda*, and began in earnest my research into capoeira.

These early steps were important to establish a baseline relationship between Mestre Silvinho and Jordan. The groundwork laid in these conversations and site visits made it possible to imagine the album and align with each other about the scope of the project, ideas about microphone placement, and our timeline. As rehearsals began, the project moved from idea into collective practice where the normal routine of our training classes became entangled with the demands of preparing for these recording sessions.

During the five months leading up to the recording, Mestre Silvinho and his students worked together to decide what songs to include and in what order. “This recording will be fun,” Silvinho told me as we began weekly rehearsals, adding wryly that “it will be a lot of work, though” (personal communication, March 2024). Some classes turned entirely into music rehearsals, sometimes unintentionally. We’d focused on how to begin a *bateria* the way Silvinho wanted: always with the gunga, the lowest-pitched berimbau, followed in turn by the médio, viola, and then the pandeiros, agogô, reco-reco, and finally the atabaque. The preparation extended outside class, too. We recorded run-throughs and shared them in a WhatsApp group so that absent members could practice. Contra-Mestre Caxambu staged a practice session with microphones so we could get used to the foreign feeling of having equipment pressed up against

the berimbau. As Roxanne recalled, “It was funky getting used to that,” speaking to the microphones and the studio session overall, “because you can’t really prepare ahead of time for everything you’ll encounter” (personal communication, August 2024).

Recording Day

When recording day finally arrived, we were well rehearsed and eager for this next stage. Mestre Silvinho took great care to tune the *berimbaus* for the recording session. As Juan Diego Diaz writes, “Capoeiristas tend to pay more attention to tuning in [...] recordings, probably because in this context the preoccupation is exclusively musical, rather than functional as in live performance” (2021, 170). Careful tuning of the berimbau for albums can be heard in some of the more iconic capoeira albums, such as Moraes (1996) and Traíra (1963). However, for FICA Seattle, whether in the *roda* or in the recording studio, the tuning of the berimbaus remains important in both spheres. While the berimbaus themselves are not tuned to a specific note or to sound a certain chord when played together, it is important that the berimbaus are tuned to each other.

When we started recording, the pace was intense and relentless, with ten tracks to record in less than seven hours. “It felt like everything happened really quickly,” Amalia said, “we had a lot to record and it felt a little rushed to me” (personal communication, October 5th 2024). I, too, felt that it was difficult to connect with each other in the way we could at the Union Cultural Center throughout the recording day. We were rushing to get through our songs and the engineers quickly moved around microphones after each session. In hindsight, we all realized that the schedule we had in place did not align with what was manageable. It did not account for a late start, practice time between recording takes, or the transitions between the *bateria* and the

berimbau orchestra. Deepa, a senior member of FICA Seattle, put it succinctly: “It was too much. It would have been ideal to have two days... We didn’t know how it was going to be, and we had both experienced musicians and a lot of newer folks” (personal communication, October 30th, 2024). In these ways, the environment challenged us to perform under the pressure of a quickly approaching deadline.

This mismatch between the allotted time we had in the studio and community needs reveals a fundamental challenge for public ethnomusicology. The stress we all felt that day was partly technical in the way that we wondered how to manage finishing ten tracks but also relational in the ways we had to compromise our comfort for the sake of completing the project. My role as facilitator and organizer meant I was responsible for this timeline and my focus on the logistics overshadowed the importance of welcoming the FICA Seattle community members to Sage Arts. Learning to arrive, in this moment, meant acknowledging I had not fully prepared the space, schedule, and energy with care.

Right before recording a *bateria* Amalia was leading, for example, Mestre Silvinho suggested swapping out some corridos to better match the group of instrumentalists assembled and we ultimately chose songs tied to water and to *Yemanjá*, the Orixá of motherhood, feminine power, and the ocean. While many in the room knew these *corridos*, others, myself included, were encountering them for the first time. Silvinho quickly wrote the lyrics on a whiteboard, and we did our best with the change. Amalia later reflected with humor:

Everything can be a metaphor for capoeira. During the recording, Mestre Silvinho changed some of the *corridos* I was going to lead. And that’s the thing—it’s like someone went a different way than what I was expecting, and I had to move and do

something else instead. You have to be flexible and ready for whatever comes (Personal communication, October 5th 2024).

This off-hand comment made a lot of sense as I reflected on the recording session overall. There were many moments where we had to move quickly in a direction that we could not have anticipated, in line with the nature of playing capoeira.

Moreover, the engineers shifted microphones after many tracks, and we had to adjust our playing to reduce body movements to maintain the clarity of sound being captured. This, along with the general idea of being recorded in the first place, left some, like Roxanne, feeling nervous at first: “I didn’t want to mess up... we’d practiced so much, and this was really important to our mestre. It took some time for me, and for the music, to feel warmed up in the space” (personal communication, August 2024). But as the day carried forward, we managed to relax into the recording process. By the time we transitioned to the berimbau orchestra, it seemed like the group was much more attuned to the strangeness of the studio.

As I came to learn at the UCC and FICA Seattle, those who commit to capoeira make it part of their lives in a holistic way. Lessons emerge not only in the *roda* but in the conversations before class, the meals afterwards, or while sweeping the studio floor after class. Jordan described these exchanges as bringing “different perspectives, different light, and a different color to what [we] understand as capoeira, and it can help [us] appreciate why it’s not written down” (personal communication, August 2024). Here, Jordan speaks to the power of oral tradition, which centers learning in community. Likewise, the music studio gave him a different way to think about music in capoeira. He took it a step further saying,

“We were taking capoeira apart, we weren’t putting it with the movement, and then we *added* elements we don’t normally add, like microphones and that is *so* capoeira. When

life happens, you move with it. So we, as a group, were forced to dance with new metaphorical rhythms that day. And that's kind of the heart of what capoeira is: you deal with as much change as you can until maybe you get outsmarted or fall down and then somebody comes and helps pick you back up and try again" (personal communication, August 2024).

In other words, the studio did not remove us from capoeira's philosophy but re-staged it under new conditions. As Deepa succinctly said, "it's not that we shouldn't record the music but it is a contradictory thing, in some ways, for this art form [...] the process takes us out of what it feels like to do capoeira in the first place" (personal communication, October 2024).

The following section explores how the choice of *ladainhas* and *corridos* in particular further centers and expands the historical narratives around capoeira, where Mestre Silvinho and his students engage in record production as an opportunity to celebrate the community of *capoeiristas* in the Pacific Northwest.

***Bateria* Song Selections**

Considering the sheer number of *corridos* in the capoeira repertoire, consisting of at least 300 songs or more (Diaz 2006), the curation of material for an album is an important avenue of creative expression and a way to pay respect to the lineage of mestres within Capoeira Angola. Song selections in *Carangolo* deliberately brought important histories and values to the forefront. While not every member of FICA Seattle speaks Portuguese, the songs on the album were often taught by translating them first into English, addressing the songs' meaning, and then learning the words and melody in Portuguese. FICA Seattle also has a booklet with standard *corridos* and *ladainhas* that students can use as a learning aid. For this album specifically, the

lyrics to each song are included in an accompanying liner note booklet in both English and Portuguese.

Bateria #1 - Pedro Cem and Quem Vem la, sou eu

The opening track features a *ladainha* called “Pedro Cem” written by Mestre Waldemar, a well-respected master *capoeirista* active in the 1940s in Salvador, Brazil. According to Mestre Silvinho, this *ladainha* refers to a Brazilian folk story about a man named Pedro Cem, “who had a hundred of everything and ended, due to arrogance and pride, with nothing” (album booklet, 2024, 9). The *ladainha* is a cautionary tale about how material possessions invited greed, as seen in the opening lines: “Lá no céu vai quem merece / Na terra vale quem tem / A soberba combatida / Foi quem matou Pedro Cem,” which translates to “Heaven is for those who are deserving / On earth, it is the rich who matter / Excessive greed / Killed Pedro Cem.” Instead of placing value on money, this *ladainha* shows how, without a strong moral compass, divine justice will eventually level the scales. For Pedro Cem, who lost all his wealth and had to beg on the streets at the end of his life, the *ladainha* reveals his challenges:

Uma esmola a Pedro Cem

Quem já teve hoje não tem

A quem eu neguei esmola

Hoje me nega também

Nasci num berço dourado

Cresci num colchão macio

Hoje eu morro no relento

Neste imundo e chão frio

(Spare some change for Pedro Cem
 Who used to have everything and now has nothing
 Those to whom I swniws my charity
 Today denies to it me as well
 I was born in the comfort of a golden cradle
 I grew up sleeping on a soft mattress
 Today, I die homeless on the cold, dirty ground)

The *ladainha*'s moral is clear: greed isolates individuals from their community, while reciprocity sustains collective life. It reminds the *capoeirista* that the things in life that have staying power and longevity are those that are built from relationships. By including this song, FICA Seattle not only honors capoeira's oral tradition but also positions itself within a broader political landscape. In a moment when the United States is marked by a widening gap between the extremely wealthy and the working class and the undeniable racial inequality writ large, the lesson of "Pedro Cem" affirms capoeira's enduring values of humility and community care when performed in a U.S. context.

In many of the *baterias*, Mestre Silvinho chose to pair *corridos* and *ladainhas* based on how they felt together energetically. While "Pedro Cem" as a *ladainha* is a song with a heavy message about a life filled with trouble, the following *corrido*, "Quem vem la, sou eu" (Who goes there? It's me), balances the energy, transforming the warning into an affirming welcome. It poses the question: "Who's there?" and the participants respond, "It's me." Essentially serving as an invitation to join the *roda*, this *corrido* supplies confidence: "*Berimbau bateu, Capoeira*

sou eu” (hear the beat of the berimbau / I am capoeira). If “Pedro Cem” sought to critique the divisiveness of greed, this *corrido* is a celebration of working together and participating in the *roda*.

Another important aspect of this first *bateria* is the inclusion of “Minha Sereia Rainha do Mar,” (My Mermaid, Queen of the Sea) a *corrido* that refers specifically to *Yemanjá*, an *Orixá* (deity) worshipped in Afro-Brazilian religion *Candomblé*. Sung by Contra-mestre Leika, Mestre Silvinho included this as a *corrido* on the opening track as a way to call in *Yemanjá* for protection and clarity, clearly situating the album within Afro-Brazilian spiritual traditions. *Yemanjá* is the mother goddess of the sea and is often depicted as a mermaid with long black hair (Floyd, 2005, 154). The last *corrido* on this track “*Catarina meu amor*” (Catarina, my love) serves as a tribute to women, as leaders and *capoeiristas*, countering other *corridos* that paint a negative image of women. The call and response section of this song, “*Fazendo o que Sinhá*” meaning “What are you doing, miss?” where the inclusion pronoun *sinhá* is a shortened form of *sinhora*, a way to respectfully address a woman of power. As such, the song works against misogynistic traditions within capoeira and honors women’s leadership within the *roda* and other parts of Afro-Brazilian culture.

Bateria #2 - Tributo a Minas Gerais

The second *ladainha*, “*Tributo a Minas Gerais*” (Tribute to Minas Gerais) explicitly grounds the album in Mestre Silvinho’s hometown in Brazil and the place where he first began training in capoeira. Minas Gerais, rarely remembered in capoeira’s songs or recorded albums, emerges here as a place of formative importance. “I wanted to bring [Minas Gerais] to the album and elevate the value of *capoeiristas* in Minas Gerais and where I came from,” said Mestre

Silvinho (personal communication, November 8th, 2024). The *ladainha*'s lyrics depict the life of rural Black cattle workers, as translated by Treneil Matteo:

Tropeiro de Minas Gerais

Amansador de burro brabo

Cabra forte e destemido

A voce devo um regalo

Olhe arreia seu cavalo

Ajunte sua manada

Pra começa a galopa

No clarao da madrugada

Que o sol ja vai raia

O trabalho começa

Tropeiro que e trabalhado

Se aprume pra trabalha

Va prepara seu alimento

Numa cuia de massape

Com farinha e feijao

Carne seca e pimenta

O que ce pode faze

Camaradinho...

(Mule driver from Minas Gerais)

Tamer of wild mules

Strong and fearless fellow, I owe you a tribute

Look, saddle your horse

Gather your herd

To start the gallop

In the first dawn of light

For the sun is about to rise,

And the work begins

You, farmer, who are a hardworking man

Get ready to work!

Go prepare your food

In a clay bowl

With flour and beans

Dried meat and pepper

Whatever you can rustle up

My friend...)

As seen above, the *ladainha* speaks to Minas Gerais' distinctive agrarian life and cuisine. One of the few land-locked states in Brazil, the region is known for its food and rural farm workers. This *ladainha* specifically tells the tale of a Black cattle worker's ("Mule driver") life, waking at dawn to begin his work and then eating *massape*, one of the most famous dishes emerging from Minas Gerais made from flour, beans, dried meat, and pepper. The first corrido in the *bateria* after this *ladainha* is "Acorda povo, simbora gente" written by Grão Mestre Dunga who is from Minas Gerais himself. The title literally translates to "Wake up, people, let's go"

and is a call to action: first, to recognize the systemic violence and the need to work together. He then addresses a negative stereotype about people from Minas Gerais in his choice of corrido, the lyrics of which are as follows: “Você pense que o mineiro é bobo / e bobo não” (you think people from Minas Gerais are dumb, they are not dumb). Mineiro refers to the “mountain” accent spoken in the east and southeast regions of Minas Gerais.

The *corrido* “Carangolo” (Friend) follows and serves as the title track of the entire album. According to Mestre Silvinho, this is an old song, sung in Minas Gerais, and is no longer popular. Silvinho sought to bring it back into circulation. On the surface, this song is an invitation to the *capoeirista* to check in with one another, “Carangolo, como vai / como passo?” (Friend, how are you doing? How are you?) Embedded in this ethos of care is also an important lesson. “To really engage in community work,” said Mestre Silvinho, “you must be seen and heard. Many people say they are collaborating with each other but they don’t treat each other as comrades. In community work, there must be compassion” (personal communication, September 16th 2025). The title track thus encapsulates the ethos of the project itself: that repertoire is not just a collection of songs but a pedagogy of solidarity, humility, and care that builds toward collective action. As a way of expanding the memory and philosophy of capoeira, “Tributo A Minas Gerais” as a whole is a powerful statement.

Bateria #3 - Falar De Guerra

With *Carangolo* being a collective project, Mestre Silvinho invited two of his students to lead *baterias* and use the recording as a platform to speak about current issues in the world as a form of creative expression. Treinel Matteo’s *ladainha* titled “Falar De Guerra” (Talking about

War) addresses mainstream narratives around the U.S. involvement in war and displacement.

Triel Matteo writes in the album liner notes that,

My *ladainha* challenges the official portrayal of our government's actions, citing two examples (among countless others) of the US government's dishonorable conduct: the ongoing, shameful theft of the Black Hills (He Sapa, in Lakota), and the overthrow of the first government of an independent Congo, whose disgraceful epilogue was the brutal assassination of President Patrice Lumumba" (2024)

One refrain makes the point starkly: "Meu governo faz a guerra / Desde antes de nascer / Contra indígenas e negros / Disso eu não vou me esquecer" (My government has waged war / Since before I was born / Against Indigenous and Black peoples / I will not forget this).

In addition, Triel Matteo seeks to re-interpret a narrative around the Italian invasion of Ethiopia in 1896. In the liner notes he writes,

The final *corrido* ("Adua, Adua") similarly re-evaluates the history that I encountered as a high school student in Pistoia, Italy. I was told about the 'defeat at Adua' during the first Italian invasion of Ethiopia in school, but only as a passing comment, with no analysis or connection to the fact that my school is located on Adua avenue. My *corrido* celebrates Ethiopia's victory at Adua against an invasion whose commanders wanted to do to Ethiopians what the United States had done to Native Americans (2024).

By weaving references to historical injustice into capoeira's oral tradition, Matteo demonstrates how *ladainhas* can be vehicles for critical memory and political voice. Together, these songs show how capoeira's repertoire can be mobilized to confront official histories and reassert marginalized perspectives.

Bateria #4 - Menino Jogue Bonito

While the other featured *capoeirista*, Treneil Amalia, did not write her own *ladainha*, Mestre Silvinho let her choose which one she would like to sing on the album. Amalia sang a *ladainha* titled “Menino Jogue Bonito” (Boy, play beautifully) written by Mestre Poloca. In an interview with Amalia, she said that it was an honor that Mestre Silvinho asked her to sing, and this *ladainha* was the first one she thought to perform. She learned the *ladainha* from Mestre Silvinho himself. “The first line says, essentially, ‘Boy, be humble’ and I see humility practiced by our Mestre, and it is also something that I strive to be within capoeira and within the *roda*” (personal communication, October 5th 2024). As a *capoeirista* gains more skill and experience, it is all the more important to play with humility and show respect for tradition and other people in the *roda*, regardless of skill level.

This *bateria* was also significant because Silvinho chose to feature women and non-binary *capoeiristas* as instrumentalists. capoeira albums rarely highlight women’s voices, with the one most notable exception of Grupo Nzinga’s album *Capoeira Angola* (2007), so to have a track that captures the presence of women in FICA Seattle expands who counts and who is remembered within the lineage of capoeira albums. The *corridos* in this *bateria* celebrate the feminine symbols within capoeira as well. “A onda quebrou na praia” (the wave rolled on the beach), for example, uses water as a metaphor for fluidity and movement in capoeira. But a second phrase speaks of a queen of the ocean, a mermaid, and her beautiful singing: “A sereia quando canta/é bonito seu cantar/Foi no toque da viola/Que eu aprendí a jogar” (The mermaid when she sings/her singing is beautiful/It was to the sound of the viola/That I learned to play).

Bateria #5 - Grande Mestre

The final *ladainha* recorded on *Carangolo* and sung by Mestre Silvinho is called “Grande Mestre” (Great Master) written by Mestre Angolinha, a contemporary of Mestre Silvinho and an early member of Mestre Moraes Grupo de Capoeira Angola Pelourinho (GCAP). The *ladainha* addresses the importance of respecting elders within capoeira and the love a practitioner feels towards their teacher. It also draws on the history of slavery in Brazil and the trauma that is still felt by Afro-Brazilians today. The *ladainha* continues, describing enslaved Africans being marked by a deep longing for the culture and homeland from which they were forcibly removed. The term ‘banzo’ in the *ladainha* refers to a specific type of malaise, a sickness of the heart that sometimes even led to death, due to the cruelty of chattel slavery. It is worth sharing the song transcription in its entirety:

*Ai que saudade
sinto do meu grande Mestre
se aqui ele estivesse
isso não acontecia
Todos vocês
tem no peito uma paixão
mas paixão igual a minha,
esta não existe não
Trago no peito,
a marca da escravidão
dos acoites na senzala
das noites de solidão
Era o banzo,*

doença de nostalgia
negro vimo pela sorte
ou morto na travessia
Saudade eu tenho
da casa onde eu morava
saudade eu tenho
do reinado em que eu reinava
mesmo sem ter tido casa
retratei em ladainha

(Oh, how I miss my great Mestre
 If he were here this wouldn't happen
 You all have a passion in your chest
 But a passion like mine doesn't exist

 All of you
 have a passion in your breast
 but a passion equal to mine
 does not exist

 I bear on my chest
 the marks of slavery
 of the lashes in the slave quarters
 of the lonely nights

It was deep melancholy
 suffering inflicted by nostalgia
 Black people whose fate brought them here
 Or died in their difficulties
 I miss the house where I lived
 I miss the kingdom where I reigned
 Even without having had a home
 I portrayed it in this *ladainha*)

This *ladainha* channels both personal and collective memory in its yearning for sense of belonging, mourning loss, and honoring teachers. For Silvinho, who lives and works in Seattle far from his own *mestres* in Minas Gerais, the song resonates as both tribute and testimony. As with “Pedro Cem,” this *ladainha* is paired with a collection of *corridos* that balance the heavy energy that preceded them. “Capoeira na beira do mar,” for example, evokes the celebration of learning capoeira, played “at the edge of the sea.” Silvinho also recognizes the good flourishing of his work in Seattle with the *corrido* “Abre a cabaça, espalha semente” (Break open the gourd, and spread out the seeds) which serves as a metaphor for the seeds of capoeira which he and his predecessors planted in Seattle. The song is a reminder to reflect on how those seeds have flourished.

Taken together, these *baterias* underscore how *Carangolo* balances honor tradition and allow for innovation. What is put on record speaks as much to the philosophies inherent to capoeira as it does to the more specific values through which Mestre Silvinho and FICA Seattle align; that of humility, comradeship, resistance, and collective memory.

Expanding Capoeira Music: The Berimbau Orchestra

While capoeira music is most often defined by the *bateria* and the procession of *ladainhas* and *corridos*, practitioners have long experimented with the creative potential of the berimbau beyond the *roda*. Beginning in the 1980s, *capoeiristas* formed ensembles of berimbaus known as *orquestras de berimbau*, or berimbau orchestras, that explored the instrument's sonic possibilities while remaining grounded in traditional toques (Diaz 2021, 163).

The pioneering figure most often credited with this innovation is Mestre Moraes, though contemporary groups such as Grupo Nzinga have carried the practice forward. As the group explains, the Nzinga Berimbau Orchestra was created in 1999 “to develop awareness of and appreciation for the berimbau as an African instrument, its connection with Black culture in Brazil, and the different ways it can be played as part of its ritual use in capoeira and *samba de roda*” (Grupo Nzinga, 2017). For Nzinga, the orchestra became both a pedagogical tool—helping students to deepen their intimacy with the berimbau—and an artistic project that expanded capoeira's musical horizons.

As Juan Diego Diaz shows in his research, such experimentation has deep roots. Even Mestre Pastinha, often regarded as a guardian of capoeira tradition, “experimented extensively with capoeira's orchestra: he reportedly tried to include instruments such as the guitar and castanets” (Diaz 2021, 169). The emergence of berimbau orchestras in the 1980s built on this experimental spirit while also drawing from folkloric ensembles of the 1950s–70s that adapted Afro-Brazilian expressive arts for popular audiences. In Bahia, for instance, folkloric troupes incorporated berimbau solos and invented new grooves to accompany other genres, innovations that Mestre Cobra Mansa suggests left the ground fertile for later orchestral formations (Diaz 2021, 172–173).

One common practice that shaped the berimbau orchestra was pedagogical in origin. As Mestre Cobra Mansa recalls, Mestre Moraes would assign different fragments of a rhythm to individual players, then use hand signals to cue transitions—a method echoing Afro-Brazilian batucada street ensembles. What began as an exercise in musical training soon transformed into performance practice, underscoring how pedagogy, improvisation, and collective coordination are woven into the orchestra’s DNA.

Grupo Nzinga later formalized this work, conceiving the orchestra not as a departure from capoeira but as an extension of its philosophy. “We conceive capoeira as part of our philosophy of life, not as something for stage performance,” writes Mestra Janja. “The berimbau orchestra gave us that new possibility.” FICA Seattle’s Berimbau Orchestra is situated within this genealogy. Like Nzinga’s, it is an ensemble open to members of all ages and skill levels, where improvisation on a foundational toque is encouraged. Over time, the group has developed a repertoire of songs and arrangements that continue to evolve, embodying both fidelity to capoeira tradition and freedom for creative innovation. In *Carangolo*, FICA Seattle takes up this lineage of experimentation, situating their Berimbau Orchestra within a history of innovation while also shaping it to reflect their own community’s expressive dialect of capoeira.

The Berimbau Orchestra Song Selections

Alongside the five *baterias*, *Carangolo* includes several instrumental tracks—some drawn from well-known toques and others newly composed. As Contra-Mestra Leika explains in the liner notes, the group sought to include classic rhythms played in the *roda*, such as *toque de angola* and *são bento grande*, while also preserving the historical significance of the rhythms not often played in the *roda*, such as *cavalaria* and *iuna*. *Cavalaria*, in particular, carries historical

weight that is an important teaching in FICA Seattle and a nod to capoeira's past. When capoeira was outlawed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rhythm functioned as a sonic code: its horse-like gallop warned practitioners that police were near. As Waldeloir Rêgo notes, *cavalaria* “denounced the presence of the infamous Cavalry Squadron” during their violent campaigns against Afro-Brazilian cultural practices (1968, 50). *Luna*, composed by Mestre Bimba and inspired by the bird of the same name, is typically reserved for special occasions in capoeira regional, but FICA Seattle included it here to honor the lineage passed down through Mestre Jurandir, founder of FICA Seattle. Recording these rhythms outside of the *roda* preserves their historical memory while also foregrounding the group's instrumental virtuosity.

Given that capoeira is an oral tradition, *toques* shift across time and place, and practitioners often disagree about “correct” versions. Contra-Mestra Leika reflected, “The thing about capoeira is that there are no rules... Depending on how you feel the rhythm of *cavalaria*, [for example], it can feel off depending on where the *atabaque* comes in” (personal communication, November 8th, 2024). Ultimately, the group deferred to senior players, balancing respect for lineage with the recognition that variation itself is intrinsic to capoeira.

In recording these instrumental tracks, Mestra Silvinho's work to create *Carangolo* aligns with that of other mestres who have released recordings of isolated *toques*, including Mestre Moraes and Mestre Jogo de Dentro. Mestre Moraes GCAP album separates *toques* by various rhythms and calling them out at the beginning of each track, such as Angola, or Santa Maria, Cavalaria, etc. Mestre Jogo de Dentro, however, has a single track at the beginning of two of his most famous albums (1999, 2004) simply titled “Ritmo” that showcases the berimbau and the musicality inherent to capoeira music and rhythm. The song itself is based in *toque de angola* but

the berimbau players continually improvise together while the rest of the *bateria* holds down a steady rhythm most commonly heard in the *roda*. Yet the Seattle album is distinctive for the way it highlights improvisation: the track “berimbau duet” is an improvised piece with Silvinho on *gunga*, Leika on *viola*, and Caxambu on *atabaque*. Of all the music on the record, the instrumental tracks translate a type of rhythmic energy and swing that is indicative of FICA Seattle’s distinctive sound.

New Capoeira Music Compositions

Carangolo also includes two important tracks that are new compositions outside of the traditional capoeira repertoire: “Triya” and “Hipi Hopi do Brasil,” (Hip Hop of Brazil) both written by Contra-Mestra Leika and the latter one featuring her daughter, Saiyana. According to the album liner notes, Contra-Mestra Leika wrote that:

The song Triya came as an inspiration to me in the early months of COVID, perhaps as a way to sooth the uncertainty of the time. Triya’s layered rhythms represent the body (*gunga*), mind (*medio*) and spirit (*viola*) (2024, 17).

This is a testament to the healing quality of creative expression and how FICA Seattle honors that facet of capoeira and *berimbau* music in particular. The terms *gunga*, *medio*, and *viola* in the quote above refer to different types of *berimbaus* that are tuned low, medium, and high, in that order. In the song itself, the rhythms played by the differently tuned instruments interlock and overlap with each other signifying the closely knit relationship between these three elements.

The closing track of *Carangolo* is “Hipi Hopi do Brasil,” (Hip Hop of Brazil) a song that blends berimbau instruments with hip-hop rhythms and rapping. The track places capoeira in conversation with African American expressive culture, showing how oral traditions of

improvisation and call-and-response move fluidly between Afro-Brazilian and Afro-diasporic contexts. Featuring Saiyana, contra-mestra Leika's daughter, this track expresses the values and philosophy of not only capoeira but the Union Cultural Center as a whole, invoked in the African Bantu word "ubuntu," which means "I am because you are." Contra-mestra Leika wrote that,

"Hipi Hopi do Brasil was a spontaneous song that emerged one evening when I was playing around with rhythms and inspired by hip hop instrumentals. My daughter, Saiyana, arrived home and instinctively flowed into a freestyle over the rhythm. What you hear on this album is the fruit from that musical pollination between mother and daughter" (2024, 17).

It is worth sharing the lyrics in their entirety:

From the words of my mother, she gave to her

daughter

I use my voice to spread it to the others

Everyone wants to be seen and heard

Spread your wings fly free like a bird

Here you are embraced as yourself rest assured

Makes me think of the Bantu word

Ubuntu, I am cuz you are.....

So welcome to the cultural center,

you and I are One

For the fusion of our souls, that's called the Union

So come as you are, no need to change

Just let me get this to you so we're on the same page

It's not about you you you
And it's not about me me me
It's about us we, it's about our community
Some of y'all can't stand that and say no,
but here we say.....
O sim sim sim
Once you accept that we can go into depth
This is our mission even after death
We don't even do this work for the check
So check this out
We are proud to show the crowd how we can get all out
Letting you feel the rhythm through the ground
Showering y'all with that ancestral sound
Remember, nothing is linear, it is all round
When I say Ubuntu, y'all say I am cuz you are
Ubuntu, I am cuz you are

As the lyrics make clear, *Hipi Hipi do Brasil* weaves together personal lineage (“from the words of my mother, she gave to her daughter”) and the energy of the music (“Letting you feel the rhythm through the ground, Showering y’all with that ancestral sound”). Moreover, it echoes the message of community health Mestre Silvinho shares in the corrido “Carangolo” through the lyrics, “Everyone wants to be seen and heard/Spread your wings fly free like a bird/Here you are embraced as yourself rest assured.” Closing the album with *Hipi Hipi do*

Brasil shows capoeira's relevancy and adaptability to contemporary issues and differing music styles.

Upon reflection, Contra-mestra Leika put it very succinctly how these berimbau orchestra choices made a permanent impact on how FICA Seattle will be seen and heard: "it felt like a very big responsibility that was literally putting a mark on our lineage, and I wanted to do that in a way that honors our lineage, but also have that artistic and musical freedom to create something new" (personal communication, November 8th, 2024). As such, she spoke to founding mestres in Capoeira Angola about what to include in the CD and gathered advice on what specific variations of *toques* to include and the validity of adding harmony to call-and-response singing. Her work contributes to the making of *Carangolo* a statement of accountability as much as a statement of creativity and artistic expression.

These instrumental tracks as a whole capture another aspect of FICA Seattle's expressive dialect: a feel for rhythm and timing that both anchors FICA Seattle in capoeira tradition and marks their local articulation of the music. The *toques* recorded, in addition to the original compositions, highlight the community's capacity not only to improvise musically but also to innovate across genres. Contra-mestra Leika's consultations with senior mestres remind us that these experiments were not undertaken lightly but framed within a broader sense of accountability to tradition. *Carangolo* demonstrates that while the recording process fragments expressive arts, it also becomes a space where historical memory, ancestrality, and creativity come together.

Album Release

The public release for *Carangolo* coincided with the UCC's annual fundraiser and celebration of Black Liberation in Brazil that occurs during the month of November. The three-day album release event, titled "Illuminate: Black Arts for Liberation," celebrated Afro-Diasporic resistance movements through the art of capoeira and African, Afro-Latino, and Caribbean traditions. While the album celebration was the culminating party on the last day, the event also included a number of workshops and community discussions all designed to highlight the artistic legacies rooted in Black liberation movements across the African diaspora.

An important aspect of these activities were discussions of *quilombos*, or communities historically formed by Afro-Brazilians who escaped enslavement and continue to exist to this day, as an effort to share strategies of resilience and cultural creativity at the heart of many Afro-Diasporic communities. Bringing the album into this larger context is reflective of the ways Mestre Moraes' album was couched in the concern for social justice and resistance to racial oppression. In some ways, I think the philosophies I described in Chapter 2 of Mestre Moraes, who taught Mestre Jurandir, who then taught Mestre Silvinho, served as a model with which FICA Seattle carries out their practice and advocacy more generally. Given that capoeira is often described as a holistic art form and embraced as a lifestyle, it makes sense that the album release of *Carangolo* also served as a moment to learn, teach, and organize. Capoeira in the 19th and 20th centuries worked as "both a tool for open resistance and as an instrument of low-profile resistance, of lower-class 'infrapolitics'" where *capoeiristas* learned how to "fool the establishment" (Assunção, 2005, pg. 210). In contemporary practices there is still the realization of capoeira as a tool for resistance and arguably draws together people to form cohesive liberatory strategies beyond the *roda*.

Conclusion: *Carangolo* and the Practice of Arrival

In this chapter I have shown the articulation of FICA Seattle's expressive dialect of capoeira in *Carangolo*, both through the repertoire and through a flexible methodology of collaboration within the recording process. The repertoire itself makes audible FICA Seattle's identity: rooted in lineage yet responsive to issues of gender, spirituality, inequality, and community care. The process of co-creation further enacted the capoeira's life teachings: adapting to change, negotiating difference, navigating the unfamiliarity of the studio space, and performing with the pressures of the recording sessions.

Read through the lens of this dissertation's broader methodology, *Carangolo* demonstrates that learning to arrive is multifaceted and can be understood both through my position as a researcher as well as from the perspective of FICA *capoeiristas* more broadly. The two recording contexts for *Carangolo* highlight this tension between community events and a polished recording and reveal how 'learning to arrive' operates differently depending on institutional and spatial orientations. The Sage Arts session exemplified what Beverly Diamond calls the "fixity" of recording, with its emphasis on fidelity and control. We encountered and navigated protocols around professional recordings. At the Union Cultural Center, by contrast, the space itself held years of training sessions and community gatherings. Here, protocols were familiar: we knew how to set up and where to gather. If anything, it was Jordan's unfamiliarity with the space that potentially taught him different ways of navigating recording sessions. Overall, this session foregrounded Turino's participatory values of inclusivity, familiarity, and collective presence (2008). Yet both contexts required attunement—listening to what the space, the equipment, and the participants need. *Carangolo* does not resolve these divergent approaches but represents both.

Carangolo begins with the wisdom and moral critique of “Pedro Cem,” anchoring the album to its lineage in Capoeira Angola, and ends with “Hipi Hopi do Brasil,” a track born from the improvisation between mother and daughter that extends the album into new contexts. In this way, *Carangolo* respects both tradition and innovation. Through the making of *Carangolo*, the processes disrupted capoeira’s normal routes of performance by transforming the cultural art into a presentational event, frozen in time, to be packaged and shared. Recording day brought these lessons into sharp relief. But participants also spoke about how recordings of mestres have been deeply influential in their growth as *capoeiristas* and how being involved in the recording project was a positive challenge to explore capoeira in a new way. As such, the making of *Carangolo* was an exercise in listening, adjusting to the moment, and exploring musical creativity.

Inside the *roda*, players are continually confronted with challenge, provocation, and surprise, and are tasked with responding with elegance and wit in pursuit of a beautiful game. In this sense, the recording sessions became another kind of *roda*: a place where capoeira’s embodied philosophy was tested against unfamiliar constraints. For some, this meant rising to the challenge of unfamiliar repertoire; for others, it meant adapting to Jordan’s conducting or to singing in the *bateria* even in the absence of the energy of the *roda*. These were not departures from capoeira but enactments of its core principle of flexibility. From Jordan’s perspective, during the inevitable challenges of the recording process, we pivoted and improvised our way through it. Supporting participants with a range of engagement levels, whether from life-long practitioners or newcomers at the periphery, was also part of the project.

While such diversity could risk muddying the clarity or intention of performance, it also reflects the reality of cultural work today. Running a studio means inviting students to engage at many levels, even as teachers hope to transmit the deeper philosophy capoeira can offer.

Carangolo absorbed this diversity, and in doing so mirrored the broader dynamics of sustaining tradition in contemporary contexts. These situations surface for many other cultural arts traditions and community groups. *Carangolo* offers a model of both/and rather than either/or. It shows how recordings do risk fixity, but they can also circulate as a resource that teaches and inspires. FICA Seattle's approach to recording offers a set of principles for others navigating similar terrain: adapt with flexibility, include participants across levels, curate repertoire with care, and remain accountable to historical contexts. What this case study suggests for ethnomusicology more broadly is that collaborative projects dealing with cultural arts work well when they embrace a process of attunement and flexibility. The lesson of *Carangolo* is not only about what was recorded but how the recording unfolded and how it continues to circulate. Chapter 4 will show how these dynamics shift again when arrival takes place not through embodiment and long-term training, but through archival labor and institutional stewardship.

Chapter 4: Northwest Folklife and the Ethnomusicologist

I began my early morning festival check-in at the office on the third floor of the Armory at Seattle Center, the heart of Northwest Folklife Festival operations. Several chairs and foldable tables took up the entirety of the space and were covered in documents, radio charging stations, laminating machines, signs, and folders. People from the production team, programming team, hired-on employees, managers, accountants, and volunteers all gathered to sign in, take direction, and ultimately, produce and run the festival. Large printers and fax machines lined the walls of the office room and people buzzed around it, printing off tech books for stage managers and emcee books for volunteers.

I walked up to Julia, the base manager for the production team whose warm, motherly energy greeted me as I signed in to grab my radio for the day. She updated me on a few details of the day and then said, “A volunteer named Susie has been looking for you. I’m not sure what she wanted but she asked where she could find the archivist and I told her that you’d be in the Art/Not Terminal (A/NT) gallery. So be on the lookout.” I nodded, mentally tagging Susie’s name in hopes of remembering this on top of the multiple other tasks and to-dos running through my head. I said goodbye to Julia and left the armory to finish preparing the A/NT gallery space, which was soon to be filled with art and archival materials from the last fifty years of the festival. I then set up for a live interview station and managed online broadcasts of pre-recorded interviews and performances.

Later that day when I was working with my assistant Juan to set up recording equipment, a petite lady of Asian descent peeked her head around the gallery wall and into the interview station where we were located. With large glasses, salt and pepper hair, and a wide grin on her face, she asked if I was Emily and walked more fully into the room. I smiled and greeted her,

noticing that her outdoor adventure vest was garnished with a large graphic button that read “Northwest Folklife Volunteer” and the many pockets on her vest were filled with a plethora of objects, as if she were about to journey into the wilderness. She held a TASCAM field recorder in her free hand with a funny looking fuzzy wind protector at the end of the device where the mics were located. She introduced herself as Susie and explained that Northwest Folklife has been her place for ‘sound gathering’ since the 1970s. With both reserved and magnetic energy, she went on to tell me that she began making field recordings on analogue tape before switching to digital audio devices and that she wanted to donate these materials to the archive. Most importantly, she wanted to see if we could work together to digitize the analogue recordings before they deteriorated.

At that point, I realized that I had heard about Susie’s work months ago in a meeting with the Northwest Folklife managing directors as we discussed community outreach, and I had been curious to hear the soundscapes she created ever since. I told her that I would be happy to meet after the festival to talk more about what I and NWFL could do to support the digitization process. We ended up talking for some time in the gallery and I learned more about her as an artist specializing in found sound. It occurred to me that if she had been consistently creating these field recordings over the years, they would be a valuable record of the festival that went beyond the current purview of the Northwest Folklife archive.

The next day, on May 24th, I was sitting in a foldable chair near the entrance of the gallery, resting my legs and greeting visitors when Susie came back with a curious sparkle in her eye. She set down her walking cane and opened her backpack to offer me a piece of paper with notes she had printed earlier that day. “After our conversation,” she said, “I wrote up some thoughts about the Folklife soundscape evolution” and offered the paper to me. I sat there a bit

stunned as I took my time to read through it. In this brief page of notes, I saw essential pieces of NWFL history and a surprising frame of critical analysis. I looked up at her and said with a newfound feeling of assuredness, “We should really talk some more about this.” She laughed shyly and I invited her to come back later in the day when I was finished with my scheduled interviews, even offering to do an impromptu interview with her for the NWFL archive oral history project. She agreed and left, carrying on with her volunteer duties.

Later in the evening, my assistant Juan had finished his shift for the day, and I went on to set up the interview space for Susie. She came in right on time, and I made sure that filming and audio recording was ready and that the environment felt comfortable to her. We then sat down, with cameras rolling, and talked. It was a conversation that involved many small details about sound, and I responded to her way of listening to me by slowing down my own racing thoughts from the day’s work. She told me about her artistic journey through found sound and handmade instruments, and how these ways of knowing impacted how she experienced the Northwest Folklife festival at Seattle Center. Through her ears, and by extension her field recordings which she would soon send to me, I heard Northwest Folklife’s trajectory not through the staged performances but in the people gathering to listen and play music together informally around Seattle Center--and the layering of sounds therein from the nearly 150,000 people in attendance. Susie shared how the early years of the festival consisted of bluegrass, sea chanties, and more traditionally understood Anglican ‘folk’ music and dance. Then, in the 1980s, with University of Washington affiliated ethnomusicologists moving into leadership positions, the festival expanded its programming to include a wider array of music styles from around the world. Over the past few years, the festival continues to evolve and now features hip-hop, fashion shows, graffiti, and local agricultural vendors, among other activations. She then described the way her soundscapes

show how the interactions between people have also changed from more spontaneous interactions and jams in the early years to increasing separation between performers and audience members, thereby losing an inclusive feeling of participation.

In this chapter, I outline how the folk revival movement in the 1960s, the rise of folk festivals and the role of scholars within its emergence laid the groundwork for the Northwest Folklife Festival – which has grown into one of the largest volunteer-powered, free cultural arts events in the United States. I do so by using written documents, scholarly publications, and archival materials from Northwest Folklife itself. I trace changes in production practices and programming philosophies over the decades, and how the gradual professionalization of staff reshaped the spatial and sonic environment of the festival. Ethnographic interviews with current and former employees, board members, and affiliated cultural workers further illuminate the crucial role that ethnomusicologists and public folklorists have played in transforming the organization. Cumulatively, these materials reveal Northwest Folklife as an important site where cultural heritage workers negotiated questions of representation, community engagement, and institutional responsibility. Particularly attending to this dissertation’s methodology of learning to arrive, this chapter explores how ethnomusicologists, cultural workers, and community participants reshaped Northwest Folklife’s mission, programming, and public meaning, ultimately making it a key site for understanding how cultural heritage is imagined and celebrated. Understanding this history is essential for Chapter 5, which explores the

methodological challenges of arriving as an archivist without the deep community relationships that grounded *Carangolo*, discussed in chapters 2 and 3.

In the following sections, I begin with my encounter with Susie's volunteer recordings to reflect on how knowledge about the festival has been produced through acts of listening, documentation, and participation. I then situate Northwest Folklife within the broader history of the U.S. folk revival and the emergence of folklife festivals, examining how ethnomusicologists and folklorists helped shape the frameworks through which vernacular traditions were documented, curated, and presented to the public. Finally, I turn to the founding and early ethos of Northwest Folklife itself, showing how scholars, organizers, and community artists together cultivated a participatory musical space that generated both vibrant cultural exchange and enduring questions about authority, representation, and the responsibilities of documentation.

Learning to Arrive

In conversation with Susie, I was reminded of how sound recordings reveal ways of being in the world by listening with attention to detail. Her approach to documenting Northwest Folklife highlights questions about whose perspective is preserved in our archive and how that shapes the narrative of the organization's history. By capturing the layered acoustic environment rather than isolated performances, Susie's field recordings challenge the conventional archival logic that privileges the preservation of staged cultural events. As a volunteer with her own recording equipment and technical knowledge, she operated outside of Northwest Folklife's internal documentation goals and created an alternative archive that captured elements the institutional recordings missed, most notably in the impromptu jams and sonic environment of vendors, patrons, and buskers.

Susie's volunteer-led documentation practice reveals what I mean by 'learning to arrive' through deep participant observation as described in the previous chapter. As a decades-long volunteer, Susie arrived at Northwest Folklife and her sustained presence and field recording collections taught her about the nature of the festival. In some ways, her recordings challenge my institutional qualifications as 'the archivist' for NWFL, a position granted to me through university connections and paid employment rather than earned through fifty years of showing up. My work at NWFL revealed that learning to arrive came through listening to people like Susie, whose relationship to the festival exceeded institutional memory that I could access. This encounter made visible a central tension: I held access to materials and decision-making power about what got digitized and how to curate the materials, but Susie held community knowledge through decades of presence, artistic vision, and experience in the festival's evolution.

By incorporating Susie's recordings into the archive at Northwest Folklife and curating them to align with her ethos, I have chosen to think differently about what is worth collecting and preserving within the organization. Her recordings are a testament to the many ways history is revealed through sound. And while this idea is nothing new to the field of ethnomusicologists, it is important to consider how her impulse to center the entire sonic environment of the festival challenges the archival memory of Northwest Folklife based solely on performances and programming. Her recordings reveal a kaleidoscope of cultural dynamics that live beyond the music itself, as well as shifting social spheres, fading informality, and an evolving festival landscape over the last 50 years. These themes shed light on larger conditions that influence the ways people engage with cultural heritage, which ultimately impact the survival of institutions that celebrate diverse arts and culture.

From Folk Revival to the Smithsonian Folklife Festival

The emergence of the Northwest Folklife Festival sits within the broader politics of the U.S. folk revival of the 1960s and 70s, a moment when “reimagining older traditions as resources for modern times” became inseparable from new forms of political consciousness (Kramer 2024, 205). What is often remembered as a musical movement can be, in effect, a container for overlapping struggles, including struggles over labor, race, gender, sexuality, and national identity. As folk music gained national visibility in the United States, it also became a vehicle for circulating progressive and socialist ideas, offering symbolic grounding for communities fighting for freedom, equity, and self-determination. Student movements and university campuses were often at the center of these cultural and political upheavals, as seen in the Kent State anti-war protests and the University of California-Berkeley sit-ins challenging discriminatory hiring and exclusionary enrollment practices, positioning young people as crucial actors in the era’s demands for social change (Cantwell, 1996). In the aftermath of WWII and amid the Cold War, the Red Scare, and the escalation of the Vietnam War, labor organizers, civil rights leaders, feminists, environmentalists, and LGBT activists alike mobilized against entrenched inequalities. Landmark efforts such as the Civil Rights Act, anti-war demonstrations, the United Farm Workers strikes, and the creation of the EPA exemplified the era’s transformative energy, even as many of these movements fell short of their fullest visions. This dynamic political landscape formed the backdrop against which the Northwest Folklife Festival emerged and shaped its ethos of grassroots participation, cultural democracy, and community-centered arts.

The roots of this folk revival movement can be traced to an earlier wave of interest in vernacular culture during the Great Depression. As artists, intellectuals, and policymakers

grappled with economic collapse and social upheaval, folk traditions came to be viewed as sources of authenticity in an increasingly industrialized and uncertain nation. Rural musicians, craftspeople, and tradition bearers were frequently cast as representatives of a premodern or precapitalist way of life whose values appeared to offer stability amid crises. Yet this celebration of "the folk" was deeply contradictory, as scholar Sonnet Retman aptly writes (2011). Folk culture was often documented and disseminated through modern technologies such as radio, recordings, photography, and film, while the people being represented were frequently romanticized, stereotyped, or framed as subjects in need of intervention. In this sense, the invention of folk culture served broader political projects, including narratives surrounding national recovery and New Deal reform. However, these recordings and song collectors, such as Willis James and the Lomax family, in addition to the framing of folk as "the peoples music," proved instrumental in the formation of larger festivals that celebrated and recirculated the recordings and ethos from the era.

The emergence of folk festivals in the United States is not far removed from the histories of museums and in situ performance. From their inception, folklife festivals have operated within a representational framework shaped by earlier exhibitionary practices, even as they sought to distinguish themselves from the object-centered logic of the museum. This type of large-scale multi-cultural festival model first emerged with the 1967 Festival of American Folklife on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., produced by the Smithsonian Institution's Office of Folklife Programs. Conceived as a nonprofit, educational event, the festival aimed to avoid commercialism and to present rather than represent cultural practices. What emerged was stage programming for artists to present their own traditions to keep these practices within their specific cultural contexts. This is a much different approach than showcases and demonstrations

central to World's Fair exhibitions, where people and objects were displayed and thought to represent entire cultures (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). While these intentions did not fully escape the complexities of staging and mediation, the Smithsonian festival nonetheless established a model that emphasized process, dialogue, and public encounter over spectacle alone.

According to an article written by the former Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage (CFCH), the Smithsonian Folklife Festival was first envisioned in the mid-1960s by Dillon Ripley, an ornithologist and Secretary of the Smithsonian Institution from 1964 to 1984, as an expansion of museum practice into the realm of live performance (Kurin, 2014). Seeking to demonstrate how objects, music, and expressive forms derive meaning through live engagement, Ripley hired folklorist Ralph Rinzler and cultural administrator James Morris to produce concerts and demonstrations on the National Mall. Rinzler, in particular, viewed the festival as a corrective to what he perceived as the Smithsonian's "narrow representation of American history and culture," which at the time included limited engagement with Black, Indigenous, and other marginalized communities (Kurin, 2014, 409). To some degree, this ideology grew out of New Deal values that sought to "support grassroots Americana in the face of growing commercialism and cultural elitism" (Sommers 1996, 230).

The adoption of the term folklife (rather than simply folk) was a deliberate move that signaled a more scholarly and ethnographic orientation, distancing the festival from commercial entertainment and youth counterculture while aligning it with the Smithsonian's institutional mission. The American Studies scholar Heather Diamond further asserts that the festival "problematized static notions of tradition and heritage by defining folklife as dynamic, inclusive, and contemporary" (2008, 3). At the same time, the festival incorporated various museum

protocols: explanatory signage, photo-text panels, curated programs, and printed catalogues. This treatment framed performance at the festival as more of an exhibition rather than a spectacle.

The first Festival of American Folklife, held over the July 4th weekend in 1967, featured over one hundred musicians and artisans from across the United States and was free to the public. Drawing heavily from Rinzler's network developed through the Newport Folk Festival, the event showcased Appalachian, Puerto Rican, African American, Native American, and other ethnic traditions through live demonstrations and participatory performances (Kurin 2014, 407). Programs were organized much like museum galleries, each focused on a specific cultural group, region, or expressive form. Performers were referred to as "cultural practitioners," "bearers," or "exemplars," emphasizing lived expertise (rather than reenactments from actors outside of the cultural traditions often found in museums or tours) while scholars and facilitators served as "presenters" who provided contextual framing. Despite early criticism that the festival lacked seriousness, it quickly drew large crowds and became an important platform for cultural practitioners—particularly Native leaders—to represent their traditions on their own terms.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett cautions that the "living" quality of performance does not free it from processes of abstraction and objectification. Songs, dances, tales, and ritual practices, she argues, are often "ethnographically excised and presented as self-contained units," rendered legible to audiences through framing and staging (1998, 62). At the same time, she carefully distinguishes performance from static objects, emphasizing the centrality of process, interaction, and embodied presence. Folklife festivals thus occupy a complicated position: they present culture as lived and dynamic while simultaneously extracting it from its habitual contexts.

As the festival's scope expanded to include arts traditions beyond those of the United States, the event was renamed the Smithsonian Folklife Festival, reflecting a growing

commitment to international cultural exchange. "Though the festivals 'collection' was essentially ephemeral," writes Kurin, staff and volunteers took great pains to document performances and demonstrations, so that over the years there has been an impressive record made—through video and film, sound recordings and images—of the traditions represented” (Kurin, 2014, 411). As he further argues, cultural leaders should “play the lead role in shaping the character of their own representation—with scholars, curators, and others engaging in dialogue, facilitating, and providing context for that presentation” (413). In this way, the Smithsonian Folklife Festival not only modeled new approaches to cultural presentation but also enabled practitioners to advance their own agendas, build networks, and engage with broader publics beyond the walls of the museum. Yet, according to Sommers, many of the choices in programming adhered to conservative definitions of folklore: community-based, orally transmitted, and historically rooted (1996).

Importantly, Diamond and Trimillos argue that the Smithsonian Folklife Festival is at its core, a:

scholarly endeavor created by professional folklorists with a social agenda. Its goals, as stated on the SFF Website (2005), are to celebrate cultural diversity and to advocate culture conservation. It does much of this work through fieldwork-based research that identifies culture bearers and offers public presentation and interpretations of their cultural contributions (2008, 4).

This shows that the social agenda to which these folklorists adhere follows protocols, values, and ideas emergent within academic scholarship at the time. The diversity that SFF strives for has more to do with showcases of thematic programs rather than representing true occupational, regional, or ethnic communities.

After the success of this and other festivals on the East Coast, people on the West Coast began to re-imagine folk and traditional music in a similar fashion. One important West Coast predecessor to the Northwest Folklife festival was the series of folk festivals held at the University of California-Berkeley between the years of 1958 to 1970. Called the Berkeley Folk Festivals, these festivals were linked to “a distinctive local movement of folk revivalist and possessed its own distinctive philosophy and atmosphere” according to historian Michael J. Kramer (n.d.). The Berkeley Folk Festivals were originally organized by guitarist and educator Barry Oliver, who was a student at the time. Oliver’s work culminated in a public access online exhibit about the Berkeley Folk Festival. The materials from which this exhibit emerged are housed at the Northwestern University Libraries. Kramer designed an undergraduate course about the collection called Digitizing Folk Music History (ibid) to begin migrating the collection to an online database and soon thereafter received grant funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities to complete digitizing and cataloging the entire Berkeley Folk Festival archive.

Organizing the First Northwest Folklife Festival

It is within this lineage that the Northwest Folklife Festival in Seattle took shape. From its earliest years, the founders drew inspiration from the aforementioned festivals in Washington, D.C, Newport, and Berkeley, and chose to favor performances that did not rely on elaborate theatrical production. Instead, they invested in high-fidelity sound equipment and hiring professional sound engineers to ensure quality listening experiences and to document performances for future use. This emphasis on listening and documentation aligns with ethnographic sensibilities that privilege sound, presence, and participation over visual spectacle.

Yet, as with many folklife presentations, the relocation of performance into a non-habitual space carried the risk of diluting ritual and sacred practices into spectacle. What distinguishes Northwest Folklife, however, is its sustained effort to grant communities agency in staging themselves—whether through costuming, parades across festival grounds, informal jam sessions, or off-stage gatherings that unfold beyond the official program. In contrast to museum contexts where curatorial authority rests primarily with internal staff, Northwest Folklife has historically positioned communities as active participants in shaping how their cultural practices appear in public, much the same way as the Smithsonian Folklife Festival.

At the same time, this participatory model is not without complication. Northwest Folklife has always relied on a designated programming team responsible for making decisions about stage placement, scheduling, and vendor locations. These choices necessarily shape how culture is encountered and experienced at the festival and lie beyond the full control of participating communities. While the festival often frames itself as a presentation of folk arts, it cannot entirely evade questions of authority, selection, and representation.

The first Northwest Folklife festival premiered in 1972 and there were several different festival models set out in the previous decade that paved the way for collaboration amongst folklorist and passionate local musicians interested in celebrating home-grown life and art in its myriad forms. The idea of a festival in the Pacific Northwest emerged in conversation between Mike Holmes of the Seattle Folklore Society and Leo Bernash of the National Folk Festival Association (Kirshner 2017). Several additional likeminded people from cultural and musical organizations in Seattle later became involved as well, including Phil Williams (1958-2017), board president of the Northwest Folklore Society who would later become an important leader

for the Northwest Folklife festival. Soon, a group of people proposed the event to the administrators at Seattle Center proper and they ultimately agreed (ibid).

The National Park Service and the National Folk Festival financed the festival, providing a scant budget of \$6,000, which correlates to around \$46,500 today. In comparison, the NWFL festival budget in 2025 was over a million dollars. Shortly thereafter, a network of local organizations with a healthy enthusiasm for the event began organizing just weeks before the opening date on Memorial Day weekend. The organizations involved included the Seattle Folklore Society, Seattle Center, the Scandia Folk Dance Society, KEAB-FM, the Washington Old-Time Fiddlers Association, and Recreation, Entertainment and Creative Help (REACH) a nonprofit dedicated to bringing entertainment to retirement homes. These organizers advertised the event as an “opportunity to see the rich heritage of traditional arts present in the area which generally are not given exposure through the mass media” (Hendrickson, 2017). With around 300 performers, and none of them being so-called headliners or ‘star-performers,’ the festival gave the public a distinct opportunity to hear and participate in music, dance, and crafts from people living in the Pacific Northwest that they may not have been exposed to otherwise.

On May 26, 1972, musicians and dancers from all over the Pacific Northwest performed on five stages with an additional area for crafts and vendors. The scope of programming from the very first year aligned with the festival’s promotional language about celebrating the diversity of cultural arts in the area, showcasing 150 music and dance groups featuring fiddlers, Scottish Highland dancing, Cape Fox Indians, King Island Alaskan natives, Oinkari Basque dancers, and other groups representing Scandinavian, Japanese, Zimbabwean, Polish, French, Balkan, and German traditional arts (Hendrickson, 2017).

With nearly 100,000 people in attendance, the first Northwest Folklife Festival was, for all intents and purposes, a great success. What has been captured in the archives further documents the festival where all five stages amplified the music and dance of a wide variety of music and people. The Mural Stage, for example, is one of the larger stages programmed during the festival and suitable for large dance groups such as the Oikari Basque ensemble. This stage featured large dance ensembles primarily from Greek and Arabic dancers to Chief Antelope & His Indian Dancers. Beyond the stages, there were also parades and buskers. A brief perusing of the 1972 program shows a number of arts and craft displays and showings throughout the festival in addition to middle school puppeteers and international costume modeling. Participatory dancing occurred every night of the festival. These elements remain pivotal to the ethos of the NWFL Festival to this day.

In its second year, the organizers brought in over 1,000 performers and vendors and the estimated attendance was near 225,000 people, making it one of the largest folk festivals in the U.S. (Hendrickson, 2017). Moreover, in 1974 and continuing until the late 1980s, the festival's sound reached far beyond Seattle Center through KRAB-FM's radio broadcast of a few stages during the weekend event every year.

Construction of a cross-cultural musical community

The success of its early years was no doubt driven by community and volunteer-led efforts and it helped that many of the volunteers were also performers. In a statement given to me during one of my archive projects, folk musician and long-time Folklife performer Larry Hanks sums up the feeling of the festival, recounting that:

I think my first NWSF was 1975, there were a HUGE number of people enjoying lots of types of music--no big stars, no big announcements... Loads of performers, and fun just making the choices of who to go hear, because at any one hour, there were tons of things going on... It really gave you a feeling and flavor of the wide variety of music that was available. I'd never been to Puget Sound before, so PNW music was new to me, more down to earth, somehow, both the audiences, and the performers. There were a few jam sessions, but not many, because it was SO packed with options and opportunities, and plenty of music to go sample...I'd never been to such a big event before that was so low-key yet so vibrant! It was more like "people's music,"the performers were not stardom-seekers. (email communication, May 20th, 2024)

Larry Hanks' description reveals the festival's success in creating what Kay Kaufman Shelemay defines as 'musical community' or a "social entity [made up from a] combination of social and musical processes, rendering those who participate in making or listening to music aware of a connection among themselves" (2011, 265). Such an environment gave the festival a distinctive neighborly feeling, constructing an ideology about the Pacific Northwest (PNW) folk scene and the festival as a massive once-a-year musical community. The cultural ethos at that time made it so that the festival was made "by and for the people" where the lines between listening, performing, improvising, and jamming were blurred.

This analysis, however, must also consider who felt included in this "people's music" and whose definitions of 'folk' shaped programming decisions. While some of my research for this dissertation addresses these concerns of inclusivity and inclusion during the early years of the Northwest Folklife festival, a more in-depth analysis is beyond the purview of this chapter. Given that the festival first emerged through collaboration with the Seattle Folklore Society that

centered on old-time and bluegrass, it is not a large step to imagine the festival centered on these genres. Many of my interlocutors said that in the early years of the festival, there was a palpable Anglo-American majority representation even as other cultural music traditions were included.

Building on this understanding of the musical community, the NWFL festival can be further understood as a recurring, temporary site of cultural convergence. Kay Kaufman Shelemay argues that musical processes play a central role in shaping urban musical communities by establishing ethnic places that unite collectivities from within while also representing them to the outside world (2012, 207–208). She situates her argument within contemporary urban conditions, noting that “our changing world has reshaped the processes through which urban communities are formed, encouraged their increasingly porous boundaries, and transformed the networks and media through which they are sustained” (207). Rather than approaching musical transmission and performance as unchanging symbols of preexisting social groups, Shelemay understands them as dynamic processes capable of generating, shaping, and sustaining new communities (208). In this formulation, performance itself becomes a powerful mechanism through which collectivity is produced, mobilized, and reimagined.

Shelemay further refines this spatial understanding of music and community through the concept of “ethnic arenas,” a term defined by cultural geographer Elizabeth Chacko, to describe spaces that provide “a temporary location for the convergence of the ethnic community” (Chacko 2003, 35). Chacko, based on her research with Ethiopian diasporic communities in Washington, D.C., argues that “urban ethnic identities are not to be sought or displayed in the residential centers, but are vested in specific places where community is forged and embodied” (2003, 210). Such ethnic arenas can include parks temporarily transformed through decorations for church ceremonies, stadiums or hotels hosting special events, or social halls activated for communal

gatherings. They may be unmarked and known primarily to insiders—such as a local coffee shop—or explicitly marked to draw public attention, as in the case of Ethiopian churches, grocery stores, or restaurants. Within such “urban site[s] within diaspora,” Shelemay notes, there exists a wealth of musical heterogeneity, spanning traditional, popular, and hybrid styles (2012). From Shelemay’s perspective, this urban landscape brings together diverse traditions for blurring boundaries between ethnic communities. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett further observes that festivals organized by professional folklorists have historically emphasized performers who claim their traditions as a “birthright” and who present what are understood as the traditional components of their repertoire (1998, 73). Yet she also notes that many ensembles actively adapt repertoire and costuming to suit concert-stage conventions, often on their own terms.

Diversified programming and the problems of essentialism

From the initial event in 1972, it is clear that the Seattle’s Folklore Society, whose members solidified the festival’s success, practiced Anglo-American music such as bluegrass, old-time, and other related genres, but the actual space of the festival generated the opportunity to ‘break bread’ with other community artists. As Shelemay shows, urban communities grow through a number of different places, including the ephemeral space of a festival. Over the decades, this event emerges as a yearly ‘ethnic area’ where Seattle Center is activated as a communal gathering and not just a performance space. This dynamic is evident at Northwest Folklife, where artists negotiate continuity and adaptation of tradition in response to community expectations and festival contexts. One of Northwest Folklife’s signature activations, the Rhythm Tent, serves as an opportunity for attendees to play music of a particular genre in a short workshop. The Rhythm Tent explicitly encourages audience participation, blurring the boundary

between performer and listener. As one of Northwest Folklife's most popular activations, the Rhythm Tent highlights how the festival relies on designated cultural bearers to anchor performance in lineage and responsibility.

And yet, the early program guides often show a type of essentialism, or at least a lack of detail around performers whose traditions were outside of the Old Time and other Anglo-American folk traditions. As seen in the program in figure 4.1, where fiddlers and ballad singers were listed by their individual names, many others were listed simply by their ethnic origins, such as "Japanese Dancer" in the closing show on Monday Night, or "Rhodesian Dancers.". This labeling practice recalls what Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identifies as the museum's tendency to classify non-Western practitioners by ethnicity, geography, or art style (dance, music, etc) rather than as artist or maker (1998). This framing positions cultural difference as the dancer's defining feature and reduces these individuals to be representatives of cultural categories.

Sunday Program, May 28, 1972			Monday Program, May 29, 1972		
8:30 PM	Arabic Dancers	Mural Amphitheater	7:30 PM	Cape Fox Tribe	Food Circus Stage
9:00 PM	Rhodesian Dancers	Mural Amphitheater	8:00 PM	Sweet Adelines, Inc., Lake Side Chapter Participation Dancing	Mural Amphitheater Food Circus Stage
Monday Program, May 29, 1972			PLAYHOUSE		
2:00 PM	Academy of Irish Dancing Arthur C. Stavig, Norwegian Trolls	Mural Amphitheater Flag Plaza Pav.	8:00 PM	CONCERT: Cynthia Wagner Nordic Lur Andy Wallace - Host	
	Tim McKamey Scottish Country Dancers	N.W. Festival Ct Food Circus Stage	SPECIAL	Nordiska Folkdancers David Bromberg Japanese Dancer Tredsknitis Champion Old Time Fiddlers	
2:30 PM	Balkan Dancers Chief Antelope & his Indian Dancers	Mural Amphitheater Food Circus Stage			
3:00 PM	Oinkari Basque Dancers Noah's Ark	Mural Amphitheater Food Circus Stage			
3:30 PM	King Island Eskimo Dancers Gold Dyke Mining Company	Flag Plaza Pav. Food Circus Stage			
4:00 PM	Greek Dancers, Church of the Assumption Audin Toven David Bromberg Lyle Cleven, Old Time Fiddler	Mural Amphitheater Flag Plaza Pav. N.W. Festival Ct Food Circus Stage			
4:30 PM	Mary Dossett, Turkish Dancer Chief Antelope & his Indian Dancers	Mural Amphitheater Flag Plaza Pav. Food Circus Stage			
5:00 PM	Granny Lamb & Old Timers Scottish Country Dancers	Food Circus Stage Mural Amphitheater			
5:30 PM	Rhodesian Dancers King Island Eskimo Dancers	Mural Amphitheater Flag Plaza Pav.			
6:00 PM	Nordiska Folkdancers Balkan Dancers	Mural Amphitheater Food Circus Stage			
6:30 PM	Mountain County Co-op Costume Modeling International	Food Circus Stage Flag Plaza Pav.			
7:00 PM	Scottish Highland Dance Studio	Mural Amphitheater			
7:30 PM	Academy of Irish Dancing Chief Antelope & his Indian Dancers	Mural Amphitheater Flag Plaza Pav.			

GRATEFUL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ORGANIZATIONS

Seattle Police Dept., Seattle Center Division
Northwest Folk Dancers, Inc.
Skandia Folkdance Society
Folkstore
Washington State Old Time Fiddlers Association
University of Washington, Costume & Textile Study
Collection.
Reach, Inc., Staff

Figure 4.1 - Programming at first annual Northwest Folklife Festival in 1972, used with permission

In this way, festival organizers potentially intensify essentialization through naming practices, program guides, and contextual descriptions. This points to a lapse in cultural sensitivity as well as a power differentiation between artists who were well known by the founders and those who were not. In a program from 1977, there was an uneven binary between ‘Western’ folk traditions and everything else, where a Sunday evening performance was titled “Non-Western Music Concert.” However, this type of glossing did not occur throughout the festival where there were marked stages with more contextualized and specific showcases as seen in the Monday “Gospel Show” in 1977, occurring from 12:00pm until well into the night and featuring more than ten different groups. Yet, while rooted in Black expressive arts, it is without a doubt a musical genre developed in the United States. Even in 1983 there were many performances simply titled “Ethnic Dance Concert” without any other contextual information.

Beyond the stages, a distinctive part of the festival is its participatory jam sessions as Hanks mentioned, occurring both on the public grounds and frequently in the artist hospitality area where musicians from all different backgrounds mingled. This was also echoed by many festival attendees and performers, including Susie, whose recordings vividly capture these jam sessions. A specific location at the northeast corner of Seattle Center became known as Bluegrass Hill where bands warmed up together before a performance set. In addition, a designated stage area called the Jam Tent, which has become a long-standing tradition at the festival to date, produced some of the biggest jams at Folklife, with musicians and dancers from many traditions and cultures interacting and performing informally.

Music workshops were also an important addition to the early festival that covered a wide array of topics from Balkan Singing to dobro, banjo, dulcimer, and kazoo in 1977. This festival also held many other workshops having more to do with technical skills around professional

staging, P.A. Systems, and even a session on “How to Get Bookings” and “Originating Folk Centers,” as seen in Figure 4.2 below.

MUSIC WORKSHOPS -

Center House Balcony Level

SATURDAY: 12:00 Room C PUBLICIZING YOURSELF and PROFESSIONAL STAGING Chris Lunn Room D DOBRO Dan Kersten Room E BAND ORGANIZATION Bob and Carol Waller Room F WOMEN'S SONGS Maggie Savage 2:00 Room C BACK-UP GUITAR Thane Mitchell Room E FRAILING BANJO Warren Argo Room F SONG SWAPPING John Dwyer 4:00 Room C DULCIMER Rod Matheson Room E CONCERTINA Bertram Levy Room F FLAT PICKING GUITAR Roger Ferguson		4:00 Room C BALKAN SINGING "Na Suncu" Room E P.A. SYSTEMS Phil Williams Room F HAMMERED DULCIMER Jan Klumph MONDAY: 12:00 Room C PENNY WHISTLE Nancy Schenk Room D BASS FIDDLE Larry Edwards Room E HOW TO GET BOOKINGS John Ullman Room F IRISH HARP Nora Joan Clark 2:00 Room C GROUP SINGING John Barlett Room E MANDOLIN Jerry Mitchell Room F FIDDLE Barbara Lamb 4:00 Room C KAZOO Sallie Spirit Room E AUTOHARP Richard Scholtz Room F STRING INSTRUMENT REPAIR Darrel McMichael	
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SUNDAY:
 12:00 Room C BLUEGRASS BANJO
 Mike Moore
 Room D HARMONICA
 Chuck Pliske
 Room E ORIGINATING FOLK CENTERS
 John Ullman
 Room F CHILDREN'S SONGS & STORIES
 John and Sally Ashford
 2:00 Room C SQUARE DANCE CALLING
 Sandy Bradley
 Room E SONG WRITING
 Steve Snyder
 Room F FINGER PICKING GUITAR
 Dave Auer

DANCE WORKSHOPS — Olympic Room
 Saturday, Sunday, and Monday
 12:00 to 4:00 Including International Folkdancing, Clogging, and Square Dancing, beginning and advanced levels. Instructors to be announced.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

The Corner Kitchen Farman Brothers Pickle Co. Kelly Clarke Company Northwest Cup Corporation Pacific Fruit and Produce Quick Stop Eatery Safeway Stores Inc. Sir Donut Sunny Jim Fine Foods Wholesale Fountain Supply A. C. Lehman Shorecrest High School FEAST Program Wax Orchards Mike and Key Radio Club Jane Doughty Art Erickson Karma Fowler Peggy Gallaher	Alyson Garland Dorothy Guttormsen Ron Lowrie Chris Lunn Kathi McKenzie Pat McMonagle Ron Mickleberry Thane Mitchell & All the Workshop Leaders Robert Rohde Gordon Tracie Bernie Whitebear & the United Indians of All Tribes Foundation Carol Winship & All the Craftspeople Pat Wright The Northwest Regional Folklife Festival is sponsored by the Seattle Folklife Society, the National Park Service, KRAB Radio, and the Seattle Center. The KRAB Radio broadcast from the Festival is supported in part by a grant from the Washington State Arts Commission.
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Figure 4.2 Music Workshop Programming from the 1977 Northwest Folklife Festival

In attempting to illuminate how Northwest Folklife enables the enmeshing of multiple communities, tensions that can be part of this process also come to light. When the visibility of

cultural traditions is mediated through program guides, stage assignments, and festival organizers, it leads to uneven representation and space for agency among the various communities represented. In the following section, I explore how ethnomusicologists and folklorists addressed concerns around representation and inclusion throughout the 1980s-1990s by way of expanded programming and album productions.

1980-1990s: Institutionalization

As Steven Lavin and Ivan Karp note, every exhibition “inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and to downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others” (1991, 1). By the 1980s, a professional staff took over organizing the Northwest Folklife festival activities and, in turn, changed the shape and scope of the festival's programming. This transitional period represents a critical turning point, moving from truly grassroots organizing and towards institutional sustainability. While staffed employees increased managed capacity and expertise in festival production, it also shifted the power dynamics within the organization and expanded the budget to nearly \$200,000 raised through donations, vendor fees, and an annual fundraiser (Kershner 2017). By 1983, there were more than 400 volunteers, according to the program guide from that year, contributing to the success of the festival as well as community coordinators who implemented specific events including film festivals, children's activities, food vendors, music and dance workshops, the gospel showcase, and the fiddlers showcase to name a few. The film festival, in particular, was supported by a grant from the Seattle Arts Commission and was a four-day event featuring a variety of films of folklife from across the country.

What began as a grassroots organizing effort to reclaim ‘folk’ culture from mass commercialization transformed into an organization where four paid staff members and one director labored in the programming and production of the event. The sponsorship from broadcast radio stations helped to promote the festival in addition to grant support from the King County Arts Commissioner. During this decade, Northwest Folklife expanded their effort to represent a broad array of music and culture at the festival, much in line with the growing popularity of the “world music” genre occurring at the national level. The attention to detail expanded beyond mere ensemble names and general genre naming; there was considerably more effort to define the musicians and the music, as evidenced by the program guides during this era. Yet still, the problems of genre classification loomed large with descriptions of Gwinyai as “African Marimbas with Dance of Zimbabwe,” as seen in the 1983 program. This gloss flattens a specific Shona mbira and marimba tradition, that has its own regional variations and cultural contexts, into a broad category. By contrast, the Anglo-American performers in the same program received detailed stylistic descriptors such as “Folk & Country, Whistling Northwest Style” and “Traditional British Isles.”

Interestingly, in 1983 the festival also included ‘Northwest Lifestyle’ exhibits that highlight vendors with “traditional folk origins.” These exhibits included everything from woodcarving, chimney services, family crests companies, white river rafting, nutritional education, and even massage demonstrations. It is clear here that NWFL has a broadly defined view of folklife and sought to include non-mainstream festival activities to support people doing this work. The Shepherds Extravaganza, occurring in that same year, was an event with a variety of educational and practical events focused on “all aspects of sheep and wool.” The program guide goes on to say “Sheep uses will be promoted and the public will have an opportunity to

share in, and learn about, the diverse sheep industry” including sheepdog demonstrations, fashion and sheep show, a fleece auction, and a sheep judging event with over 170 sheep from around the Northwest (Northwest Folklife, 1983). As I will now discuss, a handful of key people on staff were on the cutting edge of these changes geared to expanding inclusivity and experimenting with the festival event to think through representation and ritual.

Ethnomusicologists at NWFL: Gage Averill

The expanded focus I have just described had much to do with folklorists and ethnomusicologists entering the sphere of influence at Northwest Folklife. Gage Averill, who is currently provost at the University of British Columbia, came to work for NWFL in 1984 after being introduced to the organization through Phil Andrus, a Seattle based radio DJ and producer, who had been broadcasting the festival every year for the KRAB radio station. Averill stood out as being one of the first people affiliated with the UW ethnomusicology program to connect with Northwest Folklife. He came to the University of Washington’s ethnomusicology program out of happenstance, having worked in world music radio previously. Already knowing a great deal about music from around the world, his connections to people doing cultural heritage work came about not through the University but through his work as a journalist with KRAB radio in Seattle. During his tenure at Northwest Folklife, Averill instigated several important changes, as revealed to me during our interview communications.

When I spoke with him, one of the biggest concerns he had with the festival was that “everything was so atomized” (Personal communication, July 10th 2025). He felt that there was no continuity between staged performances and that little to no cultural context was presented about the musical traditions featured. In a general way, Averill was interested in making room

for the breadth of musical cultures in the Seattle area in a meaningful way. Notably, Averill attempted to center Indigenous presence and agency at the Northwest Folklife festivals during his tenure there. In 1984, he opened a stage for the Indigenous communities in the region and Vi Hilbert (1918-2008), a well-known elder of the Upper Skagit tribe, programmed the selection of artists and performances over the entire festival weekend. This set up has continued to this day, with members of Unkitawa, a non-profit organization operated by an all-Indigenous staff to heal and educate Indigenous peoples through culture and education, programming the festival. In acknowledging the fact that “one of the aims of applied ethnomusicology is to sustain musical practice,” as Carolyn Landau and Janet Topp-Fargion state, “then creating ways to encourage performance and transmission must be a central activity” (2012, 131), and Averill did just that.

As a budding ethnomusicology undergraduate, Averill was also interested in finding ways to produce an event that kept the music somewhat within its cultural context while also experimenting with how the placement of performances impacts how the music is felt, received, and interpreted. For example, instead of booking the Total Experience Gospel Choir in a large, outdoor venue, as had been done in previous years, Averill chose to put them in a small ballroom. This choice was influenced both by what he knows of the experience of music in the Black church where the distance between ‘performer’ and ‘audience’ is minimal and the energy of music “rocks the walls of the church building” (personal communication, July 10th 2025). Pairing this with the lack-luster reception of the group in prior festivals, the decision to move the performance indoors replicated the context in which the music is usually performed, resulting in a vastly different listening experience. “Things got heated up” Averill said, describing how the space was packed to the brim with patrons complaining that there was no room (*ibid*). In a lot of ways, this type of thinking mirrors that of ethnomusicological scholarship at the time, where

scholars explored performance as part of a large and “complex world through which the musician moves” (O’Meally, Edwards and Griffin, 2004). In this way, Averill sought not just to give a stage for musical acts but to present the music in relation to how it emerges as a cultural phenomenon. “It is more than just a procession of acts” Averill said, speaking to his work as program director, “it’s about making magic happen for people in a way that allows them to imagine something different.” (ibid). For Averill, what mattered most was not just about supporting the artists in a good performance but creating shared experiences for audiences and musicians alike.

This dovetails from the reflexive turn in the academy starting in the 1980s when scholars across the board became increasingly concerned with the ethnographic gaze and the importance of diversifying the ‘canon’ of scholarship (Carby 1991, 178), taking on the “responsibility for the difference in power between the research and the researched and being honest about the complex human and ethical dynamics” (Monson 2008, 268). Indeed, this claim is substantiated by Diamond and Trimillo's conclusion that the Smithsonian Folklife Festival’s evolution over the years reflects “changing academic ideas about folklife” (2008, 6). Such transformations have a lot to do with the growing emphasis on globalization and transnational identities. But as was also clear during the 1980s, there was a narrative around cultural grey out where folklife festivals afforded the opportunity to revitalize a presumed dying tradition. This sentiment of empowerment was supported by Alan Lomax, who, in 1991, argued that the Smithsonian Folklife Festival provides “support for the big river of oral tradition which is now being dissipated and corrupted all over the planet” (Office of Folklife Programs, 1991). This position is guided by unmarked colonial structures, impacting the work ethnomusicologists do and informing a type of ‘deficit discourse’ that creates a narrative about so-called ‘traditional

cultures' that find themselves at risk of being "swept away by modernity and the effects of globalization" (Defrance 2008, as cited in Bendrups, D., Barney, K., & Grant, C. 2013). The trajectory of this discourse is anchored in late 19th century academic paradigms in Europe which were motivated in part by a fear that 'native' cultures were vanishing, implying that these traditions were static and unchanging.

Outside of programming, Averill was also involved in professionalizing Northwest Folklife. Notably, the festival programming model between 1982 and 1984 did not rely on a computer. With mountains of hard copy documents, Gage and the rest of the team instead used a huge wall as a canvas and manually tacked artists' names under a stage's name. Once the schedule was in place, staff members scheduled a Volunteer Day where people came into the office to pack and seal thousands of artist confirmation letters to be sent in the mail the following day. This work was extremely taxing and inefficient. By 1985, Gage, along with the managing director Scott Nagel and a few other employees, bought new computers and introduced a database program that optimized workflow by organizing and connecting performers to stages.

Finally, Averill was also involved in the production of Northwest Folklife's vinyl album released in 1983, serving as a testament to the "spontaneity, enthusiasm, and sense of sharing that occurs at the festival" according to the liner notes that Averill wrote himself. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the album was a collaborative effort between NWFL staff and KRAB radio volunteers and engineers, including Phil Andrus, and consists of 15 tracks ranging from blue grass to Balkan orchestras, Polish folk choirs and Laotian mouth organ medleys. Important to my argument, each track is accompanied by a brief contextualizing description of the history, artist, and genre, serving an important pivot away from older programmatic materials.

Ethnomusicologists at NWFL: Peter Davenport

In 1986, Gage Averill left Northwest Folklife to conduct his dissertation fieldwork in Haiti, which eventually became the foundation of his monograph *A Day for the Hunter, A Day for the Prey: Popular Music and Power in Haiti* (1997). Peter Davenport, a friend of Averill's and another ethnomusicologist, took over his position and further moved NWFL into new programmatic territory. An important way Davenport 'diversified the canon' at the folklife festival was to push back against the protocol for an all-acoustic festival. Many people felt this was un-necessarily prohibitive and aimed towards keeping certain musics and musicians out of the festival. While still trying to appease the many folk musicians on the board at Northwest Folklife, Davenport and others first made the case that bass players, who often played in multiple bands, should not have to carry an upright bass from one gig to another. Allowing electric basses would ease the pains of hauling large and fragile instruments across the entire span of Seattle Center to play in multiple performances. This permission slowly gave way to more instruments and genres of music being allowed on stage at the Northwest Folklife festival, despite general push back from some of the founding members and participants.

To be sure, Davenport wanted to honor the original mission of the festival, built by musicians such as Phil and Vivian Williams who were leaders in the Pacific Northwest old-time fiddling and string band music. He also thought that there needed to be changes in order to move against the Anglo-American musical majority representation. Davenport introduced a reggae band during his time at folklife but not without some negotiating with the board, who disagreed with that choice. "Ironically," said Peter, "the one African American board member was the one who fought me the most on reggae. And he loved reggae! But he said at the board meeting, 'I just don't think it's right for this festival,' arguing that it isn't a folk music form

(personal communication, July 15th, 2025). When the reggae band performed at that festival, though, that very same board member came up to Peter and said, “You were right, this is great” (ibid).

Davenport also pushed the envelope by inviting performers outside of the Pacific Northwest to the Northwest Folklife festivals. He brought in Puerto Rican musicians from New York, The Rebirth Brass Band from New Orleans, and blues musicians from Mississippi, just to name a few, funded through grants he obtained. Again, the NWFL board pushed back against those choices by saying NWFL is specifically a Northwest festival. Bringing in these national acts drew much more support from attendees, though, and perhaps most importantly, the process also involved close collaboration with other local cultural arts organizations. “I’d call them in the off-season and say, ‘Let’s collaborate,’” said Davenport, “I’ll write the grant. You choose which artist to invite, someone who reflects your work, and host workshops or events the week before or after Folklife, and we’ll put them on stage at the festival” (ibid).

Ethnomusicologists at NWFL: Rakumi Arts

Northwest Folklife also partnered with other non-profits that already procured funds to support out-of-state artists. For example, Rakumi Arts International was a Seattle-based non-profit founded in 1989, but active throughout the 1990s, whose mission was to promote African arts by supporting artists from various parts of Africa to perform in Seattle. Two ethnomusicologists from the University of Washington, Jon Kertzer and Andy Frankel, spearheaded Rakumi Arts and worked closely with Northwest Folklife as well as the University of Washington’s ethnomusicology program to produce concerts and workshops.

As a result of this approach to partnership, Northwest Folklife strengthened its ties to local diasporic communities and artists and cemented their dedication to uplifting the diversity of music, dance, and art in the Northwest. Many of the program directors proceeding Davenport and Averill followed suit. Some of the fruits of these labors resulted in even more expansive programming, performances, and materials that provided educational content and intercultural understanding of various expressive arts. In 1991, under the direction of Scott Nagel, Northwest Folklife implemented a theme for each festival called a ‘Cultural Focus’ including events and projects leading up to the festival each year. At the heart of each cultural focus was a partnership with community-based advisors to shape the content and structure of events of each special activation. According to the Library of Congress’ Local Legacies Project, these collaborations involved the Pacific Northwest community of Sephardic Jews, Native Americans, African-Americans, Polynesians, Filipino-Americans, and Chicano/Mexican communities. Some of the culminating products of these collaborations include museum exhibits, album productions, and books.

The success of the Northwest Folklife festival and their year-long programs often relied on what Fenn and Titon (2004) call “culture brokers”—individuals who can navigate between academic, institutional, and community spheres. For NWFL, it was ethnomusicologists from UW such as Jon Kertzer, Gage Averill, and Peter Davenport, as well as public folklorists such as Phil and Vivian Williams, who served as program directors and artistic directors, influencing the direction and mission of the organization. While this brokerage can facilitate important preservation work, it also raises questions about who controls the representation of community traditions and whose interpretive frameworks shape how those traditions are understood.

However, there are many instances where CD productions have centered the work and perspectives of community led artists even when there remains a certain amount of control held within the managing personnel and staff at Northwest Folklife about the overall vision of multicultural celebrations. The 2000 album release of *Norte y Sur, Un Solo Pueblo* (North and South, One People), for example, highlighted the Chicano/Mexicano presence in Washington State through the music of *vaqueros* (cowboys) and Texas-Mexican farm workers who migrated to the Yakima Valley. The album features Tejano musicians from Washington state, Mexico, Texas, and California who were invited not only to be recorded but also to participate in the festival and the making of an exhibit, creating opportunities for local Seattle people to learn about Mexican culture and/or connect or reconnect with their heritage. This entire project was presented by Northwest Folklife and designed with the input of a community-based advisory council. The *Norte y Sur* project, while featuring 'community-based advisory councils,' was still 'presented by Northwest Folklife' in that it was designed, funded, and controlled through institutional channels wherein ethnomusicologists held decision-making power.

Ethnomusicologists at NWFL: Devon Léger

Devon Léger is one of the more recent ethnomusicology graduates who has been employed at Northwest Folklife. An active fiddle player and music journalist in Seattle, Léger moved from Oregon to Seattle in 2001 to attend school in the ethnomusicology department at the University of Washington. After graduating in 2005, he was hired at Northwest Folklife as a programmer “specifically because I came from the ethnomusicology department” he told me in an interview (personal communication, August 12th 2025). He highlighted how Deborah Fant, his supervisor at the time, oversaw fieldwork projects that ultimately became part of the program

guide materials based on the cultural focus at the time. In 2007, for example, he, Fant, and another folklorist Amy Mills conducted research on the borderlands between the U.S. and Canada in much the same way a folklorist would. Included in the program guide are a selection of field notes from each of the staff members, describing their work in the community as well as which artists are featured in the festival itself from this geographical region.

Regarding festival programming, Léger followed the vision set by the executive director at the time, Michael Hirschensend, who sought to “program everyone who applied as long as it had a community base” (ibid). What this meant in actuality was a substantial increase in stages to accommodate these artists, up to 35 during some years, and a truly expansive selection of genres including folk metal, ambient, ancient germanic poetry, and pirate shows among others. Léger told me his background as an ethnomusicologist taught him about the power dynamics involved in how institutions present music and how musicians present themselves. He liked the “anarchy” of Northwest Folklife and how open the festival is to lesser known and experimental genres. In this way, NWFL pushed the envelope of what a folk festival is to include anything that “people do in their communities” (ibid). When I asked about whether or not this inclusion was limited to musicians in the Pacific Northwest, he mentioned that it was usually the case but occasionally the organization procured grant money to bring in groups that were both outside the region and culturally important. Often people in various cultural arts communities in the Pacific Northwest would ask for specific artists to perform at the festival, such as when the Seattle Labor Union requested that Pete Seeger perform in 1997.

With regard to the physical archives, Devon was engaged in organizing the bulk of media during his time at Northwest Folklife and, a lot of the time, that meant whittling down the collections into 3 file cabinets of press photos, buttons, and other ephemera in addition to the

audio/visual media. Those decisions were often made in consideration of the purpose of the materials, whether or not there were duplicates, and how these materials might be used in the future. For Léger, the archives offer a lot for Northwest Folklife saying that “we should all know about this,” referring to the history of performers at the festival, “we should all know our neighbors” (personal communication, August 12th 2025).

2000-2020: Pandemic and the Growth of Digital Experiences

In the current cultural landscape of Seattle, Northwest Folklife continues to hold space as a non-profit institution, built by volunteers, scholars, and donors, deeply tied to cultural heritage communities in the Pacific Northwest. In the past few years, the NWFL Festival featured over 3,500 artists and welcomed more than 200,000 attendees at each festival with an overall budget for the entire event surpassing a million dollars. Since the very beginning planning stages of the festival in the 1970s, the organization made efforts to broadly represent the music, dance, arts, and crafts of artists living in the Pacific Northwest through not just staged performances or vendor booths but also through event collaborations. Beyond the festival, the current year-round programming includes Our Big Neighborhood, a cultural education series for youth and families; Unbroken Circle, which uplifts youth through arts and heritage workshops with culture bearers; and the Cultural & Creative Workforce Development Program (CCWD), which offers paid internships to emerging arts professionals.

For many people who attend and perform at the festival, there is a nostalgia in remembering the people and the way of life that brought the festival into creation and is, in part, why people choose to attend it year after year. “I’ve had many people come up to me,” said Ben, the artistic director of Northwest Folklife, “and say that going to the festival every year has been a tradition in their families for decades” (personal communication, May 2025). It is a once-a-

year community event that offers people a chance to see both new and familiar faces and experience new and familiar music, dance, art, and food. The artists from the band Tingstad and Rumble said,

We began our Folklife performances in the 1980's and have probably played at most every venue there since – from outdoors to indoors! We loved seeing old friends and fans. Folklife is a great place for musicians to see and hear each other too and catch up on news (personal email communication, May 12th 2024).

While the folk revival movement of the 1960s and 70s has long gone and the support from many directions decreases, the number of attendees and performers for the festival have only increased.

The socio-political and economic climate, however, differs greatly since the festival's founding. Rising costs of living, increased work demands, and changing patterns of civic engagement have meant that the volunteer labor that historically sustained organizations such as Northwest Folklife has become increasingly scarce. Arguably since the 1980s, the diminishment of trade union power and deregulation of industry critically altered the worldview of community-based, grassroots organizing that built the Northwest Folklife festival. The fundamental basis of a non-commercial and non-headliner based festival was at odds with what Andrea Moore calls the expectation of radical self-sufficiency (2016), spurred from the logic of neoliberalism.

Since the 2020 pandemic, the stalwart volunteers, largely the older generation of Northwest Folklife advocates, have understandably dwindled. Matched with rising costs of labor, physical space, and rental equipment, the festival relies more and more on donations, private donors, and large sponsorships. This presents tensions between volunteers, donors, and festival attendees who feel that the ethos of “community-driven” is altering the mission and philosophy

of Northwest Folklife. Despite this uncertainty, and in an effort to continue a legacy of community projects made “by and for the people,” Northwest Folklife now seeks to create a dynamic and engaging public archive featuring collections from its earliest years to present day performances.

Conclusion

The Northwest Folklife festival stands on the ethos of 1970s American cultural democracy—one built on volunteerism, communal participation, and a shared sense of folk politics. What makes Northwest Folklife a fascinating and complicated case study is its position *between* community and institution, a space I described in my introduction as inherently dialogic and perpetually negotiated. Founded in the spirit of the 1960s folk revival, fueled by volunteers, amateur and semi-professional musicians, and local arts audiences, the festival has always relied on community support and a network of institutional partners. Over the years, this largely came from Seattle Center, the National Folk Festival Association, and the myriad folklorists and ethnomusicologists that have come from academia to drive the ship of Northwest Folklife forward while also being participating performers themselves.

The festival’s success began by grassroots organizing and was sustained by volunteer labor but over time, the festival gradually incorporated institutional scaffolding: paid staff, grant funding, and professional expertise. The entrance of ethnomusicologists and folklorists into Northwest Folklife in the 1980s-2000s as organizers illuminates both the promise and problems of applied work outside academia. On one hand, scholars such as Averill, Davenport, and Kertzer brought critical frameworks that challenged Anglo-American dominance, secured funding for underrepresented communities, and created platforms for cultural practitioners to

represent themselves. Their work addressed cultural sustainability in the sense of supporting communities' cultural priorities and memories. They also demonstrated an additional dimension of sustainability in that ethnomusicologists can build meaningful careers outside academic departments through public-facing roles. At the same time, it positions communities as needing ethnomusicological intervention to be heard, to access resources, and to contextualize their practices for a larger public. In this way, did NWFL programming facilitate community goals or shape them? Recognizing this tension is crucial for rethinking the ethnomusicologist's role in public work. As I'll discuss in the next chapter, my own archival work at NWFL wrestled with precisely these questions of authority, access, and whose knowledge gets preserved.

The history of Northwest Folklife that I explored in this chapter matters for putting my own arrival at Northwest Folklife into context. Unlike Gage Averill, who came through radio journalism and community networks, or Peter Davenport, who built relationships through years of festival attendance, I arrived as a graduate student with a job title: 'archivist.' I inherited their institutional collection of recordings and the baggage attached through decades of documentation and programming. The bridges built between grassroots ethos and institutional infrastructure, between volunteer labor and professional expertise, between folk revival ideals and the problems of representation all crystallize in Northwest Folklife's archive. In the next chapter, I explore how to 'arrive' in an archive like this one that seeks to serve a variety of different communities and the methodological challenges of stewarding a multi-public archive without the deep ethnographic relationships that grounded the *Carangolo* project as described in Chapter 3.

Chapter 5: The Northwest Folklife Archive in Practice

I began my work at Northwest Folklife (NWFL) through an internship offered by Seattle's Creative and Cultural Workforce Development (CCWD) program, a partnership between the city's Office of Arts and Culture and Office of Economic Development. This program offers young creatives paid internships in Seattle's arts and culture industries to develop skills and connections within the city's creative and public sector. I originally applied for a position supporting the festival's programming but during my interview, I emphasized my interest in archives from an ethnomusicological perspective. A few days after my interview, I received an email about a new position: the Archiving and Digital Experience Internship. I accepted.

The first day I arrived as an intern I put on my tan slacks, nice shoes, a button up shirt and a brown belt. I walked into the Folklife office in Seattle Center on a fresh, crisp late March morning. The office had no windows to the outside. The high ceilings were dimly lit with fluorescent lights and there was a faint smell of coffee wafting from somewhere in the office. I found some folks milling about when I walked in, only one of whom I knew—Ben Hunter, the artistic director and prior visiting artist at the University of Washington. He was talking with Dom, the digital production lead, who would become my supervisor in the coming months. Ben greeted me warmly, with a big smile, and started showing me around the space. We walked out of the office to a different part of the Armory building – Room 123 just down the hall.

At first I was confused, it seemed to be a storage room full of various boxes, equipment, and other things that I could not name at the time: tiny easels, a tub of power cords, a large moving cart of vinyl tiles, and about three or more boxes of extension cords. All these things and more lined a narrow corridor just inside the entrance of the storage room. A decades-old fridge sat on the far side of the room as we walked in. Further in and around the corner, past the

shelves of miscellaneous things, I saw a makeshift stage with piping and black drape fabric lining the back wall creating a make-shift stage with graffiti art on large corex boards lining either side of the performance area. A few microphone stands and XLR cords were out in the center of the floor, seemingly left there from a previous production or performance.

Dom accompanied us to this room and pointed out the mixer and two heavy duty pelican cases with Black Magic Cameras (the fanciest equipment in the room) explaining that this was a space where they have invited artists and bands in to perform for their Quilt Sessions – a series akin to NPR’s Tiny Desk. But before I could look too closely, Ben took me over to a large closet and showed me six rows of shelving housing numerous reel-to-reel tapes and additional Costco-sized tubs of cassette tapes and DVDs as well as other shelving with binders, notebooks, and boxes of photos and slides tucked away in odd spots around the storage room. It seemed to me that Northwest Folklife had media formats from all the technological shifts from the past 50 years: reel-to-reel tapes, VHS, cassettes tapes, CDs, Mini DVs, 8mm film, and others.

I spent hours in my early internship days trying to piece together what had been digitized, what was already transferred to the online database, and what the vision of the archive was before I entered the scene. I learned that many recordings were unlabeled, and I had seemingly no trail to pick up from previous staff about what had been surveyed and already digitized. In the early stages of my archival work, I did not have access to the SharePoint folders with old spreadsheets and grant proposals. With no central database and no known hard drive of digitized materials, these materials were rich but largely inaccessible.

At the time, the archive had no designated funding beyond the implementation of my internship. Staff turnover meant the institutional knowledge of how things had been organized

was scattered. There were many days that I toiled over the massive amount of stuff in the storage room, wondering to myself, how on earth can I make these recordings matter?

This chapter explores the emergence of the Northwest Folklife (NWFL) audio/visual media collection and my role within its revitalization. It offers a distinctive case study for ethnomusicology and archival studies because NWFL is neither an academic library nor a museum, but a folk festival organization with deep ties to the University of Washington and other cultural arts institutions across Seattle. This chapter argues that the distance between the Northwest Folklife recordings and the communities they document is not just a technical problem to be solved by digitization but a relational one, produced by decades of collection without community engagement in the process. This gap is addressable through a slow, iterative, context-specific archival practice, springing from Kim Christen's, Michelle Caswell's, and other scholars' approach to archival studies. In the following sections, I trace the varied goals of recording the Northwest Folklife Festival and its yearlong programming, from gathering recordings for compilation albums, or simply to gather without any larger goal in some cases, to the eventual stewarding and preservation of materials through viewing sessions with specific cultural arts communities in the Pacific Northwest.

I situate this discussion within a larger discourse of critical archival studies. As described by Michelle Caswell, critical archival studies is a:

sub-field of information studies that is concerned with the creation, administration, and use of records as 'persistent representations' and potential evidence of human activity

that travel across space and time, as well as the people, communities, and institutions that steward them (2021, 15).

The originating impetus to record and document the festival was an internal, employee-based vision much in the same way as it was for the Berkeley Folklife Festival and the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington, D.C., as described in Chapter 4. And yet, Northwest Folklife archive now seeks to reflect how individual memory intersects with institutional practice through our ongoing efforts to connect archival media to source communities in the greater Seattle area. This is something unique to Northwest Folklife, where people from outside of the organization contribute to the archive in critical ways including building crucial parts of a public-facing online database and contributing invaluable contextual information about recordings. To a certain extent, the participation of various community members in the growth of NWFL's collections shows how this organization falls in between community and institutional archives. A network of people and organizations attempting to preserve and make accessible visual and audio assets from the festival grew throughout the decades, starting with the festival employees in the 1980s and continuing with my own entrance into the archival project as a Cultural and Creative Workforce Development (CCWD) intern in 2024 and eventual staff archivist in 2025. I understand my work in the trajectory of NWFL's preservation efforts is to align the archive more towards shared stewardship that values the "affective and emotional impact of archival collecting" (Caswell 2021,18).

My work as archivist at Northwest Folklife became a kind of laboratory for enlivening a community-based archive. As I will soon show, the projects we instigated shows the limits to what a recording generated outside of the community of origin can do and what collaborations are possible. The vast material collections at NWFL do not culminate in a stable repository of

meaning but represent a collection marked by latent potential. The recordings are rich with cultural memory but constrained by digital infrastructure limitations, inconsistent stewardship, varied community interest, and deteriorating analog formats. Tony Seeger and Huib Schippers recognize the potential of collections such as Northwest Folklife's, writing that "archives have important roles to play in returning recordings to circulation as a resource for the originating communities and, as appropriate, for specialists and the general public" (2022, 8). On the other hand, he also notes the precarity of older mediums writing that "soon it will be impossible to return anything—or use any recording—that has not been transferred from its analog originals to a digital file format" (ibid). When considering what constitutes an archive, and the extent to which community collections at Northwest Folklife really preserve records for future generations, it is essential to consider the barriers that prevent the success of that vision.

It is true that the Northwest Folklife archive has the potential to enrich local arts communities, but there is also a lack of equipment, storage, and web development to support their accessibility and engagement goals. Even with a digital, streamable database, scholar Vanessa Jackson points out that the longevity of online records is never guaranteed, considering that "part of the most challenging issue facing online community projects is the lack of permanence of internet artifacts" (2020, 49). But, if there is little to no budget to maintain adequate physical storage, digitization of assets, and the processing and upkeep of records, it makes sense that when the goal of true, long-term preservation is unfeasible, custodial-based archiving evolves into online, streamable databases.

With one hand in the past and another in the present reaching towards the future, I sought to re-engage local cultural arts groups with archival records that feature generations of their community artists through grant proposals, generous community donations, and case-by-case

digitizing projects. We took recordings once made for documentation's sake and repositioned them as tools for connection and cultural sustainability. As an additional arm to our archiving efforts, we continued the impetus to record performances during the festival but also interviewed contemporary culture workers, artists, and leaders in the PNW. All of these efforts culminated in creating online streamable access to the Northwest Folklife archival collections, both new and old. It tested the limits of what a singular, named archivist position could produce and manage, as I will later discuss.

The roots of this project began long before my time as an intern and eventual employee. The drive to curate and preserve seemingly moved from one employee to the next, each taking into their own hands ideas about what an archive can and should be. While the importance of preservation was, at first, a low priority at NWFL more generally, archiving has now taken hold and flourished across the majority of staff at the organization, with direct support from both executive and artistic directors in addition to interest from programming and volunteer staff members. And yet, my role as archivist placed me in a unique position of power within the organization—I was making decisions about what to preserve, how to organize materials, and which community voices to prioritize in digitization efforts. This responsibility required reflection on how my cultural background, my community connections, and my academic training might influence these choices. Thus, as I will describe throughout this chapter, I sought, with varying levels of success, to balance institutional objectives with community needs by accessing community interest in the archive. This continual adjustment is part of my process of learning to arrive at Northwest Folklife, and is the methodology with which I frame this dissertation.

And though Northwest Folklife has always sought to be a community-oriented organization, and in many ways it is, the decisions around recording festival performances and the mere access to professional recording equipment, technical expertise, and storage facilities represents a form of institutional privilege that many community groups lack. As such, the person doing the recording—typically a festival volunteer or staff member rather than the performing artist—holds a lot of power in deciding who gets to be recorded and how. This inevitably shapes what aspects of the festival get captured and how they are framed for future listeners, as I will now describe.

Early Documentation and Album Productions

After extensive surveys of Northwest Folklife's physical collections, the organization's collections revealed a myriad of partnerships and projects that together produced its audio-visual holdings. The earliest recordings from the Northwest Folklife festival date to its very first years: a 10" reel-to-reel tape tagged "Jean Shepherd" from 1972 and another labeled "Fitzgeralds," with no further information available. According to Phil Andrus, a Seattle-based radio DJ and producer I interviewed for this project, the systematic collection of yearly recordings began in 1974 when Andrus started a volunteer position broadcasting one or two stages on KRAB radio. He recorded directly from the board onto 10" reel-to-reels from two stages: the outdoor KRAB Radio Stage and the indoor Playhouse stage. The equipment was provided by Phil Williams, a founding member of the organization and KRAB affiliate. Andrus believed Williams was likely the first person to conceive of recording the performances, though no documentation confirms this. Given Phil and Vivian Williams' own interests in field recording within the bluegrass and

old-time scenes, it is easy to understand why capturing performances at the festival would have felt natural.

What is less clear is what those recordings were originally intended to do. There is no documentation of any stated purpose for the early recordings, but they were eventually repurposed to create annual festival compilation albums sold throughout the year, the first of which appeared in 1977. Once the commercial potential of these albums became apparent, the impetus to record grew annually. And yet, in all of my interviews with prior staff members, there was little sense of urgency to steward or maintain recordings once an album was complete. The production process itself was a community effort of sorts: staff gathered for a multi-day retreat at Phil Williams' home on the Olympic Peninsula, combed through that year's recordings, selected performances to highlight, and refined the mix for release. Artists were contacted for consent to appear on the albums, though they were not compensated for any revenue the recordings generated, however marginal that income was.

These compilation efforts eventually grew into a formal label. Northwest Folklife Recordings was established to, as stated in the liner notes of the 1997 album *Didgeri Dudes with Stuart Dempster*, "document special performances at the annual Northwest Folklife Festival." The label's scope soon expanded to include recordings of regional and world music traditions under a Northwest Archive Series, as well as productions tied to the organization's annual cultural focus. The 2001 cultural focus on Korean American musical traditions, for example, yielded *Han Madang: Musical Traditions of Korea*, a fourteen-track album with bilingual liner notes now available on streaming platforms. The 2000 release *Norte y Sur, Un Solo Pueblo*, discussed in Chapter 4, similarly emerged from that year's cultural focus on Chicano and Mexicano traditions in Washington State. Other productions grew from partnerships with the

University of Washington, including *Say a Song: Joe Heaney in the Pacific Northwest* (1996), drawn from tape recordings in the UW Ethnomusicology Archives alongside recorded workshops and classes, and *Rafael Angel Aparicio y los Hermanos Aparicios* (1997), featuring two Venezuelan musicians who were UW visiting artists. These collaborations between NWFL and the university's ethnomusicology program produced some of the label's most contextually rich work, reflecting the same reciprocal relationship between the organizations that Chapter 4 traces across decades.

The most recent albums under the Northwest Folklife Recordings label were released between 2007 and 2013 as part of a series called *Roots and Branches*, spearheaded by then-artistic director Kelli Faryar. Inspired in part by the Oregon-based festival Pick-a-Thon's own performance highlight releases, the series sought to document a broad range of genres by selecting recordings from that year's festival that were both high fidelity and could "stand alone as a track" (personal communication, July 18, 2025). By 2009, Faryar raised the production standard further by bringing in outside recording engineers and partnering with the Smithsonian Institution for distribution. All volumes in the series are now available on streaming platforms and through the Northwest Folklife archive database. One detail worth noting: these productions were mastered at Sage Arts Studios, the same facility where *Carangolo* was recorded years later. Ed Littlefield, Jr., the studio's owner, has been a longtime supporter of Northwest Folklife and Pacific Northwest cultural arts more broadly. That the same studio anchors both the institutional archive's most polished output and a community-generated album produced as part of this dissertation is a small but telling reminder of how interconnected Seattle's cultural arts ecosystem actually is.

Federal and State Support for Documentary Projects

Since the 1980s, federal and state agencies in the U.S. increasingly provided monetary support for the recording of cultural performances in an effort to sustain traditions through documentation (Schippers 2022). The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) was and continues to be a major source of federal funding for the arts, with a budget that grew from \$5 million in 1965 to \$159 million in 1981 (Starr 1983, 43). The National Park Services' Historic Preservation Fund also supported surveys, documentation, and preservation projects during this time even as the politics of the Reagan administration strained the infrastructure available for cultural preservation support. However, even when these efforts were funded, the longevity and preservation of those recordings remain precarious because, "in most cases no funds or training were devoted to organizing, storing, and preserving the recordings or noting what happened that recordings could not capture" (Seeger 2022,10). And while Northwest Folklife began recording without the support of granting agencies, the impetus to create and collect similarly overshadowed the maintenance and care material preservation requires.

As I have attempted to show, the Northwest Folklife Festival recordings began as more of a documentation effort that evolved into a means to produce albums. While these compilations are a treasured artifact of prior festival sonic landscapes, their given disconnection to the cultural arts reveals the limits to what kind of listening practices emerge from it. They remain largely invisible and under-engaged as resources for the Pacific Northwest arts communities. As the number of recordings Northwest Folklife created increased every year, so too did concerns about practical preservation of older media formats. In the early years of the twenty-first century, Northwest Folklife staff negotiated well-meaning initiatives for preservation with the pressures of festival production each year, creating a cycle of securing initial funding for archival projects

followed by inadequate support for long-term preservation. Such a systemic issue in how cultural preservation work is funded and conceptualized generated a concerted effort by NWFL staff to care for the various media formats to ensure their availability for future use.

The Grammy Grants

The largest grant successes in preserving the Northwest Folklife Archive came from Grammy Recording Academy Archiving and Preservation Grants from 2003 to 2012. The first Grammy Foundation grant in 2003 supported a two-year project to locate, examine, and transfer at least 150 – 200 hours of master tapes from the collections into digital files. John Ross was a central figure in these preservation efforts, copying and digitizing upwards of 200 hours of master tapes. Ross had been associated with Northwest Folklife since 1974 both as a volunteer and a festival staff member with ample experience working on folk music programs for the National Public Radio (NPR) station, BBC, and other local stations in the PNW. He also produced several albums and field recordings of old-time musicians in the region for several labels, including Phil and Vivian William's Voyager Recordings. In addition, as a member of the Association of Recorded Sound Collections (ARSC) Technical Committee, Ross had experience in sound restoration, particularly for older formats such as open-reel and cassette recordings. He volunteered his expertise in many ways for Northwest Folklife, helping to produce live radio broadcasts and multi-media programs, edit LPs and compact discs of festival compilations (mentioned previously) in addition to performing as a musician himself.

His scope of work for this grant exceeded just that of a media transfer, though, by aiming to create a detailed survey of audio holdings from the entire NWFL archive. This survey produced a document that at one point presumably catalogued the entire NWFL collection up to that time. Unfortunately, this document is now unretrievable without access to data migration

technology. Furthermore, changes in staff and the death of John Ross derailed its progress. Ultimately, only a smaller portion (138 recordings) of the collections were copied in collaboration with Jack Straw Productions, a local non-profit partner who transferred and catalogued the recordings. According to the final report from this grant, the digital copies were stored on two hard drives, one located at the City of Seattle's Municipal Archive and the other at the Northwest Folklife office in Seattle Center. They also produced backup sets of audio CDs on archival-quality media. The office now only has one hard drive available that contains these recordings.

In 2012, Northwest Folklife received another Grammy Foundation grant to assist in the planning and prioritization of at-risk records for archival preservation and digitization. John Gibbs took the lead on the project and prepared a Collections Audio Assessment of the archives, wrote out actionable steps and methodology for safeguarding information as well as a detailed assessment using the Field Audio Collection Evaluation Tool (FACET) developed at Indiana University. In this evaluation, Gibbs urged for more preservation efforts writing that,

This collection is in serious trouble and is a prime candidate for preservation action. If the content of the collection is to survive with the highest quality possible, preservation action must be taken soon (2012).

Of particular need are the DAT recordings, which often have a chance of “dropouts” or momentary loss of data when converting the medium to a digital format” (ibid). Gibbs ends the assessment by urging Northwest Folklife to create a position of Project Archivist to create protocols for the collections and spearhead digitization/preservation efforts.

Following the 2012 assessment, there appears to have been little initiative around archival concerns until 2020, when NWFL launched the Living Legacies Project to support

community members in documenting oral histories and producing a podcast series. The pandemic accelerated this digital turn, with the organization hosting a fully virtual festival in 2020 and committing to hybrid accessibility in the years that followed. Since the Living Legacies Project, Northwest Folklife continued to record the festival and extend their initiatives into livestream broadcasts. Virtual programming has since been an important aspect to the NWFL Festival as health concerns, geographical distance, and other factors committed NWFL to implement hybrid accessibility. These initiatives were largely spearheaded by the Digital Development lead, Dominique, who also facilitated building a production space within the NWFL office to record performances and interviews on-site to be streamed online, once stay-at-home restrictions had been somewhat lifted. The way this recording project folded into the archiving duties shows how the urge to document has never left the institution but only transformed as technology advances. These transformations, while allowing for wider accessibility to the festival performances, still generate the same questions about who the archive was for, how recordings should circulate, and what kinds of relationships the archive should sustain.

In 2023, Northwest Folklife applied for a Heritage Project grant through 4Culture to build a free, streamable public database, envisioning it as a resource for diasporic communities and underrepresented groups across King County. That comprehensive vision has yet to be fully realized. By 2024, shortly before I began my work, the organization received a significant donation of digitized festival recordings from 1977 to 1997 from Roger Lippman, a volunteer and performer at the festival for nearly five decades. From this collection alongside recordings of current artists, the digital development manager and web developer built the beginning of Northwest Folklife's first publicly accessible online archive database.

Northwest Folklife Online Archive Database

I began the Archives and Digital Experience intern role at Northwest Folklife under the supervision of Dom and the first half of my internship prioritized the production of the Virtual Festival. For me, the festival tasks involved three main focus areas: livestream management, audio-visual production, and archival curation. I crafted “Listening Party” sessions from the NWFL archive in addition to procuring artist statements from featured musicians from those sessions to be aired live during the festival. In addition, I programmed artists to perform at the NWFL Quilt Session studio, a production space in the NWFL office in Seattle Center, and recorded many other interviews during the festival itself. While this work falls outside of the realm of what may be considered typical archive tasks, I did learn valuable skills in producing meaningful audio-visual content for artists and culture bearers. I will return to this point in Chapter 6.



Figure 6.1 - Screenshot of NWFL database, captured by the author

In my early archival work, though, I spent a great deal of time maintaining and expanding the newly developed online database and cataloging boxes and shelves of media. Staff turnover meant that institutional knowledge about how things had been organized was scattered. I spent hours trying to piece together what had been digitized, what was already transferred to the online database, and what the earlier vision of the archive had been before I arrived. Aside from wrestling with spreadsheets, I worked extensively with the Lippman collection, uploading recordings, writing descriptions, and preparing them for public access.

The database itself is built around a number of filterable categories. To make navigation more user-friendly, I implemented icon-based filters representing broad geographical regions. These regional icons, along with filters for genre, year, and instrumentation, were designed to help users search the archive more easily (as seen in figure 5.1). Yet organizing archival collections for accessibility proved to be more complicated than anticipated. While filtering by genre and region is helpful, I quickly learned how problematic it can be. These categories risk oversimplifying the rich hybridity and cultural flow that characterize the Pacific Northwest's musical traditions.

Take, for example, Mohammed Shaibu's 1997 performance at Northwest Folklife. Shaibu, a Ghanaian-born musician based in Shoreline, Washington, led the Seattle band Soyaya, which blended Ghanaian Highlife, Palmwine, and U.S. Rhythm and Blues. His music challenged conventional genre classifications—should it be filed under “African,” “World,” “Highlife,” or “Blues”? In the database, I ultimately tagged it under “Music of Africa” while adding specific descriptors such as Highlife, Palmwine, and Rhythm and Blues. This was a compromise between searchability and specificity, but one that left me unsettled.

Because of the limitations of the website infrastructure, Northwest Folklife used third-party vendors, such as Soundcloud for audio and Vimeo for video, to stream the recordings. This is much different from other archive and museum websites such as the Library of Congress or the Association for Cultural Equity (ACE) where the website hosts and uploads their files directly to the website database. Using third party vendors made for a clunky set up and workflow. As an intern, though, I followed the protocol that was set forth but soon learned about more hangups. The problem with the database as I became more familiar with it lies in its access-driven approach. While few would argue that documentation alone ensures cultural significance, institutional practices often imply that access and preservation are inherently empowering.

As I worked to expand and maintain that database, the limits of an access-driven approach became increasingly apparent. Michelle Caswell's critique of mainstream archives is instructive here: "archivists have long claimed that inclusion in the archive is a form of justice, without interrogating what inclusion actually means or who it benefits" (2021, 18). Even when recordings are made available digitally, their significance is not guaranteed. In a large, filterable but effectively unsearchable database like Northwest Folklife's, users face real challenges in finding what they are looking for. More fundamentally, just because recordings exist does not mean people relate to them or want to engage with them. The relevance of an archive depends not only on availability but on memory, relationship, and context. As I became more familiar with the collection, I kept returning to the same feeling: the archive's potential was unrealized not because it lacked content but because it lacked the context and invitations for engagement.

Importance of access and engagement

In searching for a framework that could account for these concerns, I turn to scholarship in archival studies that foregrounds ethics, relationality, and process. Kim Christen's concept of slow archiving offers a vocabulary for thinking through archival work not as a product but as an ongoing practice shaped by care. Slow archiving insists on a different temporal framework, one where slowness is understood in terms of relationality and positionality, privileging restorative and reparative work that is decolonial in its logic and practice (2019). Central to Christen's argument is a refusal of the notion that cultural tradition is fixed or unchanging. She emphasizes “the multiplicity and plurality of knowledge, storying, placedness, and relational events—without reducing practices or systems to binary logics [...] past or present, authority or victim” (2019, 99). Given that Northwest Folklife is an organization in constant evolution, as discussed in Chapter 4, accounting for and adapting to changing circumstances is key to this type of work.

At the same time, an ethical approach to slow archives foregrounds not just processes through which stewardship choices are negotiated, but also where “decolonial projects must make a radical shift away from preservation as the main reason for archival work” (Christen 2019, 100). I took this shift seriously in my archival work at Northwest Folklife and treated it as a guiding principle in successive grant proposals and project iterations. Rather than centering preservation as an end in itself, I sought to expand the scope of archival labor toward questions of engagement: how recordings might be returned to circulation, how artists might want to encounter their own recorded histories, and how archival work might create opportunities for dialogue rather than simply storage.

While Northwest Folklife's turn toward digital accessibility responds to real barriers of physical access, it also raises questions about whether online platforms can genuinely democratize archival engagement without transforming underlying power relations. Christen

cautions against an uncritical embrace of digital space as inherently democratizing. In her own work, the Mukurtu Content Management System gives Indigenous communities the opportunity to define and manage access protocols through Traditional Knowledge labels, enabling flexible and culturally specific rules governing circulation, visibility, and use. This approach stands in contrast to conventional archival systems that presume universal access is an unquestioned good. Reimagining archival practice through a slow archive methodology does not reject records or preservation outright, but rather seeks to orient them instead toward “fluid, ongoing, and often unpredictable temporal paths” (Christen 2019, 91). Within this framework, archival records are not static endpoints but invitations, where meaning emerges through renewed relationships, dialogue, and use over time.

Working towards a collaborative archival model: the grant writing stage

The ideas I described in the previous section directly informed my approach to the Northwest Folklife archive, and more specifically to the design and implementation of various grant proposals. The Northwest Folklife archive became a laboratory for me and the managing staff to attempt to transform a storage room of materials into a dynamic opportunity for people to engage with the cultural diversity of Seattle’s musical landscape over the last fifty years. This process was, at once, fast-paced with short turnaround deadlines but also slow and drawn out as we waited for responses from the grant agencies. Northwest Folklife applied to five grants in total beginning in the fall of 2024 and procured only one by the Summer of 2025. Because we had to wait on grant money to procure the equipment needed for digitizing, all the archival work before the success of the grant proposal focused more on tailoring our approach to a community-driven project rather than making progressive steps toward digitization.

To gauge artists' interest in collaborating with the NWFL archive, I first sent out a poll to hundreds of past artists to ask their opinions and if they'd want to contribute, serving as a preliminary needs and values assessment. I also directly contacted artists specifically documented in the collection. Some were very interested in revisiting past recordings; others declined, seemingly not interested or not finding the recordings to be relevant. This uneven response was instructive showing that archives matter differently to different people, and not everyone wants or needs to participate. It reminded me to temper the expectations I may have for archives to serve immediate and meaningful ends.

I put my energy towards conceptualizing actionable steps to engage community members with NWFL records as part of a larger effort to digitize materials and grow our online presence. Since much of the sound recordings available at NWFL had little information on artists, genres, styles, etc., I wanted to build an iterative, community-centered process of archival stewardship that builds contextual awareness. I realized that as I began to have more regular meetings with the artistic and executive directors of NWFL that they both felt strongly about the significance of archival preservation and how the collections can be a tool for empowerment and visibility. This shared belief led to a collaborative praxis, creating knowledge through coming together and thinking through the potential of the archive. Our aim was not necessarily to build an archive that fit neatly within the protocols of long-term preservation set forth by museums and libraries across the country, but to shift its center of gravity from an institutional holding in a storage room and towards a community-defined usefulness.

Much of the direction and vision for the project was also inspired by several archivists and ethnomusicologists whom I either knew or had an awareness of their work through my graduate seminars and doctoral research. Scholar and archivist Joe Kinzer's definition of

repatriation as “enabling access to and/or engagement with recorded media by stakeholder communities, or anyone who feels the sounds are part of their cultural heritage” (2013, 2) was influential in my understanding of archival work. Michelle Caswell is another scholar-archivist whose work with the South Asian American Digital Archive (SAADA) anchored me to the urgency of meeting the evolving needs of artists and communities. John Vallier, in his article “Preserving the Past, Activating the Future: Collaborative Archiving in Ethnomusicology” explores recent archival initiatives involving repatriation and community collaboration, both from his colleagues and his own research. Vallier discusses the challenges and successes of current archival projects, including Archiving Filipino American Music in Los Angeles (AFAMILA), a multi-sited documentation of LA Filipino American musical events over the course of the year and added the recordings to the Archive with culminating events and festivals at the end, and GALA, a project that documented multiple Gospel performances at Greater New Bethel Baptist Church in Inglewood, CA which culminated in events and a concluding festival. Such collaborative initiatives can, according to Vallier, empower community partners to “shape the ways in which they are represented in the archives” and ensure that those “representations are preserved and accessible for future generations” (316).

I thus leaned heavily on my understanding of other archival projects in applied ethnomusicology and my knowledge of colonial archives at the university more broadly to inform the shape of the NWFL archive projects. Overarchingly, the takeaway from my training at the University of Washington has been that a participatory approach matters, especially for community archives. I was wary of the extractive nature of archives and, from the outset, worked very hard to position artists and community members in decision making positions for the NWFL archive project.

Department of Neighborhoods Heritage and Preservation Project

By way of a number of different grant proposals as previously mentioned, NWFL eventually found success through Seattle's Department of Neighborhoods Matching Fund grant to support a preservation project tailored for community stewardship. Beginning in the fall of 2025, the managing directors and I drew together a project aimed to digitize miniDV, VCR, and Hi8 recordings of performances spanning the 1980s to 2000s and host small, informal public viewing events where artists and community members could reconnect with their histories and contribute missing information to enrich NWFL archival metadata. The public viewing events expanded to include photo slides and other scannable documents. By bringing archival recordings to the communities they document, the goal was to enhance public access to NWFL's archives. The success of this grant hinged not just on funding, but on building an infrastructure that could sustain the work. Two developments from this grant proved crucial: the addition of Juan, an archive intern, and the launch of volunteer digitization sessions that impacted how I understood both the archive's needs and my own limitations.

The Department of Neighborhoods (DON) Grant expanded in scope and collaboration and, inevitably, changed workflow throughout its early months. With the addition of Juan as archive intern, I was able to more efficiently work through the NWFL archival materials. The additional team member became an invaluable part of the entire archive project. Being able to delegate tasks freed me to take care of administrative responsibilities, spreadsheets, grant reporting, and artist outreach. Juan is also a UW student, an undergraduate in ethnomusicology. In some ways, I felt I was extending the pathway from ethnomusicology into public facing work that Northwest Folklife has facilitated for decades. His presence shifted the project from a solitary endeavor into a collaborative process in which we could problem solve, share

responsibilities, and think through ethical dilemmas together. The work felt less isolating and more generative with another person invested in its success.

Volunteer Digitization Sessions: Learning Through Collective Practice

Much of the archival cataloging and preservation processes involved learning alongside people and creating the space to make that happen. During the first volunteer digitization day, Juan and I created six stations for different media formats: miniDV tapes, VHS tapes, reel-to-reel 7mm tape, cassette tapes, photoslides, and various paper documents to scan. At each station we connected a computer to a hard drive with an Excel spreadsheet open to track the digitization process. With advice from John Vallier and Alan Burdette, archivists I consulted throughout this project, we created unique identifiers for each archival item we digitized. We did this by embedding a format guide into each spreadsheet that tracked the date, event, type of media, and numerical identifier. We correlated this item ID to the name of the file itself, attempting to build a system that could scale as the collection grew.

Some volunteers had experience with archiving; others did not. Two participants found the event through the Washington Library Association (WLA) and were either recent graduates or currently enrolled in graduate school for library studies. Others came from the broader NWFL community—one was a former executive director, another an experienced researcher and documentarian in blues music. Within this broad spectrum of knowledge and technical skill, I had planned a session with a specific goal: reformat analog media into digital assets. Along the way, participants provided feedback that importantly improved the systems I had put in place.

The volunteers pointed out issues with consistent labeling and workflow efficiency. I gathered everyone near the end of the first session for a debrief conversation about successes and

challenges. One person shared that while it was valuable to work hands-on with physical media in ways they hadn't done before, they would have enjoyed rotating between stations rather than staying at one desk working with a single media type. They also noted that having headphones at each station would help when monitoring audio levels throughout the process. The volunteer managing photoslide reformatting suggested that a preliminary review for duplicates or blurry photographs would streamline the work. Almost unanimously, people mentioned that small laptop screens made data entry into spreadsheets more difficult and that labeling files was the most time-consuming part of the work. We spoke briefly about the potential benefits and drawbacks of using AI to assist with labeling and monitoring digitization processes.

What struck me most about this session was how it revealed the limits of my own expertise while simultaneously showing how collective knowledge could address those gaps. I had arrived at NWFL positioned as the archivist, a title that suggested specialized training I did not fully possess. The volunteer session reframed archival work as inherently collaborative, not just in the sense of community participation, but in the practical reality that other people's guidance helped in successful preservation efforts. It became clear that curating the space and setting intentions for collaborative work in volunteer sessions such as this one mattered as much as collaborating with artists themselves. The volunteer sessions taught me to be the facilitator who created conditions for collective knowledge production. Reading this experience through the methodological lens of learning to arrive, protocols of engagement with digitizing and taking care of recorded media revealed itself through discussions such as the one I mentioned in this section.

Collaborative Stewardship and Metadata Enrichment

Beyond the volunteer digitization sessions, I began reaching out to artists documented in the collection, gauging whether they would be interested in helping add context and metadata to the often vague titles and artist listings on physical records. To my surprise, many were excited to revisit these materials and offer insights through one-on-one viewing sessions. Others were not interested at all. This uneven response revealed something important: archives matter differently to different people, and not everyone finds value in institutional preservation efforts or wants to volunteer time for such projects. With those who were interested, I came to the table with clear intentions: view materials, talk through how to describe and curate the recordings, compensate them for their time, and explore strategies to surface these materials online and circulate them within the broader communities. By establishing mutual agreements with each artist about the work to be done, there was no single assumed course of action but an orientation toward dialogic processes in line with the methodology of learning to arrive, which grounds my approach in this dissertation.

While we are still in the early stages of this work, some conversations have already challenged my assumptions about what reconnecting to archival materials should do. When working with Sinae, a Korean musician and dancer to contextualize her 2001 performance, for example, I felt compelled to ask ethnographic questions about what the music meant to her and how she identified with it. She focused instead on technical aspects of the music, dance, and instruments—details about choreography, costume significance, and the specific regional style she was performing. I realized that my role was facilitating *her* vision for how the performance should be documented and understood, not imposing my own ethnographic framework about what content should be prioritized. Moreover, I recognized that my professional position at a nonprofit institution created distance between me and the artists with whom I was working.

Unlike the year of relationship-building that preceded the *Carangolo* recording project, as discussed in Chapter 3, here I was arriving as an institutional representative with limited time to establish trust.

Sinae's redirection was not a deflection of my questions but a correction of my frame. She was interested in making sure the performance was understood on its own technical and aesthetic terms. What she produced, in our side-by-side video, was not supplementary material for the archive but a new record in its own right, one in which she and her mother hold interpretive authority over the original documentation. This is what Caswell means when she argues that records are reactivated and recontextualized with each engagement, creating something new in the process. The recording of Sinae's 2001 performance did not change, but what it could do changed significantly once she could contextualize it in her own terms.

Similarly, my work with two long-time members of the polka community revealed that the Northwest Folklife collection, to them, meant the potential for more visibility. “Nobody takes polka seriously,” said Toby, one of the musicians during an interview, “but giving these recordings context helps bring to light the history and development of polka as a dynamic, multi-ethnic genre” (personal communication, January 6th, 2026). For him and others, preserving materials of the Seattle based accordion players from the 1950s to 1970s were important as these musicians were rarely recorded. Of Toby’s own performances in the NWFL collection from the 1990s, he noted that he still plays many of the songs on the recorded performances but with subtle differences in his musical articulation and melodic phrasing. Again, this reflection and the things that he focused on had much to do with the instruments, stylistic differences between songs, and the importance of bringing more respect to the genre.

With both the Polka and Korean musicians, the discussion focused on the sonic and historical aspects of the music and dance at hand but the online presentation differed depending on individual preferences. For Sinae, we recorded a live interview with her and her mother (the founder of the Korean Cultural Center that Sinae now directs) where they watched in real time a single performance and they provided feedback in their own words. We then edited the video to show side-by-side footage of the interview and the recorded media and placed that online with a brief written blog explaining the process and sharing more resources for viewers to learn more about their dance studio and watch other Korean performances from the NWFL archive. The Polka musicians, on the other hand, opted to do a live talk-back event, facilitated by myself, where they spoke to the emergence of Polka in the Pacific Northwest and performed a few pieces on the accordion. This type of engagement expanded what could be learned from archived materials, in such a way that Diana Taylor would recognize: that the knowledge held in the performance of repertoire exceeds what the archive preserves. In addition to this event, Toby also provided me with a write-up of information about all the polka materials from the archive (artist names, genres, song titles, translations) to include as a blog-form post on the online database.

Working with a member of the Alaska Native community revealed a different approach to the process, where there is careful consideration about personal impact of sharing the recordings and gathering insights from elders in the community. The conversations so far shed light on how the history of displacement contributed to the presence of Alaska Native performers in the Pacific Northwest and, more specifically, at the Northwest Folklife festivals in the late 1980s to early 2000s. While we are still planning a viewing session with a larger group from the Alaska Native community, we have also discussed the importance of incorporating the Haida and

Tsimshian language in our curation of these materials. Important, too, is the desire to include contemporary indigenous performance in tandem with the archived recordings in order to show the vitality and music innovation from these communities.

Before these recordings can do any useful work for the communities they document, there should be an understanding what consent looks like in this context, whose authority governs decisions about circulation, how Haida and Tsimshian language should be incorporated into the curation, and how to present these materials in a way that foregrounds the vitality of living tradition rather than fixing these communities in a historical moment. Christen's archiving framework is most clarifying here, because it insists that archival work is a practice in slowing down. What has emerged for us is a growing relationship and an evolving understanding of what stewardship can be. That ongoing, unfinished quality is itself part of the argument: institution-generated recordings of, in this case, Indigenous communities require not just archival care but a sustained attention to the conditions under which they were made and how they are now being used.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I described and analyzed the Northwest Folklife festival and the emergence of its archive through a critical archival lens. Despite the varied utility of the festival recordings and album productions, there are numerous possibilities for historical research based on these collections. For scholars, archivists, artists, and community members alike, there is a wealth of regional history that has the potential to offer valuable resources that track the transformation and representation of musical and cultural heritage through the region. And yet, the diversity of recorded material over the last fifty years highlights both the strengths and

challenges of Northwest Folklife's community archival project. The more comprehensive an archive attempts to be, the more difficult it becomes to remain connected to any one community's specific needs. Northwest Folklife initiated many projects to attempt to preserve and organize these collections and yet there remains question mark around its continued relevance within cultural arts communities, pointed towards the disconnect between recordings and community interests. In this way, a recording's relationship with people fundamentally impacts what those recordings can do and its usefulness within the life of a cultural tradition.

Digital and online platforms are important acts of collection and display in which heritage institutions such as Northwest Folklife are now participating. I have advanced a more organized and community-informed approach to re-designing the online database which is now equipped with readable labels, sharable links, and long-form educational content. Through the Department of Neighborhoods Matching Fund project, we continue to invite various community groups into the fold of archival stewardship through collaborative meta-data expansion and digitization skill sharing workshops. Without a doubt, the team at Northwest Folklife recognizes the potential impact of community-centered projects that take seriously the importance of relationships, collective decision making, and how they enable people to connect, transmit memory, and build relationships. And yet, the Northwest Folklife archive generated materials already at a distance from the communities it documents. The work, as I have shown, involves curating opportunities to re-engage with recordings alongside the continuous labor of preserving, cataloguing, and presenting the materials for a general audience.

The Northwest Folklife archive remains a work in progress. Christen's slow archiving framework is useful precisely because it refuses the fantasy of completion. What the archive can offer depends entirely on the relationships built around it. Building those relationships, as

evidenced in this chapter, is as much of the work as the preservation and digitizing processes.

Chapter 6 returns to that work and asks what it means for the field more broadly.

Chapter 6: Postlude

“Archives do not sustain traditions. People sustain traditions. Sometimes they use archival recordings.” (Seeger 2022,17)

Throughout this dissertation, I have written about a network of culture workers and arts practitioners in Seattle revealed through my work at Northwest Folklife, tenure as a graduate student at the University of Washington, participation at the Union Cultural Center, and my experiences as a musician. These networks exceed singular encounters but remain part of a larger history of culture and art in the Pacific Northwest through festivals, performances, recording projects, workshops, university classes, and informal conversations. And yet, the extent to which practitioners engage with recorded sound and the role of the ethnomusicologist in those engagements vary across the case studies explored in the prior chapters.

In Chapter 2, I described the listening practices around recordings of capoeira music, whether taken as field recordings by scholars or through studio albums produced by Mestres, their students, and ethnomusicologists. Studio recorded sound in this context served to forge an Afrocentric counter-memory to larger narratives about Capoeira Angola, giving agency to Mestres and keeping the tradition’s ancestrality alive for practitioners training far from Brazil. These recordings are continually activated and stitched into the ongoing practice of Capoeira Angola, where students learn to arrive as *capoeiristas* through deep listening. Chapter 3 extended this understanding through an ethnographic analysis of producing *Carangolo* in partnership with Sage Arts Studios. I sought to show why this album mattered within an inherently aural/oral tradition, arguing that the recording project generated new knowledge through praxis, enacting capoeira’s philosophy of flexibility and adaptability outside of the *roda*. *Carangolo* now lives as

a testament to Mestre Silvinho's work in Seattle and the continuing presence of capoeira in the Pacific Northwest, circulated and activated in classes, online, and during workshops as a pedagogical tool.

Chapter 4 pivoted to the history of Northwest Folklife as part of the lineage of cultural heritage festivals occurring across the nation in the mid-twentieth century. In outlining this history, I highlighted the work of local ethnomusicologists at Northwest Folklife in reshaping the spatial and sonic environment of the festival through decades of negotiating questions of representation, community engagement, and institutional responsibility. Chapter 5 follows from these insights into my own auto-ethnographic account of reconnecting communities to the archival collection at Northwest Folklife and building an online, streamable database. Together, these two chapters show the limitations of recorded sound when they are not already woven into the cultural practices themselves. The work of the ethnomusicologist, then, pivots to partnering with communities to evaluate potential openings and opportunities to spark re-engagement.

The two case studies I explored in this dissertation required fundamentally different approaches to methodology, and those differences turned out to be the most instructive thing about the research. Although both projects required me to re-orient from graduate scholar in training to public ethnomusicologist in the field, the most important transformation was learning how my positionality shaped my role within a group and the terms of engagement that were available to me, as I will now describe.

Learning to Arrive in Capoeira Angola

At the Union Cultural Center with FICA Seattle, I learned protocol for engagement in a community orbiting around the practice of a single cultural art. By learning to play capoeira, I

learned to internalize the movements, play the berimbau, sing in Portuguese, and understand the lineage of teachers who brought capoeira to Seattle. I ultimately became a part of the community while also respecting the choices and decisions made by senior students and Mestres during the making of Carnagolo.

As I grow into my life as a *capoeirista*, these protocols instill in me a system of values that inform not only how I might enter the space of the *roda* but also how I arrive in other social spaces. Through the *roda*, we shine a light of the importance of being in community: without our comrades, there can be no *roda*. There is a constant nod towards the ancestors in the lineage of Capoeira Angola who carried forward the cultural art, through persecution and in the face of violent oppression. Without the people who risked their lives to keep capoeira alive, we would not be able to practice it today. In this way, I have learned the importance of knowing and respecting the names and stories of freedom fighters from capoeira's past.

And I've also observed the nature of improvisation and its many ties to capoeira. As a person with a history in jazz performance, I understood improvisation from a musical perspective — as a language of presence, a mode of conversation, a practice of listening, and an ever-emerging expression of creation. But how has capoeira taught me how to arrive with a more expansive idea of improvisation? Though I am a new student, with only two years of training, I have developed a growing ability to improvise movements in real time and in relation to others. I have learned to expect the unexpected and find generative responses even in the toughest of situations.

Some of the more experienced *capoeiristas* I've played in the *roda* show me almost at every turn that they could outsmart me, kick me in the face, put me in a corner, and anticipate, seemingly, my every move. But they don't ever hurt me, they merely show me that they could.

Through my own trial and error, I see how this is a type of mastery of the body where an attack is so controlled that the momentum of the movement stops short of actually making contact with the other person. In this way of acting and playing, I see a deep type of care embedded in the practice and philosophy of capoeira. My mestre and peers teach me about the danger I could face but, at the same time, ensure my safety so I can build muscles of preparedness; learn to ready myself emotionally, cognitively, and physically for any situations that may come up. The point is not to harm each other but to challenge each other to find new options for responding. All of this deeply informs how I arrive in community and how I extend my own intentions of care, negotiation, and respect to my friends, my family, and my colleagues. Through these values I also am reminded that my task as an ethnomusicologist is not to capture or extract but to listen, respond, improvise, and co-create.

Learning to Arrive at Northwest Folklife

I began working at Northwest Folklife about five months after I started to train capoeira. I was hired as an archivist, a professional role that positioned me as a leader tasked with making choices about the media collections. In this sense, I could not rely on embodied practices of those around me to teach me protocols of engagement. At Northwest Folklife, I sought to make the archival project a collective effort with many community stakeholders. And I soon learned that I depended on others to sustain its momentum, from the intern Juan to the community members with which I conversed. Founded in the spirit of the 1960s folk revival, fueled by volunteers and local arts audiences, Northwest Folklife has always relied on community support alongside institutional partners and the archives proved to be no different.

In approaching my work at Northwest Folklife, however, I have had to reckon with how much my graduate training in repatriation and decolonial archival practice shaped, and at times distorted, what I thought the work required. Northwest Folklife's turn toward digital accessibility responds to real barriers of physical access, it also raises questions about whether online platforms can genuinely democratize archival engagement without transforming underlying power relations. Christian cautions against an uncritical embrace of digital space as inherently democratizing or reparative. In her own work, the Mukurtu Content Management System (CMS), a platform designed as a “tool for community access to collections” (2019, 89), gives Indigenous communities the opportunity to define and manage access protocols through Traditional Knowledge (TK) labels, enabling flexible and culturally specific rules governing circulation, visibility, and use. This approach stands in contrast to conventional archival systems that presume universal access as an unquestioned good.

However, the frameworks I brought to NWFL were developed primarily in contexts of extractive ethnomusicological collection: recordings taken from communities and deposited in institutional archives, often far from their places of origin. Northwest Folklife is a different kind of problem. The communities whose traditions are documented in the archive largely still live here, in Seattle and the broader Pacific Northwest. The distance is not geographic but relational, and closing it requires a different orientation than repatriation in its conventional sense. What has proven more useful is Jocelyn Mory's reframing of repatriation as reclaiming, a shift that centers the agency of culture bearers rather than the assumed generosity of the institution returning materials. Tony Seeger offers a complementary perspective, arguing that recordings are not just commodities but parts of social networks, and that they can be one of the ways such networks are created and maintained (2002, 6). This is the possibility I have tried to work toward at NWFL

where I am not simply making recordings accessible online, but resourcing them to enliven existing community connections across generations and geographies. The sustained contact with and between culture bearers that archival engagement makes possible is a clear benchmark of success with which to measure.

The Role of the University

In 1986, Tony Seeger asked: "Who are we ethnomusicologists serving with our research? If our recordings are 'raw material' and our journals and books are our finished products, are we not reproducing a colonial pattern in our academic work?" (267). Through my work with the UCC and Northwest Folklife, I sought to pivot away from thinking about recordings and album production as merely the ingredients for my own research. I aimed instead to locate the ingredients of good scholarship in the collective process itself, in learning to be with and beside one another, thinking about what is held in musical recordings.

And yet, both case studies already bore well-trodden pathways between the university and their respective organizations before I arrived. Northwest Folklife had years of cross-pollination with the UW Ethnomusicology Program, serving as a funnel for graduate students to step from academia into public sector roles through programming, production, events coordination, and management at one of the largest and most long-standing cultural heritage festivals in the nation. The Union Cultural Center, on the other hand, has offered students and professors alike entry into a space held and protected by diasporic communities. Through the Visiting Artist Program, students like me encountered thriving local cultural communities including capoeira, Bomba, Son Jarocho, and many others.

However, I keep in mind Martha Gonzales' cautionary statement during a debrief after the SPAN conference in October 2024: while it is true that the university can provide resources for the community, it is important to resist the gravitational pull of capture and exploitation, and to work against the university's disciplining of knowledge. I am indebted to the UW Ethnomusicology Program for the connections it made possible. But the success of these projects came largely from resources built and skills learned outside the academy. It was out of personal relationships with musicians and engineers in Seattle that we recorded *Carangolo* at little expense. It was through Mestre Silvinho and the entire capoeira community's dedication of time, energy, and expertise that made the album what it is. It was through my own skill-building outside of the university that taught me how to design album covers, distribute digitally, and produce audio and video for performances and interviews.

And yet I am entrenched in a way of knowing that has also taught me to regard academic publications, conferences, and presentations as the primary way to legitimize research and the production of knowledge. This value system draws from a long and problematic line of colonial logic that undermines the importance of community participation and on-the-ground relationships. My work exists within a moment of reckoning with this, where many scholars now advocate for community-based participatory research and the “co-creation of knowledge to build and enhance communities' capacity to advocate for their own wellbeing” (Mahoney et al, as cited in Caswell et al, 2021, 6). What the university offered, most essentially, was a network of people who believed in me and gave me their time. I remain implicated in the very systems I critique. This dissertation is housed in an institutional archive even as it questions archival authority. It contributes to academic discourse even as it insists that knowledge is produced elsewhere as well. These contradictions are not accidental. They reflect the conditions under which

contemporary ethnomusicology is practiced and the uneven terrain on which cultural sustainability work unfolds.

Beverly Diamond wrote more than a decade ago that ethnomusicology students nearing the end of graduate study need to prepare broadly for a wide range of potential jobs, noting that this conversation was "more often on the fringes of consciousness, not at the center of collegial conversations or university fact gathering" (2014). A decade later, with fewer academic positions and more qualified PhDs, this gap is more pressing. My experience offers a set of practices, relationships, and lessons that might inform how graduate training evolves. The skills this work required, grant writing, database management, album production, community facilitation, audiovisual media stewardship, are not supplementary and deserve a more central place in how the field prepares its students.

The university made this work possible by providing openings. It did not teach me how to produce an album, design an archive, hold space in community, or prepare a room energetically for collective work. Those skills were learned elsewhere: through music-making, organizing, listening, failing, and being corrected by people who had no obligation to teach me. That is its own kind of knowledge, and it belongs in the record too.

What Recordings Do

Carangolo was not an isolated project but the culmination of years of community network-building in Seattle, expanding the reach of Capoeira Angola throughout the Pacific Northwest. More than twenty-five people came together for it, and more still for the album release, a testament to the conviviality the project generated. The resonances of this project are still felt in classes, vinyl pressings, and digital streams.

The Northwest Folklife recordings document the same Pacific Northwest region, the same type of cultural vitality, but from the outside looking in. They are housed in the Northwest Folklife office and online, requiring sustained work to activate them within cultural arts communities and a belief that, as Tony Seeger writes “recordings are not just sounds; they are sounds to which people attach individual significance stemming from personal and social context” (2004, 102). My work with the stewardship sessions confirmed this firsthand. Each encounter required accompanying people through their engagement with recordings, rather than assuming what that engagement should look like.

This dissertation argues for ethnomusicology to develop the capacity to move between student, scholar, producer, facilitator, and archivist without collapsing them into a single stance. The lessons of *Carangolo* and the NWFL archive together are that ethnomusicologists must develop adaptive capacity to shift between deep immersion and professional collaboration, between student and facilitator, between participating in a cultural art and sustaining infrastructure that supports those cultural arts. Across both projects, recordings emerged not as endpoints but as relational objects, points of gathering that drew people into conversation, memory, and responsibility. *Carangolo* continues to circulate because it continues to be played in classes, shared with students, and invoked as part of a lineage still unfolding. The work with Northwest Folklife archive continues and its value is contingent on ongoing acts of reconnection, re-listening, and negotiation with the communities whose histories it holds, alongside the continuous labor of media preservation. In both cases, sound recordings mattered not because they captured culture, but because people chose to engage.

To learn to arrive, then, is to remain in dialogue with the people that make the work possible. The most meaningful outcomes of this research are not fully contained in these pages.

They live in capoeira classes, in archive sessions still being planned, and in conversations that continue well beyond this dissertation's end. As Tony Seeger writes, “Archives do not sustain traditions. People sustain traditions. Sometimes they use archival recordings” (2022, 17). This dissertation is one moment in that ongoing work.

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