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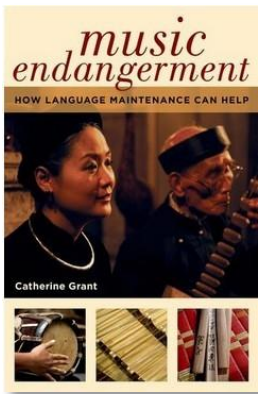
Grant, Catherine. Music Endangerment: How Language Maintenance Can Help. New York: Oxford University Press, 2014. 224pp. ISBN 978-0-19-935218-0.

While the English language and Western forms of music continue to spread throughout the world, many of the world's thousands of ethnolinguistic groups are experiencing a rapid decline in their heritage forms of music and language communication. I wholeheartedly recommend Catherine Grant's book, *Music Endangerment*, for addressing such a burning issue. Until recently few scholarly writings applied decades of language endangerment research and practice to music endangerment. In contrast, people from many indigenous language groups whose languages and musics are weakening agonize about the loss of both, often with a sense of discouragement, helplessness, and hopelessness.

Music Endangerment, along with recent writings by Neil R. Coulter (2007, 2011) and Robin Harris (2012), is a good start in applying language revitalization strategies to music, and prioritizing the often-unheard voices of community stakeholders. Grant's central question is: "How can approaches relating to the maintenance of endangered languages inform ways to support endangered music genres?" (6). Coulter's research in Papua New Guinea demonstrated the importance of evaluating individual genres within a language community's system(s) of music as he developed a graded evaluation scale for music endangerment (2007, 2011). Grant furthers the discussion by also describing an evaluation tool that stresses individual music genres rather than viewing music as a homogeneous phenomenon within a language community.

In his Foreword, ethnomusicologist Anthony Seeger endorses the book as "a model for applied ethnomusicology" (ix). I agree that it is one important type of model for applied ethnomusicology. The book fits its stated aim, "to open (or perhaps reopen) the conversation on endangered musics, and ultimately to

benefit those communities whose musical expressions are endangered against their will" (xii). Many groups that are losing their musics have not deliberately chosen to give it up, but rather have been subject to rapid social changes that have left little room for reflection about the effects such losses may have for their communities. The conversation continued by *Music Endangerment* should not be distracted from the aim of benefiting those communities. Music endangerment is complex, with many varieties of music endangerment around the world; Grant attempts to address all of them.

Overview

I will highlight a few points from each chapter. Because applied ethnomusicology is still an emerging field, Grant's introduction addresses some ethical considerations that have arisen in the field of language revitalization. Sociolinguists' concerns about sustaining endangered languages have included efforts interfering with "natural evolutionary processes of the rise and decay of cultures; [those efforts that] emphasize ideologies of purism, disallowing change in tradition . . . driven by neocolonial and authoritarian outsider involvement; and not least, time and time again they have been ineffective or have brought unanticipated or unwanted consequences" (13; also addressed in chapter 3, 82–83). Similar ethical considerations have possibly contributed to ethnomusicologists avoiding attempts to help communities revitalize or sustain their music genres. Grant counters with some possible strategies that could address those concerns, such as building the capacity of the community and alerting communities to the possibilities for revitalization. I would emphasize the importance of engaging in reflective dialogue with members of the community as an approach for building capacity of the community. I have found that to be a significant help while addressing the very legitimate concerns of unequal power relations and unwanted or unhelpful interference. Grant also mentions the important role of improving the understanding and awareness of outsiders in relation to revitalization (13). Grant adds that for language and music sustainability "[t]he attention of outsiders may act as a mechanism that aids musical vitality and viability—for example when it stimulates a community to recognize the decline, or the inherent value, of a genre and thus take steps to strengthen it" (12–13). I concur with Grant's subsequent disclaimer, that she tries to avoid value judgments and that it is up to the specific communities what, if any, action they take to sustain their music (14).

Chapter 1 introduces theoretical foundations related to culture change and music, including efforts to preserve it through documentation. Grant expands on what could be proper efforts, such as recognition, celebration, transmission, dissemination, and policy and enterprise development. She contends that there needs to be more coordination between key players in supporting endangered music genres at all levels, from local communities to international organizations like UNESCO. My experience with many indigenous groups

throughout Asia makes me skeptical of the possibility of any standardized approach to supporting and sustaining music genres, and yet Grant states that such approaches are a necessity.

In chapter 2 Grant compares and contrasts music and language as related to endangerment and revitalization. Using a framework of five domains, she describes synergies and disconnects, rating each domain by the level of synergy between language and music. This will lead to appropriate application of language maintenance models to music, discussed in the next chapter.

Based on existing language maintenance models, in chapter 3 Grant focuses on developing methods for identifying and assessing music endangerment and for advocating music sustainability, maintenance, and revitalization strategies. She offers six conditions that apply specifically to the maintenance of music genres. I consider the first condition, "The Support of the Community as a Whole," one of the most important issues of the book. While brief, it both identifies the most important condition and addresses one of the most important strategies. I resonated with the experience Grant shares of Michael Walsh as an outsider interacting with communities on language revitalization. Similarly, I have seen how community members often quickly change from hopelessness to enthusiasm when made aware of possibilities for revitalization of their music. An essential part of awareness is that revitalization can only happen with the complete ownership of the process by the community itself—or at least by key members of the community, with the support of the rest of the community.

The next section, "The Ideological Willingness of the Community to Explore New Pathways for the Genre," is also key, focusing on adaptability and flexibility. My experience has confirmed a basic community development principle: no new idea will transfer to reality in its original form, but rather it needs the freedom to be transformed within the community. The same principle applies to communities transforming old values, ideas, and traditions. Grant's other conditions include: recognition in the wider social context of the value of musical/cultural expression; adequate resources for learning, teaching, rehearsing, and performing; the means for the community to access and utilize electronic technology; and a knowledge base and access to documentation on the genre.

Grant hints at holistic strategies when she says that music alone should not define the level of success. Strategic aims and outcomes also need to consider wider social, political, and economic factors, both as causes and unexpected results. One purpose of the book is to catalyze greater coordination and more efficient networks addressing the problem of endangered music genres. Grant suggests several ideas of how this might

work for music, based on what has been done in language revitalization.

After establishing her central aim of learning from language maintenance, Grant continues in chapter 4 by proposing a model to aid a more thorough and standardized assessment music genre endangerment for the purpose of aiding music maintenance and sustainability. Based on a framework developed by a group of experts on endangered languages with UNESCO, Grant develops a Music Vitality and Endangerment Framework (MVEF). For music she expands UNESCO's 9 factors of language to 12 factors, each with its own unique means of grading the degree of endangerment. The 12 factors of the MVEF are:

1. Intergenerational transmission
2. Change in the number of proficient musicians
3. Change in the number of people engaged with the genre
4. Change in the music and music practices
5. Change in performance contexts and functions
6. Response to mass media and the music industry
7. Infrastructure and resources for music practices
8. Knowledge and skills for music practices
9. Governmental and institutional policies affecting music practices
10. Community members' attitudes toward the genre
11. Relevant outsiders' attitudes toward the genre
12. Amount and quality of documentation

Chapter 5 describes an application of the MVEF to a music genre—*ca trù*, from North Vietnam—so the reader can see how one could assess each factor in a real situation of endangered music. In chapter 6 Grant summarizes all and proposes her vision of the next practical steps to be taken for the revitalization of endangered languages, including suggestions for future research.

Grant gathers a great amount of information, synthesizes it clearly, and then expresses it comprehensively and yet succinctly. The writing is geared toward academics but is lucid and straightforward, free of jargon. There is so much information included here that I can recommend this book as a textbook and a general reference. Grant includes an extensive bibliography and maintains a companion website which includes text files, music and video examples, and a list of links to other online resources.

Cautions and concerns

From 20 years of experience working and researching in the area of music endangerment throughout Asia—and focusing on the application of previous theories and practices of language endangerment over the last 15 years—I am convinced that any approach to endangered music, especially among indigenous groups or threatened communities, must be holistic. Unfortunately Grant does not focus on holistic approaches to helping communities, though she does at least mention (in the Preface) how loss of music can affect other aspects of communities: "The endangerment or loss of musical traditions within a culture may have repercussions for individual and social identity, social cohesion, and the strength of other forms of cultural expression within those communities" (xi).

While Grant's approach is comprehensive and academically rigorous, my main concern is that readers may miss the most helpful actions or dynamics applicable to specific situations. As I read, I found it helpful to consider issues from my own working context with indigenous minority communities. Many endangered music genres exist, or have existed, among larger national ethnolinguistic groups—such as the Northern Vietnamese in Grant's sample application. Indigenous groups, on the other hand, represent a large portion of all the endangered music genres in the world, and they are the most vulnerable communities, the ones whose very survival may depend on the sustainability of their music genres as it relates to the sustainability of their communities. I have seen one clear example in which a community rejected the innovation of using wells because the idea clearly came from outsiders, whereas in other villages where an insider was able to express the need in a local method of communication (often songs) the idea was usually readily accepted. In the village where no local means of communication were used, many people died of cholera before they were convinced to find an alternative to using the local stream as a water source.

Grant has developed a tool with the intention of universality and so it does address issues relevant to many contexts, but certain issues need greater emphasis and in-depth analysis, lest they become overlooked in the total assessment package. Three such important issues that Grant either mentions briefly or only implies have particular relevance for understanding and working with indigenous minority communities. Each issue interrelates with the other two.

Multi-generational community engagement, communication, and song creation

Grant's Factor 10 on community attitudes toward a genre includes consideration of a whole community, but emphasis is needed here on the importance of *multi-generational community engagement* beyond a focus

only on older experts teaching younger students—or even vice versa (Factor 1. Intergenerational transmission). There is often a great divide between generations (young people not seeing the need for or value of their heritage, and older people being marginalized by modernity). Finding opportunities for generations to work together and better understand each other may yield greater benefit for the community than revitalizing the music itself. Music may simply be a medium for allowing that multi-generational community engagement, whereas changes in music culture often become a barrier to that engagement.

I have regularly seen younger indigenous generations use their literacy skills and knowledge of technology to research music with older members of the community. One example is among the Tampuan highland people of Cambodia (Saurman 2012, 2013). Through various workshops conducted by indigenous operated NGOs, young people built relationships with older community members by learning about their heritage culture from them. They wrote books, recorded songs, and video-recorded ceremonies. They documented song texts, learned to perform songs, and sent songs to each other via Bluetooth on their cell phones to promote their culture. Both generations gained a greater sense of value through this process, rather than each feeling devalued by the other in an environment of increasing modernization and cultural endangerment. These activities, along with many others, have transformed older methods for intergenerational transmission of music, language, and cultural values while also building communication and intergenerational relationships within their communities.

A small point that Grant makes under Factor 10 needs greater emphasis: the importance of individuals and subgroups where the vitality of a genre may depend on a few highly respected and innovative individuals from a community (122, 154). Seeger also mentions the importance of "the charismatic actions of an individual passionate actor" (ix). I have seen vitality of music genres depend on individuals primarily from an in-between generation (Malone 2004) who have some understanding of the traditions of an older generation and also some experience with literacy, technology, and other aspects of the lives of a younger generation.

Grant's central question pertains to comparing language maintenance with music, yet she barely mentions a comparison of how they both might be used for *communication*. Grant does write that it is important "to help communities reap the benefits that flow from vibrant music cultures" (14), which for indigenous groups that primarily depend on oral methods of communication would have to include communication through songs. It would be easy to overlook the fact that oral communities, in order to benefit from a vibrant music culture, need to be able to use music and other art forms to communicate important information for the overall well-being and survival of the community. The ability to use music to communicate among community members is

the lifeblood of music among many oral cultures, even more so in the midst of pervasive and rapid change.

In Grant's testing of the MVEF on a North Vietnamese music genre (*ca trù*) she found that even older practitioners could not understand the words of the songs (135, 149), so communication was not an issue in her applied example. While the revitalization of music genres contributes significantly to cultural esteem and identities, communication through music genres was not necessary for the survival of those communities. She does add that new texts have recently been added to old melodies, thus having greater potential to communicate with modern audiences (138). In contrast, many indigenous groups throughout Asia sing in special situations in place of just speaking. Using the highland people of neighboring Cambodia as an example, music had life-saving value during the time of the Khmer Rouge, as various groups sang to communicate what they must do to not be killed—such as to not wear jewelry, which was seen as anti-Khmer. They also sang about maintaining unity and love among their people for the survival of communities.

I have seen young people from indigenous communities not only gain cultural knowledge through researching with older members, but also find ways to give new meaning to a genre by using it to communicate new important information through the creation of new songs. *Creativity* or *song creation* in a useful and appropriate genre can effectively communicate new information to whole communities. I have seen communities create and use new songs to communicate with older generations in ways either not possible or not as effective by any other means. Again among the highland people of Cambodia, music and the processes of learning it allowed for better understanding of older song texts and the ability to communicate new information through familiar music genres. Decades after the Khmer Rouge, some individuals from the highland groups are now revitalizing their use of songs to holistically communicate necessary innovations and adaptations, such as motivation for vernacular literacy and multilingual education, environmental protection through community land regulations, and life-saving health information. One of the practical lessons some young people had learned from their elders was that their generation had lost appreciation for the usefulness of their music. So intergenerational transmission is a two-way street in a reflexive cycle: the elders transmit cultural knowledge and values, and the younger transmit important new information to the whole community.

I've observed the importance of intergenerational community engagement and communication through newly created songs among many other orally based indigenous groups from Nepal, China, Myanmar, Vietnam, Thailand, India, and so my appreciation for the holistic social and cultural elements of sustainability comes from a much wider experience than the highlands of Cambodia. Grant includes a passing reference to creating and composing, under Factors 6 (Response to Mass Media and the Music Industry) and 7 (Infrastructure and

Resources for Music Practices). Even more importantly, she writes about emergent genres that may represent community approaches to continuity and change (again, at least implying relevant song creation) but here I emphasize its primary significance among oral cultures, especially as combined with its use for *communicating* important information and for *engaging multiple generations*.

Conclusion

I appreciate the author's attempt at standardizing an evaluation tool, but my experience in real-life situations with indigenous groups has tempered my enthusiasm for its practical usefulness. Grant is clear that each factor is to be analyzed with flexibility for each specific situation, community, and genre. The MVEF is already multi-dimensional with its 12 factors, each having its own unique grading system that allows for more complexity than existing evaluation tools of language and, more recently, music. The other tools operate on grading scales that group together various factors under different graded levels of each scale. The MVEF directs attention at specific issues (factors), whereas the other tools are more focused on the overall level of endangerment of the language or music genre. *Music Endangerment* gives some clear examples of what may need to be considered and adjusted for each factor. Grant does not shy away from including as much complexity as possible into her framework; she invites future additions and adjustments as people use the tool. My additions recommend an even greater sense of urgency, and a more holistic approach for indigenous groups where the use of music as a communication genre, along with the communities themselves, have become endangered.

My critique is that in real-life situations among indigenous groups much more is at stake than the loss of music, and so less may be more when bringing music into a holistic approach of meeting community needs. I don't think that music or specific genres can be sustained without considering ways for indigenous communities themselves to be sustained for dignity, survival, and quality of life. Every situation is unique and in need of unique approaches. Any approach must be holistic and adaptive, and while the author does include statements along these lines, those statements could get lost in the flood of ideas and information in this book, with its very specific focus on music. Beyond the milestone of Grant's book, I advocate seeking specific approaches that cover essentials related to music, integrated with other cultural areas, such as language, other art forms, knowledge, and values, within the context of the overall needs of the communities. However, knowledge gained from studying this book and applying that knowledge to life situations will be invaluable for each new situation. In her thoroughness Grant wisely offers her own disclaimer that the factors are only offered as guidelines, and under no circumstances should the MVEF be uncritically applied (125).

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