



Review: 2019 ICTM World Conference

Dr Anaïs Verhulst

From the 11th to the 17th of July 2019, the biannual conference of the International Council for Traditional Music took place at the Chulalongkorn University in Thailand. With more than 1000 delegates, almost 700 speakers from more than 70 countries and six central themes, this 45th edition of the ICTM World Conference was the largest yet in the 72-year history of the organisation. This year, the following themes were addressed: Transborder Flows and Movements; Music, Dance, and Sustainable Development; The Globalisation and Localisation of Ethnomusicology and Ethnochoreology; Music and Dance as Expressive Communication; Approaches to Practice-Based Research and its Applications; and New Research on Other Topics.

With up to twelve parallel sessions at any one time, mixed in with workshops, concerts and plenary sessions, the choice was never easy. As an ethnomusicologist working on intangible cultural heritage (ICH) for CEMPER, Centre for Music and Performing Arts Heritage in Flanders, Belgium, I focused on the second theme, 'music, dance, and sustainable development' because of its close links to heritage work. Admittedly, this review speaks from an intangible heritage point of view.

Many sessions addressed topics such as the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, its implementation, (sustainable) communities, advocacy, music transmission, and the role of museums and digital technology for safeguarding music and dance traditions. These papers were inspirational for anyone working on music as a form of intangible cultural heritage

or, more broadly, for researchers who help the people they work with safeguarding their musical practices.

Among the speakers who have dealt first-hand with the 2003 Convention, the contributions of Rachel Harris, Marilo Wane, Lie Rong, Suhong Kim, and Jessica Rosse were particularly valuable. They addressed ICH matters in China and Kazakhstan (Harris), Mozambique (Wane), China (Rong), and South Korea (Kim and Rosse), questioning the implementation of the convention and current safeguarding practices in their research areas.

The theme 'Music, Dance, and Sustainable Development' was the focal point of the plenary session 'Digital environments of indigenous song: approaching music vitality and sustainability in the twenty-first century'. The four papers addressed the role of digital technology – and in particular audio-visual documentation – in sustaining indigenous song traditions. More remarkably, however, was the way in which this research was presented. The researchers took a step back, handing the microphone over to the Aboriginal and First Nation people they had worked with; they explained how digital archives of their ancestors' music had helped them to keep their song and dance traditions alive.

Finally, to pick out one highlight among many, the ICTM President's Forum should be mentioned. ICTM's President Salwa El-Shawam Castelo-Branco invited Timothy Curtis, secretary of the 2003 UNESCO Convention, for a dialogue about intangible heritage with Naila Ceribašić (ICTM representative at UNESCO) and Catherine Grant (expert on music vitality and endangerment). The range of topics discussed during this session were numerous; from UNESCO's listing policies to the role of accredited NGOs, and the evaluation bodies that steer there and the tensions that arise between state parties, communities, educational institutions and NGOs when implementing the convention.

The thought-provoking programme, of which this overview shows but a fraction, was completed with workshops, lunch time and evening concerts, a visit from Her Royal Highness Princess Maha Chakri Siringhorn, excellent hospitality of the hosting institution, excursions, and the food stalls provided us with endless supplies of pad thai and sticky mango rice. In conclusion, this 45th ICTM World Conference was a successful and memorable meeting. We look forward to the next World Conference, which will take place from the 22nd to the 28th of July 2021 in Lisbon, Portugal.