

ABSTRACT

Title of thesis: “UNIQUE BY NATURE, TRADITIONAL BY CHOICE”:
MUSIC INITIATIVES AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN A
RURAL APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY

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In Pocahontas County, West Virginia, a cherished musical heritage exists alongside a continuously changing population, and music initiatives demonstrate the tension between preserving local traditions and embracing diversity. Employing practice theory, concepts of globalization, and an applied ethnomusicological approach, three music initiatives—a historical performance hall, public school music education, and the local community radio station—are investigated in terms of their history, current role in the community, and programming and curricula. These initiatives serve as tools for exploring how the music programming and education in this community reflect outside interests and social changes during the past century and help frame suggestions of how public music initiatives, both in this community and elsewhere, might better respond to social change. With collaboration and an in-depth understanding of the complexities of a population, music initiatives can make positive and effective contributions to communities.

“UNIQUE BY NATURE, TRADITIONAL BY CHOICE”:
MUSIC INITIATIVES AND SOCIAL CHANGE IN A
RURAL APPALACHIAN COMMUNITY

by

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Dedication

To my sister, Anna Rachel Terman,
who guided me through this project and is
the other half of the “Terman Research Team” in Pocahontas County

To the community of Pocahontas County,
who came together to help out a couple of “outsiders” during hard times

Acknowledgements

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
<u>Working in Pocahontas County</u>	3
<u>Theoretical Framework</u>	9
<u>Research Design</u>	11
Methodology.....	11
Fieldwork.....	14
Application.....	16
Selection of Community and Music Initiatives.....	16
<u>Terminology</u>	19
<u>Literature Review</u>	20
Chapter 1-Pocahontas County, its Community and Musical Heritage.....	33
<u>The Mountains</u>	33
<u>The People</u>	35
<u>The Hammons Family</u>	47
Chapter 2- The Opera House: “Cultural Heart of the Community”.....	54
<u>History</u>	55
<u>Today</u>	58
<u>Programming</u>	61
<u>Audience</u>	65
<u>Final Thoughts</u>	69
Chapter 3- Public School Music Education: “Preparing Students for Tomorrow’s Challenges”.....	73
<u>History</u>	73
<u>Today</u>	77
<u>Local Music Education Advocacy</u>	84
<u>Final Thoughts</u>	86
Chapter 4- WVMR: “Voice of the Community”.....	89
<u>History</u>	89
<u>The National Radio Quiet Zone</u>	95
<u>Today</u>	96
<u>Programming</u>	98
<u>Listeners</u>	101
<u>Final Thoughts</u>	104
Conclusions and Suggestions.....	107
Bibliography.....	117

Introduction

For many people, the words “music in Appalachia,” invoke an image of white folk playing the banjo and fiddle on a porch in some impoverished isolated hollow. The fact that many music enthusiasts from Appalachia know little more about so-called “Appalachian music” may surprise some. In fact, interactions with various music traditions over centuries, especially since the extractive resource industry exploded in the region in the late nineteenth century, have resulted in dynamic and diverse musical cultures throughout Appalachia. Many of these music cultures, including Appalachian folk music, have been cultivated by music initiatives that have promoted certain kinds of musical traditions depending on the instigators’ agendas and usually reflecting changing social trends. This long-standing interaction with diverse music traditions demonstrates that although rural Appalachia can be relatively isolated, it continues to exist within the larger pluralistic society of the United States and has been affected by continuing social change.

Pocahontas County, West Virginia is an area that is at once isolated and affected by social change. Its relative remoteness and small tight-knit community have resulted in a preserved musical heritage, but a diverse array of people have come to call the mountainous area home. This diversity invalidates the claim that rural Appalachia is homogeneous and presents implications for the music culture of the community. In addition, music initiatives, established during the past century in Pocahontas County, have also changed the musical landscape. Three Pocahontas County music initiatives, including a historical performance hall, public school music education, and the local community radio, serve as tools for exploring how the music programming and education

in a rural Appalachian community reflect social changes during the past century and help frame suggestions of how public music initiatives might better respond to social change.

The purpose of this thesis is to explore music initiatives in a rural part of Appalachia in terms of their history, current role in the community, and programming and curricula in order to demonstrate a continuing conflict in Appalachia between preserving a cherished local culture and embracing other cultures. Appalachia has been othered, stigmatized, and degraded because of a presumed lack of refinement; but also due to this presumption, Appalachia has been a source of national pride for its perceived purity and authentic American culture. Both in defense and out of pride, Appalachians have gone to great lengths to prevent outside intervention and to preserve a certain way of life believed to be authentic and in danger. Music initiatives in Appalachia, however, have often been started by cultural outsiders with special interests. How do music initiatives in Pocahontas County navigate the strong place-based identity and musical heritage that exists in the community, and what challenges do these music initiatives face in a relatively isolated region with a mixed population? To examine Pocahontas County in relation to these issues, this project frames three music initiatives against the backdrop of the community's strong musical heritage and continuously changing ethnoscape.

Finally, after providing a thorough analysis of the three music initiatives' roles in the community and interactions with the local musical heritage and other music traditions, I employ an applied ethnomusicological approach to offer suggestions for how public music initiatives can better respond to social changes within the community and the world in general. In addition to considering the negative effects music initiatives can and have had on rural Appalachia, this thesis suggests possible benefits public music

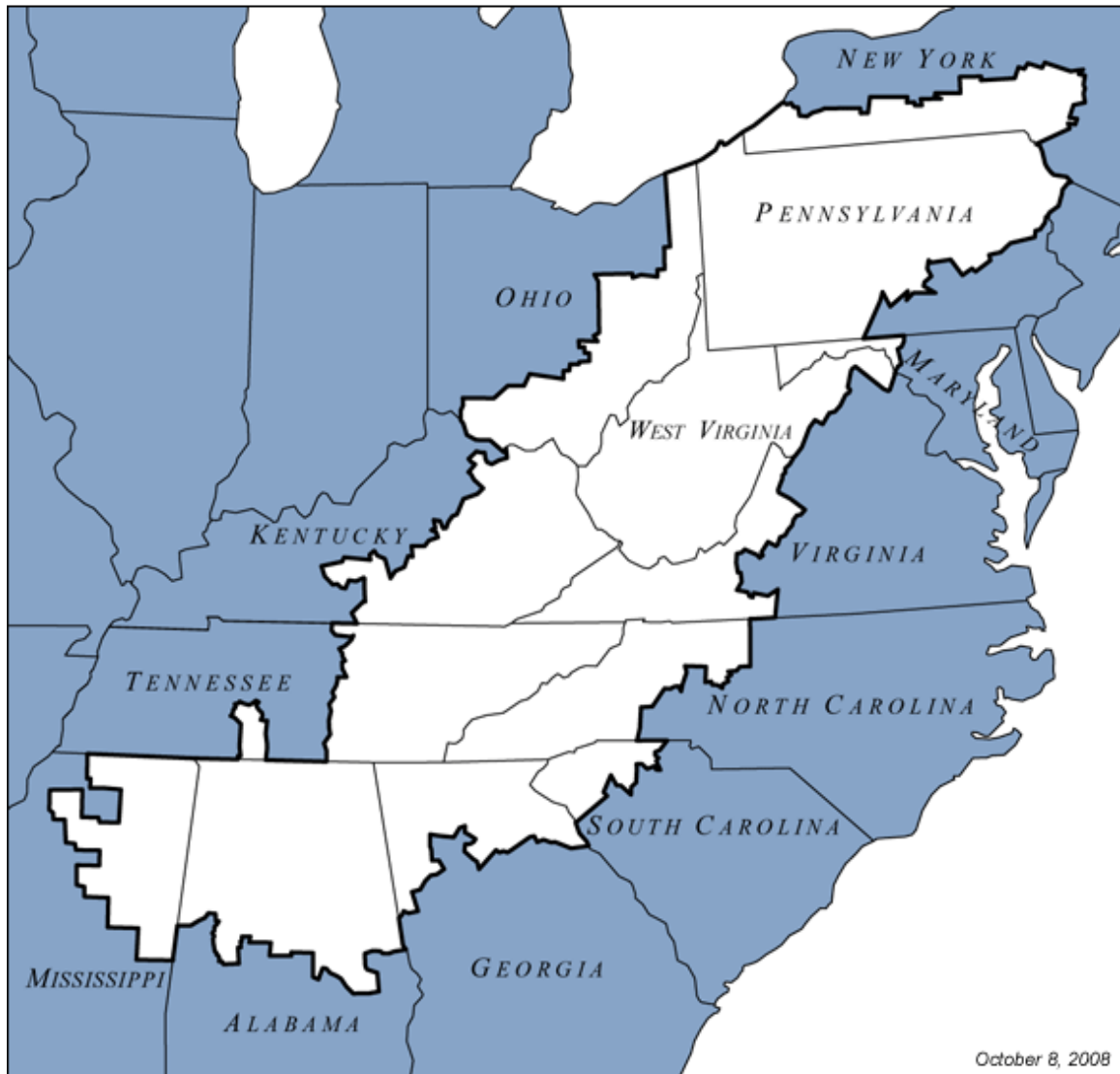
initiatives can offer rural communities with strong musical heritages, like Pocahontas County, West Virginia. Developing a deep understanding of a community's cultures, its complexities, and the problems it faces is a prerequisite for creating successful and productive music initiatives in any community.

Working in Pocahontas County

Pocahontas County is located in the Appalachian region, an area defined both by its mountainous geography and economic adversity. In terms of geography, Appalachia includes the mountains and foothills of the Appalachian Mountain range, which extends to Alabama in the South and through Maine and in to Canada in the North. As part of Lyndon B. Johnson's "War on Poverty" legislation in the 1960s, the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) was formed "to address the persistent poverty and growing economic despair of the Appalachian Region."¹ This legislation, therefore, defines Appalachia as a region that not only "follows the spine of the Appalachian Mountains," but also is economically underdeveloped.² Therefore, areas that are not usually considered part of Appalachia, such as northeastern Mississippi, are included in the ARC's definition (Figure 1). West Virginia, however, is the only state that is located fully within the Appalachian region, regardless of the difference between geographic and political boundaries.

¹ Appalachian Regional Commission, "ARC History," <http://www.arc.gov/about/ARCHistory.asp> (accessed April 28, 2014).

² Appalachian Regional Commission, "The Appalachian Region," http://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/TheAppalachianRegion.asp (accessed April 28, 2014).



Source: Appalachian Regional Commission

Figure 1. The Appalachian region as defined by the ARC.³

With only two stoplights (both in the county seat of Marlinton), Pocahontas County is one of the most rural parts of West Virginia and has the highest average elevation of any county east of the Mississippi River.⁴ The community is small, economically disadvantaged, and surprisingly eclectic despite its seemingly

³ Appalachian Regional Commission, "Map of the Appalachian Region," http://www.arc.gov/appalachian_region/MapofAppalachia.asp (accessed April 28, 2014).

⁴ Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, West Virginia Division of Tourism Research, <http://www.pocahontascountywv.com/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

homogeneous population of ninety-eight percent white residents.⁵ It has been home to various cultural cohorts throughout time, and, though not exhaustive, the current make-up of the community consists mainly of working-class loggers, farmers, construction workers, and commercial truckers who typically have strong roots in the area; the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) scientists who have had a presence there since the 1950s; Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) workers who have been sent to West Virginia since the 1960s; back-to-the-landers who started moving to the area in the 1970s; doctors and clowns of an alternative health care organization the Gesundheit Institute, established in the 1970s; employees of Snowshoe Mountain ski resort, also opened in the 1970s; members of the National Alliance white supremacist organization which relocated there in the 1980s; radical artists and environmentalists of the Zendik Farm Arts Foundation which relocated there in the early 2000s; and a recent wave of retirees.

The eclectic population described above illustrates the point that although Pocahontas County is a relatively isolated area in Appalachia, it is still affected by the larger pluralistic society of the United States. Given the variety of people living in the county, however, there is still a strong place-based identity that often feeds into the dichotomy of insider and outsider that thrives among community members who are both proud and defensive of their corner of Appalachia. Most of the constituents of the population listed above were perceived as outsiders when they first moved to Pocahontas County, and some are still viewed this way. For example, although the county has few opportunities for young people above high-school age, causing most to move out of the

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “White Population, 2010,” under “Pocahontas County, West Virginia Community Facts,” http://factfinder.census.gov/home/saff/main.html?_lang=en (accessed April 7, 2014).

area for higher education or employment, new VISTAs arrive in Pocahontas County every year, as they usually serve one-year terms under the federal program to improve economic circumstances for underprivileged communities. Most VISTAs come from out of state with little previous knowledge of West Virginia or Pocahontas County, so they are required to make a constant effort to integrate and to understand the complexities of the community. Recent heavy VISTA recruitment in Pocahontas County has resulted in an influx of middle-class urban educated young people and has created a new youth culture in the region. In fact, this program is what brought me to Pocahontas County.

I arrived as a VISTA in 2009 under slightly different conditions from most participants in the program, however. I was born and raised in West Virginia, though in the northern part of the state in Morgantown, home of the flagship school, West Virginia University. Although Pocahontas County is about a three-hour drive south from Morgantown, I had visited it several times growing up in West Virginia, my grandfather had lived in a nursing home there, and preceding my job placement there, both my sister and my partner had worked there in a social service capacity. Regardless of these associations, many still considered me a cultural outsider, and I was called a “Yankee” more than once because my hometown is located north of Pocahontas County right below the Mason-Dixon Line. Admittedly, I *was* a cultural outsider in many ways. I grew up in a less-rural, more liberal, diverse, and affluent part of West Virginia. Having grown up in a college town and earned my own college degree, I had had opportunities thrust upon me. This upbringing had significant influence on my worldview, an influence that I took to my job and life in Pocahontas County. Still, I tried to emphasize the fact that I was a West Virginian, that I played Appalachian music, and that I knew about the community’s

strong musical heritage. As difficult as it was for me to assimilate in Pocahontas County, it must be even more difficult for those whose outsider qualities are even more obvious to deemphasize their differences and emphasize their similarities to the local community.

My VISTA position in Pocahontas County was working with the Pocahontas County Opera House, but through this position, I also collaborated with the other two music initiatives detailed in this thesis. I visited the radio station regularly to record public service announcements for the Opera House, and I performed over the airwaves for their annual fundraiser. I also collaborated often with the county's public schools and music teachers to provide educational music performances for the county's youth. During the nearly two years that I worked for the Opera House, I began to realize some of the complexities of the community and the challenges music initiatives must navigate to function in an area with a strong musical heritage and an eclectic population. I also began to understand many of the challenges that the community itself faces and how music initiatives might address these issues.

As soon as I arrived on the scene, bright-eyed and bushy-tailed, the importance of preserving and promoting the local musical heritage, including old-time and bluegrass music, was clear in my position as well as in the community in general. My supervisor, who also happened to be one of the founders of the community radio station, immediately put me to work on organizing a youth fiddle, banjo, and guitar contest. Encouraging the county's youth to participate in traditional music forms was an obvious priority. I was also enthusiastic about this project, as I believe young people should learn about local music traditions. I began to realize, however, that this type of music didn't resonate with many community members, and in addition, it was feeding the strong place-based

identity that leads to xenophobia and the insider/outsider complex. Furthermore, traditional forms of music were so heavily emphasized and promoted, that the community already had many opportunities to experience them. What music initiatives in Pocahontas County really lacked was musical diversity and opportunities to experience music from different cultures. So, during my time with the Opera House, I worked both to promote and preserve the local musical heritage and to present diverse musical traditions to the community, and especially the youth.

So, I write this thesis with the background described above. I am not merely an objective observer of the community and music initiatives of Pocahontas County; I was a member of the community, and I worked for or with all of the music initiatives discussed in this thesis. Although I try to convey a reasonably unbiased analysis of Pocahontas County's music culture, I do not pretend to approach this research with complete objectivity. I came to work at the Pocahontas County Opera House as both a cultural insider and outsider, depending on perspective. As an insider, I was raised with an appreciation of my home state's musical heritage and an awareness of the importance of preserving this heritage. As an outsider of Pocahontas County, I started working there with a certain agenda, informed by my previous upbringing and education in a less rural part of the state. In this respect, perhaps I am no different from the countless outsiders with special interests who have intervened in Appalachia throughout history. In fact, this was one of my main motivations for undertaking this research. This thesis has been a learning process to understand how Appalachia has been shaped by music and cultural initiatives, how these initiatives relate to social changes, and how they might better respond to the challenges faced in rural Appalachia.

Theoretical Framework

Whereas Appalachia has historically been portrayed as an isolated homogeneous region with a static culture stuck in the past while the rest of the world steadily progresses toward modernity, practice theory rejects the narrative of a society controlled by a monolithic unchangeable culture (Bourdieu 1977). Instead, this theoretical framework helps reveal where cultural practices come from, how they are produced, reproduced, and changed through human action. Practice theory is most useful for investigating what individuals and communities actually do, rather than what people are expected to do according to some fixed set of rules (Ortner 1984). In other words, theory is meaningless unless drawn from the actual practices of people. Scholars and leaders of music initiatives alike spend so much time thinking about action that they sometimes become mostly removed from that action and even find what people actually do in the real world incomprehensible (Tilton 1992). Appalachia has been essentialized and romanticized for as long as scholars have been interested in the region. Researchers have looked for aspects of Appalachia that prove the rules they investigate, while ignoring inconsistencies and contradictions.

For example, Cecil Sharp's famous collecting of British ballads in Appalachia (Sharp and Campbell 1917) focused only on old British ballads and ignored ballads native to the United States and those with religious lyrics (Tribe 1984, 6-7). Although West Virginia has an extensive ballad tradition, Sharp spent relatively little time in the state, and collected only three ballads, all in Greenbrier County, because he saw the folksong tradition as already being adulterated by industrialization in the Mountain State. His collections, therefore, confirmed the common generalization that Appalachia was an

isolated region with authentic musical traditions; but in searching for a pure form of music kept alive in the so-called isolated Appalachian Mountains, early music collectors ignored the burgeoning styles of music resulting from the contacts between traditional mountain styles and this new industrial society. This negligence is one reason why an exploration of the idiosyncrasies of a rural Appalachian community is an important contribution to the literature on music in Appalachia and why practice theory can be helpful in investigating what people actually do in Pocahontas County and how their community has changed rather than what a rural community in Appalachia is expected to be.

Theories of globalization will also be integral to this thesis as these theories closely relate to the social change that has taken place in Pocahontas County and its effect on the music culture. Claims that traditional forms of music remain preserved in Appalachia because of its isolation may hold some truth, but Appalachia is by no means impervious to outside forces and social change. Mark Slobin argues that the complex phenomenon of musical exchange cannot be explained by any theory that emphasizes isolated and homogenous cultures with fixed boundaries (Slobin 1992). Using Arjun Appadurai's set of five "-scapes" (1990), Slobin proposes a framework within which cultural and musical exchange can be viewed. Although Slobin and Appadurai intend for their theories to be applied to transnational musical and cultural exchange, I think their theories are valid for understanding the overlapping and fluid nature of musical and cultural exchange between Appalachia and both the rest of the country and the world. One of the most influential "-scapes" on musical and cultural exchange in Pocahontas County has been the ethnoscape, or moving groups of people or individuals. Various

groups of people with diverse backgrounds have become part of the Pocahontas County community and have shaped and been shaped by the music culture in different ways.

Many of the groups that have moved into the county are part of what Thomas Turino calls the modernist-capitalist cosmopolitan formation (2000, 2003, 2008). Turino does not use the term “cosmopolitan” in the conventional sense; instead, his concept of cosmopolitanism refers to the habits and practices of a cultural formation that exists transnationally. Values shared among members of the modernist-capitalist cosmopolitan formation, for example, include eclecticism and individualism, and have roots in a combination of Christianity and capitalist principles spread by European and United States colonialism (Turino 2008). Even cohorts that move to Pocahontas County to break free from this cosmopolitan formation still hold deeply ingrained values associated with the formation, which are brought with them and have their effects on Pocahontas County. Instigators of music initiatives in the area are also often part of this cosmopolitan formation, and their motives and goals are informed by modernist-capitalist cosmopolitan values, which may or may not conflict with other cultures in Pocahontas County.

Research Design

Methodology

The use of practice theory in this thesis relates to the methods employed. Because practice theory is concerned with communities in action and processes of change, an applied ethnomusicological approach is appropriate for studying the music initiatives and social change in Pocahontas County. Like practice theory, applied ethnomusicology is a response to the increasing distance between research and action. In addition to an

increased focus on the actions of a community, however, applied ethnomusicology calls for the researcher to take action. According to the study group on applied ethnomusicology of the International Council for Traditional Music, this approach is guided by a purpose of social responsibility, which goes beyond the usual academic goal of the advancement of knowledge toward solving practical problems and toward working both inside and outside the academy (Harrison, Mackinlay, and Pettan 2010, 1).

Applied work can take many forms such as advocacy, education outside of a university context, cultural policy, medical ethnomusicology, conflict resolution, environmental sustainability, public performance, record producing, and community music programming. Although these activities are generally centered outside universities, all work done by ethnomusicologists could be viewed as applied work. University professors certainly apply research to their teaching, ensemble directing, and writing. Other, perhaps more appropriate, titles for this approach include engaged ethnomusicology, advocacy ethnomusicology, public ethnomusicology, active ethnomusicology, and practice ethnomusicology. Because applied work calls for the active participation of the researcher in communities to collaborate with them on solving social problems, it can help the researcher better understand the intricacies of social issues related to music in the community.

This thesis relates to many of the activities which can be considered applied work, but perhaps it is most closely situated within the applied work and scholarship on community music programming and conflict resolution. Many applied ethnomusicologists compose written analyses after the completion of applied projects in which they were involved by using ethnomusicological theory to explore the cultural

dynamics and challenges encountered in the process and to offer suggestions based on the projects' outcomes. For example, ethnomusicologist and music educator Patricia Shehan Campbell's article "Music Alive! In the Yakima Valley" details the challenges and rewards of an applied project in which she was involved that aimed to create connections between university music students and a rural underserved elementary school of mostly Mexican American and Native American children through sharing diverse musical traditions (2010). Applied ethnomusicologist Britta Sweers, however, focuses on conflict resolution in "Polyphony of Cultures: Conceptualization and Consequences of an Applied Media Project" (2010). This chapter, in a collection of applied studies, details a project in Germany in which Sweers was involved that aimed to enhance interethnic tolerance among schoolchildren who were exposed to neo-Nazism. Similar to Campbell's and Sweers' applied studies, this thesis details public music programming in which the author was involved to evaluate and offer suggestions for future applied work.

Critics of applied ethnomusicologists, however, accuse them of "interfering" in music cultures, but this accusation does not take into account the fact that many forces are always shaping music cultures—some have positive effects, some detrimental (Titon 1992). In fact, these various forces that shape music culture are the very topic of this thesis. Moreover, the issue is not whether or not we should interfere; ethnomusicologists are always interfering, whether we like it or not. According to applied ethnomusicologist Daniel Sheehy, the issue is whether the purpose is worthy. The results of applied work depend directly on the purpose of the action and how much thought is behind it (Sheehy 1992). Of course, whether an applied project is worthy or not is a subjective consideration, but, as mentioned above, many forces are always at work in music cultures,

and it is better to have action guided by informed purpose, a knowledge of ethnomusicological theory, and an intensive knowledge of the specific musical tradition and the greater society in which that tradition exists, rather than completely misguided action that may exploit the music culture for purposes such as economic gain or cultural hegemony.

So, the practical application of ethnomusicology should be informed by ethnomusicological theory, but the theory should also be informed by practice. Because I worked directly with the three music initiatives discussed in this thesis and collaborated with community members to carry out music programs for nearly two years, I was gradually able to gain insight into the idiosyncrasies and contradictions existing in the community. After gaining this first-hand experience with the community of Pocahontas County, I compiled primary and secondary source material related to music traditions, initiatives, and social change in Pocahontas County and the greater Appalachian region. Now that I have a more thorough knowledge of the ethnomusicological theory outlined in the theoretical framework section, it was important to go back to Pocahontas County to conduct interviews with key individuals guided by this theoretical background.

Fieldwork

Although I gained much experience and made direct observations of the Pocahontas County community while working there outside of an academic research capacity, this first-hand experience still informs this thesis. I have tried to obtain as much key information as possible from informants who have consented to participate in this academic research project, but I cannot ignore the experience and observations made

prior to official data collection. For this reason and to protect any informants who may feel that observations were made of their activities without their consent, I have decided not to include my informants' names in this thesis. I refer to most informants by their position in the community, rather than using a name, but I have changed the names of informants to whom I often refer. I have, however, included the actual names of public figures in the community who were not direct informants for the project. In consensual interviews, informants were asked a series of questions about their personal background, their general impressions of Pocahontas County, the local music culture, and the programming and management of local music initiatives. Each interview was tailored to the specific informant depending on the music initiative or community group with which she or he is associated, but the following is a sample of some questions that were asked.

- Do you think the musical heritage of Pocahontas County is part of community members' identities? Explain.
- What challenges does the Opera House face being located in Pocahontas County and trying to appeal to the local community?
- How does WVMR play a part in preserving Pocahontas County's music heritage?
- Do you think that as a teacher at a rural school, part of your job is to act as a bridge between Pocahontas County and the larger society of the United States by educating your students for participation in the outside world?

In addition to audio recording each interview, I kept a field journal of notes that highlighted key concepts and relevant information as the interview unfolded. Twelve of the thirteen formal interviews were conducted in Pocahontas County in the summer of 2013 between July and August, and one more was conducted by phone in early 2014. I identified the thirteen individuals who would be most helpful in this study because they have the most experience with a given music initiative or because they represent different factions within the community. Participants included four individuals from the performance hall, three from the community radio, two music educators from the public

schools, and four general community members. Because of the small population, several of the participants are associated with more than one of the three music initiatives.

Application

In addition to incorporating interviews, personal experience, primary documents, secondary sources, and ethnomusicological theory into a thesis exploring music initiatives and social change in Pocahontas County, I also conclude this study, in an applied ethnomusicological fashion, with suggestions of how public music initiatives might better respond to social changes based on this case study. In a more direct but long-term application of this research, I hope to be able to use the knowledge gained from this project in future music collaborations with the public, and I hope others working in public music programs can benefit from it as well. I have learned a great deal about the complex relationships between communities and music initiatives through this research and since implementing several music programs in Pocahontas County. I would only consider this knowledge valuable if it were used to improve future music initiatives.

Selection of Community and Music Initiatives

Pocahontas County was chosen for this project not only because of my experience living and working there, but also because it serves as a perfect case study of a rural Appalachian community that is both isolated and affected by social change. One thing that surprised me when I first moved to Pocahontas County was how racially homogeneous, but culturally diverse, the community is. This sounds contradictory, but a deeper understanding of the region's history and ethnoscape makes sense of this

perplexing feature of the population. Working with music initiatives in the community, it was often apparent how the special characteristics of the population related to music programming. Although I was surprised by the makeup of Pocahontas County's population, I have come to realize that this juxtaposition of isolation and social change, homogeneity and diversity, is a paradox that characterizes many rural communities in Appalachia and even the rest of the United States.

Music initiatives in such communities are constantly shaping and being shaped by an intricate web of social dynamics, and recognizing that an understanding of these social complexities is necessary in public music initiatives and developing this understanding can help improve upon past cases of cultural insensitivity, hegemony, and romanticism. An exploration of the three music initiatives in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, will not only be useful to understand how music initiatives and social change are related in this particular community, but will also serve as a case study to provide insight into rural areas in general, especially those with strong musical heritages. In an even broader sense, the case study of Pocahontas County can provide insight into any music initiative's relationship to its surrounding community.

The three music initiatives investigated—the Pocahontas County Opera House, public school music education, and WVMR community radio—were selected for this thesis because they are the three music initiatives in the county that are most accessible to the public and, therefore, provide the most insight into how the community shapes and is shaped by these initiatives. The Opera House is centrally located in the county seat of Marlinton and hosts performances at a fixed low cost so that all members of the community can attend; music education is offered in some form at four out of the five

public schools in the county; and although WVMR broadcasts on low power, they have continuously expanded with transmitters in most parts of the county to reach as much of the community as possible.

In addition, all three initiatives were started over the course of the twentieth century and reflect specific trends and ideologies of early, mid-, and late twentieth-century social changes. Pocahontas County was one of the many remote Appalachian locations that was suddenly linked to the rest of the country in a matter of a few short years around the turn of the twentieth century when railroads were built, drastically changing the social dynamics of the community and the amount of outside culture to which it had access (Lewis 1998). The Opera House was built in 1910 in this context of the booming extractive resource industry and railroad expansion (U.S. Department of the Interior 1999). Public school music education in West Virginia got its support from Progressive Era education reformers, but it was not until 1937 in the context of the New Deal that the State Board of Education issued a regulation making music a required subject in all elementary schools (Brown 1984b). Because of the economic and geographic reality of Pocahontas County, however, it was not until the mid-twentieth century that most public schools in the county were offering music classes. WVMR was started as part of a series of changes that occurred in the county in the wake of the War on Poverty and the influx of VISTA and other young educated urban individuals in the area in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶

Even though the three music initiatives discussed here began over the course of the twentieth-century and reflect specific social changes from different twentieth-century periods, to this day they remain the most pervasive and used in the county. Simply due to

⁶ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

the fact that the Opera House is the only formal performance hall hosting both local and nationally renowned performers in the county, WVMR is the only radio station accessible in much of the county, and other than homeschooling, the five public schools are the only options for primary and secondary education in the county, there are few community members who have not been exposed to music through one of these avenues. Therefore, these three initiatives reveal the most about how music initiatives in Pocahontas County reflect and respond to social change.

Terminology

Music initiatives: In this thesis I discuss music initiatives as any organization, establishment, business, program, institution, event, or curriculum that involves music as one of its primary functions and is implemented to achieve certain goals. These initiatives may be involved in such activities as music promotion, preservation, education, and business, and some are more focused on larger social, economic, and community-development goals than on music as an end in itself. David Whisnant calls such initiatives in Appalachia “interventions” because although many have good intentions, they are often implemented by cultural outsiders who are unfamiliar with rural life and impose and serve the interests of an urban intellectual class (1983).

Social Change: Although social change sometimes refers to intentional social movements, revolution, or progress, this is not what the term refers to throughout this thesis. I do not discuss social change in or outside of the context of Pocahontas County, West Virginia, in terms of a sociocultural evolution from traditional to modern or from homogeneous to diverse, for example. I do not subjectively assign any positive or negative values to the

various social changes that are discussed. Instead, this thesis objectively discusses social change as a force that occurs, whether consciously or actively instigated or not. In the case of this thesis, social change is often a result of population shifts, industrial expansion, or ideology from national movements and political discourse, and these forces are often interrelated.

Diversity: The term “diversity” is often used in today’s society to refer to ethnic or racial diversity, as seen in diversity initiatives and affirmative action in education and employment, and the term is used in such a manner throughout this thesis as well. More often, however, the term as applied to Pocahontas County is used in this thesis in a broader sense to refer to the different ideologies, place-based associations, political orientations, educational backgrounds, socioeconomic groups, and religious beliefs represented within the population.

Literature Review

Music Traditions of West Virginia and the Greater Appalachian Region

Scholarly literature on the music of West Virginia and Appalachia has tended to either embrace or ignore the diversity in the area. Early song collectors, folklorists, and music scholars tended to romanticize the music of “the folk” coming out of the hills of West Virginia, whereas music educators during the first half of the twentieth century tended to ignore native traditions and treat the mountain people as ignorant and in need of their lessons in music of the urban upper-class. In the past few decades, however, scholarly literature has begun to recognize the more complicated story of music in West

Virginia, sometimes focusing on music cultures that have existed in the shadows of the prevailing narratives.

One such study is detailed in the book *Big Band Jazz in Black West Virginia, 1930—1942* by music historian Christopher Wilkinson (2012). The author explores an aspect of West Virginia's history that is largely overlooked but which reveals an active African American music culture in the decade leading up to the Second World War. Wilkinson demonstrates how this development in West Virginia's musical history was closely related to the labor needed to construct railroads and work the coal mines and the comparative economic prosperity it afforded African Americans in West Virginia. Wilkinson also recognizes the influence of newspapers, radio, and touring bands. This is especially relevant for the study of music initiatives in West Virginia, because they tend to ignore minority music cultures in favor of music that serves certain interests.

Around the same time big band jazz was developing in the 1920s and 1930s, commercial country music was taking shape, also aided by the advent of the radio. Compared to cities like Nashville and Bristol, locations in West Virginia are usually not recognized as making significant contributions to the development of country music. However, in his book *Mountaineer Jamboree: Country Music in West Virginia* (1984), American history scholar Ivan Tribe demonstrates the important role country music played in West Virginia, especially for those who grew up around the folk traditions of ballads and fiddle tunes. The growing extractive resource industry also brought African American musical influences as well as music of Eastern European immigrants to West Virginia, and these various styles began to mix as early country artists began playing over the radio.

Although Tribes uses West Virginia folk music as a starting-off point to explore commercial country music in the state, many scholars make it the focus of their work. Studies of folksongs, ballads, fiddle tunes, and banjo traditions abound, many focusing on origin, transmission, preservation, social factors, and specific “elders” of these traditions. Gerald Milnes is one such folklorist who makes traditional folk music the focus of his book *Play of a Fiddle: Traditional Music, Dance, and Folklore in West Virginia* (1999). Milnes introduces prominent West Virginian fiddlers who have continually played traditional music since early in the twentieth century, as opposed to folk music revivalists. He emphasizes folk music’s ability to capture a disposition of people, a representation of time, and a portrayal of place, remaining faithful to cultural values and identity. Although Milnes does not go into detail about the complicated aspects of these issues, he does bring up an important point: cultural, ethnic, regional, and racial groups continually borrow from one another, causing musical forms to be related and constantly changing.

Milnes also emphasizes the prevalence of legendary musicians who are celebrated as highly esteemed players and often account for the musical legacies in their communities and are the sources of many tunes in local repertoires. One such musical family he focuses on, the Hammons family of Pocahontas County, was also recorded for the Library of Congress in 1973 by folklorist Alan Jabbour and Carl Fleischhauer. A seventy-seven-page booklet accompanied the release of their LP, *The Hammons Family: A Study of a West Virginia Family’s Traditions*, which details a rich history of this musical family. Their repertory consisted of several hundred songs and instrumental pieces, some of which have not been found elsewhere (Fleischhauer and Jabbour 1973). The legacy of this family continues to be a source of great pride in Pocahontas County.

Another study detailed in the book *Music in the Air Somewhere: The Shifting Borders of West Virginia's Fiddle and Song Traditions* by ethnomusicologist Erynn Marshall, a mentee of Milnes, concentrates more on cultural values, identity, and social barriers (2006). Marshall suggests that folk music in West Virginia has the capacity to transcend social barriers, and this openness has resulted in the merging of different musical styles. Based on her fieldwork, mainly in central West Virginia, and interviews with twelve of the oldest fiddlers and ballad singers in the state, Erynn explores themes of gender, distinctions between ballads and fiddle tunes, and the influence of African American banjo traditions.

Marshall's brief exploration of African American banjo influences on traditional Appalachian music, in addition to African American involvement in this musical culture in general, is given a much more thorough examination in several books and journal articles. One of the most prominent scholars of this subject is Cecelia Conway, whose book *African Banjo Echoes in Appalachia: A Study of Folk Traditions* (1995) has paved the way, especially in the last decade, for many more scholars to study this rich history that continues to develop through to the present day. Conway explains that "the white mountain music traditions . . . were only part of the story of old-time music" (1995, 38). Two consecutive issues in 2003 and 2004 of the *Black Music Research Journal* were devoted to what is called "Affrilachian" music traditions.

Music/Cultural Initiatives in West Virginia and the Greater Appalachian Region

The literature detailing music and cultural initiatives in Appalachia share a common narrative of urban intellectual outsiders with political or economic agendas

intervening in Appalachia. Some sought to help rural Appalachians “modernize” and become more effective participants in American society. Others sought to protect them from the rapid industrialization they believed ruined communities and their cultures. Some had the goal of improving economic problems that plagued Appalachia, while others were in it for their personal economic gain. Few outsiders involved in these initiatives, however, were very familiar with the complexities of the communities or cultures in which they worked or for which they spoke. Even fewer collaborated with the community members to plan or carry out these initiatives. The needs of rural Appalachians have continuously been imposed upon them, and the studies discussed here explore parts of a long history of cultural intervention in Appalachia.

David Whisnant, in his classic book of Appalachian studies *All that is Native and Fine: The Politics of Culture in an American Region*, explores three cultural initiatives (or, as he puts it, “interventions”) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and shows how each reflected the outside culture of their urban intellectual instigators and changed the national image of Appalachia (1983). Rural settlement schools, the ballad collecting and folk school work of Olive Dame Campbell, and the White Top Folk Festival were all intended to protect rural Appalachian traditions from industrial society and extinction, but they were based on false preconceptions of what rural Appalachia should be in the eyes of urban intellectuals. Culture workers ignored and even masked economic and political realities in the mountains, imposed the norms of the genteel Victorian popular culture, and selectively promoted traditions they saw as valuable. Although Whisnant’s case studies are in Kentucky, North Carolina, and Virginia, his

themes related to intervention are highly relevant to the West Virginia case study, as tension between tradition and change in this region manifests in its music initiatives.

Rural settlement schools were part of the Progressive movement that began in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a response to social changes caused by industrialization. In addition to settlement schools, this philosophy of gradual reform included overhauls in public education, including music education. This aspect of reform is explored by William Lee in his article “Music Education and Rural Reform, 1900-1925” (1997). At the time, music education was taught mostly in urban schools to a minority of students. Rural reformers, often upper-middle-class New Englanders, sought to extend music instruction to every American child. Yet these reformers did not seek to promote music education as an end in itself; they viewed music as a means to larger social and economic goals and believed it had the ability to uplift the rural impoverished people of Appalachia who were regarded as deviant and a threat to America.

A similar mindset continues to persist, as suggested by Alan DeYoung in his article “Constructing and Staffing the Cultural Bridge: The School as Change Agent in Rural Appalachia” (1995). Initiatives such as the War on Poverty programs of the 1960s and 1970s and the Appalachian Regional Commission were created to help “modernize the mountaineer,” as cultural inadequacies in the region are often believed to be the cause of regional underdevelopment. Because many areas of Appalachia have boom-and-bust economies, and upward occupational and social mobility is more likely to occur outside the region, today many rural schools play the role of educating the young for participation in the national culture. DeYoung uses a specific case study in Braxton

County, West Virginia, to show how rural schools, as agents of the national culture, often ignore contemporary Appalachian practices because of conflicting values.

Many of the same issues explored by both Whisnant and Lee also came into play in DeYoung's discussion of more recent education issues in rural West Virginia.

The philosophical foundation of the early reform work contrasts sharply with the intentions of Charles Seeger's New Deal music programs in the late 1930s, part of the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration. Seeger trained his teachers to find the grass-roots culture of impoverished people and collaborate with them (Warren-Findley 1979-1980). However, this was not always the approach of the New Deal music programs. Kenneth Bindas discusses the radical and controversial Federal Music Project (FMP) in his book *All of this Music Belongs to the Nation: the WPA's Federal Music Project and American Society* (1995). When the Works Progress Administration (WPA) started in 1935 the FMP was created as one of its initiatives to provide employment and establish high standards for musicians, to stimulate community interest and create an intelligent musical public, and to demonstrate the constructive work being done by the government to combat economic depression.

The FMP reflected this explicit agenda, but the directors of the project also had their own implicit agendas. For example, Nikolai Sokoloff, the first director of the FMP, emphasized Western classical music and American composers in order to promote patriotism among a fragmented and economically depressed population. While the Roosevelt administration and the New Deal programs as a whole were criticized for being too radical and communist, Sokoloff was criticized for being too conservative and nationalistic. Although the FMP employed more people than any of the other art-related

WPA projects, motivated many schools to create music programs, created dozens of new orchestras, and offered free or very low-cost concerts to underprivileged audiences, it placed a low priority on American popular and folk music (Bindas 1995).

Travis Stimeling (2003) argues, however, that even in West Virginia, where the musical culture is often described as that of old-time and bluegrass, the orchestras created under the FMP benefited from the existence of an already thriving culture for art music in West Virginia's cities. Stimeling's master's thesis, "Preserving Art Music in the Mountain State: A Study of the West Virginia Federal Music Project Orchestras, 1935-1939," discusses how the new orchestras not only provided free concerts to the general public of urban areas, but also reached rural audiences, exposing isolated families to new musical traditions. Stimeling's claim that West Virginia already had an active art music culture is reminiscent of Wilkinson's discussion of an active African American music culture in West Virginia during the same time period. Both of these studies support this thesis because they reveal dynamic and diverse music cultures in the state, even though, in the case of Stimeling's thesis, certain interests were being served and priority was placed on a certain music culture.

When the New Deal music programs were transferred to the Resettlement Administration (RA), Charles Seeger was brought to Washington, D.C. to direct them. Jannelle Warren-Findley details the activities lead by Seeger in her article "Musicians and Mountaineers: The Resettlement Administration's Music Program in Appalachia, 1935—37" (1979-1980). New Deal music programs took a sharp turn and began focusing on folk music of rural America due to Seeger's socialist ideals of national unity from the bottom up. The RA was in charge of newly built, federally supported "homestead"

communities for resettled farmers, unemployed miners, impoverished lumbermen, and their families. Five of these homesteads were located in Appalachia, three of which were in West Virginia. Designed to be model cooperative and self-sustainable homesteads, the communities were in fact extremely fragmented. The community members were families, from diverse backgrounds and with economic anxieties, who had been uprooted and thrown together in a new place with complete strangers.

In order to help smooth out this volatile situation and unify the community members, Seeger employed professional musicians to integrate music, participation in the arts, and political education into the residents' lives so that they could become more engaged citizens. Although the intentions and approach of Seeger's programs contrast with earlier settlement school and rural education reform initiatives, the results were comparable. While Seeger had a keen interest in American folk music, he was a Harvard-trained composer and had no direct experience with the life and practices of the marginal economic groups served by the RA. This was also true for most of the field representatives employed to work in the homesteads. Like the earlier initiatives of the Progressive Era, these programs were radical urban intellectual solutions for rural problems and served the purpose of achieving larger social and economic goals. Although the field representatives tried to incorporate various forms of folk music into their programs, they knew little about the folk music of the communities and often fell back on their background in standard music education (Warren-Findley 1979-1980).

In contrast to the aforementioned initiatives orchestrated by governments and urban intellectuals to serve social and political goals, the rise of opera houses in Appalachia around the turn of the twentieth century reflects a different narrative. Rather

than trying to protect rural Appalachians and their traditions from encroaching industrialization as the settlement workers had done, opera houses were often built by absentee coal and timber company owners and other wealthy entrepreneurs for their own economic gain. In his book *Coal and Culture: Opera Houses in Appalachia*, William Condee discusses how the construction of an opera house helped solidify a town's identity, culture, and business, and indicated the permanence of an emerging industrial town, luring a labor force to the area (2005). Opera houses were built in isolated regions of Appalachia that were becoming increasingly accessible and linked to urban centers because of extractive resource industries and railroads developing in the area. These vaudeville theatres not only served to connect Appalachians with popular performance acts from as far away as New York City, but also served as agents of the national genteel culture of the time. In this thesis, the case study of the Pocahontas County Opera House reveals similar functions and conflicting cultural values today.

The goals and approaches of the various music and cultural initiatives discussed here are put into perspective when considering the diverse musical cultures in Appalachia, and specifically in West Virginia, outlined in the first part of this review. Although it is clear from the varying topics of these studies that West Virginia as well as the larger region of Appalachia are dynamic and continuously changing, many of the music initiatives mentioned here exhibit tendencies either to essentialize the region or to disregard the local musical cultures.

Social Change in West Virginia and the Greater Appalachian Region

Arguably the event that caused the greatest social change in Pocahontas County since colonial times was its deforestation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ronald L. Lewis, a West Virginia labor historian, details this drastic change in his book *Transforming the Appalachian Countryside: Railroads, Deforestation, and Social Change in West Virginia, 1880—1920* (1998). Lewis devotes an entire chapter to ethnicity and social conflict in the timber industry in West Virginia. He explains that diversity characterized the work crews, which included large numbers of African Americans and Italian and Austrian immigrants, though all crews were segregated by race and ethnicity. Expressions of prejudice abound in the local newspapers of the time, and murders caused by racial and ethnic clashes were not uncommon. This is relevant historical information given that racial tension is still reported in recent issues of the *Pocahontas Times*.

The editors of *Transforming Places: Lessons from Appalachia* corroborate the counter narrative of Appalachia as a region with great diversity and contrast, despite its role as a culturally homogeneous relic of the past in the American imaginary (Fisher and Smith 2012). Maureen Mullinax contributes a chapter that details a community-based arts initiative that responds to difficulties community members face as a result of social changes. She claims that initiatives can respect diversity in places where notions of insider/outsider and strong connections to tradition endure. The editors of this book also warn that organizing in defense of place can be exclusionary and reactionary. They claim that Appalachia has been a receptive ground for the culture wars, and right-wing politicians have effectively transformed class resentments and anxieties into xenophobia.

The topic of right and left politics butting heads in Appalachia is given a much more detailed examination in twentieth-century American political movement scholar Carol Mason's book, *Reading Appalachia from Left to Right: Conservatives and the 1974 Kanawha County Textbook Controversy* (2009). Mason continues the familiar narrative of outsiders exploiting Appalachian communities for their own interests, in this case political, focusing on a period directly following the War on Poverty of the 1960s when both left and right-wing outsiders were attempting to make changes in West Virginia. For example, left-wing VISTAs and back-to-the-landers as well as ultraright white supremacists became emerging influences in the state and contributed to the battles of the Kanawha County textbook controversy. Such interest groups' relocation to West Virginia associated them with key ideas of Appalachia that were prominent in the 1970s and beyond, including poverty, rural traditional life, isolation, and homogeneity.

Two sources look more thoroughly at the migrations in to West Virginia of the back-to-the-landers and the white supremacists, respectively: Historian Paul Salstrom's "The Neonatives: Back-to-the-Land in Appalachia's 1970's" and sociologists Pete Simi and Robert Futrell's *American Swastika: Inside the White Power Movement's Hidden Spaces of Hate*. Salstrom focuses on the back-to-the-land movement in Lincoln County, West Virginia and attributes the start of the movement in that county to a former VISTA who bought land there and started a commune (2003). Simi and Futrell's ethnographic research of white supremacist movements in the United States discusses a different kind of back-to-the-lander who moved one of the most influential white supremacist organizations, The National Alliance to Pocahontas County in the 1980s (2010).

Many of the studies discussed above highlight periods of great social change in West Virginia, the greater Appalachian region, and the nation as a whole, starting with the turn of the twentieth century when the extractive resource industries first boomed in West Virginia. At this time, a diverse array of musical cultures already existed in this region, and new ones were developing alongside many music initiatives that served a variety of interests. Today, the social structure of rural West Virginia continues to change. Concurrently, many music initiatives comparable to the ones outlined here have continued to develop in the region, sometimes exhibiting echoes of many of the same issues prevalent earlier in the twentieth century such as cultural romanticism, nationalism, interventions, insensitivity, and ignorance.

Chapter 1- Pocahontas County, its Community and Musical Heritage

To understand the role each of the three music initiatives play in the community, a basic understanding of the area, its population, and its musical heritage is useful, because the Pocahontas County Opera House, public school music education, and WVMR community radio all interact with the land, its people, and its musical heritage in intriguing ways. In this chapter, I offer a brief description of the area and detail the shifts in its population in relation to the changing economy and industry over the past century. I then analyze the changing population using Appadurai's theoretical framework of five fluctuating "-scapes" and demonstrate that many of the cultural cohorts who have moved to Pocahontas County are part of what Turino calls the modernist-capitalist cosmopolitan cultural formation. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a description of the musical heritage of the area, with specific focus on the Hammons family and their legacy.

The Mountains

Pocahontas County is located in southeastern West Virginia and lies within the Monongahela National Forest in the Allegheny Mountains, part of the vast Appalachian Mountain range. Members of this community usually identify with the county in which they live, rather than the town, because most towns are too small to form an identity around. As the third largest county in West Virginia, encompassing 942 square miles and, as of the 2010 census, one of the smallest in terms of population, with 8,719 people, Pocahontas County is one of the most rural counties in West Virginia.⁷ The population is spread out, with an average of ten people living every square mile, and the biggest town,

⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Total Population, 2010," under "Pocahontas County, West Virginia Community Facts," http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml (accessed April 7, 2014).

Marlinton, which is also the county seat, has a population of just over one thousand.⁸ The nearest interstate is about an hour's drive, and with some of the highest and most rugged terrain in the state, traveling within as well as in and out of the county can be difficult. Because of the high altitudes, winters are harsh, forcing many of the county's public buildings to close down for much of January and February.

Employment opportunities are limited, and an average of thirty-three percent of individuals in the three incorporated towns of Marlinton, Hillsboro, and Durbin are below the poverty line.⁹ Historically, the county's biggest industry was commercial timbering, which resulted in the deforestation of much of the area's dense virgin woodlands from the late nineteenth century through the first few decades of the twentieth century (Lewis 1998). Today, the biggest industry is tourism, especially outdoor recreation, illustrated by the county's nickname promoted by the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau: "nature's mountain playground."¹⁰ In fact, the economic impact of travel and tourism is greater in Pocahontas County than in any other county in West Virginia. The tourism industry is the county's second biggest employer after educational, health, and social services, with one in every four jobs being generated by travel and tourism.¹¹ The county has one high school, one middle school, two elementary schools, and one elementary/middle school. There are no opportunities to earn higher degrees, and eighty

⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Housing Estimates, 2010," under "Pocahontas County, West Virginia Community Facts," and "Total Population, 2010," under "Marlinton, West Virginia Community Facts," http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml#none (accessed April 7, 2014).

⁹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Families and Individuals Below Poverty Level, 2010," under "Marlinton," "Hillsboro," and "Durbin, West Virginia."

¹⁰ Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, <http://www.pocahontascountywv.com/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

¹¹ Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, "West Virginia Division of Tourism Research," http://www.pocahontascountywv.com/quick_county_facts.aspx (accessed April 7, 2014).

percent of the population twenty-five years of age and older does not hold such a degree.¹²

The People

Although the area is isolated on many levels and, according to the 2010 census, the racial makeup is overwhelmingly homogeneous, with ninety-eight percent of the people indicating they are white, the population is deceptively homogeneous, as there is great cultural diversity among community members.¹³ Population shifts have occurred in the region for centuries, especially since the commercial timber industry boom at the turn of the twentieth century, and this fluctuating ethnoscape has resulted in a diverse mix of cohorts that make up the current population. A range of ideologies, socioeconomic groups, political orientations, educational backgrounds, and place-based associations (urban or rural, Appalachian or not, American or not) are represented among the various factions in Pocahontas County.

Families that have lived in the area for generations were often part of the logging or railroad industry or may have gotten by with odd jobs, such as construction or commercial transportation work. Although agriculture is not one of the main industries in Pocahontas County, there are many small-scale farms, and before logging became the primary industry in the late nineteenth century, subsistence agriculture was the norm. After the Greenbrier Railroad was completed in 1900, the population grew dramatically from 6,814 in 1890 to 14,740 by 1910. While the population more than doubled during those two decades, the number of people who were not native-born white residents more

¹² U.S. Bureau of the Census, “Educational Attainment,” under “Pocahontas County, West Virginia Community Facts.”

¹³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, “White Population, 2010.”

than tripled. In 1890, 383 people were not native-born white residents, but rather were either African Americans or foreign-born immigrants. By 1910, that number had grown to 1,253 (Lewis 1998). Today, only 191 people indicate that they are not solely white, but native residents still represent diverse heritages.¹⁴ Although the timber industry is not the main industry in Pocahontas County anymore, it is still present and has a major impact on the economic circumstance of the area.

In addition to this rooted community, the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) is located in the northern part of the county. Because of the mountainous topography and the remoteness of the area, which offer protection from radio transmission and wireless interference, NRAO chose this location in 1956 to build the largest fully steerable radio telescope in the world.¹⁵ NRAO employs and attracts scientists from all over the world, and some of these highly educated international scientists end up staying in the county and raising families there. NRAO affects the three music initiatives under investigation in this thesis in a variety of ways. While it limits wireless technology in the area, it financially supports local organizations and education.

Over the course of the twentieth century, Pocahontas County's economy transitioned from timber dependency to tourism dependency. The population of Pocahontas County peaked in 1920 at 15,002 people, but subsequently, after the logging industry had cleared most of the valuable timber, it began to decrease steadily (Lewis 1998). The last passenger train ran in 1958, and by 1970 the population was back down to 8,870 (about where it was right before the Greenbrier Railroad was completed in 1900).

¹⁴ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "White Population, 2010."

¹⁵ National Radio Astronomy Observatory, "History of Green Bank and the NRAO," <https://science.nrao.edu/facilities/gbt/green-bank-local-area-information/history-of-green-bank-and-the-nrao> (accessed April 7, 2014).

The only significant rise in population since it started to decrease was during the 1970s when several changes took place in Pocahontas County and the population rose 11.8 percent following federal economic development initiatives as well as tourism development in the county.¹⁶

Rural Appalachia became a destination for countless individuals and interest groups who were exposed to the media-constructed images of the region that became popular after Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty and Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 that focused on rural and urban low-income families. One of the programs created under the Economic Opportunity Act was Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), established in 1965. This federal program, designed to fight poverty, employed mostly urban middle-class educated young people to increase economic opportunity for the nation's underprivileged classes (Mason 2009). Although the first VISTAs in Pocahontas County did not come until 1981, VISTA has had a huge presence in West Virginia since its inception in 1965. VISTA workers were the first large group of educated young people from urban areas to move into rural West Virginia, but they sparked an even larger migration of urban youth to rural West Virginia, including Pocahontas County, that followed in the 1970s (Salstrom 2003).

As word about the rural beauty and cheap land of West Virginia spread to other urban youth from their VISTA friends and from publications such as *The Mother Earth News*, the back-to-the-land movement turned towards the Mountain State, and thousands of disillusioned young urbanites relocated there to live a simpler communal life close to nature (Salstrom 2003). Pocahontas County was a destination for people involved in the

¹⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "West Virginia Population of Counties by Decennial Census: 1900-1990," <http://www.census.gov/population/cencounts/wv190090.txt> (accessed April 7, 2014).

back-to-the-land movement starting in 1971.¹⁷ These individuals sought a pure lifestyle, unadulterated by capitalist corruption, in a remote communal setting so they could be economically self-sufficient and get “back to the land.”

Although Pocahontas County locals were apprehensive towards these newcomers at first because of obvious cultural differences that often resulted in misunderstandings, the back-to-the-landers were eventually embraced by most of the community. They shared farming practices with each other, and locals were generally happy that younger people were moving to the area, especially since the population had been steadily declining since the end of the logging boom in the 1920s. Still, some locals were not as welcoming because of conflicting religious, political, and ideological beliefs. Back-to-the-landers isolated themselves from their surrounding community at first because of these cultural differences, but over time, as many communes dissolved and their former residents were forced to find other ways to make a living, back-to-the-landers became much more involved in the Pocahontas County community and took on new identities as West Virginians.¹⁸ Today, many of them are involved in the three music initiatives under investigation in this thesis.

The back-to-the-landers have dissipated and become integrated in the local community, but other groups that have migrated to the county have maintained permanence and remained relatively isolated from the surrounding community. Also in 1971, in the context of the War on Poverty, Dr. Hunter “Patch” Adams chose Pocahontas County in the impoverished state of West Virginia to build his free clinic, the *Gesundheit*

¹⁷ David Holtzman, “Back to the Land in Pocahontas County,” *Goldenseal*, Summer 2009.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Institute, made famous by the 1998 film *Patch Adams*, starring Robin Williams.¹⁹ This non-profit health care organization espouses humanitarian clowning to promote compassion in healing. Due to lack of funding, however, the institute has remained stagnant for decades, and much of the staff's efforts have been focused on global outreach initiatives rather than local ones. Still, the Gesundheit Institute clowns can be seen offering free hugs at some local events, and they have been fundraising to build an arts-centered community hospital on their compound in Pocahontas County.

In 1974, Snowshoe Mountain ski resort opened in the northern end of the county, and today it is the main contributor to the county's tourism industry. Because the ski resort requires more seasonal employees than the local area can provide, it has a work exchange program set up with several countries in which foreign workers are employed seasonally at the resort.²⁰ Some of these international workers also end up staying in the county and raising families there. Snowshoe offers several services to the surrounding community, including the Snowshoe Career Center and the Snowshoe Foundation located in the county seat of Marlinton, to "enhance the quality of life of the residents of [their] region while making [their] mountain community a better place to live."²¹

The same images of Appalachia circulating in the wake of the War on Poverty that drew back-to-the-landers to the region in the 1970s also led the National Alliance, once the largest and most influential white supremacist organizations in the United States, to move its headquarters from Arlington, Virginia, to the southern end of Pocahontas County in 1985. The media-constructed images of Appalachia depicted unadulterated,

¹⁹ Patch Adams M.D. & Gesundheit Institute, "History," <http://patchadams.org/phases> (accessed April 7, 2014).

²⁰ Interview with former Snowshoe Mountain international employee, July 27, 2014.

²¹ Snowshoe Foundation, "About," <http://snowshoefoundation.org/about-us/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

racially pure communities and the remote area in which they lived—an ideal environment for the National Alliance (Mason 2009). Ironically, back-to-the-landers and white supremacists were searching for very similar ideals, but rather than seeking a racially pure life, the back-to-the-landers sought a pure lifestyle close to nature and unadulterated by capitalist corruption. The National Alliance held “leadership conferences” attended by white supremacists from across the country and produced Resistance Records, a successful white supremacist record label, on the Pocahontas County compound (Simi and Futrell 2010). Since the founder’s death in 2002, however, the organization has had much more of an Internet presence than a local one, although many members still live in the area and perpetuate the stigma of xenophobia.

Other recent groups who have found their way to Pocahontas County include the Zendik Farm Arts Foundation, a commune of artists and environmentalists dedicated to radical social change. Like the white supremacists and back-to-the-landers, the Zendiks came to Pocahontas County to escape the modern world. This group, however, is known to many people within and outside of the local community as a cult organization because of its charismatic leader, the strict rules it enforces, and the paranoia it instills in its members. Members of Zendik must change their last name to Zendik and relinquish all of their possessions and assets to the leader upon joining. One of the ways the group earns money is by selling their popular bumper stickers and t-shirts featuring the Zendik slogan, “Stop Bitching, Start a Revolution,” on D.C. sidewalks. Founded in 1969 in Southern California, the group subsequently moved to Florida, Texas, and North Carolina before finally settling in Pocahontas County in 2004.²² Its members remain relatively isolated on their commune and the children are homeschooled, but some members volunteer in the

²² “After Zendik,” <http://emeraldinajia.livejournal.com/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

community, and the leader of the group has written a monthly gardening column for the local paper, the *Pocahontas Times*.

Another wave of urban people moving to Pocahontas County recently are retirees and more affluent people building a second home in the mountains. About half of the housing units in the county recorded by the 2010 census are vacation homes.²³ Hailing from places such as New York, California, Texas, and Florida, residents in this cohort were often introduced to the area through the Snowshoe Mountain ski resort. Participation in the community depends on the resident, but vacationers in general and many retirees do not participate in the community. Other retirees who permanently move to the area for its small community charm, however, devote much of their retired living to volunteer work and other community activities. Perhaps integration into the community for this cohort will be gradual, as it was with the back-to-the-landers in the 1970s.

Finally, although VISTAs started working in Pocahontas County in 1981 to help with outreach for the newly established community radio station, recent heavy VISTA recruitment in Pocahontas County has resulted in an influx of middle-class urban educated young people. In some cases, even young people originally from Pocahontas County who have moved away are returning through the VISTA program. While some residents are apprehensive towards VISTAs who have big ideas but know little about the local community, as a whole the community has embraced the VISTAs and appreciated the services they provide in the area. Because of the nature of VISTA work, these individuals are usually very involved in the community, but cultural clashes are still common.

²³ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "General Housing Characteristics."

The current ethnoscape of Pocahontas County described above clearly demonstrates the movement of groups of people into and out of the area over the past century, challenging narratives of rural Appalachia as stagnant and disconnected and supporting ethnomusicologist Mark Slobin's claim that cultural and musical exchange cannot be explained by theories that emphasize isolated and homogeneous cultures with fixed boundaries (1992). Although Pocahontas County is isolated in many ways, the various cultural cohorts included in its ethnoscape shape and are shaped by the music culture of the community, thereby having an impact on cultural and musical exchange. The cultural diversity represented in Pocahontas County's ethnoscape also brings with it other "-scapes" that anthropologist Arjun Appadurai identifies as the overlapping and changing dimensions of cultural flows: ideoscape, financescape, technoscape, and mediascape (1990). These various "-scapes" are all interrelated and play a significant role in cultural and musical exchange. Appadurai emphasizes that the central problem with today's cultural interactions is the tension between homogenization and heterogenization, and this tension can be explored through the various "landscapes" in Pocahontas County and the music initiatives discussed in this thesis.

The various cohorts included in the county's ethnoscape represent a range of ideoscapes, or flows of ideologies. For example, families who have lived in the area for generations as part of the county's working-class loggers, farmers, construction workers, or truckers are often more politically conservative. In contrast, back-to-the-landers and VISTAs, who came from an urban middle-class background, tend to bring politically liberal ideologies into the county. Members of Zendik or the National Alliance make up a more radical faction in the county's ideoscape. Still, many other groups fall somewhere

in between. Whereas members of the more radical cohorts tend to be reclusive, members from most of the other cohorts are regular participants and contributors to the three music initiatives investigated in this thesis. Although both conservative and liberal community members would agree that national politics have little regard for the issues Pocahontas County faces, differences in ideologies do result in tension centered on the three music initiatives.

Different cohorts also represent various economic statuses, which make up the county's financescape together with institutions that are responsible for a significant flow of money into or out of the area such as timber companies, Snowshoe, and NRAO. This movement of money has a significant impact on how much musical and cultural exchange the community has access to. Many people in the county face economic adversity, and the community as a whole is economically depressed. Absentee land ownership associated with the extractive resource industry has had a major impact on the financescape of West Virginia over the past century. Three of the top eleven private landowners in the state own 17,342 acres of timberland in Pocahontas County.²⁴ Not one of the state's top ten private landowners is headquartered in West Virginia, which means a significant amount of the capital generated by this land flows out of the state (West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy 2013). However, many of these absentee landowners attempt to establish a positive presence in the communities in which they operate through sponsorship (Bell and York 2010). For example, Plum Creek Timberland, the third largest private landowner in Pocahontas County as well as in the state of West Virginia, has awarded grants to Opera House music education programs.

²⁴ To contrast this, sixty-two percent or 349,000 acres of Pocahontas County is either state or federal land—the largest concentration of public lands in West Virginia. The Monongahela National Forest makes up 310,000 of those acres, and five state parks and two state forests make up the rest.

As mentioned, one of the main economic industries for the county is tourism, with most of the income generated by Snowshoe Mountain, which draws many people to the area but is somewhat closed off from the rest of the county. The ski resort established the Snowshoe Career Center and the Snowshoe Foundation to address economic issues in the county by providing GED courses, career advising, and grants awarded to local community organizations such as the Opera House.²⁵ Another financial backer of the Opera House, NRAO also provides an economic boost to the northern end of the county where it is located, through its investments in the Green Bank Elementary/Middle School and the educational programs it offers.

This finanscape is intricately related to all other “scapes” of the area. Economic opportunity is what originally brought lumber companies to Pocahontas County leading to massive changes in other “scapes,” but perhaps most notably the technoscape with railroad expansion. The railroads, in turn, brought new people with diverse backgrounds, new ideas, and new music. The distribution of technology in the area has drastically changed, however, now that the timber industry is on the decline. The train no longer runs to Pocahontas County, and current economic isolation makes it difficult for some households to get access to the Internet and music recordings.

Furthermore, Pocahontas County is located in the National Radio Quiet Zone, an area designated in 1958 by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) in which radio transmission is restricted to avoid harmful interference with NRAO’s reception of weak signals. In Pocahontas County, this means that cell phones, wireless Internet, most

²⁵ There are still few job opportunities in the area, and even fewer educational or training opportunities, a push factor for many local young people who move out of the area for employment or higher education. On the other hand, this is a pull factor for young VISTA workers who move to the area to help improve the community’s economic situation.

other wireless devices, and even microwaves can only be used in certain limited areas, and radio stations can only broadcast using a low-power transmission that is not received in many areas.²⁶ Most of the county does not receive any radio broadcasts from more urban areas, and only one community radio station transmitting on low power exists within the county. Of course, Pocahontas County residents are not completely cut off from the outside world. Although some households do not have access to the Internet due to economic circumstances or the National Radio Quiet Zone, there are still many households that do have such access, and all of the county's five public libraries offer free Internet access (Carlson 2010).

The mediascape of Pocahontas County, the state of West Virginia, and the greater Appalachian region perpetuated by the War on Poverty has had a significant effect on the area's ethnoscape. Image- and narrative-based accounts of the reality of the region continue to label it as isolated, poverty-stricken, simple, homogeneous, and exotic. VISTAs came to West Virginia as a direct result of the War on Poverty legislation, but others soon followed. The circulating accounts of rural Appalachia drew various cultural cohorts to Pocahontas County for very different yet related reasons: VISTAs come to relieve poverty and to experience a rural environment different from their urban hometowns; back-to-the-landers exposed to this mediascape deemed it the perfect place to acquire cheap land and live simpler lives isolated from capitalist corruption; Patch Adams was motivated by the mediascape to establish the Gesundheit Institute and offer alternative healing to the rural poor who were isolated from modern medicine; the National Alliance chose to relocate to Pocahontas County because the mediascape

²⁶ National Radio Astronomy Observatory, "National Radio Quiet Zone," <http://www.gb.nrao.edu/nrqz/nrqz.shtml> (accessed April 7, 2014).

depicted a traditional lifestyle that was racially pure and isolated from multicultural cities; and after being pushed out of several other rural locations by encroaching urban sprawl, the Zendiks relocated to Pocahontas County where the mediascape promised isolation from unsustainable urban life and a space where they could live an alternative lifestyle and “start a revolution.” These various cohorts, however, all found their way to Pocahontas County for related reasons: they were all searching for a remote setting that would allow them to escape different aspects of the modern world. The mediascape of Pocahontas County translated to a romanticism of simple rural community life and an idealized alternative to modernist, capitalist society.

Despite the characteristic anti-modernist values held by many of the cultural cohorts that have moved to Pocahontas County, they are still part of the modernist-capitalist cosmopolitan cultural formation in which they were raised, and hold deeply ingrained values associated with the formation, though various cultural cohorts reject different habits of the formation to varying degrees (Turino 2008). For example, most of the cohorts who move to the area from more urban places highly value eclecticism and diversity, whereas these are values that the National Alliance specifically rejects from the modernist-cosmopolitan formation. VISTAs and Gesundheit Institute clowns bring with them the modernist-cosmopolitan value of individualism, whereas many back-to-the-landers and Zendiks were looking for a more communal life. Even with the discrepancies and contradictions between these related yet different anti-modernist cohorts, they all bring with them modernist-cosmopolitan values and act as agents of this cultural formation. In fact, ethnomusicologist Thomas Turino claims that the modernist-capitalist cosmopolitan formation is often responsible for much transnational—and in this case,

urban to rural—exchange (2000, 2003). As I make clear in subsequent chapters, this cultural exchange can have a range of effects on Pocahontas County, sometimes resulting in tension, as Appadurai explains, between homogenization and heterogenization (1990).

The Hammons Family

Music is also a major factor in Pocahontas County's mediascape. When asked to explain what they consider to be Pocahontas County's musical heritage, all of my informants immediately pointed to the Hammons family, to the unique brand of traditional Appalachian music they helped to transmit, or to that music's descendants; bluegrass and country music.²⁷ The Hammons family has reached a legendary status in the community, and folklorist Gerald Milnes even asserts that Edden Hammons has become a West Virginia folk hero (1999). The Hammonses were not the only people around playing this type of music, but they are known for being especially dedicated musicians whose knowledge of Appalachian music traditions has been passed down in their extensive family for centuries. Moreover, the Hammons family has had a profound influence on generations of music in the area since they first moved there in 1860, just before the Civil War (Fleischhauer and Jabbour 1973).

The contemporary Hammons family's ancestor, Edwin Hammons, immigrated to America from Belfast, Northern Ireland, in the mid-eighteenth century (Milnes 1999). The Hammonses then became a migratory family in the Appalachian frontier, moving throughout Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky, and eventually to the Big Sandy/Tug Valley area on the Kentucky and (West) Virginia border by 1847.²⁸ Many of the tunes played by

²⁷ Interviews with community members, July 2013-March 2014.

²⁸ At that time, Virginia and West Virginia had not yet separated into two states.

the Hammons family are known in these other areas but by different names. Due to a deadly family feud and increasing Confederate/Union tension right before the Civil War on the Kentucky/(West) Virginia border, the family moved to the remote Williams River in east-central West Virginia on the border of Webster and Pocahontas Counties. Edden Hammons was born there in 1874 (Fleischhauer and Jabbour 1973).

As a migratory woodland and subsistence gardening clan, the men in the Hammons family were renowned for their hunting, fishing, and ginseng-foraging skills in addition to their musical expertise. For many pioneering families, fiddling was considered a manly pursuit that went hand-in-hand with hunting. Therefore, it was mainly the men in the Hammons family who were known for their talent on musical instruments, especially the fiddle and banjo. Edden Hammons, for example, is said to have started fiddling when he was a child, playing on a homemade gourd fiddle until he was able to obtain a store-bought fiddle later in life (Fleischhauer and Jabbour 1973). Many stories depict Edden as being so passionate about fiddling that he neglected responsibilities in life, such as employment and family, in favor of spending time with his instrument (Milnes 1999). The women in the Hammons family are known more for their singing traditions, although they played musical instruments in more private settings (Marshall 2006).

The Hammonses ability to entertain gave them regional fame, but they did not play professionally. Instead, the most common context for their instrumental music was a dance at someone's home. Over the centuries since their ancestors first immigrated to America, the Hammonses had carried with them several hundred songs and instrumental pieces of the oral British, Irish, and Appalachian traditions. The songs include a variety

of ballads, lyric songs, play-party songs, children's songs, hymns, and humorous songs. Some of the instrumental pieces have not been found elsewhere. They were both performers of these old tunes and composers of their own. Many of the tunes they were known to play are named after local landmarks; for example, "Three Forks of Cheat," "Cranberry Rock," and "Parson's Rock" (Fleischhauer and Jabbour 1973).

But the Hammonses were not impervious to social changes in the early twentieth century. A logging boomtown was erected near the Hammonses' house on the Williams River in 1921, and the family began selling their excess produce and fish to the residents. Before long, Burl Hammons started working on the logging railroads, and his sister, Maggie Hammons, married a logger who had come from North Carolina. These changes, in addition to new interest in popular music forms introduced by radio, led the Hammonses to all but quit their musical pursuits in the 1930s. It was not until 1969 that Dwight Diller, a young local man who had recently become interested in traditional music, encouraged the Hammons family to start playing their old tunes and singing their old songs again. It was Diller who introduced the Hammonses to folklorists Alan Jabbour and Carl Fleischhauer, who recorded the family for the Library of Congress and released the LP, *The Hammons Family: A Study of a West Virginia Family's Traditions*, in 1973. The Hammons family once again became active musicians in the area and participated in regional fiddler conventions and local festivals (Fleischhauer and Jabbour 1973).

Before the logging industry and increased accessibility to popular music caused the Hammonses to lay down their fiddles and banjos in the 1930s, these major changes exerted influence on their musical style and repertoire. The labor force for the logging companies and railroad construction was extremely diverse, yet segregated, and many

workers were Italian and Austrian immigrants or African Americans. In fact, the labor needed for these jobs afforded African Americans with comparative economic prosperity in West Virginia as opposed to other areas throughout southern Appalachia (Lewis 1998). While the Hammons family is known for their old-world traditions, their repertoire and style also included traces of African American traditions, sometimes learned indirectly from popular minstrel tunes and sometimes learned directly from African American neighbors. Grafton Lacy, for example, was a black railroad worker who also lived on the Williams River and taught the Hammons Family new styles and tunes (Milnes 1999). According to Milnes, musicians' respect for each other's talents was able to break down barriers of race.

Increased accessibility to recorded music in the early twentieth century also influenced the Hammons family. Although the area did not receive radio airwaves for a long time, many families, including the Hammonses, had phonographs. A lot can be said about the photograph taken circa 1906 and chosen for the cover of the 1973 Library of Congress study and LP, which features three men of the Hammons family posed straight-faced, each holding one item—a fiddle, a gun, and a wind-up phonograph. One thing is obvious, though: rural traditional musicians were not cut off from popular music, and Appalachia was not as culturally isolated as some claim. The phonograph in this picture is a testament to the wide variety of music to which the Hammons family must have been exposed. At this time in the early twentieth century the Hammonses were probably listening to a mix of minstrel, vaudeville, show tunes, and sentimental ballads, genres of popular entertainment similar to what would be featured at the Opera House built only a few years later in Pocahontas County (Milnes 1999).

As mentioned above, there have been many other active musicians of traditional music in Pocahontas County, but it is the Hammons family that so many people name as the ones who shaped the area's musical heritage. Speaking generally about traditional folk music in West Virginia, Milnes discusses the propensity for communities to claim and celebrate their own legendary musicians who form the local musical legacy and repertoire (1999). This is certainly the case with the Hammons family in Pocahontas County, and upon driving in to Marlinton, the county seat, one can see flags hanging from street lights with old pictures of the Hammonses. Milnes explores the legendary musician status further and shows how many of these musicians are even made in to folk heroes over time (1999). This process has also taken place in Pocahontas County where the Hammons family, and especially Edden Hammons, have been depicted in short stories of fiction, such as "That Hammons Boy" in *The Last Forest* by G. D. McNeill,²⁹ and in works of poetry, such as *Hammons and the Ass*, not to mention the countless humorous stories kept alive orally in Pocahontas County.

Although the last member of the Hammons family who was recorded for the 1973 Library of Congress study died in 1993, young Hammonses have begun to pick up their family's traditions in recent years, albeit through different means and in different contexts. Teenagers Trevor Hammons and Amy Sharp have been learning banjo tunes that their great grandfather, Lee Hammons, was known for, but not directly from family members. Instead, the musical legacy of the Hammons family is being passed on to the two great grandchildren as well as many other local traditional Appalachian music enthusiasts through a variety of music initiatives in the area. In fact, initiatives to promote

²⁹ G. Douglas McNeill, 1940, *The Last Forest: Tales of the Allegheny Woods* (Parsons, WV: McClain Printing).

the community's musical heritage and opportunities to experience and participate in local music traditions abound in Pocahontas County.³⁰ The legacy of the Hammons family continues to inspire and influence local musicians as well as traditional Appalachian music enthusiasts from outside the area who travel to Pocahontas County to participate in the various programs and events offered.

Several local performing musicians, including Dwight Diller and his son, Caleb Diller; the Bing Brothers; the Black Mountain Bluegrass Boys; Juanita Fireball and the Continental Drifters; and Pam Lund, can trace their musical lineage back to the Hammons family. These musicians continue to perform tunes learned from the Hammonses at various venues and festivals in the area, and some of them make an extra effort to educate others about the Hammons legacy by organizing workshops and music camps. The Bing brothers, who were friends with the Hammonses, have been organizing a summer music camp called Allegheny Echoes since 1997 at which the Hammons family is celebrated. Pam Lund, who moved to Pocahontas County in the 1980s to learn directly from the Hammons Family, now teaches fiddle, banjo, and guitar to local youth, two of whom are Hammons children.³¹ Dwight Diller, the initial catalyst for the Hammonses to start playing music again, hosts week-long intensive banjo clinics at his home and occasionally teaches a class in Marlinton with his son, Caleb Diller. Finally, the Pocahontas County Opera House, which was established when the Hammonses who recorded for the Library of Congress were young, in 1910, has recently begun staging the annual Hammons Musical Heritage Celebration to honor the family's legacy and to showcase musicians who continue to be influenced by them.

³⁰ Treehouse Production, 2011, *Passing It On: The Rebirth of Old Time Music in Pocahontas County, WV*, Pocahontas Communications Cooperative radio documentary on CD.

³¹ Ibid.

Most of the aforementioned Hammons protégés as well as Allegheny Echoes and the Pocahontas County Opera House are now part of a recent cultural tourism initiative, the Mountain Music Trail. Similar to The Crooked Road, its predecessor in Virginia, the Mountain Music Trail seeks to promote the economic development and preservation of traditional music throughout five counties of the Allegheny Mountain region of West Virginia. Spearheaded by the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau, the Mountain Music Trail restricts performer, event, and venue partnership to those who present old-time, bluegrass, regionally significant ethnic, folk, country, or gospel—the same styles of music identified by my informants to be the region’s musical heritage.³²

³² Mountain Music Trail “About,” <http://mountainmusictrail.com/about> (accessed April 7, 2014).

Chapter 2- The Opera House: “Cultural Heart of the Community”

Standing as a reminder of the sudden grandeur that once was Pocahontas County during the logging industry boom and railroad expansion at the turn of the twentieth century, today, the Pocahontas County Opera House plays a central role in supporting and promoting the community’s musical heritage. Besides serving as the only formal performance venue in the county, the Opera House and its Foundation organize, present, and host myriad old-time, bluegrass, and country music performances and community events throughout the year. When asked to describe the purpose and programming of the Opera House, however, the three most common words used by my informants were “diverse,” “eclectic,” and “varied.”³³ Indeed, despite its obligation to the local musical heritage, the Opera House Foundation strives to present diverse performances to which the community may not otherwise have access.

In this chapter, I offer a brief history of opera houses in Appalachia and Pocahontas County, explore the Opera House’s role in the community today, and analyze its current programming and audience with particular attention to conflicting cultural values. Through these accounts, I demonstrate how The Opera House has reflected social changes over the past century and that its current goal of providing access to music and culture from outside the area actually has a lot in common with the original function of the Opera House in the early twentieth century, when the newly built railroad brought performers there from as far away as New York City.

³³ Interviews with Pocahontas County community members, July 2013.

History

Opera houses became ubiquitous in small-town Appalachia between 1860 and 1930 when the coal and logging industries were booming and railroads were ever expanding into isolated hollows that had previously been less accessible (Condee 2005). Pocahontas County was suddenly connected to the rest of the country and a national culture when the Greenbrier Railroad was completed in 1900 to accommodate the burgeoning logging industry in the area (Lewis 1998). Not only did the trains bring new diverse populations to Pocahontas County, but they also brought new music and popular entertainment. When towns were being developed around the newly constructed railroads, an opera house was considered just as fundamental in the establishment of identity, business, and permanence as a town hall, school, church, and fire station. Although many Appalachian opera houses are modest buildings belying their grand name, for the time and place these structures were regarded as a source of pride and as landmarks with monumental architecture that demonstrated the town's high cultural aspirations (Condee 2005). The Pocahontas County Opera House, for example, was the first reinforced poured concrete structure in West Virginia, and it was reinforced by steel logging train rails (U.S. Department of the Interior 1999). The central location of the Pocahontas County Opera House in the county seat of Marlinton's downtown established its role as "the cultural heart of the community."³⁴

An opera house in small-town Appalachia may seem like a contradiction, and in fact these buildings rarely if ever housed opera performances. Instead, they were multifaceted establishments used for a variety of events, such as traveling minstrel and

³⁴ Pocahontas County Opera House, "About," <http://www.pocahontasoperahouse.org/about/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

vaudeville productions, wild west shows, concerts, religious events, lyceum lectures, moving picture shows, high school commencements, boxing matches, benefits for local organizations, union meetings, roller-skating, and basketball games. The common euphemistic name for these structures itself provides insight into the social norms and morality of the time and shows how mainstream and highbrow culture from outside of Appalachia was disseminating into the region. The title “theatre” held a stigma in American society because it was associated with immoral hooligans such as actors, dancers, prostitutes, and rowdy male spectators. “Theatre” buildings were often banned by municipal law, but giving the structure the title of “opera house” was a deceptive method of emphasizing respectability and evading such regulations (Condee 2005).³⁵

If Pocahontas County was going to show itself as a respectable community with high-class big-city values to attract a labor force, it was necessary to distance itself from the rough and rowdy rural culture for which it was known. In the national imagination, rural Appalachia was a culturally inferior and backward land of immoral hillbillies who entertained themselves by drinking and engaging in frenzied musical debauchery. Establishing a formal opera house that provided respectable high quality performances in the center of the county seat was the perfect antidote to this wild culture.³⁶ Performances at these venues were family oriented; alcohol was banned and audience behavior was more regulated (Condee 2005). J.G. Tilton of Mount Vernon, Ohio, was an influential railroad magnate, publisher of the local Republican newspaper, the *Marlinton Messenger*,

³⁵ Other euphemisms included “academy of music,” “museum,” and “histrionic academy.”

³⁶ West Virginia grapples with its wild reputation to this day as evidenced by MTV’s 2013 reality TV series, *Buck Wild*, which was filmed in West Virginia and attracted much negative publicity. The state government has unsuccessfully tried to change the state slogan, “Wild and Wonderful,” to something that distances the state from its stereotype as a backward culture, though this effort was strongly opposed by West Virginia citizens.

and entrepreneurial businessman who rose to the occasion and built the Pocahontas County Opera House in 1910 (U.S. Department of the Interior 1999).

Opera houses represented a national concern with building a sense of community brought about by the fragmentation of new towns created from industry around the turn of the twentieth century. New populations, such as Italian and Austrian immigrants as well as African Americans from the South, were arriving in great numbers to work for the railroads and logging industry in Pocahontas County. The incoming populations greatly diversified the county and the greater Mountain State. For instance, there were only one thousand immigrants in 1880 in West Virginia, but by 1910 there were between twenty and thirty thousand. By 1920, sixty-nine percent of Appalachia's black population lived in West Virginia (Condee 2005).³⁷ This diversity was reflected by events at the Opera House, which attracted broad audiences across racial, class, gender, religious, political, and generational lines. The Opera House provided something for almost everyone, and as the largest gathering place in the county, virtually everyone entered its doors.

Historian Lawrence Levine argues that the distinction between "high" and "low" culture did not exist for most of the nineteenth century when both the educated elite and the lower classes enjoyed Shakespeare, opera, and orchestral music as popular forms of entertainment (1988). By the end of the nineteenth century, however, Levine suggests this shared culture had separated into sharply defined less flexible categories catering to distinct audiences. In larger cities with many venues for congregating and entertainment,

³⁷ Music historian Christopher Wilkinson explains how this relatively large population of African Americans in West Virginia was due to a unique economic and social environment created in the state in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. African Americans had guaranteed voting rights in West Virginia since the early 1870s, and because of their relatively large numbers, they had enough influence in state politics to guarantee a freedom not found in adjacent southern states. Additionally, West Virginia offered comparatively well-paid employment, and African Americans in the Mountain State were earning more than those in the South or North (Wilkinson 2012).

the population tended to divide or be segregated along class, ethnic, racial, and religious lines, with each group congregating at a different establishment (Levine 1988). But theatre historian William Faricy Condee points out that in small-town Appalachia, an opera house remained the single site for gathering and entertainment well into the twentieth century and “became the crossroads of the community” (2005, 5).

Of course, segregation was still common in rural Appalachia, including Pocahontas County, but the smaller the community was, the more people of different backgrounds interacted with each other (Condee 2005). The Pocahontas County Opera House has a balcony, which indicates that it may have had segregated seating restricting black audience members to the gallery, but many social classes, races, and ethnicities were entertained under a single roof at the same time. This meant that the events had to cater to the entire spectrum of the population and be affordable for different socioeconomic classes. For example, on February 1, 1912, the *Pocahontas Times* advertised a political play, *The Man of the Hour*, at the Opera House by quoting Theodore Roosevelt’s review, “the best play I have ever seen,” and offering tickets at various prices from thirty-five cents to one dollar.

Today

As with many turn-of-the-century railroad towns, the economy in Pocahontas County was boom and bust, and as the economy changed, J. G. Tilton ran into financial troubles. By 1912 he had begun publishing his newspaper from the Opera House, and he and his family were living upstairs. In 1914 he sold the building and left Pocahontas County. After the late 1930s, when the golden age of traveling performance companies

was waning and popular entertainment was drastically changing, the building was used at various times as a lumberyard and a car dealership. Over the course of the twentieth century the Opera House fell into extreme disrepair, but in 1991, the Pocahontas County Historic Landmarks Commission purchased the Opera House, and with the community's support, worked to restore it to its original glory. In 1999, the doors were reopened and performances started being presented once again. The building is now on the National Register of Historic Places and has become an "anchor institution," inextricably intertwined with the life of the Pocahontas County community (U.S. Department of the Interior 1999).³⁸

Just as it was in the early twentieth century, the Opera House is also a multipurpose building in the twenty-first century and reflects many of the same uses today as it did when it was first built. In addition to being a performing arts center presenting programs such as music, dance, theatre, storytelling, juggling, magic shows, and movies, the building is often used as a community center. It serves as the venue for local churches' gospel events, the Pocahontas County High School's annual prom, beauty pageants, weddings, local organization dinners, and craft shows. The Opera House has a large flat floor with moveable chairs that are cleared for events such as the occasional square dance. In addition, benefit concerts are frequently staged there, and in November of 2013, when a devastating fire destroyed several buildings just around the corner on main street, displacing seven businesses and thirteen families, the Opera House hosted a benefit show for the people affected and the fire department. The space is very versatile and can be transformed for a variety of events, which helps to give it a central place in the local community.

³⁸ Interview with Opera House Operations Manager, July 26, 2013.

Inseparably linked to the county's financescape and ethnoscape (including the logging industry, railroad expansion, and influx of new people and music) at the turn of the twentieth century, the Opera House is once again allying itself with the changing financescape and ethnoscape at the turn of the twenty-first century. Now that the county's economy has transitioned from timber dependency to tourism dependency, the Opera House has formed partnerships with various economic development and tourism initiatives, including GoMarlinton, the Appalachian Waters Scenic Byway, the West Virginia Historic Theatre Trail, and the Mountain Music Trail.³⁹ As many tourists expect to hear mountain music—old-time or bluegrass—based on the mediascape associated with the region, the Opera House is sometimes advertised as a venue for traditional Appalachian music, though it has become much more than this to the local community.⁴⁰

As a whole, the Opera House is a mostly volunteer-based organization operated by and for the community. People representing virtually all cultural cohorts described in the previous chapter serve on its board, contribute to the programming committee, or participate as audience members. The building is certainly a stage for entertainment and community gathering, but considering the eclectic makeup of the county's population, it has also become a stage on which conflicting cultural values can unfold. And although it has been over a century since the Opera House as a respectable formal establishment intervened in a very informal society, today the organization still grapples with its formality and how to operate on the border of a somewhat strict and sober tradition of concert-going and a laid-back working-class tradition of drinking and playing music with friends.

³⁹ Pocahontas County Opera House, <http://www.pocahontasoperahouse.org/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

⁴⁰ Mountain Music Trail "About," <http://mountainmusictrail.com/about> (accessed April 7, 2014).

Programming

The Pocahontas County Opera House Foundation was created in 1998 to oversee the programming of the newly restored building. Advised by a programming committee made up of board members and interested people from the community, the Foundation organizes an annual performance series consisting of more than a dozen shows each year. When performances started being staged again in 1999, they were mostly of local folk and bluegrass musicians, as they were most accessible and their music was accepted by the community. Almost fifteen years later, the Opera House still serves as a venue for local musicians, but it also books nationally renowned acts and is branching out to offer an increasingly diverse mix of music such as indie-folk, jazz, bluegrass, classical, country, and world music. They also occasionally offer dance, musical theatre, and performances geared towards children. In addition to the performance series, the Foundation organizes a variety of community programs including movie nights, open music jams, and youth education programs.

Despite the variety offered by the Opera House, bluegrass has been the safest genre of music to book in terms of keeping attendance numbers up, which may be why the Opera House is sometimes pigeonholed as an acoustic mountain-music venue. As a non-profit organization, it is important to maintain high attendance both for financial purposes and to reach as many potential audience members as possible, but as part of the Opera House's mission, "to be the cultural heart of the community," the Foundation strives to provide local people with music to which they would otherwise not have access. This is another balancing act for the Opera House, as the board and programming

committee is made up of both Pocahontas County natives and outsiders with differing cultural values and agendas.

Many Pocahontas County residents with strong place-based identities are staunch supporters of the area's musical heritage and promote mountain music above all else. A Pocahontas County native who is a programming committee member and an orthodox supporter of mountain music articulated his frustration with the current music programming at the Opera House, declaring it "a little too eclectic." He continued, "I would certainly like to see a better promotion of traditional music, but it gets to be a difficult task because of other constituents within the organizations. The people who make up those committees are large in number from urban areas."⁴¹ Indeed, outsiders often promote a more diverse mix of performances as they typically come from more urban areas where musical diversity is the norm. An NRAO employee from Colorado who is also a sound engineer and board member for the Opera House argued that "something other than old-time and Bluegrass" needs to be more heavily promoted in the area.⁴²

On the other hand, the division between Pocahontas county natives who support mountain music and transplants who support musical diversity is not black and white. An Opera House board member from New Hampshire said that the existence of many opportunities to experience mountain music in the area is "heart-warming, because I think it indicates that those kinds of traditions will continue."⁴³ In contrast, a Pocahontas County native admitted that she is "a little overworked on [bluegrass music]." She continued, "Every time there's music, it's . . . bluegrass. The Mountain Music Trail is all

⁴¹ Interview with Opera House programming committee member, July 27, 2013.

⁴² Interview with Opera House board member and sound engineer, July 28, 2013.

⁴³ Interview with Opera House board member, July 26, 2013.

about bluegrass. Any other bands in Pocahontas County that don't play bluegrass? No! Every other band is 'So and So Mountain Boys' . . . The Viney Mountain Boys and the Black Mountain Bluegrass Boys, and . . .”⁴⁴

After the Foundation was formed and started presenting performances at the Opera House again, orthodox supporters of mountain music had control of the programming committee, and the result was a performance series mainly consisting of old-time, bluegrass, and country music.⁴⁵ Eventually, the Foundation intervened in the programming committee to uphold their mission and incorporate other types of music into the performance series. Nevertheless, to get people in the door and to appeal to the mountain-music enthusiasts, the Foundation and programming committee maintain about a third of the performances in a given year as old-time or bluegrass.

In addition to an annual performance series rich in mountain music, several other programs throughout the year encourage the surrounding community as well as tourists to experience and participate in the local musical heritage. The Opera House and its Foundation host the Allegheny Echoes summer music camp; present an annual Opry Night showcasing local old-time, bluegrass, and country musicians; stage a fundraising recital for young old-time music students and coordinate KidFid, a youth fiddle, banjo, and guitar contest; honor the Hammons family legacy with the annual Hammons Musical Heritage Celebration; and organize mountain music jams and square dances. Through these programs, the Opera House remains a bastion of the musical mediascape—both supporting community traditions that locals fear will one day be forgotten and providing

⁴⁴ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

⁴⁵ Some local musicians may have joined the programming committee to promote their own old-time, bluegrass, or country band.

outsiders with the kind of authentic mountain culture they expect to experience in Pocahontas County.

The Opera House is not the only site where the community's musical heritage lives, however. From private informal house parties—the original context for participatory mountain music—and neighborhood bars and restaurants, to municipal fairs and festivals, the community radio station, and even large highly publicized Snowshoe Mountain events, it seems as though mountain music is in the air and around every corner in Pocahontas County. In addition to their commitment to the local musical heritage, the Opera House Foundation and programming committee recognize the imbalance in the types of music most commonly performed in the area and make every effort to provide the community with performances which cannot be found elsewhere in the county, even sometimes going “out of their way to bring something from a definite outside culture in.”⁴⁶ Supplementing performances of world music included in the annual series, the Opera House occasionally organizes educational programs for local youth, such as Tune Travelers (a series of world music workshops and performances) and a Japanese puppet show of a traditional folktale performed in *bunraku* style.⁴⁷ Through programs such as these, the Opera House is still serving as a bridge to outside culture and cosmopolitan values just as it was in the early twentieth century.

⁴⁶ Interview with Opera House programming committee member and sound engineer, July 28, 2013.

⁴⁷ When I was conducting interviews, many of my informants were excited to tell me about the most recent performance at the Opera House, a Malian *jeli* who played the *ngoni*, a West African predecessor of the American banjo. Members of the programming committee had argued against booking the musician for fear of low attendance, but everyone was pleasantly surprised when the Opera House became just as packed as it typically does for bluegrass performances.

Audience

The Opera House remains the only formal performance venue in the area and, as such, is still charged with the task of providing something for everyone and reaching all cohorts of the community, just as it did in the early twentieth century. Many informants agreed that with such a small but eclectic population scattered over a large area, “just getting people [to the Opera House] is the biggest challenge.”⁴⁸ One programming committee member lamented that it is a challenge to offer a variety of entertainment, because “this is one of those communities that the entire community could be Catholic, the Pope would come to visit, and nobody would turn out to see him. Sometimes when you get a big name, there’s nobody in attendance.”⁴⁹ Adding to the issue of distance between residents in the northern or southern ends of the county and the Opera House, the performance hall operates in the fairly high-context society of Pocahontas County.

Despite the variety of people who live in Pocahontas County, community members have a shared set of experiences living in a rural region of West Virginia. Having few restaurants, bars, or other gathering or entertainment sites means that residents are accustomed to informal social gatherings at home. As mentioned, an informal gathering at home was also the traditional context for musical performance and continues to be one of the main sites for music making today. This shared informal culture results in a high-context society in which community members interact and enjoy music in a very laid-back neighborly manner (Hall 1977). The Opera House, as a formal concert hall, does not seamlessly fit in to this picture.

⁴⁸ Interview with Opera House Operations Manager, July 26, 2013.

⁴⁹ Interview with Opera House programming committee member, July 27, 2013.

Musicologist Christopher Small (1987) detailed the formal ritual of attending a concert hall, and although he discusses the ritual vis-à-vis the symphony concert tradition, many elements of the concert hall as a site of ritual are applicable to the formal atmosphere of the Opera House, and these deter prospective audience members. The audience sits in rows facing the performers who appear on a raised stage from behind a curtain. There is an admission fee, and people are expected to refrain from excessive talking during the performance. There is always a twenty-minute intermission during which refreshments are served, but no alcohol. Performances are planned almost a year in advance, leaving little room for spontaneous last-minute schedule changes if a musician or performance group wanted to drop by for a performance. This difference between formal musical performance on a stage and informal musical performance with friends at home is also explained by Turino's distinction between presentational and participatory music (2008). But the fact that the clearly presentational music is being performed in a formal concert hall that bears the name originally given to it to prove itself as a high-class and high-quality establishment and distinguish it from the informal and even inferior and immoral music traditions of rural Appalachia perhaps still doesn't sit well with some community members.

Small echoes Bourdieu's claim that cultural products, in this case music and the act of concert-going, function to identify and maintain social hierarchy and class distinction in their consumers (Bourdieu 1984; Small 1987). In contrast to the symphony concert tradition that Small discusses, however, in many ways the Opera House tries to deconstruct the distinction concert halls make between the elite and lower classes. It is ironic that the Opera House was originally introduced as a formal high-class

establishment to distance itself from the informal working-class music traditions in the area, when today almost the opposite is true in that the Opera House tries to close this gap. Opinions among the board members differ on how to accomplish this and create a more informal welcoming atmosphere, and various approaches have been tested. They have tried arranging the seats in different ways, creating more space for dancing or mingling, and allowing the audience to take refreshments back to their seats after intermission. They also host casual music jams with only some success, due to the difficulty of creating an intimate atmosphere in the Opera House's expansive interior, not to mention the no-alcohol policy. Perhaps the best effort the Opera House has made to remain accessible to all socio-economic classes is to maintain a set low admission fee regardless of the performance. When it first reopened, the admission was set at five dollars, and now, fifteen years later, it is eight dollars.⁵⁰

Nevertheless, there are members of the board who are in favor of maintaining a formal atmosphere to separate the "quality" performances of the Opera House from the casual music jams that are common throughout the community. This is reminiscent of the original thinking behind the establishment of an opera house in Pocahontas County. There was once discussion of setting up a barrier between the entrance and the seating area, since the Opera House was essentially built as one big open room with the entrance at one end and the stage opposite. This would create a lobby-type feel, better sound proof the performance area from people entering and exiting the hall, and perhaps create a "transitional area" between the outside world of everyday living and the "sacred ground" of the concert hall (Small 1987). The amount of technology employed in the

⁵⁰ The Opera House is able to sustain itself on such low admission fees thanks to numerous grants it receives.

performances was also an issue of debate as some people, including the sound engineer, believed every performance needed to be wired in to the mixer for maximum sound quality, while others thought certain music, such as old-time, is not meant to be electronically altered.

Some policies at the Opera House today are reminiscent of the new performance environment introduced with opera houses at the turn of the twentieth century, and a hint of paranoia still exists among some board members who worry about the Opera House being viewed as a rowdy music venue. Perhaps this is why audience behavior is somewhat regulated and a no-alcohol policy is still strictly enforced by the county Historic Landmarks Commission, the owner of the property. Proponents of making the Opera House atmosphere more casual to match the culture of the community, however, think selling alcohol would help, especially at events like the mountain music jams. The family-oriented style of early twentieth-century opera houses is also mirrored at the Opera House today, and is demonstrated, as well as the more recent appeal to the informal community of Pocahontas County, in all its promotional material: “Performances at the Opera House are informal, family-friendly, and open to all. Children 17 and under are admitted free.”

Political agendas associated with the Opera House are another example of conflicting cultural values unfolding there. Whereas the make-up of the programming committee changes from year to year, drawing members from many different cultural cohorts, the board is mostly made up of community members with leftist political ideologies, many of whom are not Pocahontas County natives. The political orientation of the board is sometimes reflected in the performances booked for the series, which has

drawn criticism of the Opera House in the past. For example, members of the audience walked out of a performance by a musician whose lyrics carried a leftist message.⁵¹ This echoes a general rejection evident among Pocahontas County natives of ideas imposed by outsiders, a mistrust informed by a history of exploitation and based on the assumption that outsiders do not understand the community and their initiatives do not represent the best interest of native residents.

Fortunately, the fluctuating make-up of the programming committee helps to ensure a wide-ranging performance series that appeals to different cohorts of the community. For example, classical ensembles occasionally perform to small audiences consisting mostly of transplant retirees and NRAO employees; indie folk bands draw a large number of VISTAs and back-to-the-landers; and regular performances by the county's favorite local band, the Black Mountain Bluegrass Boys, attract the most Pocahontas County natives. These various performances serve as sites for gathering and facilitate a sense of community for each cohort, perhaps like events at the Opera House did in the early twentieth century for new populations of immigrants and African Americans as well as Pocahontas County natives.

Final Thoughts

Major social changes and a fluctuating ethnoscape in Pocahontas County over the past century have resulted in musical heterodoxy reflected by performances at the Opera House. The area's musical heritage, however, is part of the mediascape and community members' place-based identities, causing orthodox supporters of mountain music to apprehensively resist this musical heterodoxy. The attempt to preserve cultural traditions

⁵¹ Interviews with Opera House board members, July 2013.

while ignoring or resisting social changes, however, may lead to further complications and contradictions, such as xenophobic sentiment. Orthodoxy contributes to the dichotomy of cultural insiders and outsiders, and the fear of losing a heritage and identity can lead to extreme reactions. For example, the programming committee considered booking The Carolina Chocolate Drops, a nationally renowned Grammy Award-winning all-black old-time string band, for their 2010-2011 performance series, but an orthodox supporter of mountain music interjected, “That band in Pocahontas County would be like a Jew in Nazi Germany!” This must have convinced the programming committee that no one would come to hear old-time music performed by an all-black band, because The Carolina Chocolate Drops were consequently voted down.

Despite the fact that The Carolina Chocolate Drops are a mountain music band, they were still regarded as cultural outsiders who are part of the heterodoxy not fully accepted in the community. It was not just the color of their skin to which the programming committee objected, but the fact that they were musicians of color playing old-time music, a musical tradition commonly associated with white people and one over which the mostly white population of Pocahontas County feels a sense of ownership. The Opera House certainly does not prohibit hosting musicians of color; in fact, many have performed there over the past decade, though they have typically performed R&B, jazz, or African music; styles associated with people of color. As an all-black old-time string band, The Carolina Chocolate Drops represent the more complex heritage of Appalachian traditions that past scholars of Appalachia as well as both insiders and outsiders in Pocahontas County have chosen to ignore. There may be no African Americans who play mountain music today in Pocahontas County, but as discussed earlier in this thesis,

musicians of color did play a part in the area's musical heritage and influenced the county's beloved Hammons family.

In exploring cultural initiatives in Appalachia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, David Whisnant argues that these programs were often based on romantic and artificial notions of what Appalachia was expected to be, and discusses the contempt many culture workers had for what they perceived as outside or impure music adulterating pure Appalachian traditions (1983). Today, orthodox supporters of mountain music in Pocahontas County echo this fallacy, and do not take into account the fact that many forces are always shaping music cultures. Whisnant suggests that more positive and long-term effects may have been achieved through these early initiatives if they had been based on the complex dynamics of traditional cultures and cultural change in the region (1983). A performance by The Carolina Chocolate Drops in Pocahontas County may have had positive and long-lasting effects on the community, but conflicting cultural values prevented it. In the five years since the Opera House programming committee voted against The Carolina Chocolate Drops, the group has achieved much national fame, reflecting the demands of a pluralistic society and a conscious attempt by old-time enthusiasts throughout the country to move away from old-time music as an exclusively white tradition by linking it with its African American roots (Turino 2008). Considering the band for the Opera House performance series was perhaps a failed attempt by some programming committee members to link the rural community to the rest of the country and participate in the greater pluralistic society.

The Opera House originally served as a gathering place and a link to the world beyond the confining mountains, both for new community members who arrived with the

burgeoning industry and old community members with strong roots in the area. As the timber resources were depleted and the trains stopped coming, much of the population that had come with this industry left, and accordingly, there was no longer a use for the Opera House. After more than half a century of the Opera House standing as nothing more than a deteriorating relic of Pocahontas County's boom days in the first decade of the twentieth century, why did the community decide to restore it as the "cultural heart of the community" again in the last decade of the twentieth century? Perhaps, with its increasingly eclectic population since the late twentieth century and the transition to a tourism economy, the Pocahontas County community is once again in need of a cross-roads or a place to bring people together and promote their community's traditions while maintaining a connection to a more urban pluralistic society and participating in the national culture.

Chapter 3- Public School Music Education: “Preparing Students for Tomorrow’s Challenges”

Another form of institutionalized culture that has linked Pocahontas County to the outside world and national values and developments is music education in the public schools. Since the only alternative to public school education in the area is homeschooling, today, nearly everyone who grows up in Pocahontas County experiences music through the public schools. In this chapter, I offer a brief history of public school music education in West Virginia, and specifically Pocahontas County to demonstrate how this initiative reflected social changes and national politics in the first half of the twentieth century and sometimes clashed with local cultures. I also detail more recent developments in public school music education that reveal conflicts and contradictions between local and federal agendas. Finally, I discuss an after-school music program designed to advocate for and fill the void of music education in the southern end of the county. Through these accounts, I demonstrate that rather than reflecting local musical heritage or responding to social changes in Pocahontas County, public school music education today resembles conventional aspects of public school music education in West Virginia in the early twentieth century.

History

Music education was not part of all public schools in Pocahontas County until after World War II, but it had been part of elementary school education in some West Virginia cities since the mid-nineteenth century (Brown 1986a). As early as the late nineteenth century, when music instruction was not considered a responsibility of public

schools, Progressive Era reformers were advocating for its inclusion in public schools, mainly in rural Appalachia and the Midwest. They were interested in the arts for larger social purposes and sought to extend music education to every American child. Rural music reformers were frequently upper-middle-class cosmopolitan New Englanders who came from a background in urban settlement schools where music was often one of the primary activities. They saw music as a means to uplift rural impoverished people as well and reduce inequality caused by industrialization (Lee 1997).

In 1897, Lucy Robinson, supervisor of music in Wheeling, West Virginia schools, appealed to the State Education Association by using the philosophical principles initiated by Lowell Mason in Boston schools in 1838, and stressing the physical, mental, and moral values of music education (Brown 1986a). The first meeting of school music teachers in West Virginia was in 1920. At this time, school music teachers were known as music supervisors because they traveled around to various schools within a county to assist teachers with music instruction, but only a few of the 389 school districts could afford or justify hiring a music supervisor (Brown 1983).

During the Great Depression, music was once again used as a unifying and uplifting force in American communities by Franklin D. Roosevelt's Federal Music Project (FMP) of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration. Under the FMP, thousands of music programs were created, existing music programs were improved, and music became part of the public school curriculum in more remote areas (Livingston 2007). In 1936, the West Virginia Music Educators Association was created (Brown 1984a), and the next year the State Board of Education finally issued a regulation making music a required subject in all elementary schools, though this did not necessarily make it

a reality (Brown 1984b). Although teacher certification requirements adopted in 1929 included one or two college courses in music, rural school positions were filled by teachers with only emergency or temporary certification. Hundreds of schools in West Virginia were still one-room schoolhouses where education was very limited. Many school districts struggled to provide even five- or six-month school terms (Brown 1986b). One Pocahontas County resident who went to elementary school in a one-room schoolhouse in Minnehaha just outside of the county seat in the 1940s remembered, “We didn’t have much music education. Once I got to high school, there was a band and choir, but at the one-room school, there was no general music class.”⁵²

According to music education scholar William R. Lee, some of these rural music reform efforts were conducted through land-grant college extension programs, and techniques of persuasion developed by agricultural extension agents in farm demonstration work were also used in rural music reform. Teachers were often outsiders to the communities in which they worked and were unfamiliar with local practices and conditions. Reform efforts had political and class implications and were part of a history of intervention in what was regarded as a deviant Appalachian culture that was a threat to American homogeneity. Reformers had their own agendas and were often arrogantly authoritarian in a community they knew little about (Lee 1997).

Music educators were encouraged to play recordings of the great composers’ music and teach their students about the lives of these men. Common songs children were taught to sing in West Virginia included standard hymns such as “Come, Thou Almighty King” and “Abide With Me,” patriotic tunes such as George F. Root’s “The Battle Cry of Freedom” and Walter Kittredge’s “Tenting on the Old Camp Ground,” and “folk” songs

⁵² Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 26, 2013.

that were either actually popular minstrel songs such as Stephen C. Foster's "Old Folks at Home" or popular Irish and Scottish tunes such as "Blue Bells of Scotland" and "The Last Rose of Summer" (Puffenbarger 1995). These "folk" songs were often attempts by reformers to incorporate what they thought was folk music, but they actually knew little about the folk music traditions of the community. In fact, some reformers criticized local music traditions. These initiatives were usually not collaborative with the rural population, and some rural people resisted such reform imposed from the outside (Lee 1997). Nevertheless, the legacy left by these music education initiatives is still evident in the choruses, orchestras, and marching bands that have become the standard of public school music departments today.

By the 1950s, music education was part of most public school curricula in Pocahontas County. One resident who attended elementary school in Cass, a logging town in the northern part of the county, remembered, "Our teacher was a piano teacher and a farmer. We had a grade school chorus, and I was part of the chorus, and I enjoyed it. We also had a band in high school."⁵³ Clearly, not everyone responded apprehensively to these new music education initiatives, and it is likely that many children were enthusiastic about being exposed to music to which they may have previously had no access. Early music education initiatives in rural Appalachia undeniably gave school children new opportunities to experience music, but they also linked those children to national music trends and cultural values while ignoring local music traditions and practices. By following the model of music education curricula used by teachers in the rest of the country, early music educators in rural Appalachia showed insensitivity to

⁵³ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

local cultures. What is more, this model laid the groundwork for what was to become standard music curriculum in public schools through to the present day.

Not only does a standardized curriculum that emphasizes mainstream popular and classical music disregard the local musical heritage of Pocahontas County, but it also does not reflect the eclectic makeup of the community or offer different perspectives on music from diverse cultures not represented in Pocahontas County. Teaching a narrow perspective of music and stressing select musical traditions while devaluing others weakens the stability of the local heritage and reproduces cultural hegemony. While standardized music education does serve to connect rural communities like Pocahontas County to the outside world, it offers a skewed and limited picture that promotes national homogeneity over cultural competence and sensitivity, skills that are often not emphasized in high-context rural societies.

Today: The “No Child Left Behind Act,” Music, and Multicultural Education

A recent example of public school standardization that has erupted in national controversy is the “No Child Left Behind Act” (NCLB), George W. Bush’s 2001 reauthorization of Lyndon B. Johnson’s original 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act of the “War on Poverty.”⁵⁴ Part of the original 1965 legislation was “Title 1,” which allows for the allocation of school-wide funding to schools where at least forty percent of students come from low-income families.⁵⁵ This program continues today, and all public elementary and middle schools in Pocahontas County are school-wide Title 1 schools. To continue receiving federal funding under NCLB, schools must administer

⁵⁴ *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Public Law 107-110, 107th Congress, 115 Stat. 1425 (January 8, 2002).

⁵⁵ U.S. Department of Education, “Improving Basic Programs Operated by Local Educational Agencies (Title I, Part A),” <http://www2.ed.gov/programs/titleiparta/index.html> (accessed April 7, 2014).

standardized exams to students to demonstrate that they have met “adequate yearly progress” (AYP). Although NCLB allows for some flexibility in state implementation of the policy, the only subjects required to be evaluated by federal law are reading/writing and mathematics, areas viewed as directly related to economic success (Beveridge 2010).

Because federal funding hinges on AYP in such a narrow selection of subjects, non-tested subjects, especially those that are usually considered electives, are given less time in the school day, and in some cases are even being eliminated. Many schools struggling to meet AYP must take drastic measures to ensure continued funding, and this means devoting most of the school day to reading and mathematics (Nieto and Bode 2008). A nation-wide survey conducted by the Council for Basic Education of elementary school principals found that since the passage of NCLB instructional time for tested subjects in seventy-five percent of those schools had increased, while instructional time for the arts had decreased (2004). Another nation-wide survey conducted by the Center on Education Policy found that seventy-one percent of the surveyed school districts reported having reduced instruction time in at least one other subject to make time for reading and mathematics (2006). Music classes are among the first to receive reduced instruction time or be cut all together (Beveridge 2010).

Hillsboro Elementary School in the southern end of Pocahontas County is one such school that has had to eliminate music from the curriculum. Because of the economic downturn in the 2000s, school districts were already struggling, and Hillsboro Elementary had one teacher covering both music and physical education. Under pressure to meet AYP, however, they were forced to use what resources they had to improve

reading and mathematics at the cost of music education.⁵⁶ Hillsboro is the most economically disadvantaged town in Pocahontas County, with forty-two percent of individuals below the poverty level.⁵⁷ If children in Hillsboro do not have access to music education through the public school system, they are most likely not receiving it outside of school as access to private music instruction is limited, and many families cannot afford to pay for classes that are offered.

As mentioned, informal gatherings in the home was the traditional context for musical performance, and the home remains one of the main sites for music making today, but although it was once common for children to learn musical skills directly from family members in this context, this method of transmission has become increasingly rare. With both the tradition of informal music transmission and institutionalized music classes disappearing, many children in Pocahontas County lack adequate access to music education. It seems ironic, then, that NCLB was actually a response to the pervasive inequality in the nation's education system, and through standardization, it was intended to close the achievement gap by improving the academic performance of disadvantaged children.⁵⁸

Although NCLB does not include provisions for music education or several other crucial subjects, it does allow for some flexibility in the way the policy is implemented by each state. West Virginia's implementation of NCLB follows the required rigorous reading and mathematics standards, but it also includes a clause for multicultural

⁵⁶ West Virginia Board of Education, 2010, "Initial Education Performance Audit Report for Hillsboro Elementary School, Pocahontas County School System," by the Office of Education Performance Audits.

⁵⁷ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Individuals Below Poverty Level, 2010," under "Hillsboro town, West Virginia Poverty."

⁵⁸ *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, Public Law 107-110, 107th Congress, 115 Stat. 1425 (January 8, 2002).

education (Section 7.1.12).⁵⁹ The West Virginia Board of Education has identified multicultural education as a priority in school curricula to “foster an attitude of understanding and acceptance of individuals from a variety of cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds” and to emphasize “prevention and zero tolerance for racial, sexual, religious/ethnic harassment or violence.”⁶⁰

Multicultural education is not a new concept in the United States. In fact, as early as the late nineteenth century, African American scholars started an early ethnic studies movement and worked to integrate content about African Americans into school curricula. After World War II, when schools in the United States were segregated in the 1940s and 1950s, intergroup education emerged as a response to racial and ethnic tension and conflict in the nation. Intergroup educators emphasized interracial cooperation and envisioned a nation in which ethnic and racial differences were minimized. This movement lost momentum during the civil rights movement in the 1960s and 1970s when, instead of advocating for racial harmony, African Americans promoted a separatist ideology that demanded separate courses and programs taught by and about African Americans (Banks 1993). As demonstrated by the language in West Virginia’s multicultural education policy, the current multicultural education movement has goals similar to those of the intergroup education movement of the 1940s and 1950s.

There have, however, been many criticisms of multicultural education throughout its various stages. Some argue that multiculturalism as an institutionalized policy can create a separatist divisive mentality that leads to the fragmentation of society into ethnic factions. Others have condemned multicultural education at schools because it requires

⁵⁹ West Virginia Board of Education, Title 126, *A Process for Improving Education: Performance Based Accreditation System*, Policy 2320 (November 2007).

⁶⁰ West Virginia Board of Education, Title 126, Policy 2421.

significant changes to the curriculum that diminish the narrative of the common culture of America (Nieto and Bode 2008). Considering the context of Pocahontas County, however, where ninety-eight percent of the population is white and where a very small minority of children of color attend public schools along with children of white supremacist organizations, multicultural education can help these children to not only understand each other, but also understand different cultures to which they have no exposure.

Race relations in the area have changed considerably over the past several decades, however. One informant who moved to the area when she was seven, with her white mother and black father during the back-to-the-land movement in 1972, recalled,

We were the first “mixed family” in the area, so when we first moved here . . . it was super racist. My father . . . wanted to move because he had applied for a teaching position, and they told him that they wouldn’t have a mixed race couple as a role model in the community, so he wasn’t allowed to teach for years. This was in the late 70s and early 80s. And we had teachers saying things to us like “Race mixing is the devil’s work,” and things like that. But things have changed a lot. But just as recently as a week ago, a woman who works at the nursing home said to me, “You know, I’m not racist, but I just don’t think it’s right for people to mix, and that’s just what I was always taught.”⁶¹

Another informant, who currently raises two biracial children in Hillsboro with her husband who came to Pocahontas County from Jamaica via the Snowshoe resort work exchange program, had a different perspective:

There’s not a lot of exposure here . . . but . . . there are more people living in Hillsboro now of color than I’ve ever seen before. And in Marlinton, I see people of unfamiliar faces of color in Marlinton all the time. So, I think that’s changing. I think the kids now that are going to school will be a little less sensitive to different shades of skin because they’ve been more exposed to it. We’re a mixed-race family, and I never experienced any direct feeling of people being racist towards us.⁶²

⁶¹ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27.

⁶² Ibid.

Her husband, however, expressed feelings of isolation and unease:

I guess just the history that this place has, it makes me very curious of somebody before I get extremely like, “Hey I want to be your friend.” But, being isolated, in a sense that I’m probably one of five black people in the county, yeah... sometimes it feels really, really isolated.⁶³

Most of my informants acknowledged racism as a problem in Pocahontas County, but claimed that there are few manifestations of it because the community is so racially homogeneous.⁶⁴ Because of the high-context society and racial homogeneity of Pocahontas County, a discourse of race relations, multiculturalism, and cross-cultural understanding rarely takes place in the community. One informant noted that racism “is more of an issue almost by omission, because it is not something that is talked about at all. It’s not brought up because it is an almost entirely white community.”⁶⁵ Another informant agreed that “racism here is something that most people don’t talk about. It’s not very chic to talk about it.”⁶⁶ If these important conversations are not taking place, young people growing up in Pocahontas County will be ill-equipped to participate in an increasingly pluralistic society both when they are forced to leave their hometown for work or education and within their own ever-changing local community.

Although many informants agreed that there are few manifestations of racism today in Pocahontas County, in 2012, an African American pastor was attacked in his church by masked men who exclaimed, “We don’t need your kind messing with our county.”⁶⁷ Initial reports stated that police were investigating whether or not the incident was a racially motivated hate crime, but one informant expressed her opinion, stating that

⁶³ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27.

⁶⁴ Interviews with Pocahontas County community members, July 2013-March 2014.

⁶⁵ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ WVVA News, *Pastor Attacked While Praying in Church*, March 6, 2012, <http://www.wvva.com/story/17095289/pastor-attacked-while-praying-in-church> (accessed April 7, 2014).

“I think they just wanted to bury that because of the economics and tourism. But, the incident was absolutely a hate crime.”⁶⁸ The police never did find out who the assailants were. This incident of racial violence challenges the criticisms of and reveals the need for multicultural education in Pocahontas County. It is a clear example of the fragmentation and destructive divisions that already exist in our society. Ignoring these differences will not make them go away (Nieto and Bode 2008).

Because so much emphasis is put on achieving AYP in reading and math, however, multicultural education often becomes a low priority for schools that lack resources and professional training for this type of education. Carrying out the implementation of NCLB, the West Virginia Board of Education conducted a performance audit of Hillsboro Elementary School in 2009 and found that “a Multicultural Plan was not in place. In addition, teachers could not verbalize multicultural activities nor did the lesson plans indicate multicultural activities for students.”⁶⁹ In their follow-up review in 2011, however, the performance audit report stated that the school was in compliance with the multicultural education clause of West Virginia’s NCLB policy (Section 7.1.12 of Policy 2320):

Multicultural activities were occurring. All teachers interviewed were able to show and discuss examples of multicultural activities in their classrooms. Several outside school groups, such as Japanese Puppet Show and Taiko drums presented cultural activities for students. The school Multicultural Plan was in draft form and will be completed next year.⁷⁰

This excerpt from the performance audit report demonstrates how, rather than reducing or eliminating music education in public schools to focus on NCLB requirements, music

⁶⁸ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

⁶⁹ West Virginia Board of Education, 2010, “Initial Education Performance Audit Report for Hillsboro Elementary School, Pocahontas County School System,” by the Office of Education Performance Audits, 9.

⁷⁰ West Virginia Board of Education, 2011, “Final Education Performance Audit Report for Hillsboro Elementary School, Pocahontas County School System,” by the Office of Education Performance Audits, 9.

education can help fulfill those requirements. In this case, although Hillsboro Elementary School does not have the resources to offer music classes, the Opera House offered school performances and workshops to expose the students to music and puppetry traditions from other parts of the world.

Local Music Education Advocacy

Another local organization, Pocahontas Music, helped to bring music to Hillsboro Elementary students. Originally established in 2007 by a New York City native and VISTA alumnus, Pocahontas Music's mission was "to re-introduce music education to Hillsboro Elementary School in Pocahontas County, West Virginia, where music had not been part of the curriculum for many years."⁷¹ This organization started by recruiting a classically trained piano teacher who provided after-school lessons on battery-operated rollup keyboards. Local musicians were also invited to demonstrate other types of instruments to the students. This initial program culminated in a recital for parents and community members where the students performed "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star." The next year, Pocahontas Music provided instruction on hand bells and staged a spring performance entitled "Appalachian Spring" consisting of selections from *The Sound of Music*.⁷² Pocahontas Music's founder remembered the spectacle of this recital:

I had it fixed in my mind that there was a way I wanted these kids to look. And I had the girls all wearing pastel dresses and the boys wearing khaki pants and white Oxford shirts and a tie. I wanted this to be a formal event. They were going to look the part. So I went around to all these thrift stores. There was one down near Lewisburg that donated all these pants for me. Anyway, it was all through donations that I got this stuff. And apparently, the reaction from the parents,

⁷¹ Pocahontas Music, "About Pocahontas Music: Mission Statement," <http://www.pocahontasmusic.org/about.php> (accessed March 6, 2014).

⁷² Pocahontas Music, "About Pocahontas Music: History," <http://www.pocahontasmusic.org/about.php> (accessed March 6, 2014).

viewing these kids up on stage with the khaki pants and the shirt and the tie and the girls in pastel, was unbelievable. They never thought they'd see their kid look like that. Not in their wildest dreams did they think their kids would ever look like that. I mean, you see that on TV. And I had it under the big . . . canopy. And I had round tables with white table cloths and these glass bowls with flowers in each one. And [an audience member] says he thought he'd walked into the Philharmonic.⁷³

This description of the Pocahontas Music initiative is acutely reminiscent of cultural interventions described by Whisnant, such as rural settlement schools around the turn of the twentieth century that imposed outside genteel Victorian culture and were based on romantic and contrived notions of what rural Appalachia should be in the eyes of their cosmopolitan instigators (1983). Considering Pocahontas Music's goal to reintroduce music education to a school that lacks the resources to include music in its curriculum, the organization undeniably had good intentions but applied urban solutions in a rural context. Pocahontas Music served the interest of its founder and promoted a formal refined practice and presentation of music with the children "look[ing] the part," while suppressing the informal nature of the community.

Like the music programs Charles Seeger implemented for the New Deal Resettlement Administration's homestead communities in Appalachia, Pocahontas Music tries to incorporate folk music into its programs, but its classically trained teachers often rely on their background in standard music education (Warren-Findley 1979-1980). For the 2009-2010 school year, Pocahontas Music began to incorporate guitar instruction and coordinated a fourteen-week "Origins of Appalachian Music" workshop series. These workshops focused on exploring the local history, writing songs and poems, and

⁷³ Interview with Pocahontas Music founder, July 27, 2013.

developing basic guitar skills.⁷⁴ Although Pocahontas Music may represent the interests of cosmopolitans with backgrounds in classical music, by implementing this program the organization demonstrated a turn in their approach towards cultural sensitivity to Pocahontas County's musical heritage.

Final Thoughts

According to Alan DeYoung, a scholar of sociological and anthropological studies in education, public schools often exist in rural economically depressed areas and serve as the primary local formal organization linked to the outside world. Because many areas of Appalachia have boom-and-bust economies and upward occupational and social mobility is more likely to occur outside the region, today, many rural schools play a role in educating the young for participation in the national culture (DeYoung 1995). For example, Pocahontas County High School's motto is "preparing students for tomorrow's challenges,"⁷⁵ and the goal of West Virginia Department of Education's recent initiative, "Global 21," is "for all students to develop the personal skills and dispositions of . . . cultural awareness and good citizenship" and "to prepare students to get a job in a culturally diverse . . . world."⁷⁶

Navigating the conflicting values of the local rural community and the national culture, however, is not easy, and sometimes national culture is imposed while local practices are ignored (DeYoung 1995). Pocahontas County schools that include music in the curriculum follow the standard national model of general music classes, choir, and

⁷⁴ Pocahontas Music, "What's New: 'Origins of Appalachian Music' Workshop," <http://www.pocahontasmusic.org/whatsNew.php> (accessed March 6, 2014).

⁷⁵ Pocahontas County High School, <https://sites.google.com/site/pocahontascountyhighschool/> (accessed March 6, 2014).

⁷⁶ West Virginia Board of Education, Title 126, Policy 4373.

band without regard to the local musical heritage.⁷⁷ At the same time, however, this music curriculum does not reflect aforementioned federal, state, and school district goals that emphasize cultural awareness and diversity. Although standardized music curriculum provides students with a limited perspective of music, in some underserved and economically disadvantaged communities it is children's only opportunity to learn musical skills.

Public school music educators in the county have expressed their desires to incorporate more diverse musical traditions into their curriculum, but claimed they were unable to due to lack of time and resources.⁷⁸ With resources and instruction time for music education being reduced or even eliminated, how can rural teachers keep up with educational standards and goals to prepare their students for participation in an ever-changing and interconnected society? While Hillsboro Elementary School has had to eliminate music education all together, other schools in Pocahontas County share one music teacher who must divide his schedule and travel between schools. If public school music education was more of a priority, it has the potential to introduce students to cultural diversity and, therefore, satisfy multicultural education initiatives while also helping students to better understand their own cultures and musical heritage.

This account of music education today in Pocahontas County, however, echoes the state of music education in rural West Virginia in the first half of the twentieth century. Music education is nonexistent at some schools and limited at others; similar to the music supervisors of the early twentieth century, music educators today in Pocahontas

⁷⁷ Pocahontas County High School, <https://sites.google.com/site/pocahontascountyhighschool/>, Marlinton Middle School, <https://sites.google.com/site/marlintonmiddleschool/>, Marlinton Elementary School, <https://sites.google.com/site/marlintonelementaryschool/> (accessed March 6, 2014).

⁷⁸ Informal conversations with Pocahontas County public school music educators, 2010.

County travel to various schools within the area to offer band and choir classes; and cosmopolitan outsiders unfamiliar with local music traditions impose music education initiatives that serve their interests and impose a national culture. Furthermore, the standard model of music education does not reflect the cultural diversity of the country, nor does it reflect the continuously changing population of Pocahontas County or respond to issues such as racism that emerge in the course of social change.

Chapter 4- WVMR: “Voice of the Community”

Pushing the scan button on your car radio while driving on windy roads through the mountains of Pocahontas County will result in nothing but static until, finally, 1370 AM, West Virginia Mountain Radio (WVMR), comes in like a beacon of sound in a silent snow storm. In some areas of the county, you won't even hear that, and the static will just continue endlessly as your radio cycles through the dial again and again. For much of the community, though, WVMR, serves as the only radio station, and as such it is an important means of communication and a vital source for news, weather, emergency notifications, local sports events, and, of course, music. In this chapter, I offer a brief history of radio in Pocahontas County and describe how it compares and contrasts to the history of radio in rural America in general; I explain the impact of the National Radio Quiet Zone in which Pocahontas County is located; I describe WVMR's role in the community today; and I also analyze its current programs and listeners with particular attention to conflicting cultural values. Through these accounts, I demonstrate how WVMR has reflected social change and national politics in the second half of the twentieth century and grapples with challenges similar to those at the Opera House described in chapter two.

History

The history of radio in Pocahontas County contrasts sharply with the history of radio in most other rural areas of the United States. Although ninety-two percent of rural homes had radio by 1950, Pocahontas County continued to have very limited access until 1981 when WVMR went on the air as the first daytime radio station the community was

ever able to tune in to (Craig 2009). The founder of WVMR acknowledged that the station is, in fact, “modeled on small town AM radio of the 40s and 50s—a voice of the people, by the people and for the people.”⁷⁹ In many ways, WVMR does resemble local stations from the earlier years of radio in rural America, both in its commitment to civic duty and local talent and in its conservatism and rejection of new popular forms of music.

The story of early radio in rural America is similar to the story of other social, cultural, and musical initiatives in Appalachia previously discussed. In the 1920s, Progressive Era reformers became concerned about the isolation and lack of opportunities in rural America resulting in the migration of young rural adults to urban centers. They considered the root of the problem to be underdevelopment in rural America, and sought to modernize rural life by introducing new technology such as the telephone, the automobile, electricity, and radio. It was commonly asserted in early discourse about the impact of radio that the new technology had the power to alleviate what urban people considered to be rural desolation. Radio would put rural families in immediate contact with the outside world, transforming them from the ill-fated other into the rural counterpart of the urban ideal (Craig 2009).

Most rural families bought their first radio during the Great Depression, and by 1935 large radio stations in urban centers operating on clear channel frequencies with fifty kilowatts of power, the maximum allowed by the Federal Communications Commission, provided long-range coverage that reached many rural listeners, especially at night (Craig 2009). Some residents of Pocahontas County were able to hear clear channel stations at night such as WSM in Nashville.⁸⁰ Early studies of radio in rural

⁷⁹ Interview with WVMR founder, November 19, 2011.

⁸⁰ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

America concluded that the new technology was reducing rural-urban cultural differences and that national networks such as NBC and CBS, with which most clear channel stations were affiliated, undermined local values and imposed a national urban consumer culture in rural areas (Lynd and Lynd 1937; Forsyth 1939; Smith 1947; Taylor 1949).

In contrast, low-power local radio stations were seen as increasing rural communities' social cohesion, and they became cherished institutions on which local residents depended (Lynd and Lynd 1937). These small local stations were often family operations viewed by their owners as services to their community rather than lucrative businesses. They typically operated on a very small budget, made little to no profit, and relied on unpaid labor and talent. Station personnel were often involved in community affairs, and stations offered a range of programs to meet the community's needs and interests, providing them with both crucial information and enjoyable entertainment. The usual programming included local news, weather, agricultural reports, and coverage of school sports. In addition, local talent was showcased, and church and other community events were promoted. Although the entertainment programs included a wide range of music, rural conservatism deemed certain new popular music forms, such as jazz, distasteful and inappropriate (Craig 2009).

While the history of radio in much of rural America parallels the history of the Progressive Era and the Great Depression, the history of radio in Pocahontas County has more to do with efforts following the War on Poverty. Traces of Progressive Era cosmopolitan ideology echoed in Lyndon B. Johnson's Economic Opportunity Act of 1964, commonly known as the "War on Poverty," which inspired a wave of young cosmopolitans moving into West Virginia to improve the circumstances of underserved

rural communities. Founder of WVMR, Harvard graduate, and self-proclaimed “do-gooder” Ted Walker was at the crest of this War-on-Poverty wave in West Virginia.⁸¹ In 1965, when he was in his early twenties, Walker was hired by Appalachian Volunteers (AV), a non-profit community development organization headquartered in Berea, Kentucky, and funded by the federal Office of Economic Opportunity (OEO) to expand AV programs into West Virginia. Overwhelmingly staffed by cosmopolitans from outside of the region, AV also made use of college-student volunteers and hundreds of VISTAs (Whisnant 1994).

AV came under scrutiny by the OEO and other opponents for its failure to adhere to its mandate that the AV collaborate with the local rural poor as much as possible and allow for their participation in the administration of community action programs (CAP).⁸² AV staff and volunteers often regarded local people as part of the problem rather than partners in finding solutions. In fact, Walker is quoted by Whisnant as saying “The Appalachian Volunteers demonstrate conclusively the truth of the old adage: In the land of the blind, one-eye is king” (1994, 191). In addition, Whisnant describes him as “opportunistic,” “somewhat authoritarian,” and “openly manipulative” (1994, 193). Walker became the center of the AV controversy when, instead of a local resident, he was named director of the Raleigh County CAP. Soon after, Governor Hulett C. Smith requested that OEO cease funding the AV, and support was discontinued in 1969 (Whisnant 1994).

⁸¹ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

⁸² It was also alleged that some AV staff members were plotting a communist rebellion to overthrow local governments, and in 1968, the newly created Kentucky Un-American Activities Committee investigated AV activities (Whisnant 1994).

Walker then started Designs for Rural Action, which supported the Black Lung Association and Miners for Democracy, before becoming director of the Mountaineer Family Health Plan (Whisnant 1994). Less than a decade later, however, motivated by construction of an interstate near his home in Raleigh County, Walker and his family moved to Pocahontas County in 1978 when many back-to-the-landers were also starting new lives there. Soldiers of the War on Poverty and back-to-the-landers had a lot in common in that they were both typically cosmopolitans moving to rural areas in the 1960s and 1970s. Walker, however, did not identify with the back-to-the-landers' ideology: "I wasn't a back-to-the-lander. I wasn't trying to run away from the world; I was trying to save the world!"⁸³

Upon arrival in Pocahontas County, Walker noticed that people were talking about the need for a radio station and improved communication across the county. He began to work together with an extension agent from West Virginia University and a technical specialist from the National Radio Astronomy Observatory (NRAO) to start Pocahontas County's first radio station. As he had done with his programs in Raleigh County, Walker enlisted VISTAs to do community outreach work for the new radio station.⁸⁴ These VISTAs were the first of many to work in Pocahontas County, and Walker still serves as the county VISTA coordinator today. A Pocahontas County native, who has worked at WVMR for thirty-three years and is its longest-running broadcaster remembers the organizing effort: "At . . . [one of the first] meeting[s], I'll be quite honest;

⁸³ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

I was not impressed by the people who were actively involved in it and what I heard. Maybe it was just all too strange for me to accept at the time.”⁸⁵

As demonstrated by the quote above, Walker’s latest project may have elicited skepticism from the local community, just as his previous projects had done in Raleigh County; however, Walker maintains that WVMR is meant to be “a voice *of* the community, not a voice of the outside world coming into the community.”⁸⁶ Indeed, the first DJ recruited when WVMR finally went on the air in 1981 was a native of Pocahontas County who was asked to host a bluegrass show every Sunday afternoon, since he had his own collection of bluegrass LPs.⁸⁷ In fact, when the radio station first started, the music played was almost exclusively bluegrass, old-time, country, and gospel.⁸⁸ This emphasis on mountain music could indeed be considered a reflection of the local community and its musical culture; then again, it could have been a reflection of WVMR founders’ romanticism of Appalachian culture and music. According to Walker, WVMR “encourage[es] local pride,”⁸⁹ and although local residents may have been skeptical of the new radio initiative, one informant remembers that “whenever it did start, everyone was looking forward to it, because we had no radio in the area to hear important things, such as the news, emergency announcements, and most importantly, music.”⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Interview with WVMR broadcaster, July 27, 2013.

⁸⁶ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

⁸⁷ Interview with WVMR broadcaster, July 27, 2013.

⁸⁸ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Interview with WVMR broadcaster, July 27, 2013.

The National Radio Quiet Zone

One of the reasons radio came so late to this area is because Pocahontas County is located in the National Radio Quiet Zone, an area designated in 1958 by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) covering thirteen thousand square miles where radio transmission and wireless communication are restricted to minimize harmful interference with NRAO's reception of weak signals.⁹¹ NRAO patrols a twenty-mile radius around the telescope weekly for interference that can even come from something like an electric blanket or a microwave.⁹² Any device that may cause interference is strictly prohibited. This means that radio stations can only broadcast using low-power transmission that cannot be heard in many areas, and most of the county does not receive any radio broadcasts from more urban areas.⁹³

Even before the National Radio Quiet Zone was established, radio reception was nearly nonexistent in the area because of the mountains.⁹⁴ As mentioned, some residents were able to hear clear channel stations at night, and more than one informant recalled driving their vehicles onto the railroad tracks to use them as a supplemental antenna to listen to West Virginia University football games.⁹⁵ Now that radio has been introduced in Pocahontas County, instead of one radio tower that broadcasts to the entire county, many low-power transmitters have recently been installed in different parts of the county

⁹¹ The National Radio Quiet Zone has received increased attention from media outlets such as NPR, BBC, NBC, CBS, The Slate, and The Guardian in the past couple of years since wireless phone and computer communication has become omnipresent elsewhere in the United States where some people find it hard to believe that there are places in the country where everyone still relies on land lines, pay phones, and dial-up internet, while others envy a population that is disconnected from the constant bombardment of wireless communication. According to NPR and BBC, there has even been a recent influx of people in Pocahontas County who are fleeing electromagnetic radiation. See NPR's "Enter the Quiet Zone" and The Slate's "Refugees of the Modern World."

⁹² National Radio Astronomy Observatory, "National Radio Quiet Zone," <http://www.gb.nrao.edu/nrqz/nrqz.shtml> (accessed April 7, 2014).

⁹³ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

⁹⁴ Interview with WVMR Broadcaster, July 27, 2013.

⁹⁵ Interviews with WVMR staff July 2013-March 2014.

to sidestep the National Radio Quiet Zone’s restrictions on radio transmission. For almost thirty years, however, WVMR was a daytime-only AM station, broadcasting on five thousand watts of power, that could only be heard clearly in the northern part of the county—excluding Green Bank, the site of NRAO—where the station is located.⁹⁶

Today

In recent years, WVMR has increased accessibility to its broadcasts through the Allegheny Mountain Radio network by starting twenty-four-hour FM stations transmitting with three thousand watts from Hillsboro in the southern end of the county in 2010 and from Marlinton in the middle of the county in 2011. In addition, they have started streaming online to reach listeners who may have grown up in Pocahontas County but moved away for employment or education.⁹⁷ A listener in Hillsboro related the recent change:

I never listened to WVMR until recently . . . maybe in the last two years . . . and frankly, it’s because nothing else comes in. Now you can play WVMR in Hillsboro, and I think that’s the reason why I really listen to it more. We definitely didn’t listen to it in high school, but I think it was only AM. Now they have so many call stations, you can get it anywhere in the county. It’s just really accessible. You push “seek” anywhere you are in the county, and it’s going to put you on WVMR.⁹⁸

The role WVMR plays in Pocahontas County today has much in common with the role low-power local radio stations played in the early years of rural radio. Rather than operating as a commercial business, WVMR is operated by Pocahontas Communications Cooperative, a non-profit organization formed for the purpose of

⁹⁶ Interviews with WVMR staff and community members July 2013-March 2014.

⁹⁷ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

⁹⁸ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

managing the radio station and to provide educational and charitable services to the local community. WVMR staff and volunteers are typically active in the community in other capacities as well. With only a small paid staff, the radio station is operated mostly by volunteers on a very small budget derived from individual donations, business underwriting, and grants.⁹⁹ The main impetus for starting WVMR was to provide a communication link for a rural community, and many residents depend on its services.¹⁰⁰ In general, WVMR “helps a lot of people feel connected to what’s going on,”¹⁰¹ just as local radio had done over a half-century earlier in most other rural areas of the country.

WVMR provides Pocahontas County with an alternate local news service to the *Pocahontas Times*, the weekly newspaper. Walker explained, “We tell people who died and where the viewing and funeral is. If you had to wait for the paper, it might take you a week to find out, and they might be long in the ground. We [also] help people find their lost dogs and cows.”¹⁰² In addition, it provides information about the local schools and their sport events. A former DJ remembered, “At Christmastime I had to go around and record [school] shows, and then on Christmas day we played all the little elementary school students and all the middle school bands.”¹⁰³ It also broadcasts the local weather and emergency notifications and was a vital source of information during the flood of 1996 that devastated Marlinton and the more recent derecho of 2012 that cut off power and water supplies to much of the county for weeks. It provides information about items available to sell or trade and promotes church events and other community happenings

⁹⁹ Allegheny Mountain Radio, “About,” <http://www.alleghenymountainradio.org/about/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

¹⁰⁰ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

¹⁰¹ Interview with former WVMR community engagement specialist, July 26, 2013.

¹⁰² Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

¹⁰³ Interview with former WVMR DJ, July 27, 2013.

such as performances at the Opera House. Moreover, most of WVMR's programs are music, and local musicians are especially highlighted and invited to play live at the station.¹⁰⁴

Programming

Also similar to local radio stations in the early years of rural radio, WVMR maintains a relatively conservative music program schedule, with roughly two thirds of its airtime devoted to mountain music in the broad sense, including old-time, bluegrass, country, gospel, and folk music, although this line-up has become much more diverse since the radio station first started.¹⁰⁵ Unlike the Opera House, which interprets its mission—"to be the cultural heart of the community"—to mean that music from diverse cultures should be deliberately incorporated into its programming, WVMR seems to be more focused on promoting mountain music, preserving the local musical heritage, and encouraging local pride. Perhaps this is the legacy of each initiative's historical context: the Opera House as a product of railroad and industrial expansion into Appalachia around the turn of the twentieth century that intentionally brought outside culture in to the mountains, and WVMR as a product of the War on Poverty and the mediascape and cultural romanticism that accompanied it.

On the other hand, WVMR is comparable to the Opera House in that it serves multiple purposes. Just as the Opera House is the only large formal performance venue in the area, WVMR is the only dependable means of communication for much of Pocahontas County's population, and as such, is not only a source for music, but also

¹⁰⁴ Interviews with WVMR staff and community members, July 2013-March 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Allegheny Mountain Radio, "Program Guide," <http://www.alleghenymountainradio.org/program-guide/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

community dialogue, news, weather, events, and emergency information. In contrast, radio listeners in urban areas may tune in to different stations depending on their needs with a variety of radio stations available to them. In the Washington, D.C. area, for example, radio listeners tune to WAMU or WTOP for the news, WTEM for sports, and a wide range of stations for different musical tastes, including WPFW for jazz, WBIG for classic rock, WKYS for hip-hop, WIHT for top forty pop, WETA for classical, and WMZQ for country, among others. In Pocahontas County, however, WVMR is charged with meeting as many of its listeners' radio needs as possible.

Although most informants agreed that mountain music is the most common type of music played on WVMR, when asked to describe the station's musical programming, the words most frequently used were "eclectic" and "diverse."¹⁰⁶ As mentioned, when WVMR started, it almost exclusively played bluegrass, old-time, country, and gospel, but over the years the programming has diversified. Given that the station offers almost fifty music programs throughout the week and roughly two thirds of the airtime is devoted to mountain music, there is still plenty of room for music that appeals to a broader audience. Several DJs play classic rock and oldies, a prerecorded classical music program from WCPE in North Carolina is played late on weeknights and early on Sunday mornings, and smooth jazz is played on Wednesday evenings.¹⁰⁷

WVMR's programming format is similar to freeform radio, which gives the DJ total control over what music to play, regardless of music genre or commercial interests.¹⁰⁸ As "a voice of the community," WVMR recruits community members to

¹⁰⁶ Interviews with WVMR staff and community members, July 2013-March 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Allegheny Mountain Radio, "Program Guide," <http://www.alleghenymountainradio.org/program-guide/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

¹⁰⁸ Interview with former WVMR community engagement specialist, July 26, 2013.

serve as volunteer DJs and allows them to play a wide variety of music that interests them.¹⁰⁹ One WVMR listener explained that “there are a couple of DJs whose specialty in their show is being as diverse as they possibly can. They’ll have a Led Zeppelin song, and then immediately after that, they’ll have Earl Scruggs.”¹¹⁰ The eclectic makeup of the county’s population accounts for some of the musical diversity offered by WVMR; however, volunteer DJs are overwhelmingly mountain music enthusiasts, if not orthodox devotees, and their listeners’ allegiance is strong.¹¹¹ Just as the Opera House reveals conflicting cultural values among its board members, programming committee members, and audience, WVMR also navigates through some turbulent airwaves.

Those who do choose to play a more varied mix of musical genres are sometimes met with disapproval either by WVMR staff or listeners. According to WVMR staff, the station does not play “hip-hop, world music, or ethnic music, other than blue-eyed soul,”¹¹² and many informants lamented occasions when their musical selections were prohibited or elicited complaints: “I tried world music one time, and I got in trouble for that, because the general manager at the time said it wouldn’t go over well with the audience.”¹¹³ “One time I played James Brown at Christmastime, and people called and told me they didn’t like that. It was ‘Please Come Home for Christmas!’”¹¹⁴ A senior DJ recounted a time when, during a gospel music hour, a high school student DJ played gospel-rap: “And I said, ‘Now, you can do better than that!’”¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁹ Interview with WVMR broadcaster, July 27, 2013.

¹¹⁰ Interview with WVMR listener, July 28, 2013.

¹¹¹ Interview with WVMR founder, November 19, 2011.

¹¹² Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

¹¹³ Interview with former WVMR DJ, July 27, 2013.

¹¹⁴ Interview with former WVMR community engagement specialist, July 26, 2013.

¹¹⁵ Interview with WVMR broadcaster, July 27, 2013.

The conservatism in programming demonstrated in the above statements is reminiscent of the family-oriented environment guaranteed by the Opera House today and when it first opened in 1910. WVMR's founder explained that "there's been a few people who've wanted to [play rap or hip-hop music], but the language in it doesn't really lend itself to being played over a family radio station."¹¹⁶ The conservative programming is also another feature of WVMR that is reminiscent of local radio stations from the early years of rural radio. Instead of jazz being rejected, as it was on early rural radio, it is the newer popular music forms of hip-hop and rap that are considered offensive and unsuitable for WVMR. So, although WVMR is considered freeform radio, DJs are somewhat limited in what is acceptable to play, and certain forms of music are promoted, while others are discouraged.

Listeners

In addition to differences between various cultural cohorts in the community, some of the conflicting cultural values that unfold over the airwaves can be attributed to differences in age of both DJs and listeners. When asked what challenges WVMR faces in trying to appeal to the local community, WVMR's founder said that "because we're the only show in town, [we] have to try to be all things to all people."¹¹⁷ The average age of Pocahontas County, however, is one of the oldest in West Virginia, with a median age of forty-seven and about twenty-eight percent of the population aged sixty years and

¹¹⁶ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

over.¹¹⁸ Indeed, most listeners of WVMR are above forty years of age or retired and prefer mountain music.¹¹⁹ Likewise, older DJs demonstrate more conservatism in their musical selections and tend to be more devoted to promoting mountain music than younger DJs. Surveys conducted by WVMR show that bluegrass is the top genre of music listeners want to hear, followed by country, then gospel. According to an informant who helped conduct the surveys, however, they do not reflect young people's preferences, because adults were usually the ones answering the phones when the surveys were conducted.¹²⁰

Although there are few young people past high-school age in Pocahontas County, their preferences in music tend to be more diverse. There are many young people who are invested in promoting mountain music, but they are by no means orthodox devotees and prefer a mix with music that is popular in more urban areas. "But for some people," an informant noted, mountain music is "embarrassing and old-fashioned."¹²¹ When asked if the area's musical heritage is part of community members' identities, another informant explained, "There's so much push-back, especially at the high-school level, for it not to be a part of their identity, because a lot of them don't want to be here, and that is something that's tied to the area. For a lot of younger people, a way to separate themselves from here is to separate themselves from the music."¹²²

In an effort to reach out to their younger listeners, WVMR has recently started to recruit high school student volunteers to host their own shows at the station, and as a

¹¹⁸ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "General Population and Housing Characteristics, 2010," under "Pocahontas County, West Virginia," http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml (accessed March 29, 2014).

¹¹⁹ Interviews with WVMR staff, July 2013-March 2014.

¹²⁰ Interview with WVMR Broadcaster, July 27, 2013.

¹²¹ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

¹²² Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

result, more top-forty and other types of popular music have been introduced in the programming.¹²³ When asked how often she listens to WVMR, one Pocahontas County native replied, “When I was little, never! I would actually make my grandfather turn the station. I just don’t particularly like bluegrass music. But when I was in middle school, some of my friends hosted a radio show in the afternoon, so I would listen to it then.”¹²⁴ Overall, younger informants showed a sharp contrast in preferred programs compared to older informants, and their preferences correlate to the age of the DJ as well.

For example, the ironically titled “Traffic Jam” show that begins every weekday at three in the afternoon and runs for three hours during the after-work commute is hosted by Caleb Diller, a young Pocahontas County native who recently moved back to the area after years away at college. Caleb also happens to be an avid old-time banjo picker and can trace his musical lineage back to the Hammons family through his father, Dwight Diller, who worked with the Library of Congress to record the legendary musicians. Dwight Diller is known for being an authority and orthodox devotee of old-time mountain music, but his son’s program is one of the most eclectic on WVMR, and it is not uncommon to hear selections played back to back from completely different genres and time periods. Although Traffic Jam has drawn a following of young listeners, it is not as popular with older listeners.¹²⁵ When asked how often she listens to WVMR, a seventy-seven-year-old Pocahontas County native replied, “Every day, . . . but I turn it off at about three . . . I don’t like Traffic Jam.”¹²⁶

¹²³ Interview with former WVMR DJ, July 27, 2013.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Interviews with WVMR listeners, July 2013.

¹²⁶ Interview with WVMR listener, July 26, 2013.

Final Thoughts

As demonstrated, introducing a diverse variety of music into a mostly conservative radio station, not to mention a high-context conservative community, can be problematic and met with disapproval, but Pocahontas County is characterized by its eclectic population—in terms of race, ethnicity, cultural background, educational background, socioeconomic status, or age—just as much as it is characterized by its high-context conservative culture. Furthermore, Pocahontas County does not exist inside a bubble and has a complex history of fluctuating ethnoscares, social and cultural change, and musical influences. What is considered to be the area’s musical heritage—old-time, bluegrass, and gospel—may have shaped WVMR’s programming, but it overshadows social change that continues to occur inside and outside of the community.

Despite claims by informants that WVMR’s programming is diverse, the radio station has an overall “old-timey” character that is deliberately created by its staff. In addition to about two-thirds of its airtime being devoted to mountain music, bluegrass and old-time music are used in the background of promos and public service announcements and are interjected between programs. In fact, a tagline used on WVMR, “unique by nature, traditional by choice,” reveals a good deal about the radio station’s intentional promotion of mountain music regardless of the unique nature and changing ethnoscape of the community. Similar to Whisnant’s case studies of “interventions” which were intended to preserve Appalachian traditions but which actually ignored the complex dynamics of the local area while promoting selected traditions that were considered valuable by their cosmopolitan instigators, the predominance of mountain music on WVMR belies the reality of this multifaceted community (1983).

Like the Opera House, WVMR is part of the cultural tourism initiative, the Mountain Music Trail, which highlights venues and organizations in West Virginia that promote mountain music, and WVMR's founder emphasized the radio station's role in promoting tourism and local economic development: "[We] advertis[e] to people who are passing through interesting things to do and reasons to stay in the county."¹²⁷ According to the vision of the Mountain Music Trail, experiencing the "authentic mountain music traditions of West Virginia" is an interesting thing to do and a reason to visit the area, and as many tourists who have been exposed to the mediascape associated with the region expect to hear mountain music, WVMR conforms to this mediascape and satisfies these expectations.¹²⁸

According to WVMR's founder, the radio station strives to remain relevant in a world where music and communication are accessed via a range of media:

Now broadcasting is yesterday's story by and large; it's all about narrowcasting. You can go on Pandora and hear a channel all day long which just has two or three musicians and all the people who are trying to sound like them. And what we're doing is trying to be a *community* radio station; a community defined not by those thousands and thousands of people online around the world who like one particular narrow type of music, but a community as defined traditionally as a bunch of people actually physically occupying the same area.¹²⁹

But a bunch of people who occupy the same area do not necessarily have the same values, cultural backgrounds, or musical interests. Being a community radio station is not a straightforward task, but shining a light on mountain music while casting a shadow on other types of music creates a false impression of a homogeneous community stuck in a perpetual bygone era. Despite many DJs efforts to introduce musical

¹²⁷ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

¹²⁸ Mountain Music Trail "About," <http://mountainmusictrail.com/about> (accessed April 7, 2014).

¹²⁹ Interview with WVMR founder, March 11, 2014.

heterodoxy into WVMR's programming, overall, the radio station is indeed *a* voice of the community rather than a medium for the diverse *voices* of the community to be heard.

Conclusions and Suggestions

The three initiatives detailed in this thesis reveal a great deal about the complex social and cultural dynamics of the Pocahontas County community. They serve as a window to the long history of cultural intervention and exchange in Appalachia—the expansion of railroads and the extractive resource industry, the Progressive Era, the Great Depression and the New Deal, and the War on Poverty and its continued effects in Pocahontas County—and show their relation to this history in their current roles in the community. They all demonstrate the tension between preserving local cultural heritage and participating in an ever-changing society. The three initiatives intersect with one another in how they reflect social change that affects Pocahontas County, but they also diverge from one another in how they navigate conflicting cultural values and respond to specific challenges in the community.

The Opera House and WVMR are both known and advertised by tourism initiatives as traditional mountain music organizations, but each, to a different degree, incorporates a diverse variety of music into its programming and is more concerned with the needs of the local community than with those of tourists. Still, both the Opera House and WVMR have allied themselves with the tourism industry and cater to tourists somewhat while reinforcing the region's musical mediascape. WVMR maintains more conservative programming than the Opera House, with about two-thirds of its airtime devoted to mountain music, compared to one-third of the Opera House's performances. Both initiatives' programming, however, has become more diverse since WVMR started in 1981 and the Opera House started presenting performances again in 1999, when both

initiatives relied mostly on mountain music. In addition, both the Opera House and WVMR describe their programming as family-oriented and appropriate for all.

Unlike WVMR, however, the Opera House was originally built to provide a venue for performers who traveled by train into Pocahontas County from as far away as New York City, and today the Opera House Foundation strives once again to introduce music from outside cultures to the local community. WVMR, on the other hand, was originally established as a mountain music radio station, and, although it has gradually started to incorporate other types of music, it still intentionally creates a traditional “old-timey” character. The Opera House and WVMR also differ in that it is mostly Pocahontas County natives who have influenced the programming committee at the Opera House to include as much mountain music as possible, whereas at WVMR, although Pocahontas County natives play a significant role in incorporating mountain music into the programming, it is the station’s founder, a transplant to the area, who is especially invested in promoting mountain music.

Although public school music education shows some similarities with the issues highlighted at the Opera House and WVMR, such as its similar role to the Opera House as a bridge to outside culture and cosmopolitan values, it also departs from these two initiatives in many ways. Because public school education is strictly regulated by federal and state policies, it does not have the luxury of implementing curricula that respond to the unique needs of the local community. In fact, unlike the Opera House and WVMR, initiatives that involve a good deal of collaboration with locals, public school music education is typically not a collaboration with the local population. Federal policies enacted to provide aid to schools with economically disadvantaged students and to

incorporate multicultural education into school curricula do not take into account the complexities and idiosyncrasies of the communities in which they are being implemented. Such standardizations are often created with good intentions, but as this thesis has made clear, without an in-depth understanding of the cultures represented in a specific area and the complex issues faced by the community, music initiatives risk exacerbating problems that already exist. While the Opera House and WVMR have been able to alter their programming to varying degrees in response to the changing needs of their audience, public school music education remains inflexible, and in the case of Hillsboro Elementary School, undersupplied.

Pocahontas Music, the afterschool music program implemented in the absence of music education in Hillsboro Elementary School's curriculum, however, does demonstrate some similarities with the other two initiatives explored in this thesis, specifically with WVMR. All three music initiatives are based somewhat on the romanticism of traditional Appalachian culture. At the Opera House, this contrived image of Appalachian music is sometimes expressed by programming committee members who are Pocahontas County natives themselves, but WVMR and Pocahontas Music programming is sometimes based on romantic and contrived images of what rural Appalachia should be in the eyes of their cosmopolitan instigators. In the case of Pocahontas Music, its founder promoted a formal, refined musical performance that she saw as being a transformative experience for poor rural children, while ignoring the high-context informal nature of the community.

All three initiatives explored in this thesis were instigated by cosmopolitans who were cultural outsiders to the Pocahontas County community. Each initiative is

essentially the only one of its kind in the area, and as such, must appeal and respond to various cultural cohorts of a community that is at once diverse and conservative. Moreover, each initiative was originally established to build a sense of community in a rural sparsely populated area, but whereas the Opera House and WVMR hold this obligation as central to their current missions “to be the cultural heart of the community” and “the voice of the community,” respectively, public school music education has diverged from its original ambitions to use music as a means to unify and uplift rural communities. A final feature that all three music initiatives share is that in many different and intricate ways, they reveal conflicting cultural values within a complex community.

Although the narrative of outsider versus insider in the case of Appalachia has been used to the point where it has created negative stereotypes that portray rural Appalachian communities as clannish and aggressive towards outsiders, my purpose here is not to perpetuate such stereotypes or even to criticize insiders as being antagonistic or outsiders as being authoritarian and condescending. In fact, I have made it a point to note instances where insiders have been welcoming and helpful to outsiders and where outsiders have collaborated with and learned from insiders. There were, however, several instances in my case studies where outsiders’ cultural values clashed with insiders,’ and even where insiders’ cultural values clashed with those of other insiders. This only supports my claim that the community of Pocahontas County, like any community anywhere, is complex, with multiple levels of insiders and outsiders that continuously reveal inconsistencies and contradictions.

Both Pocahontas County native and transplant informants for my research expressed a keen awareness of the insider/outsider dichotomy in Pocahontas County.

When asked if he had experience with insider/outsider conflicts in the community, one Pocahontas County native responded, “Yes. All you have to do is read the *Pocahontas Times* every week. What else can I say?”¹³⁰ Indeed, a recent debacle covered in local news stemmed from an environmental initiative proposed by a cosmopolitan outsider to establish the “Birthplace of Rivers National Monument” as a federally protected environment. The initiative’s website emphasizes collaboration with local communities as the foundation of the proposed protected area, but informants expressed doubt that the project was actually collaborative.¹³¹ The proposal first came to public light at a county commission meeting before it had been discussed with local groups, such as bear hunters and loggers, that would be affected by the plan.¹³²

The instigator of the project did, however, bring letters of support from various local organizations, but those boards were made up largely of outsiders. An informant explained local residents’ reactions:

Because it was through a national initiative with the Obama Administration and the Department of the Interior . . . alliances [of] the bear hunters and the loggers were like, “We’re not doing this. They’re going to take away our hunting rights; we’re not going to be able to log.” Whereas the outsiders were like, “It’s a beautiful area. We need to protect this.” I think the two sides actually really wanted similar goals, [but] because of cultural mistrust and barriers, that whole thing has really gotten scuttled. The county commission . . . actually withdrew . . . support of the proposal.¹³³

Although this incident was a result of an environmental initiative rather than a music initiative, it reveals similar tension between inside and outside values and interests. After discussing small-town gossip issues in the community, a Pocahontas County native exclaimed, “If there’s one thing I hate more than gossip, [it] is somebody who comes in

¹³⁰ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

¹³¹ Birthplace of Rivers National Monument, <http://www.birthplaceofrivers.org/> (accessed April 7, 2014).

¹³² Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 26, 2013.

¹³³ Ibid.

who says, ‘We need to protect you from yourself.’”¹³⁴ Clearly, the mishap with the environmental initiative was not an isolated incident, and with a long history of fluctuating ethnoscaapes, cosmopolitan transplants, and exploitative enterprises in Pocahontas County, local residents are accustomed to a predictable pattern.

Although some of the most common words informants used when asked to describe the people of Pocahontas County were “skeptical” and “suspicious,” words that were mentioned just as frequently were “welcoming,” “neighborly,” and “friendly.”¹³⁵ While recognizing the insider/outsider dichotomy in Pocahontas County, many transplant informants expressed appreciation for the comfort they feel living there and the accommodating nature of the community. A former VISTA who now works at the public library explained her policy of mutual respect: “I tend to think that when you move to a place, you have some responsibility to be observant of where you are.”¹³⁶ Another informant, while discussing the conservatism of the community, qualified his remark, “But I think it’s also a place that’s very tolerant of people and their differences.”¹³⁷ Considering that Pocahontas County is made up of such diverse groups as the logging community, back-to-the-landers, white supremacist organizations, and scientists studying outer space, the claims of tolerance and acceptance undeniably hold some truth; but this does not mean that everyone always lives in harmony with no clashes between the various cultural cohorts.

Much of the scholarly literature that focuses on the insider/outsider dichotomy in Appalachia is highly critical of idealistic outsider impulses to “save” the underprivileged

¹³⁴ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

¹³⁵ Interviews with Pocahontas County community members, July 2013-March 2014.

¹³⁶ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, July 27, 2013.

¹³⁷ Interview with Pocahontas County community member, March 11, 2014.

Appalachian people, but despite the fact that the movement of cosmopolitan outsiders into rural Appalachia has continued for more than a century, and it does not look like it will abate anytime soon, scholarly literature often falls short of offering suggestions for how cultural outsiders might more effectively contribute to these communities. The three music initiatives explored in this thesis were all started by enterprising outsiders, but they all continue to serve an important role in the community. The Opera House, public school music education, and WVMR are all situated, both physically and ideologically, at the intersection of a cherished heritage and social change that continues to shake the community's time-honored foundation. In this important position, each initiative has the opportunity to respond to this tension and to the needs of the diverse ethnoscape of Pocahontas County.

A common mistake of both the music and cultural initiatives that were the subject of this research and other studies that informed this thesis was that the instigators tended to either essentialize or ignore the communities in which they worked. Essentialism can lead to one musical tradition believed to be representative being valued, while other traditions are ignored. As this thesis demonstrates, even communities that seem mostly homogeneous can in fact be quite complex and diverse. If a music initiative is to play a central role in a community, it must demonstrate cultural sensitivity by addressing the complexities and idiosyncrasies of the population and responding to the unique challenges of the community. These are guidelines often employed by applied ethnomusicologists working in various capacities in a wide range of communities. For example, Anthony Seeger suggests that for instigators of many music initiatives, intensive knowledge both of the local community and of the wider social context in

which that community lives is essential (2006). Another ethnomusicologist and music educator, Patricia Shehan Campbell, emphasizes cultural sensitivity in applied work in culturally distinctive communities (2010).

Despite claims of cultural sensitivity and collaboration with local communities, initiatives, like the “Birthplace of Rivers National Monument” example given above, often get caught up in achieving higher goals and lose sight of their original commitment to cultural sensitivity and collaboration. Examples of this oversight also abound in music initiatives in Pocahontas County. In 2010, the National Symphony Orchestra (NSO) chose West Virginia as the site for its annual American Residency Program. The orchestra mainly performed in the state’s more urban areas, but also split up into smaller ensembles to visit more remote locations. A wind ensemble from the orchestra visited Pocahontas County and performed to a small but enthusiastic audience at the Opera House. The NSO American Residency Program suggests a commitment to cultural sensitivity by stating that one of its goals is “to explore the diversity of musical influences within the state.”¹³⁸ Considering that Pocahontas County is known for its musical heritage, the NSO’s visit there would seem to be the perfect opportunity for the orchestra to carry out this goal; however, it was not part of their program at the Opera House.

Initiatives that claim to be committed to cultural sensitivity and collaboration but do not adhere to this commitment can be as unproductive as initiatives that entirely disregard the local community. Perhaps, if the NSO had made their commitment to explore the diversity of musical influences within the state more of a priority during their

¹³⁸ National Symphony Orchestra “American Residency Goals,” <http://www.kennedy-center.org/nso/community/> (accessed April 6, 2014).

visit to Pocahontas County, their performance would have generated a broader interest drawing a larger audience. Orthodox supporters of mountain music may resist musical heterodoxy for fear that it encroaches on the local musical heritage, but if music initiatives strive to find a balance between promoting local music traditions and introducing musical diversity, they can not only reflect the complex makeup of the population and the greater society in which it exists, but also respond to specific challenges in the community, such as isolation, xenophobia, and the preservation of the local musical heritage.

The three music initiatives explored in this thesis were all started with admirable intentions, but negotiating between the preservation of cherished musical traditions and participation in a continuously changing society has resulted in various conflicts in each. These initiatives, however, have the capacity to be beneficial by facilitating a kind of musical exchange in which the local community can better understand their own musical heritage by being exposed to musical heterodoxy. Although most scholarship on multicultural music initiatives focuses on urban contexts where it is argued that music should reflect the racial and ethnic diversity common in cities, musical diversity is important in contexts that lack racial and ethnic diversity as well. For example, applied ethnomusicologist Britta Sweers participated in a music initiative to facilitate cross-cultural understanding in a German city where Neo-Nazis had a strong presence (2010). As Pocahontas County is also a community that struggles with xenophobia, applied ethnomusicology projects such as this can help inform music initiatives in the area.

The community of Pocahontas County may be unique in terms of the various cultural cohorts that make up its population, but the challenges it faces are not specific to

the area. Many communities, both within and outside of the Appalachian region, are faced with the challenge of preserving a cherished local culture while embracing other cultures and social change. Individuals involved in music initiatives can sometimes find themselves in the position of referee caught in the middle of this contested subject, and instead of taking sides, they have the opportunity to demonstrate that these interests are not in opposition to each other, but rather that they can complement one another and respond to various needs and challenges of a diverse community.

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