

# Island Songs

A Global Repertoire

Godfrey Baldacchino



THE SCARECROW PRESS, INC.

*Lanham • Toronto • Plymouth, UK*

2011

Published by Scarecrow Press, Inc.

A wholly owned subsidiary of The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc.  
4501 Forbes Boulevard, Suite 200, Lanham, Maryland 20706  
<http://www.scarecrowpress.com>

Estover Road, Plymouth PL6 7PY, United Kingdom

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British Library Cataloguing in Publication Information Available

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Island songs : a global repertoire / edited by Godfrey Baldacchino.  
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8108-8177-8 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-8108-8178-5 (ebook)

1. Singing—Social aspects. 2. Island people—Music—History and criticism. 3. Island people—Social life and customs. 4. Music—Philosophy and aesthetics. I. Baldacchino, Godfrey. II. Advance Interdisciplinary Research in Singing (Project).

ML3838.I85 2012

782.420914'2—dc23

2011024080



The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of American National Standard for Information Sciences—Permanence of Paper for Printed Library Materials, ANSI/NISO Z39.48-1992.

Printed in the United States of America

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## Foreword

Thou'rt the music of my heart,  
Harp of joy, oh cruit mo chridh,  
Moon of guidance by night,  
Strength and light thou'rt to me.

—From the *Eriskay Love Lilt* (traditional song of the Scottish Hebrides)

What an honor it is to provide a few prefatory remarks for this outstanding volume, entitled *Island Songs: A Global Repertoire*, conceived, compiled, and edited by my colleague Godfrey Baldacchino, the Canada Research Chair in Island Studies at the University of Prince Edward Island (UPEI). How fortunate I feel that he is my university colleague and co-investigator on the AIRS Project—Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing. *Island Songs* is the first book to result from the AIRS Major Collaborative Research Initiative, and it is a special thrill for me that this inaugural volume was masterminded by a faculty member at UPEI, the AIRS project hub.

In his introduction to this volume, Dr. Baldacchino describes how singing impacts lives on so many dimensions, from birth to the grave. Yet, in spite of its significance, singing is relatively unexplored. Much is unknown about how the skill of singing develops, how songs and singing styles are absorbed into a culture, and how singing affects both performers and listeners. Some of the answers to these questions could come from the study of islands, their communities and cultures. The chapters in this volume, representing islands of wide variety around the globe, are ample testimony to the fact that islands—as living, tangible, and manageable laboratories—provide conditions for a vibrant exploration of the many influences on singing development and song style. As case studies, the

chapters in this volume advance our understanding of singing and lay the groundwork for future research on such important topics as the role of singing within and between cultures, and the role of globalization on the resilience of songs and singing styles.

As Dr. Baldacchino mentions in his Introduction, this book has arisen as a result of the AIRS Project. It makes sense then for me, as the director of AIRS, to briefly describe the project and to try to place *Island Songs* in the context of the AIRS objectives and milestones.

AIRS is a seven-year major collaborative research initiative that aims to Advance Interdisciplinary Research in Singing (AIRS) through the cooperation of over seventy researchers representing every province in Canada and fifteen other countries on six continents. Aiming to understand individual, cultural, and universal influences on singing and the influences of singing on individuals and societies, the AIRS researcher community is focusing on three broad though inter-related themes:

1. the development of singing ability,
2. singing and learning, and
3. the enhancement of well-being and health through singing.

These themes may be regarded respectively as defining:

1. what behaviors associated with singing are possible, given mental, physiological, and environmental constraints,
2. what singing behaviors occur in practice, and
3. what are the “big picture”—societal, cultural, and political—implications of singing.

Within and across these themes, researchers are sharing their knowledge and expertise from numerous disciplinary perspectives, including sociology, ethnomusicology, psychology, musicology, music therapy, education, anthropology, folklore, medicine, and audio and computer engineering. They are also sharing their work audio-visually using a digital library and an interactive website. Several common motifs integrate the collaboration: an emphasis on student training opportunities; researcher meetings supported by electronic technology fostering transfer of findings across themes; and an AIRS test battery of singing skills woven through the research themes.

The research results are being disseminated through traditional academic means (papers and theme issues in scholarly journals, workshops, conferences, and books [like this one]) and through activities and settings

(school curricula, homes for seniors, medical interventions, performances, school choirs). Such dissemination aims to provide a foundation for decision making in education, health, culture, immigration, and foreign policy. *Island Songs* is a new volume that reflects the early realization of the dissemination plan, not yet two years into the project.

A project of the scope of AIRS requires substantial and long-term funding. The opportunity for both arose some years ago through Canada's Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) Major Collaborative Research Initiative Program (MCRI). A history of multidisciplinary research had taken place at UPEI that provided a foundation for research on this scale. A grant from the Canada Foundation for Innovation had awarded funding toward the procurement and installation of audio-visual technology, as well as for a videoconferencing facility and a digital library in support of the study of the role of electronic media in education, taking culture and cognition into account. We had also carried out an intensive multidisciplinary research project called Arts-Netlantic, funded by Canadian Heritage. We had developed a virtual forum for discussions among academics, government, and industry in three universities across two provinces and two cultures and languages. With this infrastructure in place and experience behind us, the possibility for studying singing in all its dimensions became feasible. When I mentioned to Dr. Baldacchino the possibility of mounting a large research project on singing, he immediately came on board. Had it not been for his support of the idea, this project might not have taken place. His credibility meant that others joined in. Following some shared brainstorming, it is to him that we owe the acronym AIRS. While his work for Island Studies is his primary research, his co-leadership of the AIRS research theme on cultural understanding has been invaluable. His participation in our annual meetings and regional workshops always underscores why this project thrives in our small and extraordinary university. At our meetings, Godfrey has everyone singing his song in their own voice, just as he has coordinated a harmonious choir of articles for this outstanding book.

You might have wondered how I happened to mention such a project on singing to Godfrey in the first place. It is another story, and one I was not going to tell until I read Godfrey's introductory chapter. Like many others, I would not consider myself an island scholar. But, just like many others, I too am, and have been, especially touched by the affective power of island songs. In Godfrey's introduction, I learned that Eriskay is a tiny Hebridean island off the coast of the Scottish mainland, known for its Celtic songs. It suddenly occurred to me that the AIRS project was also indebted to, if not dependent on, an Eriskay island song, "Eriskay Love Lilt." Here is why.

Back in 1997, I enrolled in a few singing lessons. My purpose was to pick up a few tips to enable me to sing some songs that I had written. There was no plan to practice or to go beyond a few weeks of lessons due to the pressures of my academic responsibilities. Pamela Campbell, my voice teacher, kindly agreed with my plan, though it ultimately changed. After several lessons, primarily on breathing exercises, she finally presented me with a real song: “Eriskay Love Lilt.” This beautiful Celtic ballad has been recorded by many vocalists, from Paul Robeson to Rita MacNeil. Some of the lines are in Gaelic and some in English (in the version I learned) and express deep and simple emotions “Sad am I without thee/Thou’rt the music of my heart.” Other lyrics refer to the vital forces of nature: “black the night, or wild the sea.” Give a straight-laced academic who has just lost her father a song like that and it’s not long before you see a few tears streaming down; the power of the music coupled with the words command deep feelings and not a little attention. My vocal lessons did not end, but continued, enabling me to experience firsthand that every human being comes equipped with a musical instrument, the human voice. Indeed, over the next ten years, I went on to achieve the Associateship Credential granted by the Royal Conservatory of Music of Toronto (ARCT), and sang some of the most glorious music known to the world. From my background in music psychology of several decades, it was clear to me that there was much to be learned about and from singing. Singing appeared to me as a gift to humans. It could be exploited for good. Its power, in the wrong hands, could be used for harm. While a song other than the “Eriskay Love Lilt” might have opened the same route, I can only say for sure that there is a connection between that Eriskay island song and the AIRS megaproject on singing, and it seems all the more fitting that this volume, *Island Songs*, represents the achievement of one of the first major milestones for AIRS.

Thus, I heartily thank all of the contributors to the volume and encourage them in their continuing research on singing and islands. There is still so much to be discovered for which this volume provides a worthy foundation, for others to follow. Individually, each article makes a contribution with added value provided by the total collection. My gratitude is also extended to Scarecrow Press, a leading publisher in the field of music, for seeing the promise of this volume and the potential of the AIRS Project. I am also appreciative of the support of the University of Prince Edward Island, its Office of Research Development, the Faculty of Arts, and my own Department of Psychology for efforts on behalf of the AIRS Project, and all researchers, faculty, students, and staff alike involved in AIRS. Of course, the AIRS Project is indebted to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for its support.

The last words of acknowledgment and praise, however, go to Dr. Baldacchino for envisioning and seeing through this extraordinary achievement of the publication of the compendium on *Island Songs*.

Annabel J. Cohen  
Director of AIRS SSHRC MCRI  
Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing

# Introduction

## Singing, Islands, and Island Songs

*I*n most parts of the world, singing, alone, or in company, is part of the tapestry of life. In its universality, singing can break down cultural, educational, linguistic, and emotional hurdles. By evoking thoughts, memories, and feelings, singing can open lines of communication and serve as an outlet for emotions.

From the lullabies sung by parents to newborns, and the songs sung by children as they play; to the chants that accompany traditional rituals, dances, and rites of passage, traditional cultures often reverberate with opportunities for augmenting regular speech by the use of tonality and rhythm, as much as for dance and movement (Bader-Rusch 2003; Lobban 1986; Lomax et al. 1997; Maceda 1958a, 1958b; Trehub & Trainor 1998). Such practices are often handed down inter-generationally, via example and/or oral transmission. Singing is a central component of large social functions such as weddings and fund-raising events. There are songs of praise for notable feats, religious events, storytelling, formal singing or wailing to accompany death rituals, and song competitions between men and women (Johnstone and Feinberg 2006; Lindstrom and White, 1993; Russell 1997).

Singing is notoriously hard to define: Like speech, it is a specialized mode of communication, often meant “to express the shared feelings and mould the joint activities of some human community” (Lomax 1968, 3). Singing is known to enhance our well-being; reduce pain and stress; build up courage, confidence, and resilience; promote alertness; improve one’s mood; express profound values via performance; bond us with others; offer pleasure in leisure; provide profound insights into the self; even to prolong our life (Eyerly, 2007; Stacy et al., 2002). Studies have linked singing with a lower heart rate and decreased blood pressure (Valentine and Evans 2001). Singing

together is a social and communal ritual that can redefine relationships and lubricate business negotiation practices (Holt and Chang 2009). Seniors who belong to choirs report easier and better regulated breathing, better posture, and higher immunity, resulting in fewer health issues: Singing promotes respiratory fitness by strengthening the lungs and increasing oxygen levels in the blood (Clift et al. 2008). Alzheimer and dementia patients may still sing and enjoy music, though they may no longer be able to converse. Various studies offer evidence of the physiological, cognitive, and emotional benefits of group singing for an improved quality of life (Clift and Hancox 2001). Others offer insight as to how a familiarity with, and performance of, the songs of other cultures acts as a conduit for oral history as much as for improved intercultural understanding (Finnegan 2007). Whether natural or achieved, singing is culturally ubiquitous as a form of individual expression and social communication (Nettl 1983), and is significant throughout the lifespan (Cohen 2005). Nor is singing significant only for human beings: as Darwin (1871) had noted, other living species—including birds and frogs—manifest interesting associations between language, song, and sexual selection (Searcy and Andersson 1986). Nor is such an association completely ruled out for human beings (Miller 2000, Mithen 2005, 176–182).

In contrast to traditional societies, contemporary urbanized Western society does not encourage us to sing. Paradoxically, song, as part of music, is everywhere: Piped into shops and restaurants as background noise, supporting commercials on radio and television, a staple inclusion in movies and video games, handy succor off an iPod, presumably helping us to be patient while a phone line is busy or as we wait in line to speak to an agent. But we are encouraged so much more to consume song—listen to it, buy it, download it, play and replay it—rather than produce it. A pervasive and disabling Christian rationalism and neo-Platonism (that went so far as to condemn the singing by nuns as “devil’s work”, permitting only the plainest of chants) has seeped through most legal-rationally driven Western institutions—from the school classroom to the hospital ward, even to the family (Stapert 2007, 23). This infiltration—also exacerbated by other orthodox religions—may have played its part in effectively curtailing and repressing opportunities for singing in the twenty-first century, and often tightly regulating, territorializing, and scripting these where they occur—whether during religious celebrations, music festivals, sporting events, karaoke sessions, or when drinking alcohol.

Of course, some people seem to want to sing, no matter what: Many find ways for doing so, even when society, subtly or otherwise, discourages the practice. In spite of its implicit democratic and populist potential, singing has become—like all the arts—a task only reserved for the gifted, the well trained, and the well equipped. (Thus, and typically, while I enjoy singing, I have never

been considered a singer, nor have I ever considered myself one. Admittedly, I did spend a few years in my youth singing as a soloist in an amateur church choir; but that was largely as an excuse to spend time with a young woman who would eventually marry me.)

As a result, and in spite of rampant secularization, song with all its magic and allure, has been somewhat sidelined as a mechanism that can regularly represent and convey broadly felt social and cultural sentiments in developed countries. Of course, there remain many instances where a strongly-felt opinion, theme, or argument, is conveyed through song, and electrifies audiences at large. We are, in such instances, reminded of song's gripping, visceral power. Young people turn more naturally to song to satisfy their search for meaning and emotional refuge during the turbulent crises of adolescence; amongst contemporary singers, Justin Bieber has been hailed as "the first real teen idol of the digital age" (Suddath 2010). Marginalized and challenged communities manifest their hardy resilience through the revival of folk traditions, possibly resurrecting defunct words and ritual in the process. And it is not only those fundamental issues that bedevil human existence—life, death, pain, love, beauty, betrayal, loss, anticipation, patriotism, religion, war—that find expression through song and land wide public appeal. Dave Carroll's first of three "United Breaks Guitars" songs in 2009 dealt with a rather unexciting complaint against an airline company; yet became instant media frenzy and one of the most popular downloads ever on YouTube, already with almost ten million hits. United Airlines executives had to listen. And what about singing sensation Susan Boyle, catapulted to fame after her stage performance on the TV show *Britain's Got Talent*—and already with over fifty-six million hits on YouTube?

Meanwhile, elsewhere, song maintains a powerful grip on people's minds and hearts (and voices). Two key events of 2010, eliciting sharply different emotions, are both more easily recollected through song: A remixed version of "Wavin' Flag," by Somalia-born, Toronto-raised, hip-hop artist K'naan, served as the official song of the FIFA 2010 World Cup, held in South Africa. While the misery, despair, and redemption that followed the devastating January 12 earthquake that struck Port-au-Prince, is captured by local singer Beken (stage name of Jean-Prosper Deauphin) in "Earthquake Haiti." (Others may prefer the UK charity single organized by Simon Cowell, based on a re-recording of R.E.M.'s "Everybody Hurts" from 1992, to recollect the same event.) Still in Haiti, carnival singer Michel "Sweet Micky" Martelly won the run-off presidential elections (Reuters 2011); his candidacy had received a welcome endorsement from Wyclef Jean, a Haitian rapper and former member of band the Fugees, who had also sought to run for the presidency (*Sunshine Coast Daily* 2011).

## THIS BOOK

This text is a modest attempt to illuminate, read, and enjoy songs with the intent of better understanding the inherent contradictions and paradoxical modalities of island life. It proffers to exploit the representative, titillating, and evocative power of song to address the tensions faced by island and island peoples around the world, as they navigate the unruly waters of globalization. In teasing out patterns from their diversity, this text seeks to capture the explanatory power of comparative island studies, where the subject matter must navigate “inbetweenity” (Philip 1997). In so doing, it brings together the perspectives and experiences of sociologists, anthropologists, geographers, cultural studies specialists, folklorists, ethnomusicologists as well as singers and musicians. It nicely complements Kevin Dawe’s pithy collection of island music(s) (Dawe 2004) as well as Mackinlay et al.’s (2009) collection of current musicological research in Australia and New Zealand by looking at the way in which, in our case, *song* is socially constructed and assigned meaning in island societies, even as the same societies deploy song to evoke and capture drama and sentiment in place. (The attempted emphasis here is more on *song* than *music*—which involves melody and requires instrumental accompaniment—even though such a distinction may not make much sense either in some cultures or in relation to certain expressions—say, Qur’anic chant.) Moreover, as write Mackinlay et al. (2009 xix), the magic inherent within [the] positioning of islands as isolated and unique locales of fun, pleasure, treasure, and discovery—a juxtaposition of islands and songs that already has a long pedigree (Peacocke 1900)—is one feature which permeates the theoretical, methodological, and analytical boundaries of their edited book. It comes as no surprise that islands (especially the tropical kind) and songs are exquisitely bound in a heavily nuanced, romantic and bucolic embrace that the marketing industry has sought to capitalize, captured, for example, in the exotic nostalgia of Harry Belafonte’s “Jamaica Farewell” (1956):

But I’m sad to say,  
I’m on my way,  
won’t be back for many a day.  
My heart is down,  
my head is turning around,  
I had to leave a little girl in Kingston Town.

Or, half a world away, in the haunting, traditional Fijian tune of “Isa Lei,” another farewell “song in place” (lyrics reproduced in Stanley 2004, 203):

Isa lei, na noqu rarawa  
 Ni ko sana vodo e na mataka  
 Bau nanuma, na nodatou lasa  
 Mai Suva nanuma tiko ga  
 (Isa Lei, the purple shadow falling,  
 Sad the morrow will dawn upon my sorrow;  
 O, forget not, when you're far away,  
 Precious moments beside dear Suva Bay.)

*Island Songs* hopes to capture this powerful affect of song as “sonic narrative” (Berry, 1976), illuminating histories, cultural practices, and social change; exploring identity through emotional attachments and connections to place. Following on Anthony Seeger (2004), this book proposes a sonic anthropology that does not just probe how song is part of sociocultural life on islands; but also how song performs that island life.

#### A PERSONAL NOTE

In this case, I have unapologetically taken the lead to produce this compilation not so much as a specialist in the study of song, which I am certainly not; but really to combine two lifelong interests of mine: My professional pursuit of the comparative and critical study of islands for their own sake, and my love of singing (even to the chagrin of those around me). Thus, please, do consider this book as the outcome of a “fun” (albeit still serious and scholarly) project, meant to be enjoyed as much as to be studied.

My claim to singing fame is limited to one “rap” song, whose lyrics I composed and “sang” as an academic address which I delivered to the graduation ceremony at the University of Malta, in Malta, in November 1998<sup>1</sup>. That event, unheard of in such a format throughout the 400-year plus history of that university, my *alma mater*, was brought to the attention of the institution’s rector/president a week before the fateful day. He tried to dissuade me from breaking with tradition, but I stuck to my guns, and only conceded not to have a student choir to sing the refrain on stage. On the appointed day, all but a few trusted colleagues and university employees were taken by surprise. The rector was tense, fearing the worse. But the student audience warmed up to the unorthodox oration and applauded the performance. The minister of education enjoyed the episode, moving his legs with the beat. He later called me “my troubadour.” A daily newspaper described it on its front page as a “RAPturous oration” on its next day issue. Invariably, reminiscing about the event makes me feel good. Even though, in retrospect, I should have stuck to my choir.

## WHY ISLANDS?

Islands are key depositories of the world's genetic and biotic diversity: They are well-established as significant and relevant milieux in the biological sciences. The emergence of the basic principles of a theory of evolution, and the associated attributes of endemism and extinction, have made islands veritable “hot spots” for research in such fields as conservation ecology and biogeography. Studying and interpreting the Galápagos finches (*after* Darwin, 1859), the butterflies of the Aru Islands (*after* Wallace 1880), or following the biotic dynamics on the recently born islands of Rakata (Indonesia) or Surtsey (Iceland), are today basic features of any core biology text. Some island states—Kiribati, Maldives, Marshall Islands, Tuvalu—have been thrust unwittingly on the global stage as the “canaries in the coal mine” for such contemporary phenomena as sea level rise. Meanwhile, other island territories—Socotra, Macquarie, the Tasmanian wilderness, Yakushima—have had their unique, and mainly natural, attributes recognized via their designation as UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Heritage, however, also includes culture, as UNESCO itself would be enthusiastic to affirm: Especially pertinent here is the 2003 Convention for the safeguarding of “Intangible Cultural Heritage,” which includes both music and song (UNESCO 2010). Designated world heritage sites on islands include monasteries and churches (as on Reichenau island, in Switzerland); prisons (as on Gorée island, Senegal); distinctive lifestyles (as the Pico island vineyards, in the Portuguese Azores); as well as whole island cities (as in Venice, Italy). The geographical features of islands, and their relative isolation, help both to define and nurture their distinctive natural and cultural features. Notions of uniqueness and endemism, typically under threat, therefore straddle both the natural and cultural worlds. Thus, it comes as no surprise to note that much of the world's extant stock of linguistic and musical diversity can be traced to various island societies, and especially Papua New Guinea (PNG)—“linguistically, the most complex nation in the world” (Summer Institute of Linguistics 2007; Gillespie 2009, 20) as well as “a last frontier . . . a place where indigenous life, with minimal intervention from Europeans, can be studied” (Gillespie 2009, 21)—along with Vanuatu, today depositories of perhaps some one thousand out of the world's three thousand or so remaining spoken languages (Crystal 2000; Marett 2010; Miyaoka et al. 2007). Taku atoll, a PNG outlier, is “arguably the only Polynesian society practicing traditional religion” (Moyle 2009, 58); its residents believe that their *lluu* songs have been composed by the dead themselves.

Clark (2004) has elaborated on how a traditional event—in his case, the ballad dance of the Faroe islanders—has been revived, as much as reinvented,

in the context of the threats and opportunities presented by rampant global cultural sameness. (Even more pertinent to this collection is that this “ballad dance” is not a dance at all but mainly singing, and a kind of walking that accompanies the singing.) Song can be similarly examined from such a “cultural collision” lens. Paraphrasing Fairley (2004 86): Song lyrics, along with their accompanying music, can be comfortably read as a barometer of life and as major cultural markers of change.

#### ISLANDS AND SONGS: A GLOBAL REVIEW

Of course, deploying song to unpack and enact cultural issues is not an original idea; nor is the resort to islands to indulge in this connection. Material islands are also “anxious spaces” (Jackson and Della Dora 2009), redolent with meaning and affect; and so their island nature is also a metaphor deployed naturally to describe their particular conditionalities, including musicology (Eriksen 1993). It is a stance that transcends the mere urge to catalog, classify and preserve “island songs” for posterity, in text, tape, on disc, or on the web. The “Islands of Globalization” program, a graduate seminar devised by the East-West Center in Hawai‘i, and supported by the Ford Foundation, explored “South-South” island interchanges, and used (among other cultural devices, such as movies and texts) the songs of the Caribbean and the South Pacific to enhance critical understandings of the origins, nature, and consequences of globalization from the perspective of small island societies, and the threats and opportunities that these may pose to reinvention, tradition, and authenticity (EWC 2006). More specifically, Hayward (2006) explores the fluid evolution of song and singing styles and their role in the construction and representation of history and communality on Norfolk and Pitcairn islands. López Viera (2006) laments the decline of the *baile del tambor* (drum dance), which comprises singing in call-and-response format accompanied by drumming, and couple dancing, from La Gomera, in Spain’s Canary islands. Earlier, MacLean (1965) accounts for how a decline in language ability has led to “song loss” amongst the Māori of New Zealand.

Cultural renewal has benefited from song, just as much as it has found expression through this medium. Szego (2003) investigates how native Hawaiians re-ascribe meaning to their indigenous language through its rendition in song; York (1995) had done likewise with the Torres Strait islanders. Bithell (2007) reviews the revival and reconstruction of the “old way” of singing the Latin Mass in various Corsican villages. Brown (2009) provides a historical context of the growth of Celtic music on Cape Breton Island, Canada, and traces its corollary development as a key component of a cultural tourism

product. Alexeyeff (2009) provides a rich ethnographic account of how song, along with dance, plays a particular role in articulating the multilayered local, regional, and transnational agendas of postcolonial Cook islanders. Čaleta (2008) looks at the recent dynamic transformation of *klapa* singing, a multi-part singing tradition of the coastal and island part of Dalmatia, Croatia; while Erler (1998) traces the recent gender, textual, and melodic transitions in the performativity of *ghana* (ballad songs) on Malta. Three Torres Strait islanders and singers/songwriters based on mainland Australia—Ruth Ghee, Toni Janke, and Sarah Patrick—explain how their songs connect them to their community, allowing them to construct and express their identity and heritage, as they pass on information to the next generation (Barney and Solomon 2009, 84–85; Lawe Davies and Neuenfeldt 2004, 138). And in post-independence Vanuatu, even as depopulation has inhibited the transmission of traditional *kastom* activities, rendering them increasingly anachronistic to young ni-Vanuatu, augmented stringband music and song comprise a new aspect of cultural heritage (Fitzgerald and Hayward 2009, 123).

Songs thrive as sites and sounds of resistance. Moulin (1994) explains how, in French Polynesia, Marquesans strive for empowerment through song in the face of French cultural hegemony. Okinawan songs may be heard/read as sites of memory that trace that archipelago's conflicted positions within the Japanese empire and state (Roberson 2009). Marginalized Haitians have used *chan pwen*, a song tradition, to simultaneously exploit and challenge oppressive sociopolitical norms (Smith 2004). Akindes (2001) has suggested that Hawaiian rap acts as emancipatory discourse in contemporary Hawaiian politics. Anazagasty-Rodriguez (2002) argues how Puerto Rican rock produces a vibrant critique of imperialism and capitalism, while Flores (2000) provides an account of how song, from bomba to hip-hop, molds Puerto Rican identity amongst the extensive diaspora in the United States.

Recognizing their value, songs feature prominently as expressions of national identity, inclusive of statist projects of nation-building. Anderson (1983, p. 145), renowned for his work on nations as “imagined communities,” offers the concept of “unisonance” to refer to the sense of community and totality that are meant to arise when all those present sing something like the national anthem at the same time. Guy (2002) probes the multiple layers of meaning in the singing of the Taiwanese national anthem by a pop diva of indigenous descent during a presidential swearing-in ceremony. Kelen (2003) does likewise, looking at three songs and their relationship to the construction of the national Australian imaginary. Barney (2005) examines how Torres Strait islander Christine Anu's performance of the song “My Island Home” at the closing ceremony of the Sydney 2000 Olympics celebrated an increasingly reconciled national identity; yet also worked to disguise “the history of race

relations and contemporary political debates about social justice and human rights for indigenous Australians” (Barney and Solomon 2009, pp. 77–78). Dibben (2009a, 2009b) examines Icelandic eclectic singer and songwriter Björk and her multimedia output in relation to landscape and national identity. And in that multi ethnic island city-state, “Sing Singapore”—a biennial, state-sponsored competition—has morphed into a cynical populist movement celebrating songs for their banal, kitsch value (Tan 2005).

And what about intercultural understanding? There may be promise in pursuing research that examines how attitudes can change when one culture gets exposed to the songs of another. Sousa, Neto, and Mullet (2005) note changes in the stereotyping of (dark-skinned) Cape Verdean islanders amongst (light-skinned) Portuguese children when the latter were taught the former’s songs and music (Neto & Williams 1997). Early exposure to music foreign to one’s culture might be an important step towards appreciating that culture later in one’s life (Levitin 2009).

Alexeyeff (2004) strikes a common island theme in addressing singing in the Cook Islands: Despite the centrality of local music and song in many social contexts, it is also viewed by some as a “bastardization” of “traditional” expression and an indicator of “global” corruption, “swamped” as it is by Western popular music. Cultural hybridity, for better or for worse, is a pervasive concern: this may unleash a “great new force and energy as by fission or fusion” (McLuhan 1964, 48). Yet, cross-culturality has its serious detractors: This issue is discussed by Archer (2007) with respect to New Zealand; Bendrup (2009) with regard to Easter Island/Rapa Nui; Park (2006) on changes to improvisational practice on Chindo Island, Korea; Maring and Maring (1997) on its connection with Japanese *shunka* (erotic folksong); and Stillman (1991) on the mutual reconstitution of English hymn tunes and Tahitian music practice in French Polynesia. Meanwhile, Italian aficionado Daniele Mezzana is leading a team of social scientists analyzing the lyrics of 104 songs from twentieth century (mainly pop and rock) music that speak to island themes. (Readers of my generation may especially remember Simon and Garfunkel’s “I Am a Rock”).

Within the broader scholarly literature, there has been much written about song in context with respect to Cuba (Baker 2006; Fernandes 2003); the rich and competitive diversity of song, amongst other genres, in the regional Caribbean (Clarke 1980; Guilbault 2005; King et al. 2002; Manwel 2000; Moscowitz 2007; Sager 2002) and of song as articulation of glocality in Indonesia, Japan, and the Philippines, the world’s largest archipelagic independent states, and their diasporas (Adams 1981; Aragon 1996; Baes 1987; Becker 1975; Bodden 2005; Condry 2006; Cooper 2000; Devitt 2008; Gillan 2008; Gutierrez 1961; Hatch 1976; Hughes 1991; Magdamo and Griffith

1957; Ong 2009; Roberson 2010; Watanabe 2005). What remained was a general unease with searching for ‘universals’ or for suggesting that culturally specific expressions were somehow directly and plausibly comparable to those of other disciplines, or locales. Missing was a coordinated attempt to look at this exciting diversity holistically. There is however, an emerging interest in cross-cultural comparisons. What would an edited collection dealing with island songs look (or sound) like? What distinctive, overarching themes would it have to grapple with?

### THE AIRS PROJECT

The opportunity arose with the launching of AIRS (Advancing Interdisciplinary Research in Singing: [www.airsplace.ca](http://www.airsplace.ca)), one of the major collaborative research initiative (MCRI) proposals financed by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC). Running since 2008, and under the overall leadership of my colleague Professor Annabel Cohen at the University of Prince Edward Island, Canada (UPEI), AIRS brings together over seventy-five researchers from around the world to promote and sustain a more informed understanding and appreciation of singing in relation to human development, education, health, and well-being. An electronic message was sent out in May 2009 to the AIRS network members, as well as to the members of the list-serves for the Society for Ethnomusicology, the International Small Islands Studies Association (ISISA), and the Small Island Cultures Research Initiative (SICRI). The message invited expressions of interest; and suggestions as to how to take an “island songs” research strand forward. The latter would involve undertaking complementary research that investigates island songs and singing styles; identifying scholarly literature that explores the relationship between song and island culture; and suggesting scholars and practitioners from a variety of disciplines and countries who may be interested in joining this research effort, which has the potential to take the form of a global “island studies” project. Within a month, forty-eight individual scholars and practitioners had responded positively to the idea: from Jersey to the Solomon Islands, from Corsica to Canada’s West Coast, from Scotland to the Seychelles, and from the Caribbean to the Pacific. These became the founding members of an informal group called the Island Song Research Network (ISRN). They share a keen interest in examining the condition of song, singing, and singers in island contexts around the world. The rich information provided by these individuals has greatly helped to refine the research aims and objectives that led to this book’s proposal.

## JUSTIFICATIONS

Owe Ronström, a contributor to this volume, did well to urge us to articulate more precisely what we could expect islands to contribute specifically to this study. Thanks to his timely prodding, four main justifications for a text on island song have been proposed.

First, that islands, and islanders, can serve as subjects with a clearer (though still in their own way messy) relationship with local identity and the external other. Islands the world over have an uncanny disposition to be undivided jurisdictions, presided by a single government; where they don't—Cyprus, Ireland, Timor, Sri Lanka until recently—the accommodation is often contentious. They are thus more likely to construct an indigenous and unitary sense of “ethnie” and affiliation, to more readily identify those who are “from heres” as against “come heres” (Srebrnik, 2004). Such a situation may help to somewhat clarify a complex identity issue; in the sense that its representation and denotation in song is typically more stylized and rendered less complex. Islands are easy victims of such reductionism.

Second, that the distribution of islands around the world can create a truly global smorgasbord of case studies. Moreover, the fractal nature of islands—for example, typically always having referent land masses both larger and smaller than themselves—can help to acknowledge and disentangle the hierarchical natures of globality and locality, as expressed through song and singing. There are typically always forces that loom more and less dominant than oneself.

Third, that tourism has come to occupy a significant role in most island economies, especially those located in warm waters; the tourism industry therefore has come to exercise an inordinate influence on the associated image/brand that such islands craft and cultivate about themselves. Song, and singing, can reproduce, critique, and otherwise connect with and contribute to tourism and any commodification of island culture and self-representation.

Fourth, that given the concern, if not obsession, of island cultures with the shore, the sea, navigating the great beyond, migration, and longing for home, as already noted in the likes of “Jamaica Farewell” and “Isa Lei”—these concerns provide a fairly specific thematic that is likely to serve as the basis for a set of comparative transversal benchmarks for the expression of island culture worldwide through song, unless the evidence proves us wrong.

## OVERTONES

Sociolinguist Daniel Long quite rightly warned us early on not to “reinvent the wheel”; there is already significant material published about islands

and songs, particularly within cultural anthropology and ethnomusicology. What would this project be hoping to achieve that is perhaps new and cutting edge? And so, by way of reply, and within the overall parameters of the AIRS Project, the “island song” project component addresses questions that speak to the connection between islands, song, and interculturality. We wish to indulge in assessing the island contextuality of song, rather than songs that so just happened to be sung on, about, from, or for islands. Necessarily obliged to navigate between endemism and vulnerability, the songs and singers from island spaces should reflect such tensions, and colorfully.

More specifically, one key focus of this work is to interrogate how, and to what extent, is island song and singing socially constructed “in place”; an outcome of particular island contexts and concerns: navigating *roots*—locality, identity, lineage, genealogy, self-sufficiency, xenophobia, nationalism—and *routes* (mobility, hybridity, diaspora, cosmopolitanism, trans-nationalism (Bonnemaison, 1994; Clifford, 1997). If environmental degradation, political corruption, tourist invasions, the fear of the invader, and the Disneyfication of island life, are key concerns of island societies, how then do island song and singing convey and perform these concerns?

Acknowledging the pivotal contemporary role of island tourism, a second focus of inquiry grapples with how island songs and singing are important sources of sustainable income, entrepreneurship, and economic activity. What are the consequences of island songs and singers that have achieved major national, regional, or global impacts: on local identity, singer careers, and island economic development generally?

Third, is the evolution and changing popularity, rendition, and consumption of island songs as reflective of, and contributors to, the evolution and reconfiguration of island culture, which is typically thoroughly penetrated by exogenous forces? How would such a rendition, consumption and appreciation differ between indigenous island communities and those of their respective, and significant, overseas diasporas?

Finally, island songs, singing, and singers could serve to reinforce cultural stereotypes and kitsch portraits of island life (as paradises, exotica, escapes, mysterious spaces) and of islanders as banal and happy natives, willing to please. Islanders themselves get caught up easily in reproducing these same island tropes—also in song.

These were the key parameters that the members of the island song research network were invited to address for the pages of this book. A serious attempt has been made to get the various contributors “singing from the same songbook,” with a hopefully satisfactory outcome.

## REVIEW OF CONTENT

The most intensive tourist playground on the planet, the Caribbean region, is well-known for its vibrant culture and an oral tradition where song and singers are held in very high regard. In her chapter, Ijahnya Christian reviews a diversity of genres, from calypso to gospel song, from reggae to chutney soca songs, which dominate and indeed typecast the anglophone Caribbean, particularly Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago, and Barbados. A Rastafarian herself, Christian expounds colorfully on the manner in which these songs act as a “secret language,” capturing political sentiment, enlisting resilience and fortitude in the face of crisis, and speaking longingly of redemption.

In the same region, however, the Spanish-speaking population is the largest. Many songs there continue to echo the politics of race and identity. In Puerto Rico, the Creole peasant emerged as the icon of locality and collective memory. Songs celebrate this heritage even as more Puertorriqueños seek their fortunes elsewhere via migration, mainly to the United States. Indeed, as Soraya Marcano vividly illustrates, a rich variety of songs based on a fusion of diverse musical genres has emerged from the Latino communities in New York, thus reinventing tradition and lacing the peasant with nostalgia for a romanticized past.

Another deeply rooted cultural representation in the Caribbean region is the *doudou*, which refers to a black or métisse Creole woman who falls in love with a white man, a persistent character in the repertoire of French imperial mythology. For the French Caribbean, as Yoko Oryu and Godfrey Baldacchino argue, “Adieu foulard, adieu madras” [“Farewell Neckerchief, Farewell Madras Head Dress”] is a song that powerfully attests to the long history of musically engendered colonial longing. But it is also a cultural product that has accreted additional and different layers of significance, especially amongst Antillean immigrants in continental France.

The ability of islands to sustain relicts that may have gone extinct elsewhere is well documented in bio-geography. The same could be said for culture. But this is a dangerous approximation: once an island becomes an idealized place from the past, tensions and conflicting narratives will invariably arise as to the extent and manner in which such island practices are meant to remain authentic, or else embrace change and somehow incorporate elements of the contemporary. Cape Breton Island, on Canada’s east coast, is one such locale that markets itself strongly as a tourist destination around its “pastness” and virtues as a living museum of Gaelic culture. Heather Sparling problematizes this condition, focusing on the history and practice of “the Mod,” an annual cultural competition.

Cultural sociologist Deatra Walsh takes us to another Atlantic Canadian island, Newfoundland, and the success of the indie-rock band Hey Rosetta! “Newfoundland songs” are often understood as dealing with themes of socio-economic struggle, political commentary, and identity making, accompanied by folksy tunes. But Hey Rosetta!, claims Walsh, strengthens old anchors of identity differently: appealing to place as provenance and affiliation, rather than topic and theme. She cogently argues that a band need not sing about a place in order to reflect its concerns. This is an aspect of the “complex discursive matrix” of songs that invites an equally more complex rendition and understanding of places as socially constructed “emotional geographies” (Stratford, 2008).

On the other side of the North Atlantic lie the Hebrides, a chain of islands off Scotland’s northwest coast. These have a long history of human settlement, but their living legacy in song is very limited. Still, one can confidently trace the form, content, and transmission of some such songs, and describe their rich artistic, musicological, and sociocultural credentials. The father-daughter team of Ray and Kathryn Burnett speak to this legacy, role, and function of song, some sung around the waulking board (a rough wooden table-like structure which sits at floor or waist level) with a specific focus on the small islands of Mingulay and Eriskay. They question a contemporary irony: while there has been an explosion of late of Gaelic singers (especially women) and of a heritage industry more generally, to what extent does song persist in such island cultures as an interpreter and interlocutor for individual and communal wellbeing?

Still in the British Isles, Henry Johnson uses his insider knowledge to introduce us to the song traditions of the Crown dependency of Jersey (population: 87,000), one of the Channel Islands. There, the revitalization of the local Jèrriais is closely linked to its public and social performativity. Creativity in song production in this vernacular tongue at various local fêtes is a significant feature of local cultural practice. One salient feature of such displays is to make humorous references to other islanders and their traits; in this case, with those from the neighboring island of Guernsey.

From the Atlantic, we move next to the Pacific Ocean. With respect to Papua New Guinea (PNG), the largest Melanesian country (with a population of over 6.7 million), researcher and musician Oli Wilson discusses songs from the album *Matha Wa*, released in 1981 by Paramana Strangers, a popular band. As with the Newfoundland chapter, the author argues that songs can exemplify traditional features, even when they do not appear to do so at face value. The use of cryptic, traditional style poetry—known as *Old Aroma*—within songs is a vital source of social prestige, and acts as a display of traditional knowledge (*kastom*). A practice of “borrowing” and “twisting”

melodies—what would be considered a flagrant breach of copyright in the West—is actually a legitimate practice, and this underscores how globalization can seriously impact developing island communities because of the transmission of new and historically alien proprietary values.

Moving on to the Fiji Islands (population: 840,000), the ceremonial drinking of “kava” (*yaqona*) is an important social and familial bonding event amongst *i taukei* (indigenous Fijians); “sing-drinks” (*sigidrigi*) that usually accompany such ceremonies. Jennifer Cattermole notes how the popularity of this genre is declining, especially amongst the young, who have adopted other, more Western, musical preferences. With research undertaken on the island of Taveuni, Cattermole proposes explanations for this waning interest and illustrates the social (and largely generational) divisions as to whether traditional *sigidrigi* is and should be celebrated, protected, museumified or just allowed to go extinct. The analysis offers insights into how such island communities are navigating the capitalist world system and buying into its global cultural products.

Externalities impact strongly on island life, and song, part of that life, is no exception. The role of the Puerto Rican diaspora in influencing local song has already been mentioned. In their examination of the song culture on the Chilean island of Chiloé (population: 150,000), Philip Hayward and Waldo Garrido highlight the role that external folklorists have had in fashioning local styles and repertoires. Other than a few ceremonial songs, Chiloé’s traditional Williche song repertoire is dominated by Spanish language material written mainly by non-Williche and non-Chilote composers. A syncretic movement has been combining traditional music, song, and poetry with modern transnational forms such as jazz, classical, funk, and pop.

The Mediterranean has been a millenary crossroads of cultures, empires, religions, and continents. In her chapter on Crete, the largest island in Greece (population: 650,000), Maria Hnaraki explains how song mediates tradition, refines cultural stereotypes, cultivates notions of home, and idealizes a heroic past. Cretan songs, typically sung from memory and only by men, are intimately wedded to the principal musical repertoires for communal feasts and celebrations. Especially iconic are the *rizitika*, which embody the traditions, beliefs and legends of the land.

Moving to the largest island of the Mediterranean, the Italian island of Sicily, with a population of over five million, Sergio Bonanzinga argues that, in spite of their diversity, contemporary “author songs” (*cantastorie*) share a concern with the construction of active cultural resistance to creeping global pressures. And yet, local folksong customs are themselves a fusion of ancient and modern genres: There are no “pure currents” as may be imagined by the pioneers of comparative ethnomusicology.

Sicily may see itself as a periphery next to the European continent, but Sicily is seen as the mainland for those residing on the Aeolian Islands, a clutch of seven islands located north of Sicily, with a resident population of around 10,000. Cristoforo Garigliano describes Aeolian folk song and music by means of a personality profile of three of the islands' main musicians.

The Mediterranean is, like the Caribbean, a mass tourism destination. Ibiza, writes Judith Cohen, is certainly synonymous with parties, beaches, and low-cost airlines; a place for "chilling out" (Bennett 2004). But this Balearic island (and its even smaller neighbor, Formentera) have their lesser known folklorist song traditions, including the *cancó redoblada*, with its "song duels" (*redoblat*). Some folk groups and artists have thrived by producing versions of traditional songs. And yet, as with the other island communities documented in this book, there is no rampant, local sense of despair at the loss of traditional singing genres and styles. Once again, the mixing of the old and the new, tradition and progress, is the norm: hardly refuges against modernity.

Our final "island song" chapter is by Owe Ronström, a singer, musician, and a professor of ethnology from the Swedish island of Gotland (population: 58,000) in the Baltic Sea. He struggles explicitly with the island theme, and sets off to find examples of islandness infusing island folksongs. But this is not to be in the case of Gotland: There is, he admits, a stark absence of reference to place, other than in more subtle and nuanced ways: recognizable and understandable only to insiders. And perhaps that is how "island songs" are meant to be acceded, deciphered, and enjoyed. In this sense, even the most penetrated island spaces—invaded by mass tourism, swamped by Western culture, infiltrated by immigrants, administered by mainlanders—usually construct safe, hallowed cultural and linguistic spaces where meaning-making is restricted to, and for, the locals. It is there that otherwise vague references and nods to island life can be recognized and understood.

#### CONCLUSION: SOUNDS WONDERFUL

The book's contents are clearly place specific, but comparisons are encouraged, not least because of the burgeoning theoretical baggage of "island studies" (Hay 2006; Baldacchino 2008). Many ethnomusicologists have been hesitant to pursue a comparative methodology and are wary of the distorting effects of data sampling (Merriam 1977), although comparative work in this field is "clearly here again" (Nettl 2005, 63). Moreover, the "island imagination" as is offered by the overarching thematic of this book, the concluding sweep by John Connell, and the parameters of the AIRS Project (as described in the Foreword by Annabel Cohen), should permit even cautious

readers to test and determine for themselves similarities across contexts, as with Dawe (2004). Song and singing can be read as situated and “embedded in a locale”; their emotional entanglements and connections to place lend themselves to a critical reading of social events and identities (Crang 1998, 9). Unique and uncompromisingly bounded, alluringly simple and yet paradoxical, islands propose themselves as concentrated places, distinctive vantage points for unpacking how a keen “awhereness” (Thrift 2011, 9) is performed. In Act 3, Scene 2, of *The Tempest*, Shakespeare’s islander, Caliban, extends the invitation to allow ourselves to be charmed, and our senses heightened, by the island’s sonic experience, an invitation that remains as fresh and valid today:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises  
Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight, and hurt not.

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