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Winners of the 2020 ICTM Prizes

The International Council for Traditional Music is pleased to announce the inaugural awards for [Best Article](#), [Best Book](#), and [Best Documentary Film or Video](#). Details on each of the winning submissions are followed by comments from the members of the three subcommittees.

Prize Committee: J. Lawrence Witzleben (chair), Brian Diettrich, Lee Tong-Soon, Razia Sultanova, Louise Wrazen

Article Prize Subcommittee: Brian Diettrich (chair), Clare Chan, Adriana Helbig

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Documentary Film or Video Prize

Subcommittee: Razia Sultanova (chair), Sergio Bonanzinga, Leonardo D'Amico

Best Article

“One or Several Gamelan? Perpetual (Re)construction in the Life of a Balinese *Gamelan Semara Pagulingan*,” by **Tyler Yamin** (*Ethnomusicology* 63/2, 2019: 357-392.)

- “This article is very impressive. It takes classic topics in ethnomusicology and redefines them with ideas in ontology, agency, and Indigenous studies.”
- “The article redirects and shifts organology and ethnomusicology in innovative ways, including proposing a novel theoretical stance, ‘metabolism,’ as a means for scholarly research for ‘reassessing humanity’s place in the world.’”
- “This approach engages with arguments in critical organology that argue for a biography of instruments and is very relevant to present interests in ethnomusicology.”
- “Yamin brings on a fresh and new perspective toward how ethnomusicologist can examine their research areas. Rather than examine musical instruments for sonic qualities and the musician as an

(January 2025, New Zealand)

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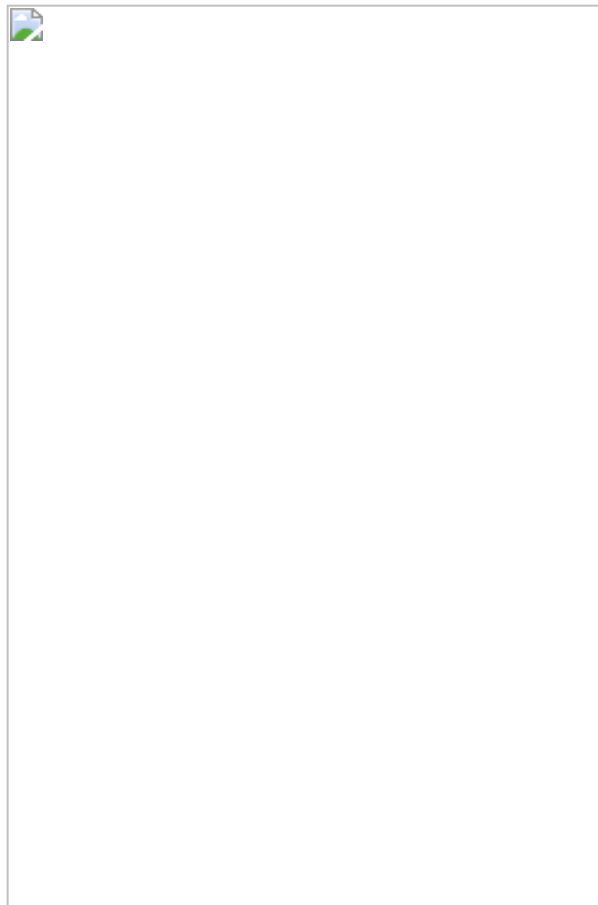
agent to the music produced, Yamin looks at the instrument as a non-human, subjected to issues involving humans who created music on it.”

- “The article is at once in-depth in its focus on *gamelan semara pagulingan* of Kamasan village, Bali, but also expansive in its theoretical breadth and the proposing of not only new ethnographic material, but new ideas of how we consider music and instruments.”

Best Book

Winner

Musical Minorities: The Sounds of Hmong Ethnicity in Northern Vietnam, by **Lonán Ó Briain** (Oxford University Press, 2018)



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- “Ó Briain’s study is well-structured, clearly articulated, and comprises all the ingredients of solid traditional ethnographic work and contemporary reflexive writing: fieldwork, musical analysis/examples, and a focus on the individual and groups of individuals balanced with a broader overview of music and community.”
- “This is a classic piece of ethnomusicological work, including notations, close musical analysis, and references to the Hornbostel-Sachs system. It has an excellent structure and is very well written.”
- “Although focused on one minority group in a remote part of Vietnam, the issues addressed are major ones: majority attitudes toward and policies on minority ethnic groups, the role of the state in music performance and education, music as propaganda, folklorization.”
- Ó Briain “allows the complexity of minority representation to shine. The ethnographies here are really cogent. We get to know individuals, venues, different populations. The sonic detail is excellent. Transcriptions are used well and not just inserted.”
- “I really like the range of audio/video recordings, from field recordings to music videos. Many of these examples correspond to thick descriptions in the text—the text and AV materials are integrated in a way that is all too rare.”

Honourable Mention

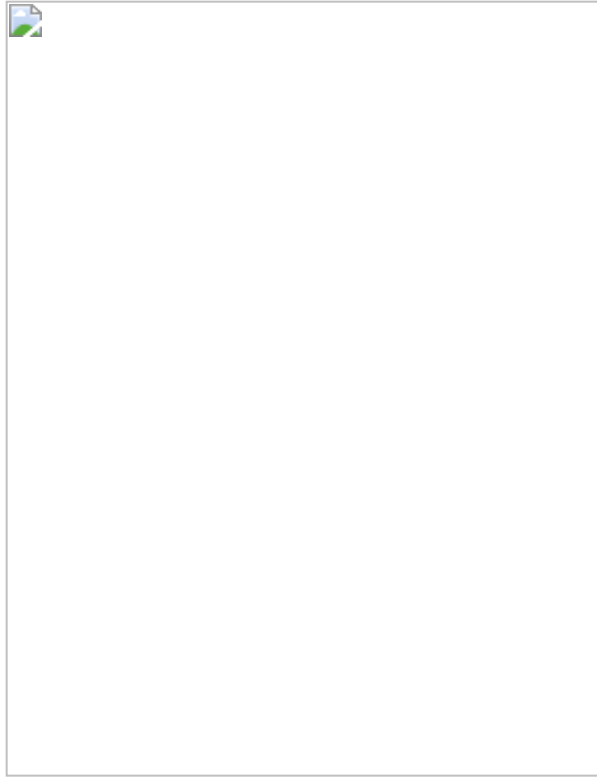
The Legacy of Tanzanian Musicians

Muhidin Guromo and Hassan Bitchuka:

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Rhumba Kiserebuka!, by

Frank Gunderson (Lexington Books,
2018)



- “This is an evocative ethnography which describes music well via the lives of the musicians that make it; it is fresh and innovative. The author writes passionately and enthusiastically which makes for engaging reading.”
- “He leaves no doubt about his commitment and depth of knowledge.”
- Gunderson “draws on a tremendous amount of information from numerous sources and enlivens his narrative in a way that keeps the reader interested to know more.”
- “His camaraderie with the two musicians is a model for other researchers, and he goes out of his way to let their voices be heard.”
- “The author clearly knows the field extremely well and is thus able to craft the various parts of the narratives--interview

transcripts, vignettes, descriptions, etc.--in a rigorous and seamless manner that allows readers to understand the broader contexts and issues.”

- “In an era where we struggle to decolonize scholarship, we commend Gunderson for writing a bilingual book that local non-English speakers will appreciate.”

Best Documentary Film or Video

Winner

Home Coming—The Ethnography of Dong (Kam) People’s New Year, directed by **Qiaoqiao Cheng** (Shanghai Music Publishing House and Shanghai A&V Electronic Literature and Publishing House, 2019)

- “The Dong/Kam people located in Guizhou province (Southwest China) are a little known Chinese ethnic group renowned for rich culture and various traditional songs performed for the most important holiday in China—the Spring New Year Festival. The good choice of the documentary plot is showing China through the prism of cultural survival. At the beginning the well detailed ethnography exceeded music which later appears in abundance, indicating various instruments, genres, performances, etc.—everything in excellent editing display.”
- “The complex musical system associated with the Spring New Year Festival offers Qiaoqiao Cheng the chance to investigate

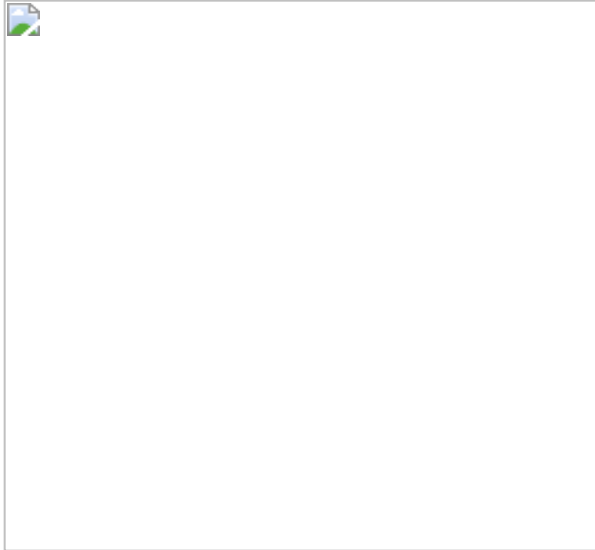
different aspects of social and cultural identity: relations between different generations, gender issues, persistence and change of musical form and behaviour, etc. Through an effective shoot/reverse of interviews and contextual performances the young author shows a deep knowledge of the local ethnography, constructing a beautiful ‘scientific’ documentary.”

- “The documentary is focused on the Kam/Dong, an ethnic minority located in Guizhou province, famous for the polyphonic choir singing called *kgal laox* in the Kam language (侗族大歌 *Dòngzú dà gē* in Mandarin Chinese, Kam Grand Choir or Grand Song in English, inscribed in 2009 on the UNESCO list of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity). In Xiaohuang village, people form a choir to mark their passage through stages of life, especially for women. Through singing, they learn knowledge, search for spouses, and interact with allied villages, which nowadays mostly happen during the New Year’s ritual.”
- “Shot in observational style, the camera follows the social and musical life of a Kam female singer living in between the intense working life in the city and the festive rituals of the village. Despite her young age, the Chinese ethno-filmmaker demonstrates familiarity with the cinematographic language as well as the requirements of the ethnomusicological insights; in particular the representation and construction of Kam cultural identity through different generations, musical/cultural changes and transformations of the traditional Grand Song facing with processes of exoticism and hybridisation with pop-songs and dance. The film is constructed on a

balanced narrative of interviews and performances intercut with images that contextualize the ritual event.”

Honourable Mention

Voices of the Rainforest, directed by **Steven Feld** (Documentary Educational Resources, 2019).



- “Steven Feld defines *Voices of the Rainforest* as ‘an eco-rockumentary, a cinema for listening concert of day in the life of the rainforest and the music it inspires in Bosavi, Papua New Guinea.’ Produced and directed by Feld, who recorded the original (1991) *Voices of the Rainforest* CD with Grateful Dead drummer Mickey Hart, the film stems from a 2018 return to Bosavi, with filmmaker Jeremiah Richards, to gather images for the recomposed soundtrack (Dolby 7.1) with the precious collaboration of sound editor Dennis Leonard (Skywalker Sound).”
- “This film returns to field research carried out by Feld forty years ago among the Bosavi people. Feld’s ethnographic contribution on the subject is well known, with a great number of publications (books,

articles, CDs, etc.). The work in Bosavi led Feld to develop a theoretical frame which was very innovative, by expanding the object of study far beyond what was deemed to be relevant under a 'musical' profile: from the inflection of the spoken language to 'voices' of birds, from the sounds produced during work to the ones typical of the natural setting. Starting from an 'anthropology of sound,' he has then conceived a new discipline: acoustemology, which links acoustics and epistemology. The whole elements of his conception have been generating an original approach in which the 'aesthetic dimension' is supported by a distinguished ethnographic deepness."

- "*Voices of the Rainforest* is an outstanding example of 'poetic restitution' of an ethnographic experience and, at the same time, a valuable case of 'repatriation practice', as all film screening and future sale proceeds benefit the Bosavi Peoples Fund, advocating for environmental and cultural justice in a remote part of Papua New Guinea."
- "*Voices of the Rainforest* is an experiential documentary about the ecological and aesthetic coevolution of Papua New Guinea's Bosavi rainforest region and its inhabitants. Through sounds and images, the film immerses viewers in the rainforest, and makes audible myriad connections between the everyday sounds of the biosphere and the creative practices of singing by the Bosavi people."
- "The author has chosen an impressionistic style to create a narrative constructed mainly on sounds and images: still pictures and short videos of the Bosavi people's

daily life and their environment, intercut with short musical performances, accompanied by their songs in the background. Astonishing images and the remarkable sound recordings make this film a valuable contribution to the 21st century documentary films heritage.”

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Documentary Film or Video Prize

Subcommittee: Razia Sultanova (chair),

Qiaoqiao Cheng, Leonardo D'Amico

Best Article

Winner

“Fostering Reconciliation through Collaborative Research in Unama’ki: Engaging Communities through Indigenous Methodologies and Research-Creation.” By **Marcia Ostashewski, Shaylene Johnson, Graham Marshall, and Clifford Paul.** *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 52, 2020: 23-40.

- This article is exemplary as a model collaborative approach in music research, by addressing new methodologies for work and lives within community.
- The co-authors open new space to further decolonize ethnomusicology in their approach, methodology, and collaboration.
- The article is very timely in re-imagining our roles and responsibilities within communities and practices.

Honourable Mention

“Central Australian Aboriginal Songs and Biocultural Knowledge: Evidence from

(January 2025, New Zealand)

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Women's Ceremonies Relating to Edible Seeds." By **Georgia Curran, Linda Barwick, Myfany Turpin, Fiona Walsh, and Mary Laughren**. *Journal of Ethnobiology* 39(3), 2019: 354–370.

- The committee was impressed with the article's attention to song and environment in new innovative aspects of research.
- The article opens up new methodologies for exploring connections and synergies between Indigenous knowledge and the sciences.
- The co-authors offer avenues of collaborative research with Indigenous communities and advocacy for Indigenous song knowledge.

Best Book

Winner

Sonic Ethnography: Identity, Heritage and Creative Research Practice in Basilicata, Southern Italy, by **Lorenzo Ferrarini and Nicola Scaldaferrri** (Manchester University Press, 2020)

- "Ferrarini and Scaldaferrri present a rich account of a musical culture and region relatively ignored in ethnomusicology, anthropology, and sound studies. They do so using text, image, and sound in equal parts to bring these cultural practices to life"
- "This is a sublime and exhilarating work. Its multi-faceted, multi-media approach is

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truly breathtaking; the photography itself conveys sound just as much as the text and sound files do"

- In the authors' own words, Sonic ethnography demonstrates how acoustic tradition is made and disrupted and acoustic communities are brought together in shared temporality and space"
- "The sensory submersion into cultural practice has the effect of bringing the audience in as participants; a truly successful way of imparting knowledge and experience"
- "Their thoughtful reflections on methodology and theoretical musings provide a wealth of insights on cultural politics, heritage policies, arts practice research, creative interventions, and photography in anthropology"
- "It is experiential, exciting, and a genuine pleasure to read"

Honourable Mention

After the Dance, the Drums are Heavy:

Carnival, Politics, and Musical

Engagement in Haiti, by **Rebecca**

Dirksen (2020, Oxford University Press)

- "This book offers a you-are-there sensibility of living and musicking in Haiti, unfolding over time and space"
- "Dirksen presents a model example of close listening for contemporary ethnomusicologists . . . The writing is poetically framed with techniques from the Caribbean literary movement of Spiralism"
- "Dirksen's book is beautifully written, with a flowing narrative"

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- "Throughout the book she engages in a kind of vital conversation with other voices: Kreyòl- and English-speakers, living and dead scholars, Haitians and non-Haitians. This approach gives us a strong sense of local ideas, and offers a process of decolonization of access"

Honourable Mention

Ritual Soundings: Women Performers and World Religions, by Sarah Weiss (2019, University of Illinois Press)

- "It is an absolutely fascinating drawing together of disparate vignettes in a cohesive recognition of the huge shadow culture of women's agency in world religions"
- "Her sensitive contextualisation, description, and juxtaposition of the case studies gently unravels diverse arguments on religious exceptionalism and reveals how women's agency animates ritual practice"
- As Weiss astutely observes, "Far from peripheral to the practice of religion in a particular place, women's activities are instrumental in focusing and shaping local variants of the practice of world religions around the globe"
- "The afterword conveys an important message: that people from different religious backgrounds might be able to value one another more once they realise the similarities they share"

Best Documentary Film or Video

Winner

Sakhti Vibrations, directed by **Zoe Sherinian** (2019)

- Shot in observational style and adopting a participatory method of conducting fieldwork, *Sakhti Vibrations* offers the viewer a visual/audiovisual ethnography of the musical practices of the Dalit women, also known as “untouchable,” one of the most vulnerable and oppressed groups of women in the world. The narrative film directed by Zoe Sherinian interweaves scenes of performances by and conversations with singers and teachers while bringing to light musical practices of the Sakhti community not examined before by ethnomusicologists. Through observations of their activities, emotions, and worldview in a social educational institution, the exemplary ethnographic film reveals how music and dance heal and empower the Dalit women of India.

Honourable Mention

Kiraiñia (Long Flutes) directed by **Juan Castrillon** (2019)

- This ethnographic documentary focuses on the *kiraiñia*, a long flute from the Cubeo musical culture, and the rich cultural heritage of the indigenous communities in Vaupés, Colombia. The film poses questions about the preservation and revival of disappearing music via personal narratives and deconstructing colonial ideology. Structured as a journey into memory with the testimonies of the bearers of culture as the main subject, the

documentary directed by Juan Castrillon is both a reflection of the role of the ethnomusicologist as a catalyst of a revivalist process and the community's attempt to restore its cultural heritage.

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