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Mark Pedelty, *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 228 pp.

Can music play a significant role in environmental activism and ecological sustainability? What is the underlying value of global events like Live Earth? Should musicians adopt the environmentalist creed of “Think Globally, Act Locally”? In *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment*, Mark Pedelty addresses these important ecological issues and discusses the relationship of music and environmental activism. Pedelty uses the tools of anthropology and ethnography to closely examine the role of music in environmental activism and ecological sustainability. *Ecomusicology* investigates three important aspects of popular music: communication, art, and advocacy. Pedelty organizes his investigation around the issue of how music can be a sustainable endeavor; his goal is to address the following questions: How might music actually promote and inspire the sort of collective action needed to make our towns, cities, and nations more sustainable? What are some of the material, aesthetic, aural, lyrical, and even visual considerations that we need to keep in mind when aiming towards more sustainable forms of music? And, most importantly, what’s really at stake? (5).

Central to this study is the multidisciplinary field of “ecomusicology,” a field that draws from a variety of disciplines ranging from ecocriticism to classical musicology and biological ecology to ethnomusicology. “When applied to environmental issues,” Pedelty writes, “these fields can be collectively described as ‘ecomusicology,’ a multidisciplinary moniker that is rapidly gaining acceptance” (7). Throughout the book, Pedelty juxtaposes global events like Live Earth and Live Aid with small local festivals, such as the ones where his own band, The Hypoxic Punks, have performed. An example of this is seen in the book’s first chapter. Here, Pedelty contrasts large-venue concerts and benefits with smaller events, such as a fundraising concert on Orcas Island in Washington State. The latter included local musicians and groups noted for not only their environmentally themed music but also their commitment to environmental issues. The point of this comparison is to illustrate the different ways that music can disseminate messages of conservation and sustainability. However, Pedelty urges, *can* is far different from *do*. What gets lost in the “wholesale” message of larger concerts at larger venues is the simple fact that while musicians are putting forth the effort to be carbon neutral and to be activists, their concerts are still guilty of producing a large amount of emissions. Pedelty appreciates the commitment that many musicians make,

stating that they act out our collective conundrums in public and bring attention to environmental issues. However, the focus on “all-too-easy answers like carbon offsets” does a disservice to the sustainability movement. To elaborate on this point, he focuses on the Live Earth concerts of 2007. Pedelty understands the importance of these events as “ritual,” an opportunity to engage an audience in meaningful action. However, there are far too many contradictions with global events like Live Earth. Pedelty dissects these contradictions and explains that while Live Earth was ambitious and, in a sense, successful in getting its message out, it also, with its large-scale production, lack of environmentalist support, and industry/private-sector focus, missed the point of promoting sustainability through action, and not only message.

As a contrast to these large-scale events, Pedelty shifts his focus to local events, such as Jack Johnson’s All at Once project, which, Pedelty states, “directly engages fans in environmental activities” (30). In addition, Johnson’s project, in collaboration with musician Michael Martin, partnered with over 200 nonprofit groups, as opposed to the corporate sponsorship of events like Live Earth. Johnson’s concerts include Martin’s innovative Eco-Village concept, providing an opportunity for fans to engage in a hands-on education concerning environmental sustainability. As representatives of a more focused, local experience, Johnson and Martin are transforming “rock performance from passive consumption to active engagement” (30). Consumption traps a listener in the role of consumer, further cementing music’s place as commodity; active engagement, however, relies on communication. In the 21st century, communication is changing, which leads Pedelty to conclude Chapter 1 with a discussion of the impact of globalization and social media, focusing on the ever-changing and ever-expanding notion of place in the 21st century. He posits two important questions: 1. Are people becoming more globally conscious or less locally aware? 2. What happens to our sense of connection when our consciousness moves “out there” as opposed to “right here?” The answer, for Pedelty, is ambiguous. He is hopeful that the more widespread dissemination of information and the ease of access of downloading and sharing the work of environmentally-minded musicians, even those who are not yet widely known, offers a new opportunity for environmental discourse and advocacy. The ecomusicologist’s goal, writes Pedelty, echoing Leslie Marmon Silko, may be to seek “a communal truth rather than an absolute” (41). In other words, the role of social media and technology is to initiate communication. We can be optimistic that this will be its greatest contribution to environmental discourse, one that will overshadow any flaws in its effects on local and global societies.

Chapter 2 focuses on the ecological implications of American popular music in a national context. For much of this chapter, Pedelty focuses on three popular songs: “America the Beautiful,” “God Bless America,” and “This Land is Your Land.” The juxtaposition of the first two songs, both of which Pedelty labels as anthems, is interesting due to the nature of each. “America the Beautiful,” written in 1883 by Katherine Lee Bates, offers a pastoral vision of America, one where “purple mountain majesties” reign over the landscape. This is a song about balance, Pedelty writes—and in today’s context, balance is a move toward abolishing anthropocentrism and embracing

sympiosis and sustainability. “God Bless America,” penned by Irving Berlin, used religion as a rallying cry for the nation at a time when fascism was emerging as a threat in Europe. A conservative song, “God Bless America” offers a more “jingoistic” and “anthropocentric” vision of America, one in which more emphasis is placed on the divinity and exceptionalism of the nation. Woody Guthrie, after listening to “God Bless America” on the radio in 1940, wrote “This Land is Your Land” as a response. Pedelty uses this song, and Guthrie as folk hero (and Leftist intellectual), to illustrate the importance of place and a connection to the natural environment. Pedelty argues that this song echoes Thoreau (51), and he focuses on the idea that individuals in Guthrie’s song are not defined by their nationhood, as in “God Bless America,” but by their connection to the land. Pedelty continues his discussion of “This Land is Your Land,” by placing it in a timeless context. That is, he effectively connects the ideas in Guthrie’s anthem to the ever-present environmental issues facing the nation and the changes that have occurred with respect to environmentalism in American public discourse. Tracing the life of the song, from its beginnings as a form of critical subversion, a theme song for George McGovern’s 1972 presidential campaign, the centerpiece of Barack Obama’s 2009 inauguration ceremony, and finally, its resurrection as an environmental anthem following the 2010 BP oil spill, gives the reader a view of how a song can continue to serve as a rallying cry long after it has been introduced into the public domain.

Chapter 2 ends with a discussion of how activists use music. Here, Pedelty discusses his content analysis study of fan blogs in 2009. His goal was to see the extent to which music can influence individuals into environmental, and social and political, activism. The results were surprising; he found that many individuals, some of whom later became activists, were introduced to a wide variety of environmental issues through the music they listened to. A comparative analysis of musical genres follows, focusing on the connections between folk music of the 1960s, to punk of the 1970s and hip hop today. This is an effective transition to Chapter 3 (“Regional Geography in Song”) which focuses on the ways in which music builds regional identities in relation to specific environmental projects, such as the damming of iconic rivers and watersheds. This chapter focuses on two important projects in the relationship of music and environmentalism: Woody Guthrie’s role in the damming of the Columbia River in the 1940s and Pete Seeger’s project to restore the Hudson River. Pedelty’s analysis of Guthrie’s time working for the Bonneville Power Administration, composing songs to promote dam construction on the Columbia River, offers a view of the intrusion of corporate interests and industrialization into environmental activism. Guthrie’s time with the BPA had an unfortunate outcome: he “empowered the very forces he so effectively opposed in the rest of his musical life” (87).

Guthrie’s work on the Columbia is juxtaposed with Pete Seeger’s work to bring attention to the pollution of the Hudson River. Aboard his boat the *Clearwater*, Seeger sailed the Hudson, promoting beautification projects while urging residents to take part in his effort. What developed was the Clearwater Concert in 1966, an event that Pedelty sees as the first of a long line of benefits in the decades that followed. He then connects Seeger’s project to the present day, outlining how individuals such as folk artist Carolyn

Cruso, who sailed on the *Clearwater*, have followed Seeger's lead. In Cruso's case, the experience with Seeger led to a life of advocacy work on Orcas Island and across America. Pedelty states that Cruso's work forms part of Orcas Island's musical consciousness. This is an idea further developed in Chapter 4, a chapter that highlights the results of eight years of Pedelty's musical fieldwork in Minnesota and Washington State. This chapter addresses the serious issues that local musicians and activists face: What role do artists and citizens play on the local stage? Can music serve the environment by promoting sustainability on the local level? Or, are we now relegated, in this globalized world, to simply watch events unfold far from our own locales?

Chapter 4 includes an intimate discussion of Pedelty's work, as musician and ethnographer, in local environmental projects. Highlighting the role of the performer as more than simply an entertainer and the importance of audience participation, Pedelty puts the reader both on the stage and in the audience. The collective effort that Pedelty espouses, with a focus on the local, goes far beyond our immediate surroundings. He stresses the importance of involvement and communication, discussing the role that music has to play at local fundraisers, awareness concerts, and even documentaries and films. In *Ecomusicology*, Pedelty effectively explains his role as an anthropologist "pretending" to be a musician as "ethnographic": "I wanted to explore the political ecology of rock from the inside" (3). After reading this book, it is safe to say that Pedelty is no longer "pretending" to be a musician—he is a musician. His success in this study hinged on his participation in the world of ecology and music, studying the effects of music as a medium for communicating ideas and spurring activism. I feel that many readers will wish to follow Pedelty's lead. As he promotes an active involvement in environmental advocacy, he outlines ways in which all individuals, and not just musicians and anthropologists, can play a role in promoting and working towards ecological sustainability.