

Borderlands of Sonic Encounter

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2022 Balzan Prize for Ethnomusicology

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Affiliated Institution: University of Chicago

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Concept

Music histories traditionally account for the ways in which style, repertory, and practice converge around centers—political, geographic, and aesthetic. Music historians write about the music of nations, the emergence of canonic genres and common soundscapes. Music theorists establish the rules whereby meaning accrues to structure, which in turn paves the well-worn paths of influence. It has been the contribution of ethnomusicologists, in contrast, to move through and beyond the centers of nation and genre to open ways of encountering precarity of the borderland. The borderland is the site of diverse and often conflicting forms of encounter, of both accommodation and violence. Unlike the musical confluence that settles in the center, movement across the borderland is complex and encumbered, mobilized as migration, rerouted as the journey of refugees. Aesthetically, the movement across music's internal borderlands endows it with changing meaning and ontology, opening the portals of difference and sounding the ways musicians bestow agency upon sonic encounter.

The 2022 International Balzan Prize in Ethnomusicology will work with colleagues around the world to engage more fully with the forms of sonic encounter that are afforded by the borderland. Listening to and acting with music at the border is more critical in the twenty-first century than ever before. Migrants and refugees move ceaselessly across borders at the sites of conflict. The sonic landscape of borders resounds with violence and threats to sovereignty. The metaphors of the border reflect the most profound of human concerns, above all the borders between life and death. The Balzan research project

Borderlands of Sonic Encounter takes shape around three foundational concepts for understanding the sonic functions of borders:

- 1) the borderland as a site of silence and those who have been silenced;
- 2) the borderland as a site of mediation and passage;
- 3) the borderland as a contact zone, transforming music and affording new narratives.

Because ethnomusicology is a field of agency and ethnography, *Borderlands of Sonic Encounter* will generate projects for young scholars that combine historical and analytical work with the fieldwork that makes sonic encounter for those scholars global. The project itself unfolds across five years of work that will coalesce around symposia and workshops that largely take place at the global centers of the University of Chicago (especially Paris, Delhi, and Hong Kong). Balzan fellowships for young scholars will fund two types of projects. Some scholars will work in more broadly historical ways, utilizing archives and research centers dedicated to the study of border regions. Other Balzan fellowships for young scholars will facilitate new and innovative ethnographic fieldwork, for example, with refugee communities or in diaspora studies with migrant communities. With fellowship support from *Borderlands of Sonic Encounter*, an initial research project is already underway, Tomal Hossain's documentary film of exceptional Rohingya musicians in the life of a refugee camp on the Bangladesh-Myanmar border. Most fellowships will fund about three months of intensive research.

Publication Plans

The projects undertaken by participants in *Borderlands of Sonic Encounter* will take two general forms. The project as a whole will lead to the creation of an interactive digital archive and website that enables scholars throughout the world to engage more intensively with the soundscapes of borderlands. The interactive archive, currently called *Musical Topographies of the Borderland*, will be developed with colleagues at the South Asian Collection of the Regenstein Library of the University of Chicago, already the home to global digital projects including the internationally acclaimed South Asia Digital Library (<https://dsal.uchicago.edu>) and the newly established Forum for Digital Culture. *Musical Topographies of the Borderland* not only allows global accessibility, but it also assures that there will be contributions to the Balzan project itself long into the future. The second direction toward publication will be a series of small monographs, each addressing a borderland or site of sonic encounter. Two models for such small monographs are the Oxford University Press *Very Short Introductions* and the Bloomsbury *33 1/3* series, both of which include volumes by Bohlman. Authors for new monographs in these series may be sought among the project's young scholars, affording them the chance for more intensive research during its early years, and establishing possibilities for public-facing scholarship for them. Other potential publishers for series may include the University of Chicago Press, where Bohlman is editor of two book series, *Chicago Studies in Ethnomusicology* and *Big Issues in Music*.

Infrastructure and Timeframe

Conversations with the Humanities Division at the University of Chicago about the ways in which the University of Chicago could provide the infrastructure for “Borderlands of Sonic Encounter” are underway, and the network of University of Chicago global centers will create accessibility for the symposia and workshops, as well as bases for research for young fellows. The final projects, *Musical Topographies of the Borderland*, and the monograph series, too, will benefit from the University’s infrastructure.

A timeframe extending from Autumn 2023 to 2029 is foreseen, with a wide range of activities, including symposia, regional conferences throughout the world, a capstone event with the opening of an interactive website, and the publication of small monographs on borderland projects by participating young scholars (12 volumes planned). The initial three symposia/workshops are planned for winter and spring 2024, in Paris, Philadelphia, and Kolkata. University of Chicago global centers as well as many other prestigious partner universities will host these events. Martin Stokes of King's College, University of London, has been designated Deputy Supervisor for the purposes of coordination, and to take over duties of direction if required.