



Community Music at the Boundaries. Edited by Lee Willingham.
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Community music-making has been around for as long as people have desired to sing and/or create instrumental soundscapes together. As an academic field, however, Community Music (CM) has a shorter history, and it is generally considered a sub-field of Music Education (for example, see the International Society for Music Education’s statement on CM¹). Although scholars from diverse disciplines have studied CM, an acceleration point has been the work of Lee Higgins, director of the International Centre for Community Music at York St-John University in York, UK. Higgins is an oft-cited scholar, with a doctoral thesis entitled *Boundary-Walkers: Contexts and Concepts of Community Music*² and a widely cited CM theory articulation.³ He has partnered on various projects with Lee Willingham, who is on Wilfrid Laurier University’s (WLU) music faculty, and who promotes a similar, though not identical, CM philosophy of hospitality and intervention. One fruit of this partnership is their co-authored text for classroom use, *Engaging in Community Music: An Introduction*;⁴ a second was a co-hosted international conference at WLU in May 2017, “Walking the Boundaries, Bridging the Gaps.” These collaborations provide context for Willingham’s continued thematic use of boundaries in the edited text under review, *Community Music at the Boundaries*.

Reflecting CM’s emergence as a field of study, *Community Music at the Boundaries* joins only three other CM multi-author edited books, *Community Music: A Handbook*,⁵ *The Oxford Handbook of Community Music*,⁶ and *Community Music Today*.⁷ CM is a field that has always invited practitioners to reflect on and write about their work; thus, chapters in Willingham’s collection are from both scholars and practitioners. This can be an editorial challenge, and the result is that each chapter varies in terms of content, rigour, and reading accessibility. Moreover, the field itself varies

¹ International Society for Music Education, “Community Music Activity Commission (CMA)”, accessed November 14, 2023, <https://www.isme.org/our-work/commissions/community-music-activity-commission-cma>.

² Lee Higgins, “Boundary-Walkers: Contexts and Concepts of Community Music” (doctoral dissertation, University of Limerick, 2006), <https://hdl.handle.net/10344/1213>.

³ Lee Higgins, *Community Music: In Theory and in Practice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁴ Lee Higgins and Lee Willingham, *Engaging in Community Music: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

⁵ Peter Moser and George McKay, eds., *Community Music: A Handbook* (Lyme Regis: Russell House, 2005).

⁶ Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and Lee Higgins, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Community Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

⁷ Kari K. Veblen, ed, *Community Music Today* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2013).

greatly—as it can include any kind of music-making in the community—although the tendency for scholars is to focus on marginalized groups, which is framed as the “boundaries” of music-making. *Community Music at the Boundaries* certainly reflects this focus; however, broader CM accounts are also included, providing a fuller view of the field’s activities, which cross genre, age, and cultural borders. A unique feature of *Community Music at the Boundaries* is its significant amount of Canadian content (approximately 20 authors), which sets it apart from the previously mentioned publications. I will note some of these authors in my following comments.

Following University of Toronto CM scholar Roger Mantie’s foreword, “On the Scholarship of Boundary Walking” (pp. xii-xvi), the book is divided into six sections, beginning with “Community Music: Walking the Boundaries of Contexts and Borders.” This section establishes CM as a practice occurring in various settings, and launches the book with a remarkable chapter by WLU’s Deanna Yerichuk and Justis Krar on “The Problem of Community—What Does it Really Mean to Be Inclusive?” (pp. 7–25). This chapter tackles a thorny issue in CM studies, i.e., is inclusive music-making always possible or desirable? Some have suggested that the CM field tends to look at itself through rose-coloured glasses,⁸ so it is refreshing to see an examination of the nuances and paradoxes of inclusivity. The late Glen Carruthers also contributes to this opening section with “The Borders Are Open: Community Music in Higher Education” (pp. 96–106). This chapter was perhaps his last scholarly contribution, written as Dean of Music at WLU before his untimely passing in 2020. It is an important chapter that gives some background to the Laurier Center for Music in the Community and discusses implications of taking a type of music-making that happens outside of institutions and bringing it into the institution for study. A chapter such as this is also vital in detailing the emergence of CM studies, especially within Canadian contexts.

The second section is “Community Music: Walking the Boundaries of Education, Ensembles, and Changing Paradigms,” which contains Canadian content from WLU’s Brent Rowan and Richard Marsella of Toronto’s Regent Park School of Music. The third section, “Community Music: Seeking Relationships with Indigenous Communities,” has contributions from Canadians Glenn Maurais and Kelly Laurila, both associated with WLU. This three-chapter section is perhaps a bit on the short side but does offer indigenous perspectives. “Community Music: Walking the Boundaries of Health and Wellness” is a section that reflects the influence of WLU’s music therapy programs, with contributions from WLU faculty Heide Ahonen and Liz Mitchell, as well as Canadians Bev Johnson and Sarah Pearson (of the music therapy resource group Room 217) and Sasha Judelson, who describes a Waterloo County intergenerational choir initiative for singers with dementia. The fifth section, “Community Music: Walking the Boundaries of Prisons,” includes a contribution from Rebekah Jordan-Miller on her work in a federal prison. The final section, “Community Music: Walking the Boundaries of Cultural Identity,” includes WLU professor Brandon Leis reflecting on Waterloo County Mennonite worship practices. It is rewarding to see a chapter referencing sacred CM contexts, as this common CM activity can be ignored within the field. WLU’s Gerard Yun also

⁸ Alexandra Kertz-Welzel, “Daring to Question: A Philosophical Critique of Community Music.” *Philosophy of Music Education Review* 24, no. 2 (2016): 113–30, <https://doi.org/10.2979/philmusieducrevi.24.2.01>.

writes on ethical intercultural improvisation and there are chapters from Western University professors Danielle Sirek and Kari Veblen, who is rightly considered a CM academic pioneer.

Other chapters come from authors outside of Canada, and many are recognized names in CM, such as Australia's Brydie-Leigh Bartleet and UK-based Pete Moser, Dave Camlin, and Phil Mullin. American Mary Cohen, a leading scholar in prison music-making, has co-authored a chapter with current and formerly incarcerated musicians. Other authors detail work in Ireland, South Africa, Italy, Portugal, and the United States. Consequently, this book can not be labelled a Canadian CM account, yet its strong Canadian content is remarkable and welcomed, even if these accounts are Ontario-based and often have a WLU connection. Some may be left wondering if CM scholars exist elsewhere in Canada, to which the answer is *yes*, and their work is found in publications related to music education, popular music, musicology, ethnomusicology, media studies, and sacred music studies, as well as in broader health and social sciences, such as cultural geography. Perhaps a future anthology could gather more voices from across the country as a reflection of the growing interdisciplinary interest and perceived value of CM study. It would be exciting to see what might result from this type of extended call or curation.

Community Music at the Boundaries attempts to provide international perspectives, but to be a truly international volume, contributions are needed from further afield. Nonetheless, this collection is an important contribution to the literature, and it succeeds in broadening the existing scope of CM scholarship and establishing the place of Canadian CM research and practice in wider discourses.