

A THEORY OF VIBE

Ecomusicologies on Hornby Island

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ABSTRACT: This article offers ways of considering the relationship between musicking, community, and place that arose from research with residents of Hornby Island, British Columbia. I advance a theory of vibe that captures how Hornby Islanders understand the role of musicking in their society and its importance for community solidarity, and I offer practical examples of this theory in action. Throughout the article, I discuss the relationship between Islanders' ideas, Charles Keil's theory of participatory discrepancies and my conclusions.

KEYWORDS: ecomusicology, sociomusicology, musicking, vibe, participatory discrepancies, Hornby Island

Introduction

This article offers a theory of vibe and then practical examples of its application for the field of ecomusicology. The discourse is a method for describing the relationship between musicking (Small, 1998),¹ community, and environmental cosmology and ethos that arose from my grounded research with Hornby Islanders (Mark, 2015a; 2015b). Hornby Island is situated between Vancouver Island and the mainland of British Columbia in the Salish Sea (Figure 1). The island is approximately 12 square-miles and contains c1,100 year-round residents. Like many of what are known as the Gulf Islands, Hornby has a history of counter-cultural community activities and has a thriving arts community. In some respects, the island could be described as an aging artist colony. The research that informs this article involved a cumulative year of participant observation geared towards ethnographic ends and involved extended and multiple interviews with forty individuals gathered between 2011 and 2014, several of whom are quoted below.² In the first portion of this article, I highlight a powerful conception of the importance of music for community on

¹ Christopher Small, a musicologist, sociologist and perhaps symbolic interactionist, determined that while the study of "music" in abstraction of social conditions was important, without additional focus on human interaction during musical events, or the recognition that people are essential for "music" to happen at all, "music" as such has no meaning. To keep people in his idea of "music," Small used the term *musicking*—as dance is to dancing, music is to musicking. His framing shifts the value and meaning of "music" away from musical objects (scores, instruments, CDs, radio broadcasts, etc.) and towards the process of music making and listening. This pivot, from music as reified and consumable to musicking as emergent and social, is how music making as an activity helps reveal and handle the environmental consequences of objects and their success and failures. For example, while songs, in abstraction, can stand as powerful elegiac monuments and memorials to loss, they only become powerful in their emergent, processual, and discrepant recitation and reception (Mark, 2016).

² I have lived on Hornby full-time with my family since Autumn 2015.

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Hornby by describing a theory of vibe that Island musicians share. In the second portion of this article, I offer pragmatic examples of the ways in which Islanders use vibe to transform Hornby and their environmental cosmologies and ethos. My presentation of a theory of vibe is an expansion of Charles Keil's theory of participatory discrepancies (PDs), the idea that musical groove is the product of imperfect micro-timing, tuning, and timbre between musicians (1987). While Keil's concept of the groove helps explain the power of music as communal, participatory, egalitarian, and variable, vibe is an extra-musical ecomusicological process that connects musicking and grooving to pragmatic outcomes of community solidarity and environmental ethos.

NB – Unless otherwise attributed, all quotations from musicians involved in the Hornby Island music scene are taken from interviews with the author conducted in 2011-2014.

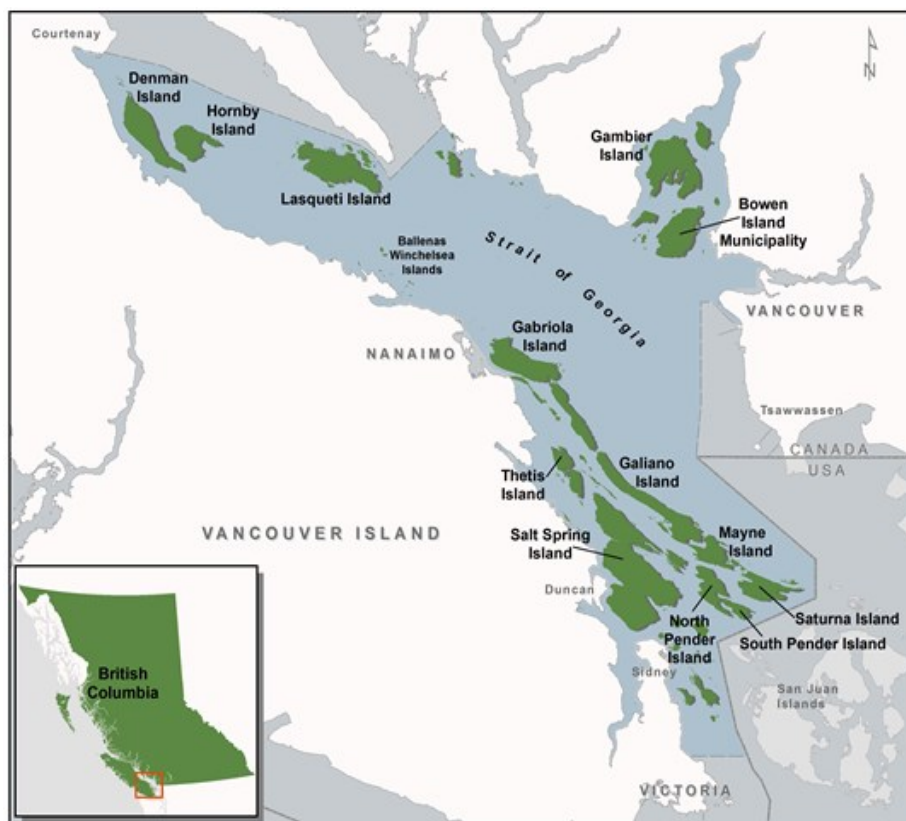


Figure 1 – Hornby Island and the Salish Sea Islands' positions in British Columbia (source: Islands Trust)

Vibration Theory

Consider the proposition that reality is composed entirely of vibrations, one of the ramifications of string theory (Greene, 2003: 16). In part through popular exposure to this idea, Brett Martens, a local guitarist on Hornby Island, has developed a way of approaching all social and material interaction through the musical metaphor of vibe:

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Music has a role in everything because everything ultimately is vibrations. Everything is a different vibration... when we think about the word 'music,' what comes to mind [are] the audible vibrations that we hear. [But] music is... [all] vibrations happening at once. So music is happening for everybody; so music is all around. There are a lot of musicians on Hornby... some of them choose to move that energy for other people, choose to blatantly move energy by performing music... You can go out and play a show, and you know that twenty or thirty or fifty or a hundred of the people that are there are people that you know, and that is pretty awesome in the fact that it keeps it very real... It's more of everyday life. It's like you are hanging out with your friends, and you're playing music and moving energy... [for people] you [see] everyday and talk to... everyday... we're just kinda doing it for each other. (2011)

There are two ideas I want to examine from this quote. The first is Martens' notion of vibrations, and the second is about what vibrations have to do with community.³ That the two ideas appear next to each other in our interview, entwined, makes sense. People and musicians, the world over, talk about vibe as if it is a concrete thing we experience. Vibe is an obdurate reality and not a romantic projection of wishful mystique. Anyone working with musicians knows that there is consensus about the importance of vibe, creating a vibe, influencing the vibe, and that vibe represents an essential undeniable component of musicking. Others might choose words like "energy" or "mood" or "feeling" or "affect," but vibe is more useful as a musical metaphor that always implies a place-based, holistic, ecosystemic, and even cosmic view of what is going on when musicking happens.

Regarding Marten's first cosmological idea: physicists do allow that reality can be described as a composition of vibrations (Greene, 2003), a world patterned and composed of crests and troughs of waves. Metaphorically then, as Martens asserts, musicking and sounding are a manipulation of our experience of reality and community. We play music, just as we communicate, to transform reality. Whether we are grieving, commemorating, celebrating, or possibly even rejecting reality, musicking has a role to play in these processes. Regarding Martens' second idea of community concern: there is already a relevant theory of musicking that describes a phenomenon that is very much like and helps inform vibe, and it connects musicking to community just as Martens does. It is called the theory of participatory discrepancies (PD), and it focuses on the production of groove and how musicians create groove by using micro-differentiations in timing, tuning, and timbre in dialogue with other musicians who are also undertaking musical dialogic moves (Keil, 1995).⁴ Keil argued that egalitarian forms of musicking influence the production of more or

³ In keeping with the scholarly sociomusicological heritage in which I situate this article, where music implies musicking, I move from vibe to vibrations interchangeably and effectively treat "vibe" not only as a feeling or product, but also a process, and something a person does or practices. A person or space can have a "vibe," a person can "vibe" on something, like a groove, much like they could "dig" something, and all of these possibilities include the process of putting out and receiving different vibes or vibrations.

⁴ Keil's theory of PDs also evolved in reaction to the idea that musical meaning can be evaluated absent from a social milieu. Keil rejected the idea that imperfect musicians get in the way of perfect music. Keil's theory demonstrated a strong defence of process over product, musicking over music (see footnote 1) as relevant criteria for appreciating the role of music in society. Others followed this train of thought (eg Shepherd, 1991; Small, 1998; Turino, 2008) and today many take such observations as self-evident: of course beauty is in the ear of the beholder, of course we need to look at what audiences are doing (or not).

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less egalitarian societies (and conversely, societies with more hierarchical forms of musicking produce more inequality). Because of the initial presentation and controversial reception of PDs as mathematically demonstrable, the theory has languished as positivistic and closed. Keil hoped PDs and groove would ultimately help explain larger social phenomena of conflict and environment, but PD scholarship has not moved past debating and documenting the presence of PDs in music making. However, from a macro vantage point, Keil's PDs demonstrate that groove involves a community of musicians that have to cooperate. I ask: what are these communities of musicians doing with their grooves in their wider communities?

On Hornby Island, grooves change the environment because musicians produce vibrations that move through and change the larger community of humans. Humans are part of ecological systems, and for Hornby (and everywhere), the abstraction of musicking from society and environment is impossible. Ergo, musicians transform Hornby with vibrations as they also transform Hornby's vibe (Mark, 2015b). Not only are musicians transforming things as difficult to measure or describe as community solidarity—a subject I will address in detail—but musicians' vibrations also physically impact bodies:

Having done a lot of meditation focusing on body sensations and how external stimulus evoke... your senses... your body feels everything and remembers everything. And [with] music, sound ripples through your body with sensation. And that happens all the time, whether we're aware of them or not. So I think... that's what emotions are. That's why we say we feel things, right? because we actually do physically feel them. I think music does that. It resonates in a real way physically and ripples through our bodies, and we feel it. That's... one of the reasons it's powerful. (Ted Tanner, 2013)

Tanner, a singer-songwriter and carpenter who runs the island's sound rental company, extends Martens' description of the power of musical vibrations to affect change and feeling. While Charles Keil may have eventually incorporated the "feel" of a song and the processual experience of emotions one encounters *through* music into the theory of participatory discrepancies and groove (1966; 1987), Tanner and Martens are pointing towards actual physical vibration of matter and the "feeling" and vibe of musicking. Vibe is all about community. Martens describes how on Hornby in particular, musical gatherings have an intimacy that "town" or "the city" (off the island) might not:

You can go to town... and, quite rarely... you have an all-ages friendly event. But on Hornby, most of the time... it is very family oriented... If you played a dance in the city, you might have [only] one or two friends that pop in, you know? (2011).

On a regular basis, musicking has a significant impact on the everyday lives of Islanders. In Martens' formulation, as he moves from speaking of vibrations to speaking of energy, he asserts that musicians on Hornby are not making music merely for the enjoyment of a drinking, urban, adult audience that is likely to be rather anonymous, but rather, musicians are sharing a gift with known people and friends of all ages in order to actively enliven their community, every single time they play.



Figure 2 - Summer of 2013 - this was the first live broadcast of an entire band on Hornby Island on Radio 96.5 CHFR. Members of the Island's reggae and soul band performed an impromptu free event outside the radio station at the Joe King Ball Park as an experiment (the author is on drums) (photo: Faron Crowe).

When musicians speak of vibe and vibrations, inevitably the subject of “energy” arises as an essential component of vibe or simply a synonym for vibe.⁵ Musicians intuit that the kinds of songs they play, the order in which they play them, their own demeanour, and so many other countless factors all change the energy in a space. Such a process involves a participatory exchange between performers and audiences, the positive or negative feelings evoked—the vibes—as interactions in a dialogue of give and take. Vibe and energy also imply more or less friction between transactions. This transfer is a kind of gift process (Hyde, 1999), the sum of which might leave performers and audience members saying things like, “It was electric! We were hanging on every note.” For community solidarity, the rewards of these kinds of exchanges of energy are short and long term, and of course, these are also felt within bands of community members in addition to influencing the people who may attend their performances:

Often for an extended period of time, if you're part of a group, you actually belong to something, [musicking] achieves that good feeling of giving you a sense of... meaningful purpose. And I think another big need of people's is to give good energy... people feel good when they give... music... Even if you don't have an audience, you're still giving that gift to each other of creating something... Belonging is a circle of give and take when you belong to a group, and you all have your responsibilities and needs that you each help each other to keep fulfilling. (Jill Candlish, 2013)

⁵ Parsing the difference between vibe and energy may prove a productive subject for further research.

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When it is positive for individuals and collectives, musical exchange builds the significance of communication and connection to a level of gifting and dialogue. Feel, atmosphere, affect, vibe, energy, groove, participatory discrepancies, these are all processual and dialogic phenomena of give and take, crest and trough: vibe.

Returning to Martens' account and inserting the intervening ideas above, theorising dialogic vibration as being (in) the environment—in this case, on Hornby—suggests the power of sound-centered cosmologies or “ecomusicologies,”⁶ casting musicians and their voices as energy producers who intervene in social and environmental milieus and charge and alter the vibration of the fabric of reality, how reality is perceived and experienced by community members. Dialogic vibration produces a discursive space that centers on musicking as transformative of our relationship with our bodies, our selves, our communities, and by extension with our environments. Though we tend to think of vibrations as sounded and heard, as Tanner explained above, vibrations are felt through the body in an immediate fashion. Felt vibrations often interact with the somatics of dancing, the sum of which can influence everything from our bones to our cellular alignment and perhaps even what some might consider to be our “souls”. Tony Law, one of Hornby's elected Islands Trust⁷ representatives, does the descriptive work for me,

If you're involved in any... social and political activity and you're dancing together, it creates a sense of unity and common purpose and connection... I really see the value of dance in political, social movements as a way of providing energy and unity. Particularly with a lot of issues where you're approaching them in... an intellectual way. And there's struggles... [but] music provides a kind of counter-point to that. [It's] very physical, hitting a different level. I realise probably other people can really get inspired by, say, literature or visual art, but I find the physical element of music and dance goes deeper for me, deeper to the soul than other forms of art, because there's that physical vibration aspect to it that other art forms don't have. You're looking at something or you're reading something, but here it's actual physical vibrations, going through your ears making your body move. That takes things a lot deeper. (2013)

How deep can vibe go? Based on the consensus of my research participants, my metaphoric hypothesis is that as musical vibrations move through a networked soup of actors and objects—or a web or even rhizome of nodes, in this case Hornby Island community members—the social distance between individuals shakes and settles, shrinks and compresses to become more thick and solidified. As a result, communication speeds up

⁶ In this article and elsewhere (2015), I use the term “ecomusicology” not only to signal a body of literature and field of study, but also to describe a given cosmology that has essential musical and environmental components. Further, I use “ecomusicologies” to refer to the variety of musical and environmental cosmologies, religions, spiritualities, creation-stories, myths, and practices that can be found around the world. I argue that musicking inevitably produces ecomusicologies like the theory of “vibe” that Hornby Island musicians develop and use. My use of “ecomusicology” or “ecomusicologies” as such is in keeping with the highly inclusive, adaptive, and interdisciplinary tradition that I and my colleagues in ecomusicology have worked to foster through the *Ecomusicology Review*, the *Ecomusicologies* conference series and in so many works (to name only a few: Allen and Dawe, 2015 and the entire collection of ecomusicologies; Pedelty, 2012; 2016; Kinnear, 2012; 2014; Titon, 2017; Von Glahn, 2013; Galloway, 2014; Stimeling, 2012).

⁷ The Islands Trust is a unique body of ecological governance that oversees development in the Southern Gulf Islands.

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while also becoming more synchronous (in time). Solidarity increases. This is what Law might describe as people being more willing to “get on the same page” after a dance (2013). As musicking proceeds, social mass improves in strength, unity, flexibility, density, proximity, and solidarity through this input of directed energy: not unlike a stringed instrument that improves in value the more it is played and “opens up.”⁸



Figure 3 - Summer of 2013. A random ensemble improvises to Matt O'Donnell's sitar playing in between sets by the island's belly dancing troupe outside of the Hornby Island Arts Council for an exhibition opening (author is on drums) (photo: Meredith McEvoy).

Hornby Islanders have not discovered some New Age power and accompanying mythology but rather they are using language that brings attention to musicking in ways that explain the social consequences of the movement of vibration through bodies and community. The power of musical vibe is used for all sorts of politics and ends (Law, 2013; Small, 2011; Pedelty, 2012, 2016); they aren't always positive, not at all (Turino, 2008). Silas Crowe, a local MC and singer, confirms the essential role of musicking within Hornby society for improving community vibe, contending that music is:

a focus and a centre during the quiet times. And then a time in the summer to let it out and express it. It's huge on the island. The music that is going on is where the people are. That's where they go... It breaks down the walls... From what I see, it's the times that people get to putting down their [disputes] and communicating with each other is when there is music there, centering them... Whether it's to dance or communicate, talk and communicate. When music happens, it's when people celebrate. And at the same time it's when people delegate, and... it brings people together, and when you bring people together into one place, the ideas [for how to improve Hornby] are there, and they start

⁸ Solidarity and synchronicity does not produce Hornby Island as a community without conflict. Hornby Islanders may aspire to utopia but they are most sober about the significant social and environmental problems on our island: hence their politicised desire to make change and not merely drift in perfect pleasurable fantasy. The kind of solidarity and synchronicity that vibrations promote speed confrontation and ideally, the release of tension, no matter the outcome for the entire community.

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talking about them... it's the intention behind it, and especially with words and lyrics that are there and talking about the big picture; it brings people to that place, and... that's the only time I see people really getting down to what they really care about, rather than just the, "hey, howrya doin? Good to see ya, peace."... just bringing people together. (2011)

Here Crowe, who has lived on Hornby his entire life, is speaking to times, like Hornby's winter months, when Islanders fall into difficulties in confronting what he believes is an increasingly isolated and fragmented island society, largely due to the forces of gentrification and capital mobility. Crucially, Crowe identifies musical activities as the most important spaces for the entire island to get together to share the same room, where "the ideas are there, and they start talking about them." He means those ideas that make Hornby such a creative and caring place for innovative response to communal, societal, and environmental problems. He also places emphasis on musical activities for overcoming the resentments that can build in any small community. As Tanner describes, "for something to be really a communal, high-energy, good *vibe* thing happening, [music] is just essential to pull people out of the dumps sometimes in the winter and get people out and give them a reason to go out and be social" (2013). In the main, this being-together is what music is for on Hornby.



Figure 3 - Canada Day 2016. The marimba band (with author on drums) plays its annual gig outside The Thatch pub and ferry terminal where there is a boat race (boats made from recycling centre and free-store materials) and tug-of-war (photo: Meredith McEvoy).

For many island musicians, their musical practices involve rehearsals and recording through the winter, and then public performance each summer, not unlike other arts practices on Hornby. With "a focus and centre during quiet times" Crowe is speaking to the dedicated social practices of winter musicking. Further, when the community literally sees itself out in force in winter, it is most often on the dance floor. Aside from festivals, there are few other frequent popular occasions that will bring large numbers of year-round Islanders together to socialise.

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Hornby has no single gathering place for song, story, and coffee, and yet this is precisely what musical events encourage when they happen. People talk, dream, and plan when and where music happens, “the ideas are there, and they start talking about them.” During any formal show, perhaps a quarter of an event’s attendees cycle through an outside gathering, to talk, to smoke and to drink. A good number of folks might not have the funds to go inside, but they still listen to the music and enjoy a conversation. At set breaks, better than half the audience moves outside to cool off and catch up. This is an important place where the community talks and “cuts loose” (Devost, 2013). This is the public commons, and this is how musicians transform the Hornby vibe.

What is the Hornby Island vibe then? What is it that musicians are influencing with their vibrations? What is it that draws people to this place and sends them to hours of ferry line-ups? Here is one answer from Bee Wolf-Ray, a singer-songwriter:

There is a different sensibility, and I've always had a feeling that this island is a living entity and that it attracts the right people to serve the needs of the whole in a way. Like a lot of people come here because they feel called. They feel a kind of a resonance with the vibe here, and they fit. And other people come, and it's just an awesome way to spend their vacation. And they weren't considering living here because it's just this little island and, "what do you do in the winter?" you know? (2013)

I think this extra-musical vibration that I and others experience is concretely propagated by the resonance, confrontational, and differential relationships between three things: dominant North American norms; the norms and aesthetics of life on Hornby; and the aspirational ideals of how Hornby is imagined as a utopian place. I will use examples from an interview conducted in 2013 to illustrate how vibe propagates:

1) Dominant North American norms:

Author: [Upon moving to Hornby] *have you guys ever experienced this weird rebound effect, like how is that?*

Deidre Atkinson: *For about a year, I felt like I was battling my consumerism. I think when you live in a city one of your favourite hobbies is shopping, no matter what it's for, like food or clothes or knickknacks... Yeah, so you sort of wake up in the morning, and I sort of had this feeling I needed to buy something, and that took about a year. I battled with that. I was a bit antsy. I felt kind of weird, like I should be out there buying something.*

2) The norms and aesthetics, or the realities, of life on Hornby:

Mark Atkinson: *It's unusual, or challenging because most of the musicians that I play with, professionally, do not live on the island.*

3) The aspirational ideals of how Hornby is imagined as a utopian place:

Deidre Atkinson: *I find it romantic living. It's like we get to live before city life became so crazy. It's the old-fashioned life.*

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Through friction⁹ between these realities, categories, and meanings (and more), Hornby takes on a charged energy, a feeling of discontinuity with the mainland, a vibration that is quite intense for visitors and newcomers from fast-paced homes, a vibration some can align with and others feel rejected by, as I and others have personally witnessed. As Marc Atkinson, one of Canada's premier guitarists, alludes to, Hornby's vibe requires change, adaptation, flexibility, and sacrifice. Deirdre Atkinson, the artistic director of Hornby Island's lauded music festival, is not suggesting that life on Hornby is somehow pre-modern in terms of environmental impact, but she is pointing towards a pace of life that contrasts with "crazy" cities, openly and knowingly qualifying this idea of Hornby as romantic. People often talk about how all they seem to do when they leave Hornby is spend money, for transport, for food, for fun, as if the vibe of the outside world would seem to be composed entirely of economic transactions.¹⁰ As the local fiddle instructor notes:

We don't have McDonald's... I don't even know what's out there, I've been here so long. Dairy Queen or... You don't spend money on stuff that you might in the city. The money doesn't melt out of your pockets the way it does when... you're in holiday mode [off-island] but there aren't the temptations [here]. You go to The Co-op, you might be tempted by a chocolate bar, but you're not tempted by all of the consumerism... you don't have to fight with your kids every time you pass the fast food place. (June Cannon, 2013)

The degree to which living on Hornby can be considered as "romantic" depends on everything from the adequacy of one's housing and income, to the ability of people to successfully navigate the realities of life in a remote and isolated community. Most popular romantic visions of Hornby come from people who do not actually live here, but visit in the summer months when the weather and beaches can appear almost tropical (to Canadians at least).

The vibrations that musicians promote to change Hornby are not so two-dimensional as negative or positive. The ultimate objective of manipulating energy using vibrations is to bring people closer together in a wide range of experiences. Musicians do this with much more than their musical talents, more than the groove, just as Keil's PDs have been used to argue:

If the ensemble is creating positive energy... they are enjoying what they're doing. They're enjoying being with each other. They're enjoying being with you [the audience]. That counts for a lot... because you get drawn into that, and it gives you a good feeling... Bands [might] not... [offer] a lot musically, but they've just got such wonderful energy that you just can't help but smile and feel good about the experience. Because it's just a good human experience rather than necessarily a good musical experience - that has value too. (Tony Law, 2013)

The vibes that musicking works with are well beyond the confines of groove, of song or mere virtuosity, but include intervention into the vastness of human experience and

⁹ Another set of participatory discrepancies: "the slightly different initiations of sound waves in time rubbing against each other, and the slightly different sustained sound waves through time rubbing or 'beating' against each other" (Keil, 1995: 12).

¹⁰ This came up in almost all my interviews. It speaks to a slower form of capitalism on the island.

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sharing. Here is where, in addressing community solidarity, the theory of participatory discrepancies fails to help explain the social situation in which groove takes place, something vibe demands we consider. Law demonstrates in the above quote that for creating positive energy, a good musical experience can be about much more than musicianship and even music: vibe, as a theory and descriptor, captures what groove misses. For example, having been asked to sit in with the jazz band at The Thatch, the Island's pub, and after playing a particularly beautiful song, one for which I had to simply improvise my playing, Tony Wilson, one of the island's famous guitarists, turned to tell me and said, "I wrote that song for Stash, Lex's dad, after he died." His sharing this was deeply moving for me. It was beyond the music. It was a moment of trust. It was a gift that had to do with much more than the song, or how I played it, but it had to do with allowing me into the community, to share something so meaningful, something the rest of the band and much of the audience was feeling.

Recently we had a party at Lex Dominiak's home, the home Stash had built, a beach-log structure with no code or right angles, on Syzygy, one of the island's land cooperatives, and we played the night away as fit for the occasion, a "blessingway"¹¹ for Matt O'Donnell, a musician and father-to-be. That night, in what was at times an particularly chaotic jam, Wilson somehow managed to make musical sense out of the noise to give the entire room needed cohesion, proximity, and meaning. Stash was a pillar of the community, and perhaps I was in a minority of the people at The Thatch the night we played his song who did not know the meaning of the piece, and yet the moment made sense to me. Wilson writes compositions to fit particular musicians and people, like those on Hornby. He crafts his work with close intension. Here Wilson explains some of what he uses music for, the meaning he finds in it, and how he produces vibrations that bring people closer to shared experiences with him, like the memory of his friend Stash:

It's the best way for me to, it's not even to express my emotions, it's not even about that, but that's in there as well, but it's my way of being able to communicate, and I have a way of communicating that's different than other people's... what am I trying to communicate? I think like any artist you're trying to communicate something that you found that is special in life, and so through your expression that's what you try and give. Within that there's a lot of different possibilities, a lot of emotional possibilities from joy to introspection, a little sadness... there's a lot of power to invoke a lot of different things and this is why music works the way it does... So much of life is a mystery. It should be a mystery... What I'm trying to give an audience is just what I'm trying to give myself. Which are those feelings that I have at those moments that I play those songs... I'm hoping that I'm doing something that makes them feel good about themselves, and that the world is a good place and within that there's sadness and introspective situations, but not to be dragged down in that... and I already know what people are going to think about it... I'm not trying to bring people to God or bring people to any higher reasoning. (2013)

¹¹ Hornby Islanders have blessingways for expectant parents instead of baby-showers. The ritual is normally for the mother-to-be and involves sharing birthing stories and food, and is intended to help the expectant feel supported and connected in the birth and months to come. The blessingways for fathers-to-be (also referred to as "manways"), have a less-organised flavour, but often involve musicking, drinking, and stories about the worthiness of the father as a community member.

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From my list of explanations for Hornby's vibe above, rather than further detail 1) Hornby Islanders' projections of dominant North American norms and lifestyles, or 2) the norms of life on Hornby, let's look more closely at category 3), Hornby's imagining. While musicians manipulate Hornby and its vibe, the opportunity to imagine what Hornby is all about, what the vibe is, is a topic of debate and an activity that feeds back into the experience of Hornby. To experience Hornby is to contemplate what Hornby is. Let's look at a local example of Hornby's most aspirational imagining through musical metaphor.

In a general sense, Clair Cronia, an arts enthusiast, speaks to how musicking moves her on Hornby, but below she also discusses a specific historic event that encapsulates particular imaginings of Hornby as utopia that is now only a fable for the current generation. In doing so, Cronia explains Hornby's institutional functioning as a musical phenomenon:

Cronia: [Specifically about singing] I get so moved by the harmonies and the blends, and so touched that I just forget everything to do with the words... the all-night jams on the beach whether it was drumming and guitar and voice, there was really a strong movement here in the like-minded musicians and music, and so it was huge and it was really a core big group of us and a big strong women's group and women's movement... with spirituality... it was all about chanting. I got very very, very turned on by that group... That is when [in the 1980s] I realised our innate passion to rhythm music... It really really changed my life... one of the main reasons I stayed here was because of the music... [and, significantly later]... the festival of myth. If you've not heard about that, that was... a week long or two week long celebration... we were all huge in helping create this week long, where we had dream circles, this big tai chi, you know we built the big Taiko drums.

Author: And so would you do this in the summer and then people would come to see it?

Cronia: Oh my gosh, it was very well attended, and there was a huge thing that went all back behind the Hall, and dances, a huge bonfire out in front of the Hall and everybody was in costume and girls dressed up like Pan and people are leaping over the fire. Now I'm talking about magic, real magic because magic happens here on this island. You know it really really does. The synchronicity, the intuition... you know magic that happens all the time if you're listening, if you're really listening... The only kind of thing that makes that happen is like minds. As a people working together and people that hear the same melody and hear the harmonies in it and all of a sudden you're joining your little piece of what could work with this. I think that's a little bit a part of how all of our nonprofits work. It's sort of like a harmonic convergence that happens here with a lot of the organisations, a lot of the people [here]. (2013)

Cronia points towards Hornby's having a kind of environmental, musical, and pagan complex that Michael MacDonald has detailed other places as having in his ecomusicological work (2009). What I have seen in my time on Hornby are the residues of these intensive rituals from the 1980s, and from women in particular I have heard whispers of Wiccan rituals, found mix tapes of Canadian dub poet Lillian Allen at the radio station, or have heard tell of mythic festivals like the one Cronia describes. Jill Candlish was running an all-women's music group in 2013 and her organising was more than just musical in aim. She was deliberately fostering community and bringing awareness to the current

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moment's (transient and temporary?)¹² lack of visible all-women music groups (Candlish 2013). This echo of the past also reflected the significance that lesbian feminism had on Hornby in the 1970s and 1980s, including "lesbian 'separatists' who moved to rural settings to live collectively away from urban heteropatriarchy [who] had a clear idea about the importance of nature in their culture, and the importance of their culture to ecology" (Sandilands, 2002: 132).



Figure 5 - Summer 2013. Every Wednesday and Sunday the Cardboard House Bakery and Pizza Galore host musicians in their orchard. A local swing trio entertains the audience and kids who line up to jump off the rock in front of the stage (author's photo).

In Cronia's description one can find both evidence of the extravagance and the time that Islanders once put into such activities but also Cronia's *solastalgia* (Albrecht, 2005), that feeling of mournful loss of an environment from the past one cannot return to, but a future one hopes for. This is a taste of that utopian element of music and environmental exchange Hornby's reputation elicits, where even the relationships between Hornby's plethora of NGOs are imagined as parts of a "harmonic convergence." In this ecomusicology, taken with other's ideas above, these activities—musicking on the beach, multi-week musical gatherings—these utopian foundations underpin Hornby's institutional functioning, including institutions that explicitly regulate how Islanders interact with their environment. This history continues to impact the natural and cultural aesthetics of the island: the vibe.

To summarise this first portion of theorising vibe on Hornby Island, Island musicians point to a robust and diverse theory of vibration to explain the importance of musicking for their society. Working with these ideas, I theorise the Hornby vibe as something that is a

¹² As I was carefully reminded by interviewees of both genders, some bands remain cohesive ensembles with repertoire for decades on the island but the case may be that they have not had a gig in three or more years. Though they may have only rehearsed and jammed, they still identify as "together." So one's definition of active female participation in Hornby's music scene really depends upon time-scale. Additionally, an assessment based only upon public musicking really could not address the actual number of women participating in musicking on Hornby. At many of the private gatherings I attended, women were well represented, and the converse is also true.

product of friction with the mainland—which can produce problems for people—and as a practice to manipulate the experience of being on Hornby, of being a part of Hornby’s community. This musical practice takes place in place, an island with a substantial history of musicking for community, a glimpse of which Cronia offers. Islanders put this theory of dialogic vibration and their history of musicking for community into practice in order to strategically bring people more closely together and to improve their resilience in responding to community needs, hard times, and problems. Vibe also has a physical component experienced by Island bodies, and vibe has an institutional component as groups of people relate on the Island. I base the need for a theory of vibe to better advance the discourse of environment, music, and justice that Keil promoted through participatory discrepancies and groove, and I offer the possibility of vibration as a theoretical tool that actually captures place, music, social atmosphere, community, and environment all-in-one.

Vibe in Application

Thus far, with the help of research participants, I have located a theoretical construction of vibe as an ecomusicological expansion on the idea of participatory discrepancies. On Hornby, vibe as theory is put into pragmatic application in artists’ practices. In this section of the article, I use several examples to investigate how the recognition of the importance of vibe influences how artists use vibe to transform Hornby and local environmental ethos.

Rachelle Chinnery is an award-winning ceramicist from Hornby Island. She is also a scholar, a poet, a photographer, a writer, community activist, and an ecocritic. Chinnery has been working for some time to articulate her artistic practice as an environmental response. In 2014, Chinnery posted a short film to Facebook. As the images and narration in the film move from her pottery to the kinds of patterning one will find in the ripples of Hornby’s beach sands, the connections she sees between patterning, place, and practice become apparent. She offers a way towards understanding how people who work intimately with an art are transformed by that practice to assemble metaphoric understandings of reality that are mirrored or translated through their art form, yet another ecomusicology (for musicians) or explanation for vibe:

*When I first started working with clay, I could feel myself change under the influence of the medium. It felt like I became hyper-aware of all sorts of patterns and rhythm, especially in the natural world... Wherever the dynamic of natural change and growth exist this pattern shows up... Working with clay took me from a fixed perspective on how we are in the world to a very mutable perspective. **My mind changed under the influence of this medium, and I think craft does that to craft practitioners. The medium becomes their metaphor for understanding, or at least for participating in life in a meaningful way.** I think I can say that working with clay has made me more attentive to the physical world and how disconnected we as a society have become to that world. The experience of nature and who we are in it is something I was less aware of before I was a potter... I’ve always admired the beauty of the natural world, but clay has made me feel that world. I feel the rhythms of nature, the pulse and the change within it. I don’t know if that happens because clay is entirely haptic; you have to feel the medium to work in it. Or whether it’s because **you run that circuitry from hands to heart to mind and back...** I don’t think true environmentalism can be realised without this basic awareness in our own bodies as living*

feeling beings. The physical arts, craft, train us to feel. (2014: online – emphasis added)

Chinnery and I agree that the arts as practices can be pathways to activating environmental ethos. In my presentation of vibe as the interaction between musicking and environment in this article, two kinds of dominant possibilities emerge for musicking to help enliven the environmental ethos and cosmology that Chinnery points towards. At their most essential, one is that musical vibrations transform relationships between community members and therefore the Island's institutions and discourse (ones that govern human activity in an environment). Another points towards some kind of spiritual outlook or (un)conscious environmental awareness that links music and environment in a philosophical and immaterial manner that can ultimately form an environmental-musical cosmology: an ecomusicology (an example of which is vibe). This first possibility for vibe involves the capacity of musicking to train us to acknowledge and work with other humans as a social activity but musicking also trains us to experience our bodies in our environment, "to feel" as Chinnery states above. The second possibility is metaphysical, where the medium of an art, in my case musicking, informs a metaphoric language for life, the method by which we develop ideas like a theory of vibe. The first scenario is passive, observational, phenomenological and embodied or "corporated" (Hennion, 2005: 139) and the second develops from the experiential encounter of propagating vibrations as a musician but also as a participant in musical activities generally. These two ideas are certainly not mutually exclusive but dynamic and dialogic. As a practical example of how Island musicians experience the movement between influencing vibe and being transformed by it, consider Ted Tanner once again.

Tanner is one of the new members of Syzygy, a land co-op from the 1970s. He is 45 and is building his home himself. Before Hornby, he made his living busking in Victoria when tourism was booming, selling CDs and playing for tips. Tanner plays exacting renditions of popular songs and accompanies himself on guitar and harmonica, often strapping percussion to his feet, tapping his foot on a stomp box to keep time. Tanner has taken part in extended "Buddhist style retreat practice" since his twenties, and has put careful thought into his attraction to music. I often noted Tanner fasting and cleansing. His spiritual practice has challenged him: "although I couldn't see anything wrong with playing music, the performance aspect of things kind of worried me because it's tied up with ego...cultivating ego, and to perform in front of people, it's a real danger" (2013):

Author: Does music ever reach the level of something you might describe as a spiritual experience? And, if so, can you describe it?

Tanner: Yes, I think to me, spirituality is about feeling connected and dissolving the boundaries between your ego and the world that we're all so intimately interconnected with. And it's a total illusion of the mind that we have, that our bodies end at our skin, and we're totally separate from the rest of the world. We're constantly giving, taking, physically from the world, our breaths... and skin is falling off and getting absorbed by the Earth and growing new stuff, and it's a delusion. And it's a reality, at the same time... music helps to dissolve that boundary for me... and I forget who I am and am just lost in the music, the music is almost like a cellular... it's coming out of me, but it's also being perceived by my senses and influencing what's coming out of me. It's a great, amazing feeling of getting out of your head and being totally absorbed by what you're doing... And getting lost in it isn't even a real

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expression; it's almost like it's a getting found in it, coming home... And when that happens with other people it's even more powerful, I think, that feeling of being home.

Author: *Why does [interacting] with other people make a difference?*

Tanner: *We're completely social beings... There's something powerful when you connect with other people on that level, when you look at somebody, and they're playing music, and things are working, and you know what they're thinking when they look at you... It's a dissolving of boundaries, where you're all experiencing if not the same thing, a very similar thing... It's very hard to put your finger on, but that's a spiritual experience, and extend that to an audience who's also feeling that same thing, and that's what that energy is. It just grows and when it takes off it's magic, you know? I'm sure you know that, when that happens. And then the music gets better because of it, and everybody reacts better, and it's this growing, awesome thing. And I think our egos get in the way of that happening... It's an art form to be in that space as much as possible. (ibid)*

Tanner reveals the usefulness of Chinnery's emphasis on physicality for musicking but he also speaks of the dissolution of self through vibes as a kind of magic. In my interviews, people would move from observations about grounding in their practice of vibe, or the phenomenology or experience of their practice as transformational, and then turn towards community and environment. Chinnery does this here in her language of authorship:

I'm looking at reflexive writing as a way of re-attaining sense experience in order for us to actually be in the world as sensing beings, and I think that that is really, really key to people understanding environmentalism, that if you can't be in your body... if you can't be in a sensing, aware body, both aware that you're sensing it and in a sensing, aware body, then how... could it possibly matter to you that the bigger world, the bigger body, matters? How... why would you make that connection? (2013)

Let's look at another interview exchange to tease this awakening to one's being a part of a bigger body through the arts further (or "vibration propagation," as I argue), this time from Glen Rabena, a 70 year old, respected artist, musician, singer, builder, and long-time community member. Rabena, like a number of senior community members I interviewed, began playing music in his thirties. He is the kind of musician who claims only to know how to play songs, not his instrument:

Author: *Can you describe to me the feelings you experience while playing music? When you're playing music what's going through your head?*

Rabena: *Yeah, well up until recently I've always played with other people, and so the kind of music I like to play, I really like it when it all fits together. Especially bluegrass music. When it happens, when you make that sound work, it's really neat. You are all part of it. You're always as important as each other. That's what I want to say. Old Timey music, Celtic music, just sharing that with everybody is just really neat... Yeah, it's a new kind of experience for me not having someone else to share the whole thing with...*

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Author: *You were talking before about this feeling where everybody has got their part, and you become all the same somehow?*

Rabena: *What is that, is that an analogy or a metaphor? I like that example because I see the universe like that. And if we can look at it more like that I think that would be a cool thing.*

Author: *So what you're saying is?*

Rabena: *Play your part and make it all work, and let's all have a good time, because you ain't all that much more important than the other person really, right? Let's all get together and make it work, and it's a good thing kind of thing. That's pretty simplistic though.*

Author: *No, I think there's a lot there. Can you elaborate on that? That's about as specific as you get?*

Rabena: *I don't know, because what I like to do, I like to get right to the point. Even my artwork... with my Northwest Coast Art I'm inspired a lot by Chinese brush painting where a few strokes get the whole point across, and I am like that with a lot of things like my music too. I don't need a whole mess of notes to say what I want to say, and if you say the right notes, then boy I think that is: YEAH. Less is more, and that is a reflection too of everything else. Less should be better in a lot of ways, and that is a really strong kind of an environmental statement I think. If you approach everything that same way that you do with music, you don't need more. See if we can make do with less. And that's an interesting one. I'd never thought of that in my life.¹³ (2013)*

Rabena's comments about doing one's simple part for the whole speaks to how musicking can shape one's experience of community. Unsurprisingly, June Cannon, who often plays with Rabena, echoes him,

The connection between the people as you play is really the high for me... It doesn't happen with everybody, and it doesn't happen every time and... it mostly would happen in a small group; it doesn't as often happen in a big group. But... somehow it becomes more than just the sum of the instruments that are playing. (2013)

My interviews revealed a consensus about how musicking brings musicians closer together in a kind of unified egalitarian communal experience and these reports support my argument that a theory of vibe must rely upon Keil's work:

I think it's just the synergy where you find where each person's contribution can fit together, and you're playing off people and... rather than just responding to what's coming out of you, you're responding to what's coming from other people. (Tony Law, 2013)

¹³ Minimalism and "it's the notes you don't play" offer other paths for reflecting on ethics of environmental consumption.

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Rabena's most obvious ideas about musicking and power are in relation to participation and egalitarian equality and reflect an ethos of justice. Rabena's political attention to bluegrass for musicking makes good sense. In bands, rhythm instruments generally have a continuous and repetitive role to play, pursuing specific goals and occupying specific acoustic frequencies with predetermined parts that interlock in particular ways. Fulfilling one's obligations to a part, simple or intricate, and having that part combine with others produces a profound sense of belonging, inclusion, and equity. Learning how to produce vibrations as a group to communicate such egalitarian ideals involves learning to work well with others: the medium transforms how the self interacts with others.

I have played a fair amount of music with Charles Keil. He often relies on Cuban *comparsas* to explain the theory of participatory discrepancies because to manifest such grooves, many percussionists are required, and each one must fulfill a small part to make the larger groove work. Each part might seem very simple, even relatively un-musical and a-synchronous in isolation, however, maintaining a complete *comparsa*, as a group, is complex. If a single person does not have the right part, and even more so, if a single person does not have good time, then the entire endeavour will not work and the groove will fail long before it can begin to influence something like vibe and one's larger community outside the musicians at hand. To a degree, genre can be useful for generalising the degree to which some forms of musicking are more or less publicly accessible, influencing the degree to which a music can be more or less for or with a community. Hence, June Cannon offers her preference for fiddling repertoire, "I'm into cooperative music, but not competitive music" (2013). Obviously, different genres of music require different kinds of social organisation and hierarchy, but ultimately, coordination and cooperation are required at some level in most music, if only to decide on things like what to play the musicians or where they will play.

What other core lessons about community making and consciousness raising come from vibe? It's possible that awareness the community's appreciation for one's capacity to put out vibrations to make social transformations fuels a person's drive to discover what else can make change for community. Musicking can become a pedagogical life lesson in perseverance:

I want to get [teenagers on Hornby] hooked on guitar, because, you start to realise that if you can get that much joy out of making sounds on an instrument with friends, well, then there's no reason why you couldn't cook dinner with the same approach. Then there's no reason why you wouldn't garden with the same approach. You start to wake up. You start to go, "oh, everything can be done that way." And we're always jamming [in life], and we're always trying to make it a good jam, and when you're hanging out with your kids... and so I think people want to live a life that's filled with art and beauty.
(Marc Atkinson, 2013)

Chinnery's Marshall McLuhan-like observation that "the [artist's] medium becomes [an artist's] metaphor for understanding, or at least for participating in life in a meaningful way" (2014) clearly rings true for Atkinson. Atkinson had an isolated childhood on Quadra Island, but music became his point of access to and inspiration for engaging with reality, a way into understanding the world. Life became a jam.

When asked how they think the community perceives them, my informants would respond with something about their artistic identity. One should not underestimate the importance

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of identity and pride in carrying such a public and visible role as a Hornby musician Hornby. In a way, musicians are viewed as public servants because of their role in shaping Hornby's vibe. As these musicians describe "waking up" to such responsibilities, to the vibe and to (self-) awareness in the community, to the jam that is life, they also describe discovering the significance of their impact in extra-musical and environmental realms of Hornby life, their abilities and obligations to the whole beyond their grooves. Part of this responsibility is also tied up in the pride of Islanders I spoke to who feel in some measure that they have helped raise up younger musicians to experience the world and hopefully continue their traditions and even, "make the world a better place." These musicians were trained in processes of equity and patterning, and their practice became an important part of how they articulate equity and pattern, including how they understand their environment, how they explained to me what the Hornby Island vibe is.

Conclusion

This article discussed a theory of vibe grounded in the experiences of Hornby Island musicians, a theory that contributes to ecomusicological thought. I began with reality as a form of vibration, described Hornby's vibe and Hornby musicians as vibration manipulators, and I linked vibe to an expansion of Keil's theory of participatory discrepancies. The second portion of the article offered practical examples of how musicking, or, making vibrations, can transform one's relationship to community and environment to inform environmental ethos. I offered several possibilities for dialogue about how musicking inevitably produces a language that invents ideas like "vibe" in order for musicians to explain what it is they do in society. Vibe is everywhere, all the time. Musicians know this: not a few interviews ended with something to the effect of, "I've never really said or shared these ideas with people, but this is part of how I see this community, the world, and my musical practice." Vibe as a term and theory helps make explicit our implicit knowing of the very purpose of music in our lives, and in particular continues the open and exploratory ecomusicological work that Keil pioneered between 1987 and 1991, before his theory of participatory discrepancies became reified in ethnomusicology.

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