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Sound Terrains: "Soundscape," Place and Nature in South Moravia

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Introduction: Sound Terrains of South Moravia

The connection between musical sounds and nature has a long intellectual and popular history in Europe. My purpose here is to investigate this relationship as it has played out in South Moravian traditional music.[1] In this exploration, I am interested in understanding the significance of 'nature' and soundscape as they structure Moravia as a coherent region.

To understand the totality of sounds in the ecology of South Moravia, I propose to use the Czech phrase *zvukový terén*, which literally means "sound terrain." Like Murray Schafer's "soundscape" (Schafer 1977), the phrase places focus on environmental sounds over humanly organized "musical" sound. However, the expression connotes a closer connection to land or "terrain," suggesting a deeper linkage between sound and place. I have drawn on Louise Wrazen's (2007) discussion of the experiential geographies of music among *Górale* musicians in Poland (*zakopane*) and Canada (Toronto). Wrazen suggests that landscape may be seen as a "social construct" that orients a viewer toward a particular "way of seeing the world and imagining a relationship to nature" (Wrazen 2007, 186). In this light, I take sound terrains as

[1] This relationship has not by any means gone unnoticed by Czech scholars of traditional music. In a 1989 book titled "The World of Folk Songs," Jiří Pajer proposed an "ecological" study of folk songs. He held that songs should not be studied outside their environment, which might be typically conceived as the village. Moreover, he emphasized a functional approach to categorizing songs that grouped folk songs as family songs, calendrical songs, harvest songs, and the like, based on their texts. Similarly text-focused is Marta Toncrová's (2002) proposal that songs be divided by subject matter into love songs and jocular songs. The functional idea that such "folk songs" serve a purpose rather than espousing any musico-aesthetic value is still prevalent. These approaches tend to be reductive, however, or focus mainly on musical features or functions. I want to step back from Pajer's predominant focus on song categorization, or the analysis of rhythm (Úlehla 1949), to take a broader look at what might be termed a sound ecology, or to adopt Feld's term "acoustemology," of the South Moravian region. In drawing on ideas about soundscape, speech about music, and songs about place, I hope to open up broader perspectives on this aspect of Moravian traditional music.

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particular ways of hearing and, most importantly for my project, ways a listener understands his or her relationship to place and nature (through music).

Another theme that I will trace in this paper is the importance of past time (and perhaps nostalgia) as linked to place. Edward Casey (1996), who outlines a phenomenological philosophy of place, shows that while place is specifically "geographically embedded" and physical, it is more than "mere location." It is also the setting for everyday experience and memory. If South Moravia is a coherent region, then certainly sound terrains are important placial structures that help "make sense" of the place. In Casey's words, they are one of "the lived body's active ingredience in emplacement" (44). Sound terrains are a way of getting into place.

I. Hearing South Moravia

Many factors indicate the importance of place and music in *slovácko*. The region is known for its natural beauty, vibrant folk festivals, and viniculture. The region's gently undulating hills form an ecosystem suited to the cultivation of wine grapes, and these have in turn closely entwined musical expressions and wine-related cultural activities. When the regional magazine *Zelené Slovácko* asked readers this March what came to mind when they were asked about *slovácko*, aside form folk songs and folk costumes, the "terrain, fields, and vineyards" were frequently mentioned.[2] Music, as well as the natural ecosystem, has been closely associated with *slovácko*'s identity, creating a unique link between sound and this place.

I noticed the importance of this connection during my first research trips to the Czech Republic in 2003 and 2004. I will focus on three ways that music is "placed": on album covers, through song texts, and in ways of speaking about music. While perusing cover art in the "folklore" section of most record stores, the dominant illustrations were landscapes or musicians in natural settings. These ranged from gently rolling hills, fields, and trees, to birds, to abstract landscapes. Occasionally there were also dancers, or pictures of musicians in ethnographic costume in landscapes. Other images also appeared on album covers, including village scenes or famous musicians, but the genre of cover art depicting landscapes was enough to suggest to me that something was going on.

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[2] Anketa Slovácko, 28 March 2010, at http://zeleneslovacko.cz/novinka/anketa_kdyz_se_rekne_slovacko.html, accessed 6 November 2010.

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Song texts also evoke nature, and thereby also generically "Moravian" places. Common folksong images include little green meadows, pear trees in fields, buzzing bees, fishponds, and wild paths. Characters include fish, black horses, gray falcons and little black swallows. Obviously, there are again other themes like love, war, work, and drinking, but the recurrence of natural settings and animal characters seemed remarkable. The title track of Jura Petrů's 1999 *Zahučaly hory* presents another paean to the land: "The mountains roared, the forests roared," which appears to be the fury of life around the singer who is quickly reminded of his youth: "My youth, I already lost it, as if I were a stone thrown into water." It seems to become an existential metaphor for the world at large, though told from a South Moravian viewpoint since it is expressed in the regional dialect. All of this suggests that there is something important about nature, sound terrain, and place in Moravian traditional music. I will focus on the last aspect, ways of speaking about music, in the rest of this paper.

I do not want to suggest that it is the same thing for someone to talk about song in terms of nature as it is for a folk song to use a natural metaphor, or for an album to use a picture of a field on the front. I do, however, want to suggest that all of these things indicate a common way of thinking about, or way of hearing, that is structured around place and sound terrains. In other words, music is made meaningful by its connection to place and sound terrain.

I. a. Historicizing and Folklorizing the Village Soundscape

The importance of soundscapes power was indicated by a 2001 album called *Konec u Kyjova*. The album samples sounds terrains recorded by the band leader Jura Petrů in and around the town of Kyjov.

Petrů describes the soundscapes he used as "sounds that should characterize the space" and life in and around Kyjov, and all were recorded "directly in the field [*terén*]" (Petrů, liner notes to *Konec u Kyjova*). These are what Schafer describes as "soundmarks," or sounds that are unique to the community or "possesses qualities which make [them] specially regarded or noticed by the people in that community" (Schafer 1977, 10; see also Sakakeeny 2010). Petrů's soundmarks include birdsong, the sharpening of scythes, harvesting hay by hand, hymn-singing at the Catholic church, sellers advertising their wares at an open-air market, a cooper at work, church bells, a wedding feast, horses, woodcutting, and the crackling of a wood fire. The sounds suggest a nostalgic hearing of village life, and they are also arranged on the album to reflect the

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passage of a day in the life of a traditional village. Inherent in the conception of the album is that these sounds are a disappearing natural resource that are important to the community and may have already disappeared from the echology of the local sound terrain. The soundmarks create a virtual soundmap of the history and traditional life around the village.[3] The acoustic community suggested by the album is intimately bound up with music since each soundmark is blends into a song or musical performance by Petrů's band, and thus the album as a whole suggests an organic enjoinment of the soundscape with local musical expression.

Sound terrains a particular way of hearing the soundscape (see Schafer 1977; Feld 1996; Wrazen 2007, 186). It suggests that there is a historical depth to the acoustic community. It also suggests that, despite being recorded in the place to which it refers, the soundscape is also more abstract, or "spatial" in nature: whether soundmarks or placed folksongs, South Moravian sound terrains have been heard as nostalgic, with expressive potential, and aesthetic value (see Wrazen 2007, 186). Petrů's band of musicians, implicated by the editing of recorded samples, appear to be actor's in Kyjov's historicized soundscape, an impression strengthened by the group's history. They trace their roots to the late 1940s when Petrů's father founded a musical ensemble. The band features Petrů on cimbalom, his brother Petr as lead violinist, two second violinists, violists, a bassist, and clarinetist, in a "cimbalom band" instrumentation that has been common since at least the 1940s. Since the 1980s, the band has toured widely in Europe and abroad; Petrů has led the band (and singers) since 1984. (He makes his living, however, as an optometrist.)

I. b. The Village as an Acoustic Community

Konec u Kyjova suggests that the band, its songs, and the sound terrains are part of an agrarian soundscape that can only be heard as a village. [The following shaded text was not read at the conference.] In terms of sound, the village is idealistically represented as a hi-fi setting in which individual sounds stand out and are not obscured or drowned out by the mishmash of urban sounds or by loud industrial sounds (Schafer 1977). This is an ideal, of course, since many villages are home to large factories, wood processing plants, sirens, and every village has a train or bus station. I will focus on the idealization here, however, since this is what comes through in discourse and recent recordings. As Daphne Berdahl pointed out in her study of the East German

[3] Possible to create a "soundmap" for the presentation? Pictures and placement on map of region?

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village Kella, the European "village-study paradigm" of European ethnology has tended to view change as "unilineal and unidirectional" and neglected particulars and the experience of individuals (Berdahl 1999, 13). I point this out not to position this paper as part of this paradigm, but to recognize that the concept of the village has purchase not only among Moravians but also among European ethnologists in general. I hope to point out the historicity of this paradigm through particular South Moravian examples and, while this may cement some impressions of European ethnology, I want to stress that the village is indeed an important social institution, even if it is mainly as a locus for an idealized, "imaginary" social cohesion.[4]

Village, however, might be considered as much a mindset—a conceptual place—as a population statistic or physical location.[5] Nonetheless, most Moravian villages can usefully be called an "acoustic community" (Schafer 1977, 214). Schafer describes such a community as one defined by the reach of acoustic sounds (Schafer 1977, 215). In small Czech towns, this may include the sound of church bells, rooster crows, or the passing of local buses that mark certain times of day.

The reach of sounds is extended by the use of village-wide loudspeaker systems. The speakers around Czech villages broadcast community news on most evenings, play music throughout the town during festivals, and share events throughout the community. In a sense, the acoustic community created by these events marks the lifecycle rituals of the village, and it appears to remain vital even into the present. Although many residents have access to newspapers, radio, and Internet, small towns maintain these speaker systems.[6]

Throughout the rest of this paper, I will explore in more detail music and speech about music as expressions of ways of hearing nature.

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[4] Villages, of course, have been noted as the locus of other cultures as well. In the even smaller Amazon village community in *Why Suyá Sing*, for example, Anthony Seeger devotes significant time to explicating how the "village can be likened to a concert hall, its annual round equated with a concert series, and its population equated with an orchestra," thus making the sonic life of the community a unique chronotope and site for the negotiation of social relations (Seeger 1987, 65).

[5] For example, if one conceives a village as a small population center, Kyjov may not appear to be a village. According to the Czech Statistical Office, the population of the town was over 11,000 as of January 2010. In contrast, nearby Vřesovice has only 600 residents. Český statistický úřad, census reports as of 1 January 2010, online at http://www.czso.cz/cs/2010edicniplan.nsf/p/1301-10 (accessed 4 November 2010). Kyjov has 11,597, while Vřesovice is listed at 603 inhabitants.

[6] A similar case is noted in John Baily's discussion of the creation of national identity in post-WWII Afghanistan. Baily suggests the importance of "loudspeaker systems" in the main streets of many "main provincial towns" extended the reach of national broadcasts of "news, music, and other programmes" (Baily 1994, 57).

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II. Nature, Speech, and Song in the South Moravian Folkloric Terrain

Historical discourses have established the link between song, sound, and land in Moravia. Czech folk culture has been historically legitimized and reified through concerted collection and preservation efforts.[7] Collected songs, originally only texts and later melodies transcribed in staff notation, were typically published as large anthologies, which have come to serve as a basis for claims about the historical authenticity of folk culture.[8]

II. a. The Historico-Folkloric Discourse Linking Song and Nature

The first major Moravian songbook of this type was *Moravské národní písně* [Moravian National Songs], first published in 1835 by the Brno priest František Sušil, and again in 1859 as a significantly expanded edition. The latter was a massive effort that contained 2,091 melodies and 2,361 texts, many with multiple variants (Vysloužil 2001).[9] Sušil's collection shows two main ideas that shape thinking about folk music: first, it establishes the basic unit of music as the folksong text and its melody; second, Sušil's written introductions show how song was conceptualized as part of the natural landscape.

The seeds of this "naturalizing" ideology appear in the written prefaces. Sušil conceived of folk song as a pure, unsullied, and somehow a natural part of the landscape.[10] Thus, Sušil makes clear that the songs are indigenous and naturally occuring. This is clear from the 1835 epigraph, a quotation attributed to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1668) printed in English, which suggests that the songs are not cultivated but naturally occurring in nature:

> Flow'rs . . ., which not nice art
> In beds and curious knots, but nature boon

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[7] From early efforts by landowners and noblemen, and later by educated urban elites searching for national roots, collection has a long history in Moravia that dates back to the eighteenth century (see Markl 1987). Jarmila Procházková defines collection [*sběr*] as a "unique situation when a collector (occasionally multiple collectors) records folkloric expressions from an individual interpreter or group of interpreters" (Procházková 2006, 16): *Jedinečná situace, kdy sběratel (popř. vice sběratelů) zaznamenává u jednoho interpreta či skupiny interpret folklorní projevy*.

[8] This folkloric culture, which began taking shape in the nineteenth century, has been characterized by Andrew Lass as a "second culture" that was always an ideal—enshrined, partly imagined, and written down in the collections of nineteenth century collectors (Lass 1989).

[9] Czech poet Jan Neruda (1834–1891) is reputed to have described Sušil's undertaking as "more important than the Czech translation of the New Testament." I have not been able to verify the original quote, though Neruda was known for his satirical humor. Subsequent nineteenth-century collectors included the linguist František Bartoš, composer Leoš Janáček, and the teacher from Velká nad Veličkou Martin Zeman.

[10] Susil also suggests that songs may reveal the national spirit or character, which resembles Herder's ideas, an aspect that is explored further by Johnston 2008.

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Pour'd forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain.

In the introduction that follows, Sušil compares Moravian folk songs to a "posy of field flowers" and contrasts them with the exotic plants one might find in a conservatory, cared for by experts and brought from the far ends of the earth. Indigenous songs, unlike foreign ones, need no cultivation and sprout spontaneously from the spirit of the people and the realm of Nature.

Sušil's rhetoric established a soundscape in which songs grew naturally among Moravians. While this may seem far removed from the present, Sušil's collection is still in print and can be found in bookshops today. The melodies have therefore been used by many subsequent musicians. It is, in fact, still readily available in recent editions and reprints. The songs are so well-known that musicians often refer to them as *sušilovky* and their importance has been renewed.[11]

The nineteenth-century discourse of nature, then, is still current and, as with Petrů's album, suggests a particular way of hearing the relationship between the soundscape, place, and musical space. Sušil suggested particular thinking about music's origin in the soundscape, namely that music springs from the land itself. (This again suggests the importance of land in the concept of *zvukový terén*.) Moving forward to a more recent example, I suggest that this equation between music and natural sound is still a meaningful discourse among South Moravian musicians.

II. b. Music and Space in Speech

Particular ways of speaking about musical expression conspire in local configurations to create a sense of place in musical space that indexes authenticity. I focus here on two performances of Zuzana Lapčíková, a well known singer and performer on the cimbalom. Lapčíková is also known for her eclectic fusion of Moravian songs with Slovakian Roma and American jazz inflections. At her June 1, 2006, performance the program notes identified Lapčíková as a native [*rodačka*] of *Moravské slovácko*, as well as "our most requested folkloric

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[11] Much later, the composer and ethnologist Leoš Janáček compared north Moravian dances to an innocent flower: "I knew where I had recognized that yet hidden flower, of wee and sweet form and innocent colors—our dances" (Janáček 1955 [1891], 597). In a letter to his collaborator Hynek Bím on 14 June 1906, Janáček lamented the lack of affordable editions of folk song available to a wider public: "It will be necessary to take the work to a cheaper outlet. To listen to the song as to the song of the birds. The bird entertains for free" (quoted in Vysloužil 1955, 65; Holý 1978, 109 n. 19). Just as flowers and birds may be sold in markets, this suggests that elements of the soundscape, in this case including folk song, can have economic as well as aesthetic value.

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cimbál player and singer." This clearly located her musical beginnings and inspirations in traditional Moravian music, thus granting her authority via birthright in the genre of folklore.[12]

The word *rodačka* [female, native to a place] as a descriptor for Lapčíková was important (see Johnston 2008, 269, for further discussion). Identifying Lapčíková as a *rodačka* not only placed her as a local, suggests that she is "descended from" people in that place. As a "native," she had the authority to speak on behalf of—or, more accurately, to music on behalf of—*slovácko*. If this is so, then songs become a metonym for place in South Moravia.[13] As Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 36) observe, "metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves the function of providing understanding." Metonymies create understandings that focus a speaker "more specifically on certain aspects of what is being referred to" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 37): in this case, the sound aspects of places. The interrelation of people and place extends to music, and in many cases, places are understood in terms of their songs.

In performances of the music from this particular album, which I attended in 2005, the performance space was linked to the rural places of Moravia. The stage featured a backdrop that matched the cover of the 2000 album *Morava*. To add dimension to the flat backdrop of the landscape, a row of blue lights that visually echoed the undulation of a hilly landscape was placed behind the performers. When combined with the live performance of songs closely linked to the natural soundscape, these effectively transported the performance into a songspace of rural South Moravia.

Though not divorced by physical distance from the natural surroundings, the musical performance created a "place-bound experience" (Wrazen 2007, 187) of local nostalgia for the continuing validity of a folkloric past in the modern present. In other words, the relationship of nature, soundscape, and the place of the South Moravian village acoustic community has not only remained strong but enacted in the present.

II. c. "Natural" song as World Resource[14]

The 2000 album of cimbalom player Dalibor Štrunc recasts the South Moravian soundscape into the spatial realm of globalized world music. The album's title *Prameny* might be

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[12] All quotes in this paragraph are translations from the program note signed by Petr Ch. Kalina.
[13] Metonyms are language devices that "use one entity to refer to another that is related to it" (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 35).
[14] See also Seeger 1987, 61–63.

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translated as *Sources* or *Springs*. Most of the songs are composed by Štrunc, and throughout the songs and liner notes he uses natural metaphors to connect music with flow, rivers, and water. This conception suggests a link to a putatively globalized discourse of "world music."[15] Štrunc compares music to a "great river for which the watershed is the entire world" (liner notes). This may play into new-age, or spiritual, associations with world music in Moravia, but it also plays on the Czech discourse of music and the natural realm. The songs are a "natural" element of Štrunc's music that, reminiscent of Sušil's songs, are drawn from a collective human spring. This plays into a unique integration of Moravian musical characteristics with other "streams" of music like Irish folk (mentioned in the liner notes).[16]

According to Štrunc, the songs and instrumentals on the album develop a sort of natural flow. This can be heard in the first song, *"Pramen"* (Spring), with a text by the poet František Hrubín. Various voices, or confluent streams of music, seem to join and Štrunc invites us to listen:

Nežli řeka zahučí,	Before the river will roar,
zpívá pramen osamělý,	A spring sings alone;
než se rozezpívá strom,	Before a tree bursts into song,
dřív se lístky rozševelí.	Each little leaf must whisper.

The poem by Hrubín, chosen as a song text, suggests that soundmarks of the landscape are tantamount to music. In fact, music springs from the natural world. Reflecting the ideology of global connectedness, the lyric symbolizes the joining together of the various streams into one—as Štrunc puts it: "Rivulets and brooks springing from the most diverse places around the world, and most varied parts of the soul, join in its [music's] powerful current" (liner notes, my translation). The impression is communicated through multitracking on the album to create a confluence of female voices, English horn, tarogáto, soprano sax, and bassoon, over the rolling accompaniment of the cimbalom, bass, and didgeridoo.

[15] The idea parallels idealized conceptions of globalization that implicate world music as a force to unite humans and create equality (Stokes 2003, 297). Steger critiques this as an idealistic and unitary narrative about globalization (Steger 2003, 110 ff.).

[16] It also seems to be an example of Veit Erlmann's observation about the underlying "samenesses" celebrated by world music as a global aesthetic. Commenting on concerts at world music festivals, he observes that "while the concerts celebrate the diversity of artistic expression in the world's cultures, this celebration of difference conceals as it rests on a more fundamental 'sameness'" (Erlmann 1996, 477).

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III. Conclusions

In this presentation I have elaborated the concept of sound terrains, and I have considered the historical discourses of nature that pervade the ecosystem of South Moravian songs. Although the conceptions I have explored here seem to draw on historical changes, many further questions might be asked. If the soundscape represents a particular hearing of the present, why has it been "traditionalized" to match visions of how the South Moravian wine region should look, feel, and sound for tourists? Other recent acoustemological studies have taken more experiential and social approaches that, as Matt Sakakeeny puts it, "underscore the significance of sound less as a point of consensus than of negotiation" (Sakakeeny 2010, 3). Along these lines, a myriad of other understandings about the soundscape–place–music relationship should be investigated. If sound terrains are ways of hearing, these South Moravian sound terrains certainly reflect or generate various dominant perspectives, and we should ask what sounds have, consciously or not, been "tuned out" of this soundscape. For example, despite its obvious importance to this style, the songs and sounds of Roma life are rarely if ever acknowledged. This suggests that the soundscape does not just echo the sounds within it, but it may also be resounding with the silences of those silenced from it. In addition, while there are many male instrumental virtuosos, Lapčíková is the exception as a female instrumentalist. We might ask what sorts of discourses or other cultural processes of the soundscape tend to silence these types of fringe voices.

One reason that I have taken a broad, integrative approach in this presentation is the attempt to go beyond the analysis of texts and the categorization of songs. As I have suggested, historical thinking and tropes of place appear to structure particular ways of hearing music in the South Moravian "sound terrain." These ways of organizing musical thought are apparent at the surface level of recording packages to stage sets, to the level of musical sound and to domains of speech and thought about music. Whatever the reasons for this link, nature and sound terrains offer meaningful structures for conceptualizing the musical "echosystem" and place of South Moravia.

Thank you for listening!

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