

Pedelty, Mark. *Ecomusicology: Rock, Folk, and the Environment*. Philadelphia: Temple U P, 2012.

What better way to grab an individual's or a community's attention regarding environmental activism than through music? While early rock and roll preferred to sing about hops, cars, teen angels, motorcycles, and surfboards, rock and folk musicians of the late 1960s and early 1970s introduced a number of songs—Jessie Colin Young and the Youngbloods' "Get Together," Buffalo Springfield's "For What It's Worth," Barry McGuire's "Eve of Destruction," Marvin Gaye's "What's Goin' On?," to name only a few—whose lyrics challenged listeners to think about more than sex and cars and to think about themselves as an integral part of the world, responsible for acts that could destroy it and capable of acts that could preserve and restore it. In 1970, Joni Mitchell bemoaned a world in which people were paving "paradise to put up a parking lot" and where all the trees were being put in a "tree museum" and people were being charged "fifty cents just to see 'em."

Who listened to Mitchell's catchy folk tune? What happened when people bought *Ladies of the Canyon*—Mitchell's third album on which this song is found—and heard other songs that plead for an awareness of human interconnectedness to the natural world? Did people listen to "Big Yellow Taxi" and "The Circle Game"—even "Woodstock" is an anthem to the organic connection of humankind and nature—and begin to think of their relationship with nature in a different, more organic, and less mechanistic fashion?

In this elegantly argued book, Pedelty, associate professor of mass communication and anthropology at the University of Minnesota, probes deeply the relationship between music, especially rock and folk, and the environment. Is there a relationship between popular music and the environment? If so, then "how might music actually promote and inspire the sort of collective action needed to make our towns, cities, and nations more sustainable?" (5).

Ecomusicology, Pedelty points out, is "the study of music, culture, and nature in all the complexities of those terms. Ecomusicology considers musical and sonic issues, both textual and performative, related to ecology and the natural environment" (6). With this broad definition in hand, he launches into a tuneful exploration of all aspects of music—global, national, regional, local—and examines the ways in which audiences and performers work together to make music that helps create awareness of environmental concerns and that helps shape a response to those concerns. His book deals with "communication: music as a means of mediating environmental matters; art: music as creative, aesthetic, symbolic, and affective expression of environmental meanings; and, advocacy: music as an attempt to inform, inspire, and persuade audiences" (7).

Is one genre of music—rock, folk, hip-hop, country, blues, jazz, classical, to name only a few—more effective at weaving together these various aspects? Is one genre more effective in moving individuals toward action? Does one genre, in the very ways the music is made, offer a more effective example of sustainable practice? That is, might a rock band that travels with (literally) tons of equipment and people leave a larger carbon footprint than a single folk performer who travels with her guitar and uses the soundboard at the venues at which she arrives to play? Is folk music inherently—given its musical styles, the clarity of its sound that enables listeners to hear a song's lyrics clearly—a genre of music whose aesthetic and affective properties communicate a message of sustainability? Stated even more plainly: Joni Mitchell or The Beatles? Pedelty ranges over a number of genres of music as well as a variety of

well-known musicians—from U2, Jack Johnson, Sheryl Crow, and Soundgarden to Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger, and Ani DiFranco—in his quest to discover whether rock or folk or another genre achieves more sustainable music.

Yet, the great value of Pedelty's book is that it is not simply a collection of dry-as-dust theoretical speculations about these matters. True to his field work roots, Pedelty himself straps on a guitar in order to make music and to participate in a local music scene. First, he discovers—and this is one of the most significant and enduring insights in his book and all musicians need to write this message in bold letters on their set lists to remind them of its deep truth—"audiences make music through listening, dancing, downloading, and playing recorded music in social contexts" (10). Second, Pedelty finds that "at the local level, we have no one to rely on but ourselves...What we need most are better ways to coordinate and apply those talents [music, activism, environmental stewards] toward the creation and maintenance of cleaner water, clearer air, diverse habitats, and environmental justice" (198).

On the one hand, Pedelty's book pedals a pretty simple message with which any reader who grew up in the 1960s will resonate: music is a change agent and can be used to bring people together, tear people apart, or advocate for particular issues. On the other hand, Pedelty encourages listeners and readers to look far below the surface of music to see the ways that interacts with other arts and the ways environment creates music just as music creates environment. Pedelty urges us to get up off our chairs and dance, sing, clap, dig, vote, and record as we move from being passive recipients of music to being active creators of the soundscape of our lives.

- Henry L. Carrigan, Jr., *Northwestern University*