

REVIEW OF THE 48TH WORLD CONFERENCE OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL FOR TRADITIONS OF MUSIC AND DANCE

Yang Bo [杨波]¹

Abstract

The International Council for Traditions of Music and Dance (ICTMD) is a global scholarly organization dedicated to the study, documentation, and promotion of music and dance traditions worldwide. Originally founded in 1947 as the International Council for Traditional Music (ICTM), it was renamed in 2023 to reflect its commitment to both music and dance research. ICTMD fosters interdisciplinary collaboration among ethnomusicologists, dance scholars, and practitioners through conferences, study groups, and publications, supporting the study, practice, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of diverse music and dance traditions across cultures. The 48th ICTMD World Conference was held in Wellington, Aotearoa New Zealand, from 9 to 15 January 2025, bringing together scholars, performers, and practitioners from diverse backgrounds to explore global perspectives on music and dance. Notably, this marked the first time the ICTMD World Conference was hosted in New Zealand. Organized by Te Herenga Waka, Victoria University of Wellington, and Te Kōkī, the New Zealand School of Music, the conference aimed to foster interdisciplinary dialogue, showcase new research, and strengthen connections between academia and performing arts communities.

Keywords

ICTMD, Wellington conference, themes, performances, reviewing

THE CONFERENCE THEMES

The conference themes generated extensive discussion and engagement, with over a thousand submissions covering the following topics:

- a) Indigenous Peoples' Music and Dance
- b) Environment, Place, Displacement, and Relocation
- c) Translation, Inclusivity, and Reception
- d) Dance, Movement, Gesture, and Embodiment
- e) Technologies of Sound, Music, Movement, and Dance
- f) Alternative Approaches and Methods in Research, Education, and Knowledge Dissemination
- g) New Research

As both a presenter and a volunteer, I had the privilege of welcoming 522 scholars and practitioners to Wellington, alongside 258 online participants, bringing the total number of registered attendees to 780, and with participants from some 85 countries. With the inclusion of performers and additional contributors, the overall engagement in the conference exceeded 800 participants. More importantly, I was grateful for the opportunity to learn from scholars worldwide, exchanging ideas and perspectives with individuals from diverse backgrounds. The experience was both enriching and inspiring, reinforcing the significance of cross-cultural *kōrero* (talk, discussion, meeting) in the study of music and dance.

The conference opened with New Zealand's Indigenous Māori *kapa haka* (performing arts) and joyful Samoan music and dance, followed by the powerful keynote address given by Jerome Kavanagh and Ruiha Turner, titled *Oro Atua Wānanga Rongoā Puoro: Reviving Ancestral*

¹ Yang Bo was a volunteer working with the organisers of the reviewed event. More information can be obtained via email to antonioyang22@gmail.com.

Sound Practices in Modern Times. The keynote set the tone for the conference by emphasizing the importance of reviving and preserving ancestral sound practices in contemporary contexts. Kavanagh and Turner, both experts in Māori music and taonga pūoro (Māori musical instruments), discussed how ancestral sound practices are not merely historical artifacts but living, breathing elements of cultural identity. They highlighted the role of sound in healing, community building, and cultural transmission, leaving a lasting impression on participants.

The conference was artfully conceived and meticulously orchestrated, offering participants not only the opportunity to present their research and engage in scholarly discourse but also a diverse array of interactive activities. These encompassed Study Group meetings, workshops, and film screenings, alongside a vibrant program of music and dance performances, fostering both academic exchange and artistic engagement. In the following, I wish to convey my reflections on the conference from my point as both a participant and a volunteer.

CONFERENCE SESSIONS: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY EXPLORATION OF MUSIC AND DANCE

The conference's sessions and topics showed remarkable diversity in terms of geographic focus, subject areas, and methodologies. The conference included sessions on Indigenous music and dance, gender and politics, and technology and innovation, reflecting a commitment to addressing contemporary issues in music and dance studies. The emphasis on cross-cultural collaboration and interdisciplinary approaches also highlighted the importance of diverse perspectives for understanding the complexity of global music and dance practices. The following four categories do not encompass all the topics discussed at the conference; instead, they highlight the ones that left a strong impression on me, and I would like to share my thoughts on them.

REGIONAL MUSIC AND DANCE STUDIES

The conference showcases a strong emphasis on regional and cultural diversity, highlighting music and dance practices across various geographical and social contexts. Sessions explore Asian music, such as *Ceremonial Music and Narrative Song in East Asia* and *Concepts, Posture & Safeguarding in China & Malaysia*. African music and dance are also well represented with panels such as *Musics in Africa* and *Music and Dance Education in Africa*. Additionally, Indigenous music and dance traditions receive significant attention through sessions such as *Indigenous Music and Dance in Changing Contexts* and *Indigenous Voices and Song Collections*. Other regions, including the Pacific, Latin America, and the Balkans, are explored through topics such as *Pacific Music Practices*, *Music and Dance Research in Papua New Guinea*, *Music and Dance in Chile and Brazil*, and *Imagining Diasporic Balkan Communities through Dance*.

THEMES OF RITUAL, IDENTITY, AND HERITAGE

The conference extensively explores the intersections of ritual, identity, and heritage in music and dance, reflecting on cultural practices, historical transformations, and community connections. Topics such as *Ritual and Performance* and *Music, Water, and Ritual* examined the role of ritual in shaping musical traditions, while *Tensions and Entanglements in Chinese Music and Poetry* and *Music, Memory, and Identity* delved into the ways music expresses personal and collective identity. Heritage preservation is a key concern, with sessions such as *Safeguarding Intangible Cultural Heritage* and *Decolonizing, Deconstructing and Dismantling Hegemonic Music Narratives* addressing efforts to sustain and reinterpret musical legacies.

MUSIC, TECHNOLOGY, AND INNOVATION

The conference also explored the relationship between music, technology, and innovation,

showcasing how advancements in digital tools, media, and sound technologies influence musical practices and research. Sessions such as *Global Musics, Dance, and Technology* and *Sounds and Technologies* explore how technology affects performance, dissemination, and reception. Topics such as *Digital Musicologies* and *Archives and Digital Technologies* examined the role of digital archives and data preservation in safeguarding musical heritage. Additionally, *The Role of Technologies in Keeping Communities Vital* and *Music, Dance, Communities, and Technologies* addressed how technology fosters cultural sustainability and community engagement. These discussions underscored the vital role of technology in researching, disseminating, and preserving music and dance.

GENDER, POLITICS, AND EMPOWERMENT

This section of the conference delves into the intersections of gender, power, and performance within music and dance. This section explored how music and dance serve as platforms for expressing and challenging gender identities and political ideologies. Topics include the role of women and queer voices in performance, the empowerment through artistic expression, and the political dimensions of music and dance in contexts of resistance and inclusion. For example, sessions such as *Women, Gender, Voices* examined the representation of women in music and dance, while *Queer-feminist Troubles in the Field* addressed the challenges and opportunities of queer-feminist approaches in performance. Other topics, such as *Bodies, Gender, Empowerment* and *Ideologies of Resistance and Inclusion*, highlighted how music and dance can be tools for social change, challenging dominant narratives and fostering inclusivity.

This conference also provided a range of Study Groups that facilitated knowledge exchange among participants, benefiting early career scholars like me. Covering diverse regions and themes—such as Indigenous music, musical instruments, and applied ethnomusicology—these discussions explored traditions, methodologies, and interdisciplinary approaches. Key topics included safeguarding intangible heritage, social inclusion, and the impact of technology on music research. Most importantly, established scholars openly shared their expertise, fostering collaboration and deeper understanding.

In addition to the above, two plenary sessions were also significant in emphasizing the themes and aims of the conference. These plenary sessions examined the essential role of Indigenous music, arts, and language in education, cultural revitalization, and well-being. *Learning & Sharing Indigenous Knowledge: Music, Language & Arts* brought together scholars and community-based researchers to explore how creative practices support decolonization, equitable education, and cultural sustainability, emphasizing the deep connections between artistic expression, language revitalization, and Indigenous knowledge systems. *Healing, Health & Wellbeing: Indigenous Perspectives on Music & Dance* extended these discussions, focusing on music and dance as pathways to healing and holistic well-being. Speakers shared stories of learning, transmission, and resilience, underscoring how Indigenous practices foster cultural resurgence and address the impact of colonialism. Both sessions reaffirmed the power of music and dance as vital expressions of Indigenous identity, community, and holistic wellness.

PERFORMANCE: MUSIC AND DANCE FEAST

One of the most memorable highlights of the conference was the series of music and dance performances that captivated the audience with their diversity and cultural richness. Each evening, participants gathered to experience magnificent performances from artists representing different cultures. Among them, three performances stood out for their artistic excellence and profound impact.

The opening concert set the stage with an outstanding performance by six Chinese music performers from the Central Conservatory of Music in Beijing. The musicians showcased the beauty of traditional Chinese instruments with remarkable technical prowess. The program

featured a delicate balance of tranquil and exhilarating pieces, drawing the audience into the essence of Chinese musical heritage. The two full ensemble pieces, in particular, elevated the concert to its climax, celebrating the successful opening of the ICTMD 2025 conference.

The second evening introduced an unforgettable performance that came from the Mi'kmaw Delegation (Graham Marshall, Austin Christmas, and Leim Joe) of Cape Breton. Accompanied solely by drums, their powerful vocals conveyed deep emotion and energy through rhythm and melody. A particularly moving moment occurred when Māori performer Jerome Kavanagh joined them, playing taonga pūoro to create a seamless musical bridge between two distant cultures. This collaboration fully demonstrated the cohesiveness of music and left a lasting impression on the audience.

Another mesmerizing performance of music and dance was presented by the First Nations Australian Delegation. Led by Rupert Manmurulu in collaboration with Dr. Reuben Brown, the Inyjalarrku “Mermaid” singers and dancers from Goulburn Island in Arnhem Land performed Australian Indigenous songs and dances from diverse regions and traditions. With characteristic instrumentation—percussion and the didgeridoo—their performance was profoundly moving. The intensity of the performers’ expressions and the characteristic and representative dance movements offered important insights into dance from Australia. Complementing this, Warlpiri women from the Tanami Desert (in collaboration with Dr. Georgia Curran) and Mayi singers and dancers from central New South Wales brought their own regional dance forms, embodying cultural heritage through each rhythmic movement. Even without understanding the lyrics, the audience was immersed in the profound emotional depth of these First Nations traditions. As an ethnomusicologist, I was also impressed by the dedication and hands-on research approach demonstrated by Dr. Brown and Dr. Curran.

Beyond these standout performances, the festival continued to offer a wealth of musical and cultural experiences. The Javanese dance segment, performed by the Triadhika Productions delegation from Jakarta and Gamelan Padhang Moncar from Victoria University of Wellington, enchanted the audience with graceful movements and subtle orchestration. A large-scale performance by Mekar Bhuana and involving many ICTMD members showcased the vibrant traditions of Balinese music and dance.

Adding to the diversity, Professor Randy Lee and Professor Welson Tremura delivered an exhilarating Brazilian-focused performance, featuring trumpet melodies and dynamic guitar rhythms. Meanwhile, Professor Kim Cunio and Heather Lee from the New Zealand School of Music presented a performance taken from the Bhagavad Gita, enveloping the audience in an ethereal and meditative musical experience.

The conference also featured a range of workshops and film screenings that provided attendees with opportunities for additional modes of research engagement. The conference workshops offered immersive, hands-on experiences across diverse musical and cultural traditions. Participants engaged in interactive sessions such as guqin playing (China), Angklung music (Indonesia), Balinese dance and gamelan, and Maskandi guitar, deepening their appreciation of global performance practices. Workshops also explored Indigenous traditions, for instance, Mi'kmaw songs, dances, and language. These workshops fostered cross-cultural exchange and deeper engagement with music, dance, and research methodologies. The film screenings showcased a diverse array of musical and cultural narratives from around the world. Documentaries explored Indigenous traditions, ritual performances, and music’s role in cultural revival.

In conclusion, the 48th ICTMD World Conference in Wellington was a resounding success, bringing together a global community of scholars, performers, and practitioners to engage in a rich exchange of ideas and performances. The diverse range of sessions, workshops, and performances allowed for a comprehensive exploration of music and dance traditions from around the world, with an emphasis on cross-cultural dialogue, innovation, and community engagement. Special congratulations are due to the chair of local arrangements, Brian Diettrich,

and the programme co-chairs, Marcia Ostashewski and Kirsty Gillespie, whose leadership and dedication were key in ensuring the smooth organization and execution of this impactful event.

As an ethnomusicologist, presenter, and volunteer, I had the invaluable opportunity to immerse myself in this global learning experience, gaining new insights from experts in the field and participating in meaningful discussions. This conference not only deepened my understanding of global music and dance practices but also expanded my appreciation for their role in cultural identity, social change, and community healing.

Looking ahead, I eagerly anticipate joining the ICTMD World Conference again in 2027, when it will be held in Santiago, Chile. The experience in Wellington has truly been enriching, and I am excited to continue contributing to and learning from this incredible international community.