



Dr Marcia Ostashewski and the Centre for Sound Communities



Dr Marcia Ostashewski is the founding director of the **Centre for Sound Communities (CSC)** at **Cape Breton University**, Canada. The CSC is an arts-based social innovation hub that uses collaborative, participatory ethnomusicology research to work with and support equity-deserving communities and facilitate decolonisation and reconciliation within the music industry.

In this podcast, Marcia tells us about her journey to becoming an ethnomusicologist, and we'll hear from her colleagues and research assistants who share their advice for those of you who are interested in this field.

Break the podcast down:

00:54: Hello, Marcia, welcome to the Futurum Careers podcast. How are you today?

Marcia: Hi Joe, it's so nice to be here with you. I'm feeling good.

Could you kick things off by telling us a little bit about your background and about your journey towards becoming an ethnomusicologist and a dance ethnographer.

Marcia: Oh, sure. That's a long story, right! But growing up on the farm, my father's parents immigrated from Ukraine. My mum's family came one generation earlier, but where we were growing up on the prairies, there were many, many people of Ukrainian ancestry — recent immigrant families. So, in my family, it was really important that we carry on Ukrainian traditions. I learned as a young child to do the dancing and the singing, and I took some lessons. My dad always loved my singing. So, then he arranged for me to have these lessons.

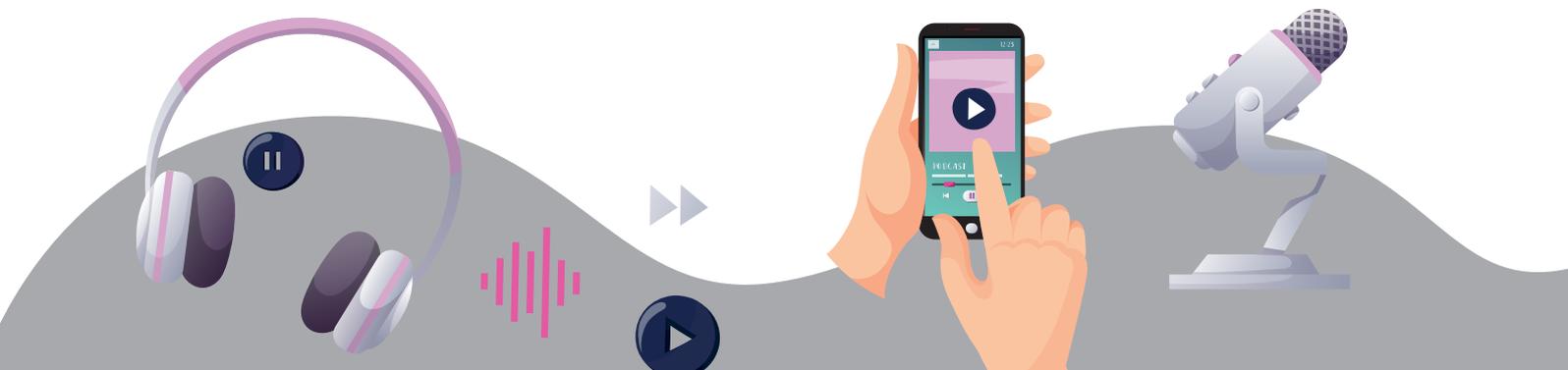
And then I was just singing at a public event, a festival, and the adjudicator happened to be a university vocal professor, and he's like, "Oh, I want you to come audition to my studio, when you're coming to university." So, I did that. I mean, I didn't even know that was a thing you could do! Anyway, so I got in to that music programme and this whole world of music that I really knew almost nothing about was open to me. And also, all of the music that had been my world was *not* in that university music space, at all. I mean, I had fantastic professors who encouraged me to explore the histories of these musics, the musics I grew up with, and the musics that we were studying and where they intersected.

And so, at the last year, I had heard about this programme that was starting up, which was ethnomusicology, and it really seemed to resonate with my interests, the questions that I had. And that's kind of how I started on that path. And then I went to grad school and the fact that I'd also danced professionally really was an additional strength.

02:57: What was your experience of university like?

Marcia: When I went to university, none of the musics that I knew were really considered music. So when I came to university to study vocal performance (opera), I mean, I loved singing and I loved performing. I was a really good theatrical performer. But for me, any time the stuff that was the music of my upbringing... it just felt always kind of uncomfortable or awkward, like bringing it into that space or acknowledging it or somehow, right? Until I had certain professors do that. And people knew that that's where I had come from, that I really didn't have the same background as all of the other students. They all did piano lessons or violin or something — Western art music — from the time they were like four or younger, right? So, it didn't feel like that was the space for it until it was invited by my professors.

And in fact, so many of the students that we teach in universities, most do not come from Western art music backgrounds. Most of the students in the schools don't have... that's not the music that these children and young adults or other university students are listening to day to day. That music is exquisite. I love it. I want us to have that be part of what we study and learn and practice in university music programmes and in school music programmes. *And many, many other musics of these many traditions and practices, and the new musics that people are creating all* →



the time around the world. That's the nature of people. Music and culture are changing all the time. I think that's really exciting. And, that's maybe the most exciting thing about music, I think. The richness and the beauty of it. Why wouldn't we be studying that? Right? That's what music is to each of us.

05:00: For young people who are considering studying ethnomusicology or pursuing this as a career, is there anything that you wish you'd known or that you'd wish you'd been told when you were starting out that might be of use to them?

Oh, sure. Yeah. First of all, my father loved — loved — my singing. He loved to hear me sing. He wanted me to... he did the singing lessons. But he wasn't thrilled that I was going to go to university for music. I mean, that's not a serious profession in his view, right? It wasn't like a teacher or a lawyer. That's what he had in mind for me, a lawyer. I remember [him] being quite upset when I chose that, actually! But I guess this is to say, think about what your possibilities are. I had no idea of the breadth of possibilities that is possible in university. I didn't even know there was a music thing until that invitation. So, I wish I could have known that so many other things would be possible. Even for me, in my career path. I went to study music, to study so I could be a singer, a performer. I didn't know that I could also potentially be a professor at a university. I didn't know I could also join that up with dance. I didn't know that I'd also be able to make films. And I could be a producer of festivals. I could run festivals. I could run museums. These are skills that I would gain just by being in that world and being open to the possibilities that were in front of me.

So, maybe the best thing to say is to be open to other potential avenues. To be listening and watching and really taking opportunities, because university is not about what you read in your books and what you memorise, or even what you research and what you write. University is about learning to learn and really having the fire, the interest, the curiosity about things really nurtured and supported. And for us to learn as students in the university that there are lots of different ways to think and lots of different ways to understand things, and that's important. But also, we connect with people near to us and around the world, and being open to different ways of being in this world and knowing and understanding is, I think, the best thing we can do for ourselves in university.

07:44: Do you have any final advice for our listeners as they go forward or anything else to add?

Along the way in my life, it has made all of the difference... none of this would have happened without the support of really key people. Without them, I wouldn't be doing this. So for people coming up, find your people. Hold on to them. And also remember to nurture those relationships all through life. Because really, ultimately, whatever we're doing here, it's

ultimately about who we are as people and about caring for one another. That really is all that matters: our relationships with other people. So that's kind of what I'd say. It's not exactly about this or that career, or this or that area of study, but it's really about... that's what life is all about.

Great. I think that's a perfect place to end. That's really important advice for everyone. Thank you very much for joining me, Marcia.
Thank you, Joe.

- *Balafon music* -

08:52: So, that was Dr Marcia Ostashevski talking about her educational journey and her advice for any of you who are interested in pursuing ethnomusicology.

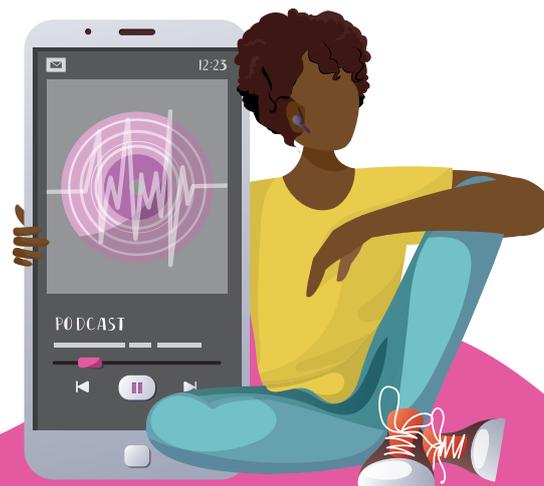
Now, the music that you can hear playing in the background is a piece called Kaira by Lassana Diabate, a virtuoso balafon player. Lassana comes from a family of balafon masters in Guinea, and he has worked closely with Marcia and the Centre for Sound Communities over the last decade.

Next, we're going to hear from some of Marcia's colleagues and students from the Centre for Sound Communities who will share their experiences of working in this field.

09:33: Graham Marshall: Hi, my name is Graham Marshall. I'm part of the research team here at the Centre for Sound Communities. The great thing about my job here is that I get to teach about my passion, I get to teach about my culture and everything that I learned since I was a child, and pass those along to the next generation, either through story or song. And that really makes my heart warm, because that is something that has been left from my ancestors to us. But it gives us the ability to tell that and to teach that to the next generations that haven't been born yet.

Do what you're passionate about. Do something that makes your heart warm. Something that gives you the ability to leave a legacy when you're retired and gone. And that doesn't mean you have to be accomplished. You have to do something for yourself. Something that is meaningful for you is the most important thing so that you can leave that legacy on for the next generations.

10:36: Jennifer Mellizo: My name is Jennifer Mellizo, and I am the education specialist at Smithsonian Folkways Recordings in Washington, D.C. We are involved in a project where we're producing and distributing albums in collaboration with the Centre for Sound Communities. For each of the albums that we produce, we're producing a corresponding educational resource. And those educational resources are called Smithsonian Folkways Music Pathways.



There are a couple of things that I love about my job. The first is that I absolutely love to learn. If I could get paid to do it, I would just be a student for the rest of my life. And so, this opportunity to do this work allows me to learn something new every single day. And I also get to learn about new music cultures that I know nothing about, which is another passion of mine. And then the other thing that I love is I get to be really, really creative. And what I put into creating these lesson plans gets distributed to a lot of kids around the country and around the world, and it's really cool to know that the impact of your work is having a wider reach.

I would say my biggest advice is to just always give yourself grace and remember that you are learning and that you are going to continue to grow, and that what you do as an educator is never going to be perfect. But the idea is just to keep learning and to keep growing and getting better. Just to be gentle with yourself is probably the best advice I can give.

12:16: Jody Stark: Hi, my name is Jody Stark, and I'm a professor of music education at the University of Manitoba at the Desautels Faculty of Music. For the Centre for Sound Communities, I'm involved in making learning resources to go with albums from culture bearers that are being produced in conjunction with the Smithsonian Folkways record label.

I love learning and growing, and I love teaching. And part of what I love about teaching is that I get to meet new students and new people, and I get to get to know them and think about what experiences would be meaningful and help them grow. And in the process of doing that, I get to grow.

I started out teaching elementary music in the school system, and I really enjoyed it. And every time a door was opened to do something a little bit deeper, I took the opportunity. So, the first thing that happened for me is someone asked me if I would teach a university class for other music teachers who taught in French, because I taught in French in the school system. And I was like, "Okay, I don't know if I'm qualified to do this, but I can ask for help and sure, I'll do it." And I stepped through the door. So my advice is just: step through the door. If an opportunity arises, try it out. And if it's not the right thing, oh well, you can stop doing it and do something else.

13:37: Michael Aucoin: My name is Michael Aucoin. I'm actually a retired music teacher, and I've taught other things. I'm a musician, a choral conductor and I play folk music still. So that's also part of my music heritage that I love very much.

I especially love working with people who maybe have never sung or done choir work, so I love to train voices. I love working with those of Acadian origin. They have this sense of music, of phrasing. They're very easy to teach.

Don't just be a consumer of music; learn to make music yourself.

14:19: Selina Kibanda: Hello, my name is Selina Kibanda and I am from Tanzania, and I'm a research assistant here at the Centre for Sound Communities. It has been a wonderful experience because everyone is really friendly here. Anyone that you meet is always ready to help you out if you are not sure about how things work. So, I feel like that is one thing that I really love about working here. And you learn new things all the time. When I started working here, I thought I would just be playing drums, but actually I had to learn about cameras and so many things. And we went to the Broadmoor theatre as well, and I had to work with the lights and everything. There's so many things that we learn here. So that's one thing that is exciting. So if you want to be part of this team, you get to explore many different things as well, not just one thing.

15:07: Next up we're going to hear from Liem Joe, a research assistant at the Centre for Sound Communities. Liem grew up in Eskasoni, the world's largest Mi'kmaw First Nation community, and here he tells us about Mi'kmaw music and culture, and about how they have influenced his life.

- *Mi'kmaw chant and drum beat* -

15:50: Hi, Liem. Welcome to the Futurum Careers podcast. Thanks for joining me today.

Yes, thank you for having me.

It's good to have you here. Can you describe to our listeners a bit about what they've just heard?

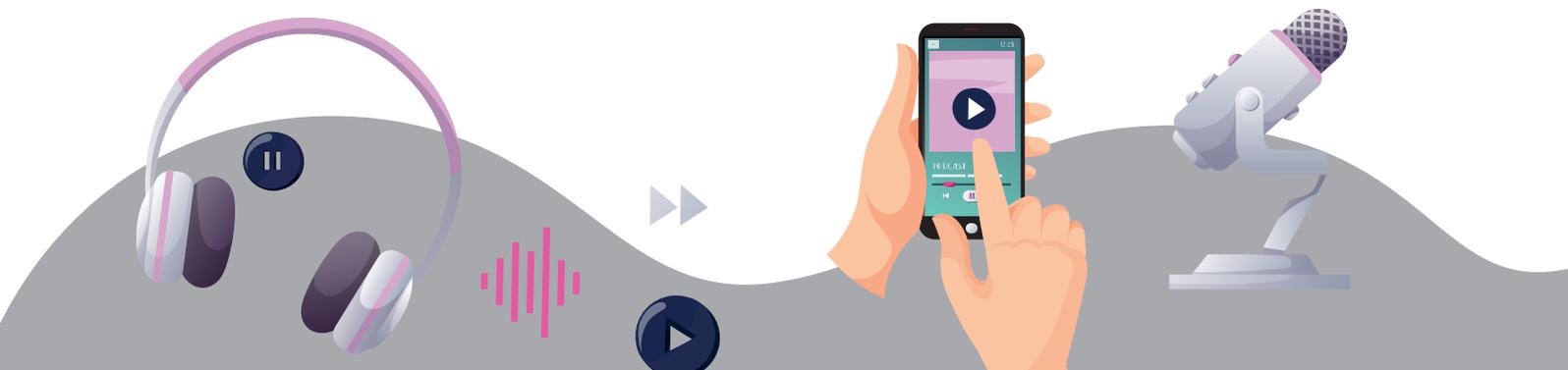
So, that was a round dance. That one was called Kwanto'te'. So, this is something you would see at a powwow on the East Coast. Most round dances are on the plains, and you would see drummers doing all their songs in round dance style. That Kwanto'te' song is one that was made for the round dance. It's one song that I know a lot of drum groups around here use.

Could you tell us a little bit more about what a powwow is?

Yeah, it's a social gathering. Most communities on the East Coast have adopted the powwow style, and it's a gathering with formalities such as drumming and dancing and singing. There are formalities that follow, but there's different activities that follow it as well. During the evening time, some people will do their own twist of events like arts and crafts type of thing and just really make use of creativity. It's pretty cool.

What role do powwows play within your community?

Powwows were not a Mi'kmaw tradition. It could have been. But because of the effects of colonisation and the residential schools, there were so many teachings lost over the years. So, I'm pretty sure in the eighties, a couple culture bearers from Mi'kmaq went over into the western plains to learn their teachings. So, they brought back the powwow, they brought back the drum, they brought back certain dances. My great grandmother, Sarah Denny, she was a part of that revitalisation. And she brought back the Ko'jua. The Ko'jua is one social dance that is starting to be adopted into powwows and one that is central to Mi'kmaw. The role that comes



with the powwow is revitalisation, proudness of culture, and to keep the generations interested in our culture. As much as colonisation has taken away from our people, our people adapted and were able to find a way to keep our culture strong. I believe that's why they're so essential and so important to Mi'kmaq people, especially, is because they play a huge role in revitalising our culture and the language.

18:28: In your role as a research assistant at the Centre for Sound Communities, is this the kind of thing that you're working on?

Yes, for sure. I've only learned about some of the things that I've been talking about from oral teachings from certain individuals that we've come across in our research. And not all research is looking through books. A lot of what I've learned has been through social interactions with knowledge holders all across Unama'ki. And it's in this role that I'm starting to learn about my culture, especially where the origins come from. And that's where I take most interest, I think.

How long have you been playing the drum and learning the chants? Has that been something you've been around your whole life or is it a more recent thing?

It's more recent me taking up and embracing it, but I've always been part of it. I've always heard the chants. But a couple years ago, somebody told me, "If you don't take a hold of your culture now, you will regret it, because every time you look at somebody and you're proud of them, but you're not proud of yourself, you're missing out." So I picked up the drum and started singing.

I really enjoy drumming, especially as I start to learn more about the drum and learn about more different teachings from different knowledge holders around the area. It's starting to become apparent that it's more than just singing, and it's more than just music. For me, it's a sort of prayer in a way, and I feel when you're singing for the people and you have a purpose, when you're singing for the people, it's a lot more meaningful.

Read Marcia's article and download her activity sheet and PowerPoint at [futurumcareers.com/how-can-innovative-ethnomusicology-research-help-foster-diversity-inclusivity-and-equity-in-the-music-industry](https://www.futurumcareers.com/how-can-innovative-ethnomusicology-research-help-foster-diversity-inclusivity-and-equity-in-the-music-industry)

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