



Soundscapes of the People: A Musical Ethnography of Pueblo, Colorado

The College of Music's American Music Research Center at the University of Colorado Boulder proposes a comprehensive study of the music and music making of Pueblo, CO and the surrounding county. Led by CU ethnomusicologists Drs. Susan Thomas and Austin Okigbo along with Dr. Xochitl Chavez, from the University of California, Riverside, the study will document the music and culture of the city of Pueblo, Colorado and its immediate vicinity. Researchers will interview community members who are current and past participants in musical activities and will create a digital archive of interviews and performances that will be accessible to the general public through the University of Colorado Libraries. The project is also partnering with the Latino History Project and K-12 educators to create educational and curricular materials.

Pueblo's story is integrally tied to the nation's. The city can be thought of as occupying a double "borderland," both between North and South--as it once stood on the U.S. border with Mexico--and between East and West--the "rails and nails" produced at the city's steel mill and the region's quite literally provided the key to open Colorado's Gateway to the West. Pueblo's industrialization and importance of the Colorado Fuel and Iron steel plant made the city a



beacon of 20th century modernism and also a draw for waves of immigrants from Europe, the eastern United States, surrounding rural areas, and Mexico and Central America. Pueblo is surrounded by quality farmland and the city's economy and culture is marked by both industrial and agricultural labor and the struggles of workers to secure and retain their rights. In spite of the region's centrality in the U.S.'s economic, geographic, and military development and its role in shaping narratives of the American West, Pueblo's own cultural history and its contributions have largely been lost and overlooked. Looking to music as a tool for community building and activism, and as the soundscape for Pueblo's experiences of industrialization and cosmopolitanism as well as economic decline and isolation, this project aims to shed light on the role of music in shaping the city in the past, helps us to better understand the present, and suggests new paths for the future.

Research Team

Dr. Susan Thomas is Director of the American Music Research Center and Professor of musicology at the University of Colorado Boulder. With research specializations in Cuban, Latin American, and Latinx music as well as music and gender studies, she is trained in both ethnographic and historical methodologies. Prior to coming to CU Boulder, Thomas was Professor of Musicology & Women's Studies at the University of Georgia. There, she was Co-Director of the Athens Music Project, a hyper-local research initiative that used collaborative community-based ethnographic methods to conduct oral histories of Athens-based musicians, with a particular focus on musicians from underrepresented communities. Those oral histories were digitized and made accessible to the community as well as academics, and the program developed multiple performance and educational outreach opportunities to bring greater attention to the city of Athens and the artistic and economic impact of its music scene.



Dr. Austin C. Okigbo is Associate Professor of ethnomusicology at the College of Music at University of Colorado, Boulder. He has a specialty in African and African American music, and religious music studies in general. He has an ongoing project on world music of the Front Range, which documents music of ethnic and immigrant communities in the Front Range of Colorado. The grassroots/community-based research and documentation project brings to light Colorado's cosmopolitanism that is often underrepresented in literature.



Dr. Xóchitl C. Chávez is the first tenure track Chicanx assistant professor in the Department of Music at the University of California, Riverside. She is a scholar of expressive culture and performance, specializing in Indigenous communities from southern Mexico and transnational migration. Her current work focuses on second-generation Zapotec brass bands in Los Angeles, California and transborder relationships with their communities of origin in Oaxaca, Mexico. An alumna of CU Boulder, Dr. Chávez is a native of Pueblo, Colorado and has maintained strong community ties through her work with the Colorado State Fair Fiesta Day Committee and social justice advocacy. From 2104-2017, Dr. Chávez worked with the Smithsonian Institution as a Bilingual Digital Curator and Content Specialist for the Smithsonian Latino Center Live Mobile Broadcast Series (2014-2017).



Support the Project

Working with CU Boulder’s Dr. Austin Okigbo, and Dr. Xochitl Chávez from the University of California, Riverside (herself a Pueblo native and CU alum), we aim to document the rich musical and cultural heritage of Pueblo and its many diverse communities.

How can you help?

Please consider supporting the project by sharing this information with potential collaborators, donors, and community partners or by making a donation. Additional information, downloadable documents, and details about making a donation can be found at www.colorado.edu/amrc/pueblo. We invite you to explore the site and join us on this exciting project.

Learn More

If you have additional questions about the American Music Research Center or the “Soundscapes of the People: A Musical Ethnography of Pueblo, Colorado” contact Susan Thomas, Director of the American Music Research Center, susan.thomas-1@colorado.edu.