

**Singing for Peace: A Biographic-Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and Her
Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries**

by

Raymond Scott Sexton

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Approved by

Dr. Jane M. Kuehne, Chair, Associate Professor of Music Education
Dr. Nancy H. Barry, Professor of Music Education
Dr. Matthew Hoch, Professor of Voice
Dr. Hannah C. Baggett, Associate Professor of Research Methods

Abstract

The purpose of this biographic-narrative study was to examine the musical stories and lived experiences of Mary Cay Brass and her work with choral singing and peacebuilding within her choir programs in the United States and Balkan Europe. Mary Cay Brass's choral singing and peacebuilding work is generally defined as her lifework in using Balkan choral music to promote peace and cultural understanding.

Two overarching questions guided this study: (1) How did Balkan music experiences contribute to the development of Mary Cay Brass as a choral music educator and peacebuilding facilitator? (2) What are the key stories surrounding Mary Cay Brass's singing and peacebuilding experiences in North America and Balkan Europe? This study utilized a qualitative research approach through the lens of biographic-narrative inquiry. I interviewed Mary Cay Brass and some of her closest colleagues and created a narrative life history of her peacebuilding work through Balkan music. This study also included an examination of personal field notes, her personal journal writings, choir concert programs, local newspaper, photos, and reel to reel recordings.

As mentioned, the focus participant of my study was Mary Cay Brass, with specific examination of her peacebuilding work. Brass is a middle-aged, White woman currently living in Southeastern Vermont. She has over forty years of experiences as a teacher and performer. Through biographic-narrative analysis and structural hypotheses, strong interest in Balkan music, an affinity for teaching cultural understanding, and using music and peacebuilding emerged as reasons for the Brass' career development. Finally, tenants of Gillian Howell's (2021) harmonious relations music and peacebuilding framework helped discuss and highlight Brass' most important singing and peacebuilding experiences.

Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my grandmothers, Jean Irizarry and Mary Sexton. “Grams” went to heaven during my doctoral studies and taught me to appreciate and love people from all cultures. “Granny” went to heaven one week before the completion of my dissertation and taught me to always love and help others. I love and miss you both.

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I would be remiss to not offer my gratitude to Mary Cay Brass. She personally introduced to me to another musical world and inspired me to view music education from a different perspective. I am also very grateful that she spent countless hours sharing her story through interviews, emails, and many picture and document scans as we pieced together her story.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents, Raymond and Lydia Sexton. They have offered me their unwavering love and support from day one. They often sacrificed so that I could have

the best opportunities, especially in my musical education. I know they are proud of me; however, I am even more proud of them for always modeling a hard work ethic in all they do.

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
|---------|--|
| CONTACT | Contact Transformation Across Cultures |
| ESL | English as a Second Language |
| KUD | Kulturno Umjetnicko Drustvo |
| SIT | School of International Training |

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We have hoped through our singing of these beautiful songs to “humanize” the peoples of the former Yugoslavia; to give a picture of their lives through dance songs, love songs, wedding and ritual songs, songs of joy and sadness.... And, through our sharing of these songs, help to build some new bridges between peoples.

-Mary Cay Brass: *Balkan Bridges*¹

In 2016, Village Harmony sang a concert in Konjic, Bosnia as part of one of its international singing camps. Set in post-war Bosnia, this particular camp included both singing and peacebuilding components. The camp’s leader was Mary Cay Brass. The concert was in an outdoor amphitheater near the center of town. Local Bosnians trickled in to form an audience while the choir took its place on the concrete stage. The audience curiously stared at the choir members on the stage, not knowing what to expect. After a quick test of the sound equipment, one of the Bosnian co-leaders of the singing camp addressed the unenthused spectators. He then called Mary Cay Brass to the microphone. In her humble and unassuming demeanor, she greeted the crowd in perfect Bosnian. The Bosnian audience immediately lit up with excitement and anticipation. Mary Cay Brass led our choir through a concert of choral arrangements of local Bosnian music traditions and upbeat Appalachian and gospel songs. Unlike a traditional choral concert in the United States, the audience was very participatory, and enthusiastically sang and danced along with the Bosnian songs. Though the American songs were unfamiliar to them, they eagerly listened with appreciation. Following the concert, some of the local Bosnians hosted our choir for a large feast.

¹ Mary Cay Brass, ed., introduction to *Balkan Bridges: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria* (Brattleboro: New England Dancing Masters, 1999), i.

Mary Cay chatted in Bosnian with many of our hosts. Mary Cay helped translate as our Bosnian hosts shared inspirational stories of resiliency and forgiveness from a post-war society.

This is just one of my many musical memories with Mary Cay Brass. At the time, I was a young choral music educator. I stumbled across Mary Cay's Balkan music and peacebuilding programs by accident; I originally wanted to participate in a Village Harmony international singing camp in South Africa. When I could not attend the South African music camp, the people who handled registration at Village Harmony suggested I apply for their international music camp in Macedonia. I had to look up its location on a map and after initial research and extensive listening, I quickly became mesmerized by Balkan Music.

My initial experience in the Macedonian music camp under Mary Cay Brass's direction did more than just provide an enriching immersive music experience. It unlocked the potential for me to experience the power of music on a new level, both personally and in my teaching. Balkan music opened doors for me to experience music beyond my Western European-dominated musical training and experiences. I learned about music full of Eastern influences and cultures that represented religions other than my own. My Balkan music experiences also caused me to rethink the role of singing and its powers to spread love, peace, and unity. Learning about the complexities and history of Balkan Europe and the role of music in peacebuilding served as an example for me to use choral music as a tool to heal in a divisive American society. Most of all, Mary Cay Brass's passion for Balkan music and peacebuilding inspired me to see the world of music with a new lens. It is through the spirit of this inspiration that I wish to tell her musical story through the lens of biographic narrative inquiry.

An Overview of Mary Cay Brass's Balkan Music Journey

Mary Cay Brass is a living choral director and ethnomusicologist whose career spanned from the 1970s to the present. Brass's interest in Balkan music began as a child when she joined a folk-dance ensemble with her Croatian neighbors.² She continued to develop this interest as a student at the University of Minnesota, a place that offered numerous folk dancing opportunities in the 1970s. As a college student in Minnesota during this time, she was instrumental in starting a folk-dance ensemble that mostly focused on the performance of music and dance cultures from Balkan Europe.³ Brass graduated from the University of Minnesota with a degree in ethnomusicology and subsequently was awarded the prestigious Fulbright scholarship to study Yugoslavia's music traditions. From 1976 to 1978, Mary Cay Brass lived and studied in Croatia and Serbia. She studied at traditional music academies with ethnomusicologists and conducted fieldwork, attending cultural events throughout the region.⁴ During this time, Brass experienced the cultural diversity of the area and collected songs from numerous ethnic groups in former Yugoslav countries.

When Mary Cay Brass returned to the United States after completing her Fulbright experience, she earned a master's degree from Columbia University, where she studied Teaching English as a Second Language.⁵ During this time, she purchased an old accordion. Consequently, she experienced two newly-found musical passions: (1) accompanying the many Eastern European folk tunes that she had learned until this point in her life, and (2) learning and playing the contra band dance musical traditions of New England. She moved to Vermont and became a

² Mary Cay Brass, "Bio," accessed October 13, 2020, <https://marycaybrass.com/bio/>.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

prominent musician in the traditional music scene as a Greenfield Dance Band member, collaborating with this group and others to make several recordings.

By the mid to late 1980s, Mary Cay Brass established herself as an integral part of the traditional folk music scene in New England. In 1989, Larry Gordon invited Mary Cay Brass to teach Balkan music in his newly-founded organization Village Harmony.⁶ He started the organization one year prior as an ensemble for teenagers wishing to sing music from many cultures. In her first days with Village Harmony, Mary Cay helped Larry lead summer intensive music camps and tours for teenagers throughout New England. These music camps focused on singing songs from music cultures all over the world and sharing this music in concerts all over New England. Since its inception in 1988, Village Harmony has grown to include summer and year-round ensembles and workshops for teenagers and adults across the United States and multiple locations worldwide.⁷ Mary Cay's early association with Village Harmony provided the impetus for her to create two book compilations of the Balkan music she had been teaching: *Village Harmony: Traditional Songs of the Balkans*⁸ and *Balkan Bridges: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria*.⁹ Mary Cay Brass has been a valuable teaching member of Village Harmony for over thirty years. In addition to authoring two books, she led eight Village Harmony international music camps in the Balkans—four in Macedonia and four in Bosnia. The music camps in Bosnia simultaneously focused on traditional music cultures and the role of singing in peacebuilding.

⁶ Mary Cay Brass, "Bio," accessed October 13, 2020, <https://marycaybrass.com/bio/>.

⁷ Village Harmony, "Who We Are," accessed October 13, 2020, <https://villageharmony.org/who-we-are/>.

⁸ Mary Cay Brass, ed., *Village Harmony: Traditional Songs of the Balkans* (Marshfield: Northern Harmony Publishing, 1995).

⁹ Mary Cay Brass, ed., *Balkan Bridges: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria* (Brattleboro: New England Dancing Masters, 1999).

Mary Cay Brass and Singing/Peacebuilding

The ethnic wars that followed Yugoslavia's collapse in the 1990s proved to be catastrophic for the region. Religious and ethnic groups fought each other, primarily in Croatia and Bosnia in the early 1990s and Kosovo in the late 1990s. Brass, greatly affected by these conflicts, organized numerous benefit concerts, particularly for the war victims in Bosnia and Kosovo.¹⁰ In Mary Cay Brass's work in Balkan music in both the United States and Europe, she actively promoted music cultures from all sides of the conflicts. One of her most significant philosophies was that singing "promotes cultural understanding."¹¹ It was not uncommon for Brass to include a song based on an Islamic prayer, an orthodox chant, and a piece of Sephardic origins in one concert. When the Balkan wars ended, Brass continued to donate proceeds from her community choir concerts to peacebuilding organizations in Bosnia, among other organizations that shared her philosophy of promoting cultural understanding.¹²

In the early 2000s, Brass traveled to the Balkans to research the possibility of starting a Village Harmony singing camp in post-war Bosnia. This research resulted in four immersive singing and peacebuilding camps held across two decades in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The format of each camp was very similar. There was typically a week of rehearsals in one location followed by one or two week choir tour across the country. The repertoire included music from each main music culture in Bosnia in addition to arrangements of music from American genres. The camps' participants were a multigenerational mix of Americans and Bosnians. Choir participants usually stayed in Bosnian homestays for accommodation. In addition to singing, there was always an exchange of emotional life stories of war survival and reconciliation.

¹⁰ Mary Cay Brass, ed., introduction to *Balkan Bridges: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria* (Brattleboro: New England Dancing Masters, 1999), *i*.

¹¹ Mary Cay Brass, "Bio," accessed October 13, 2020, <https://marycaybrass.com/bio/>.

¹² *Ibid.*

Need for the Study

There is much potential for the development of the intersection of choral music education and peace education. There are some misconceptions about the role of music in peace education.¹³ Music education is experiencing many changes in technology, expression, and conceptualizing. One cannot contextualize music in these changes without including the ethnic identities and sociocultural meanings of music.¹⁴ Sandoval¹⁵ argued for the examination of music's role in peacebuilding and claimed that issues within music education and peacebuilding are often perpetuated by Eurocentric music curricula. If choral music educators focused their curricula on their students' individual identities in addition to the traditional Western European-dominated music curricular norms, music education and peace education would have a better opportunity to co-exist with better purpose and meaning.

Previous research in choral singing and peacebuilding largely focused on immigrant and refugee communities.¹⁶ In these studies, choirs were formed in refugee communities to provide a space for singing, healing, forming friendships, and assimilating into their new lives in their new countries. Both Pettan¹⁷ and Balsnes¹⁸ discussed how the refugee choirs sang music from many cultures and how it promoted cultural understanding among the choir participants. Similar

¹³ Alberto Cabedo-Mas, "Challenges and Perspectives of Peace Education in Schools: The Role of Music," *Australian Journal of Music Education* 1, (2015).

¹⁴ David Lines, *Music Education for the New Millenium: Theory and Practice Futures for Music Teaching and Learning* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2006).

¹⁵ Elaine Sandoval, "Potential Contributions of Music Education to Peacebuilding: Curricular Concerns," *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016).

¹⁶ Svanibor Pettan, "Making the Refugee Experience Different: 'Azra' and the Bosnians in Norway," in *War, Exile, Everyday Life: Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Renata Kirin and Maja Povrzanović (Zagreb, Croatia: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996); Anne H. Balsnes, "Hospitality in Multicultural Choral Singing," *International Journal of Community Music* 9, no. 2 (2016).

¹⁷ Svanibor Pettan, "Making the Refugee Experience Different: 'Azra' and the Bosnians in Norway," in *War, Exile, Everyday Life: Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Renata Kirin and Maja Povrzanović (Zagreb, Croatia: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996).

¹⁸ Anne H. Balsnes, "Hospitality in Multicultural Choral Singing," *International Journal of Community Music* 9, no. 2 (2016).

studies focused on the role of arts education and peacebuilding within the context of Balkan music and culture.¹⁹ Of particular interest is the Balandina²⁰ study. The researcher brought together Balkan youth from different ethnic groups and taught them music and dances from each other's culture, and in turn, fostered peace dialogue and healing among the participants.

Minimal research exists on Balkan choral music and peacebuilding. Robertson's²¹ ethnography illustrated the potential for peacebuilding in a choral setting in Bosnia. Bithell²² provided a narrative account of one of the first Village Harmony singing camps that Mary Cay Brass led in Bosnia. While these studies examined the stories of choirs in peacebuilding settings, there has been little research on the experiences of a choral director in a peacebuilding setting. Barrett and Stauffer²³ recognized the potential for narrative inquiry and its use of stories and experiences in research to "reconceptualize the ways in which we think about music engagement, music education, and inquiry in music education." Is there potential to reconceptualize music engagement through choral directors and their peacebuilding efforts? By examining the stories of choral directors and their work with global music in peacebuilding, using biographic-narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach, we can better understand the nuances of the lived experiences of choral directors and peacebuilding. With this understanding, choral music educators can better

¹⁹ Alexandra Balandina, "Music and Conflict Transformation in the Post-Yugoslav Era: Empowering Youth to Develop Harmonic Inter-Ethnic Relationships in Kumanovo, Macedonia," *International Journal of Community Music* 3, no. 2 (2010); Dijana Milošević, "Theatre as a Way of Creating Sense: Performance and Peacebuilding in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia," in *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict*, eds. Cynthia E. Cohen, Roberto G. Varea, and Polly O. Walker (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2011); Erica Haskell, "The Role of Applied Ethnomusicology in Post-Conflict and Post Catastrophe Communities," in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*, eds. Svanibor Pettan and Jeff T. Titon (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²⁰ Alexandra Balandina, "Music and Conflict Transformation in the Post-Yugoslav Era: Empowering Youth to Develop Harmonic Inter-Ethnic Relationships in Kumanovo, Macedonia," *International Journal of Community Music* 3, no. 2 (2010).

²¹ Craig Robertson, "Musicological, ethnography, and peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016).

²² Caroline Bithell. *A Different Voice, A Different Song* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²³ Margaret S. Barrett and Sandra L. Stauffer, eds., *Narrative Inquiry in Music Education: Troubling Uncertainty* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), 1.

incorporate strategies for using global music as a tool for cultural understanding and peace education.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this biographic-narrative study was to examine the musical stories and lived experiences of Mary Cay Brass and her work with choral singing and peacebuilding within her choir programs in the United States and Balkan Europe. Mary Cay Brass's choral singing and peacebuilding work is generally defined as her lifework in using Balkan choral music to promote peace and cultural understanding. The study was guided by two overarching questions:

1. How did Balkan music experiences contribute to the development of Mary Cay Brass as a choral music educator and peacebuilding facilitator?
2. What are the key stories surrounding Mary Cay Brass's singing and peacebuilding experiences in North America and Balkan Europe?

Limitations

Although Balkan Europe encompasses most of Southeastern Europe, the term "Balkan music" in this study includes some of the former-Yugoslav countries, mainly Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Slovenia and Montenegro's countries were also formerly part of Yugoslavia; however, Mary Cay Brass did not include many songs from these countries in her peacebuilding work. A few Bulgarian songs exist in her compilations, mainly due to the strong cultural ties with neighboring North Macedonia. However, this study will not include Bulgaria, a country whose singing traditions have been well-represented in the global music literature. Though these countries are located on the Balkan peninsula, the study will not include teaching music cultures from Albania, Greece, Romania, or Turkey. Figure 1.1 shows a map of

Balkan countries and those specifically included for this study. The countries where Mary Cay Brass lived and/or studied are marked with a black triangle.

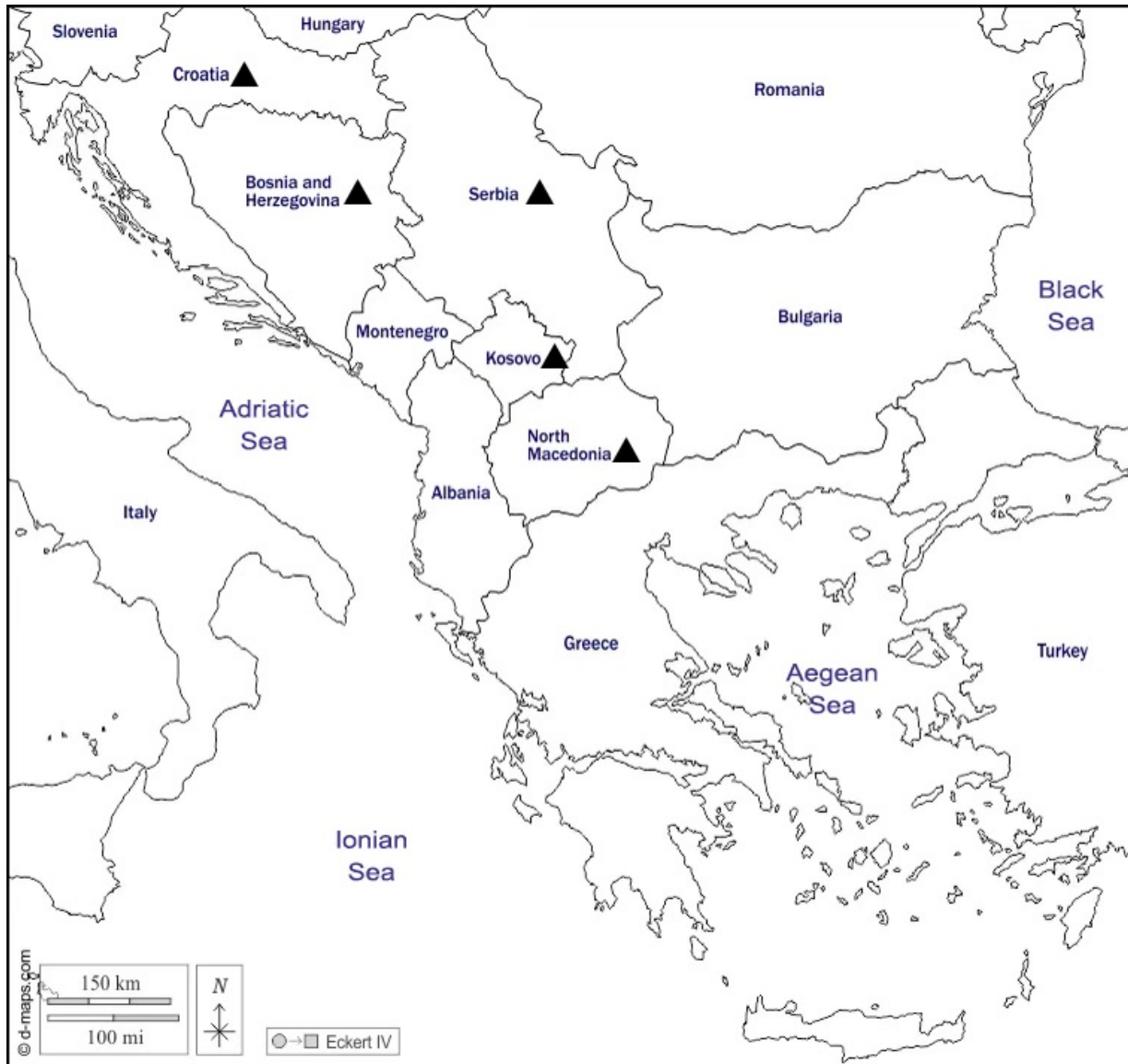


Figure 1.1. Map of the Balkan Peninsula.²⁴

Balkan music is just one part of Mary Cay Brass’s multi-faceted music career. She continues to have a successful career in community music leading choirs across Vermont and Massachusetts. In addition to American folk music traditions, these choirs sang choral music

²⁴ d-maps.com. Accessed May 10, 2021. https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=2071&lang=en

from many cultures worldwide. Further, Mary Cay Brass was an elementary music teacher for several years. Moreover, she worked with the New England Dance Masters to co-author and co-edit publications such as *Chimes of Dunkirk*. Though her contributions to the community and folk music and dance world are noteworthy, this study focused on how she has used Balkan choral music in peacebuilding settings.

Finally, I acknowledge that there are many conflict and post-conflict areas of the world. This study focused on Mary Cay Brass's choral and peacebuilding work in some of the former Yugoslav countries (see Figure 2.1) and her work to raise awareness and provide support for this region in the context of her choir communities in Vermont and Massachusetts.

Delimitations

Several delimitations exist for this study. Mary Cay Brass was the main participant. Additional participants were chosen from her associates in her choir and peacebuilding work. These included: (1) a veteran chorister who sang in Mary Cay's choirs for over thirty years, both in a choir in Vermont and in summer peacebuilding programs in the Balkans, (2) a co-leader of some of the summer Bosnian programs and current director of a peacebuilding institute in Sanski Most, Bosnia, and (3) an additional co-leader of the summer Bosnian programs and current music teacher and director of two community choirs in Bugojno, Bosnia. The study took place over the course of four months (September to December). Though Mary Cay Brass performed and taught all over the world, the study took place in three places where her work with Balkan music and peacebuilding was most notable: Central and Southern Vermont, Bugojno, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Sanski Most, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Bosnian locations are illustrated in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2. Bosnian locations of Mary Cay Brass’s singing and peacebuilding music camps.²⁵

²⁵ d-maps.com. Accessed May 10, 2021. https://d-maps.com/carte.php?num_car=2109&lang=en

Chapter Overviews

This study is divided into five chapters. The first chapter introduces Mary Cay Brass and her work with Balkan music and peacebuilding, the need for the study, the statement of purpose, the research questions, limitations, and delimitations. The second chapter is the literature review divided into the following topics: (1) a brief overview of the evolution of global music education in the United States as it relates to Balkan Music and cultural understanding, (2) a brief history of the Balkans and Balkan music to provide historical and sociological context, (3) an overview of Balkan music and dance in the United States, and (4) the role of singing and peacebuilding. The third chapter includes the methodology used to conduct the research. The fourth chapter provides a chronology of re-storied data to provide a narrative of how Mary Cay Brass used Balkan music to facilitate peacebuilding. The final chapter offers discussion for findings, implications for future research, and a conclusion. A section before the appendices includes a glossary of foreign language terms and lyrics from the songs listed in fourth chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter includes a discussion of related literature organized in four sections. The literature examined in the first section provides an overview of global music education in the twentieth century, with attention to the many initiatives that attempted to address cultural understanding through music. The second section briefly outlines important literature surrounding Balkan music to provide background and context for its use in the present study. The third section reviews literature that traces the evolution of Balkan music's popularity in the United States and the use of Balkan Music in American music education. The final section contains an overview of the scholarship about the study of singing and its role in peacebuilding related to this study.

Section One: Global Music Education in The United States

Mary Cay Brass's career began amid the growth and evolution of global music education in the United States. She particularly worked in Balkan music cultures throughout her career. Although the literature on general global music education is expansive, the Balkan music cultures have not been prominent in the global music education literature. Therefore, an attempt was made in this section to place Mary Cay's singing and peacebuilding work into the context of music education events and research in the timeline of her career.

Several scholars discussed the changing nature of terms used to describe different music cultures. In her review of research, Quesada²⁶ stated many terms, such as multicultural music

²⁶ Milagros A. Quesada and Teresa M. Volk, "World Musics and Music Education: A Review of Research, 1973-1993," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 131 (1997), 46.

education and world music education, were used interchangeably. Recent research places “global music” as the current term in the literature. Wade and Campbell²⁷ discuss numerous sociological identities in music and suggest that “global music” is the more inclusive term for all musical cultures. Therefore, the term “global music is used throughout the study.

Global Music in American Music Education from 1900 to the 1960s

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries, the United States experienced a great surge in immigration.²⁸ Over twenty-seven million people from all around the world moved to American cities during this time.²⁹ Several scholars agreed that this immigration increase enabled the birth of multicultural music education in the United States.³⁰ Up until this time, Western European classical music dominated the American music education curricula. The common view accepted by most white Americans at the time was that all immigrants should adapt American cultural values as their own. However, Volk³¹ highlighted reformers such as William James, Horace Kallen, and W.E.B. DuBois, and discussed their ideas of cultural pluralism and how they embraced the notion of many distinct cultures making up American society.

Jane Addams, a prominent American social worker, believed that immigrants coming to the United States should not lose their culture. She celebrated the possibilities of the United

²⁷ Bonnie C. Wade and Patricia S. Campbell, eds., *Global Music Cultures: An Introduction to World Music* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021), 45.

²⁸ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 72.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Terese M. Volk, “Music Speak to the Hearts of All Men: The International Movement in American Music Education 1930-1954,” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 133 (1993); William M. Anderson, “World Musics in American Education, 1916-1970,” *Contributions to Music Education* 3 (1974); Marie McCarthy, “Canticle to Hope: Widening Horizons in International Music Education, 1939-1953,” *International Journal of Music Education* 25 (1995).

³¹ Terese M. Volk, “Folk Musics and Increasing Diversity in American Music Education: 1900-1916,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 42 (1994), 288.

States being enriched by the diversity of the immigrant cultures.³² Addams was forefront of the settlement house movement and was the director of the Hull House in Chicago. The settlements houses of Hull House in Chicago, along with the Henry Street Settlement in New York City, became activity centers for immigrant communities in these urban cities. They became cultural centers in which the new immigrant communities could share their dance and music. The experience of Jane Addams at Hull House caused her to further advocate for the inclusion of immigrant cultures in American society—especially public schools. Her ideas rose to national prominence when she spoke about her vision for the inclusion of these cultures at the 1908 National Education Association Conference.³³

Folk dancing became a popular form of community recreation because of the settlement houses. This led to its popularity in public school music curricula. Although a large part of the immigrant population was from Eastern Europe, the curricula still only consisted of Northern and Central European folk songs and dances, with a very small number of Native American and African American folk songs.³⁴ In 1916, culturally distinct music and folk dancing was a noticeable addition to the exclusive Germanic classical music traditions in public schools from 1900. World War I also helped expand the music repertoire of American schools. The American public expressed anti-German sentiments because of the war and searched for other music and dance sources to include in the school music programs.

In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a rise in the publication of several new music book materials that included Western European folk music and dances. Interest in new music cultures

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 290.

³⁴ Ibid., 298.

started to increase during these decades. Anderson³⁵ and Campbell³⁶ wrote about these new music cultures and their place in American music education. Anderson mentioned the 1936 publication of *Music Highways and Byways*, a book that included the music of China and Japan.³⁷ He also specifically mentioned that the book included a section on the music of Yugoslavia. Cultural exchanges and policies established by the Roosevelt Administration led to an increase in Latin American music. Campbell outlined some of the work of Charles Seeger, a musicologist who traveled throughout Mexico, Central America, and South America. Through his work in these regions, he advocated for this music to be included in the American public schools and worked with Music Educators National Conference to create music exchanges between American music educators and musicians from Latin America.³⁸ At the Music Teachers National Association conference in 1940, Charles Seeger charged the attendees to focus on music cultures outside of Western European traditions.³⁹ As interest grew in international music cultures, especially the music of Latin America, sessions started to appear at music conferences. This interest in Latin American music was also a main focus of the 1941 National Music Educators Conference in Milwaukee, aptly named “Music Unites the Americas.”⁴⁰

³⁵ William M. Anderson, “World Musics in American Education, 1916-1970,” *Contributions to Music Education* 3 (1974).

³⁶ Patricia S. Campbell, *Music, Education, and Diversity: Bridging Cultures and Communities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018).

³⁷ William M. Anderson, “World Musics in American Education, 1916-1970,” *Contributions to Music Education* 3 (1974), 27.

³⁸ Patricia S. Campbell, *Music, Education, and Diversity: Bridging Cultures and Communities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018), 32.

³⁹ William M. Anderson, “World Musics in American Education, 1916-1970,” *Contributions to Music Education* 3 (1974), 30.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

McCarthy⁴¹ detailed the state of international music education in the mid twentieth century. Following World War II, organizations formed to promote peace and international cooperation among all the countries of the world. One of these created in 1946 was the United Nations and the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It promoted the cultures of the world.⁴² In 1949, from this organization, the International Music Council was created. This organization eventually evolved into the International Society for Music Education at the 1953 Brussels International Conference on Music Education.⁴³ The 1950s were also an active time for the inclusion of international music cultures in the Music Educators National Conference.⁴⁴ Many of the MENC conferences from the 1950s reflected international themes. The American Civil Rights movement of the 1960s also gave a boost to the international music movement. The movement amplified the voices of traditional oppressed groups of African American, Latinx Americans, and Native Americans. Many educators started to infuse their curricula with more goals to increase global awareness and cultural understanding and to address inherent inequities in the American educational system.⁴⁵

Finally, Campbell also stressed the importance of the Society for Ethnomusicology, an organization formed in 1955. This important event allowed universities to begin to reconfigure their curricula to include music cultures of the world. During the 1960s, universities began to incorporate ethnomusicology courses and performing ensembles.

The Yale Seminar, The Julliard Repertory Project, Tanglewood Symposium

⁴¹ Marie McCarthy, "Canticle to Hope: Widening Horizons in International Music Education, 1939-1953," *International Journal of Music Education* 25 (1995).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 44.

⁴⁴ William M. Anderson, "World Musics in American Education, 1916-1970," *Contributions to Music Education* 3 (1974), 34.

⁴⁵ Patricia S. Campbell, *Music, Education, and Diversity: Bridging Cultures and Communities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018), 34.

The 1960s ushered in great change for American society. Interest in international music peaked and new genres of American popular music emerged. Though numerous initiatives, projects and symposia were created to better the quality of music cultures and diversify the music repertoire of schools. The Yale Seminar, the Julliard Repertory Project, and the Tanglewood Symposium were some of the first events to call for the inclusion of global music education in the United States.

In their book *A History of American Music Education*, Mark and Gary⁴⁶ specifically outline these events. In 1963, the Yale Seminar was a government-funded conference held on the campus of Yale University.⁴⁷ Its aim was to examine the state of music education and to make recommendations on the type of music to be used in the American public schools. Since the participants were mainly musicologists and included very few in-service teachers, it did not have a lasting impression on music educators. However, it was successful in challenging the traditional Eurocentric music curricula, and in enabling music teachers to start to think about including global music cultures in their classrooms.

Mark and Gary⁴⁸ stated that the Julliard Repertory Project was an outcome of the Yale Seminar. Through a federally-funded grant, Julliard School created a team of prominent musicologists and music educators. Together they selected and implemented over four-hundred compositions that represented numerous genres. However, many music teachers were still not convinced about including music outside of classical traditions, and this project was not a large-scale success.

⁴⁶ Michael L. Mark and Charles L. Gray, *A History of American Music Education*, 3rd Ed. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Education, 2007).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 399.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 400.

The Tanglewood Symposium was a landmark event that called for the reexamination and realignment of the American music curriculum.⁴⁹ Though the symposium also advocated for the inclusion of popular music and jazz, one of its main tenants was also the inclusion of music from all cultures. Ethnomusicologist David McAllester wrote:

Music of all periods, styles, forms, and cultures belong in the curriculum. The musical repertory should be expanded to involve the music of our time in its rich variety, including currently popular teen-age music and avant-garde music, American folk music, and the music of other cultures.⁵⁰

These events and their goals for diversifying the music curricula remain important hallmarks of American music education history. However, several scholars have questioned the success of these events. Charles⁵¹ and Ross⁵² each commended the Yale Seminar for its attention to the betterment of music education but questioned its effectiveness and influence. McCoy⁵³ reported on the fiftieth anniversary of the Tanglewood Symposium. She stated this symposium provided structure and direction for music education and helped pave the way for future efforts in the field. This statement best summarizes her views:

While I am amazed at how much these recommendations speak to the needs of profession currently, I am also aware that because these recommendations still hold relevancy for us today, they remind us how far we have yet to go in realizing them.⁵⁴

After Tanglewood

The Tanglewood Symposium's charge to include global music provided the impetus for many music educators in the field to create educational resources to help music teachers include

⁴⁹ Ibid., 365.

⁵⁰ David McAllester, "The Substance of Things Hoped For," in *Tanglewood Declaration*, ed. R. Choate (Reston, VA: MENC, 1968), 139.

⁵¹ Leonhard Charles, "Was the Yale Seminar Worthwhile," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 60 (1979).

⁵² Jerrold Ross, "Since Yale," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 60 (1979).

⁵³ Constance L. McCoy, "On the 50th Anniversary of the Tanglewood Symposium," *Journal of Music Teacher Education* 27, no. 1 (2017): 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

this music in their classrooms. Volk⁵⁵ discussed the importance of the Music Educators National Conference and the Music Educators Journal in the years following Tanglewood. Articles in the journal included multicultural education, jazz education, and popular music education. In 1971, the Music Educators Journal created its first exclusive issue dedicated solely to African American music.⁵⁶ The next year, another special multicultural issue followed that highlighted music cultures from all over the world. The 1980s witnessed a focus on music training in global music education. The next exclusive multicultural Music Educators Journal issue was issued in 1983 and emphasized the teaching of global music cultures.⁵⁷

In the years following Tanglewood, there was an emergence of some of the first scholars that worked at the intersection of music education and ethnomusicology. Nketia⁵⁸ examined the role of authentic folk music in the classroom. Nettl⁵⁹ carefully explored the combination of music education and ethnomusicology in his work. New philosophies began to emerge as music education and ethnomusicology were studied in tandem. Quesada and Volk⁶⁰ explained the philosophy of one of the early music education and ethnomusicology pioneers, Barbara Lundquist. She used the term “intercultural music education” to give a name to international music study. This name implied that music was not just a two-culture process, but rather a multicultural process, in the sense that all people could learn music from any culture.⁶¹ In the late 1980s, Patricia Shehan Campbell, one of the most prolific scholars in global music education

⁵⁵ Terese M. Volk, “The History and Development of Multicultural Music Education as Evidenced in the ‘Music Educators Journal,’ 1967-1992,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 41, no. 2 (1993).

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 142.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁵⁸ J. Nketia, “Music Education in Africa and the West: We Can Learn From Each Other,” *Music Educators Journal* 57, no. 3 (1970).

⁵⁹ Bruce Nettl, *The Study of Ethnomusicology: Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts* (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1983).

⁶⁰ Milagros A. Quesada and Terese M. Volk, “World Music and Music Education: A Review of Research, 1973-1998,” *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 131 (1997).

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 45.

emerged. Her 1989 publication that she co-authored with William Anderson, *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education*⁶² became one of the most important resources in global music education and included authentic teaching materials for this music. This resource was a prelude to the 1990 Music Educators National Conference that was titled “Symposium on Multicultural Approaches to Music Education.”⁶³ This event was co-sponsored by the Society for Ethnomusicology and the Smithsonian Institution.

Patricia Shehan Campbell also led the charge to improve pre-service and in-service teacher training in global music education. She proclaimed “It is imperative that music teachers be prepared in ways that correspond to the diverse musical interests and needs of their prospective young students.”⁶⁴ Some of the multicultural music education research extended to the general elementary education pre-service teaching training curriculum. Teicher⁶⁵ conducted a quasi-experimental study on pre-service elementary teachers’ attitudes towards teaching multicultural music by utilizing a pre-test and post-test design throughout their semester course. She found a significant difference in the attitudes and willingness to teach this music, but no significant difference in the attitudes surrounding the development of lessons and preparedness for multicultural music teaching.

Global Music in American Music Education in the 21st century

Differing philosophies regarding the authenticity of music used in global music education began to emerge in the new millennium. Reimer⁶⁶ compiled a collection of essays from some of

⁶² William M. Anderson and Patricia S. Campbell, *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education* (Reston, VA: MENC, 1989).

⁶³ Patricia S. Campbell, *Music, Education, and Diversity: Bridging Cultures and Communities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018), 37.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁶⁵ Judith M. Teicher, “Effect of Multicultural Music Experience on Preservice Elementary Teachers’ Attitudes,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 45, no. 3 (1997).

⁶⁶ Bennett Reimer, *World Music and Music Education: Facing the Issues*. (Reston, VA: MENC, 2002).

the leading global music education scholars of the time. In this compilation, Volk⁶⁷ discussed challenges of authenticity as it relates to outsiders becoming insiders in the quest to teach and learn global music. In an earlier article, Silverman⁶⁸ addressed this outsider to insider approach through her own experiences as a Balkan music performing artists and scholar and encouraged further scholarly exploration on this topic. While Reimer pointed out potential pedagogical problems associated with global music education, Elliot⁶⁹ strongly supported global music education in his writings. He believed that a focus on praxial teaching and including global music education in the curriculum aligned with his philosophy of “self-understanding through ‘other’ understanding.”⁷⁰ (Ibid)

Patricia Shehan Campbell continued to be a leader in the field with the publication of *Teaching Music Globally* as part of the Global Music Series. This book served as a resource for students of all ages and included activities and ideas for authentically teaching global music. In her latest project, Campbell served as the series editor to seven volumes of the World Music Pedagogy series. Bartolome⁷¹ authored the volume dedicated to choral music education. She provided a brief history of the American Choral Directors Association and their attempts to include multicultural music articles in the Choral Journal. Though there are articles that generally address world music tone production⁷² and selecting repertoire⁷³, no articles currently exist on Balkan choral music. Additionally, The Choral Journal has little literature on religious choral

⁶⁷ Terese M. Volk, “Multiculturalism: Dynamic Creativity for Music Education,” in *World Musics and Music Education: Facing the Issues*, ed. Bennett Reimer (Reston, VA: MENC, 2002).

⁶⁸ Carol Silverman, “Learning to Perform, Performing to Learn,” *Journal of American Folklore* 108, no. 429 (1995).

⁶⁹ David Elliot, *Music Matters*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 209.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 209.

⁷¹ Sarah Bartolome. *World Music Pedagogy: Volume V*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019).

⁷² Mary Goetze and Ethan Sperry, “Vocal Versatility and Bel Canto Style,” *The Choral Journal* 55, no. 2 (2014).

⁷³ Lawrence Burnett, “Ethnic & Multicultural Perspectives: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Learning and Performing Multicultural Choral Music,” *The Choral Journal* 46, no. 4 (2005).

music other than Christian music. André de Quadros⁷⁴ wrote a brief article to discuss choral music in the Islamic world. However, his article largely discussed Islamic singing in the Middle Eastern and Southeastern Asian cultures. European Islamic music traditions prevalent in the Balkans were not mentioned.

Literature on Global Music Educators

There are few studies addressing the life stories of global music educators. Schippers and Campbell⁷⁵ included several early global music educators in their work. Some of the scholars studied were: (1) Ki Mantle Hood, noted for his work with the term “bi-musicality” and the Indonesian gamelan, (2) John Blacking, noted for his music work with the Venda of South African, (3) David McAllester, noted for his music work with the Navajo and Comanche, and (4) Bruce Nettl, noted for his music work with Middle Eastern and Indian music cultures. Campbell⁷⁶ provided a more in-depth life history study on John Blacking and highlighted his efforts in ethnomusicology and his focus on education. There are also very few studies on musicians that have been awarded Fulbright Scholarships to other music cultures. Brumfield⁷⁷ conducted a study that examined the biography of folk singer and teacher Jean Ritchie and her Fulbright Scholarship to the British Isles. In addition to creating a narrative history, she also analyzed many of Ritchie’s field recordings from the Fulbright.

Section Two: Balkan Music Cultures

⁷⁴ André de Quadros, “Choral Music of the Muslim World,” *The Choral Journal* 55, no. 2 (2014).

⁷⁵ Huib Schippers and Patricia S. Campbell “Cultural Diversity: Beyond Songs From Many Lands,” in *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, eds. G.E. McPherson and G.E. Welch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁷⁶ Patricia S. Campbell, “How Musical We Are: John Blacking on Music, Education, and Cultural Understanding,” *Journal of Research in Music Education* 48, no. 4 (2000).

⁷⁷ Susan Brumfield, “Jean Ritchie’s Field Trip- Scotland: An Examination of Unpublished Field Recordings Collected in Scotland, 1952-1953,” PhD Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2000.

The second section of the literature review provides a background of scholarship in Balkan music. Though a wide variety of literature in Balkan music exists, most of the reviewed sources primarily pertain to the specific Balkan vocal genres that Mary Cay Brass has incorporated into peacebuilding throughout her career. Scholarship in Balkan music cultures has been documented in Balkan languages since at least the nineteenth century; however, this section examines English-language publications for this study. One of the first monumental contributions to Balkan music scholarship in the English language was Hungarian composer and ethnomusicologist Béla Bartók's *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs*⁷⁸ in 1951. In this book, Bartók⁷⁹ developed a complex analysis system for the numerous songs that Harvard professor Milman Parry collected throughout the Balkan nations. This book project was one of the first instances in the literature of a thorough academic analysis of Yugoslav music.

Re-emergence of Yugoslav Folk Music

The region of the world formerly known as Yugoslavia has long been a place of ethnic diversity and political complexity. Most ethnic diversity stems from the religions of the area's multiple conquerors: Eastern Orthodox from the Byzantine Empire, Roman Catholicism from Central European influences, and Islam from the Ottoman Empire. From World War II to the present, the former nation-states of Yugoslavia witnessed numerous political changes. In 1946, the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia was formed under the leadership of a communist government led by Joseph Tito. Subsequently, the republic was renamed the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1963. During Tito's communist rule, the region's religious diversity was not important—he instead advocated for commonly shared values and traditions of a Yugoslav identity.

⁷⁸ Béla Bartók and Albert Lord, *Serbo-Croatian Folk Songs* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1951).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

Laušević⁸⁰ discussed this cross-cultural concept in her works and wrote about the government of Yugoslavia's promotion of all traditional music. Through multiple initiatives, government-led programs taught Yugoslav youth the songs and dances of all ethnic groups represented in the country. One of these initiatives was the Cultural Arts Society, or *Kulturno Umjetnicko Društvo* (KUD).⁸¹ This program funded traditional music and dance ensembles throughout many villages, towns, and cities in Yugoslavia. The goal of the *Kulturno Umjetnicko Društvo* was to promote a multiethnic Yugoslav identity. In this spirit, Yugoslavians from all ethnic groups learned the music dances of each other's culture in their local KUD. This program even supported the formation of professional music and dance ensembles that would later provide the impetus for the Balkan Music and Dance movement in the United States: *Kolo* in Serbia, *Lado* in Croatia, and *Tanec* in Macedonia.⁸² During the same era, there was a surge in the popularity of Yugoslav folk music. Petrović⁸³ reported that numerous performing artists recorded their folk song arrangements with traditional music ensembles, and in turn, the music became very popular, particularly in the towns and villages. These arrangements utilized the centuries-old folk melodies but often featured an evolved and more elaborate vocal line and an altered musical form in the verses. In addition to religion, the aforementioned conquerors to the Balkan region also brought elements of their musical cultures. These influences are evident throughout the multiethnic Yugoslav folk music.

Croatian and Serbian Traditional Vocal Music

⁸⁰ Mirjana Laušević, "The Ilahiya as a Symbol of Bosnian Muslim National Identity," In *Retuning Culture: Musical Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Slobin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 118–119.

⁸¹ Anthony Shay, *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2008), 146.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 147.

⁸³ Radmila Petrović, "The Concept of Yugoslav Folk Music in the Twentieth Century," *Journal of the International Folk Music Council* 20 (1969): 24.

Mary Cay Brass's two ethnomusicology mentors during her time in Yugoslavia, Jerko Bezić and Radmila Petrović, were especially active in academia in the 1960s and 1970s. Entries about their career contributions to Balkan music are found in the Oxford Music Online encyclopedia.⁸⁴ A respected Croatian ethnomusicologist, much of Jerko Bezić's scholarship focused on the vocal music traditions of Dalmatia, a region on the Mediterranean coast of Croatia.

In a 1997 article, Bezić⁸⁵ traced the evolution of the Dalmatian folk song. He explored the textual and musical connections between Dalmatian vocal music and other Mediterranean music cultures as far back as the sixteenth century. Bezić⁸⁶ further explored the Dalmatian folk song in a 2011 article, in which he examined the lyrics, form, melody and stated the music's ties to Italian and Slovenian folk tunes. This same article also discussed Balkan ethnomusicologists' perceptions of Dalmatian vocal music as a musical phenomenon because of how the music is listened to and performed—freely and spontaneously. One style of singing that emerged from the Dalmatian folk song is *klapa*. Čaleta⁸⁷ wrote about *klapa* singing as a musical phenomenon. *Klapa* usually involves three or four-part singing with up to eight singers and, most of the time, the close harmonies are sung by all-male singers, though there are some all-female and coed *klapa* ensembles. Due to the surge in Yugoslav folk music genres' popularity in the 1960s, the Omiš Festival established the dominant music festival for *klapa* singers. *Klapa* singing became

⁸⁴ *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Jerko Bezić," accessed January 7, 2021, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>; *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. "Radmila Petrović," accessed January 7, 2021, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

⁸⁵ Jerko Bezić, "Approaches to the People's Life in Dalmatia in the Past and Present," *Musica e Storia* 5, no. 5 (1997).

⁸⁶ Jerko Bezić, "The Dalmation Folklore Urban Song as the Subject of Ethnomusicological Research," *Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* 49, no 1 (2001).

⁸⁷ Joško Čaleta, "The Klapa Movement- Multipart Singing as a Popular Tradition," *Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* 45, no. 1 (2008): 129.

so popular that the singing spread not only across Croatia but also across Croatian diasporic communities.

There have only been a few English-language contributions to Serbian traditional vocal music in the literature. Radmila Petrović, a Serbian ethnomusicologist, was one of the first Balkan music scholars to publish in English. Her research included the following: the history of folk music research in the Balkans and Serbian vocal traditions, which resulted in extensive fieldwork throughout rural Serbia.⁸⁸ Petrović's⁸⁹ work as an ethnomusicologist in Western Serbia examined various styles of rural vocal singing. She studied two rural vocal styles—the *iz vika*, characterized by loud singing, and the harmonically focused *na bas*. While *iz vika* was typically two-part singing involving only two people singing in unison or intervals of a second, *na bas* involved group singing that utilized intervals such as the third and cadential fourths and fifths. Petrović⁹⁰ claimed that *na bas* would eventually replace *iz vika* as the newer style of singing. She also attributed the emergence of the accordion's popularity in Yugoslav music as a changing force in the tuning of the traditional melodies since songs had to adapt to the accordion accompaniment from their standard intonation.

A few studies addressed the analysis of Serbian folk songs. Petrović claimed that “music and poetry are inseparable”⁹¹ in Serbian folklore. In the same study, she analyzed the musical form and verse structure of Serbian folk songs. She found while the songs' melodies were arranged in stanzas, the texts formed verse lines that were not in stanza structure. Petrović⁹²

⁸⁸ *Oxford Music Online*, s.v. “Radmila Petrović,” accessed January 7, 2021, <http://www.oxfordmusiconline.com>

⁸⁹ Radmila Petrović, “Two Styles of Vocal Music in the Zlatibor Region of West Serbia,” *Journal of the Internatinoal Folk Music Council* 15 (1963): 45–47.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁹¹ Radmila Petrović, “Some Aspects of Formal Expression in Serbian Folk Songs,” *Yearbook of the International Folk Music Council* 2 (1970): 63.

⁹² Radmila Petrović, “The Oldest Notation of Yugoslav Folk Tunes in Yugoslavia,” *Studia Musicologica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 7, no. 1/4 (1965): 109.

previously wrote about this text structure in a 1965 journal article, in which she analyzed folk songs from the oldest-known written source of Yugoslav folk music. The epic-form poetry found in many Serbian folk songs was the subject of the book *Songs of the Serbian People*.⁹³ This book contained an extensive collection of traditional Serbian poetry that spanned thousands of years, telling stories of antiquity. Nineteenth-century scholar Vuk Karadžić collected the poems and songs. The songs collected told the story of the Battle of Kosovo, the event in which the Serbs fell to Ottoman rule, the time during Turkish rule, and stories of the Serbian uprising against the Turks.

This work was not the first instance in the literature of Serbian song patriotism in times of conflict. Longinović⁹⁴ discussed Serbian war songs sung during the time of the Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Many of these songs included lyrics about the “holy war.” The song lyrics expressed the Serbs' anger, who felt wronged by Hitler’s alliance with Croatia during World War II. This alliance did not recognize the Serbs as part of the Nazi’s ideal “superior race.” Additionally, the Serbs involved in the 1990s conflict felt wronged by the Ottoman Turks and blamed the Ottoman Empire’s religious descendants—Bosnian Muslims. This resentment resulted in many Serbian war and propaganda songs and fueled their rationale to participate in the ethnic cleansing of Bosniaks and Croats.⁹⁵

Bosnian Muslim Vocal Music

In this section, I use the term Bosnian Muslim to distinguish between the followers of Islam and the ethnic Croats and Serbs who also live in Bosnia. The English-speaking world may

⁹³ Milne Holton and Vasa Milhailovich, eds., *Song of the Serbian People: From the Collections of Vuk Karažić* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997).

⁹⁴ Tomislav, Longinović. “Music Wars: Blood and Song at the End of Yugoslavia,” in *Music and the Racial Imagination*, eds. Ronald Radano and Philip Bohlman (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 638.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 639.

also refer to Bosnian Muslims as Bosniaks. The term Bosnian may refer to anyone from any ethnic group living in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, this part of the literature review examines singing cultures that have evolved from Bosnian Muslims.

Perhaps the most well-known musical genre from the Bosnian Muslim culture is the *sevdalinka*. Petrović⁹⁶ provided a historical and cultural overview of this important secular music style. The songs originated from the Bosnian Muslim culture, but the Turks directly influenced this music in their four-hundred years of Ottoman rule. The word *sevdah*, meaning love, came to Bosnia from the Turkish language; however, the Turks borrowed the term from Arab cultures.⁹⁷ The songs, described as melancholic and highly passionate, also told stories of Ottoman society in the Balkans. This music was popular among the Muslim population, but it also flourished in parts of Yugoslavia, where the Ottoman administrative rule was the strongest. Middle Eastern influences are heard throughout *sevdalinka*, especially when the augmented second was utilized in the melodic lines. The songs were accompanied initially by the *saz*, a lute-like instrument of Middle Eastern origin; however, during the rule of the Austro-Hungarians, more European influences were incorporated into this music, such as using the accordion and added vocal harmony. Laušević⁹⁸ argued that Yugoslav folk musics mass popularity on government-run television and radio stations caused the Westernization of *sevdalinka*. As a result, the music became more associated with a Bosnian identity rather than a Muslim identity.

⁹⁶ Ankica, Petrović, "Paradoxes of Muslim Music in Bosnia and Herzegovina," *Asian Music* 20, no. 1 (1988/89): 133.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁹⁸ Mirjana Laušević, "The Ilahiya as a Symbol of Bosnian Muslim National Identity," In *Retuning Culture: Musical Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Slobin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 123.

Several scholars have elaborated on the aesthetic and philosophical implications of *sevdalinka*. Durić⁹⁹ argued that *sevdalinka* evokes a state of emotion in the listener, especially Bosnian Muslims, that brings forth memories and traditions. Efendić¹⁰⁰ reviewed Balkan language literature on *sevdalinka*. There was an increase in scholarship on this music in Yugoslavia in the 1960s. Several scholars studied *sevdalinka* in a theoretical sense. Most stated that these songs were more than just music; instead, they were an experience. In her thesis about *sevdalinka*, Peters¹⁰¹ wrote of the nostalgia that many diasporic Bosnians felt when they heard this music. Many of those Bosnian immigrants had to flee the Bosnian war during the 1990s, experienced a longing for happy times their pre-war homeland

Another type of song from the Bosnian Muslim music culture was the Muslim religious hymn, *ilahiya*. There is little research on this music; however, a chapter is devoted to its evolution in Bosnia in *Returning Culture: Musical Changes in Central and Eastern Europe*.¹⁰² Though *ilahiya* have existed for hundreds of years, they lost popularity during the twentieth-century communist rule of Yugoslavia. After the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, which fueled nationalism in a post-communist society, this religious music resurged in popularity among Bosnian Muslims.¹⁰³ Unlike some music in Islam, *ilahiya* is heard outside of the mosque. *Ilahiya* choral arrangements became added repertoire to Bosnian Muslim choirs, and concerts in crowded stadiums were frequently held in post-war Bosnia. Though many Bosnian Muslims sing

⁹⁹ Rašid Durić, "The Traditional Bosnian Song of Sevdalinka as an Aesthetical, Musical, and Philological Phenomenon," *Spirit of Bosnia* 13, no. 1 (2018): 2.

¹⁰⁰ Nirha Efendić, "The Sevdalinka as Bosnian Intangible Cultural Heritage: Themes, Motifs, and Poetic Features," *Croatian Journal of Ethnology and Folklore Research* 51, no. 1 (2015).

¹⁰¹ Heather L. Peters, "Song of Sevdalinka: Cultural Anthem of Bosnia-Herzegovina," Master's thesis. (York University, 2006), 153.

¹⁰² Mirjana Laušević, "The *Ilahiya* as a Symbol of Bosnian Muslim National Identity," In *Retuning Culture: Musical Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Slobin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 125.

some *ilahiya* in the Turkish and Arabic languages, many have been translated or written in the Bosnian language.

Sephardic Music in Bosnia

Mary Cay Brass taught Bosnian Sephardic music to her choirs for many years. Though academic discussions often include Sephardic music, its role as a music culture in Bosnia is cursorily mentioned in the literature. Petrović¹⁰⁴ researched a historical overview of Sephardic chants in Bosnia. Sephardi Jews originally lived in Spain; however, with King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella's banishment of the Jewish people from Spain in the late fifteenth-century, many Jewish families sought refuge in the Balkan region. By the mid-sixteenth-century, there was a significant Jewish population in Sarajevo, Bosnia. The Sephardi Jews established a distinct religious community in Sarajevo. They spoke their own language, Ladino. Words from local Balkan languages gradually appeared in Ladino throughout the centuries. Petrović¹⁰⁵ discussed the importance of music and religion in this Jewish community in Bosnia. The Sephardi Jews in Bosnia enjoyed a harmonious relationship with the local Bosnian Muslim community. Consequently, many Islamic and Eastern influences exist in the Bosnian Sephardic chants. During World War Two, the Nazis exterminated a majority of the Jewish population in the Balkans. This tragedy almost destroyed the Sephardi community in Sarajevo. Today, only a few families remain.

North Macedonian Music and the Roma

North Macedonia, formerly Macedonia, was Yugoslavia's most southern state. Its location and its small size and population meant that the neighboring cultures of Serbia,

¹⁰⁴ Ankica Petrović, "Sacred Sephardi Chants in Bosnia," *The World of Music* 24, no. 3 (1982).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

Bulgaria, and Greece historically dominated Macedonian culture and politics.¹⁰⁶ Much of the North Macedonian literature highlights Roma music traditions. Scholars believe that the Roma migrated to the Balkan region from India over one-thousand years ago.¹⁰⁷ As a result, the area that is now North Macedonia had one of the largest Roma populations in the Balkans and the rest of Europe.¹⁰⁸

The Roma were known as traveling musicians with virtuosic abilities and performed from town to town in the Balkan region.¹⁰⁹ Particularly in Serbia and Macedonia, the Roma played a large role in these musical scenes. They performed Romani music, but they also assimilated into all of the other music cultures of the former Yugoslav countries. For example, for a time in Bosnia, many talented performers of *sevdalinka* were Romani musicians. Petrović¹¹⁰ explained that Roma were the mediators between the Eastern and Western music cultures. Like many of the music cultures from the Balkans, the music of North Macedonia and the Roma borrowed many Eastern musical elements from the Ottomans. Petrović¹¹¹ also theorized that the Roma and their historical ties to Eastern cultures made it easy for them to adapt the Ottoman instrumentals, vocal styles, melodies, and rhythms.

Seeman¹¹² researched one of the most important musical styles to emerge from the Roma and North Macedonia. *Čalgija* became a prominent type of music carried over from Ottoman society. This Turkish-influenced music was popular with the Roma, many of which were

¹⁰⁶ Sonia T Seeman, "Macedonian Čalgija: A Musical Refashioning of National Identity," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21, no. 3 (2012), 297.

¹⁰⁷ Carol Silvermann, *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics & Balkan Music in Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

¹⁰⁸ Elsie Dunin, "Čoček as a Ritual Dance Among Gypsy Women," *Makedonski Folklor* 12 (1973), 194.

¹⁰⁹ Radmila Petrović, "Folk Music of Eastern Yugoslavia: A Process of Acculturation: Some Relevant Elements," *International Review of Aesthetics and Sociology of Music* 5, no.1 (1974), 219.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 220.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² Sonia T Seeman, "Macedonian Čalgija: A Musical Refashioning of National Identity," *Ethnomusicology Forum* 21, no. 3 (2012).

Muslim, and by the 1960s and 1970s, Romani musicians dominated performances of *čalgija*.¹¹³ In a 1960s push by the Yugoslav government to accept and appreciate all Balkan cultures, *čalgija* became so popular that it was not considered a Romani or Turkish identity, but as an evolved Macedonian identity.¹¹⁴ In summary, the Roma largely contributed to the development of Balkan music scenes and the preservation of Balkan folk music. However, as a minority ethnic group in the Balkans, the Roma were not seen as equals by their Slavic counterparts. Pettan¹¹⁵ detailed some of the prejudices the Romani musicians experienced in music concerts and festivals around the Balkans.

In her book *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics & Balkan Music in Diaspora*¹¹⁶, Silverman traced the evolution of the international popularity of Romani music. She conducted ethnographic studies in several diasporic Romani communities to examine their music in a context outside of the Balkans. Of particular note, Silverman¹¹⁷ also provided an account of Esma Redžepova, a famous Macedonian-Romani singer, in her book. She discussed Redžepova and the many barriers she broke as a Romani starting as a singer in 1960s Yugoslavia. Redžepova was the first Balkan Romani to achieve success in the non-Roma world as a recording artist. Also, she was the first-ever Macedonian woman to sing and perform on national television. Redžepova's success paved the way for Romani musicians to advance in the Balkans and helped Balkan Romani music become known worldwide.

Section Three: Balkan Music in The United States

¹¹³ Ibid., 307.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Svanibor Pettan, "The Others from Within: The Case of Gypsy Musicians in Former Yugoslavia," *The World of Music* 43, no.2/3 (2001), 123.

¹¹⁶ Carol Silvermann, *Romani Routes: Cultural Politics & Balkan Music in Diaspora* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 201.

The rise of international folk dancing in the twentieth century introduced the United States' general public to global music cultures. Much of the research in Balkan music in America simultaneously focuses on music and dance. In her book, *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America*,¹¹⁸ Laušević traced the development of international folk dancing in the United States. She listed a handful of folk-dance leaders, specifically named Michael Hermann, Song Chang, and Vytautas Beliajus as three of the main contributors to the development of international folk dance in the United States of America in the twentieth-century.¹¹⁹ Each leader taught a diverse collection of folk dances from many nations in their programs, including Yugoslav dances.

Although Michael Hermann was known as “the father of the international folk-dance movement” through his work as a dance leader, he also created and produced many world folk music records. These records provided authentic music for Hermann’s group rehearsals and performances.¹²⁰ Beliajus and Hermann taught Serbian circle dances, known as *kolos*, as early as the 1930s and 1940s, while Changs International Folk Dancers were the first group that offered a class solely dedicated to the Serbian *kolos*.¹²¹

Dick Crum participated in several of Beliajus’ and Hermann’s dance courses and workshops and became one of the most important Balkan dance teachers in America. Leibman¹²² and Laušević¹²³ described Dick Crum’s contributions to the Balkan dance world. Crum

¹¹⁸ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 143.

¹²⁰ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 160.

¹²¹ Ibid., 184.

¹²² Robert Leibman, “Richard George Dick Crum: A Life,” in *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 5–11.

¹²³ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 190.

possessed both a comprehensive knowledge of Balkan dances, and also became one of the first people to hold the dual role of teacher and researcher in the Balkan Dance scene.¹²⁴ He attended Duquesne University, where he became a part of the Balkan music ensemble Tamburitzans. In addition, in 1954, he first traveled to Yugoslavia with this group. Subsequently, he attended Harvard University and earned a master's degree in Slavic languages and literature. Liebman¹²⁵ further explained that Dick Crum was largely influential to the Balkan music and dance scene because of his interest in authenticity and collecting the dances at their source.

Balkan dance flourished several decades before musicians offered instruction in Balkan vocal music. Laušević¹²⁶ claimed that Ethel Raim was primarily responsible for Balkan vocal music development in the United States. Most leading Balkan teachers came to Balkan music through folk dance; however, Raim who did not have a folk dancing background, founded the Balkan singing group Ženska Pesna, and was the most extensive and thorough Balkan vocal music teacher in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹²⁵ Robert Leibman, "Richard George Dick Crum: A Life," in *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 9.

¹²⁶ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 209.

Evolution of Balkan Music and Dance in the United States

Several scholars maintain that Balkan music popularity stemmed from the visits of Balkan cultural performance groups from Yugoslavia in the mid-1950s.¹²⁷ Evanchuk recalled the anticipation of a California performance by the Macedonian folk group *Tanec*:

At that first *Tanec* concert in 1956, as the lights were lowered and the curtain rose, few had any idea of what to expect or what would be contained in an evening of folk dance “in concert.” It would have been difficult to predict the impact the next two hours would have on the individuals attending.¹²⁸

Evanchuk¹²⁹ further discussed the newly-found obsession in the aftermath of the Yugoslav touring performances of *Tanec* and *Kolo* in the 1950s. Attendees of these performances quickly memorized *Tanec* and *Kolo* dance programs, sought out dance directions from other sources, learned Balkan languages, and created Balkan folk costumes. Distinct Balkan dance communities formed on both the West and East coasts of the United States, and the popularity of the *kolo* quickly dominated the international folk dancing scene.¹³⁰ Terms coined for this music phenomenon included “Balkan craze” and “kolomania.” Laušević described the appeal for the *kolo* in her research:

The novelty of the material, and the novelty of its teaching and presentation were certainly important to their charm. It makes sense that, in a scene that was partly about enjoying things exotic and peasant, eventually some people would turn to the things the most exotic and the most peasant. For most folk dancers, the music and the dance involved in the kolos was... the furthest removed from the mundane.¹³¹

¹²⁷ Ibid., 196; Robin Evanchuk, “Inside, Outside, Upside-Down”: The Role of Mainstream Society Participants in the Ethnic Dance Movement,” in *Balkan Dance: Essays of Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 181.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 182.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 186–87.

¹³⁰ Robert Leibman, “Richard George Dick Crum: A Life,” in *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 5–11.

¹³¹ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 187.

Laušević¹³² conducted an ethnographic study among Balkan music and dance participants to research this phenomenon. She found that only two percent of surveyed participants were of Balkan origin. When she asked participants, “What do you like about Balkan music?” she categorized their answers into the following: drone and modality, dissonance and close harmony, timbre and vocal production, and rhythm.¹³³ In a similar ethnographic study, Vail¹³⁴ encountered similar data when she researched Balkan music appeal and found that none of her surveyed participants were of Balkan origin. She also found that Balkan music’s complex meters and vocal timbres attracted her participants.¹³⁵

Balkan Music in Music Education in the United States

Few music education research studies exist that address the use of Balkan music in the music classroom. Some focused on the complex meters that are typical of Balkan music. Irwin¹³⁶ conducted a statistical analysis that examined the perceptions of irregular meter in elementary students who experienced Balkan music in a curriculum and found that scores between the pre and post-tests were statistically significant. In the book *World Music Pedagogy: Volume V*,¹³⁷ Bartolome discussed the benefits of using dance and movement to help high school choral students master the irregular meter in a popular Serbian folk song.

Similarly, other studies highlighted the importance of Balkan dance in the music classroom. Campbell¹³⁸ outlined an approach to teaching music through Balkan dance by using

¹³² Ibid., 3–68.

¹³³ Ibid., 58–60.

¹³⁴ June Vail, “Balkan Tradition, American Alternative: Dance, Community, and People of the Pines,” in *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 201.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 200.

¹³⁶ Frances Mary Irwin, “Comparative Methods for Teaching Irregular Meter through Balkan Music to Elementary Students,” *Missouri Journal of Research in Music Education* 5, no. 3 (1985).

¹³⁷ Sarah Bartolome. *World Music Pedagogy: Volume V*. (New York, NY: Routledge, 2019), 69–73.

¹³⁸ Patricia S. Campbell, “Teaching Music through Balkan Dance,” *Music Educators Journal* 71(1984), 47–51.

four Balkan song examples, while Collins and Accola¹³⁹ shared their experiences in using Balkan music and dance to build community in their classrooms and pointed out that Balkan music and dance pedagogy is easily adaptable to the Orff-Schulwerk teaching approach. While the previous studies focused on rhythm and dance, two book publications by Brass¹⁴⁰ provided resources for choirs to learn songs from former Yugoslav countries and had arrangements in numerous voicings and background information and pronunciation guides.

Section Four: Singing and Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding in music has largely influenced the music education philosophy of Mary Cay Brass. As a choir director, she has used singing to promote peacebuilding in all of her choral ensembles. Her more recent international music camps through Village Harmony featured peacebuilding components in their programming. This section examines research in singing and peacebuilding and focuses on music and peace studies conducted in Balkan Europe, as well other arts-related peacebuilding activities throughout the region.

Music and Peacebuilding

The intersection of peacebuilding and music, especially singing, is a relatively new concept in research. Some authors highlighted the numerous benefits of the role of music in peacebuilding. Wu¹⁴¹ discussed these benefits in a study that examined the role of secular music in society. The study cited the Beatles as an example of a music group that influenced culture by

¹³⁹ Ardith Collins and Madolyn Accola, "Join the Line and Embrace the Band: Celebrating Balkan Music and Dance in the Orff Schulwerk Classroom," *Orff Echo* 50, no. 2 (2018), 22–27.

¹⁴⁰ Mary Cay Brass, ed., *Village Harmony: Traditional Songs of the Balkans* (Marshfield: Northern Harmony Publishing, 1995); Mary Cay Brass, ed., introduction to *Balkan Bridges: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria* (Brattleboro: New England Dancing Masters, 1999).

¹⁴¹ Haishang Wu, "Music's Role in Peacebuilding," *Journal of Aggression, Conflict and Peace Research* 11, no. 2. (2019).

singing music that promoted counterculture and peace, particularly during the Vietnam War era of the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁴²

Sandoval¹⁴³ realized the potential role of music education in peacebuilding and argued for curricula revisions through decolonizing traditional Eurocentric music curricular norms. She explained, “Through decolonizing a project, though, we can shift our focus to the pluriversal realities of individuals rather than essentializing categories of identity.”¹⁴⁴ Beyond the benefits of music education in peacebuilding, some presented challenges facing music educators who seek to include peacebuilding in their curricula. Cabedo-Mas¹⁴⁵ asserted that the field must challenge the idea that all music automatically encourages peace among listening and music-making participants. He argued that some music could achieve the opposite effect and provided the example of military propaganda music that evoked warrior-like emotions and fighting.

Authors examined the role of music in fostering dialogue for peace. Pruitt¹⁴⁶ conducted fieldwork among youth communities in two different countries: an organization that addressed violent conflict among youth in Australia and an organization that promoted peace among youth Catholic and Protestant cultures in Northern Ireland. In both case studies, participants reported music as an accessible way to engage in dialogue about cultural differences.¹⁴⁷ In a similar study, King¹⁴⁸ examined the role of music and dialogue in interfaith settings and found that musical

¹⁴² Ibid., 139.

¹⁴³ Elaine Sandoval, “Potential Contributions of Music Education to Peacebuilding: Curricular Concerns,” *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 244.

¹⁴⁵ Alberto Cabedo-Mas, “Challenges and Perspectives of Peace Education in Schools: The Role of Music,” *Australian Journal of Music Education* 1, (2015), 79.

¹⁴⁶ Lesley Pruitt, “Creating a Musical Dialogue for Peace,” *International Journal of Peace Studies* 16, no. 1 (2011).

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 88.

¹⁴⁸ Roberta King, “Music, Peacebuilding and Interfaith Dialogue: Transformative Bridges in Muslim-Christian Relations,” *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 3 (2016).

collaboration and performances were an outlet to provide opportunities for effective dialogue between Muslim and Christian communities.

A few studies addressed music's role in the aftermath of conflict and the role of music in violence. Sandoval¹⁴⁹ stated that the literature rarely addresses the combination of music in peacebuilding and music in violence. Some of the literature has examined creative approaches to ways music is used as a means of healing in the aftermath of conflict. Ragan¹⁵⁰ wrote an essay that analyzed the lyrics of Emmanuel Jal, a peace activist and musician from Sudan, for their contribution to peacebuilding.

Several scholars examined music in the aftermath of conflict in ensemble settings. Balsnes¹⁵¹ conducted addressed how Norwegian community gospel choirs used hospitality. These ensembles were mainly comprised of immigrants and refugees from war-torn regions of the world. These choirs provided means of musical therapy and ways for immigrants to integrate into their new country successfully. Four main themes emerged when participants were questioned about the choir's impact on their new lives: community, empowerment and respect, integration, and meaning.¹⁵²

In 1996, Pettan¹⁵³ completed a similar study among a sizeable Bosnian refugee community in Norway. Through an initiative called the Azra Project and a partnership with ethnomusicology courses at the University of Oslo, Bosnian refugees and Norwegians studied

¹⁴⁹ Elaine Sandoval, "Music in Peacebuilding: A Critical Literature Review," *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016), 200.

¹⁵⁰ Lee-Anne Ragan, "Emmanuel Jal: A Modern-Day Nomad's Approach to Peacebuilding through Music," *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review* 5, no. 1 (2015).

¹⁵¹ Anne H. Balsnes, "Hospitality in Multicultural Choral Singing," *International Journal of Community Music* 9, no. 2 (2016).

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 178.

¹⁵³ Svanibor Pettan, "Making the Refugee Experience Different: 'Azra' and the Bosnians in Norway," in *War, Exile, Everyday Life: Cultural Perspectives*, eds. Renata Kirin and Maja Povrzanović (Zagreb, Croatia: Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, 1996), 250.

and performed music traditions from both cultures. This project created opportunities for cultural understanding, helped the refugees adjust to their new countries and addressed the psychological issues from the refugees' experiences in the Bosnian war.

Howell¹⁵⁴ detailed music and reconciliation opportunities in post-conflict regions throughout the world. In her research, she offers an analytical framework for examining specific music-making and peacebuilding scenarios.¹⁵⁵ While she conducted research in the Balkans, she collaborated with others to research music and peacebuilding opportunities in post-conflict areas in other regions.¹⁵⁶

Performing Arts and Peacebuilding in the Balkans

Accounts exist that examine the arts in peacebuilding efforts throughout Southeastern Europe in the aftermath of the Balkan wars of the 1900s. Several focused on community arts organization initiatives in the former Yugoslav nations. Milošević¹⁵⁷ wrote about her experiences in the theatrical arts and reconciliation in Serbia, where she helped start the community-based DAH Teatar. Through her work with this group, she explored the double role of activist and artist and aimed to balance their activism with artistic quality. DAH Teatar's work resulted in numerous projects and public theater performances that enabled its participants to grieve the war and address the injustices between different ethnic groups in the Balkans. In another community-based arts project, Balandina¹⁵⁸ conducted research among Macedonian and Albanian youth in

¹⁵⁴ Gillian Howell, "Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021).

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ Gillian Howell, Leslie Pruitt, and Laura Hassler. "Making Music in Divided Cities: Transforming the Ethnoscape," *International Journal of Community Music* 12, no. 3 (2019).

¹⁵⁷ Dijana Milošević, "Theatre as a Way of Creating Sense: Performance and Peacebuilding in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia," in *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict*, eds. Cynthia E. Cohen, Roberto G. Varea, and Polly O. Walker (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2011), 28.

¹⁵⁸ Alexandra Balandina, "Music and Conflict Transformation in the Post-Yugoslav Era: Empowering Youth to Develop Harmonic Inter-Ethnic Relationships in Kumanovo, Macedonia," *International Journal of Community Music* 3, no. 2 (2010).

North Macedonia. In this project, youth participants from the main ethnic groups performed traditional songs from each of their cultures and composed songs using languages from each group represented. The research project found that youth removed social barriers through informal music-making.¹⁵⁹

Bosnia and Herzegovina suffered some of the greatest tragedies of the conflicts in the Balkans in the 1990s. Authors have specifically researched music and peacebuilding initiatives in the aftermath of the Bosnian war through the lens of applied ethnomusicology. Haskell¹⁶⁰ detailed an account of an aid agency's post-war humanitarian work in the Bosnian village of Guča Gora. The war greatly affected the village livelihood, and the agency financially supported a local folkloric project in which the villagers could preserve local music and dance traditions. This support provided an outlet for artists to prosper in post-war society and offered ways for the local community to heal and experience artistic therapies. Those types of post-war arts initiatives were found in rural and urban areas of Bosnia. Robertson¹⁶¹ conducted an ethnographic study among participants of an inter-religious choir, Pontanima, in Sarajevo, Bosnia. Choristers in this choir represented the three largest ethnic groups in Bosnia—Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs.

Robertson concluded:

Musicking in the Pontanima context did not completely satisfy the conflict transformation models that were employed. The musical context did, however, largely satisfy the inter-group contact theory requirements for prejudice reduction, and this is considered a key turning point in conflict transformation.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 240.

¹⁶⁰ Erica Haskell, "The Role of Applied Ethnomusicology in Post-Conflict and Post Catastrophe Communities," in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*, eds. Svanibor Pettan and Jeff T. Titon (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 454–455.

¹⁶¹ Craig Robertson, "Musicological, ethnography, and peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016), 252.

¹⁶² Ibid., 262.

To an extent, music and peacebuilding influences from the inter-religious Pontanima choir influenced musicians and ensembles around Bosnia. British ethnomusicologist Caroline Bithell¹⁶³ wrote a narrative about her experience as part of a Village Harmony international camp in Bosnia in 2008. Mary Cay Brass led this camp, along with three local Bosnian musicians. The participants, mainly American, learned songs from all the main religious traditions of Bosnia. The leaders sampled much of their song repertoire from the Sarajevo-based inter-religious choir Pontanima. After a week of rehearsal in Bugojno, Bosnia, the participants traveled around Bosnia and performed a series of concerts featuring the numerous song traditions.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Caroline Bithell. *A Different Voice, A Different Song* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007). 281–84.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 283

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the stories and experiences of Mary Cay Brass's work in choir and peacebuilding with the music of the former Yugoslav countries. This study utilized a qualitative research approach through the lens of biographic-narrative inquiry. I interviewed Mary Cay Brass and some of her closest colleagues and created a narrative-life history of her peacebuilding work through Balkan music.

Research Design

Clandinin and Connelly¹⁶⁵ state that “narrative inquiry is stories lived and told”. Through narrative inquiry, researchers come to understand experience through a collaboration with participants over time, place, and social environment.¹⁶⁶ The researcher becomes a storyteller and tells stories about the unique experiences of people.¹⁶⁷ Scholars describe how these stories might be situated in the realm of narrative inquiry in music education. McCarthy¹⁶⁸ used a metaphor of “spinning” and “weaving” to illustrate process of making stories and creating subsequent narratives to interpret these stories. “Spinning” is similar to making stories. Stories are made throughout time in different locations among different groups of people, just like separate pieces of yarn. “Weaving” is the analogy for creating narratives. Just as pieces of yarn weave together to make fabric, stories are artfully pieced together to create narratives. Barrett and Stauffer¹⁶⁹ claim that narrative inquiry in music education has been employed to examine the

¹⁶⁵ D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly, *Narrative Inquiry: Experience and Story in Qualitative Research* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Boss, 2000), 20.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid.

¹⁶⁷ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 9.

¹⁶⁸ Marie McCarthy, “Narrative Inquiry as a Way of Knowing in Music Education,” *Research Studies in Music Education* 29, no. 1 (2007): 4.

¹⁶⁹ Margaret S. Barrett and Sandra L. Stauffer, eds., *Narrative Inquiry in Music Education: Troubling Uncertainty* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), 223.

many ways that music interweaves in lived experiences. Authors seldom document the lived experiences and musical lives of music educators who have extensively taught global music cultures. Narrative inquiry operates under the assumption of a constructivist paradigm in which knowledge is socially constructed by collaborative process between the researcher and the participants.¹⁷⁰

Polkinghorne¹⁷¹ distinguished two types of narrative inquiry based on Bruner's¹⁷² work in the paradigmatic and narrative modes of thought: (1) analysis of narratives, where the data produces themes and categories, and (2) narrative analysis, where the data is analyzed into stories. In this study, I will focus on narrative analysis. Thus, this study fits into a qualitative approach, utilizing the life history aspect of biographical-narrative as an underpinning of narrative inquiry. Bolívar and Domingo¹⁷³ claimed "a biographical-narrative approach tries to explore the deep meanings of life histories, rather than being limited to a methodology that gathers and analyzes data." Filipkowski¹⁷⁴ carefully explained the juxtaposition of the terms biographic-narrative and biography in research and claimed that to fully understand the lived experiences, the narrative "how" has to work towards the biographical "what." Kim¹⁷⁵ discussed the biographical narrative study and emphasized that participants and researchers in this approach are not merely collaborative reporters, but collaborative interpreters of the life experience.

¹⁷⁰ Donna Mertens, *Research and Evaluation in Education and Psychology*, 3rd Ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2010), 16.

¹⁷¹ Donald Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 8, no. 1 (1995).

¹⁷² Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

¹⁷³ Antonio Bolívar and Jesús Domingo, "Biographical-narrative Research in Iberoamerica: Areas of Development and the Current Situation," *Forum: Qualitative Social Research* 7, no. 4 (2007).

¹⁷⁴ Piotr Filipkowski, "Narrative Agency and Structural Chaos: A Biographical-Narrative Case Study," *Qualitative Sociology Review* 15, no. 4 (2019).

¹⁷⁵ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 126.

Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal¹⁷⁶ warned of the potential participant unintentionally leaving out a major part of how an experience came to be. Kim¹⁷⁷ further cautioned the researcher about romanticizing the participant. Munro¹⁷⁸ explained the importance of not picking and choosing only the heroic elements of the narrative and stated “attend to the silences as well as what is said, that we need to attend to how the story is told...or not told.” It is important that the researcher interprets all nuances of the life experiences, not simply the experiences that appear to best by the participant. By balancing the narrative “how” with the biographical “what” and using other types of data sources besides the interview, the research results in a mix of objective and subjective experiences. Furthermore, the participants and I will construct a narrative based on the musical stories and experiences surrounding Mary Cay Brass’s lifework with Balkan choral music and peacebuilding.

Positionality/Subjectivity

Mary Cay Brass taught her international summer camps, began much of her Balkan music and peacebuilding, and published through the organization Village Harmony. I participated in Village Harmony’s domestic and international camps as a chorister and as guest teacher. As a result, I formed close friendships with the people that I interviewed about Mary Cay Brass’s work with Balkan Music in Village Harmony. Through these six years of experiences, Mary Cay Brass became a colleague and friend. However, I remained conscious of my insider view privilege when analyzing the collected data from this part of the research.

¹⁷⁶ Gabriele Rosenthal and Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal “The Analysis of Narrative-biographical Interviews.” In *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, ed. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke (Thousand Oaks: CA, Sage Publications, 2004).

¹⁷⁷ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 211.

¹⁷⁸ Petra Munro, *Subject to Fiction: Women Teachers’ Life History Narratives and the Cultural Politics of Resistance* (Philadelphia, PA: Open University Press, 1998), 13.

Rosenthal and Fischer-Rosenthal¹⁷⁹ wrote of the importance of the researcher distinguishing between the “life as narrated” and the “life as lived”. Since Mary Cay knows that I had been a part of her peacebuilding journey, it could have been easy for her to leave out major data in an interview. Therefore, I relied on additional data sources such as documents and archives to make sure major story plots are not left out in the story.

My first experience as a chorister participant in Mary Cay Brass’s international music camps occurred in Macedonia in the summer of 2015. Under the auspices of the global choral music organization Village Harmony, Mary Cay Brass was a leader of this camp. In this camp, the participants spent ten days in a hotel in Berovo, Macedonia learning traditional Macedonian songs in addition to a collection of songs from American music cultures. After this rehearsal period, the choir participants performed concerts of Macedonian and American music in Berovo and many of its surrounding towns and villages and participated in immersive folk-dance experiences in music festivals by traditional Macedonian and Roma musicians.

The following year, in 2016, I traveled to Bosnia and Herzegovina as a chorister participant in Village Harmony’s international singing and peacebuilding camp. Mary Cay Brass also served as a leader for this camp. Members spent two weeks in Sanski Most, Bosnia learning traditional Bosnian songs and American folk songs before embarking on a one-week tour around the country. In addition to learning musical repertoire, they participated in sessions about peacebuilding and the role of singing in peacebuilding led by a local Bosnian peacebuilding organization. The program repeated in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2018 under a similar format, and I was also a participant in this camp.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Because the Balkan songs and peacebuilding aspect of Mary Cay Brass's program largely influenced my teaching, I invited her to teach some of her Balkan music through a short one-week artist residency with my choral students in Mississippi in 2019. Along with a Bosnian colleague, Mary Cay Brass and I led a Balkan choral concert with my students at the end of this residency. This experience also led to an invitation by Village Harmony for me to serve as a teaching artist in their 2019 summer programming in New England. During this program, I spent two days among Mary Cay Brass's community choir in Southeastern Vermont.

I grappled with multiple claims of positionality in this study. As a participant in the Village Harmony international choir camps in the Balkans under Mary Cay's leadership, I have personally experienced her Balkan music teaching. Many of the participants are also members of Mary Cay Brass's year-long community choirs in New England. Through these immersive choral touring experiences, I have developed friend relationships with Mary Cay Brass and several of these longtime chorister participants of her programs. My experiences in these Balkan music programs led me to take additional solo trips to the Balkans to study the music and the language of the region. In addition to the Balkans, I have also taken solo trips to visit members of Mary Cay Brass's choir community in Vermont and Massachusetts. For these reasons, I posited myself as an insider of this research. I had an insider knowledge of the Balkan music communities that Mary Cay Brass created in New England and the Balkans. I was very familiar with the social and historical contexts of these communities and the ways that Balkan music plays a role in these communities. As a student who has studied Balkan cultures—both formally and through informal immersive experiences—I was able to understand the meanings behind the musical stories of Mary Cay Brass and her participants in these programs. This insider knowledge helped in reconstructing the meanings of these stories into narratives.

Mary Cay Brass's work with Balkan music spans over five decades. Due to complexities in the past, I also claimed to be an outsider in this study. My initial perceptions and Mary Cay Brass's initial perceptions of Balkan music were limited, and the Balkan countries came from two relatively brief time periods in history. Mary Cay Brass initially studied Balkan culture and first visited Balkan countries when they existed under the nation of Yugoslavia. Under this communist regime, all the different music cultures lived in relative peace. My initial reality was somewhat different—Yugoslavia had dissolved into six different nations with distinct and separate ethnic identities. As a researcher who is a non-native of the Balkans, I could not claim to know the contexts of Balkan music before the dissolution of Yugoslavia, what life was like during the Balkan wars, or the role that music played in Balkan societies following the wars. This outsider view enabled me to better focus on constructing and interpreting narrative data that surrounded these complexities in the past.

Participants

The focus participant of my study was Mary Cay Brass. Brass is a middle-aged, White woman currently living in Southeastern Vermont. She has over forty years of experiences as a teacher and performer. In this time, she led two long-time community choirs in Vermont and Massachusetts and traveled to Balkan Europe countless numbers of times for immersive musical experiences and cultural exchanges. In order to help construct a narrative of Mary Cay's lifework with Balkan choral music and peacebuilding, three additional participants were selected by purposive convenience sampling. The following criteria were established for selecting participants: (1) sung in Mary Cay's community choirs for at least ten years, (2) participated in at least one of Mary Cay's Village Harmony Balkan international music camps, or (3) co-led at

least one of Mary Cay's peacebuilding music camps. The participants were required to meet at least one criterion; however, all participants met at least two of the three of the criteria.

The first additional participant was a middle-aged White woman living in Southeastern Vermont. She is an elementary school principal and sang in Mary Cay's community choirs for over thirty years. Additionally, she participated in four Balkan music and peacebuilding camps on-location in Macedonia and Bosnia. The second participant was a middle-aged Bosnian woman living in Bugojno, Bosnia. She currently teaches music at the local school and conducts two community choirs. She served as a co-leader for two of Mary Cay's singing and peacebuilding camps in Bosnia. The third participant was a middle-aged Bosnian man living in Sanski Most, Bosnia. He currently serves as director of a peacebuilding institute and also served as a co-leader for two of Mary Cay's singing and peacebuilding camps in Bosnia. The fourth participant was a middle-aged White woman living in Southeastern Vermont. She is a professor at a local university. She participated in one of the Village Harmony Macedonia camps and has sung in Mary Cay's community choirs for over thirty years. The final participant is a young White woman who is taking a gap year from college. She has participated in Mary Cay's choirs for over 10 years and attended the last peacebuilding and singing camp in Bosnia.

Data Collection

Narrative inquiry is premised on collection of multiple and varied forms of data.¹⁸⁰ This study included interviews as well as the examination of Mary Cay's personal field notes, personal journal writings, choir concert programs, local newspaper and television station archives, and photos. These documents were gathered directly from Mary Cay Brass and the additional participants in the study. I conducted interviews using the Zoom conferencing

¹⁸⁰ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 161.

platform on my MacBook Pro laptop and the Voice Memo application on the iPad mini. I also used the Voice Memo application on my iPhone as a back-up recording source. The Zoom Recordings and Voice Memos were saved to my laptop, iPad, and iPhone, my personal iCloud storage, and Auburn Box. All devices and the iCloud are password-protected. I used the camera feature on the iPad and iPhone to take photos of any archival artifacts such as private photos or concert programs. The data collection process included three distinct phases.

Phase One

In the first phase, Zoom interviews were held with Mary Cay Brass. She video conferenced from her residence in Athens, Vermont. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with Mary Cay Brass about each stage of her Balkan music career. Initially, two to three two-hour sessions were planned. In addition to the interviews, Mary Cay Brass volunteered her field notes, journal entries, choral concert programs and photographs pertaining to her choral music and peacebuilding work. She scanned them to me via email and I stored them via a secure online storage system. I took field notes while examining these artifacts.

Phase Two

In the second phase, I arranged multiple zoom interviews with people who have closely worked with Mary Cay throughout her career. I conducted semi-structured interviews with these participants about their experiences with Mary Cay Brass. The interviews were conducted via Zoom from their homes in New England and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Several of the participants volunteered to share documents such as photos from their experiences with Mary Cay and personal correspondence with Mary Cay such as emails. I saved these in a secure online storage via Auburn Box and took field notes while examining these artifacts.

Phase Three

In the final phase of the data collection, follow-up interviews were conducted with Mary Cay Brass via the Zoom conferencing platform. Follow-up interviews via Zoom with the other participants were scheduled as needed to clarify any potential discrepancies among interview transcriptions, field notes and my reflexive journaling.

Data Analysis

Data included recorded, semi-structured participant interviews over three months. Data were stored and organized in a password-protected online storage system. The interviews ranged from 60 minutes to 80 minutes and took place between September 2021 and December 2021. The interviews had a combined total five hours and twenty-three minutes. Interview transcription was completed from September to December 2021. During the listening and transcription process, I took notes and developed potential questions from the responses. These questions served as the basis for the next round of interviews with Mary Cay Brass and determined if follow-up interviews were needed for additional participants. Additional data included field notes, personal writings, concert recordings, concert programs, and photographs. I reviewed my notes on these artifacts and attempted to organize them chronologically with the data from the interview transcriptions.

Polkinghorne¹⁸¹ identified the story as the outcome of a narrative analysis. The researcher's role is to place the data elements into a plot. Major data and events are attributed as advancements to the storyline. The data were organized through "restorying" in order to provide a clear, chronological narrative to form a beginning, middle and end to the story.¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ Donald Polkinghorne, "Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 8, no. 1 (1995).

¹⁸² John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth, *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2017), 72.

Polkinghorne¹⁸³ (1995) also stated “Human experience does not match a carefully crafted, congruent story.” Through the process of narrative smoothing I attempted to make the story coherent and engaging to the reader by eliminating disconnected raw data.¹⁸⁴ Moen¹⁸⁵ described the need to extract meaningful episodes from human experiences. Through the selected episodes, the data is dually interpreted and assigned meaning as it is placed into the narrative.

To achieve this narrative, I adapted Wengraf’s¹⁸⁶ Biographic-Narrative Interpretive Methods as a means analyze the data. In the analysis method, the researcher attempts to reconstruct how the subject experienced and interpreted their story. This reconstruction is a constant mix between the subjective and the objective; rather the narrated and the actual life happenings so that both findings are related to each other.¹⁸⁷ In employing elements of the biographic-narrative interpretative method, I first identified objective life events and started to place them in chronological order. This chronology of events was checked with document artifacts such as photos, field notes, concert flyer and programs, and websites. Next, the analysis moved to the story as it is told by the subject. The transcript was analyzed and chunked into segments.¹⁸⁸ These segments start and end when the following things happened in the transcript: the speaker changed or the topic changed. I developed separate hypotheses in my notes for each of these steps, the objective chronology and the subject text-chunking, to ascertain why these events happened and how they were experienced. Finally, developed hypotheses related the lived

¹⁸³ Donald Polkinghorne, “Narrative Configuration in Qualitative Analysis,” *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 8, no. 1 (1995), 16.

¹⁸⁴ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 192.

¹⁸⁵ Torill Moen, “Reflections on the Narrative Research Approach,” *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 5, no. 4 (2006).

¹⁸⁶ Tom Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 233.

¹⁸⁷ Gabriele Rosenthal and Wolfram Fischer-Rosenthal “The Analysis of Narrative-biographical Interviews.” In *A Companion to Qualitative Research*, ed. Uwe Flick, Ernst von Kardorff, and Ines Steinke (Thousand Oaks: CA, Sage Publications, 2004), 265.

¹⁸⁸ Tom Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 234.

life, or the biographical nature, and the told story, or the narrative nature. The structural elements of the lived life and the told story combined for the end written result.

Thus, the end result of the data analysis for this research was a chronological narrative about the lived experiences of Mary Cay Brass's work with Balkan choral music and peacebuilding. Afterwards, a discussion of the research questions will bring together the related literature and structural hypotheses that evolved in data analysis. Sections of Howell's¹⁸⁹ harmonious relations music and peacebuilding framework were used to discuss the specific music-making experiences in this context to address the peacebuilding aspect of the research. This framework helped explore the key experiences and relationships within Mary Cay's peacebuilding and musical activities, and its tenants will specifically help to discuss the final research question.

Trustworthiness of Data

Polkinghorne¹⁹⁰ stated that "narrative researchers need to argue for the acceptance of validity of the collected evidence and the validity of the offered interpretation." I used some of the validation procedures explained by Creswell and Miller¹⁹¹ to ensure trustworthiness of the data such as disconfirming evidence and thick, rich description. They recommended these strategies for researchers working in the constructivist paradigm. Additionally, validation strategies employed in this study included member-checking and researcher reflexivity.

I checked for disconfirming evidence to support the credibility of the collected stories. After I initially created possible plots that may emerge from the data, I will search for possible

¹⁸⁹ Gillian Howell, "Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021).

¹⁹⁰ Donald E. Polkinghorne, "Validity Issues in Narrative Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 13, no. 4 (2007): 478.

¹⁹¹ John W. Creswell and Dana L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory Into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2010): 126.

data that could disconfirm the themes. Lincoln and Guba¹⁹² explain that member checking is a very important way of establishing credibility. Member checking keeps participants in the research process by utilizing the participants' feedback in the data analysis process. I ensured member checking by sending the interview transcripts to the participants to verify that I accurately transcribed the interviews. I also shared my final narrative with Mary Cay Brass to confirm whether the account is realistic and accurate.

I practiced researcher reflexivity through the extensive use of a reflexive journal. Kim¹⁹³ illustrates the concept of reflexivity in her writing: "whereas reflection is to take one step back from the phenomena under examination, reflexivity is to take one more step back from reflection." The journal served as an opportunity to reflect and allowed me a way to view my notes from an outside lens. In addition to journaling, I used this journal to jot down field notes as well as keeping about travel and interview schedules during the research process.

Researchers in the constructivist paradigm strive to create thick description by contextualizing in detail the people and places being studied.¹⁹⁴ Though thick description I attempted to create verisimilitude in order to make the readers so close with the stories that they have the sense and feeling that they could have experienced the stories.¹⁹⁵ This concept was especially important when describing the role that certain songs played in Mary Cay Brass's Balkan music and peacebuilding experiences.

¹⁹² Yvonna S. Lincoln and Egon G. Guba, *Naturalistic Inquiry*, 1st ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1985), 314.

¹⁹³ Jeong-Hee Kim, *Understanding Narrative Inquiry* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2016), 248.

¹⁹⁴ John W. Creswell and Dana L. Miller, "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry," *Theory Into Practice* 39, no. 3 (2010): 129.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Mary Cay's Story

The first part of my findings focuses on Mary Cay's story from her Balkan beginnings through her time in Vermont and her early experiences with Village Harmony. The next section of findings discusses key connections with people who influenced Mary Cay to emphasize peacebuilding in her choral work. Finally, the findings focus on Mary Cay's work in the Village Harmony Balkan summer music camps and other highlights of her life's career.

Balkan Beginnings

Mary Cay's music and cultural interests began at an early age. As a young girl in White Bear Lake, Minnesota in the early 1960s, she danced in a Croatian folk dance troupe for children. Her neighbors during this time were a Croatian family with three young daughters who all danced in the dance troupe. This family was very active in the Croatian community around the twin cities of Minnesota. The family eventually invited Mary Cay to join them in a Croatian folk dance gathering at a local high school gym. Mary Cay instantly developed a passion for the music and dance of this Croatian folk youth dance troupe. Mary Cay described her first experience with Balkan music and dance:

It was just kind of this magical thing! There was this wonderful woman leading that folk dancing named Phyllis. And there were all these little kids, these little girls in a circle and she puts an old 45 record on and they all start dancing kolo...And pretty soon, they opened the circle and folded me right in the circle. And that was it, you know?¹⁹⁶

The leader of the dance ensemble was a woman named Phyllis Cohen. Though Phyllis did not have Balkan heritage, she was a product of the popular Balkan music and dance movement of the

¹⁹⁶ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

60s. Minneapolis-born Dick Crum, a pioneer of the Balkan music and dance movement in the United States, inspired Cohen to start a cultural Balkan dance troupe for children. During the group's existence, it performed for numerous cultural events in the Twin Cities, Minnesota area, such as the state fair, international festivals, and the local Croatian cultural association.¹⁹⁷ Mary Cay danced with this group for about three years. During this time, rehearsals occupied most Saturdays where the dance troupe members would learn new dances and songs. Many of the members attended the same school as Mary Cay and it was common to hear the girls sing Balkan songs during playground recess. Unfortunately, most dance group members became too busy in high school, and the group eventually dissipated.

Collegiate Years: Rediscovering Balkan Music

During Mary Cay's high school years, Balkan music and dance became a distant memory. However, one fateful summer evening reignited her lifelong Balkan passion. After high school, Mary Cay attended the University of Minnesota. In the summer between her freshman and sophomore college years, she and her friends were on their way to a jazz concert when the friend group happened upon a large group of people folk dancing in front of the student union on campus. Mary Cay immediately recognized the familiar sounds of Balkan music among the rest of the international dances. She encouraged her friends to head to the jazz concert and opted to stay behind to watch the folk dancing. At this folk dancing gathering, Mary Cay rediscovered two significant influences in her life: (a) her love for Balkan music and dance and (b) her first Balkan dance teacher. She recalled this chance meeting:

¹⁹⁷ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, December 3, 2021.

And sure enough, you know, people came up and were talking to me and I would just jump in and try to do these dances and things about them were familiar, but you know, everybody was really friendly. And I told them how I danced when I was younger with Phyllis. And they said, oh, Phyllis is here right now. And she's over there! So I went to reintroduce myself to her...¹⁹⁸

After Mary Cay reintroduced herself, Phyllis told her about the thriving international folk dance scene at the University of Minnesota. Dance sessions highlighted a different dance culture each night of the week. In addition to Balkan dance on Thursday evenings, other sessions included Hungarian dancing on Monday nights and Israeli dancing on Sunday nights. Mary Cay instantly immersed herself in the international dance scene at the university and regularly attended sessions each night.

The frequent dance sessions inspired Mary Cay and a group of her friends to form a performing group of their own. The newly formed dance ensemble focused primarily on Balkan cultural traditions. The performing group eventually became the *Ethnic Dance Theater*, an organization that continues to exist in Minneapolis today. The group's earliest members, including Mary Cary, often lived together in houses and immersed themselves in Balkan culture. Members made their costumes for their performances. Self-proclaimed "Slavophiles,"¹⁹⁹ the members also took courses in Serbo-Croatian from the university including the year-long course of study in the Serbo-Croatian language. After four years of studying music and languages at the University of Minnesota, Mary Cay Brass earned a Bachelor of Arts in Ethnomusicology and German.

Fulbright Application

After graduation, Mary Cay worked in a music store near campus. She remembered it as a fun place to work since many area musicians patronized the store. One day at the music store,

¹⁹⁸ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

Dr. Donna Cardemone visited. She was one of Mary Cay's music history professors from the University of Minnesota. She knew of Mary Cay's interest in the Balkans and encouraged her to apply for a Fulbright to Yugoslavia. Unbeknown to Mary Cay, Dr. Cardemone was once a Fulbright scholar in Italy, and at the time, was the head of the Minnesota's Fulbright commission. Dr. Cardemone saw promise in Mary Cay, guiding and mentoring her through the Fulbright application process. Initially, Mary Cay thought that Fulbright scholarships were only for serious graduate students and professors, but she soon found herself applying for an at-large Fulbright. While interest was high for Fulbright applications to Western Europe, applications to communist-led Yugoslavia were uncommon. Unsure of what to expect, Mary Cay applied for an at-large Fulbright fellowship to Yugoslavia.

In October of 1975, Minnesota's Fulbright committee interviewed Mary Cay Brass. Two days later, Dr. Cardemone visited her at the music store exclaiming that the interview had been a success! Though Mary Cay described herself as very young and inexperienced, her passion for Balkan culture was evident to the Fulbright committee and the panel approved the application, forwarding it the national level. Almost ten months passed. Mary Cay had nearly forgotten about her Fulbright application when she received a notice from the post office during the July 4, 1976 weekend that she had received a thick envelope from Washington D.C. The envelope contained her acceptance letter and welcomed her as a Fulbright scholar to Yugoslavia.

Fulbright to Yugoslavia

At the time of Mary Cay's Fulbright acceptance and her subsequent stint in the Balkans, the nation of Yugoslavia included six constituent republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Serbia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Slovenia. A central socialist government ruled these republics from the end of World War Two (1945) until the early 1990s. This time period was

peaceful and prosperous and Mary Cay was able to experience this region in a different lens from modern day perspective.

Mary Cay's next two years were paramount in her Balkan music journey. Though she had already established herself as a Balkan music enthusiast, the skills she would acquire in this experience laid the foundation for a successful career in choir and peacebuilding. Like much of Eastern Europe at the time, visitors and tourists did not frequently travel to Yugoslavia. It provided the perfect opportunity for Mary Cay to immerse herself at the source of Balkan culture. The lived experiences during her Fulbright era set the stage for a lifelong career filled with immersive musical opportunities and cultural connections.

Mary Cay Brass moved to Zagreb, Croatia, which at the time (September, 1976) was part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. During this time, Yugoslavia experienced a folk music revival of sorts. Josip Tito, the Yugoslav dictator, and his communist government supported many cultural initiatives. One of these initiatives was the *Institut za Narodnu Umjetnost* (Institute of the Folk Arts) in Zagreb. Many prominent ethnologists, anthropologists, and ethnomusicologists, worked there, including Jerko Bezić. Bezić was a Croatian ethnomusicologist at the institute and served as Mary Cay's mentor during her first year of the Fulbright program. Under Bezić's guidance, she listened to numerous field recordings from all over Croatia. Through this copious listening work, Mary Cay learned linguistic differences and familiarized herself with the specific peculiarities of Croatian regional music.

Mary Cay also utilized many cultural immersion opportunities outside of the institute. For example, during her first few months in Yugoslavia, she devoted much of her time and effort to Serbo-Croatian language study. In addition, after her first several housing situations were not optimal, Mary Cay placed an ad to look for housing. She found a Croatian family with three

children, and in exchange for English lessons, she lived with them rent-free. The family owned a large home on Rockefeller Street, near the Zagreb city center. The house had an apartment with a separate entrance and kitchen. Mary Cay taught the kids English twice a week and usually joined the family for dinner each Sunday. As a result of this arrangement, both parties benefited immensely from language immersion, and Mary Cay had a comfortable place to live. Furthermore, because she did not have to pay for housing, Mary Cay could use her Fulbright stipend for additional travel and cultural opportunities throughout Balkan Europe.

In the spring of 1977, Mary Cay Brass accompanied Jerko Bezić on several fieldwork expeditions around the Balkans. Around this time, Bezić also arranged for her to meet Radmila Petrović, a Serbian ethnomusicologist who is known for her prolific fieldwork in the Sandžak region of Serbia. Mary Cay traveled from Zagreb to Serbia to participate in some of Petrović's fieldwork which ultimately led to an invitation to continue her studies with Petrović in Serbia. However, Mary Cay's initial Fulbright scholarship only covered one year. She applied for and was granted an extension and she moved to Belgrade, Serbia to continue her Balkan music studies and ethnomusicology fieldwork with Radmila Petrović.

During her first Fulbright year in Croatia, Mary Cay gained a crucial academic foundation with intense language study, her experience the following year in Serbia offered more hands-on opportunities in Balkan music. Her Belgrade work centered in the *Muzikoloski Institut*, a musicology organization founded on the same premises and around the same time as the institute in Zagreb. Radmila Petrović was a professor at this institute and Mary Cay collaborated with her on many of her fieldwork projects. She and Petrović traveled throughout rural Serbia to several villages, searching for traditional music from the region. Mary Cay described one of the village scenes in her field notes:

We arrived in the little mountain village of Jabuka (apple) about noon on May first, Labor day in Yugoslavia, to find hundreds of people gathered on the grassy hills at a fair or *vasar*. The sight was indeed impressive. There were bonfires spread about the hills with roasting lambs and pigs. Several *kolos* had formed to the accompaniment of people playing accordions or clarinets. In some places, groups of older men and women had formed and were singing songs about the villages they were from, describing the countryside.²⁰⁰

One of Radmila Petrović's main goals was to determine whether the younger generation knew Serbian folk songs. Over several field visits, Mary Cay and Radmila found many talented teenagers who impressed the ethnomusicology duo with their interpretations of the regional folk singing. Much to the local teenagers' delight, Mary Cay, a foreigner, spoke their language, and they seemed eager to sing their songs for her. These song and dance collecting adventures also allowed Mary Cay to witness first-hand the religious diversity of the Balkan region. Her field notes from these fieldwork journeys reflect the various music cultures of the ethnic groups in the area:

During the next days and on successive visits to the region, we taped over 70 songs and 20 dances from the various villages around Prijepolje, including both Moslem and Orthodox villages. These two cultures have each nurtured a very unique musical style very separate and very different from one another. The Orthodox villages preserve the old Serbian Dinaric style and the Moslem villages preserve an oriental style passed on from the Turks during their several hundred year occupation.²⁰¹

Although Radmila Petrović's mentorship played a large part of her time in Serbia, Mary Cay participated in other musical opportunities with other faculty members of the musicology institute in Belgrade. Dimitrije Stefanović, a Serbian musicologist who also worked at the music institute, was considered a renowned scholar of old Serbian and Byzantine music. He channeled his academic music interests and created a Byzantine choir. Mary Cay accepted his invitation to sing in this choir and considered it one of her most memorable experiences in Serbia. The choir

²⁰⁰ Ibid.

²⁰¹ MCB field notes

performed early Byzantine chants and medieval Serbian music and primarily sung in the Old Church Slavonic language. The choir was also another way for Mary Cay to visit numerous places in Serbia. Many of their performances were in old Serbian Orthodox monasteries, filled with grand acoustics, beautiful frescoes, and ornate wood carvings of religious icons.

Mary Cay's work at the institutes in Zagreb and Belgrade only lasted for the academic school year. Through her newly-established Balkan music connections, she discovered a dance camp on the Adriatic coast on a Croatian island near Korčula. The summer program was an extension of the Yugoslav *Kulturno Umjetnicko Drustvo* (KUD), a network of cultural performance ensembles sponsored by the government to promote cultural understanding among the various ethnic groups in the country.²⁰² Leaders and members of these KUDs from the different regions of Yugoslavia participated in this camp each summer. Balkan cultural academics divided Yugoslavia into different musical zones, and each summer's camp focused on a couple of different zones. Participants learned dances from other cultures and would return to their homes and teach them to their KUD ensembles.

Many of the participants described the setting for these camps as paradise. Daily activities included swimming in the clear, calm waters of the Adriatic Sea, eating fresh, delicious food, and singing and dancing all day until the early hours of the morning. At the end of each day's seminar, many participants headed over to the local *kafana*, where someone would pull out an accordion, and everyone would sing for hours. Not only did Mary Cay learn many songs, but she also attributed this experience as an integral part of her Serbo-Croatian language study. She and fellow Fulbright scholar Kate Nation were often the only Americans present, so these three-week programs were a perfect language immersion opportunity. These summer experiences were

²⁰² Anthony Shay, *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company Inc., 2008), 146.

one of Mary Cay's first journeys into music, peacebuilding, and witnessing how people from different cultures could connect through music. Though the little summer dance camp on the Adriatic Sea was a celestial moment, no one could imagine the devastation the complex ethnic wars would bring to the region just years later.

From the Balkans to New York City to Vermont

The next few years that followed Mary Cay's time in Yugoslavia were paramount to developing her unique career. Though she remained active in music and dance, she spent this period of her life developing her skills in cross-cultural understanding. During this time, the skills Mary Cay acquired provided a strong foundation for much of her music education philosophy to emerge. This music education philosophy eventually morphed into one that purposefully and simultaneously included peacebuilding. These experiences also launched Mary Cay into a lifelong career as a choral director.

Mary Cay did not immediately return to the United States at the end of her Fulbright scholarship. Instead, she remained in Europe and collaborated on several Balkan language and music cultural projects. One of these projects was a collaboration with a Serbian man named Sasha, whose father worked in the Balkan film industry. Sasha was once a Serbian exchange student to the United States. Mary Cay's Serbo-Croatian language skills had reached near fluency, so together, they worked to create subtitles for Balkan movies that were exported to other countries.

In addition, she attended various festivals and workshops throughout Yugoslavia and met several Northern Europeans who shared a love for Balkan music. They encouraged her to come and visit their countries to lead Balkan music workshops after her Fulbright program. As a result, in the summer of 1978, Mary Cay embarked on a mini-tour of sorts and visited Germany,

Sweden, and Denmark where she led Balkan music workshops and participated in their folk music and dance communities. She discovered thriving music scenes with talented singers, dancers, and instrumentalists in each place she visited. Singing, dancing, and parties filled an enriching summer in Northern Europe, and after a couple of months, she returned to Zagreb and Belgrade to say goodbye to her Balkan friends. While in Belgrade, she received a written invitation to work at the Balkan Arts Center in New York City. Mary Cay did not want to return to Minnesota and was excited at the prospect of living in New York City, so she accepted the position at the Balkan Arts Center.

New York City to Vermont

In Mary Cay's first couple of years in New York City, she exercised her newly-acquired expert Balkan language and culture skills in several job positions. In her first position at the Balkan Arts Center, she mainly assisted with their programming and cultural outreach and helped with a project to catalog old 78 records. Unfortunately, though Mary Cay was able to dabble in Balkan culture at this job, she was not fulfilled professionally and started to look for another job. She immediately found a bilingual secretarial-type job working for the Yugoslav News Agency, an organization located at the United Nations in New York City. At this job, Mary Cay enjoyed using her Serbo-Croatian language skills and helping communicate important news events between the United States and Yugoslavia. These positions created great opportunities for Mary Cay at that time in her life, but she did not envision a whole career working for these organizations.

Mary Cay spent the next four years honing two newly-acquired skillsets: teaching English as a second language and accordion playing. Even though she possessed a bachelor's degree in ethnomusicology, and an impressive stint as a Fulbright music scholar in Yugoslavia,

she was not interested in pursuing a career as an academic ethnomusicologist. Instead, she wanted to find a more marketable skill, so she enrolled as a graduate student at Columbia University and completed a master's degree in teaching English as a second language. After graduate school, Mary Cay taught English as a Second Language (ESL) at Riverside Church in New York City. The students in this program were immigrants and refugees from around the world. She fondly remembered her time in this job as a cultural facilitator who connected people worldwide and created a community in her classroom for students whose backgrounds spanned different languages and religions. In a sense, this was Mary Cay's first professional venture into peacebuilding and created a career avenue that would eventually intersect with music education.

Mary Cay was also active in folk dancing communities around New York City during the same era. However, her desire to accompany herself on her beloved Balkan songs and learn some New England contra dancing tunes led her to purchase an accordion. This newly-found interest in the accordion reignited Mary Cay's passion for performing, and she started to play for contra dances in Vermont and throughout New England. Discouraged by the constant noise and crime of New York City and satisfied with the vibrant folk music community and her new friends in New England, Mary Cay moved to Vermont in 1984.

Vermont: The Making of a Music Educator and Peacebuilder

The mid-1980s and early 1990s were crucial for the growth of Mary Cay's music career. During this time, she was an active instrumentalist, a music teacher, and an English as a second language educator. This period was also when Mary Cay's strong choral directing skills blossomed due to her professional experiences. World events also influenced her work. As the former Yugoslav countries erupted into war in the 1990s, Mary Cay honed her choral director and peacebuilder skills. One of the reasons for this focus was coping with the horrible news

coming from the Balkan region. This part of her life was instrumental in funneling her many talents and skillsets into her present-day philosophy as a choral director and peacebuilder.

Though Mary Cay initially moved to Vermont to immerse herself in the folk music and dancing community, she continued her work as an ESL educator, teaching part-time. In addition, she began her longtime association with the School for International Training (SIT) Graduate Institute²⁰³ in Brattleboro, Vermont, first as an ESL teacher and later with numerous collaborations with her choirs. However, the demand for ESL teachers in Vermont was not what it had been in New York City, allowing her to focus on numerous gigs as a musician. She spent her first few months in Vermont working part-time as an ESL teacher and playing contra dance gigs on her accordion. However, Mary Cay knew that she needed a full-time position.

Mary Cay's contra dance gigs enabled her to meet Peter and Mary Alice Amidon, prominent folk music performers and music educators. Mary Cay collaborated and shared songs with the Amidons numerous times in the New England contra dance music scene. They encouraged Mary Cay to become a music teacher. Mary Cay was worried because she had not studied music education in college; however, at the time, Vermont had a teacher shortage, and teacher certification was easy to attain with a content-area college degree. Peter Amidon invited Mary Cay to come to observe his teaching. Inspired by Peter's folk music and contra dancing in the elementary music classroom, Mary Cay accepted her first teaching job in 1984. She was an itinerant elementary music teacher, and she taught at six different elementary schools in the same district. Mary Cay eventually spent eight years as a school music teacher. A hallmark of her lifelong friendship with the Amidons, her contra dancing experience, and her time teaching elementary music, she co-authored several book and CD publications through New England

²⁰³ "School for International Training." Accessed December 26, 2021. <http://www.sit.edu>

Dance Masters.²⁰⁴ These publications would serve as a valuable resource for elementary music teachers who wished to teach folk music and dance traditions in their classrooms.

In 1989, Mary Cay had already established herself in the Vermont music scene when she received a phone call that would unknowingly launch her choral music career. Prominent Vermont choral director, Larry Gordon, had started Village Harmony, a choral music organization that focused on global folk singing traditions. Mary Cay remembered this pivotal moment in her choir directing life:

Larry Gordon called me up and said, “I’m thinking of starting a camp for teenagers. And I hear you know a lot about Balkan music. Would you like to come and teach at it?” I said yeah. And so that first summer we had this group of 18 teenagers and it was amazing, you know, and they were such quick learners. And then the next summer we did two camps, and then the next summer we did three camps...²⁰⁵

In the first Village Harmony teenager camps, the young singers would spend a part of the summer learning songs from many lands and then travel throughout New England for a choral concert tour. In these teenager camps, Mary Cay was able to teach songs that she had learned throughout her life as a Balkan music enthusiast and scholar. These first Village Harmony tours often featured Mary Cay playing the accordion to accompany Balkan songs and leading, often with audience participation, Balkan dances in each concert.

Through her participation as a leader in Village Harmony, a choir leader was born. Inspired and empowered by her work with Village Harmony, Mary Cay started several choirs in the early 1990s. She led several children’s choirs through her elementary school teaching jobs but eventually left elementary music teacher for another stint working full-time at SIT. After several parents of the children’s choir members encouraged Mary Cay to begin an adult community choir, she founded the River Singers in Saxtons River, Vermont, in 1991. Shortly

²⁰⁴ “New England Dancing Masters.” Accessed December 27, 2021. <https://dancingmasters.com>

²⁰⁵ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

thereafter, she founded Greenfield Harmony, another community choir based in Greenfield, Massachusetts. Both adult community choirs were instantly successfully and widely popular. Due to the choirs' successes, Mary Cay took a leap of faith, resigned from full-time teaching, and focused on her two community choirs and contra dance band gigs on the weekends.

Mary Cay modeled her community choirs after the choirs in the Village Harmony organization. The music was communal, reachable, and brought together singers of many different ages and backgrounds. Mary Cay recalled her initial experiences as a choir director:

I feel like I kind of fell into choral conducting, you know, from Village Harmony and then starting my own choirs. And, it was like learn as I go along and kind of develop my philosophy as I go along. It started out as a community choir, as an alternative to the classical community choirs. And to focus on more elemental and traditional music from various cultures, which is more accessible to people than a classical choir...²⁰⁶

Peacebuilding notions were present in Mary Cay's earliest days as a choral director. She emphasized creating a musical environment where singers could connect and learn about the world. Songs from Balkan cultures were an integral part of her community choirs. Each choir session included at least four or five songs from various Balkan music cultures. Unfortunately, the beginning of Mary Cay's choral music career aligned with the timing of the Balkan Wars, and the media constantly showed images of a war-torn Yugoslavia. Mary Cay was personally devastated as the Balkan region descended into chaos. Balkan songs in her choirs had a two-fold purpose: 1) to spread her passion for Balkan music and educate others about Balkan culture, and 2) to dispel war myths and to humanize the people of former Yugoslavia. Mary Cay somberly remembered how she felt during the Balkan wars:

What I found myself doing was teaching repertoire from Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia to kind of humanize all those people... because the news was just full of gruesome, horrible, stories. And so I just tried to bring this sense of humanity to them all through music... it was very upsetting to watch this all happen. It was horrifying. Staying connected to the music was kind of a balm, and teaching it to other people was a way

²⁰⁶ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, October 1, 2021.

I felt like I could, I don't know, you feel so helpless, like I should be able to do something, I spent time there, I speak the language, but there wasn't anything for me to do... just doing it with music was probably the best way for me to express my sadness and grief through music and teaching it to others...²⁰⁷

During the war years in the 1990s, Mary Cay's community choirs and Village Harmony continued to succeed in their programming. She received numerous invitations to teach Balkan songs at Village Harmony camps throughout New England, and by the mid-1990s, Village Harmony had expanded internationally to England. The Balkan repertoire was wildly popular in England. Audience members wanted access to Balkan sheet music, but there were very few English language publications of Balkan songs and certainly no choir arrangements. Mary Cay responded to this need. In 1994, with the help of Larry Gordon and Village Harmony, she published her first book of Balkan music, *Traditional Songs of the Balkans*,²⁰⁸ in 1994. She assembled a team of Village Harmony teenage singers, adult singers from her music circles, and instrumentalists to record a compact disc (CD) to accompany the book. Village Harmony's success in England continued, and a chance encounter in 1994 likely provided an essential pivotal point in Mary Cay's choir and peacebuilding career.

In the early 1990s, the rise of nationalism and failed politics caused Yugoslavia to descend into chaos. Each of the republics (Croatia, Bosnia, Slovenia, Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) eventually became independent nations; however, political division and ethnic strife enable horrible and complex wars to emerge in the region—particularly in Croatia and Bosnia. As the wars raged in the Balkans, tragic stories emerged from refugees who fled the region. During the same time, Mary Cay accompanied Village Harmony on a tour to England as a co-

²⁰⁷ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

²⁰⁸ Mary Cay Brass, ed., *Village Harmony: Traditional Songs of the Balkans* (Marshfield: Northern Harmony Publishing, 1995).

leader. On this 1994, Mary met Emsuda Mujagić, a Bosnian refugee. This encounter greatly affected Mary Cay's outlook on the Balkan Wars and her role as a peacebuilder.

Emsuda Mujagić

Mary Cay's initial connection with Emsuda Mujagić and her continued association with Village Harmony provided the impetus to unite her music and peacebuilding work. She initially met Emsuda on a Village Harmony Camp in England. In 1994, the camp performed in a tour of England, and in typical Village Harmony fashion, choristers spent the first week in intensive rehearsals and concert preparation in one location. Hazelwood House, a sort of bed and breakfast and retreat center in Devon, England, was the rehearsal location of this particular tour. Mary Cay did not know that the women that managed the Hazelwood House also regularly hosted refugees from Bosnia. Coincidentally, the center hosted two Bosnian women during Village Harmony's rehearsal residency. On the last evening of the rehearsal week, Village Harmony performed a concert for the guests and staff of Hazelwood House. The audience included Emsuda, who was elated to hear the music of her country performed by young Americans singing perfect Bosnian. Emsuda, who spoke no English, was relieved that Mary Cay spoke her language. She captivated Mary Cay for the next few hours with her powerful Bosnian story of survival and resiliency.

Emsuda had lived in Kozarac, a predominantly Muslim town in Northwestern Bosnia ethnically cleansed by Serb forces during the early part of the war. Emsuda and some of her family managed to escape at night through the woods and eventually made their way to Zagreb, Croatia. Though the war was still raging in Bosnia, Emsuda and her friend Šerifa had come to the Hazelwood House for some recuperation from Zagreb, where they had been living in a Bosnian refugee community. Emsuda was instrumental in establishing a therapy center for women refugees in Zagreb. This center taught the women skills such as knitting and hairdressing

to earn a living for their families. Because of the war, many women had lost their husbands and were now the sole providers for their households. Emsuda was quite the activist; in addition to her work at the women's therapy center in Zagreb, she founded the nongovernmental organization *Srcem do Mira* (Through Hearts to Peace). This organization promoted reconciliation in the war-ravaged Northwestern region of Bosnia, particularly in Emsuda's hometown, Kozarac. Furthermore, due to her administrative work in *Srcem do Mira*, Emsuda secured various international sponsorships, including assistance from the Finnish government, to aid in her peacebuilding work in this region.

Emsuda and her reconciliation work left a significant impression on Mary Cay. The two had become good friends since their initial meeting. When Larry Gordon, the director of Village Harmony, planned a 1996 Northern Harmony (a semi-professional touring ensemble that is part of the auspices of Village Harmony) tour to Europe, there was a gap in the tour schedule. Mary Cay suggested a stop in Zagreb to visit Emsuda and the Bosnian refugee community. Larry agreed to this tour addition, and Emsuda and the woman's therapy center graciously hosted Northern Harmony for performances and homestays. This instance marked the first occasion when one of Mary Cay's choirs would perform on-location in the Balkans. The interaction between Northern Harmony and the Bosnian refugees at the woman's therapy center was positive and spirited. At the time, Western nations had often overlooked the Bosnian War, and the refugees were thrilled that the young American singers cared enough about their culture to sing their songs and dances with expertise and enthusiasm. Even though the center's resources were scarce and their income was limited, Emsuda insisted that each singer take a hand-knitted sweater as a remembrance of the exchange.

After the Zagreb stop, the ensemble had a few days of no performances before they traveled to England to complete their tour. Meanwhile, Emsuda had invited Mary Cay to accompany her on a quick trip into Bosnia. Because Emsuda's town Kozarac had been destroyed, they stayed in the nearby city of Sanski Most. Mary Cay, shocked at the scenes she witnessed in immediate post-war Bosnia, painfully remembered the visit:

I'd never seen a war-torn country. It was just like, everything was bombed out. Every church, mosque, and house had pockmarks all over them. There was no infrastructure left, there was no power...and I remember falling asleep at night and hearing explosions and I'd say, "Emsuda, what's that?" And she said, "Oh, that's probably an animal stepping on a mine." So that was my first experience. It kind of made me sick. It was hard for me.²⁰⁹

The Dayton Agreement was a peace treaty that had brokered a ceasefire in Bosnia, placing an end to the Bosnian War just a few months prior. Part of the visit included accompanying Emsuda to visit her displaced friends and family from Kozarac. Mary Cay recalled the Bosnians being so grateful that there was no more shooting. After a few days in Bosnia with Emsuda, Mary Cay flew to London to rejoin the Northern Harmony tour.

The Bosnian trip experience rendered Mary Cay speechless. Her witness to Emsuda's story and subsequent peace activism and her first-hand visit to a war-torn country were pivotal in developing Mary Cay's music philosophy. These events enabled her to shift her music-making and revolutionize her choirs as a tool for peace activism. In the time following these events, her choir concerts became benefit concerts for victims of the wars in Bosnia. As the Balkan conflicts ended in Bosnia, they shifted to Kosovo towards the late 1990s. Always sensitive to the events unfolding in the Balkans, Mary Cay's benefit concert work included opportunities to raise money for people affected by the war in Kosovo. In addition, she created numerous Balkan choral music arrangements during this time frame based on her Balkan adventures in song collecting. As a

²⁰⁹ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

result, she published many of these arrangements from her work with Village Harmony and her community choirs in New England in her second book, *Balkan Bridges Songbook: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria*²¹⁰, in 1999. She also continued to work with students from all over the world in the ESL program at SIT in Brattleboro, Vermont. While Mary Cay was combining her choir and peacebuilding talents in her work in this era, Village Harmony continued to expand its international music camp offerings.

Summer Music Camps

Mary Cay's work expanded through the Village Harmony Balkan summer music camps. Mary Cay provided expertise and a niche for Village Harmony's blossoming choir programming as it increased its network of camps in countries worldwide. The first Balkan camp was in Bosnia in 2006 followed by another in 2008. She expanded this work to Macedonia with summer music camps in 2010, 2011, 2013 and 2015. Finally, Mary Cay organized camps in Bosnia in 2016 and 2018. As the camps expanded and evolved, the cultural understanding and peacebuilding became more prominent and apparent with each camp.

First Summer Balkan Music Camp: Village Harmony Bosnia 2006

By the early 2000s, the Vermont-based choral music organization Village Harmony had expanded its offerings from a summer teenager program to include opportunities for adult and multigenerational choirs. Their programming also started to spread worldwide and included short summer performance study opportunities in several countries around the globe. In addition, Mary Cay had become a regular choir camp leader for Village Harmony's programming. Throughout her career, she always knew that she wanted to lead an international Village Harmony singing camp in the Balkans.

²¹⁰ Mary Cay Brass, ed., introduction to *Balkan Bridges: Traditional Music of the Former Yugoslavia and Bulgaria* (Brattleboro: New England Dancing Masters, 1999).

In 2005, Village Harmony sponsored Mary Cay to travel on a fact-finding trip to explore the possibility of offering a singing camp in the Balkans. She had remained in touch with Emsuda and heard about her continued efforts to rebuild Kozarac, Bosnia. Emsuda and her nongovernmental organization, *Srcem do Mira*, had been very instrumental in helping refugees return home to Kozarac to begin their post-war lives. Heavily supported by a small group of women from several countries, *Srcem do Mira* sponsored a peacebuilding conference each May. Mary Cay planned her research trip to the Balkans in conjunction with this event. She spoke with the Emsuda about the possibility of having a Village Harmony camp in Kozarac, and Emsuda enthusiastically agreed.

In addition to a camp location, Mary Cay also wanted to find Bosnian teachers for the singing camp. She had a previous connection with American Laura Hassler, founder of the Dutch-based Musicians Without Borders²¹¹, an organization that had its beginnings in the Balkans in the aftermath of the ethnic wars of that region. Hassler recommended several key people in the Bosnian music scene and connected Mary Cay with the interreligious choir Pontanima. Through Hassler's recommendation, Mary Cay traveled to Sarajevo and met Father Ivo Markavić, the founder of Pontanima, and Maja Budimir, a singer in the Pontanima choir. Mary Cay also met another talented Bosnian musician, Tijana Vinjavić. Mary Cay invited Maja and Tijana to help lead the first camp in Kozarac. She also asked an American ethnomusicologist, Mark Forry, to help lead the first camp. Forry, also fluent in Serbo-Croatian, had researched in Yugoslavia and met Mary Cay during her Fulbright years.

Mary Cay's research trip set the stage for the first camp. In the summer of 2006, around twenty singers of all ages traveled to Kozarac, Bosnia, to participate in the camp. The program

²¹¹ "Musicians Without Borders." Accessed Jan 4, 2021. <https://www.musicianswithoutborders.org>

format followed a typical Village Harmony camp: an initial rehearsal period lasting about a week, cultural activities and day trips, then a series of concerts in local venues, often with local performing groups. Emsuda accommodated the whole camp at the newly established *Screm do Mira* headquarters in the middle of Kozarac. With Maja's help, the repertoire of the camp followed a music and peacebuilding structure similar to the choir Pontanima's operation. The camp songs included *ilahija* from the Bosnian Muslim tradition, Serbian Orthodox chants, and music from American folk cultures.

Although the Kozarac camp had many redeeming qualities, it also presented some unexpected challenges. At the end of the camp, the concerts were not well-organized and happened in atypical venues, such as the community swimming pool. An unexpected thunderstorm canceled an outdoor concert, so the choir sang an impromptu concert on the side of the street. In addition to the unusual concert settings, some participants had trouble sleeping each night; Emsuda's center was located directly across from a bar that played loud music into the early morning hours.

Overall, the camp met Mary Cay's musical expectations and included some essential elements of peacebuilding. Maja's stories from her Pontanima choir experiences inspired the participants. They were especially interested in Pontanima's mission and how it aimed to perform music from all ethnic groups in the region. Though Emsuda was not a musician, she guided the group on cultural experiences such as the local mosque to learn more about Islam and a former concentration camp to learn more about what happened in the region during the Bosnian War. Most importantly, the camp included sessions to interact with local Bosnians, eager to share their war experiences with the camp participants. This region was ground zero for ethnic cleansing and genocide, so the Bosnians' stories were horrific. Mary Cay and co-leader

Mark Forry would translate the survivors' stories from Bosnian to English in these sessions.

These stories were challenging for Mary Cay to hear:

I actually got really sick and I had to leave early...but you know, a lot of people had a really powerful experience at that camp. And I think it was a hard camp for me to do personally. When I decided to do a second one, I decided to not go back to Kozarac, partly because of that... not being able to really listen to stories like that.²¹²

Though many considered the 2006 Village Harmony camp in Bosnia an incredible experience,

Mary Cay wanted to scope out other Bosnian places to host the next camp.

Second Summer Balkan Music Camp: Village Harmony Bosnia 2008

Mary Cay sought to make the second camp stronger and include better performance opportunities created more meaningful music and cultural exchanges. She gathered another great musical American and Bosnian team: Tijana Vinjavić served as Mary Cay's co-leader, Maja Budimir returned to teach a set of Balkan repertoire from Pontanima choir, and Branka Vidović, an ethnomusicologist from the Sarajevo Music Academy, came to introduce a collection of traditional Bosnian village songs. Mary Cay chose to have the 2008 Village Harmony Bosnia camp in Bugojno, a small city surrounded by mountains and forests in the central part of the country. Tijana, an established musician and teacher in Bosnia, suggested Bugojno because of several music connections in the area. One of the most critical connections was Samira Merdžanić, a Bugojno-based accordion teacher and choir leader. Samira was a driving force in organizing the local choir concerts for the 2008 camp session.

This camp also included over twenty participants from the United States and a few participants from Western Europe. The group rehearsed at Hotel Karalinka, a log cabin-style lodge hotel in the hills on the edge of Bugojno. For eight or nine days, the camp ensemble rehearsed a concert program of various Bosnian singing cultures such as *sevdalinka* and

²¹² Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

American music such as shape-note and gospel songs. Samira and some of the choristers from her girl choir also visited the participants at the hotel throughout the camp session. This exchange between the girls and Village Harmony erupted in spontaneous Bosnian dancing, singing, laughing, eating, and the occasional accordion duet from Mary Cay and Samira. Mary Cay would later fundraise and invite two of Samira's choristers to participate in a teen Village Harmony camp in the United States.

One of the memorable concerts from this camp was an outdoor joint concert in a plaza in the center of Bugojno, where singers from Village Harmony and Samira's local choir captivated the local Bosnian audience with their songs. The Bosnians could not believe that foreigners were singing their songs with detail, proper tone and pronunciation, and enthusiasm and passion. Other musical opportunities included several exchanges with local musicians and choirs throughout Bosnia. One of the musicians was the late Omer Pobrić, a well-known Bosnian accordion player who was a prominent figure in preserving *sevdalinka*. He hosted the entire camp in his traditional Bosnian living room, complete with ornate Bosnian rugs. Participants took off their shoes and sat on the floor, where Pobrić served Bosnian cakes and coffee. Pobrić played his accordion for the group all afternoon. The camp ensemble sang along with the Bosnian songs that they knew.

After a few performances around Bugojno, the tour moved to Sarajevo. The camp had an opportunity to attend a rehearsal with Pontanima, the choir from which Maja hailed and brought the interreligious repertoire model. The rehearsal took place at St. Anthony's Catholic Church in Sarajevo. The acoustics in the church were beautiful, and after listening to Pontanima for a few selections, the Village Harmony group joined the choir for some of the pieces they had learned in the camp. The choir's model of singers from all backgrounds singing each other's songs inspired

the camp participants. Afterward, the camp participants mingled with members of Pontanima in a cigarette smoke-filled break room over several rounds of Bosnian coffee. A few nights later, the Village Harmony Bosnia choir sang at a festival in the old town of Sarajevo on the steps of the Sacred Heart Cathedral for their last performance of this very memorable tour.

British ethnomusicologist, Caroline Bithell, documented much of the 2018 Village Harmony Bosnia camp in her book *A Different Voice, A Different Song*²¹³. Bithell wrote of the camp experience: “People told us how important these songs had been in keeping up the morale in the war.”²¹⁴The music exchanges were very meaningful among the participants and Bosnians. Two of the leaders shared some of their war experiences. Tijana had lived through the siege of Sarajevo, and Maja escaped the war and lived as a refugee in Italy. As a result, the camp participants better interpreted the ethos of the songs and how they boosted morale during and after the Bosnian War. The camp concerts amazed and warmed the hearts of the Bosnians at each performance. In a gloomy post-war society, the songs significantly lifted the spirits of many concert attendees. Overall, this camp better accomplished Mary Cay’s singing and peacebuilding goals.

Third through Sixth Summer Camps: Macedonian Village Harmony 2010, 2011, 2013, 2015

After the two Village Harmony camps in Bosnia, Mary Cay’s Balkan music path took a slight detour. In late 2008 or early 2009, she received a phone call saying that a Macedonian accordion player and singer needed to fill a few days on their American concert tour. Mary Cay agreed to host them in Vermont. The accordionist was Goran Alachki, a well-known Macedonian virtuoso, and his then-wife Adrianna was a talented singer. Goran spoke Serbian because he had lived all over former Yugoslavia (his father had been in the Yugoslav military).

²¹³ Caroline Bithell. *A Different Voice, A Different Song* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²¹⁴ *Ibid*, 283.

Because Goran spoke Serbian, it was easy for him and Mary Cay to communicate. He took a great interest in Mary Cay's choir experiences in Balkan Europe. Goran suggested that Mary Cay offer a similar music camp in Macedonia (now known as North Macedonia). Goran and Mary Cay continued their conversations over Skype after Goran returned to his home country. After a few brainstorming sessions, they decided to offer a summer music camp in Macedonia through Village Harmony in 2010. Goran was well-connected to the Macedonian music scene and had a lot of musical talent within his family. He and Mary Cay hired an impressive faculty for the first Macedonian camp: Adrianna, Goran's wife and a well-known and talented singer in Macedonia, Graciela, Goran's daughter and Macedonian folk dance extraordinaire, Igor Dimovski, an accordionist, and Bajsa Arifovska, a versatile and talented multi-instrumentalist specializing in Macedonian folk instruments. Goran played accordion for most Macedonian songs, and Mary Cay and Village Harmony director Larry Gordon would alternate teaching sets of American songs. Zenil Strucni, a local KUD leader, led the folk dancing at a later camp.

The Macedonian Village Harmony camps experienced immense success. They were so popular that Mary Cay planned three additional camps in Macedonia beyond 2010: one year later in 2011, and then 2013 and 2015. Each camp started with a rehearsal period at Hotel Manastir in Berovo, a town in the Maleševo mountain region in Macedonia. The camps were the ultimate folk music enthusiast's holiday. Each day typically began with a folk dancing class and morning rehearsals with the teaching faculty. Copious amounts of break time occupied the afternoons. Participants often enjoyed hiking the beautiful surrounding nature, swimming in a nearby lake, exploring the ornate Christian icons in local orthodox monasteries, and sipping Turkish coffee in a local bar or restaurant. The food at Hotel Manastir was delicious and fresh, and the staff served the guests farm-to-table style feasts for each meal. Large parties were held in the hotel restaurant

each evening after dinner. Goran and the other Macedonian teachers would create a dance band, and they would play a variety of Balkan music so that the participants could sing and dance along. Apart from the occasional monastery, the Macedonian camp concerts occurred in outdoor plazas in villages and towns throughout Macedonia.

Mary Cay did not consider the Macedonian camps an enormous success in peacebuilding; however, she did consider them significant in using global music to connect people. The performance opportunities in each camp were immersive and joyful experiences for the Macedonians at each concert. Frequently, Village Harmony Macedonia performed concerts with a local KUD dance troupe, so there would be hundreds of attendees. The concerts were not a typical formal concert experience; locals would sing along with the Macedonian songs and jump on the stage to join in on dances. The concerts would often turn into large block parties in the villages. The Macedonians received Village Harmony with curiosity and gracious hospitality. It was not uncommon for them to invite the foreigners into their homes, serving them generous amounts of coffee, sweets, and *rakija* (locally homemade fruit brandy). In one village near Berovo, Mary Cay witnessed some young girls who were talented singers and dancers. She smiled as she remembered: “Larry Gordon came up to me and grabbed my arm and said I want to bring a couple of these girls to the States next summer!”²¹⁵ Two of the Macedonian girls attended Village Harmony summer teen camps in New England a couple of years later. A similar exchange happened almost a decade earlier in the second Bosnia camp. Still, this instance became a part of a larger model for Village Harmony to bring youth from underprivileged countries to teen camps in the United States.

²¹⁵ Mary Cay Brass, interview by author, Zoom, October 1, 2021.

Though the Macedonian camps did not have an explicit peacebuilding focus, some indirect notions of fostering reconciliation were in the camp. There were several cross-cultural opportunities within Macedonian music at the camp. The camps had strong connections with the local Roma population, a traditionally marginalized group within the Balkans and the rest of Europe. For instance, some camp excursions took place in Roma neighborhoods, where participants would dance *oro* (dances from the Macedonian tradition) in the streets while Roma brass bands played along. In addition, the leaders and participants had informal conversations about the Roma people and their situation in Macedonia.

After four successful Village Harmony summer camps in Macedonia, Mary Cay felt that the program had run its course. Though the programs were a happy and expected surprise in her career, Mary Cay longed to return to the music and peacebuilding programming she had started years earlier in Bosnia. So in 2015, around the time of the last Macedonian camp, Mary Cay turned her efforts to planning a third Village Harmony summer music camp in Bosnia.

Seventh Summer Camp: Village Harmony Bosnia 2016

The fourth summer music camp, Village Harmony Bosnia 2016, came to fruition from Mary Cay's connection with Vahidin Omanović. His personal experiences during the Bosnian War eventually led him to Vermont, which connected to Mary Cay's peacebuilding and choir work in the area. Their connected experiences and collaborations helped create a seventh Village Harmony Balkan music camp at Vahidin's peacebuilding center in Sanski Most, Bosnia.

Vahidin Omanović was an important figure in Mary Cay's career. Vahidin grew up in a village near Sanski Most, Bosnia, an area of Bosnia that experienced unspeakable horrors during the Bosnian War. When he was sixteen, the war forced him to move to a refugee camp in Slovenia, where he remained for four years. Vahidin resettled in Sanski Most after the war and

began teaching English at the local high school. Like many Bosnian war victims, he harbored hatred and resentment against the Bosnian Serbs. The principal at the high school where Vahidin taught strongly encouraged him to attend a peacebuilding seminar led by Paula Green, an American woman and prominent peacebuilder who taught at the School of International (SIT) in Vermont and co-founded its master's program in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. This seminar inspired Vahidin to dedicate his life to peacebuilding. Vahidin became a protégé of Paula Green and traveled to the United States to study at SIT. After Vahidin completed the peacebuilding program at SIT, he returned to Sanski Most, Bosnia, and founded the Center for Peacebuilding, devoting his lifework to fostering reconciliation in Bosnia.

Mary Cay's connection with Vahidin began through her association with SIT in 1999. Her community choirs in New England had already established collaborations with SIT's newly established CONTACT²¹⁶ (Conflict Transformation Across Cultures), a summer program Paula Green founded that brought together participants worldwide to study peacebuilding. As a result, Mary Cay's choir performed songs from many lands as part of the summer's seminar activities. Vahidin, particularly moved by the choir's performance of Bosnian songs, told the story of his first experience hearing Mary Cay's choir:

When I watched Mary Cay with her choir the first time, I'd heard they were singing Balkan music. I'm like, okay, whatever. People try to sing many things, but when Mary Cay showed up with her accordion, she was standing there. And they started to sing. They were really good...they sounded like Bosnians, you know, and the energy! Sometimes you have people who sound like natives, but the energy is missing...but when they sang Bosnian songs, I was just amazed!²¹⁷

Mary Cay and Vahidin met after this performance, where they discussed her extensive background with the Balkan region. She invited Vahidin to a local Balkan dance night. To

²¹⁶ "About Paula.", accessed January 9, 2021. <https://www.paulagreen.net/about-paula/>

²¹⁷ Vahidin Omanović, interview with author, Zoom, December 22, 2021.

Vahidin, who was homesick at times, these dance gatherings were a welcome addition to his life in Vermont. The two remained friends through the years and occasionally met for lunch or coffee, saw each other at folk dancing, and even collaborated on a presentation where Vahidin spoke and Mary Cay played and sang Bosnian songs. When Vahidin returned to Bosnia and founded his peacebuilding center, Mary Cay became an ardent supporter. In fact, with the help of her choir community, she was the organization's first donor.

Vahidin remained professionally connected to New England in several ways following his completion of the program at SIT. Keene State College in New Hampshire often hosted Vahidin as a guest lecturer for their master's program in genocide studies. Vahidin lectured in their program in 2015, and while he was there, Mary Cay invited him for a coffee. In a small New England coffee shop, she proposed the possibility of having a Village Harmony Bosnia camp at Vahidin's peacebuilding center in Sanski Most, Bosnia.

After Village Harmony approved the budget for the new camp in Bosnia in 2015, Mary Cay spent much of the next few months planning with Vahidin. This camp would be different from the other camps, as Mary Cay wanted it to have a specific and intentional peacebuilding focus. She arranged for Vahidin to lead the participants in peacebuilding sessions. These sessions would coach the participants on creating dialogue in reconciliation, educate them about Bosnia, and familiarize them with the peacebuilding center. The Center for Peacebuilding in Sanski Most had also recently started a choir, Harmonija. Mary Cay viewed this as a vital exchange opportunity to see music and peacebuilding in action.

Mary Cay hired a strong teaching team for this camp: Alma Karić and Samira Merdžanić, well-respected choir leaders from Sarajevo and Bugojno respectively, would teach choral arrangements of the Bosnian *sevdalinka*, Alma Karabeg, leader of the peacebuilding center's

Harmonija, would lead some additional choral arrangements of Bosnian folk music, Zorana Guja and Lejla Čaušević, ethnomusicology students from the Academy of Music in Sarajevo, would teach the women a set of Bosnian village songs, and Suzannah Park, a popular Village Harmony teacher from the United States, would introduce a collection of Appalachian choral arrangements. In addition to their administrative duties, Mary Cay would lead a few American shape-note and gospel songs. Finally, Vahidin would teach the men Islamic Sufi chants from the Bosnian Muslim tradition. Samira, who had helped with the previous camp in Bosnia 2008, was well-connected in the Bosnian choral music scene and helped arrange most of the concerts on tour. The tour and rehearsal period began in Sanski Most, had stops in Bugojno and Konjic, and ended in Sarajevo.

Hotel Sanus, a hotel near the center of town along the Sana River, hosted the rehearsal week for the camp. The main mosque in Sanski Most was almost directly across the river, and mellow call-to-prayer sounded at various intervals throughout each day. The Center for Peacebuilding was only a few blocks away, so it was easy for its staff to participate in the camps' activities each day. In addition, members of the Harmonija choir would attend rehearsals and sing with the choir each day. The ages of the participants spanned an extensive range; there were teenagers, and there were people in their eighties. The participants ranged from amateur musicians to professional singers and music teachers. As the camp happened in mid-summer, the days were hot. On rehearsal breaks, participants swam in the cool waters of the Sana River or walked alongside the shady trees on the banks. On evenings after the rehearsals, participants frequented the bars, restaurants, and street vendors along the main street of Sanski Most. Peacebuilding sessions were interjected into the rehearsals each day. Local religious leaders hosted the participants for tours at a mosque, an orthodox church, and a catholic church.

At the end of the rehearsal week, members of the Center for Peacebuilding staff and Harmonija choir hosted the choir participants for a couple of nights as guests in their homes. In these homestays, the hosts fed their guests seemingly never-ending amounts of Bosnian food, integrated them into their family social activities, and took them sightseeing around the area. This sightseeing included the region's stunning nature, and participants hiked to beautiful waterfalls, caves, and incredible views. Again, it was important to Mary Cay that each person experience the warm hospitality of the Bosnian people.

The fact that the 2016 Village Harmony Bosnia camp accomplished its musical goals was apparent in the audience at each performance. After the musical introduction of each *sevdalinka* arrangement, audiences clapped with appreciation and recognition. At the beginning of each women's village song, the audiences chuckled not because the choir sounded terrible but because they immediately felt nostalgic for an older female family member, such as a grandmother. During the soul-lifting American gospel songs, the audience joyfully clapped along. Local Bosnian Muslims would often close their eyes and sing along with the choral arrangements of *ilahija*.

Each musical performance visibly moved Mary Cay, but she remembered an afternoon performance in Hrustovo, a village near Sanski Most, as her favorite. Vahidin and the staff at his peacebuilding center had arranged this special performance as a surprise. The concert was in a cave on the side of a small mountain. Hundreds of tealight candles in the dark cave created a breathtaking atmosphere, and the rock formations created resonant acoustics. Local Bosnians and visiting Bosnians who now lived in other parts of Europe, North America, and Australia filed in the cave to listen to the concert. A local news station sent reporters and camera crews to cover the show. The Village Harmony choristers sang a fantastic concert with the help of lights from

their phones and flashlights. After the concert, the choir participants made their way downhill to a local picnic area. Local Bosnians had gathered to prepare an impromptu feast for all the visitors. The local men spit-roasted lambs on open grassy areas while the women prepared other food in small huts. An accordion player appeared, and Bosnians and the Village Harmony participants danced kolos after eating delicious food. The weather was sunny, but not too hot, with a gentle breeze. As Mary Cay recalled this experience, she exclaimed, “It was kind of magical!”²¹⁸ The occasion was a momentous one for Hrustovo—there had not been any community celebration in the village for over twenty years.

As is the tradition in many Village Harmony camps, the participants circled for discussion on one of the last days of the program. Mary Cay led the debriefing of the program tour. She allowed space for each participant to process perceptions of Bosnia, its music, and how peacebuilding played a role in its current social and political climate. Each person in the 2016 camp had something similar to say; through tears, hugs, and laughter, everyone agreed that the camp had been one of the most rewarding experiences of their lives. Mary Cay considered this camp one of her most significant life and career accomplishments: “I remember thinking when I came back from the Bosnia trip in 2016, I was like, okay, that’s about the best I could do in this life!”²¹⁹

²¹⁸ Mary Cay Brass, interview with author, Zoom, October 1, 2021.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

Eighth Summer Camp: Village Harmony Bosnia 2018

Mary Cay was already planning the next Village Harmony Bosnia camp before the 2016 camp ended. She wanted to build on the resounding success of the 2016 music camp, strengthen its programming, and grow its outreach and musical opportunities. Vahidin graciously agreed to host the camp in Sanski Most. In addition to teaching her *sevdalinka* choral arrangements, Samira agreed to plan a rewarding and ambitious concert tour schedule. Zorana and Lejla returned from Sarajevo to teach Bosnian village songs. A couple of new teachers joined the program: Avery Book, a regular Village Harmony teacher in the United States, added a new dimension to the camp by teaching a set of songs that addressed social justice, and Muamer Ćukle, a member of the choir Sejfullah in Konjic, led more Islamic Sufi chants from the Bosnian Muslim tradition. In addition, Mary Cay brought traditional American and South African songs to the camp's repertoire.

The 2018 Bosnia camp had many similarities from the 2016 Bosnia camp. The rehearsal period happened at Hotel Sanus for the second time. Many of the 2018 music campers had also participated in the 2016 camp. The Bosnians, especially the peacebuilding center staff and the Harmonija choristers greeted everyone like old friends and family members. People went to familiar cafes and their favorite coffee and ice-cream spots in the breaks. Many of the choristers even stayed with the same host families from 2016.

Vahidin conducted more extensive peacebuilding seminars with the participants at the 2018 camp. Since the last camp, he had established a farm on the outskirts of town. The farm belonged to the Center for Peacebuilding and served as an outreach program for the center. The center planned to attempt self-sustainability and use the farm to educate the public on climate change. Vahidin hosted the camp at the farm one afternoon. Everyone walked around the

meadow to look at the garden and the animals while Vahidin and his friends prepared a large Bosnian feast in the farmhouse. The peacebuilding farm and its goals impressed the participants so much that they gave a donation earmarked specifically for the farm at the end of the camp.

The 2018 choral participants created another masterful concert of American and Bosnian songs. The concert tour included a few more stops; it started in Sanski Most and made its way through Jajce, Donji Vakuf, Bugojno, Konjic, and Sarajevo. Each location afforded more opportunities for a richer cultural exchange. Post-concert parties included tons of food and spirited kolo dancing in traditional Bosnian fashion. In addition to the 2018 Village Harmony touring choir, each concert also featured a local choir. These opportunities satisfied Mary Cay; she wanted to expand the cultural connections at this particular camp.

Though there was no cave concert in 2018, the musical opportunities remained extraordinary. One of Mary Cay's favorite memories included the day at Jajce. A local retirement group hosted an afternoon feast in this city. After the meal, many hosts wore costumes, and one of the hosts played the accordion. The hosts joyfully sang old folk songs all afternoon. Later that evening, the hosts sat in the front row of the outdoor choir concert. The setting for the Jajce concert was adjacent to an old medieval church on the complex of the remnants of a castle. High on a hill, the concert overlooked a vast valley while the sunset served as the backdrop. Usually, outdoor concerts in Bosnia have gossip and chatter; however, the Village Harmony choir captivated the audience with their songs. Mary Cay and Samira began many Bosnian songs with an accordion duet introduction. This music excited the audience, for many Bosnians present now lived in another country. Nostalgia for their traditional music filled the air. When the choir sang upbeat American gospel songs, the audience nodded with approval. The audience particularly liked the South African peace hymn "Ukuthula." The audience stood

and made the accompanying dance motions with the choir. The Jajce audience was genuinely grateful for the concert experience.

The peacebuilding ethos of the 2018 camp deeply permeated the music in a way that Mary Cay envisioned when planning the camp. Mary Cay's favorite examples involved one of the camp participants, an American Catholic priest. Dominic, the priest, enthusiastically volunteered to sing a solo in one of the *ilahija*, a sacred song from the Muslim faith. This gesture was especially compelling for the Bosnian audiences. Samira Merdžanić, one of the Bosnian music camp teachers, remembers the reaction of the audience at the concert in her hometown of Bugojno:

They were so deeply touched when, in 2018, a priest, Dominic sang ilahija. And everyone liked that song, but especially the people who knew that he's a priest and singing ilahija. Yeah. That was a really, really emotional moment. Not just for the audience. It was an emotional moment for us who were on the stage at the moment.²²⁰

The Bosnian people simply could not believe that a priest willingly sang an Islamic song. But, for Mary Cay, these small moments represented the ethos of her career and the work she was doing in the Balkans. When she taught this song to her community choirs in the United States and told them the story, one of her choristers, a retired minister, volunteered to sing the solo.

The 2018 camp ended in Sarajevo. The last performance happened in conjunction with a local KUD festival at a local community center auditorium. About one-hundred small children dressed in traditional costumes danced Bosnian folk dances on the stage. Then, the Village Harmony amazed another audience with their renditions of Bosnian *sevdalinka*. The whole auditorium clapped their hands and tapped their feet when Mary Cay led her American choral

²²⁰ Samira Merdžanić, interview with author, Zoom, October 12, 2021.

arrangements. Mary Cay wanted to have another Bosnian music camp a few years later, but the COVID-19 pandemic halted those plans.

Additional Career and Work Highlights

While Mary Cay's experiences with Balkan music and peacebuilding through Village Harmony are essential milestones in her career, these were not the only significant events in her work. The Village Harmony camps in the Balkans were one-time events that served as meaningful hallmarks in her career; however, her choir and peacebuilding work was ongoing, particularly in her choir communities in New England. Global awareness became an inherent component of Mary Cay's career as an educator. Her community choirs were not simply musical ensembles; through Mary Cay's vision, the groups also continually supported various initiatives beyond music-making.

Mary Cay grouped the rehearsals for her community choirs into semesters. Each semester, the groups rehearsed numerous songs and present a concert at the end of the session. Since the choirs' inception, the concerts usually serve as fundraisers to help a local or global organization. These organizations often addressed important issues such as food insecurity, refugee crises, and peacebuilding initiatives. Mary Cay and her community choirs continually supported Conflict Transformation Across Cultures (CONTACT) at the School for International Training (SIT) in Brattleboro, Vermont. Mary Cay's longtime association with SIT as an ESL instructor blossomed into a partnership between her community choirs and the organization. From the late 1990s well into the 2000s, Mary Cay and her ensembles fundraised for the CONTACT program. Through these fundraising initiatives, they would sponsor a peacebuilder from a conflict region in the world to come and attend the three-week CONTACT program each summer. This collaboration resulted in hosting people from places such as Haiti, Tibet, China,

and Rwanda. Mary Cay's choir would always sing during the first week of the CONTACT program. The CONTACT program offered one free tuition for one of Mary Cay's choristers each year in exchange for this sponsorship.

Another important peacebuilding aspect of Mary Cay's career was her quest to include global music cultures beyond the Balkans in her rehearsals. She intentionally achieved this by bringing in guest teaching artists who represented various cultural traditions. One of the more extended associations is with prominent African-American gospel teaching artist Kathy Bullock. Mary Cay has hosted Kathy Bullock every other year since 2006. Other teaching artists include Merita Halili and Raif Hyseni, famous performers of Albanian music, Nicholas Williams and Pascal Gemme, French-Canadian musicians from neighboring Quebec, and Matlakala Bopape, a South African choral director associated with Village Harmony. These teaching artists complete a short residency with Mary Cay's choirs and then perform in a concert. Mary Cay was incredibly proud of finding these artists: "I just sort of reached out to people I have connections with to bring sort of a deeper look at other cultures in my choirs."²²¹

Mary Cay and her choir community have also helped several young people from the Balkans participate in cross-cultural exchanges through Village Harmony. Mary Cay has financially sponsored at least ten musically-talented teenagers from Macedonia and Bosnia to travel to the United States to participate in Village Harmony's summer teen music camps. Many of these youth participants had never traveled outside of their home country. Mary Cay's initiative provided the youth opportunities to travel, experience another culture, and further their music education.

²²¹ Mary Cay Brass, interview with author, Zoom, October 1, 2021.

Through her love for other cultures and singing, Mary Cay influenced several young members of her community choirs. One singer studied in a peacebuilding program in Serbia and Bosnia for a semester in college. Then, she followed Mary Cay's footsteps and earned a Fulbright to Macedonia, where she completed an English language teaching assistantship. Another student plans to study music education at college in New England, where they have asked her to start a Balkan choir. Mary Cay's music and peacebuilding ethos inspired these singers to follow similar career paths in Balkan culture and singing.

Mary Cay's career spans over forty years. She passionately turned all her main interests and skills into a unique and creative mix that became her life work. Mary Cay continues to contribute to the choir and peacebuilding world through many new performance projects and collaborations to connect people through music.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the stories and experiences of Mary Cay Brass' work in choir and peacebuilding with the music of the former Yugoslav countries. Biographic-narrative research methods were employed to gather insight on the most important experiences in Mary Cay's career. A chronological narrative presented the findings from this research study. The following chapter provides a discussion of these findings. First, I address the first research question and offer several hypotheses to explain its findings. Next, I present some tenants of the harmonious relations framework²²² to help address and discuss the second research question. Then, I present an overview of my personal transformation as it relates to the research. Finally, I conclude with implications and future directions for research and a short narrative epilogue.

This study provided a unique glimpse into the role of a choral music educator who used global music as a tool for peacebuilding. Previous studies focused on biographic research, music educators, and ethnomusicologists who focused on global music.²²³ Additional related literature on music and peacebuilding focused primarily on ensembles and organizations rather than individual music educators.²²⁴ However, there is no biographic-narrative research on choral

²²² Gillian Howell, "Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021).

²²³ Huib Schippers and Patricia S. Campbell "Cultural Diversity: Beyond Songs From Many Lands," in *Oxford Handbook of Music Education*, eds. G.E. McPherson and G.E. Welch (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012); Patricia S. Campbell, "How Musical We Are: John Blacking on Music, Education, and Cultural Understanding," *Journal of Research in Music Education* 48, no. 4 (2000); Susan Brumfield, "Jean Ritchie's Field Trip- Scotland: An Examination of Unpublished Field Recordings Collected in Scotland, 1952-1953," PhD Dissertation, University of Oklahoma, 2000.

²²⁴ Roberta King, "Music, Peacebuilding and Interfaith Dialogue: Transformative Bridges in Muslim-Christian Relations," *International Bulletin of Mission Research* 40, no. 3 (2016); Alexandra Balandina, "Music and Conflict Transformation in the Post-Yugoslav Era: Empowering Youth to Develop Harmonic Inter-Ethnic Relationships in Kumanovo, Macedonia," *International Journal of Community Music* 3, no. 2 (2010); Erica Haskell, "The Role of Applied Ethnomusicology in Post-Conflict and Post Catastrophe Communities," in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*, eds. Svanibor Pettan and Jeff T. Titon (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015); Craig Robertson, "Musicological, ethnography, and peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016).

music educators as peacebuilders. Thus, one of the goals of this study was to fill a void in the research and to encourage future research in telling the stories of music educators as peacebuilders.

Research Question One: How did Balkan music experiences contribute to the development of Mary Cay Brass as a choral music educator and peacebuilding facilitator?

As part of the biographic-narrative analysis process, I analyzed the life experiences of the subject (Mary Cay Brass) using outside data sources such as other interviews and documents.²²⁵ Further, I analyzed the told story using the narrative material obtained from interviewing the main subject. After analyzing both objective and subjective data, I brought them together creating structural hypotheses to weave the data into a narrative. These hypotheses are interpretations that I made as a researcher after reviewing all data sources and relating them to the literature.

First, I suggest that Mary Cay’s early life, collegiate, and Fulbright experiences made her a lifelong and passionate enthusiast of Balkan music. Several studies document the initial popularity of Balkan music in the United States and offer theories about why the music is so popular among its participants.²²⁶ Mary Cay started her Balkan music journey at the height of what could be characterized as “the Balkan music craze” in the United States. She attempted to explain her fascination for Balkan music:

I used to think, oh, I must be reincarnated from that part of the world, because I was so drawn to it like a magnet. From the childhood group where I just blended right into the group right away to being in college. It was magnetic to me in some way and kind of magical, just people moving together in a line and a circle was beautiful. I just loved the music, and who can say why you love any particular music? It’s kind of one of those

²²⁵ Tom Wengraf, *Qualitative Research Interviewing* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 233.

²²⁶ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007); Robin Evanchuk, “Inside, Outside, Upside-Down”: The Role of Mainstream Society Participants in the Ethnic Dance Movement,” in *Balkan Dance: Essays of Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008); June Vail, “Balkan Tradition, American Alternative: Dance, Community, and People of the Pines,” in *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008).

mysteries, I think.²²⁷

Vail²²⁸ and Laušević²²⁹ theorized the Balkan music appeal in their writings. Both authors discussed the unity that Balkan music enthusiasts felt in musical concepts through close harmonies, folk-like vocal timbres, and complex, though unified, rhythms. This sense of unity in Balkan music captivated Mary Cay for the duration of her career. Because of her numerous immersive experiences in her earlier life and career, this music simply became part of Mary Cay. So naturally, this music became a permanent fixture in her music pedagogy. Moreover, Balkan music became a teaching tool in her peacebuilding efforts.

Next, I suggest that Mary Cay's early experiences in New York as an ESL educator and her first experiences as a choral leader with Village Harmony enabled her to foster and promote cultural understanding throughout her music teaching. Some research studies detail the music education field's earliest attention to fostering cultural understanding.²³⁰ Like these earlier studies, Mary Cay recognized the potential to encompass cultural understanding in her music teaching. Mary Cay was in a unique position as a music educator. Though she had a music degree and training in ESL education, she had no formal training in music pedagogy. She possessed a rare combination of skills that allowed her to create her own unique ethos as a choral director. Later in her career, she described her work:

I direct community choirs that sing multicultural music, lead camps both domestically and abroad that are about learning traditional music in a host culture, and also about building bridges within cultures. Also, just within my community choirs, I like to focus

²²⁷ Mary Cay Brass, interview with author, Zoom, September 27, 2021.

²²⁸ June Vail, "Balkan Tradition, American Alternative: Dance, Community, and People of the Pines," in *Balkan Dance: Essays on Characteristics, Performance and Teaching*, ed. Anthony Shay (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2008), 198.

²²⁹ Mirjana Laušević. *Balkan Fascination: Creating an Alternative Music Culture in America* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007), 58–60.

²³⁰ Marie McCarthy, "Canticle to Hope: Widening Horizons in International Music Education, 1939-1953," *International Journal of Music Education* 25 (1995); William M. Anderson, "World Musics in American Education, 1916-1970," *Contributions to Music Education* 3 (1974); Patricia S. Campbell, *Music, Education, and Diversity: Bridging Cultures and Communities* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2018).

on particular songs that have a particular meaning at the time, and give people a broader view of the humanity of people in other countries, beyond political soundbites, I couldn't have carved out what I do for a living as a young person, because it kind of didn't exist. I've kind of created it.²³¹

Cultural understanding was not an added component of her pedagogy; it was the core of her philosophy as a music educator. Through her earlier experiences as an ethnomusicologist and subsequently, as a teacher, she used Balkan songs to educate students about other cultures. As Mary Cay's network of opportunities expanded, she taught songs from different cultures worldwide. In her teaching, the Balkan songs were her entry point to the world of music cultures, but they were not the only songs from other cultures. In a sense, Mary Cay was a peacebuilder from the very beginning of her career. However, her Balkan experiences in the mid-1990s caused her to tackle peacebuilding intentionally.

Finally, I suggest that Mary Cay's Balkan experiences amidst and immediately following the Bosnian War solidified her stance as a dual choral director and peacebuilder. These experiences allowed her to revolutionize her choral ensembles to become active humanitarians in peacebuilding. A few choral settings demonstrated successful choir and peacebuilding opportunities.²³² Similar to these settings, Mary Cay created space in her choral programming for her choristers to experience other cultures and actively serve as peacebuilders from near and far. The Balkan conflicts greatly affected Mary Cay, and her work with music and peacebuilding was her way to help and self-heal. During the war, she organized benefit concerts and additional fundraisers for war victims from afar; however, she used music on-location in the Balkans numerous times after the wars. Music was her answer to conflict and reconciliation. There have

²³¹ Mary Cay Brass, in-person interview by Magda Sharff, October 18, 2018.

²³² Anne H. Balsnes, "Hospitality in Multicultural Choral Singing," *International Journal of Community Music* 9, no. 2 (2016); Craig Robertson, "Musicological, ethnography, and peacebuilding," *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016); Caroline Bithell. *A Different Voice, A Different Song* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²³² Ibid., 283

been several successful arts initiatives in the Balkans to foster peacebuilding.²³³ Through her previous experiences, Mary Cay was attuned to these opportunities and created similar programs through her endeavors. Both Americans and Bosnians praised her music-based peacebuilding initiatives. Mary Cay recounted a visit to the Sarajevo, where ethnomusicologist Tamara Karača Beljak invited her to speak with Bosnian ethnomusicology students:

And she sort of presented me as someone who is an ethnomusicologist, but shows how to use ethnomusicology in a different way than just an academic way. And she asked me to talk about the work I do in schools, choirs, and camps... She said to the students, like Mary Cay I want you to broaden your horizons, what's possible to do with ethnomusicology, that it's not just collecting academic work and analyzing it, but you can use it in these kind of peacebuilding ways.²³⁴

Mary Cay used Balkan music to connect foreigners to a culture they otherwise would not have known. In addition, it brought happiness through song to a post-conflict society. The people of the Balkans welcomed and accepted her music to bring people together. A closer examination of her Balkan music and peacebuilding work is discussed later in this chapter.

Research Question Two: What are the key stories surrounding Mary Cay Brass's singing and peacebuilding experiences in North America and Balkan Europe?

Chapter four's content offers the key stories of Mary Cay's singing and peacebuilding career; however, this section analyzes the context of the peacebuilding scenarios Mary Cay created in her musical work. Tenants of Gillian Howell's²³⁵ harmonious relations analytical

²³³ Dijana Milošević, "Theatre as a Way of Creating Sense: Performance and Peacebuilding in the Region of the Former Yugoslavia," in *Acting Together: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict*, eds. Cynthia E. Cohen, Roberto G. Varea, and Polly O. Walker (Oakland, CA: New Village Press, 2011); Alexandra Balandina, "Music and Conflict Transformation in the Post-Yugoslav Era: Empowering Youth to Develop Harmonic Inter-Ethnic Relationships in Kumanovo, Macedonia," *International Journal of Community Music* 3, no. 2 (2010); Erica Haskell, "The Role of Applied Ethnomusicology in Post-Conflict and Post Catastrophe Communities," in *The Oxford Handbook of Applied Ethnomusicology*, eds. Svanibor Pettan and Jeff T. Titon (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2015).

²³⁴ Mary Cay Brass, interview with author, Zoom, December 3, 2021

²³⁵ Gillian Howell, "Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding," *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021).

framework will help guide this discussion and the structural hypotheses that evolved from the biographic-narrative research methods. The framework helps analyze the context of a peacebuilding scenario where musical activities occur. It captures the relationships between sounds, people, and spaces in a music and peacebuilding event. In this section, I present tables of each component of the harmonic relations framework. A brief discussion of each element through Mary Cay’s life story lens will follow each table. Much of these discussions happen in the context of Mary Cay’s peacebuilding experiences in Balkan Europe; however, she mirrored most of these experiences with her choir communities in New England. There was always a symbolic cultural bridge between her work in Europe and North America. Her experiences in Balkan Europe always informed her work in New England.

Sounds

The sounds component explores the sonic relationships within the context of Mary Cay’s peacebuilding work. Examining Mary Cay’s key choir and peacebuilding experiences, I asked questions about the role of sound in her efforts.

Table 1. Harmonic relations framework: Interrogating the relationships embedded in sounds²³⁶

| Harmony Varieties | Questions to Ask |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Geopolitical/ethno-political ordering | What (people, places, or situations) does the cultural heritage of each instrument represent? |
| Power dynamics and interests | Whose interests are served through the presentation of this particular music in this time and place and what aspects of the sounds are serving these interests? |
| Other Sonic Symbols | To what extent are peace, harmony, or (re)conciliation sonically portrayed? |

Under Mary Cay's direction, the choirs in the peacebuilding settings performed traditional Balkan and Western music. The traditional Balkan music represented a wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Mary Cay’s choirs performed a large portion of their repertoire a capella;

²³⁶ Gillian Howell, “Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021), 91.

however, some pieces utilized traditional Western instruments such as guitar, piano, flute, and conventional Bosnian instruments such as accordion. Traditional Balkan instruments such as the kaval and tambura dominated the accompaniment in the Macedonian ensemble settings. Apart from the accordion, traditional instruments accompanying songs were largely absent in Bosnia.

With the help of her native Balkan co-teachers at each camp, Mary Cay navigated the intricacies of teaching the distinct vocal styles and timbres from various ethnic backgrounds. Local Balkan chorister participants were also instrumental in modeling the Balkan vocal timbres for the non-Balkan participants. As a result, the choirs in Mary Cay's peacebuilding settings were able to present the appropriate timbral diversity of the Balkans in their concert performances. This notion of timbral variety helped in her peacebuilding endeavors. The authentic performances and the choir's ability to switch between the appropriate vocal styles of each Balkan culture amazed the local audiences.

There were very few instances of Mary Cay and her choristers using written music notation. Instead, Mary Cay, along with her fellow Balkan culture bearers, taught the majority of the songs by rote. This rote teaching was conducive for both American and Balkan participants who did not read music. In addition, rote learning helped the participants learn the specialized ornamentation in the Middle-Eastern influenced *sevdalinka*. The participants were also able to understand better the various modalities that are not present in Western music.

Most of the Balkan music was three or four centuries-old folk music. Most of the music originated as a unison melody line. Mary Cay and the local Balkan co-leaders harmonized each song into a choral arrangement following Western music theory expectations. However, most people in the Balkans accept such choral arrangements as authentic interpretations of their

music.²³⁷ Likely due to Mary Cay’s expert Balkan music coaching skills, and her ability to draw on numerous connections to assemble an expert teaching team in each peacebuilding setting, the audiences accepted Mary Cay’s choirs as authentic performers of Balkan music. Many could not believe that Americans made up the majority of the choir’s membership. Regardless, people of all nationalities in both choir and audience considered these opportunities healing and life-changing. The sonic relationships allowed all involved a chance to connect on a deeper level.

The Practitioners (Musicians, Performers, Composers)

According to the harmonious relations framework, the practitioners are the “actors that bring the sounds into existence.”²³⁸ The following questions address the relationships within Mary Cay’s performing communities in her peacebuilding scenarios.

Table 2. Harmonic relations framework: Interrogating the relationships between participants²³⁹

| Harmony Varieties | Questions to Ask |
|--------------------------|---|
| Order and non-dominance | How are identity, hierarchy, and social order expressed in the physical enactment of the sounds? To what extent is equal status between the practitioner visible/audible? |
| Relationship development | What characterizes the relationships being enacted? For whom are they “ideal”? What kinds of interpersonal relationships have room to flourish within the time frame of this project? Can they be maintained independently beyond this project? |

Mary Cay is the person who brought everyone together in each peacebuilding episode.

The performers consisted of people from her community choirs in New England, the occasional chorister from Western Europe, local Balkan people from her connections in the region, and

²³⁷ Mirjana Laušević, “The Ilahiya as a Symbol of Bosnian Muslim National Identity,” In *Retuning Culture: Musical Challenges in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark Slobin (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996).

²³⁸ Gillian Howell, “Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021), 91.

²³⁹ *Ibid*, 91.

expert music staff of song leaders and choral arrangers. Figuratively, Mary Cay is at the top of the hierarchy in each program as the leader and organizer; however, she is also a participant. She conducted the songs that she taught, but she gracefully retreated to the alto section to sing the songs that the other camp leaders led. There was no conductor in some of the impromptu performances outside of a concert, such as a random stop at a church or a quick song on the main street of a village, and Mary Cay would sing along as a chorister. All participants deeply respected Mary Cay for her leadership abilities and talents in bringing people of numerous cultures together for a beautiful music experience.

Some Balkan participants often hosted American choir members in their homes while the group was on tour. Some of the local Balkan youth participants in the peacebuilding programs often participated in a music exchange to travel to the United States. Mary Cay and her American choirs would financially and logistically arrange these exchanges. Some Balkan co-leaders felt inspired to lead similar peacebuilding programs with their choirs. In addition to the musical experiences, these connections exist because of the social engagement and opportunities for continued interaction.²⁴⁰

The Audience and External Stakeholders

The audience and the external stakeholders are the people who experience the musical action. The following questions guide the discussion of Mary Cay’s role with these groups of people.

Table 3. Harmonic relations framework: Interrogating the external stakeholder relationships²⁴¹

| Harmony Varieties | Questions to Ask |
|--------------------------|-------------------------|
|--------------------------|-------------------------|

²⁴⁰ Ibid, 93.
²⁴¹ Gillian Howell, “Harmonious Relations: A Framework for Studying Varieties of Peace in Music-Based Peacebuilding,” *Journal of Peacebuilding & Development* 16, no. 1 (2021), 92.

| | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| Order, agency, dominance | Who is the audience, and what is their relationship to the wider context of this musical action? What are their existing or desired relationships with the performers? What conventions determine audience interactions with the music and musicians? |
| Context for investment and interest | What is their motivation for being here? What is their interest in the type of harmony/peace being performed? |

One of Mary Cay’s strengths in organizing each singing and peacebuilding experience was her ability to work with the local Balkan teaching staff to arrange numerous performance opportunities. The evening concert opportunities were popular among the Bosnians and served as central artistic and social events for each community. Since most of the camps happened during the summer, performances often happened in conjunction with local music and arts festivals. The Bosnian War caused many Bosnians to move to other countries; however, in the summer, many of them returned to their home country to spend several weeks with their families. Mary Cay and her Balkan colleagues advertised the concerts in each location. Concert attendees also include people who came in contact with the programs, such as hotel and restaurant staff and homestay hosts. In addition, there were often partnerships with local organizations. For example, in 2018, the Bosnian camp sang for a local remembrance ceremony through a municipal organization in Sanski Most.

These audience members seemed to invest curiously, enthusiastically, and emotionally in the performances. Their curiosity often peaked when Mary Cay, an American, welcomed the crowd in perfect Bosnian. Subsequently, she would often sit down and begin a concert with a lively accordion introduction. The audience listened to the American choir songs with curiosity. However, the most robust connection happened when the groups performed Balkan music. People would enthusiastically sing at the top of their lungs when Mary Cay would lead the choir through her accordion-playing in popular songs such as “Zapjevala Sojka Ptica” and “Crven

Fesić.” Some audience members would even join hands and start a kolo dance with the lively accordion band accompaniment. Tears were often present, especially during emotional and reverent Bosnian ilahijah songs like “Samo Allah.” The music prompted nostalgic memories for Bosnians and Bosnians from the diaspora alike. The music enabled them to remember wonderful times in post-war Yugoslavia, during a time when neighbors loved and did not hate one another. The music reminded them of a loved one who passed on from this earth. The music made them feel incredibly proud of their culture.

The Place and Space

This component of the framework examines the context of the performance site. The guiding questions help explain why Mary Cay chose these sites for her peacebuilding concerts.

Table 4. Harmonic relations framework: Interrogating spatial-temporal-social relationships²⁴²

| Harmony Varieties | Questions to Ask |
|--|--|
| Order (social, political), freedom, dissonance | What are the cultural-historical overtones of this site? |
| Power dynamics and interest | Whose interests are served through this musical action taking place here, in this particular time? |
| Order, consonance | Is the action embedded locally or detached from its context, and why? |

Each performance site within Mary Cay’s singing and peacebuilding programming experienced some sort of ethnic division and strife. Particularly in Bosnia, each performance site had experienced unimaginable situations just a couple of decades earlier in the Bosnian War.

²⁴² Ibid, 93.

Yet, each concert helped attendees heal through music in a small but meaningful way. Bithell²⁴³ wrote about the 2008 Bosnia camp experience in her book:

People thanked us repeatedly for coming to Bosnia and taking such a keen interest in their culture. Far from being seen as uninvited guests riding roughshod over their territory or intruding on their still fragile lives in a voyeuristic way, we were generally cast as playing a part in their country's reconstruction and healing.²⁴⁴

In typical Balkan summer fashion, many of the concert events happened outdoors, often in the main plaza of each town. It was important to Mary Cay that her music work was as least invasive as possible. Usually, concerts happened in collaboration with a local KUD group or choir. Rather than a stand-alone concert, many performance settings existed within the life of the local community.

Personal Transformation

One goal of this research project was to add to the limited research canon of singing and peacebuilding. In addition, I wanted to tell the individual story of a woman who spent her career fostering peacebuilding within her choral pedagogy. As I conducted this qualitative study, the story I discovered helped me examine my choral philosophy. Mary Cay's choir and peacebuilding story enabled me to challenge my pre-existing notions of the choral field.

First, I started to examine the role of music and singing in my choral settings. For years, I was obsessed with the idea of all choral music coming from a particular list or a certain choral publisher. My focus was mastery of the music so that each concert presentation would be near perfect. Sometimes this process was not enjoyable for my choristers or me. This study reaffirmed that there are numerous avenues for the roles of singing. Music is not just a privilege for a

²⁴³ Caroline Bithell. *A Different Voice, A Different Song* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2007).

²⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 283.

classical concert hall; it should be accessible to everyone. Singing is not just a recreational or academic activity; it activates as a tool for therapy and healing.

Another component of my philosophy that this study enabled me to examine is my view of diversity or repertoire in the choral setting. As a person who identifies as White and Hispanic, I thought that my multiethnic background allowed me a unique matter to address this in my choral ensembles. While I consider myself more advanced in this area than many other choral directors, I still realize that I have so much work to do. Mary Cay masterfully navigated diverse repertoire in all her singing settings. Her example showed me how easy it might be to stray from the typical choral music canon to teach more music representing women, people of color, various religions, etc. This diversity only helps push my philosophy forward in a positive direction; it continues to help me build the proverbial bridges in my choral settings.

Finally, this study inspired me to continue revolutionizing singing to connect people in a meaningful way. I will think of more extensive ways to show my students that music can revolutionize peacebuilding efforts when used in selfless ways. In the spirit of Mary Cay's philosophy, music can humanize people in times of trouble. In the wake of recent events in Afghanistan, I have taught Afghan songs to replace my students' images of a war-torn nation with images of a beautiful culture. Amidst the racial struggles in our country, I can celebrate and perform the rich traditions of Black music with my students. I can share the music of my family's Puerto-Rican heritage with my students in hopes that this can combat preconceived notions of Hispanic immigrants. There does not have to be a war to involve concepts of peacebuilding in the choral classroom. Mary Cay's story is just one of many; however, it shows us a powerful way to use singing. The narratives presented in this research give me hope that music education has more possibilities to bring people together in harmony.

Limitations

There were several limitations to this study. The primary limitation was the effects of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Because of the uncertain nature of the pandemic, all data collection happened online. Zoom interviews could affect the interaction and interpretations between the researcher and the participant. The researcher relied on Mary Cay Brass and other participants to scan and send field notes, articles, photos, and recordings. Places with additional archival materials were limited to Bosnia and Vermont. These places were usually small and did not have an online archival presence.

Implications

Types of narrative inquiry allow the researcher to examine the stories of the individual. In music education, the narratives of individual music educators help us gain insight into the successes of the teaching field. Biographic-narrative research methods help the researcher gain a more in-depth and accurate account of the story of an individual. Simultaneously, the methods allow the researcher to focus on giving a voice to the subject studied. Sandoval²⁴⁵ stressed the importance of including non-Western music in the peacebuilding process in music education. This study examined one music educator's lifework using a specific type of global music to address peacebuilding in choral settings. There is much potential for choral music educators to use global music as tools for peacebuilding in their ensembles.

The current literature on peacebuilding and music largely provides discussion in the use of popular and classical music as music in peacebuilding scenarios. This study offers the story of an individual who enlisted the music of localized music cultures as a means of peacebuilding in a post-conflict region. Her story could provide insight for music educators who wish to do similar

²⁴⁵ Elaine Sandoval, "Potential Contributions of Music Education to Peacebuilding: Curricular Concerns," *Journal of Peace Education* 13, no. 3 (2016).

work with the music of current conflict countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, and Ukraine. Music educators do not necessarily to work with people from a particular place to use peacebuilding methods in their music classrooms. The inclusion of global music cultures from these conflict regions not only provides an outlet for students to cope with current world events, it provides a chance for music educators to build cultural bridges, promote cultural understanding, and humanize the cultures from these places.

I offer several possibilities for future directions in the next section.

Suggestions for Future Research

I suggest several research areas to address the gap in the literature that exists in choral singing and peacebuilding. First, more narrative research accounts are needed to examine the lives of choral directors who employ peacebuilding strategies in their choral settings. We can learn much about incorporating peacebuilding into our choral classrooms by examining their stories. Next, more specific research should document singing and peacebuilding experiences in immediate post-conflict zones worldwide. Identifying the successes of these initiatives will help inform future music and peacebuilding initiatives. Peacebuilding is not limited to post-conflict areas. Third, more research should examine singing and peacebuilding opportunities present against the social struggles in our nation. Finally, we should better examine the current state of teacher education programs and professional development programs to determine what, if any, training in peacebuilding and choral singing is offered to choral educators.

Epilogue

It is a cold and snowy winter day in Southeastern Vermont. The setting is a cozy cottage on a hillside in the middle of a clearing in the woods. In the kitchen, a wood-burning stove radiates its warmth throughout the cottage. Near the stove, Mary Cay Brass and one of her

longtime choristers sit and play accordion duets and arrangements of music from the Balkans. Unfortunately, the current pandemic placed a damper on much of the choral singing in Vermont; however, the pair of singers regularly meet to make music. Since she was eight years old, the chorister has sung in Mary Cay's choirs. Mary Cay inspired her to continue her interests in music and peacebuilding. The chorister will soon leave to volunteer at a peacebuilding initiative in Bosnia, and shortly afterward, she will major in music education at a college in New England. Both women smile, laugh, sing, and chat in Bosnian. The harmony of the Balkan songs is food for their souls. Mary Cay is satisfied with her long career; however, one does not retire from peacebuilding. Her passion for music and peacebuilding will continue to inspire many for years to come.

Barrett and Stauffer encourage the researcher to allow readers to “consider other ways of engaging with people in and through music.”²⁴⁶ It is my hope that choral directors will realize that there is more to singing than concerts, festivals, and competitions. This story allows us to see one small example of the potential of singing to change lives for the better.

²⁴⁶ Margaret S. Barrett and Sandra L. Stauffer, eds., *Narrative Inquiry in Music Education: Troubling Uncertainty* (New York, NY: Springer, 2009), 2.

Glossary

ilahija: religious Islamic songs from the Bosnian Muslim tradition.

klapa: A style of traditional a capella singing originating from the Dalmatian region of Croatia. Common themes in the music include love, patriotism, wine, and the sea.

kolo: A type of communal folk dance performed in a circle from several Balkan traditions.

Kulturno Umjetnicko Drustvo: “Cultural Art Society” in Serbo-Croatian. An initiative from the Yugoslav government to promote cultural unity. This initiative established cultural programs in cities and towns across Yugoslavia to promote the teaching and performing of Balkan music and dance cultures. Abbreviated as “KUD”. Many KUDs still exist in Balkan countries today.

oro: The Macedonian word to describe the localized communal folk dances. “Kolo” is used in Serbian traditions.

sevdalinka: passionate and melancholic love songs from Bosnia. They originated as urban secular love songs from Bosnian Muslims during the Ottoman rule and contain musical influences from the Middle Eastern and Sephardic traditions.

Song Lyrics

CRVEN FESIĆ²⁴⁷

Crven fesić, mammo
Crven fesić, joj mamice
Crven fesić, u dragana moga,
Joj mammo mamice.

Crne oči, mammo...

Medna usta mammo...

Da me hoće, mammo... poljubiti

Dala bih mu, mammo... sve carevo blago

My sweetheart is wearing a red fez.

Black eyes.

Honey lips.

Does he want to kiss me?

I'd give all the czar's treasure for it.

ZAPEVALA SOJKA PTICA²⁴⁸

Zapevala sojka ptica misli zora je, aman, aman, misli zora je.

Ustaj Kato, ustaj zlato, spremaj darove, aman, aman, spremaj darove.

Ja sam mlada i Sirota, neman darove, aman, aman, neman darove.

Da si mlada i sirota, što se udaješ, aman, aman, što se udaješ?

Udala me stara majka, nisam ni znala, aman, aman, nisam ni znala.

The jaybird began singing thinking it was dawn.

²⁴⁷ lyrics and translations from Mary Cay Brass, ed., *Village Harmony: Traditional Songs of the Balkans* (Marshfield: Northern Harmony Publishing, 1995), 11.

²⁴⁸ Ibid, 30.

“Get Up, Kata, get up golden one, prepare your wedding gifts.”

“I am young and poor and I have no gifts.”

“If you’re young and poor, why do you marry?”

“My old mother married me off and I didn’t even know.”

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APPENDIX A: INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR MARY CAY BRASS

1. What are your earliest memories of Balkan music?
2. What are the important experiences from your initial interest in Balkan music until your choral music and peacebuilding work in the USA and the Balkans?
 - a. Prompts: Fulbright?
 - b. Prompts: What did you do after the Fulbright?
 - c. Prompts: Book and CD publications and how they were important to peacebuilding and promoting cultural understanding?
3. How did the Balkan Wars of the 1990s affect your teaching and promoting of Balkan vocal music and culture?
4. Tell me about how you came to teach international music camps in the Balkans for Village Harmony?
5. What are the factors surrounding your planning of the singing and peacebuilding camps in Bosnia?
6. What were the musical goals of the Village Harmony camps in Bosnia?
7. What are the highlights of the Village Harmony peacebuilding camps in Bosnia?
8. What are the most moving and powerful memories of the Village Harmony peacebuilding camps in Bosnia?
9. Tell me about your music teaching philosophy (in general and as it relates to Balkan singing and peacebuilding) and how it has evolved throughout your career.
10. Tell me about your favorite memories, highlights, and experiences in teaching Balkan music and promoting peacebuilding throughout your career.
11. Is there anything else you would like to share?

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR COLLEAGUES AND CHORISTERS

1. In what capacity do you know Mary Cay Brass?
 - a. Prompts: How long? Through what organization? How did you meet?
2. How were you initially drawn to Balkan singing and/or culture and peacebuilding?
 - a. Prompts: Did Mary Cay introduce you to Balkan singing and/or peacebuilding? If not, how did you first experience Balkan music and/or peacebuilding?
3. What are your favorite memories and experiences with Mary Cay Brass and Balkan singing and peacebuilding?
 - a. Prompts: favorite concerts, favorite trip experiences (domestic or international)
4. How has Mary Cay Brass influenced your musical life as a teacher of Balkan vocal music and peacebuilder?
5. How do you think that Mary Cay Brass has contributed to the world of music education (particularly global music education) and peacebuilding?

APPENDIX C: INTERNAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVALS

From: IRB Administration <irbadmin@auburn.edu>

Date: Tuesday, August 31, 2021 at 10:05 AM

To: Scott Sexton <rss0044@auburn.edu>

Cc: Jane Kuehne <kuehnjm@auburn.edu>, Marilyn Strutchen <strutme@auburn.edu>

Subject: Sexton Approval, Protocol #21-307 EP 2107 "Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries"

Use IRBsubmit@auburn.edu for protocol-related submissions and IRBadmin@auburn.edu for questions and information. The IRB only accepts forms posted at <https://cws.auburn.edu/vpr/compliance/humansubjects/?Forms> and submitted electronically.

Dear Mr. Sexton,

Your protocol titled "Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries" has received approval as "EP" under federal regulation 45 CFR 46.110(b)(6,7). Please find approval of your protocol attached.

Official notice:

This e-mail serves as official notice the protocol has been approved. By accepting this approval, you also accept your responsibilities associated with this approval. Details of your responsibilities are attached. Retain a copy for your records.

Consent documents:

Attached is a copy of your consent form. You must provide a copy for each participant to keep.

Expiration:

Continuing review of this Expedited protocol is not required; however, all modification/revisions to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB.

When you have completed all research activities, have no plans to collect additional data and have destroyed all identifiable information as approved by the IRB, please submit a final report.

Best wishes for success with your research!

IRB Admin
Office of Research Compliance
Auburn University
540 Devall Drive
Auburn, AL 36832

**AUBURN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD for RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS
RESEARCH PROTOCOL REVIEW FORM
FULL BOARD or EXPEDITED**

For Information or help contact **THE OFFICE OF RESEARCH COMPLIANCE (ORC)**
Phone: 334-844-5966 e-mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu Web Address: <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/index.htm>

Revised 04.01.2021

Submit completed form to IRBsubmit@auburn.edu

Complete this form using Adobe Acrobat Writer (versions 5.0 and greater). Hand written copies not accepted.

1. PROPOSED START DATE of STUDY: Upon approval Today's Date: ?sesqr 2, 0. 0/

PROPOSED REVIEW CATEGORY (Check one): FULL BOARD EXPEDITED

SUBMISSION STATUS (Check one): NEW REVISIONS (to address IRB Review Comments)

2. PROJECT TITLE: Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries

| | | | |
|---|------------------------|--------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 3. <u>Raymond Scott Sexton</u> | <u>Ph.D. Candidate</u> | <u>Curriculum and Teaching</u> | <u>rss0044@auburn.edu</u> |
| PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR | TITLE | DEPT | AU E-MAIL |
| <u>300 W. Walnut St., Troy, AL, 36081</u> | | <u>601-988-2056</u> | <u>choralscott@gmail.com</u> |
| MAILING ADDRESS | | PHONE | ALTERNATE E-MAIL |

4. FUNDING SUPPORT: N/A Internal External Agency: _____ Pending Received

For federal funding, list agency and grant number (if available). _____

5a. List any contractors, sub-contractors, other entities associated with this project:

b. List any other IRBs associated with this project (including Reviewed, Deferred, Determination, etc.):

PROTOCOL PACKET CHECKLIST

All protocols must include the following items:

- Research Protocol Review Form** (All signatures included and all sections completed)
(Examples of appended documents are found on the OHSR website: <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs/sample.htm>)
- CITI Training Certificates** for all Key Personnel.
- Consent Form or Information Letter** and any Releases (audio, video or photo) that the participant will sign.
- Appendix A, "Reference List"**
- Appendix B** if e-mails, flyers, advertisements, generalized announcements or scripts, etc., are used to recruit participants.
- Appendix C** if data collection sheets, surveys, tests, other recording instruments, interview scripts, etc. will be used for data collection. Be sure to attach them in the order in which they are listed in # 13c.
- Appendix D** if you will be using a debriefing form or include emergency plans/procedures and medical referral lists (A referral list may be attached to the consent document).
- Appendix E** if research is being conducted at sites other than Auburn University or in cooperation with other entities. A **permission letter** from the site / program director must be included indicating their cooperation or involvement in the project. NOTE: If the proposed research is a multi-site project, involving investigators or participants at other academic institutions, hospitals or private research organizations, a letter of **IRB approval** from each entity is required prior to initiating the project.
- Appendix F** - Written evidence of acceptance by the host country if research is conducted outside the United States.

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
07/08/2021 to -----
Protocol # 21-307 EP 2107

version date (date document created): August 28, 2021

page 1 of 1

From: IRB Administration <irbadmin@auburn.edu>
Date: Wednesday, September 15, 2021 at 2:17 PM
To: Scott Sexton <rss0044@auburn.edu>
Cc: Jane Kuehne <kuehnjm@auburn.edu>, Marilyn Strutchen <strutme@auburn.edu>
Subject: Sexton Modification Request - AU IRB Protocol #21-307 EP 2107, "Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries"

Use IRBsubmit@auburn.edu for protocol-related submissions and IRBadmin@auburn.edu for questions and information. The IRB only accepts forms posted at <https://cws.auburn.edu/vpr/compliance/humansubjects/?Forms> and submitted electronically.

Dear Raymond,

The IRB reviewed and approved the modification to the protocol referenced above. Attached is a copy of your IRB-stamped modification request.

Official notice:

This e-mail serves as official notice that your protocol has been modified. By accepting this approval, you also acknowledge your responsibilities associated with this approval. Details of your responsibilities are attached. Retain a copy for your records.

Expiration:

Continuing review of this Expedited protocol is not required; however, all modification/revisions to the approved protocol must be reviewed and approved by the IRB.

When you have completed all research activities, have no plans to collect additional data and have destroyed all identifiable information as approved by the IRB, please submit a final report.

Best wishes for success with your research!

IRB Administration
Office of Research Compliance
115 Ramsay Hall
Auburn University
Auburn, AL

AUBURN UNIVERSITY HUMAN RESEARCH PROTECTION PROGRAM (HRPP)

REQUEST for MODIFICATION

For Information of help completing this form, contact: **The Office of Research Compliance (ORC)**
 Phone: 334-844-5966 E-Mail: IRBAdmin@auburn.edu Web Address: <http://www.auburn.edu/research/vpr/ohs>

- In MS Word, click the enter date area to select correct date, click the enter text area and type your text; click checkboxes to check/ uncheck.*
- Federal regulations require IRB approval before implementing proposed changes.
 - Change means any change, in content or form, to the protocol, consent form, or any supportive materials (such as the investigator's Brochure, questionnaires, surveys, advertisements, etc.). See Item 4 for more examples.
 - Form must be populated using Adobe Acrobat / Pro 9 or greater standalone program (do not fill out in browser). Handwritten forms will not be accepted.

| | |
|------------------------|----------|
| 1. Today's Date | 9/9/2021 |
|------------------------|----------|

| | | | |
|---|----------------------------------|---|------------------------|
| 2. Principal Investigator (PI) Name: Raymond Scott Sexton | | | |
| PI's Title: | Ph.D. Candidate | Faculty PI (if PI is a student): | Dr. Jane Kuehne |
| Department: | College of Education | Department: | College of Education |
| Phone: | (601) 988-2056 | Phone: | (334) 844-6852 |
| AU E-Mail: | rss0044@auburn.edu | AU E-Mail: | kuehnjm@auburn.edu |
| Contact person who should receive copies of IRB correspondence (Optional): | Click or tap here to enter text. | Department Head Name: | Dr. Marilyn Strutchens |
| Phone: | Click or tap here to enter text. | Phone: | (334) 844-4434 |
| AU E-Mail: | Click or tap here to enter text. | AU E-Mail: | strutme@auburn.edu |

| | |
|--|---|
| 3. AU IRB Protocol Identification | |
| 3.a. Protocol Number: # 21-307 EP 2107 | |
| 3.b. Protocol Title: Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries | |
| 3. c. Current Status of Protocol – For active studies, check ONE box at left; provide numbers and dates where applicable | |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Study has not yet begun; no data has been entered or collected | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> In progress If YES, number of data/participants entered: Click or tap here to enter text. | Current Approval Dates From: 7/8/2021 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Adverse events since last review If YES, describe: Click or tap here to enter text. | To: 6/1/2023 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Data analysis only | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Funding Agency and Grant Number: N/A | AU Funding Information: N/A |
| <input type="checkbox"/> List any other institutions and/ or AU approved studies associated with this project: N/A | |

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from 09/15/2021 to -----
 Protocol # 21-307 EP 2107



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
CURRICULUM & TEACHING

(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT)

INFORMED CONSENT
For Participant: Mary Cay Brass

“Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries”

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This research study is voluntary, meaning you do not have to take part in it. The procedures, risks, and benefits are fully described further in the consent form. The purpose of this study is to create a biographic narrative of your work in choir, peacebuilding, and Balkan choral music. There will be a total of four online video conferencing (Auburn Zoom), with each section lasting one hour for a total commitment of 4 hours. You will be asked to participate in online semi-structured interview about your career. You may also be asked to share documents pertaining to the study such as photos, audio files, personal journals, and notes. The only risk is related to the potential loss of confidentiality. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. The benefit to researchers is to help choral directors better understand the role of peacebuilding in the choral music setting. The alternative is to not participate in the study.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to take part in semi-structured interviews via online video conferencing (Auburn Zoom) at a location of your choosing. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded and will focus on questions about your peacebuilding and choral music career (please see attached audio/video release). You also may be asked to provide audio files, video files, photos, and private writings such as field notes or journal entries to help construct the narrative of the research project. Your total time commitment will be approximately 4 hours, consisting of four, one-hour Auburn Zoom sessions. You may also be contacted following the interview for follow-up questions or further clarification of data.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The primary risk in this study is breach of confidentiality. Because this is a study about one person’s work in the small community of peacebuilding and choral music, I am requesting permission for you to be identified and be identifiable through data collected and possible professional publications and presentations. The identifying information includes your name, role in the field, and location. If you would prefer to remain confidential, I will make every effort to protect your privacy through de-identification of data as well as storing the data in a secure location. Information collected through your participation will be used to meet dissertation requirements, may be published in a professional journal, and/or presented in a professional setting.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? Participation in this research study may help choral directors better understand the role of peacebuilding in the choral music setting.

5040 HALEY CENTER
AUBURN, AL 36849-5212

TELEPHONE:
334-844-4434

FAX:
334-844-6789

www.auburn.edu

Participant’s Initials: _____



Will you receive compensation for participating? You will not receive any compensation for participating in this research.

Are there any costs? There are no costs for participating in this study.

If you change your mind about participating, you can withdraw at any time during the study. Your participation is completely voluntary. If you choose to withdraw, your data can be withdrawn as long as it is identifiable. Your decision about whether or not to participate or to stop participating will not jeopardize your future relations with Auburn University, the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, nor the Music Education program.

Your privacy will be protected. Any information obtained in connection with this study will remain confidential. You may wish to reveal your identity for this study. If you wish to reveal your identity, indicate this by initialing the appropriate line below. Information obtained through your participation may be used for professional presentation and/or professional publication.

If you have any questions about this study, please ask them now or contact Raymond Scott Sexton at rss0044@auburn.edu, or Dr. Jane Kuehne at kuehnjm@auburn.edu. A copy of this document will be given to you to keep.

If you have questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334)-844-5966 or e-mail at IRBadmin@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

HAVING READ THE INFORMATION PROVIDED, YOU MUST DECIDE WHETHER OR NOT YOU WISH TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS RESEARCH STUDY. YOUR SIGNATURE INDICATES YOUR WILLINGNESS TO PARTICIPATE.

It will be your right to change your mind regarding confidentiality while the research is in progress.

If you are willing to be identified in the study, please initial here. _____

If you would like to select confidentiality in the study, please initial here. _____

Participant's signature Date Investigator obtaining consent Date

Printed Name

Printed Name

Co-Investigator Date

Printed Name

The Auburn University Institutional
Review Board has approved this
Document for use from
07/08/2021 to -----
Protocol # 21-307 EP 2107



COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
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(NOTE: DO NOT SIGN THIS DOCUMENT UNLESS AN IRB APPROVAL STAMP WITH CURRENT DATES HAS BEEN APPLIED TO THIS DOCUMENT)

INFORMED CONSENT BY SUBJECT

“Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries”

You are being asked to take part in a research study. This research study is voluntary, meaning you do not have to take part in it. The procedures, risks, and benefits are fully described further in the consent form. The purpose of this study is to create a biographic narrative of Mary Cay Brass and her work in choir, peacebuilding, and Balkan choral music. There will be a total of one online video conferencing session (Auburn Zoom) lasting one hour, for a total time commitment of one hour. You will be asked to participate in an online, semi-structured interview about the peacebuilding and Balkan choral music career of Mary Cay Brass. You may also be asked to participate in a brief follow-up interview to address any further questions. The only risk is related to the potential loss of confidentiality. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. The benefit to researchers is to help choral directors better understand the role of peacebuilding in the choral music setting. The alternative is to not participate in the study.

What will be involved if you participate? If you decide to participate in this research study, you will be asked to take part in semi-structured interviews via online video conferencing (Auburn Zoom) at a location of your choosing. The interview will be audio and/or video recorded and will focus on questions about the peacebuilding and choral music career of Mary Cay Brass (please see attached audio/video release). Your total time commitment will be approximately 1 hour. You may also be contacted following the interview for follow-up questions or further clarification of data.

Are there any risks or discomforts? The primary risk in this study is breach of confidentiality. Because this is a study about one person’s work in the small community of peacebuilding and choral music, I am requesting permission for you to be identified and be identifiable through data collected and possible professional publications and presentations. The identifying information includes your name, role in the field, and location. If you would prefer to remain confidential, I will make every effort to protect your privacy through de-identification of data as well as storing the data in a secure location. Information collected through your participation will be used to meet dissertation requirements, may be published in a professional journal, and/or presented in a professional setting.

Are there any benefits to yourself or others? Participation in this research study may help choral directors better understand the role of peacebuilding in the choral music setting.

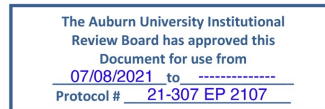
5040 HALEY CENTER
AUBURN, AL 36849-5212

TELEPHONE:
334-844-4434

FAX:
334-844-6789

www.auburn.edu

Participant’s Initials: _____





COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
CURRICULUM & TEACHING

AUDIO AND VIDEO RELEASE

During your participation in this research study, "Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries," you may be audio and/or video recorded. Your signature on the Informed Consent gives us permission to do so.

Your signature on this document gives us permission to use the audio recording(s) and/or video recording(s) for the additional purposes of research poster, professional presentations and publications beyond the immediate needs of this study. These audio recording(s) and/or video recording(s) will not be destroyed at the end of this research but will retained indefinitely.

In addition, the following persons or groups will have access to the recording(s):

- Participant (below)
Raymond Scott Sexton
Dr. Jane Kuehne

You may choose to reveal your identity for this study. If you wish to reveal your identity, please indicate below by initialing the appropriate line.

Your permission:

Yes, I give my permission for audio recording(s) and/or video recording(s) produced in this study, "Singing for Peace: A Biographic Narrative Study of Mary Cay Brass and her Choir and Peacebuilding Work with the Vocal Music of the Former Yugoslav Countries," to be used for purposes listed above, and to also be retained indefinitely.

Do you wish to reveal your identity?

No, please do not reveal my identity. _____

Yes, I agree to reveal my identity for publication, research posters, and in presentations. _____

5040 HALEY CENTER
AUBURN, AL 36849-5212

TELEPHONE:
334-844-4434

FAX:
334-844-6789

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Participant's Signature Date Investigator's Signature Date

Participant's Printed Name Investigator's Printed Name

The Auburn University Institutional Review Board has approved this Document for use from 09/15/2021 to Protocol # 21-307 EP 2107

Appendix B

Email Protocol for Participants

Dear Music and Peacebuilding Colleague,

You have been invited to participate in a research project that will examine the peacebuilding and choral music career of Mary Cay Brass. This study is being conducted by Raymond Scott Sexton, Ph.D. candidate at Auburn University, under the supervision of Dr. Jane M. Kuehne, Associate Professor of Music Education. If you decide to participate, we will ask you to allow us to interview you about your peacebuilding and music experiences with Mary Cay Brass. The interview will take approximately one hour via an online video conferencing platform (Auburn Zoom). The interview will be recorded. You might also be contacted following the interview for follow-up questions or for further clarification of data collected.

The results of this project will be used for my dissertation as fulfillment for the requirements of a Ph. D. in Music Education from Auburn University. The results may be disseminated in peer-reviewed professional publications and/or conference presentations. Because this study involves the small peacebuilding and choral music community, I am requesting permission for you to be identified and be identifiable through data collected and possible publications and presentations. If you would prefer to remain confidential, I will make every effort to protect your privacy through de-identification of data using pseudonyms for your name, roles, and location. All electronic data will be stored in a secure location and will be destroyed at the conclusion of the study. It will be your right to change your mind regarding confidentiality while the research is in progress.

Your decision to participate (or not to participate) will not jeopardize your future relationship with Auburn University, or the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, nor the Music Education Program. Note that you may withdraw from participation at any time, without penalty.

As a result of your voluntary participation in this project, we hope to gain inside on the role of choral directors in peacebuilding and choral music settings.

If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact me via phone or email beforehand. If not, please return the attached Informed Consent to me within three days to confirm your participation in this project. Once this form has been received, I will call to set up a time for our interview. Additionally, I have included an audio/video release form to request permission to use segments of your interview in presentations. Please let me know if you have any questions about the audio/video release form. For more information regarding your rights as a participant, you may contact Raymond Scott Sexton, principal investigator, at (601) 988-2056 or rss0044@auburn.edu or the Auburn University Office of Research Compliance or the Institutional Review Board by phone (334) 844-5966 or email at hsubject@auburn.edu or IRBChair@auburn.edu.

Sincerely,

Raymond Scott Sexton
Ph.D. Candidate, Auburn University

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APPENDIX C: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INITIAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR MARY CAY BRASS

Thank you so much for volunteering your time to contribute to this study!

Please look over and sign this consent form giving us permission to use your interview data for the study.

Do you have any questions regarding the consent form?

I would also like to request permission to use excerpts of the interview audio/video for professional presentations. Please look over this audio/video release form and let me know if you have any questions.

The purpose of this interview is to gain insight on the stories and experiences of your career as a peacebuilder and choral music educator through your work with Balkan choral music. I hope to gain additional perspective on the role of the choral director as a peacebuilder.

1. What are your earliest memories of Balkan music?
2. What are the important experiences from your initial interest in Balkan music until your choral music and peacebuilding work in the USA and the Balkans?
 - a. Prompts: Fulbright?
 - b. Prompts: What did you do after the Fulbright?
 - c. Prompts: Book and CD publications and how they were important to peacebuilding and promoting cultural understanding?
3. How did the Balkan Wars of the 1990s affect your teaching and promoting of Balkan vocal music and culture?
4. Tell me about how you came to teach international music camps in the Balkans for Village Harmony?
5. What are the factors surrounding your planning of the singing and peacebuilding camps in Bosnia?
6. What were the musical goals of the Village Harmony camps in Bosnia?
7. What are the highlights of the Village Harmony peacebuilding camps in Bosnia?
8. What are the most moving and powerful memories of the Village Harmony peacebuilding camps in Bosnia?

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9. Tell me about your music teaching philosophy (in general and as it relates to Balkan singing and peacebuilding) and how it has evolved throughout your career.
10. Tell me about your favorite memories, highlights, and experiences in teaching Balkan music and promoting peacebuilding throughout your career.
11. Is there anything else you would like to share?

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR COLLEAGUES AND CHORISTERS

Thank you so much for volunteering your time to contribute to this study!

Please look over and sign this consent form giving us permission to use your interview data for the study.

Do you have any questions regarding the consent form?

I would also like to request permission to use excerpts of the interview audio/video for professional presentations. Please look over this audio/video release form and let me know if you have any questions.

The purpose of this interview is to gain insight on the stories and experiences of the career of Mary Cay Brass as a peacebuilder and choral music educator through her work with Balkan choral music. I hope to gain additional perspective on the role of the choral director as a peacebuilder.

1. In what capacity do you know Mary Cay Brass?
 - a. Prompts: How long? Through what organization? How did you meet?
2. How were you initially drawn to Balkan singing and/or culture and peacebuilding?
 - a. Prompts: Did Mary Cay introduce you to Balkan singing and/or peacebuilding? If not, how did you first experience Balkan music and/or peacebuilding?
3. What are your favorite memories and experiences with Mary Cay Brass and Balkan singing and peacebuilding?
 - a. Prompts: favorite concerts, favorite trip experiences (domestic or international)
4. How has Mary Cay Brass influenced your musical life as a teacher of Balkan vocal music and peacebuilder?

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5. How do you think that Mary Cay Brass has contributed to the world of music education (particularly global music education) and peacebuilding?

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APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTS

Mary Cay Brass: Interview 1

September 27, 2021

Scott Sexton: So thank you again for volunteering all your time. Um, I really appreciate it. I look forward to digging into this project. Um, I just want to confirm that you received the consent form and audio release form and that you looked over it. Um, did you have any questions about this document?

Mary Cay Brass: No, I don't have any

Scott: No questions. All right. So do you still wish to participate in this study? All right. Super, super. Um, as you know, the purpose of this interview or these series of interviews is to gain insight about the stories and experiences of your career as a peacebuilder and as a choral music educator through your work with Balkan choral music. So through this, I hope to gain perspective from the role of the choral director as a peacebuilder, because there's not a lot of info in the literature about this. So hopefully this story will provide implications and inspire others to do it. Um, so what are your earliest memories of Balkan music?

Mary Cay: Uh, my earliest memories are of my neighbors who were Croatian and they, their dad was very active in the Croatian community in the twin cities, Minnesota. And there was a, a children's dance group that the, their three daughters all belonged, belonged to. And I was really good friends. They were my neighbors and they, um, they invited me to come with them to their Croatian dance group. And I was, I was, it was like the first time I was there, it was in a high school gym. And I even remember how the gym smelled when we walked in, it was just kind of this magical thing. And there was this wonderful woman leading that folk dancing named Phyllis. And there were all these kids, these little girls in a circle and she puts an old 45 record on and they all start dancing on kolo and I'm like, and I'm standing over by the wall, really shy, you know, and, and Phyllis is motioning come and join us, come and join us. Then I'm like, oh no, no, no. But I was really drawn to it. And I kept moving closer to the circle and closer to the circle. And pretty soon they opened the circle and they just folded me right into the circle. And that was it, you know? And I, I folk danced with that little group for maybe like from when I was like nine to 12 years old and every Saturday morning we went there and we did Balkan dancing and we learned songs and my friends, we all went to the same school. We would sit out on the playground at our Catholic school and sing Balkan songs [laughs].. and we were like ten years old.

Scott: Wow. Well, can you tell me, like what years would this have been? Um, and in Minnesota you said the twin cities, Minneapolis? St. Paul?

Mary Cay: Yeah. What, and my town is outside of St. Paul, it's called White Bear Lake. Um, and what years? Like '62? '63? '64?

Scott: Awesome. That's incredible. Because as you know, that's, that's right around the time that the Balkan craze really hit United States. Um, but you have, you definitely have an inside with your neighbors being Croatian and learned the culture directly from a culture bearer. That's great. Um, you mentioned Phyllis with this be Phyllis Weikart by any chance?

Mary Cay: No, that's not her name.

Scott: But I just wanted to know, you know, Weikart and music education. She has a pretty involved, you know, multicultural dance series. So I just wanted to know if there's any relation, but that that's great. Um, so yeah, then let's keep going. And, um, we're just to the, we're just sort of building your timeline from your early interests until, um, whenever whatever we get to. So, um, next we're gonna move into what was next. I know you did a Fulbright, but obviously you just didn't jump into Fulbright. Can you tell me a little bit about between your youth group until you got to the Fulbright?

Mary Cay: Yeah. What, um, you know, I, that group broke up when we got to high school. I think we all got too busy and, um, and so I didn't even think about it for years all through high school. And then I was at the University of Minnesota and it was, I was, I was, uh, studying music and languages and it was summertime. And I was on my way to a jazz concert the summer after my freshman year. And we were walking by the student union and in front of the student union must have been 150 people, folk dancing, and I recognized the music and I said, oh, I recognize this from when I was little. And this music sounds so familiar. And I just told my friends, you go to the jazz concert, I'm going to stay here and watch this. And sure enough, you know, people came up and were talking to me and I would just like jump in and try to do these dances and things about them were familiar, but, you know, everybody was really friendly. And I told them how I danced when I was younger with Phyllis. And they said, oh, Phyllis is here right now. And she's over there. So I went over and reintroduce myself to her and, you know, then I found out there was Hungarian dancing on Monday night, international on Tuesday night, Balkan on Wednesday night, um, and Israeli on Sunday night. And I just started going every night.

Scott: Oh, wow, Yeah!

Mary Cay: And then a bunch of us decided to form a performing group. And it was the early days of a dance theater that still exists in Minneapolis called the ethnic dance theater. And we were that we were the early people who created it. I mean, we made our own costumes and, you know, I was pretty involved in the singing and the dancing, and a lot of us live together in group houses. And we all studied Serbo -Croatian together at the university. We were pretty into it, I'd say [laughs].

Scott: Wow. So this group, did you all venture into traditions outside of the Balkan world? Or was, or would you say it's more about the Balkan traditions or...

Mary Cay: The, the dance group that we formed was really specifically Balkan.

Scott: Super, super.

Mary Cay: Yeah, we all did all those other kinds of international dances, but that performing group was specifically Balkan.

Scott: Awesome. So, yeah, I know you speak, um, the Balkan languages, Serbo-Croatian, and you mentioned you all studied the language together, so you also took it formally?

Mary Cay: At the university, yeah at the university offered one year of it. And, um, we all, a bunch of us who were living in a house together, took it... So I had one year behind me before I went and lived there. So I had, I had some, you know, kind of basic working knowledge of the language when I went there.

Scott: So at what point, um, did it even occur to you that you wanted to maybe apply for a Fulbright? Did you have someone tell you about it or did you know someone who had done one or?

Mary Cay: You know, I, I would never have thought of it, but after I graduated, I was working in a music store, just off campus. It was, um, it was really fun place to work. And like all the musicians in the area came to this music store. And, and one day, one of my professors came in to buy some sheet music. And she, um, she had been my music history professor, and she knew of my interest in Balkan music and the performing ensemble and everything. And she said, you should think of applying for a Fulbright. And I said, I don't really even know what it is. Uh, I thought it was something that you needed to be sort of working, getting research for your dissertation to get a Fulbright. I didn't realize it was like that I could get one without being in a, you know, actually in a program. Cause I had graduated at that point and I wasn't in grad school and she said, oh yes. You know, you can apply at large, I guess it's called. So, so she said, come to my office and let's have a talk about it and I'll help you with this. And she just took my hand and she guided me through the process and I didn't know this, but she was, she had been a Fulbrighter herself in Italy, in Renaissance music, I think. And she didn't, um, she didn't what she didn't tell me is that she was the head of the Fulbright commission in Minnesota. I think she was, she was scouting for other women who had interesting, you know, interests, um, and let them know that Fulbright was an option for them.

Scott: Well, yeah. And it's sounds like a big compliment to you that she saw promise and knew that she knew that you would be able because from what I understand, the application's pretty prestigious and pretty, um, pretty complex. So, um, like you said, you had that unique interest as well.

Mary Cay: Yeah. The unique interest really helps and going to a unique country, like there's a lot more competition for like Germany and

Scott: Yeah. Some of the Western European stuff, especially for music.

Mary Cay: Yeah. But at that time, Yugoslavia, communist country, you know, it didn't, it didn't draw a huge pool of applicants, I don't think. But, um, they had a considerable program there, you know, so there are government funded there and you know, so, um, so I, I, I did my application and um, and then I didn't realize this one, I had to go and have a big interview, you

know, and there were, uh, there was a team of people interviewing. And what I didn't realize is that two of the people who had written me recommendations were on that committee, including that professor, that woman, professor Dr. Cardemone. And, um, so there I was, and I'd never been at an interview like this. I mean, I was like 22 years old, you know, I was pretty young and really inexperienced and I, but I was passionate about what I loved. So, um, you know, I just did the interview and I thought, whatever, you know, it was a good experience, but I probably got it because, you know, I just didn't have the confidence in myself at that point that I would get something like that. And, uh, Dr. Cardemone came in the store where I was working the music store, a few days later, and she said, I just want to tell you that your interview was the best interview. We heard that day because you were the only person who looked us in the eyes and the only person who talked with any enthusiasm about their project, that was a big learning for me, you know, like, oh look people in the eyes. Okay. I was doing it naturally. But, um, she, so she was really, um, and she said, I just want you to know that we've put your application into the nationals. So that means they sent it to Washington and from Minnesota, and then it was out of their hands. And then I don't know who chooses in DC, but that was maybe October when I had those interviews. And I found out that I got it, um, on, well, it was 4th of July weekend and I received, um, a thing saying there was a registered letter for me at the post office, but it was the 4th of July. So I couldn't go get it. So on the 5th of July, I went to the post office, but before they opened, I remember it was really hot. I'm sitting on the cement in front of the post office, waiting for them to open. [laughs] I went in and it was a thick envelope. So I thought this probably looked good

Scott: Awesome!

Mary Cay: If it was just a single letter that just said, sorry, you know, thick envelope. So anyway, that's how I found out. And they said be prepared to go on September 1st, two months.

Scott: Um, do you remember what year is this?

Mary Cay: '76.

Scott: '76 also, uh, for the interview. Can you clarify, can you, do you remember the name of the professor and this is at university of Minnesota?

Mary Cay: Yes. Dr. Donna Cardone, C A R D E M O N E.

Scott: Great.

Mary Cay: Eventually she got married and I think it was a hyphenated Cardemone-Jackson. She's no longer alive though. Yeah.

Scott: Um, cool. So before we go into the details of Fulbright, um, thinking back to all these wonderful experiences that you talked about from your childhood to dancing in college, to performing in the, you know, um, dedicated group to Balkan music, why Balkan music? What do you experience when you perform and hear it? Like, do you remember some of those initial

feelings you had, um, is there anything that you were specifically attracted to, or was it just the feeling of everything? Can you try to describe any of that?

Mary Cay: Yeah, that's, that's an interesting question. You know, I really don't know the answer to it. You know, I used to think, oh, I must be reincarnated from that part of the world, or something like that, because I was so drawn to it like a magnet, you know, really like that, like from the childhood group where I just, you know, blended right into the group right away to being in college and saying to my friends, you go to that other concert, I'm staying here, you know? And then just like, um, it was magnetic to me in some way and kind of magical just people moving together in a line and a circle was beautiful and I just loved the music and who can say, why you love any particular music. I, you know, it's so personal and you just like something or you don't like something. And I just was drawn to it from such an early age. And it's, it's kind of one of those mysteries, I think.

Scott: Yeah. Yeah. Awesome. All right. Um, are you ready to talk a little bit about your Fulbright? So maybe we can pick up from, so you got your acceptance letter and it's a thick packet and said to go there by September 1st. Um, what happened then? So you spend two months and you're preparing and packing?

Mary Cay: Yeah. Um, yep. And then I, um, flew over, they had, um, Fulbright meetings in, um, I was, I was going to live my first year in Zagreb and work with a professor, Jerko Berzić, who was an ethnomusicologist at the, um, Institute for folk arts. It used to be called Narode Udmnost. Um, and there were a lot of ethnologists and anthropologists, ethnomusicologists who worked at this center. This was something that was really supported by Tito's communist government.

Scott: Right, I don't know if you saw, I wrote a little bit about that, uh, in the sixties, especially he really put an emphasis on all the cultural art forms and put a lot of money

Mary Cay: Yes. Into all those little folk ensembles in every little town.

Scott: Right! The KUD?

Mary Cay: Yeah. They call them KUD and, and they were brilliant. Really. It was a brilliant thing. I think that Tito did because it, um, it connected people like, like there were these camps. I went to this camp on an island in the Adriatic that camp was called Baria and it's near Korčula. And I went to this camp three summers and every summer for like three weeks, they would focus on two regional zones. They have all of Yugoslavia divided into zones, musical zones, Adriatic zone, Dinaric zone, Panonian zone, Alpine zone, um, Bardar zone, which is Macedonia and Moravska zone. Mora-...[chuckles] a zone from Serbia anyway. So, uh, every summer I would go to this camp on an island and in the Adriatic for three weeks with leaders of all those cultural, artistic societies, those KUDs from all over Yugoslavia, I was like the only American and, um, or my friend, Kate, who was also a Fulbrighter with me. She went a couple of times with me and we just lived... We swam, we ate, we sang and we danced all day. And at night after, after our seminar was finished, there was a little kafana on the other end of the island. We'd all walk over there. There's always somebody with an accordion, they'd take out the accordion and everyone would sing. So here's people from all over Yugoslavia, learning the dances from each other's,

um, republics and taking those home to their home groups and teaching medleys of Serbian dances of Macedonian dances of Croatian dances. So every one of these, these little KUDs all over the place represented the music from other areas and they went to little festivals. So they would, you know, invite codes from Croatia and Serbia and Bosnia and to a festival in Macedonia. And they'd all get to know each other and they talk together. And I think that it was really a way of not looking at the other cultures as "other", but you know, the music, the dance, um, the, they were thriving little communities and people loved them. And it gave people an opportunity to travel outside of their village, outside of their Republic and even outside of the country. So they would go, these KUDs would get invited to, to, um, immigrant communities in Germany and Scandinavia, you know? And so it was, it was a big opportunity for young people and I got to be a part of it, you know? And, um, yeah, so that, that's the kind of thing I did in the summers between my Fulbright years. But during the year, like the first year I was in Zagreb, I spent a really, a lot of time, the first four or five months learning a language

Scott: Did you live with a family. Or did you live on your own in an apartment or,

Mary Cay: Uh, you know, I, I had several housing situations that were not, not great. And then, um, a friend of mine who worked at the Institute with me said, you should put a personal ad in the newspaper and say exactly what you want. So he helped me write an ad that said, American Fulbright scholar, looking for, I'm looking for room in house or apartment and in exchange for English lessons. Well, this amazing family called me right up. And, uh, they, they lived in big house on Rockefeller street and they, um, had three children and they had an extra apartment, oh, I had my own apartment in their house with my own entrance, my own kitchen. Plus I ate with them almost every Sunday for Sunday dinner. And I taught each of their kids twice a week, English. They were seven and 11 and 15 about. And, um, yeah, and they also, their father was really into this. They studied Italian and German and English, all these. And, um, so I had a great living situation. It was free. I didn't have to spend my Fulbright money on it. Um, because in exchange for that lessons, I got rent, which was kind of amazing. And, um, and so my Fulbright money was mine to spend in the summers to go to festivals and whatnot, you know?

Scott: So backing up a bit, so what, when you got your acceptance letter, what was your charge like, what was your purpose, the boat you went and worked at this Institute? Was it mainly like academic research or, um, you were assisting a professor or an academic?

Mary Cay: Yeah. You know, he, he set me up with, uh, field recordings, listening to field recordings from different areas and learning the different stylistic differences and linguistic differences, um, between areas he would have me do some transcriptions. It was just, he was just mentoring me in, uh, in Croatian and all of Croatia, which has vast differences of from the coast to the mountainous region behind Zagreb called Zagoria to the whole Slavonian plain, music styles are so different. Medugorija up by Hungary sounds very Hungarian. And so learning those stylistic differences, learning that different, um, dialects and how, you know it through this, through the music. And, um, yeah, the only thing I was disappointed about is that he didn't bring me out into the field very much... Finally, in the spring he did. And, um, but he also set me up to work Radmila Petrović, and, um,

Scott: She's in Beograd (Belgrade)?

Mary Cay: Beograd, at the musica- [tries Serbian] Institute, musicological Institute, uh, the Serbian academy of arts and sciences. And he set me up to do some field work with her that she'd been doing down in, um, an area of Serbia that borders Bosnia called Sondak, and there's a lot of mixed villages, Serbian, Muslim there. And, um, and I really liked working with her. And I went in the spring of that first year down to that area with her, and she agreed to take me on the next year. So, um, and Fulbright did give me that extension. And so the second year I moved to Belgrade and worked with Radmila and she brought me out into the field a lot more, but also we did a lot of academic work of learning the regional styles and dialects. And, but she did bring me several times to that same region of Serbia. Um, and, but she brought me to, um, brass band festivals and other festivals around all around Serbia. And at the same time, I sang in a Byzantine choir with a wonderful, um, another wonderful musicologist in that Institute named Dimitri Stefanović a. And we, we would go around and sing in these ancient monasteries with the beautiful frescos. And, yeah. So that was a really rich experience as well.

Scott: For sure. Um, so I'm just imagining, I guess if you weren't doing fieldwork, were you in some room in the Institute somewhere like listening to headphones and taking notes?

Mary Cay: Reel to reel!

Scott: Yeah, Reel to reel! [laughs]

Mary Cay: You were, they were, ujer. That was the brand that they all used and heavy equipment, not like nowadays.

Scott: Yeah.

Mary Cay: So you were in Croatia, uh, in Zagreb from like September '76. Did you go all the way to the next September or was it like based on the academic year or, yeah, it's based on the academic year, but in the summer, like I said, I went to that dance program on the island of Baria. One thing I always had to do is leave the country and come back in because my visa didn't cover for the summer. So I always had to find some tricky way to leave the country and come back in. Um, and, um, but I, you know, it wasn't that much of a problem. And then in September, I'd get my student visa again for the next.

Scott: Yeah, sure. So, um, September '77, you were in Serbia by this point. Yeah. Cool. Um, in my research, I found, you know, both Jerko and Radmila, they're both pretty prolific in English writings in ethno circuit. So even in the sixties, before you went over there, they had already published a lot. So that's neat that you started with really two of the top, Balkan ethnomusicologists. That's great.

Mary Cay: At that time, Yeah. And how have you come upon their writings?

Scott: Um, so as a PhD student, we have access to virtually everything. And if we don't have direct access to it, we can request access. So I'm happy for the, you know, to share, um, some of them you can read them.

Mary Cay: I was amazed, um, when I saw the list of articles that found by them, cause I'd never been able to find anything, you know,

Scott: With, you know, with internet and technology. Every, every, every archive pretty much has digitalized, not every archive, but many archives can digitalize some of the things. And they were writing for English publications. Also, I'm sure their work is way more expansive in the Balkan languages, but these were English. Like they wrote them in English. So,

Mary Cay: Well, I don't know if you know this about Radmila but she did her master's or was it a PhD too? At Wesleyan?

Scott: I saw that I didn't realize which degree it was but saw just studied there and what I, unfortunately, she passed away, I don't know, 10, 20 years ago. And unless you have heard different, I think Jerko is still alive?

Mary Cay: No.

Scott: He's not? Well, the Britannica, encyclopedia, whatever I looked up, they don't have an end date for him that had the death for her, but not for him, but not for him, they left it open. So I don't know, maybe I'll contact them [chuckles].

Mary Cay: I think he's not. Um, because when I initially went over to Bosnia to, um, to try to set up Village Harmony camps in Bosnia, I, um, contacted an ethnomusicologist at the university in Sarajevo named Tamara Karaća Beljak. And, uh, she was very welcoming and she, um, she, you know, in my first meeting with her, she, she asked me about how I'd learned the language and who I'd studied with. And, and I said, you know, Jerko and Radmila Petrović And he said, she said, oh, they're both gone.

Scott: Yeah. It might've been Britannica. Let you know the English from England encyclopedia. So maybe they've just had no one update, they have a lot of like ethnomusicologist profiles. Um, I meant to ask you about that. Cause she had a definite death date and his was open, like he had not passed, so they probably just not updated. Um, cause they would definitely know.

Mary Cay: Yeah. I'm pretty sure they're both gone. Um, and, and I think I read somebody, a Croatian, a few years ago who told me they had known him and that he had passed. That's fine. I mean, he would be wicked old right now if he still alive. Cause he wasn't a young man when I was there.

Scott: Well, he was still, he wrote some things in the early 2000s, so he must have lived a long, long time. Um, so that's really neat. Um, wow. Um, so yeah, so you did a year in Serbia. Um, at some point this time, did you ever think, like you mentioned, you were so fascinated at how this music and thiss cultural, uh, how the KUDs brought everyone together. Um, do you think looking back and now that you have a whole career of bringing people together, though, you think that was one of the first times you might've been inspired to do this?

Mary Cay: That's a really good question. You know, I never made the connection, but um, very possibly, you know, because I saw, I really got to experience the beauty of that. You know, being on that island, it was like paradise and, and seeing all these people from all over Yugoslavia, singing together every night, all the songs from each other's republics and just the, the emotional ties that, that they would have with each other, from singing and dancing together all day. I know. And then bringing what they'd learned back to their communities to share. And yeah, everyone would always say this Macedonia music it's the best [laughs]. I didn't necessarily agree. I liked it all. But so many of the, like the Serbs and the Croatian leaders and stuff, they go, oh, Macedonia is the best Macedonian is the best. That was their bias.

Scott: It could have been, you know, they really had a big like folk music revival in this time and I think a lot of the Macedonian artists were like the top artists on their radios, you know, from what I've read, I don't know that to be true, but um, maybe it was because they were very popular and on their radio, that's what they were listening to. So I don't know, I'm sure you've had other popular artists also, but it seemed like Macedonian artists kind of dominated that '60s, '70s era.

Mary Cay: Well, the dance, the dance tradition there is really rich. And for example, Bosnia doesn't have a rich dance traditional Really attracted to the other republics that had more, you know, um, a much livelier dance tradition. And so that, I think maybe that was part of it, but I used to always laugh when they'd say that and I'd say, well, I don't agree. You know, I love your music too.

Scott: That's a good answer. Um, so do you remember, like, what was your last month of your Fulbright is so we're in '76 to '78, like did you come home in May '78 or did you spend another summer doing festivals?

Mary Cay: I did. And then, you know, I had met all these people from Germany and Scandinavia at these various festivals who were also sort of "Slavo-philes." And they said, when you get done with your Fulbright, come visit us or we'll set up workshops for you. So, uh, so, and also I had a friend who had, had set me up with some, um, his father was in the film industry and, and this guy, Sasha, he was violent. He had been an exchange student in St. Louis. So he was, his English was excellent. And my Serbian was really good at this time. So together we would work on putting subtitles on movies. And, uh, so I kind of had this job where we were creating subtitles, um, for Balkan movies for export. Um, and then I decided to go on this big trip and I, I went to Berlin and then I went to, uh, Stockholm and, and I stayed, I stayed, I was gone a couple months, so I don't know how long I was in each place, but people in those places set up workshops for me to do. And I had a blast and people were just inviting me to parties and I just, they in Sweden, they brought me to the sweetest folk dancing you know? And then, um, they said, oh, you have to go visit these friends of ours in Copenhagen. So they connected me with this other community in Copenhagen and I stopped there and had a really great time with those musicians there. And then I went back to another place in Germany and gave workshops and then made my way back through Zagreb to say goodbye to friends, and then back to Belgrade. And at that point I got a letter from this Institute, the Balkan was called the Balkan Art Center in New York City. And they offered me a job to come work there. And so that was like, okay, I guess that's what I'm doing next. I really didn't feel like I wanted to go back to Minnesota

because of what would I do there? And I like moving forward in my life. And so I, I moved to New York city from Belgrade.

Scott: So, um, I don't know, it's one of your first international tours I guess? Uh, this summer teaching all throughout Europe, uh, you were teaching songs and dance, and This is probably your first, first time you're teaching Balkan music to other people?

Mary Cay: Yeah. Yeah, it was really, um, it was a lot of fun and I met a lot of great people. Um, so then, um, yeah, and I moved to New York City and worked for this organization. Um, it didn't turn out to be the job that I really thought it was going to be. So that's why I went to graduate school in, um, uh, Columbia and teaching English as a second language. So I had something practical I could do, um, and employable. And, um, and so I did that and taught ESL in New York City. And I really loved it because again, I'm working with refugees and immigrants from all of the world in a classroom, trying to create community in a classroom with people whose languages are yeah. All over the world. And, um, I happened to teach in a school that was based on the principles, uh, of, of a methodology called counseling, learning community language learning. And it was a, um, methodology of language learning developed by a Catholic priest in Chicago. And I really loved the sense of community that this school had in it, it was, it existed in Riverside church, in New York city and for the students, it was a free program. It was grant-run. So I, I did that for a bunch of years and, um, and just was kind of folk dancing. And what on the side, you know, I, I wasn't developing that part of my, you know, career yet, but, um, yeah, it wasn't until I moved to Vermont, you know, and I moved because I started playing concordances and coming up and seeing what a vibrant music community it was plus it was beautiful. And, um, I was really tired of the noise and crime and everything else. So I, um, I moved to Vermont and started by teaching ESL a little bit. There's not a lot of work here, you know, it's a, it's an urban job really. And then eventually some good friends of mine. Peter Amidon said, you should teach music here, visit me. The teaching job opened up, you know, and I didn't have an ed degree. So, but at that time they were so desperate for music teachers that you could get peer review and get, get certified with peer review. So

Scott: What is your undergraduate, do you have a BA in music?

Mary Cay: Ethnomusicology! And actually believe it or not German. German, because I focused on Serbian and, uh, so my, my German is really passive, you know, but I put a lot of it did a lot of the study programs and stuff, but I never lived there long enough to get any fluency. Yeah. So

Scott: That's interesting. Cause, um, I didn't know, uh, I knew a lot of the other stuff about you, but I didn't know about this period in your life. So that's interesting to hear, but you, so you really didn't get into the music part yet in a sense, you were already working with bringing people together and, you know, the whole, you know, cultural, promoting cultural understanding, which I feel are hallmarks of your career and in your ethos as a music educator. So in a way you never stopped.

Mary Cay: It kind of morphed into different things! And then, um, in about 1990, that's when, uh, Larry Gordon called me up and said, I'm thinking of starting, uh, a camp for teenagers. And,

um, I hear, you know, a lot about Balkan music. Would you like to come and teach at it? I said, yeah. And, um, so that first summer we had this group of like 18 teenagers and it was amazing, you know, and they were such quick learners and yeah. And then the next summer we did two camps, you know, and then the next summer we did three camps and you know,

Scott: Now I know it's just... so you were, you were really like after the next main Village Harmony teacher, like you and Larry are the first ones for Village Harmony. Yeah. All right. Talk to me about your accordion playing at what point in all this mix did you begin playing accordion were you playing it the first Village Harmony camps? Did you learn it in your Fulbright? Where does that come in?

Mary Cay: I learned it in New York city after my Fulbright because, um, I just figured because I was a piano player that I could learn it pretty easily and I wanted to be able to accompany myself on Balkan songs. And, um, so I found an old accordion in Minnesota from an old Swedish guy who had a basement full of accordions and I bought it for \$35. Yes. And that accordion I have now sold to Magda.

Scott: That's very cool. That's a special that one of your longtime choir members. So you get to pass it along to her.

Mary Cay: Yeah. So Magda has that now. Um, I started playing in New York City and I first actually started by learning some easy New England tunes and trying to figure out how to get the left-hand or right-hand together and, you know, all that, the, the, uh, the coordination. Um, and I, I was totally self-taught and, um,

Scott: Yeah, I was, I was going to ask, did you, did you ever collect any like scores or anything while you were there? It's just like, you just started picking up stuff by ear from what you had?

Mary Cay: Oh, I mean, I have a lot of music too, but also, um, mostly I was learning accordion by ear.

Scott: Hmm. Yeah. Wow. No one would ever know. I mean, that's a compliment. I figured I just assumed somewhere you've studied formally at some point, like maybe studied with your Fulbright or something.

Mary Cay: No. Ha! In fact, this last year, uh, during COVID I've been taking lessons, I love to play Scandinavian music too. So I've been playing, taking lessons from a young really virtuoso accordion player who went to New England conservatory and she's in Sweden and I've been taking lessons from her. She's my first teacher.

Scott: Oh, wow.

Mary Cay: I've never had another teacher. I told her that. I said, you're my first teacher!

Scott: Wow, that's shocking! So you were teaching, um, with Village Harmony. And, um, you started doing that most summers and like you said, it evolved into numerous camps. Um, w how

did you decide, like what to teach them? I obviously Larry asked you the column and do Balkan music with them, but like, how did you get a feel or a sense of what teenagers might enjoy from this Balkan music? You just kind of picked some of your favorites and went with it, and I'm sure I'm sure you've taught them good dance steps to go with it. I know you have a lot of dance in your concerts and

Mary Cay: Yeah. And, um, I mean, all the, all that repertoire that's in my books, that's what I did with the kids. Yeah. My, the Village Harmony book and the Balkan Bridges book, I did a lot of that with the kids. And a lot of, I chose a bunch of the kids to be on those recordings. So most of the people, a lot of the people singing on those recordings are

Scott: Your first campers!

Mary Cay: People like Susanna and her sister Rosie and Emily Miller and all these early, early Village Harmony kids were on those recordings.

Scott: Um, how did the idea come up about making a book and a CD? Is that something you wanted to do or did, um, did Larry kind of encourage you to do this? Or...

Mary Cay: We started doing camps in England, people would say at the concerts, where do you get this music? Where do you find this music? And, um,

Scott: You have to go to Yugoslavia!

Mary Cay: And so that's why I, you know, Larry and I thought of this project of, of, you know, creating a book and CD, um, so that when we went, when we were doing camps in England, we would have a book to sell and with a CD, a companion CD. So, yeah. Um, but you know, a couple of years after we started doing camps, it was 1992 and the wars were starting. Yeah. So, um, what I found myself doing at camps was teaching repertoire from Serbia, from Croatia, from Bosnia to kind of humanize all those people to the kids, because the news was just full of gruesome, horrible stories. And, um, so I just tried to, you know, just bring this sense of humanity to them all through the music.

Scott: It's interesting. I think, um, I haven't really said with many people, but I think, one reason I'm so drawn to music from this part of the road is my earliest news memories were not of domestic news. My earliest news memories were of all the awful images in Bosnia. I was about 5, 6, 7 years old around this time. And that's what I remember. That's the first like media stuff I remember watching on TV. So in a way, I don't know if this is selfish or just that, you know, it makes me feel better to know this beautiful culture, because I saw all this bad images, someone, to be honest, I don't know. Um, I don't know. So I, I think that's one reason, you know, I found it, it's so beautiful. I'm drawn to it because it allowed me to kind of reverse those images and replace them with beautiful memories and, and music. I don't know. Um, so if I may, can I ask a few personal questions about your feelings during that time, um, obviously you have very strong connections there and probably had friends and friends that are like family, um, that were there. Um, what are some things that you felt when, you know, awful things are going on in the

Balkans and you're here, um, you had an answer to, you know, teach music from all the cultures and all sides of the conflicts, but what are some things that you may have gone through?

Mary Cay: Um, yeah, it was, you know, it was very upsetting to watch this all happen. It was like, it was horrifying. Um, staying connected to the music was, you know, kind of a balm, you know, to, to that and teaching it to other people also, um, it was a way I felt like I could, I don't know, you know, it was like, you feel so helpless. Like I should be able to do something, you know, I spend time here, I speak the language, but really there wasn't anything for me to do. And I don't have the kind of nervous system that can go live in a war-torn country very successfully. I don't think so. Just doing it with music was, was probably the best way for me to express my sadness and grief through the music, um, and teaching it to others. Um, and it was right around, you know, maybe after I'd done Village Harmony a year or two, that my friends said, why don't you start a group like that for us? So we can sing that music. Um, cause they would go to the Village Harmony concerts and hear these kids sing and say, wow, we want to do that. And so that's how I, my local choir here, um, and it started like with 25 people and then that went to 35, you know, eventually 80 or 90 people. And, but, and through that whole time I was, you know, we were singing songs from lots of traditions, but also in, in any one session I would probably do four or five songs from the Balkans,

Scott: Which community choir was first?

Mary Cay: Um, River Singers.

Scott: That's the longest one. Um, what, and what year was that? Do you remember? '95ish?

Mary Cay: No earlier, earlier, let's see. [pauses to think] Um, it was like '91 or '92. It was like 30 years ago. Yeah. Yeah. So it was pretty soon after starting the Village Harmony. So yeah, so that's, that's how I got involved in, in doing community choir. It was really because of Larry inviting me to Village Harmony and, and then on Northern Harmony tours, I went on three Northern Harmony tours with Larry one in England. And two more, uh, in all of Western Europe, you know, big tours from England to, um, to Italy, but also, um, um, this, this, and this leads to how I ended up doing camps in Bosnia. When we were doing a team camp during the war in, but it was, um, maybe '93 or four. And we used to use this place called Hazelwood House in Devon, in England as our retreat center, where we would host with the kids and rehearse where we rehearsed for a week. So, Hazelwood House was an interesting place. These two women ran it and they were very dedicated to helping people in Bosnia. And they had befriended these two women. One of whom was Emsuda Mujagević from, uh, Kozarac, which isn't far from Sanski Most, but it's in the Republika Srpska. Um, Kozarac had been ethnically cleansed and Emsuda and her family escaped into the woods. You know, like a lot of people did. She has a harrowing story of escape and people helping her. And at the time I met her, she and this other woman Šarifa were living in Zagreb working with the refugee community there. And they had started like a women's therapy center where they knit sweaters. And because there's no traditional therapy, you know, in village life, in the Balkans people talk when they're in a circle knitting together or, you know, doing an activity together. And so, um, she had like a women's crisis center was all these women who are victims of horrible things. And, um, she was working with them and, but I met her in England because, um, the Hazelwood House people would invite

her and Šarifa to come kind of like for an R and R from their work, rest and recuperation. And they would stay at Hazelwood House. So we happened to be there at the same time. And we, I heard, you know, from that they were there and then we started, we met them and then we did our first concert for them, for the, and the Hazewood House people, and these people from the Balkans that were staying there. And Emsuda was just blown away that here were these American teenagers singing her music and she was just, you know, tickled and we became good friends and she didn't speak any English. So it was really a relief for her to find somebody to speak to. Um, she told me a lot about her story and how they escaped. And she got her kids out of Bosnia through the fellowship of reconciliation, ran a program called the Bosnian student project. And her two kids Elisa and Adis were placed with American families for their high school. They didn't lose their schooling. They, she got them out of there, uh, during the war. So, um, she, and she was a mover and a shaker. She went back after the war and she was one of the forces that rebuilt Kozarac in spite of being in Republika Serbska and having being hassled constantly, you know, by the authorities to do, to do this. But she was responsible for thousands of Muslims moving back and rebuilding. And she created a cultural center there and she created a, um, an NGO called, um, Srcem do Mira, through hearts to peace. And, uh, she got money from the Finnish government to build this cultural center. Anyway, so when, um, I'm trying to think of the order of things... we were on a Northern Harmony tour. We were gonna do one in the fall of maybe like 95 and we were going to be in Austria. And I realized we had a hole in our schedule that we hadn't filled. And I, I said to Larry, do you want to try to go to Zagreb and visit Emsuda and see the work she's doing there and see if we can do a concert for them. And he said, sure. So I, I worked it out with Emsuda that, and she said, don't worry, we'll find a place for you to stay. I didn't know how she was going to do this. Um, a lot of people stayed in the women's crisis center and some various other people, I can't remember, remember where I stayed, but she found places for us. And, um, they, we did a concert at the Bosnian consulate there for our refugees. And, um, and then she brought us to the women's therapy center, where there were boxes and boxes of sweaters that they had knit. And she insisted that each of us take a sweater and we were like, no, no, we can't do that. You know, this is, you've created these sweaters to sell it's your it, you know, she's trying to give women a trade because all the men were dead, you know, and these women had to fend for themselves now, and she was trying to give them a trade. And yet here she was offering us wealthy Americans to take one of these sweaters. We, it was, it pained us to take these sweaters, but she would not say no, we had to take a sweater. And, um, so that was, and then at the end of that, that visit in Zagreb, she wanted me to go down to Bosnia with her. This was going to be the first time that I'd ever been in Bosnia since the seventies.

Scott: That was, that was the preceding visit. Was that the first time you had returned to Yugoslavia or former Yugoslavia?

Mary Cay: No... I did in '83.

Scott: We'll have to talk about that another time.

Mary Cay: Yeah. So, uh, but I didn't go there for many, many years because of the war, you know?

Scott: Well, you couldn't. So you both went, you went with her to Bosnia?

Mary Cay: I did. And Larry, meanwhile went back to England and I was going to fly back to England and meet him there. And we were going to do a, um, Easter week retreat at, I mean, a workshop at a, at a school. So, um, so I had a few days off while they were traveling back to England and I went down to Bosnia with Emsuda and, um, you know, I'd never seen a war-torn country. Um, and it was just like, everything was bombed out. Every church and mosque and houses had pop marks all over them. And people just, there was bare, there was no infrastructure left, there was no power, you know, and we stayed, um, we stayed in Sanski Most, believe it or not. And Kozarac was in a shambles still, you know, that it hadn't been rebuilt yet. She, um, and I remember falling asleep at night and hearing explosions and she I'd say Emsuda. What's that?

Scott: Yeah. So this is technically like before the Dayton agreement?

Mary Cay: No, this is right after Dayton.

Scott: Right after Dayton.

Mary Cay: And she said, oh, that's probably, uh, an animal stepping on a mine. Yeah. So that was my first experience. It kinda made me sick. It was hard for me. Um, and then we drove back to Zagreb and I got on a plane and flew back to England and it was like shocking, two hours away, two hour flight to London and it's another world. It's a completely different world. That was just [pause]...it just blew my mind. Like this horrible thing happened in the middle of Europe, you know, and I fly two hours away and I'm in England. I was like, nothing, you know, it's just regular daily life going on as usual. So yeah. So when I, when I had the idea finally to, um, to do a Village Harmony camp in the Balkans, that was when the Village Harmony had started doing camps in other countries. And so I kind of had it in the back of my mind. I'd like to do something in the Balkans, but I didn't have, I just was waiting for the right moment. And then, um, I asked Emsuda if we could do a camp there in Kozarac after Kozarac got rebuilt. So around 2005, I knew she had rebuilt Kozarac. And I knew that every May, she had a conference for her through hearts to peace NGO and people, those people, those women from England came every year to it. Plus uh, this whole group of women that have been really active in supporting her from different countries. So I decided I'll actually Village Harmony paid for me to go on this fact-finding trip? And that's when, um, so I went to her conference and um, and we talked about like a lot of the logistics of what it would take to have a camp there. And then I went to Sarajevo and I met with that ethnomusicologist, Tamara, and um, I needed to find some teachers and I actually found my first teachers at that camp through, um, Laura Hassler, um, musicians without borders in Holland. They did a lot of work in the Balkans. They, um, because the, the Dutch were the peacekeepers around Srebrenica, you know, that, that whole thing and that, uh, they, uh, they started Musicians Without Borders there to, um, work with people after Srebrenica. Yes. And Laura Hassler I knew about how did I know about her? We knew about each other. I just called her up one day in Holland. She's American, but she lived in Holland. I called her up and I said, Hey, I want to do a camp in Bosnia. Can you help me out? You know, and I knew she had a lot of connections there. So I, she helped me hire a few people and she was really involved with that with Pontanima the interreligious choir. And I was really fascinated by Pontanima.

Scott: Was she a singer? Or was she just an arts organizer?

Mary Cay: She's a singer too. And so, she connected me with Father Ivo, uh, Markavić who started Pontanima and, um, and with Maja Budimir who sang in Pontanima and was a really good musician. And, um, and then Tijana Vinjavić, uh, another good musician from sorry about, so these were all connections I got through Laura and that's how I created my first camp. So Maya came from Pontanima and taught us ilahija and, um, and Serbian Orthodox chants. And she sort of brought that, Pontanima model of doing music from the various religious traditions yeah. To, um, to Village Harmony. And, um, so we did that first camp. Um, it was a really challenging camp for me. Um, it was hard there. The other person who co-lead it with me, Mark Fory is also an ethnomusicologist who lives in Hungary now, but is also fluent in the language. But between the two of us, we had to translate a lot of really hard stuff. People were wanting to unload their stories, you know, because who else did they have to tell them to each other and they'd all live through it together.

Scott: Yeah. I can't imagine. I mean, for obvious reasons, I can't imagine, but for a secondary reason of the fact that you loved this place and culture so much, you know, 20 years before and all your life. But, you know, but to see this, some of the things that happened, and I just can't imagine how...

Mary Cay: I know I actually got really sick and I had to leave early. I just was, uh, like I said, my nervous system, doesn't not, um, like I don't watch horror movies on TV. I'm really careful what I watch and um, how much news I even taken at all. Um, so that, but you know, a lot of people had a really powerful experience at that camp. And, um, I think it was a hard camp for me to do personally. Um, and then when I decided to do a second one, I decided not to go back to Kozarac partly because of that, uh, not being able to really listen to those stories like that.

Scott: And that was the center of the ethnic cleansing and...

Mary Cay: Yeah, we all had to, um, visit concentration camps and stuff like that. And, um, but I, I asked Tijana who has one of my singer, um, singing teachers there, who is from Sarajevo, I asked her, do you want to co-lead camp with me? And if so, where could we do it? And she started scouting around and that's how we found Bugojno. Cause she knows Samira and we, we rented out a whole hotel there out on the outskirts of,

Scott: Yeah, I've been... Samira actually took me there a few times and she was like, yeah, this is where the first or one of the first Village Harmony. Um, it's like a lodge, kind of with wooden...

Mary Cay: Yeah. The lodge. So, um, yeah. And so Samira would bring her girls up and they would, we would chat and sing and you know, and we went to visit them where they rehearsed and we visited her accordion students and we made a really nice connection there. Um, and we were kind of self-sufficient there in our, in our hotel. And, um, we, we had rented vans that we could use. And um, we went, we had a couple of really cool outings and um, and a little tour where we went to a very famous accordion player named Omer Pobrić. He's now passed on, but he was big sevdalinka accordion player, and pretty famous in his day. Um, and this was a highlight. We went to a Pontanima rehearsal.

Scott: In Sarajevo?

Mary Cay: In Sarajevo. And, um, We just made a day trip. You know, we went back to Bugojno that night, but we met with Father Ivo. He told us all about how he started it. We, we listened to them rehearse. And then on their break, they, they all go into another room and there's like cakes and coffee and stuff. And everyone pulls out their cigarette [laughs] ... the room comes to smoke, you know,

Scott: Not in the Balkans! [Laughs].

Mary Cay: And uh, but for all of us, I have to say it was really moving to be there with these people, from all the different religions, singing together, you know, ilahija and Serbian chants and Croatian hymns, and Jewish Sephardic music. And that was really powerful. Um, that was a really powerful thing. And so, and then we, we did a concert in Bugojno with and Samira's girls, you know, that, that Village Harmony model of do something with a local choir so it brings in audience... That works. So we had bought and some the same place, we that same outdoor place where we've done. Yup. And, um, yeah, so that was the 2008 one, which is also well-documented by, um,

Scott: Right. In the book... Bithell? Bithell?

Mary Cay: Yeah. Bithell in England. Yeah. She did a great sort of ethnographic study of that trip.

Scott: Yeah it's good. It's like a part of a chapter for sure. Yeah. I've definitely read it and I'll be using that some as well. Well, um, we've gone about an hour and 10 minutes. I want to be respectful of your time. It gives you a chance to take a break and all. Um, wow. So I'm going to stop the recording if that's okay with you.

Mary Cay: Sure.

Mary Cay Brass: Interview 2

October 1, 2021

Scott Sexton: Good to see you again. And we will pick up where we left off. And we were talking about, um, you were telling me about Emsuda and her organization and her work in Kozarac. And you were also kind of talking about the first Village Harmony camp you did in Bosnia, and some of the things that you did before that, to make that happen. So somewhere around there, um, if you want to pick up and just, um, I guess a good question, would be, um, you know, try to remember as much as you can and tell me a little more about the first camp, that first camp you did, um, the format, how long it was. Um, I know you mentioned some of the key places earlier... Let's revisit that.

Mary Cay Brass: Sure. Um, yeah, the first village harmony camp was in Kozarac and I co-led that camp with, uh, another American ethnomusicologist named Mark Forry F O R R Y Mark. Um, I had met Mark when I lived in Yugoslavia and our times there overlapped, he did a lot, he did a doctoral dissertation in ethnomusicology on Tamburica orchestras in Vojvodina, north of... North of Belgrade. And he's, um, he lives now in Hungary. He's married to a Hungarian Serbian, Serbian- Hungarian woman. So, uh, anyway, he co-led it with me and, um, Emsuda hosted it at her at her center in Kozarac that she had rebuilt with money from the Finnish government. And that was her through hearts to peace center. Um, that's the name of her NGO through hearts to peace or Srcem do Mira and she, um, you know, she had never, she's not a musician and she had never promoted concerts or really had a clue about that. So, um, so our concerts weren't successful in the way of like, like mostly we would just go somewhere and start singing on the street. Um, but she didn't really know how to promote. Um, so, um, it, it wasn't, I mean, our concert in Kozarac itself got promoted because basically she came in one day with a bunch of paper and markers and said let's make posters! [Scott laughs] And then we started putting them out, tacking them up places. And it was, we did our concert at the swimming pool because there wasn't anywhere else.

Scott: That's where everyone was. It was the summer!

Mary Cay: Exactly! We did our concert at the swimming pool. And, uh, and then we did another concert in Banja Luka. And I'd say there were a few more people there because she had connections to the Bosnian Muslim community there, even though it's primarily a Serbian town, it's the capital of Republika Serbska Um, we went and did a nice concert there. I, I just remember people jumping up on stage and singing and dancing with us. And I also remember, uh, a Bosnian who lives in the states now, maybe Detroit was there visiting. And he said, no one sings anymore. Since the war, no one sings, no one dances. He said it took a bunch of Americans coming here to get people to sing and dance again. And, um, so that sticks out in my mind, you know, like I didn't realize how much they had not sung, you know, and how much singing was a part of their lives. So, um, and we also, we went to Sanski Most and we were supposed to do a concert outside, but it was, there was a thunder storm. I think we kind of stood on a street corner and say a few songs. You know, it was what it was. Um, you know, um, she brought us to the mosque and talked a lot about Islam to us. She brought us to, um, one of the concentration camps turn Trnopolje, which is right outside of Kozarac. Um, we heard a lot of really hard stories. At

one point, she gathered a lot of the village, a lot of the people who had moved back into a big circle and with us, and they basically went around the circle and told their stories, which were one horrible story after another. It was very hard to translate that. And, um, just emotionally... Mark and I were doing the bulk of that. Um, but you know, a lot of people got a lot out of that trip. And when I did the next camp, two years later, a whole pile of people who've been at the first camp came to the second camp. I was amazed! I thought, oh, this is, this is emotionally heavy to do a camp here, but people found it gratifying. They found our teachers at that camp, or, uh, a young woman, a musician named Maja Budimir and she sings, she sang with Pontanima. And so she represented that repertoire to us and told a lot of stories about Pontanima to us, which were all really interesting, you know, how people found their way there about father Ivo, Marković, who founded it and how he founded it. And their stories were riveting. You know, everybody was really fascinated by them and, and, um, and Tijana Vinjević who I co-led the 2008 camp with. She was also wonderful musician and singer, um, from Sarajevo. And she was our, one of our other teachers. And um, and we all stayed in her center. Um, it was a little challenging because across the street from the center was the kafana that was playing glaringly loud music until all hours. Um, there were challenges like that. And finally, I, I went and slept at Emsuda's house, but at Emsuda's house the rooster started crowing at about four!

Scott: Oh no! Go from one sound to another!

Mary Cay: Yeah, so, uh, I had a hard time sleeping, but, um, a lot of people who are good sleepers, it was no problem. So yeah, that was, that was, uh, only like 10 years after the war, you know? And, um, so a lot had been rebuilt, you know, it was really inspiring to see how much these people had come back to their village and rebuilt it in spite of all odds. I don't know that I would have been strong enough to do that. And, um, and I'd say Emsuda was the fire behind it, her very optimistic, positive vision. She did not stray from her vision. And, um, yeah. So I think that's all I really have to say about that camp then I think, did I talk about the 2008 one last time?

Scott: We started to touch on it briefly because you told me about how the British ethnomusicologist mentioned that in her book. Um, but we didn't really talk in detail. Um, you did say it was in Bugojno and I think by then you had met Samira and some of her girls, so to clarify, 2006 was in Kozarac and then 2008 was the first time in Bugojno?

Mary Cay: Yeah, um, and Tijana co-led it with me. It was kind of challenging because she was also in graduate school. She had a master's degree in conducting, she conducted a youth orchestra, I think, but she was now doing a master's degree in political science as well, to be able to use music for political in political ways. That that was her goal. And Tijana is somebody who lived in Sarajevo through the war...her father's Serbian and her mother's Muslim, they stayed in their apartment. They, um, and Tijana and a bunch of girls, they were about 14 years old, started a choir called Corona, which, um, met in an, in a basement apartment with no windows. And they started singing at the, during the war in this safe place. You know, they would dodge the snipers and get to this neighborhood place and rehearse, and that group still exists-- Corona. And, uh, actually you can probably find some recordings on YouTube of them. Well, they are wonderful singers and they did traditional music mostly. And I think this is what really carried them through the war. And, uh, and, uh, Tijana had a lot of stories too, about being in Sarajevo during the war. And there's a certain pride that people have who stuck it out. Her sister didn't, her

sister went to Toronto. And, um, there's, there's a certain pride in those that stuck it out. I I've noticed. And Tijana said she would never leave. And, um, and interestingly enough, uh, at the end of the camp, several of my campers wanted to see the tunnel museum under the airport where people escaped from and Tijana had never been there. And so she took them cause they wanted to go. And in that museum, there's a constant TV playing scenes from the war of grenade, of snipers, it's just non-stop. And, uh, she walked in that room and looked up at the TV and she got really shaky and she left the room and she said to me, I could never do that again... After bragging to me how she could, she would never leave. And if it happened again, she would never leave. She took one look at that TV and said, I don't know how I lived through that. Yeah. She was, um, yeah. So anyway, Tijana, she's a strong leader in many ways and she was a little, um, overbooked because she was writing a graduate thesis at the same time as leading a camp and running back and forth from Bugojno to Sarajevo to take classes, but we managed and, um, the other, and I think, uh, Maja again, taught us at that camp from Pontanima and she organized a field trip where we went to, Sarajevo, went to Pontanima I think I did talk about this. Um, and we met with father Ivo and we got to watch her rehearsal and meet everybody after at the break and the coffee room where everyone pulled out a cigarette. Cigarettes and Turkish coffee. And, um, and that was a really highlight, you know, and, and we went in the church where, um, they met at St. Anthony's, um, monastery in Sarajevo, and when we went into this big Baroque kind of church and they sang for us in the church, it was beautiful. And we sang a couple of songs with them that we'd learned, and that was fun for us and, and inspirational. And, and, um, I think it was really inspirational to see all these people from the various religions singing together, this spiritual music, you know, that was, that really, uh, was very inspiring. And, um, back in Bugojno we, we really made, uh, a nice connection with Samira and her girls choir. And they often came up to the hotel where we stayed and we would just hang out and sings kind of spontaneously and dance, and, and she invited us to a rehearsal. And, um, and then we did a big concert out in the open, which was really well-received. And actually I have Samira brought me a video of it on DVD. The last time she was here visiting, which was really fun to see. And we had a really strong group of singers and the concert sounded really amazing and actually was well-recorded. And, um, yeah, so we also went to visit Omer Probić, a very famous sevdalinka, accordion player accompanist. And, uh, he was kind of spearheading this movement to really bring sevdalinka back to life. And he, he hosted us for an afternoon and we sat in his little, uh, very traditional Bosnian-like living room on the floor on carpets. And he served us coffee and cakes, and he was very proud. And then he would play as accordion played for some songs we knew, and we sang with him and stuff like that. It was, it was, that was also very, very moving. So those are some of the highlights of that trip. And I guess probably I'd have to go back and, and read what Caroline, uh, wrote about that trip to remember more. Cause it's quite a long time ago now, like 13, 15 years.

Scott: Yeah. So you did Village Harmony Bosnia 2006 in 2008. So what was next? I know Village Harmony, under your leadership, did a series of camps in Macedonia, um, was that just a connection that came open and you just wanted to try there or...?

Mary Cay: No, this is how that happened. Um, one day in the middle of winter in Vermont, I get a call from someone in Boston and they said, oh, we have this Macedonian accordion player here with his wife. Who's a singer and they're looking, they're doing some concerts. And they're looking for, um, they're looking for a place to do more concerts. Could you host something? And

I, this was like spontaneous, right? And, um, I said, yeah. And he came up and he, he and Adriana who he was still married to, at that time, stayed at our house. And I organized a workshop and a concert for them. It was very snowy and cold. They had never quite seen, in fact he Skyped his son and he was going around from window to window. And I was saying, look at the snow, look at this! And then he took, and then, uh, I was with my former partner at that time, his name was Roger and Roger was cooking breakfast and, and he showed us, he says, look, the men here cook!

Scott: This is Goran?

Mary Cay: This was Goran, yeah. So then, um, he, I told him about the camps I had done in Bosnia. And he was really interested in asking a lot of questions, Goran speaks fluent Serbian, cause his dad was in the army. So he lived all over the former Yugoslavia. And so we communicate really easily in Serbian and, he was gung-ho about doing a camp and we started that conversation and continued it on Skype. And so in 2010, we did the first camp in Macedonia and it was very successful and very exciting. And his whole family was really engaged in it. His wife was a singing teacher. Um, his daughter Graciela was a dance teacher throughout Graciela's boyfriend, um, Igor was, uh, another accordion player. There were other, several other musicians that joined in the evening dances. It was like a big dance party every night. And, um, we were at Hotel Manastir and, um, we had, yeah, Adrianna was a really good teacher and Bajsa. I don't think you ever met Bajsa did you? A young, uh, Roma woman who is a phenomenal, amazing musician who plays everything, virtuosic, everything, clarinet, fiddle, um, Tamburica, Tapan accordion, you name it, she plays everything. And, um, she was really good also at arranging Macedonian songs into really interesting arrangements for a choral setting anyways. So those were our teachers and, uh, the camp was so exciting and so much fun that we did one the next year in 2011. And then I waited two years to 2013 and then 2015. And that was the last one.

Scott: Um, I remember, so I was part of the 2015 camp, but for some reason, myself and a few others, you had invited us to your room and you were showing us a clip of a Bosnian choir doing the cup song in Bosnian. And so that's when I first remember hearing about, and you're like, well, actually next year, we're planning a Bosnia camp in 2016. Um, so I would like to talk about Macedonia later on, but while we're talking about the Bosnian camps, um, so talk to me about the time between 2008 and 2016. And I know eventually you got connected with Vahidin and, um, what, what factors made you decide to do another Bosnian camp and why, why the distance, uh, you know, you, you described the first two camps, so powerful. Did you just need some space to step back a little bit or, um, why the distance that or did you just, this is where you focus on Macedonia?

Mary Cay: Well, Macedonia kind of came up and, um, and so I was taking advantage of it, but also, um, I needed to find a different place and a different, some different leadership,

Scott: The right mix.

Mary Cay: It was the right mix of leadership. And that I was that I'd be really happy with. And I hadn't, there were issues at, um, I that camp. Um, but then, but I had been friends with Vahidin since he lived here in the nineties and, uh, studied peacebuilding in Brattleboro at the school for

international training, which is the school by the way where Leslie Turpin works and that school had a program called the contact program, which is called it's basically a peacebuilding cultural... I can't remember what the acronym stands for, but, um, they had, um, a master's degree in peacebuilding basically. And, but, um, and the woman who founded that program, Paula Green had gone to Bosnia at the invitation of Emsuda, Emsuda found out about her and said, will you come to Bosnia and teach us how to talk to each other again? And that's, and, Vahidin ended up going to one of those retreats that she taught in Prijedor. And that was where he had his big awakening, where he met Serbian people who apologized for the way they were, their culture treated his culture. And that was a big awakening for him. And, um, he was so impressed with Paula Green. He decided he wanted to be her. He actually said those words to me. He says, I want to be Paula Green and he's doing it! He he's totally doing her work. He's he's she was quite the mentor. She's an amazing person. And, um, even in this country, a few years ago, she brought a group of New Englanders to Kentucky and they talked about their different political, you know, sides and, uh, really had dialogue and learn to respect and listen to each other. So she did that in Bosnia over a series of many years. I'm not even sure how many, um, but she, she found ways to get the heat in here to have him go to, uh, what do you call it? Community college too? Cause he never completed high school because of the war. And he was in a camp, you know, in Slovenia for four years. So, um, he, uh, he did that and then he did the masters program anyway. So I met him, he would come to folk-dancing. And so we connected at folk-dancing and, you know, I just saw him on and off over the couple of years he was here. So I, I knew him. And then in about 2015, I think he was, he was over just across the river in Keene, New Hampshire teaching, uh, Keene State college has a genocide studies program and he was teaching in it for like a month or something. And I saw him put something on Facebook about being in Keene, and I went, Hey, what's up? Coffee? And so we met for coffee and Keene, and I proposed this idea because at that point he had, um, his, his organization, he was, there was a choir working with the organization, Harmonija with Alma Karabeg. And he, um, and he had founded his center and, and it was getting going, and I thought, okay, this would be a great possibility, you know, and I laid it all up to them, you know, at this coffee, this coffee shop, you know, like what we would need, you know, places to stay, to create a little tour. And I knew he was capable of all these things, and he was such a good, um, person to work with. Cause he knew America and Americans and spoke fluent English. And I know he would get it on a, on a lot of levels. So, um, he just agreed right away to do it. And then we, we started Skyping like every month, you know, to create the whole, um, the whole scenario of how we were going to do it. And where are we going to do concerts? And I'm kind of blanking out on that camp. Like, yeah, I think Samira was involved in that camp.

Scott: Right. So those teachers for 2016, um, we had Susanna Park as your co-American teacher, and then Alma Karić, Samira, and then Alma Karabeg did a little, um, and then you had those two girls from the institute in Sarajevo do some village?

Mary Cay: Yes. Uh, village songs. Yeah. Zorana Guja and Lejla, and I'm not remembering her last name right now. Yeah. Zorana and Lejla. They were fabulous. Yes. So I felt like, I felt like I had a really good team for that camp... Really strong in every way. So, um, and I really wanted the peacebuilding to be a, um, an explicit part of the camp instead of just implicit, you know, like we're going to study about peacebuilding and what people do to build peace and how they do it from the ground up. And, um, and so yeah, that's and you know, and, and, um, well, he didn't is

so good about like taking us to visit the mosque and talk to the imam and taking us to visit the Serbian church and talk to the priest and the Catholic church. And we had a Catholic priest in our group and that, you know, so that was a really nice connection. And, and Samira being, uh, a really established choral director in Bosnia knew how to set up concert. And that, that had been sort of lacking before I hadn't had somebody who would really take the reins and, and create good situations for concerts. And so that, I felt like that was really a successful camp and worthy of repeating. And so we did.. Two years later and we probably would have last year, we were intending on doing it last year, in fact, and being part of a, uh, uh, international choral festival in Slovenia afterward, everything got canceled. So who knows when I'll do it again, but...

Scott: Hopefully soon!

Mary Cay: Hopefully. Yeah. But I, I really liked that team. And, and in fact, I feel like in the 2018 camp, we made the peacebuilding part even more explicit by, Vahidin working with us in circles and with those peacebuilding exercises that he does with young people in Bosnia. So we could really feel the energy of what those, those workshops that he gives are about. So, and I think that in some ways it made the group, uh, it was a bonding thing for the group to do this group work together and, and brainstorming ideas together with big sheets of paper on the floor and markers, and then presenting, you know, from our small groups, our ideas about it. And I think that was a really worthwhile part and visiting the peace farm as well, the garden of the opportunities that they've created and really are developing, I can see on Facebook it's really taken off and they do their camps there. They built some new buildings there they've dug upon, did that. They're growing lots of crops. They have lots of people coming in and working. Um, it's really a dream come true for them, I think. Yeah.

Scott: Yeah. Sure. Um, so do you feel, do you feel your musical goals were reached in those camps? Um, I mean, I think so, but you as, as a leader?

Mary Cay: Totally. Yeah. No, it's a great mix. We did village song, we did ilahija the sacred songs we did sevdalinka You know, we had people in our groups who were good musicians, who could, who played, you know, accompanied the songs. And I felt like all the, all the song leaders were really strong in both of those camps. Yeah. I was very happy with it, which is why I would continue to do those camps when the coast is clear.

Scott: I understand. Um, so you mentioned a lot of this with the 2006 and 2008 camps. Can you, um, maybe think through some, some of your personal highlights of the 2016 and 2018 camps, both in terms of musical memories or just memories in general that really moved you, um, maybe moments when the music and peacebuilding together really moved you. What were some of your standouts from those experiences?

Mary Cay: I think in the 2016 camp is safe to say that singing in a cave [chuckles] was, was pretty amazing that whole day of, uh, walking into this big hole in the earth and with our flashlights and candles all along the way and getting to this internal room in inside the earth and with hundreds of candles and, uh, water dripping the stalagtights, stalagmites, and this is very dramatic and the acoustics were kind of amazing. And, and, um, and we did our concert for the villagers there who were gathered, who were celebrating and they hadn't been celebrating

Scott: Right. And correct me if I'm wrong, from what I understand, that was one of the first big gatherings after the war. I know a lot of them had come back from the diaspora. And, um, cause I remember having a big feast and folk dancing and impromptu accordion playing...

Mary Cay: Yeah. Afterwards, it was just kind of magical. Like they brought us down this field and there were lambs and these little huts and picnic tables and people dancing and accordion playing. And it was like this other world that we walked into. So that day was definitely a big highlight.

Scott: Yeah. That's also an, all of my Village Harmony, both domestic and international. That's probably one of my top experiences as well. That was really, really moving for sure.

Mary Cay: So, um, and then, uh, another highlight concert for me, what's the one we did at the last trip in 2018 in Jajce.

Scott: Yeah!

Mary Cay: That up on the hill, in the fortress, in that open air. Um, I don't know what it was, but it's kind of a concert area in the fortress and, um, and audience and just that whole day also meeting with their local singers and dancers. And they had that feast laid out for us and they sang for us. Then we sang for them and that was all really beautiful. And then, um, and then I felt the concert, maybe it was because we had connected earlier in the day.

Scott: Yeah. So that's special. But I remember that audience been really participatory, you know, more so than...

Mary Cay: Very tuned in and really listening. And it's typical in Bosnia that people talk a lot during concerts. There's not that aesthetic of, oh, you have to be hushed during a concert there they're often, like, I don't know what, you know, gossipy and are talking about the concert or just, that's just the culture, how they do it.

[Mary Cay's partner comes in to say "hi"]

Scott:

Uh, the Jajce concerts and, uh, um, the people, I think you were describing the concert, where it was and how the people were so involved.

Mary Cay: Yeah. It just felt, I think probably because we had met earlier in the day and hadn't experienced together some singing dancing, some eating that they were, um, they, weren't a typical audience, I think a little more, a little quieter and more attentive to what we were bringing. And um, yeah. So I just remembered that.

Scott: I remember them wearing a lot of, when they hosted of us earlier that though they wore a lot of traditional costumes. Where were they also from those traditions or were they just trying to represent all of them with a costume that did rehab like Bosnians and Croats and Serbians there? Or do you remember any, regardless, just them showing the different costumes from the different regions. I thought that really played well into the purpose of the camp and our mission.

Mary Cay: I think I did hear this, that, um, a lot of those people that we met had spent the war years in Scandinavia.

Scott: Yeah.. At the meal, I sat by a woman and she was from Sweden or had lived in Sweden.

Mary Cay: And they came back, but they were less damaged because they waited it out. I mean, it's certainly traumatic to watch your country, even from afar, do, go through what it went through. But I think that they were less traumatized, you know, than other communities that we visited. And you could feel that, I think Samira explaining that to me, you know, like, yeah. A lot of these people went abroad and came back. So

Scott: I do, I don't know if you remember, but I remember you making a comment that day or maybe the next day, that's the joy and the singing and they were all singing together after our meal. You said that reminded you a lot of when you were there in the 70s, that the togetherness and the just, you know, um, I remember you making that comment.

Mary Cay: Yeah. And it's because, you know, that's how they grew up there as part of the former Yugoslavia with everybody singing and dancing together in those KUDs. And, um, and then they left and they left her in the hard times and came back with that same energy and that same, um, desire to work together. Yeah.

Scott: Yeah. Maybe we can talk a little bit about, we've talked a lot about your work in Bosnia and peacebuilding and music, but maybe talk about a few ways that you have brought these experiences back to our country with your work, with your community choirs and, um, any other camps and choir you've done here, what are some ways that you've incorporated what you learned?

Mary Cay: Um, well certainly the repertoire, you know, I teach it, I teach whatever I learned there, spread it around, teach it at camps here, teach it to my choirs, even though my choirs sing multicultural, excuse me, multicultural music. Um, there's definitely a focus on the Balkans and probably in any one session I have at least four or five songs from the Balkans, from all different, um, traditions in the Balkans. There's just so much vast repertoire. That's really different from the next village or the next Republic, or, you know, there's so many, so many musical traditions there that are so unique and, and different and separate from others, you know, like Dalmatian klapa music isn't anything like sevdalinka, which are just over the mountain from them. So amazing. You know? So, um, and starting way back in the early Village Harmony years, you know, I would tell stories about when I was there and now as I was teaching the war was going on. So everybody was hearing about the war all the time and I just started to humanize the people through their music and, and give a sense of the village life that I witnessed, get us, give a sense of the folk dance ensembles that I've visited and, and, um, yeah, so just storytelling and, and teaching the songs. And, and I felt like I had a lot of context to bring to songs because of that. And I would, I, I talk about that context and tell stories around it and I know people really appreciated that. And, um, and yeah, so it was more than, oh, I, I I've got this cool song from blah, blah, blah. But for example, remember the, um, ilahija that, um, Father Dominic sang the solo on. Yes, it was. And people were so moved by that because he was a priest and Vahidin told the audience, this is a Catholic priest, he's going to sing our ilahija for us. And yeah. So when I,

when I taught that song to my choir, we, I told that whole story about Dominic and how people were moved by it. And actually I chose to do this solo, this older man, who's been singing with me a long time, he's in his 80s, a wonderful singer. And he's a retired minister congregational minister. And so he was really moved to sing that, you know, and to hear that story about Dominic doing it, and he really took that song seriously and really worked on it. Yeah. So things like that, you know, always, I always include music from there and try to give it as much context as I can.

Scott: Sure. I know a lot of your teaching, a lot of your choirs, you guys are always doing some sort of benefit. Um, do you try to pick something each semester you do something? Or is that just every now and then, or?

Mary Cay: No, it's been every semester. Um, for many years we pick something local or global that's peacebuilding in some way it might be, um, you know, uh, organizations that are working towards food security with people are, um, we've, we've raised money for Vahidin's organization more than once. Um, just all kinds of, um, sort of peacebuilding oh, and also that program that Vahidin did contact every, um, until a few years ago, they ran a three week summer Institute where peacebuilders came from all over the world here to Brattleboro. And I did this program and so did Manny. And so did Leslie, um, it's a wonderful program and you meet peacebuilders from all over the world and Paula Green, who was the head of it. And, um, every year we would raise money to pay for a peacebuilder from someplace in the world. Every spring semester our concerts would raise money to bring a peace builder to do that program. And so we had brought a, a Haitian guy, uh, we brought, uh, a Tibetan and a Chinese guy, and they had never met each other's culture, even though Tibet is part of China. And, um, uh, we brought over a Georgian, I think, at one point and, um, oh, several people from Rwanda. Yeah. Which of course has its own trauma and its own peacebuilding efforts, which are, and they've done a lot of work with truth and reconciliation in Rwanda, and that was very inspiring it, so, and my choir would go sing a concert during sort of at the end of the first week for this whole community. And that was always a high point for my choirs, you know, just to be singing for people from all over the world, some of them speak the languages we were singing in. And just, yeah. So that's, that's, that's the contact program and its influence within our community. And, um, yeah, so every spring really our concerts were for the contact program. And then in the fall, our December concerts were some other organization. And I would just kind of wait until, like I got inspired by something.

Scott: This is just based on current events or what you're doing. I think in one of your books, you talked about doing some separate Kosovo, some maybe that was in the late 90s when, um, when one of your books came out or something.

Mary Cay: I can't remember.

Scott: Yeah. Um, I want to circle back to Macedonia. So obviously your, your four campus in Bosnia explicitly had the peacebuilding tie. Um, did you ever do that work with your Macedonian campus? I know for instance, um, think about... You might have done it indirectly because I remember, like we would go see a Roma village and then, you know, be in the Macedonian culture and kind of see, you know, some of the issues and some of the ways that

they deal with bringing people together. Um, so talk to me about that. Did you ever, you know...what kind of peace building implications may have been at your Macedonian camps?

Mary Cay: Yeah, well, of course it wasn't explicit, but it was, I would try, um, to work with Goran on to give us like the first couple of camps we did there, we did homestays and, um, they were really powerful. And when we did concerts in, uh, some local towns near, um, uh, be, no, Berovo. Yeah. Um, and at that time, like in the first camp, he was still married to Adrianna and she was kind of a rock star singer. And, you know, we would, she would kind of, we would be your backup band at these concerts in, in the village. And there would be hundreds of people there, like, so she was a real draw and then we were all there and it would turn into a big party and dancing and everything. And, and then I remember, I think it was the 2013 camp where he brought us to this other village. Maybe we went there in 2015 too? I'm blanking on the name of the village right now, but we had this wonderful day in the village where we spent all day there. We helped make this giant soup. People brought vegetables and they made this giant soup for us. And, and, um, um, Goran's daughter Graciela was there and she would leave dancing and the villagers were dancing and in her boyfriend, Igor was playing accordion and we were all singing. And that's one of the, that was the day we, we spied, there were a whole bunch of young girls there who are really good singers. And Larry, Larry was on this trip and he I'll never forget. He came up to me and he grabbed my arm and he goes, I want to bring a couple of these girls to the states next summer. And so we talked to Goran about, I said, what do you think we'll, we're gonna we'll raise the money. So this is something else I raised money for to bring the Macedonian girls here and to bring Bosnian kids here, three times, we raised the money to bring them here with our concerts. So, um, so we held auditions in Hotel Manastir, and we announced them at this concert. We were giving in the village and a whole bunch of little girls showed up. I mean, they were like 12 and 13 years old. And we, you know, we held these auditions, Goran would play something on accordion and they would sing. And if it wasn't right, quite the right range, he would change keys and find the range for them. And we picked two girls, Simona and Marija. And, uh, I think they think they were like blown away that this was really going to happen. They'd never been out of their country, you know, and their English was pretty minimal. Um, but we did it. We brought them over and they did a camp with Larry. And, uh, I have a little video of them dancing. They're beautiful dancers, these girls, beautiful dancers, they dance, they dance in a KUD in Berovo. The KUD is led by Zenil. They're really close friends with Zenil. Yeah. So I think that that trip here for those girls was, you know, like just a dream and they thanked me many, many times. They stayed at my house. I picked them up at the airport. They stayed at my house and I got them to dance on my deck and took a beautiful video of them dancing anyway. Um, so yeah, it was sometimes challenging to be on the same wavelength with that, with Goran and particularly the last trip, uh, which unfortunately was the one it's not unfortunate that you were at it, but it's unfortunate that some of the really, um, moving things about some of the earlier trips didn't happen on that trip. And I was, um, yeah, which is why I haven't explored doing it anymore. Um, but that's, it's kind of a long story, but, um, it, it was a challenge to just keep going on the same page with what Village Harmony is and what my, um, my wishes and vision for the camps to be. Um, even though we would talk about it and I think everything was all set, I had at times, surprises showed up like, yeah, some surprises that I wasn't expecting, like, like that his wife was no longer his wife or our primary music teacher. I found out after I got there!

Scott: That's kind of big!

Mary Cay: It was kind of big, yeah. So, um, and that's why I've never gone back. I feel like I did four really good camps there, and people had a great time. And even the camps that were a little more disappointing, still had a lot of redeeming qualities. And, um, and they were really, really fun and I've had many people ask me, are you ever going to go back and do one? And, um, it hasn't really grabbed my heart to do that. And I'm, uh, I'm more prone to want to continue the Bosnian connection once, once it's safe.

Scott: I'm sure there's still so much more to be done with the Bosnian connection. More meaningful.

Mary Cay: Yeah. And I feel like Vahidin, his organization and it's become more and more, I don't know, solid, and, and his work is, is really important. And I think his work really inspires a lot of people, you know, just observing him and what he's done, I think is it really inspires people. So there's more to be done there.

Scott: I agree. Okay. Well, if you don't mind, let's talk a little longer. Is that okay? We're at 54 minutes. So is that, is that okay with you?

Mary Cay: Yeah!

Scott: I have two big questions and then maybe we can do a third interview to kind of clarify some things maybe after I start interviewing some of the others. Um, so this is big, um, and you've kind of touched on it all throughout your stories, but tell me about your choral music teaching philosophy. Um, both just in general and, um, and then also how it relates to your using Balkan choral music. Again, you touched a lot on it, um, but think about it and the ways of how it has evolved through your career. Again, your stories have hit that, but, um, your general philosophy of starting from the early days to now tell me about it.

Mary Cay: Um, Hmm. It's kind of challenging to like lots of years, um, because, uh, you know, I feel like I kind of fell into choral conducting, you know, from, from Village Harmony and then starting my own choirs. And, and it was like learn as I go along and kind of develop my philosophy as I go along. And I mean, it started out as a community choir, you know, as an alternative to the classical community choirs in our community. And, um, and to focus on more elemental and traditional music from various cultures and which is more accessible to more people than a classical choir, you don't really have to know how to read music to be in my choirs. But what would always happen is there would be a certain amount of certain number of readers, certain among a number of people just learning by ear, and they would all sort of help each other along. And, um, and, you know, as the choirs grew and, um, you know, in my Vermont choir in the last many years has had usually around 90 singers in it. And, um, so I would, I ended up starting a smaller group within it for people who wanted to sing maybe a little bit more challenging repertoire, then I could do it with 90 people. So I had this big group and small group concept and, um, in both choirs, my Massachusetts choir and my Vermont choir. And the other thing, the thing that I haven't talked about yet is that probably for the last 10 years, and really till since about 2006, every spring semester, I've invited guest teachers from different cultural

traditions to work with us, to offer their culture and from a deeper perspective than what I can offer. And so some of those have been Kathy Bullock teaching African-American gospel, and she's worked with us really every other year, practically since 2006. So maybe eight or nine times, there's an, uh, an Albanian couple who live in New Jersey. Um, the wife is Merita Holly, she's a rock star singer from Albania. Like every Albanian you ever met would know who Merita Holly Lee is. And her husband Raiv Hosanni is an accordion player from Kosovo. And they are just wonderful people. They, they live in New Jersey, Raiv teaches music in a high school. Marita's just a beautiful singer and beautiful, wonderful person. And they came up and gave us a workshop on Albanian music. And then we, um, they came back, I taught, I continued on with the music and, um, you know, and then they came back for the concerts and that was just great having them at the concerts. And they were so excited by us that they invited us to a big Albanian festival in the Bronx. In New York. We rented a bus and we all got on this bus and went, drove down to the Bronx. And we sang with Marita and rife for thousands of Albanians who live in the metropolitan area around New York, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut. And, uh, that was a high, we were all pretty blown away by that. And, um, so a lot of our connections have led to really exciting, um, exciting relationships like that. And, um, we, we also had, um, some musicians from our neighbor in Quebec come and do French Canadian music with us a few years ago. And, um, that was Nicholas Williams and Pascal Jam. And they are part of a band called John decorum. And they, they actually live just north of the border from us. They're really like a half hour into Quebec from Vermont. So they're about three hours away. So yeah, Nicholas came down, gave a workshop and then I continued the material, you know, rehearsing it. And then they came back and did our concerts with us. And, and then from that came Nicholas and I conceiving of doing a camp in Quebec, focusing on Quebecois music and dance and tunes. So that's, um, yeah, that, that was another, you know, great connection. And, um, who else? We, there's a composer from Bloomington, Indiana named Malcolm Dalglish. I don't know if you've ever heard of him. He's done a lot of really interesting choral music, very folksy, uh, but, um, but choral and a lot of it's based on poetry by Wendell Berry. He, he did this whole song cycle of poems by Wendell Berry. Um, anyway, I invited he's also a virtual, so hammered dulcimer player, and I invited him to come and he came for a week and did two rehearsals with each choir. And I had prepped them on the music. They had, you know, they had MP3s and they had the music, so it went pretty fast. And then he stayed for the weekend and did the concerts with us. And so that was another, oh, and Matlakala from South Africa, she was around one spring, cause her daughter was graduating from Columbia. I invited her here. She taught us south African songs and did our concerts with us. So, you know, I've just sort of reached out to people that I've known. I have connections with and whatnot to bring sort of a deeper, um, look at other cultures into my choirs.

Scott: Yeah. I think that's, um, uh, oh gosh, that feedback... Hang on. Okay. Um, what was I saying? Sorry,

Mary Cay: I don't know. Oh,

Scott: Because easily, you know, not only have you given your choristers space musically, but you give them suppose just to be with each other and to connect. And, um, I think that's great. And I think a lot of choir directors miss that point a lot, you know? So, that's great. Um, so yeah, we're kind of wrapping up to the end of my major questions. I think you've provided so much for

me to get materials from. And, um, I'm really curious to see what the others have to say. Um, so, you know, I'll interview them and, um, uh, you know, eventually get back with you in a few weeks and we'll probably just have a third interview, maybe just to clarify some stuff, let me go through my notes and make sure I get things right. And everything. But as we close up this portion, um, you know, you've had such a remarkable career. I mean, this is turned from something, you know, um, you know, an interest you had as a young girl and now, I mean, look at all the things you've done and all the people you've influenced, um, looking back, you know, do you have, this is hard to put in a box that in your whole and your whole journey, do you have like some top favorite things that have happened, um, it can be a music memory. Like, I don't know, something, I don't know, publishing your book. I don't know what, what are some like, wow, like I'm so proud I did this moments, um, of your career. And if you need time to think we can talk about it, um, next time. That's a big question. I know.

Mary Cay: Well, I feel like doing those camps in the Balkans was really kind of a highlight for me from it sort of brought together so many skills that I had in so many interests. Um, musically linguistically, the dance, singing, the playing that, um, and then giving people a taste of what village like life was like in the Balkans. And, um, yeah, I remember thinking like when I came back from the Bosnia trip in 2016, I was like, okay, that's about the best I could do in this life! [laughs]

Scott: But then you outdid yourself in 2018 and it keeps going!

Mary Cay: Yeah! Um, but it just felt like, wow, still there were so many good things about that trip and yeah, I could do this again and it feels really gratifying on so many levels. Um, but you know, there were lots of great memories in the early years with the kids too, just having really stellar, amazing singers and, um, turning these kids on to this music was really fun. And, you know, I remember driving around in the Village, Harmony bus, singing Balkan songs, you know, and, and, um, and I, a bunch of the village, how many kids went to a local boarding school here, Putney School. And they, part of that camp working, going to that school was working on the farm and that, you know, I'd hear stories about them singing Balkan songs while milking cows and fixing fences, things like that. You know, so I know that, you know, the songs sort of took on a life of their own and the kids took them where they went and, you know, like Magda is going to go to Vassar next year. And they've already asked her to start a Balkan choir. And, you know, she's been in my choir since she was like eight or nine and then went to village harmony since she was 12. So she's had an, a bunch of those years with me, so she learned a lot of stuff. And then she came to Bosnia. So she's, she's got a lot of knowledge already as an 18 year old, you know, and a lot of experience, deep experience. So yeah,

Scott: Thank you!

Mary Cay: Yeah!

Dr. Leslie Turpin: Interview

October 12, 2021

Scott Sexton: Thank you so much for taking the time to volunteer, to contribute to this study. I'm very excited. So first I just want to make sure, um, that you did receive and sign the consent form for participants.

Dr. Leslie Turpin: Yes.

Scott: Awesome. Um, and did you have any questions about that consent form?

Leslie: No.

Scott: Okay. Do you still wish to participate in this study?

Leslie: Yes.

Scott: Okay. Thank you so much. So, um, as you read, the purpose of my study is to gain insight on the stories and experiences of the career of Mary Cay and her peacebuilding, ,choral music, directing work with Balkan choral music. So, and during, so I hope to gain additional perspective on the role of the choral director and the peacebuilder and, um, how those roles, um, coexist. Um, first, can you tell us your name and what you do for a living?

Leslie: Sure. Um, my name is Leslie Turpin and, um, I teach at SIT graduate Institute in the language teacher education program. It's a master of arts in teaching TESOL, and I've worked there off and on for almost 35 years.

Scott: Awesome. Great. So, how long have you known Mary Cay Brass?

Leslie: Um, well she taught in the language department at SIT, um, many, many years ago and I can't remember, I remember probably seeing her on campus then, but, um, the first memories I have of, of knowing her were, um, she was an artist in residence in the Westminster west elementary school where my children were going to school in the nineties. And I don't know if you saw the movie, "The World in Claire's classroom", have you seen that movie?

Scott: I have not!

Leslie: You should see that movie because it's, it has Mary Cay features in it and she's teaching the kids and, um, she's interviewed about, um, her work and she brings in her students who are English language learners studying it, sit as part of this cultural exchange that the teacher in this classroom is, is trying to conduct. And so Mary Cay is working with her around that. So that was one of the first memories. And then right around that same time, my husband and I joined her choir, um, which was mid-nineties. So that was when I really started to get to know her. And then my daughter joined the fire, um, a few years later and was in the choir pretty much from

third or fourth grade all the way through high school and then would come back occasionally even after she left, um, to go to college. So, um, so it's been awhile.

Scott: Yeah, definitely. Um, she identified you as a long-time singer, so yeah, that's been, that goes back. Um, can you, uh, remember and tell me, uh, what made you join the choir?

Leslie: Um, well I remember my husband just saying, you know, we should do this. My husband has a training in music and he loves singing and, um, I love singing, but have never done any kind of training in singing at all. And in fact, when we went to the first choir rehearsal, you know, I was like, I don't even know what part I sing. And he said, oh, you're probably an Alto. Go sit with the Altos. And I didn't know what that meant. I didn't know what being an Alto even meant. I thought it was just that maybe we just sing the same stuff down a notch because I didn't know what part-singing was there anything, I mean, it's pretty embarrassing, but all my singing had been, I mean, all my music instruction had been on the piano and it would have just been classical music.

So, um, so that was when we started. And it was, you know, at the same time that the Mary Cay was working with the kids and we actually, at that point, she was doing her rehearsals in Saxtons River at this place called Main Street Arts. And right next door, there was this pizza joint and my husband and I would take the kids with us to rehearse them. We'd park them at the pizza place and they'd order one piece of pizza and they'd cut it in half for the two kids. So they'd sit there and they'd eat their pizza. And then when they were done, they'd come and watch the rehearsal and our daughter in particular, she learned all the music. She just sat there. And so we'd have concerts and she'd be singing in the audience, just kind of singing along or mouthing the words. If you didn't know your music, you just had to look at my daughter, like, you know, she was lip syncing everything. And, um, so Mary Cay just said why don't you just join us? You know, rather than, you know, sing with us and stuff, singing out us sort of thing. And, um, so then my daughter joined, and this is not the question you asked was why did we join? Okay. And it was just sort of it rejoined on a whim and had no idea it was gonna end up. We've done it. I think every, I don't think we've missed a year since that beginning year. Yeah. I pretty much plan my life around it. And, um, you know, maybe we missed a semester here or there, but I, I honestly can't think of a time that we weren't singing with that group.

Scott: Um, so you alluded that, um, joining, that was kind of your first experience singing, but it's also your first experience with Balkan music or had you experienced it before?

Leslie: I, it was my first experience. I only, you know, my, she was working with Balkan music for the kids in elementary school. So I might've had a little bit of understanding of, of it then, but, um, but then also, you know, probably about 13 or 14 years ago, my daughter got very interested in Balkan music and she actually ended up going to Macedonia and doing a Fulbright there and marrying an Albanian man and, um, living in the Balkans for many years. So we kind of got pulled into the Balkans. Um, thanks to Mary Kay. I mean, she sort of set Claire on that path and we all followed along and um, but then I also start playing accordion. I really, watching Mary Cay play the accordion and I love the Balkan accordion music. And so about 13 or 14 years ago, I just said, I'm going to learn how to play the accordion. And then I bought an accordion and Mary Cay, bless her sort of worked with me, it was pretty touch and go. The first kid we saw was so determined that I just could not make the instrument. I don't know if you play the accordion,

but all the stuff you have to do at once. I just thought I will never be able to do this, but I was determined. And so, um, and Balkan music is one of my favorite things to play on the accordion now. And I take lessons every once in a while from Mary Cay and, um, but she really started me out on, on that. And, um, uh, I'm working too much right now to be able to really play it a lot, but I was just about to call her to ask to start up lessons.

Scott: Oh, that's really neat. She didn't tell me about the accordion playing. That's really cool. Um, neat hobby for sure. Is your daughter, you mentioned, uh, the Fulbright Macedonia... did she also study music? Or was it another discipline that's just studied.

Leslie: Yeah, no, she did an English language teaching assistantship. She, thanks to Mary Cay. Again, ended up getting involved with Village Harmony, you know, cause you've been on some of their camps and they used to run, you know, Mary Cay really encouraged her to, I really credit Mary Cay with a lot of co-raising my daughter and a lot of other young people. And, um, uh, she really encouraged Claire. She does for the lot of young people to do Village Harmony camp. And so when Claire was about eighth grade, she started doing summer camps and then gradually did international camps and went to Georgia. And, um, uh, but I think the Balkan music, even though she didn't do her, um, her Fulbright in music going to the Balkans was really influenced a lot by Mary Cay. And she actually did a peace studies program through SIT in the Balkans as well. And so that was another thing that she and Mary Cay really shared and Vahidin. Claire, my daughter lived with Vahidin when she was studying in Bosnia. And so that was another connection with Claire and Mary Cay, um, and us sort of, we got pulled into it a lot. I think both Mary Cay and Claire that, you know, then we got to get to know Vahidin, um, and his work.

Scott: It sounds like, uh, your career... You've had some peacebuilding influences or peacebuilding work. Can you tell me a little bit about your background with that?

Leslie: Well, I'm a language teacher educator and my real interest has always been working with refugees. That's sort of how I got into this field. And so kind of, um, working more with the aftermath of war then really with the peacebuilding side. But, um, but I believe that all language teachers, all teachers are peacebuilders. So I've always sort of had that attitude about teaching and, and then I took sat, offers this peacebuilding certificate first, the, the contact program. And then if you're interested, you can take the certificate in peace building. And so I took that for a year while I was teaching and trying to look at what other bridges I could make between my own teaching and the peacebuilding. And then, and Mary Cay had already taken the contact program. So that was another kind of common thing that we had in the year that I took it, her partner Manny also took it with me. So that was sort of another thing that we all kind of have in common, that idea that peacebuilding, you know, for her it's music for me, it's teaching, but I feel like it's everybody's job and it's something everybody can be working on. And there are small ways then, and I think Mary Cay really embodies that in the way that she just approaches the community in her singing and, and children and supporting kids. And then the peacebuilding work that is more specific. I think that she's doing through her camps through the contact forward and through our concerts being, um, um, fundraisers for different organizations. And over the years, I've watched as her choices around what organization, um, to give to are, you know, really about social justice and about peacebuilding and poverty and, um, and scholarships for seeing him. I mean, she's just, she just always got that on her mind and, um, uses the skill she

has as a singer and the resources that she has, and then, um, thinks about where those can be of service somewhere beyond just us all getting together and sing. mean, it's, uh, you know, as you probably know, it's just this wonderful thing. We all get the benefit of getting together and singing, having this great community, having something we look forward to every week, um, the thrill of kind of working with these different performers and, and then, but it all contributes to something else either locally or globally too. So, you know, we feel like we're doing something fun, but there's another part of it that is contributing to the greater good. And I feel like the way that she'd find that is pretty, um, wonderful.

Scott: Um, so that was a great segue. I think you went into the next part of my question. So that was awesome! Building on that, can you think of some highlights of the ways that she has, um, like you mentioned the fundraiser concerts and even as they relate to the Balkans or maybe even refugees, I know there's work with Bosnian refugees here in the States well. Can you think of some details throughout the years about those type of things?

Leslie: Um, well, you know, I think on a very micro level, I think the way that she thinks about community and thinks about even the chorus things, something everybody can join. You know, if there's space, it's not like you have to, um, um, audition or anything it's, and, you know, it's sort of like this is open to everybody and she's very, um, showed us some, put anybody on the spot she doesn't. So I think on a very micro, just the way that she functions as a choral director and the way she supports young people to really find a path. And she's always asking, you know, how's Claire doing, what's Claire doing, but she's so interested in other people in a really, um, sincere way. And I think that's sort of at the core, peacebuilding, it's sort of your own way of approaching the people around you.

And that's, so, you know, it's one thing to be a peace builder out there, but to really embody that and just the way that you are. And so I think she really works on that. I feel like she that's a practice that she, um, has really committed a of energy too. So on that level. And then, um, you know, I think in terms of specific things, I mean, like, um, um, uh, uh, like the concerts that we give and who they're for one time, it did a benefit that was for, um, the refugees social service organization in Burlington. Um, she's done work with, I also worked for the Vermont Folklife Center and I know she's worked with the Bosnian community, the singers and dancers that were resettled up in Burlington and tried to be a link with them and the Bosnian , um, sort of, that's sort of on this level.

And then, you know, that she was teaching refugees when she was in New York and, and, um, had refugee center classes. So she's, it's been part of her path, you know, that's everywhere every time her path goes in a different direction, there's always a way for her to integrate those things in, you know, in her way of approaching the world. So whatever she's doing, she's sort of always, it seems like thinking about that and whether it's peace-building, and in that sense, it's more about, um, contributing in some way to, um, more healthy, um, community on whatever scale. And so then, you know, she became friends with Vahidin. I think he just sort of a student at SITC studying peacebuilding. And he was, as I understood it, I don't know Mary Cay knows this better. I remember he just sort of showed up at one of our rehearsals.

He was like, what are all these people in Vermont doing singing Bosnian music? And he just wanted to see what we were doing. And then they became friends and he, of course, was working to develop this peace camp. And this place in Bosnia, Mary Cay, pretty much hooked my daughter, Claire up with him. And Claire went to live with him, um, when she was doing her

study abroad. And, um, and so and Mary Cay continued to talk with him. And then they had this idea of the music camp that would be integrating the village harmony experience, but explicitly looking at the Bosnian experience of war and peace then, uh, um, peacebuilding. And, um, so, and I don't know, did you do that camp?

Scott: Yes, I did both of them actually, that's one thing that really kind of steered me down this research path.

Leslie: Yeah. Okay. And I, I did not do those, but, um, but then I do know, you know, on a personal level, she also, um, several years, our benefit concert in the spring was to support peacebuilders to come to sit and study in the contact program that she had taken and that I took. And, um, and she both the, um, the arrangement with us, it was that we would give a scholarship to an international student so that they could come into this and they would give a scholarship to somebody in the chorus. So it was a way of both building, um, you know, the peacebuilding awareness within the chorus, um, and also giving other people opportunities to come and do this thing that she had found so valuable. And, um, the woman who led the peacebuilding program, Paula Green is no longer there. I think she and Mary Cay had a very close connection.

And, um, and she was, had also worked with Vahidin. So there was, it's just the circles. Once you kind of get in a circle, you start to meet all these other people. And, and some people come in through the singing door and other people come through the peacebuilding door and other people come in through another door, but they all kind of come and end up in the same room. And, um, and Mary Cay is just somebody who, um, is, I think she really likes to making connections. So there's this opportunity for all those people then to me, because she, um, I think in some ways she bridges a lot of different interests. And so she kind of pull those things together. And I think the boss do camp was a great example of her. And she and Vahidin really worked well together. And then she already had this, you know, other singer connections in Bosnia from her time there, but also that she'd made on the singing circuit. And, um, and so she pulled, you know, those people in as well. I've never, I haven't done the Bosnia camp, but I've, I've talked to Mary Cay a fair amount comes back from it, and I know it's been incredibly powerful for her, and I'm sure you had your own...

Scott:

Hopefully it will be safe to do another camp in the near future. And maybe you can hop on that... it really is such a powerful experience, like you mentioned for sure. Um, I think did Mary Cay tell me, you did, maybe you did one of the Macedonian camps?

Leslie: Mhmm!

Scott: Could you tell me a little bit about that and really, um, you know, like you said, in the camps in Bosnia, by the, there was an explicit attention to the peacebuilding but, um, uh, our interviews with Mary Cay these past few weeks, um, as you alluded to before she was doing so much of this connecting people together before. So, um, could you tell me about the Macedonian camp you did and through the lens of that aspect? Or maybe...[coughs]... excuse me, I'm sorry!

Leslie: Yeah, no, it's okay. It's so interesting. The Macedonian Camp, was fascinating for me. And part of it was, you know, we went to Macedonia, I'd never been there before. It was my first time thing. And it was at the same time that our daughter was living there and she was going to join us into the camp. And she had just started going out with this young man in Macedonia who's Albanian. So he's from the ethnic minority and he, he does not like Macedonians. I mean, generally speaking the marginalizations of Albanians in Macedonia is really, um, awful. And I didn't really get any of that until we got there. And I think, um, you know, I, I think Mary Cay was really tuned in to, um, you know, I, I think, well, there were a couple of things I remember, um, being somewhere, it was, it was really fun camp. We went to two different places and we sang in all these little villages. And I remember in one concert, there was this little old woman who just got out of the audience and came and sat next to my daughter and started singing all the songs. She must've been about 85. And she sang in the concert with us, um, um, and Larry Gordon, who you probably know, Mary Cay said it was in that moment. She thinks he actually understood what she was doing, that it was this really, it was about the relationships and everything between the people. It's not just concerts. It's about all of these different relationships that she's very much thinking about. And, um, and I think one thing that happened in the course of that camp was she became more, and this is just my perception. I don't know, I'd, I'd want to talk to her about it, but she came back and organized, um, singing with these two Albanian teachers here.

And, um, and this is actually a great story. They, um, this really famous Albanian woman, um, who had been our son-in-law's fathers, like he'd just...the CD that's in his car that he plays all the time is this woman's music. And she was somebody from his past and she's since married to a man from Kosovo and, who is Albanian who plays accordion. And so anyway, she had them come up and work with our choir. And it's, I think there was something in her that saw that there was some Albanian needs somehow that also needed to be expressed and to be. And, um, and so we ended up learning all this Albanian music, and then Mary Cay helped us organize when my daughter got married and her Albanian husband came to the us, we had to organize this wedding pretty quickly. And it was in winter on the coldest day of the year, on Valentine's Day, in the middle of a blizzard, we had organized for the whole chorus to come to this little pub and just hang out and then surprise this new man when he came into the pub, it was just going to be packed with all these people. And everybody was going to start singing all this Albanian music that we had learned in the middle of Putney, Vermont, which is, you know, 200 people. So he walks in and there are all these people just sitting at the bar and pretending like they don't know each other or anything. And he sits down and Mary Cay pulls out the accordion and everybody starts singing and dancing in Albanian, and it just blew him away. And, you know, he was, he just didn't know what to make of it, that here he was in this blizzard and there was this packed bar with all these people singing Albanian. And so that was sort of his introduction to the community. And he... it was just such a welcoming thing. And Mary Cay really was so instrumental in making that happen. And she played the accordion at their wedding. And, you know, she's just, I mean, I'm getting a little bit off.

Scott: No, this is great!

Leslie: The Balkan thing has kind of connected our family and her, it just, it feels like it runs so deep. I feel like she understands Claire. She understands a lot of things about Claire and her experience in the Balkans and the struggle she's had there. And, um, no, I, um, and she, you

know, she's just been a really significant person and how our whole family's life unfolded. She's been sort of walking with all of that all along the way, you know,

Scott: This is great. No, all of that was so good. Um, so, uh, um, I'm working with a relatively recent framework scholarly framework, um, and that's been kind of coined in the music peacebuilding scholarly world, it's by someone in Australia. But they call it harmonious relations and it's pretty much all the relationships and stuff. So I'm so happy to hear you talk about that, you know, relationships and yeah. So is really, really rare.

Leslie: Yeah. It's so much, it's about relationships, I think at all levels. And I love that idea of the harmony, um, and the discord as well. That's in music too, that there's this dissonance that's, um, that you have to, um, somehow reconcile. And I think that's true, maybe in music as follows, peacebuilding just there and you have to kind of work with it and yeah.

Scott: Um, oh no, I was just going to ask, um, in all your time singing with Mary Cay, do you have, I know this is a hard question to ask, cause I know me as a singer, you don't have just one favorite memory. Do you have some top favorite memories of times? I mean, for instance, it sounds like with your son-in-law in the pub, that was just unbelievable, but maybe you can tell a few other instances where you just felt so powerful and connected, um, through the lens of Balkan music, maybe.

Leslie: Yeah. Well, I always feel it, you know, in our concerts from our singing together and, you know, we've got this little Balkan band, I was really excited this just before COVID we were going to actually perform with a Balkan band that was coming up from New York and, and it didn't happen because of COVID, but I always feel, um, you know, when we're singing the music and, um, I, um, you know, especially when we've worked on it a long enough time that it actually all kind of starts to click. Um, and that's just really exciting for me. Um, and certainly with the accordion, I just feel it personally being able to play the accordion music of some of those songs. And, um, I played the accordion at both my kids' weddings, two little Balkan songs, you know, my husband and I played together. And, um, um, so memories of things that have, um, you know, I think one thing that really stands out is every year we also have a potluck, um, at the, just before a concert and we always give Mary Cay a gift.

That's often something that somebody in the chorus has made. There are a lot of really talented artists in the chorus. And I always feel like that's such a moving moment. It's like when we're all just in this place of feeling grateful for what she's given all of us and this fact that we're all together and it just feels so, you know, it's not like it's any one particular, um, moment, but, um, I often, you know, just, I tear up, I just feel like it's something that it feels like it's really, um, um, just such a special thing to think of. This has been such a big part of our life for what, 25 years. And, um, and even though a lot of the people in the chorus, I don't see other than in chorus, you know, there aren't that many that I, um, connect with outside chorus. Of course, some people who I do, but there are a lot of people come.

I, I only see them in chorus, but, um, but I, I, I just love when we come together, I feel like it's, um, everybody, um, yeah, I think there've been a few people who it's hard for them because maybe they're, they have a very particular way of what music should be. And it's a little bit more, you know, it's not this community singing. And I think what Mary Kay is really working out is to make everybody feel like you don't have to be a great singer. You just have to come and wanna

sing and do the music. And, um, and, um, so in trying to make it inclusive, I think some people, it hasn't worked for them, but I think Mary Cay has done a really good job of, um, kind of holding to keeping it something that will be welcoming to everybody regardless of your musical talent.

And I feel like that's a really special thing as a conductor, you know, and, um, you know, even my husband came from a much more traditional music training and music theory, and I remember he used to raise his hand at the beginning and say, but Mary Cay, that's not the way it is on the page. She would say, yeah, we're not singing it the way it is page, you know, get over it. It's, you know, it's sort of, you kind of have to just let go and go with it. And, um, and so they, these aren't necessarily special moments, but I feel like there moments when I've really appreciated Mary Cay, as a facilitator. And, you know, I think it's a teacher. I kind of watch her too and watch how she's teaching and how she's leading a group and how she's kind of managing this whole, which could get very chaotic very quickly.

And, um, and over the years really learned or have really watched how she's kind of come become much more confident too. And being able to hold this kind of messiness when things are not yet worked out and make people feel really fine with it, it will work out. And if it doesn't work out, she never puts us in a concert, um, singing something she doesn't think we can do, you know, I think she'll pull it before she'll put us in that situation. She wants us to really enjoy singing and to feel like it's coming out of us and not that we're struggling with it, you know, cause then we don't enjoy it. So, um, so I think she's, she's very careful about wanting us to feel good about ourselves and good about what we've created. Um, so those aren't specifics really. Um, um, but it's more kind of general general things. Um,

Scott: Sure. Um, yeah, I can definitely relate. So I came to Village Harmony as a trained, you know, I have a master's in choral conducting and I just remember, you know, I was having a great time, but my first camp was in Macedonia and, um, I did the last Macedonian camp. Um, and I remember thinking, I'm like, oh my gosh, this is going to drive me crazy. Why don't you fix this section or whatever, but then after we had our first several, uh, concert opportunities, it just clicked and I'm like, oh yeah. So anyway, I think what you just said really captured the ethos of Mary Cay's philosophy.

Leslie: Yeah. Yeah. It was hard for my husband in the beginning, but then he came to really appreciate it too, I think. And um, yeah. Yeah. I think you have to kind of focus on what it is instead of what it's not. And so, um, and it's really, you know, I think the idea of in other cultures for everybody singing, it's not a thing that people sing just on stage, but it's just so much more integrated into life. And you know, we've been to Mary Cay's house so many times when she's pulled together people just to come over to her house to sing. And it's just, that's how... I almost loved that the most, because I feel like then it's just, you know, it's so informal and it just sort of comes out of everybody sitting around and, and I really wish our culture had more of that just being interwoven into our daily life.

Scott: Sure. Yeah. So again, you're... You're such a, you're so articulate, um, you kind of hit my last question, but maybe if you can think of a good summer, um, my last question was pretty much, how do you think Mary Cay has contributed to the music education world and the peacebuilding world ?

Leslie: Oh, wow.

Scott: That's a hard question, but...

Leslie: Yeah, well I think, you know, certainly the camps and I know she's worked with Larry for years from the very beginning, she, she was connected with him with Village Harmony and I feel like the Village Harmony in itself has been huge and the number of young people and adults that have gone through camps. And so on that level, I think, um, you know, on that scale, I feel like that has really been significant. And then, um, you know, I think just through her, um, you know, her life, even, not even in the fire, but just she's in so many different musical worlds and connected to so many other musicians and, you know, she's always on Facebook trying to like, this would be an example, like, um, when we did one song, "The Cup Song" and we learned it and it was this Bosnian girls' orphanage and they watched it on YouTube and, you know, I just feel like there's so many, she just loves to connect with other people and create those connections.

And I think that's been significant, you know, in these different worlds that I'm, I don't even, I don't even know what the worlds are, that she circulates them, but I know there are a lot of them and it's all these musicians and all different places that, um, and then, you know, I feel like in particular, the Bosnian camp has been really from what I've heard, just that idea of what she and Vahidin kind of created there. Like that's been really significant, but you know, I would just stay in our, if I can just look at our family and our daughter and how much Mary Cay has impacted her. And then I look at Mary Cay with other young people and how she takes, like there's currently this one girl in our choir is just graduating from high school, but she's been singing with us probably...

She was eight or nine.

Scott: Is this Magda?

Leslie: Magda. Yes. She was actually just here. She's been in a Village Harmony Northern harmony camp. And she was spending the night with us. And, you know, I feel like Mary Cay has really supported her singing interests and really given her places to, to go with it and then to invite her to be a co-leader in a workshop and really trying to kind of get young. She's really thinking about young people and how to groom them and take them to the next... next level. And I, I really admire that. Um, and she gives them, um, you know, she supports them in a way that makes them again successful in doing that. She brings them in at a level that, you know, is challenging for them, but it's doable. And she kind of supports them to make it work well. So they feel good about what they're doing and we feel really good about it.

And it's certainly really great for us to see somebody who's been in the choir since they were little and all of a sudden they lead a choir and giving us workshops it's really thrilling. And she does that with a lot of young people. You know, I just know it from my own experience with my daughter, but I've watched it with, you know, other young people and she made sure they have solos and stuff so that they kind of keep growing. And, um, and so I think, you know, maybe in Village Harmony and in all of these big networks, she had a big, bigger footprint. And, um, and certainly in the Bosnian world, she's really, I think, uh, probably significant there, but in a more local level, I think she's had a lot of, um, um, impact just on the people around her and the people that are in our chorus. She's she really takes the time to get to know everybody and follow up and

see how people are doing. And, um, so, um, that's we're her flock, you know, I just feel like she's the shepherd of a flock.

Scott: Thank you so much. Um, is there anything else you'd like to add that we haven't discussed?

Leslie: Oh boy. Um, I don't think so. I feel like I probably talked to all over the place! I tried to answer the questions directly!

Scott:

No, you answered them very well!

Leslie: Well, if you have any other questions, you know, feel free to ask that, um, I can't, um, um, uh, as you can tell, I'm a real fan of her and I'm just so glad you're doing this project. I feel like it's so great to see, um, somebody recognized that somebody's valuable enough to write about. And, you know, I think by doing that, you're kind of amplifying her presence and her, I hope, you know, I, I feel like you're just recording and I just talked with her a little bit about it and how powerful for her. It is just to be thinking about our career and thinking about to be at this point, and to be able to look back and have somebody curious about, you know, what was your path? What gift you're, you're giving back to her too. So I, I really appreciate it.

Scott: Well, I also, um, respect and admire her very much. And, um, you know, and in choral music education, you know, there's so many buzz words, you know, about this kind of work and also social justice. And, but, you know, one of my claims is like, well, Hey, you know, this is great that we are paying attention to this now, but don't forget that we have had people all along the way that have done this work. So let's not pretend it hasn't been happening. And let's, you know, value those who have led the way.

Leslie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You know, I, um, I was thinking one other thing that really stood out to me and I don't know your politics at all, but

Scott: Let's say I'm an oddity in the South!

Leslie: [laughs] Well, when, uh, when Trump was elected, everybody was so despondent up here. I mean, you're talking about Bernie land here and, um, Mary Cay just said, let's get together and sing. And so she'd just call, made an open thing. Let's all get together and just sing songs. And so people came and just, we all gathered at the church wherever we rehearsed and, um, and people, you know, she didn't lead the songs, people just, and that felt to me like such a gift of, you know, we're all just feeling like we need something to lift us up right now. And music is our go to, and so just kind of on a whim, pulling everybody together and saying, let's, let's just do this. And so I think that's also another thing that she does have. Um, yeah.

Scott: Yeah. Well, thank you again so much for your time. I really appreciate it.

Leslie: You're welcome. You're welcome.

Samira Merdžanić Interview

October 12, 2021

Scott Sexton: Good afternoon. Thank you for your time. I really appreciate it. And thank you for helping with my study. So first I'd like to ask to make sure you received the email and consent form I sent you. Did you receive that form?

Samira Merdžanić: Yes, I received.

Scott: Do you have any questions about that form?

Samira: Not really. Everything is clear.

Scott: Okay, good. Um, do you still wish to participate in the study?

Samira: Yes, of course.

Scott: Okay, cool. So the purpose of this interview today is to gain insight on the stories and experiences of Mary Cay Brass and her career as a choir director and peacebuilder, um, with Balkan music. So I hope to gain additional perspective of the role of the job of the choral director as a peacebuilder with my study. Um, so that is the study. I have to introduce it to you formally. So now we will start the interview. Um, so, um, tell us your name and where you're located.

Samira: Um, my name is Samira Merdžanić. I'm from Bugojno, that small city in, in the central Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Scott: Right. Um, so tell us what you do in Bugojno?

Samira: Uh, I'm working as accordion, uh, teacher in primary music school. Also, I'm leading, uh, two choirs. Uh, one is a choir for girls. Uh, it's named Vocal Ensemble Bugojno and also I'm leading a children's choir. Uh, name is Horojupci uh, uh, I'm helping, uh, or I'm working as music therapist in, uh, association, uh, Leptir, what means, uh, butterfly, um, I'm teaching, uh, students with special needs they're to sing, to dance, to play some instrument and stuff like that.

Scott: Awesome. Thank you. That sounds great. So how do you know Mary Cay Brass? How did you meet Mary Cay?

Samira: Um, I think that happened in 2008, uh, one colleague from Sarajevo, uh, actually conductor from Sarajevo, Tijana Vignjević, who, who was, uh, connected with, uh, Mary Cay called me and suggest to have a camp for Village Harmony here in Bugojno. And so I, uh, accepted that, uh, even, I didn't know anything about the Village Harmony. I mean, just a couple things, uh, what a Tijana Vignjević said said to me. So I organized everything here in Bugojno. I hosted them in some motel in Bugojno and they spent, I think, nine days. And during that days I met Mary Cay Brass and, uh, the thing, uh, the most important thing, uh, what connected us, uh, besides that we are like, uh, work with the choirs is that, uh, we are both, uh, accordion players.

Scott: Awesome. So when Tijana contacted you, um, what did she tell you? What did she say? Did she say, you know, I have some Americans coming to Bosnia and they would like to learn music? um, what, what was that conversation?

Samira: Yeah. Um, Tijana Vignjević told me that that, that there will be a group of American people, people from America, and they would like to learn some Bosnian songs and she will organize teachers from Bosnia and Herzegovina. So most of teachers for was from Sarajevo to teach them, uh, our traditional songs, uh, not just sevdalinka, uh, they learn to sing, uh, Ilahija that spiritual, um, music from Boston Herzegovina and also, uh, uh, traditional village songs.

Scott: Super that's great. Um, so what did you think when you found out that Mary Cay had been to Yugoslavia before, and, and also when you found out that she spoke your language, what did you think?

Samira: Oh, I was really surprised. Uh, uh, also I have to say that I was surprised how, how much she knows about Bosnia and Herzegovina and about the tradition from here. You know, I didn't expect, I mean, uh, at that point, I didn't know that she, uh, graduated, uh, music, Ethnomusicology in Zagreb. Um, she told me, so, uh, that's helped me to accept and realize why she knows so much about this, uh, part of our planet [laughs]. And, um, I dunno, uh, it was really, really interesting to speak with her on my language and to speak with her, uh, about our songs. And, uh, I can say, uh, even it's a little embarrassed for me, but I realized that she knows much more than me, you know, because she studied that, and I'm accordion player and classical accordion player. And I know our traditional songs more from, uh, how to say it... From my parents, you know? But she learned much more about, uh, at the Zagreb, but music academy in Zagreb

Scott: Course. So if it's okay, I'd like to know, um, about the 2008 camp, what, what are some things that happened at the 2008 camp? I know, um, Mary Kay mentioned that your girls from vocal ensemble, they would come up to the lodge at Karalinka?

Samira: Yeah, Karalinka.

Scott: They would come to the lodge and participate. And you would also come? Can you tell me a few stories from that 2008 experience?

Samira: Yeah, of course. Uh, first I want to say the time was surprised, you know, because, uh, there was a group of people from 17 years old to 70, so it was amazing for me, you know, uh, to see that people from America, just, just like that, you know, uh, pack their backpack and come to explore my country and learn that sounds. And it was amazing for me, you know, because, uh, I didn't, uh, met someone here who wants to stop their life, put their backpack and go to somewhere just to sing and explore. So, uh, during that nine, nine days we spent, uh, uh, sometimes together we sing, my girls and, and I went to, uh, learn with them. And, uh, I was surprised how fast they are learning our song. Uh, it was interesting now how they accept, uh, our language and how they like to, uh, uh, learn, not just melody and just lyrics. They, they, they really like to know everything around that songs, you know, who wrote, if there's someone who wrote that or, um, I mean, where come from that song and stuff like that. And, um, uh, we also

play, uh, together, like dance, dance from our country. We call that... Kolo... And, uh, one day we had the, like, um, picnic together and we played a lot than single lot, and I don't know what to say more.

Scott: Cool. Good. Um, in that camp, did you have concerts? I know when I came, we had concerts like in the middle of Bugojno. Did you also have a concert at that camp in Bugojno?

Samira: Yes, of course. Uh, uh, I forgot to mention that we visit, uh, uh, uh, some special place in our town. You know, we visit church and mosque because they wanted to learn, uh, really a lot about how we live here in Bosnia. And, um, um, also they went to visit, uh, like, uh, folklore ensemble to see how we dance here. And at the end of that, I think nine days we had joint concert together. So, uh, my choir and we invited some others, a small choir from Bugojno and we had concert together in the center of my city, in the center of Bugojno. And as I can remember, uh, people was surprised, uh, how they, uh, live to sing our Bosnian songs and how they pronounce. And, uh, uh, sometimes they were confused, you know, they didn't believe that they are American people. I mean, they, they were, um, like, uh, surprised how they pronounce and how good melody, good, good intonation and, uh, uh, some Bosnian ornaments. And it was amazing really. Uh, it was, uh, some really special, uh, moments for me, you know, something what I didn't, uh, experience before I met Mary Cay and Village Harmony.

Scott: Uh, that's a cool, um, so we know that later in 2016, and in 2018, there was a big peacebuilding focus in Village Harmony camps in Bosnia. In 2008, Were there any, was there any talk about peacebuilding I know you said that you learned different music cultures. Did you all have a space to come together and talk about peacebuilding, or maybe talk about what happened in Bosnia or anything like that in this camp?

Samira: Uh, for 2008, I really can't say about that because, um, I was just like host person and person who make contacts for Mary Cay and Village Harmony, uh, with, uh, uh, people in bull going up. Uh, we visit mayor. Um, and we talk just about, you know, Bugojno, not, not really about, I don't know about war or about peace, but we talk like that. We would like to have some, uh, similar, similar meetings in the years with, with what will come, you know, so we didn't speak, uh, at that point so much maybe, uh, professors from, Sarajevo, maybe they, uh, explain them, uh, what's happened in Bostonian, how it was, you know, during the war. But, uh, I miss that, uh, in that .

Scott: I was going to ask if you went to Sarajevo with them in 2008 and you did not go with them?

Samira: Uh, we were in Sarajevo, but just because, uh, my choir was invited from, uh, sorry, uh, from, uh, from Sarajevo, for, uh, from, uh, organization, uh, Sarajevo Art, uh, they, they organized, Bašćaršike Noće, Bašćaršija evenings. So my choir sang, uh, at the same night, like Mary Cay's choirs.

Scott: I remember she told me about a Village Harmony went to a rehearsal with Pontanima... I didn't know if you also went to that rehearsal, but you were probably with your choir.

Samira: Yeah, I didn't know. And I went because, because, uh, in 2008 Tijana Vignjević was, uh, charged For everything. I was just connect person in Bugojno. I know, but, uh, uh, probably because we were good host or I don't know what, but, uh, next year, 2009, uh, Mary Kay invited, uh, two girls from my choir to come to America to spend three weeks there at the teenage camp to learn some other song. And also also to teach, uh, songs from Bosnia and Herzegovina to other teenagers.

Scott: Yeah. I remember her telling me about that. Did they have a great time?

Samira: Yeah, it was really, really great experience for them.

Scott: That's great. Um, so after 2008, did you keep in touch with Mary Cay, which you guys wrote to each other, um, maybe to share music?

Samira: Yes, of course. We stay in contact to the Facebook to mail. Uh, we exchanged some scores. We talk to a little sometimes, and then I think, uh, 2015, she, uh, called me and, uh, proposed like, uh, invited me to be, uh, one of the teachers for Village Harmony for camp camp 2016. And, uh, I can say from that time is really, uh, becoming, uh, my, uh, deeper or how to say? A better connection with Village Harmony and with the Mary Kay. Uh, you understand?

Scott: Right. I understand. Actually, I think she was very impressed with your ability to, um, organize concerts. And, um, also as your ability as a teacher, um, she told me this, she really enjoyed that. So I think she saw a lot of potential in you. And, um, anyway, so I'm glad because that's, that's how we became friends. And now you're a teacher with Village Harmony and that's great. So can you tell me a little bit about that conversation, that invitation when she contacted you in 2015? What did she say?

Samira: As you mentioned already, uh, she followed my, uh, uh, everything, what I post on Facebook also at that time I lead a small group. We called that klapa, um, for, for, uh, like Croatian folkloric traditions.

Scott: Yeah. Folkloric organization?

Samira: Yeah. For Croatian woman. And I worked with them and I think, uh, Mary Cay, uh, as you mentioned, uh, uh, so in me, a person who, who has a sense for people, for singers and, uh, who is able to connect people to music, to the music. Um, and probably that's the reason why she choose me. Um, I'm working this, this, uh, I mean, I work with the choir, um, now 25 years. So I have really a good connection with the choir, people in Boston and Herzegovina, and also around. And, um, uh, I am good in organization of, you know, like, um, what's important to, to see in Bosnia, to eat... Uh, uh, I, I think that I'm good in choosing, uh, nice songs, uh, interesting songs for people. So, and, uh, so when she called me, she said, you know, Samira, I would like to invite you to teach for Village Harmony. Uh, I would like to come again to Bosnia, uh, in 2016, I have connection with, uh, um, organization peacebuilding from Sanski Most. And, uh, if you want to be like feature, I would like that you accept. So at the first I was, uh, like proud because she choose me because I didn't really, I never expect, I, uh, the whole time I pulled that probably someone from Syria or from music academy will invite it, but she choose me. Uh, and I was also

afraid because of knowing my English, but I can say, uh, she helped me to improve my English through these years. She helped me so much. Maybe I should, uh, uh, to, to speak with her much more than I used to so that I can improve my English.

Scott: And now you're fluent!

Samira: [laughs] Thank you, Scott!

Scott: So you, before the 2016 cap, you were essentially working as, also as a peacebuilder with your music work with working with the Croatian women, your children's choir also has children from different backgrounds. Um, so what did you think when she mentioned to you that this new camp would have a peacebuilding focus? What were your first thoughts?

Samira: I can do it! [laughs] The first thoughts, thoughts, I mean, uh, you know, for me, uh, work with, uh, for example, Croatian people or Serbs people or whatever, uh, background for me, it's normal. Like, that's my job, but here after the war, uh, um, it is normal, but you know, people sometimes making some question why you choose to, uh, to, to work that with them or why you do, you are free to go to Croatia, to Serbia, you know, because, but I think, um, music helping us to build bridges between people and, uh, ruin, uh, ruin, um, problems, like, uh, making them that they're not, uh, exist. Problems not exist. And, um, I don't know. Um, I met people from, uh, peacebuilding from Sanski Most, uh, at that point. So I'm grateful to Mary Cay because she connected me with them. I, we didn't know each other, but we, when we met each other, we realized that we are working like similar teams, you know, because it was, for example, it was strange for some people from my town, uh, when I started with, uh, work with klapa from Napredek and, you know, uh, people didn't use that. Uh, for example, if you are Muslim, like you cannot sing any Christian or Orthodox songs. Like, not really, but sometimes, you know, people thinking, especially after the war. So, um, so I, uh, working with the klapa Napredek.

Scott: You kind of jumped over the barrier.

Samira: Yeah. I jumped the barrier. Yeah. And connect to people. And so after that, uh, so many people come from to visit, to listen our concert, you know, it's, it was, uh, it wasn't, uh, important who you are, people start to coming just to listen. Nice music. You understand me?

Scott: Okay. I do understand. Do you think the first peacebuilding camp in 2016? So, I think it was successful for Americans, for us that participated. Do you feel like the camp was also successful for Bosnians and successful for the communities that we sang in and the communities where we gave concerts? Do you feel that it was successful?

Samira: I think it was successful.

Scott: Yeah. Tell me some reactions. Um, or tell me if you remember some reactions from Bosnians in the concert and the audience, for instance, um, if you remember, we had a Catholic priest singing ilahija. What were some of their reactions?

Samira: Um, is that as I already mentioned, uh, sometimes some people can't accept or can't realize that that's really happening, you know, but for me that's normal and I like to do that. Yeah.

Scott: For the general public, like the other Bosnians that watch their concert. Do you think they were touched, do you think?

Samira: Yeah, they, they were so deep, uh, touched, uh, as you know, like, uh, in 2018, a priest, Dominic sang ilahija. And, uh, uh, everyone liked that song, but especially people who knows that he's a priest and singing ilahija. Yeah. That was really, really, uh, emotional moment. Uh, not just for audience. It was emotional moments for us who were at the stage at that moment, as you remember,

Scott: Do you think, uh, the Village Harmony camps, I know you are already doing such a great job on your own in Bosnia and connecting people through music. You're so great at that. And I think a lot of that is because of your character and how nice and giving of a person you are, do you think Village Harmony, peacebuilding camps gave you more confidence to do similar work in your country?

Samira: Yes, of course, yes. They gave me some ideas, but it's not easy like in America, you know, because we are still like country after the war, even it's 25 years later. So, um, um, I would like to do something like, you know, to connect, to try to have some camps. Uh, um, also I talked with some people, you know, and they are interested, but sometimes, you know, for example, uh, if I can, uh, say about one thing, what's happened in my life, uh, for example, uh, a couple of years before I connect where I met, uh, a conductor from Serbia, and we become good friends and we, not that we like, uh, the same songs and we like to work a lot with our singers. So, um, I, uh, suggest her to make some joint concert. So I invited her to come to Bugojno, And, uh, also I expect that she will invite us to go to Serbia. I don't want to mention which towns. So, uh, it happened that, uh, first happened that we from Bugojno went to Serbia, you know, and we were there and we had really nice time there, uh, make some connection with her choir, sing together, uh, spend a whole day walking around town, and then we return back to Bosnia. And, um, uh, we, we invited them to come maybe a couple months later, but in some points, um, they... they didn't want to come because they not is that we are talking about Srebrenica as you know, in that happen genocide. And, uh, we pulled some song or some movie about that. And they were like, uh, hurted about that. And she sent me a message, like, you know, Samira, we don't want to come to Bosnia. Now we are afraid. And I told her, you her, uh, why you are afraid? I opened my, uh, my door from my house. I invited you to come here. I, uh, I'll try that you have really good time here. And I'm sure that you won't have any troubles here. Uh, you know, but she, she feel like if I mentioned genocide to Srebrenica, uh, that, that, that sound somehow, um, reflects to her and to her, uh, to hers, uh, members of choir, you understand me? You don't need Faris to help? You understand, uh, in what area and living and working and why it's sometimes, uh, strange if you are connected with someone or if you singing some other songs, you know, but that doesn't matter. So I can say if we put on, on scale, uh, there's just a few people who can accept difference and, uh, to learn who doesn't want to learn about someone else, you know, who live just in their, like

Scott: Right. Their own world. I understand! You're doing a great job.

Samira: Thank you. I mean, I just try to explain.

Scott: Yeah, sure. And I certainly know from experience how things can be in your country, but also, um, I know, you know, that there are people like you and Vahidin, and Mary Cay, who are also doing good work and trying to make a difference, trying to make something better. So now maybe we can talk about something else maybe, um, just in your time, knowing Mary Cay. Think about some memories you have with her and with her work. Um, can you tell me maybe some of your favorite memories, some, maybe some, um, some of your favorite experiences with Mary Cay, maybe it's a music experience, maybe it's just somewhere just hanging out with coffee. I don't know. Can you tell us some memories?

Samira: Yeah. I have so many memories. I mean, I, I, I'm calling her like, she's my sister, you know, because, uh, even we are so, so far away from each other, uh, we are so connected to our heart and we really share, uh, not just, uh, things happening around our choirs. We share, uh, our lives, uh, things, you know, uh, the special moments, uh, if I have to choose is when we play accordions together, you know, um, we have some recordings, video recordings, and it's amazing, you know, she, uh, I mean, I graduated, uh, accordion in 1993. And after that, I'm playing accordion just for my classes. And, you know, uh, um, at the beginning I was a person who played for family for parties and, you know, for gathering people. And at some point I stopped to play accordion because I was like, uh, bored and tired.

Scott: Yeah, we say burned out!

Samira: Yeah. And, uh, but she, uh, she made me to, to start practice again and play our traditional songs. And, you know, like she gave me inspiration for that. And, uh, I liked to play accordion with her. Also a special moments for me was, uh, when I come to visit her in America. And when I come to her beautiful, uh, red house, uh, I noticed so many CDs and books from Bosnia and Herzegovina. And, uh, I could, I could cry, cry, you know, because she's so involved in to this country. And, uh, she, uh, and she's really, really, uh, good in connecting people because I, I spent with her, I can say four or five or, um, camps. And it's really amazing how people like her, how they admire to her. And, uh, for me, like for like for conductor, it's amazing how, she's a work so easy with the people, you know? Uh, I think sometimes I'm making pressure on my singers, you know, to make them better. But Mary Cay, like, she's trying just to make fun for everyone. You know, I don't know. I mean, I really have so many special moments with Mary Cay and with Village Harmony and with you through Village Harmony.

Scott: I understand what you mean. A lot of times when you teach your choir, uh, some from another language it's hard for them. Sometimes it's hard for them to enjoy the song because they can't really relate to what is being said, but I'm impressed when I hear Mary Cay's choirs, singing Balkan languages because they understand. And they feel it from their heart and that's hard to teach. Um, so it, like you said, she definitely her love for the Balkan culture... I think it's contagious, it spreads.

Samira: Yes it is.

Scott: Yeah, for sure. Um, you've told me so much, this has been great. How do you think, uh, just stepping back, stepping back and looking at the whole picture, uh, her whole career, um, how do you think Mary Cay has contributed to the world of peacebuilding and in the world of music education? [pauses] That's a big question. I know.

Samira: Um, that this big, uh, question and, uh, I hope that I can give an answer. So, um, I can say that it's not important just saying, you know, and just music, it's important to, uh, learn about countries, about people, uh, to help yourself, you know, yourself to help yourself to, to build you, uh, you as a better person. I think, uh, if we, uh, this camp, uh, for me, and I can say for most of people, uh that's that, that they are a special moments now because, um, we say, sorry, um, I, can I speak on Bosnian?

Scott: It's not only important, uh, the musical aspect of it singing, playing instruments, but it's also extremely important for human interaction for somebody to be willing to come from another continent, you know, just to have the experience of our country and to build peace and new connections.

Samira: And it's also unbelievable that how, uh, Mary Cay and all of the American teachers, um, have, I guess, patients and with the amount of care that they come to our country and to the entire region, you know, to fix problems and, uh, you know, just to, um, I guess just to spend their time here, you know what I mean? So, yeah. Yeah, because for example, um, uh, she doesn't want to go to hotel/motel. Uh, we know that they have a money for that, you know, but she, every time she liked to go to people's house, because there's the only way you can feel, learn, And, uh, what else? uh, other people, you know, you understand? I dunno. She's amazing. And I'm so happy that I'm person who meet her. And, uh, and, uh, I am so proud because I can say we are friends and, uh, I am so happy that she, uh, give me this opportunity to, uh, to uh, to expand my horizons, and I learned so much from her and, uh, she helped me to, to build "this Samira", you know, I couldn't, I can't say that I was like this in 2008 and 2016, but she helped me, you know, and I'm learning how to, uh, connect with the people, how to appreciate difference. You're understanding me?

Scott: Yes.

Samira: I hope that, uh, it's not easy to, to explain The whole experience we, we had. I mean, uh, also, uh, sometimes maybe because I live here, sometimes I'm so full of politics, religious, and every type things, you know, and sometimes I'm just closing door and leaving that there. But, uh, she, uh, show me that sometimes I have to open that door to see that things you know, to accept that things. And the thing that things can be better. We, people can change if day one, just if they want.

Scott: Um, this has helped so much, um, learning about, not only your story, but Mary Cay's story and her work. So thank you so much. Is there anything else that you would like to say about Mary Cay or anything else you'd like to say in general?

Samira: I really, uh, wish her good health and so many years, uh, and high hope that we will continue to be this project, because I think, uh, uh, these camps, um, are good for American

people and Bosnian people. And I think we are healing ourselves uh, to this project. So I hope that we will continue and the, that some days someday, uh, we'll ...Yeah, hopefully one day in the future, there will be another person to follow Mary Cay's footsteps, and to kind of have the same rule as such a big role, you know, uh, such big shoes to fill as she has, you know, to create more peace and, and just general love and about Balkan area.

Scott: Yeah. Hopefully. that'd be great. Well, thank you so much for your time. I really appreciate all your words and your stories and thank you for sharing.

Samira: You're welcome. It was my pleasure. Thank you inviting me.

Amy Harlow Interview

October 16, 2021

Scott Sexton: Hey again, so thank you for volunteering your time. Really appreciate your contribution to this study. Um, I just want to confirm that you received the consent form and that you read over everything and signed it?

Amy Harlow: I did.

Scott: Great. Um, do you have any questions about the consent form?

Amy: I did not.

Scott: Okay, thank you. Um, do you still wish to participate in this study?

Amy: Yes, I do.

Scott: Awesome. Thank you. So, um, as you bred, the purpose of this interview is to gain insight on the stories and experiences of the career, Mary Cay Brass and her work with choir and peacebuilding. Um, and so it's my hope to this study that, um, I can tell her story and gain additional perspective on the role of the choral director and the peacebuilding world. Um, so, uh, Mary Cay has identified you, um, as a potential long -time choir participant and associate. Um, so can you tell me, how did you meet Mary Cay?

Amy: I met Mary Cay. She was a music teacher for my son, uh, uh, Ryan when he was in elementary school and she was, um, she started a choir, she had a choir there, but then when she left that position and was working at SIIT, she started a choir for children, a children's choir, and Ryan was in that choir. And so we would go to these amazing concerts and, um, some of the other parents, and I would say to her, can you start a choir for us? And so she did. And so in the beginning, um, you know, a lot of us were parents of the kids that were singing in her children's choir. That's how I met her.

Scott: Cool. Um, would you say... was it through her that you first experienced Balkan choral music or had to been exposed to it before?

Amy: Um, for sure it was the first time that I had experienced singing the Balkan music, but my father was a folk dance caller. And so I did the folk dancing from growing up and it was international, so it wasn't just Balkan, but, um, you know, I learned the dances from around the world from him, so, yeah, so it was familiar like sort of like the music was it, it was very, it called to me because it was part of, you know, I grew up on an international campus. Um, and so the, just the people that I knew and the places that I had been, um, as a child, not, I hadn't been to the Balkans, but I had spent time in Italy and in South America. And, um, and then just the dancing and seeing all the people that, that were on that campus all the time were, were people that were from all over the world.

Scott: Yeah. So it sounds like learning about other cultures, it was just part of your family and part of your upbringing. Um, you mentioned your son and, um, amazing concerts. Did, do you remember, did Mary Cay teach one of her Balkan songs to some of the kids or dances to some of the kids?

Amy:

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. They were singing in all these different languages and it was so much fun to hear them and they're so good. You know, kids are so much more, um, able to learn music, you know, like that and by heart and, um, yeah, so that, I noticed that also she, I observed her with the kids at the Westminster West school also. And, um, so just noticing how, how much they loved that energy.

Scott: Yeah. Um, we'll talk about your experiences a little later, but what is it, um, about Mary Cay that you think made her so successful with the kids and, um, really brought out some great musical experiences from them?

Amy: That's a good question. I think she's a really good teacher because she has very clear expectations, um, from them and, um, and she doesn't, um, [pauses]

She doesn't let them get away with, so she's very focused. So when she's teaching her focus is on the songs she's singing and how she's going to, um, create that performance in the end, but also the experience that the kids are having and the joy that they're having in the moment. So she, she has a great balance between all of those things, but it's also not, it's not crazy. Like it's not out of control and the kids are interested. She talks, she tells a lot of stories when she's teaching. And so the stories are also really important for the kids and for us, um, just, you know, of her experiences in the Balkans and how she, she experienced certain songs or, or different cultures, or, um, there's always a story about, you know, somebody in a village who, you know, taught her this or somebody that she knew who taught her something, um, that was really important that she brought forward in her career.

Scott: Yeah. So, um, as a singer in her choirs, and as one of her friends, you've sung with her for almost 30 years,

Amy: [laughs] Isn't that crazy?

Scott: Yeah! So would say, a lot of what you're just mentioning in her work with children would say a lot of that transfers over to her... Also with adults?

Amy: Yeah, absolutely. And, and, um, you know, so she got me involved in the Villa Harmony and in, um, and exploring, traveling while singing and, um, having those experiences. And that, that really has been one of the most amazing things in my life is to experience that kind of community in song. And so, um, she encouraged, um, she encouraged that in everybody, you know, just to be able to, in the same way she did with kids to experience the music, to hear the stories, to, um, to have clear expectations around performance and, um, not, you know, not fooling around, not making, um, you know, being silly and you know, that this was a serious, you know, she took it seriously. She took what she did seriously, but she also knew how to have fun and knows how to have fun. And, you know, there was always a dance involved or, you

know, some way of, of learning, um, the culture through food or whatever, you know, bringing these people in, to meet us. Yeah, yeah.

Scott: Yeah. So I believe you were a singer in her groups around the time she was making her book and CD projects that you have any part in those?

Amy: Yeah. Yeah. Actually we were in, um [pauses] I can't remember which book it was, but we definitely went into the studio. And so, yeah, I think it was the second one that she did. Yeah.

Scott: Uh, so I know you were a participant... Or frequent participant in the Macedonia camps. Um, the first Macedonia camp that you attended... was that your first time to Balkan Europe?

Amy: Yeah, I think it was, yeah, because I had been to Western Europe. Um, the first international trip I did was to England and then Italy and then, and then with Mary Cay to Macedonia. Yeah. And I went four times to Macedonia. That's pretty crazy. And one time to Bosnia. So, so far.

Scott: Yeah. So, um, tell me, you know, tell me what you'd like to, about those camps. Um, how did you find those experiences... I'm interested, especially, you know, connecting those camps to your early experiences with Mary Cay and maybe you've been, you were singing all that Balkan music, you know, for years and years, and you're finally there. So tell me about it.

Amy: So, yeah, so we had really no context for what it meant to be in the Balkans and what it meant to be in a country like Macedonia. And, um, and of course I'd had experiences in Western Europe, so it was, um, it, it, then that's a whole different experience than going to a place that has been so recently, um, in strife and in conflict and, you know, all of what they've gone through through the years. And I know that with, I remember Mary Cay being literally sick when things were, when, when the war was happening in, in Bosnia. Like I remember her just like falling apart, um, with, with grief, for what was happening to her people there and the friends that she had. So, um, so going to, especially going to Bosnia, um, but going to Macedonia also like learning about all the culture there, like from, from the, the Roma people to the, you know, to the food, to the, you know, and I know that she had, she, she always seems to be able to make connections with people who are going to make that experience even more amazing and the connections that she had with Goran at that time, I think made those trips so much fun.

Um, and, and it, it helped me to, to see travel in a different way and not in a sort of a glitzy way, but having the opportunity to live with families and to, um, to make friends with the people in the village and to, um, you know, the story about the Walnut lady, remember where were you there that summer? And, uh, yeah, it just, like, I felt like even though I didn't speak the language that I could communicate with this Walnut lady because of, of the music and because of, of just the, the experience that we had there. So yeah, I think she opened up in the same way she did in the choir, giving us those experiences, then taking that opportunity to travel. Um, and she, she would, I guess sort of guide us, I guess it was sort of like a guide, a guiding to, to that, um, to building on what we already had here. Um, yeah.

Scott: Yeah. I, I love how you keep mentioning her connections with people. So as you and I both know that the first Village Harmony camp in Bosnia had an explicit peacebuilding

component. That was one of the first official times, you know, they called it peacebuilding and music, but, um, I feel that this has been the ethos of Mary Cay's career, really. Can you think of several instances, whether it's in the nineties in the community choirs, or maybe even in the Macedonian camps where, um, you know, there might've been an indirect peacebuilding focus or maybe an instance of Mary Cay, um, as a peacebuilder with her music?

Amy: Well, every single time we had a concert, she donated the proceeds of the concert to some, something that helped to build connection between cultures. And sometimes it was for, to send overseas. Sometimes it was to, to be able to send somebody overseas to make that connection, or to bring somebody to our country to make a connection. So it was always about creating those spaces for other people to experience, um, culture. And, um, so in terms of peacebuilding, you know, the first, like I said before, I think she was really affected by the war in Bosnia. And, and then she started the work with, um, with, I can't remember her name, Green, somebody Green.

Scott: Paula Green.

Amy: Paula Green. Yeah. She started that work with Paula Green here and, and, um, and that was when she went to that camp that summer, or that, that training at SIT, I think that shifted her into another space.

Um, whereas before it was sort of like, you know, cultural and experiential and, um, fun. And, and after she did that camp, um, it became a whole different thing to her. It became more, you know, and when she met, met Vahidin, you know, that opened up this whole heart inside her, that was so, um, it healed her in some ways, I think it was healing for her because of what had happened when, you know, when she saw all of, all of that pain and suffering in the countries that she loved so much. So, yeah, I would say that, that it was always a little bit a part of what she was doing, but, but then that was sort of like the, the thing that opened her wide and, and, um, I think Vahidin has been really well, both Paula Green and Vahidin have been really influential in her and helping to heal her and, um, yeah. To move forward in a more positive way.

Scott: Yeah, for sure. Um, what about, again, you you've been with her for so long. What are, you know, you mentioned healing... mentioned powerful experiences. What are some of your favorite musical memories of Mary Cay? Maybe they were healing moments. Maybe they were powerful moments. Maybe they were just having a good time and connecting with music moments. I don't know. What are some of your highlights? I know you've had a lot to choose from.

Amy: [laughs] Yeah. Um, we traveled with Mary Cay and she probably wouldn't say this is one of her favorite moments, but it was w w when we went as a small choir, it's France and we had, did an exchange with another choir. Um, we, I just remember like doing... Busting in the streets and just like her spontaneous, willingness to, to share music. And in these places where it wasn't a formal concert, or it wasn't, you know, like, she'd just be like, okay, everybody let's sing this song, you know, and everybody would be like, okay, let's do it. You know, we're all really eager to, to perform at any time. So I think that, um, I think that, that spontaneity and her willingness to just share music in the streets, or, you know, in, in a place in Brattleboro at a pop-up, or, you know, like just anywhere where she's willing to do that.

Um, and it brings joy to so many people. I think that's one thing that I, I, I think really sticks out for me is that she wants to bring joy through music and healing again, to, you know, cause I sing in the hospice choir with her and I think, um, that was also something that helped her to become more, um, connected to, you know, as we age, I think, you know, we have a whole different outlook on life, um, when we're in our twenties and our thirties and even our forties. And then when we start to move into, um, you know, the second half of our life and think, you know, like, how can we give back? How can we, how can we help? Um, and so I saw that transformation in her and I think that, that, that's one of the things I really admire, um, that she's, she's been able to transform that performance-based piece, um, to be more of a, of a gift, you know, I guess, so is there some sort of ego, like there's, there's definitely an ego around musicians as you know, like when you're performance, when you're a performer, you have to have an ego you're you have to, to... you have to preserve your yourself in some way.

And, um, and I think there, there definitely was a shift over the years into this place of, of gifting rather than performing.

Scott: You've kind of touched on this a lot, actually already... One of my last questions... How has Mary Cay influenced your life as a singer and person? And like I said, you've mentioned a lot of things already, but...

Amy: Yeah, no, it never would have been a singer. You know, like I, I didn't even, I didn't sing in the choir in high school. I never thought of myself as a singer. I know that when I was younger, I used to say, I wanted to be a music teacher. Like I wanted to be what you do. And, um, and I just, I didn't have the, um... I didn't have the guidance in terms of, of learning musical instruments. I had sort of a traumatic thing happened when I was in high school, around a music teacher leaving and, um, and then, and then I just didn't follow-up on any of that. And, and I went into education and not music education. Um, and so I didn't think of myself as a singer or a musician or anything. I knew I was musical and I had a really good, good ear for music, but I never really felt that I was somebody that could read music.

Um, and so I, um, I think that, you know, having that opportunity to sing with her after the kids had song, right? So she had the choir for the kids and I said, well, they can do it. Then I can do this. And so that was sort of like this coming out for me, so to speak in terms of, of, of singing and, um, and then just loving it and learning more and more and more as we went along. Um, yeah. So I think that she does that with a lot of people. I mean, I think there are a lot of people who come into her choirs who are like, you know, know everything and know, you know, music theory really, really well. And, and there are a lot of people who've come into her choirs who just love to sing for the, for their heart, you know?

And I think that she nurtures both. Um, and you know, those who come in like Magda, who, who was a little girl and sang with us and then be, who is somebody actually, you should interview, I hope you do. Um, and, uh, you know, then becoming somebody who can teach music, you know, like, so she nurtured her through that as a, as an academic, I think of music and also nurtured me through it as a joy of music, you know, so, and it not to say that Magda doesn't have joy when she was sang, she certainly does.

Scott: Super, um, one of my last questions, how do you think Mary Cay has contributed, [clears throat] excuse me... To the world of music education and peacebuilding like her whole life work career, where do you think her contributions will be?

Amy: I think connections. I think that she's, she's just contributed by connecting, um, connecting people to people, the music world, the finding, finding people here who sing this type of music and bringing that music there and then to, you know, meeting somebody there. And I think it's just like this web of connections that she's made, um, create a, um, sort of, it's a world web, that's a worldwide real web of, of music, um, together. And, you know, I think that in the same way that Village Harmony has, but her, her lens more recently has been on that peacebuilding. And, um, and, and taking that in that healing piece, um, for, I think that that lens has made it even more poignant, you know, not just not just creating the web of music, but creating a web of, of, um, of connection through, through healing. Cause it was part of what she needed, she needed to heal. And, um, so I think that, that she understands what it means to be healed, I guess.

Scott: That's great. Um, is there anything else you'd like to share?

Amy: Hmm, let's see. Um, yeah, I think that just, you know, that I, as a person who has spent all these years with her and, and has have known her and known how, how much pain she's had around, um, what happened in the Balkans, I think has really just been clear in her work, moving forward, like that. Maybe I didn't even realize that until we did this interview, but, you know, just that, that healing that she needed to do, how it translated into how she's giving back. Um, yeah. So,

Scott: Well, thank you again for your time. I really appreciate it.

Amy: You're very welcome.

Magda Sharff Interview

October 25, 2021

Scott Sexton: So thank you again for being so willing to participate in this study. I really appreciate it. Um, I just want to confirm, did you receive the consent form I sent you and sign it?

Magda Sharff: Yes.

Scott: Great. Did you have, did you have any questions about the consent form?

Magda:No.

Scott: Okay. Are you still willing to participate in the study?

Magda: Yes.

Scott: Thank you so much. All right. So Mary Cay, I'm doing my study on Mary Cay and her career and, um, Balkan music and peacebuilding, so I'm kind of examining her whole career, um, and telling her story. So I hope to offer implications and, um, insight in how the choral director, um, can have a role in peacebuilding how choir teachers can have a better role... And that some hope in her story will help with that aspect. So that's what I'm doing. Um, so Mary Cay, identified you as a person who has, um, you have sung with her for a long time, um, and you have watched how she works and participated in many of her choirs and programming. Um, so how did you meet Mary Cay?

Magda: Well, my mom, um, had joined River Singers a couple of years before me. Um, and I went to all the River Singers concerts, and I always was so enamored with the work that she was doing in the music they were singing. Um, yeah. And yeah, just local to the area. So she's sort of a, uh, a notable figure in, um, in Southern Vermont, especially in the music community.

Scott: Yeah, for sure. So your... You said your mother was singing in her choir. How old were you when you started singing in her choir? I

Magda: I was nine years old.

Scott: Wow. That's that's awesome. Um, so in this choir, uh, I know, um, Mary Cay is big on intergenerational singing. I think you may have been the youngest one maybe, or one of the youngest and then there are singers all the way up to 80s, 90s even. Um, so when did you think of that experience?

Magda: Um, it was, it was a good introduction to like, I think how to, how to interact with, um, adults and, and, and connect with people who I wouldn't normally connect with their music. Um, and, and Mary Cay was always really, um, welcoming and, and wanted to make sure that I was, I think for a few years I was the only kid and she really wanted to make sure that I was fully engaged in participating in, um, and felt welcome.

Scott: Awesome. So among many cultures that her choirs, um, she teaches many music cultures in her songs, but of course, one of her main, um, areas of expertise is Balkan music. Um, so do you remember some of your first impressions of Balkan music and maybe some of the first music that you learned with Mary Cay?

Magda: Um, let's see. Balkan music specifically. I mean, we do a lot of it. I remember, um, doing some like Balkans songs in and River Singers and, and being really like, like, I really wanted to like show off to my friends that I could like recite words in Croatian or whatever. Um, and so I was really excited about it. Learning that pronunciation and learning the sort of something that was different from what I was used to, um, and a song that like there was this Bosnian village song that Mary Cay taught in one of my first Village Harmony camps, and that is one of the only songs that I learned at that camp that I actually like still remember. And I remember all the words and all the verses and, um, so I was really excited about that kind of music.

Scott: Cool. Great. Sorry I'm trying to make sure this works. Technology...

Magda: Sorry. Vermont wifi is not the best.

Scott: No, It's okay. I'll make it work. Um, for sure. It's no problem. So one of Mary Cay's main focuses in her career has been peacebuilding and then bringing people together through music. So, um, I don't know, when did you first realize that it was more than just sending more than just the choir rehearsal? Um, and if you don't remember when you first realized that maybe offer some examples of the way she has incorporated peacebuilding throughout your time in her choirs?

Magda: Um, she brought, and I don't, I don't remember exactly how this all worked cause I was pretty young, but, um, uh, we did, we would always do concerts at SIT um, graduate institute and the, and I'm not sure what the connection was, but it felt really, um, powerful to do that since it's a, it's an institution that has, um, global sort of roots. And, um, and there felt like it felt like there was a really concrete, um, peacebuilding aspect to that and doing those concerts and, um, having conversations about that before and after those concerts. So that was a big part of, at least for me realizing that. Um, yeah.

Scott: Great. So I know, um, you had a unique school experience going to the Putney School. It wasn't a public school, but would you say Mary Cay was the person who first introduced you to both Balkan music and peacebuilding or did she have some experiences elsewhere?

Magda: Mary Cay was definitely the first person who introduced me to Balkan music. Um, and, and peacebuilding really through, uh, the, the Bosnia trips that she led with Village Harmony. Um, and Yeah, and throughout working with her and her choirs.

Scott: Yeah, sure. So I know you went to Bosnia in 2018. Um, what are some of your memorable impressions from that trip? Maybe it can be a music memory, a peacebuilding

memory or some kind of cultural memory. What are some of your top... Top impressions from that trip? I know that's a loaded question because so much happened on that trip, but, um, what do you think?

Magda: Um, well, I'd say one of the biggest aspects of that trip that really stands out in my memory is interacting with the audience. Just all of the audience members were so excited to hear us singing their music and wanted to come up and talk to us afterwards. Um, and it was, it felt really meaningful that we were able to do that and have a powerful response from people. Um, and I also remember as part of that, like, um, feeling like I wished I could really talk to them and really like connect with them on a language level. And it was really cool to see Mary Cay doing that and, um, and communicating so like fluently. And, um, yeah,

Scott: Neat. So, Um, I know from others and from Mary Cay that you've gotten to a place where you've actually been able to lead songs in some instances in her choir. And, um, I know you're, you've had extensive work with the Village Harmony and Northern Harmony. Um, maybe do you think she's had an influence on you and, um, and your ability to lead and teach music?

Magda: Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Um, I don't think I would be, I think, I don't think I would have at all considered doing that or are trying to do that, um, that having some with Mary Cay. Um, and she, she invited me to help her teach a workshop this past summer, and I was like so excited and that just felt, yeah! Um, like she definitely was the one who introduced me to that whole community. And, and definitely, um, helped me.

Scott: Before she asked you to do this workshop, what are some ways like throughout the years and you've known here that she may have encouraged you, um, or work with you, um, with music or encourage you to dig deeper in the music culture, et cetera?

Magda: Um, a few years ago I was as a school project decided to, um, to do a study of Balkan music. Um, and I talked to Mary Cay about it and she was like, she, she really wanted to contribute and help me with that as much as possible. And, um, she was like, do you want to learn the accordion as part of that? [chuckles] Um, I was like, yeah. Um, so, and she ended up selling me her accordion and, um, setting me on a totally different course than I had expected. Um, and yeah, just in general, she's always been super supportive and, and wanting to teach and support as much as you can. Um,

Scott: Um, do you think you want to go into music as a career or do you know, what you want to do?

Magda: Yeah, I do. I mean, I definitely want to have music be a big as big a part of my life as possible. And I think I want to go into music education and I don't think I would have been, if not for Mary Cay and Village Harmony.

Scott: Super! I'm very glad to hear as you know, that's, that's my field and I love it. And I like, I love to see promising young people who I know will do a wonderful job thinking about going into it! So really just a few more questions, maybe one or two. Um, so stepping back, you know, obviously Mary Cay has had a profound influence in your life, but stepping back away from

everything, um, you know, if we look 30 years down the road, how, in your opinion, how would you say that Mary Cay has contributed to the music education world, the choir world, the peace building world. Um, what you think her greatest contributions will be?

Magda: Um, the first thing that jumps to my mind, um, and this is not the most profound, profound comment in the world, but, um, I can think of so many musical scores that I've seen that have been handed to me by people other than Mary Cay that have had the initials MCB and 1976 on the top. And some like Balkan piece that she collected, um, and, and transcribed. And that's, that's already such a lasting impact that, that her transcriptions have just traveled so far and wide. Um, so that's one thing

Scott: For sure. I think, um, she would definitely be a name of someone who... so, long story short Balkan music was very popular in our country, in the sixties and seventies. Um, and I think it's still popular in some circles, that some of that has faded off, but in this, in this era, in this time, I think Mary Cay will certainly be one of the main people who has kind of perpetuated and, um, spread that infectious love for Balkan music and culture, for sure. Uh, what about as a teacher? Can you offer anything like as a teacher and as a person, um, uh, just stepping back, looking at her career overall, um, and if you don't want to... like.. what am I trying to say? If you don't want to say like, oh, what her greatest influences are, what are some redeeming qualities or things she does really, really well that really highlight her?

Magda: Well for one thing, she's, she's personally forged a lot of like a lot, a lot of, of connections, um, internationally and, um, and connected a lot of people in really profound ways and, and that doesn't just go away and in 30 years that'll continue to build for sure. Um,

Scott: Awesome. Thank you. Um, um, as we conclude this interview, is there anything else you'd like to share? Um, you know, you said a lot, but is there anything I haven't asked you about you'd really like for me to know about Mary Cay?

Magda: Not sure. Um, you probably don't need this. You probably already have all the information that it would provide you with, but I, uh, my sophomore year did a little interview and portrait essay of, of her. And there wouldn't be any new information in there, but it might provide perspective.

Scott: I can definitely, um, you know, I can use that. I cite it! It'll be your first citation! Yeah. If you don't mind sharing, I would love to see that. Well, thank you. Um, in addition to something that if you can think that really thing in like, oh, I wish she really, I wish I would have told him that or something like that, feel free to email me later or Facebook me or something.

Magda: Yeah, absolutely.

Scott: Yeah. Thank you very much.

Magda: Thank you! Yeah. And best of luck with, with this project. I can't wait to see how it turns out.

Mary Cay Transcript

Follow-Up Interview

December 3, 2021

Scott Sexton: Okay. So we were asking about the S-I-T program and your, um, your connection and your participation with that program.

Mary Cay Brass: Yeah. So S-I -T is like graduate school in the area that focuses on two main areas. One of them is, uh, training language teachers, mostly ESL. Um, and the other is, um, it's called program and intercultural management. And that has a lot of different majors in it's bucket, you know, like peace studies and all kinds of sustainability and just all kinds of things. I don't even know what they're all called Vahidin... well the whole connection to S-I-T. Um, well I used to work there. I taught English as a second language there, but coincidentally, at the same time, the person who was the head of the contact program, which was the contact program, was like, uh, I can't remember exactly what the acronym means. You can probably look it up. Um, but it's in... Cultural, um, I just, just, I'm just blanking on it, but it's got to do with, um, intercultural understanding and peace studies and stuff like that.

Scott: No, I haven't, I haven't had a moment check out their website and stuff, so I'll see if I can find some stuff and if not, we can email or whatever.

Mary Cay: Yeah. It'll probably be more explicit on the website. Um, so Paula Green founded that program and she is quite an amazing peacebuilder. She, um, and, and people in Bosnia heard about her work and invited her to come there and lead dialogue between Muslims and Serbs in the Prijedor/Sanski Most area. And, um, Vahidin um... let's see.. there's so many connections, but Vahidin was... I think he might've heard him tell this story how he was a, he had been, you know, in Slovenia for the whole war and he basically left school at 16. And then when he came back to rebuild and, and resettle in Sansi Most, he was asked to teach English because he learned English pretty well, in the camp. And even though he didn't have any kind of degree or anything, he was asked to teach English. Which he did. And the principal of his school said, oh, there's this woman coming from America and she's going to lead dialogue between Muslims and Serbs. And we want you to go on to represent our school because you speak English. So he went. And he went kicking and screaming. He did not want it to do this. He hated Serbs and he did not want anything to do with it. But he went and, um, and it was life changing for him. Um, especially there was this moment with this Serbian woman where she looked at him and she said, I, I am really sorry for what my people did. And he realized, oh, not every Serb is bad. You know, that there, some people were just victims of their government up there... The policies and politics. And, um, and so he became quite devoted to Paula's work. And, and asked if there was some way he could come to the States and, and study with her. Now S-I-T is only a graduate school and he didn't even have him even finished high school, but Paula figured out a way for him to come and take enough classes at a community college. And so I think I spent like a year or so, or maybe more at a community college. And she got funding for him. I'm not sure how, and he, he finally got enough classes where they, I think they were kind of loose and let him in, you know,

without an official degree, but they let him into the graduate program. And, and then he did his master's in um, conflict transformation, you know, and at one point I remember saying to Vahidin... So what does Paula do when she comes to Bosnia? And he said, oh, Mary Cay, I want to be Paula Green. And that's what he's doing. He's being Paula Green. So, um, so then, uh, a few years ago, like 2000...it must have been 2015. He was teaching just over the border in New Hampshire at Keene State College, where they have a genocide studies program. Remember they're the first Bosnia camp. There was that young woman who was like an intern. Uh, I can't remember her name. Kat?

Scott: Yeah, Kat.

Mary Cay: She was a graduate of that program, the genocide study program. And, Vahidin went and taught in that he occasionally has come and taught courses in that program. And I saw that he was here and I, I knew him because of when he lived here and was getting his master's, you know, I saw him and got to know him then, although I didn't see him that much, because he was busy all the time, but I, I saw him at folk dancing. He would go to the folk dance dancing group. And, um, occasionally I would pin him down and, you know, have lunch or something. And then he asked me to be part of his presentation at the end, uh, where I played some accordion and we sang some sevdalinka. Um, she, so then when I saw he was teaching at Keene State in, um, 2015, I thought I really had this idea. I wanted to create another Bosnia camp with him. And I saw that at that point, there was a choir attached to IM, um, same, uh, you know, uh, Harmonija and at, uh, anyways. So I, I had coffee with him in Keene and I said, so I worked for this camp... And this is, I would really like to do a camp that's, you know, focused on Bosnian music and your peacebuilding work there. And, and he was really excited about it. And he, and we, you know, we made, we made a plan and I ran it by Larry. And Larry said, yeah, come up with the budget. Let me know. And so he and I, we did manage to Zoom or Skype, you know, like once a month, he was always late and he was all his kids were, you know... Woo! It was like a tornado always, but we did manage to put the camp together. And, you know, I had to ask him a lot of questions and make sure that he was following through on them, you know, and being as busy as he was, I was a little nervous, you know, is this all gonna happen? And, um, you know, the hotel's a little flaky...[laughs] As we know! And, um, but it all worked. And Larry thought it was a great idea. He okayed my budget and we went forward with it and, you know, the rest, it was great! And then we did it again two years later and we were supposed to do it again in 2020, but we know what happened. And, um, hopefully I'd love to be able to do it again, but maybe in 2022, if COVID's under control and I don't know.

Scott: Yeah. Cool. Yeah. So you, you taught ESL with the SIT, uh, was that your first connection with them?

Mary Cay: Well, when I first moved to Vermont, the first summer I moved here, I was living in New York city teaching ESL. And I, um, I had a summer job teaching at sit, but they didn't have enough steady work. Right. Um, and they mostly hired their own graduates.

Scott: Got it. But regardless, that was your first connection with them now. Um, yeah. And I think Leslie, um, she mentioned something, I don't know, maybe you and Manny eventually took some of their programming, am I correct?

Mary Cay: Ok. Yeah. There's another whole thing.

Scott: I was, um, trying to fill in the pieces for that, but Vahidin's story. That's very, very important, especially if I'm not able to get up with him, that's really what I needed.

Mary Cay: So, um, yes, every summer there's a three week intensive peace building program that peacebuilders from all over the world would come here to Vermont and study with all these amazing teachers from all over like Rwanda and Japan, and really like top names in the peacebuilding world. And every year, um, my choirs always do our concerts as a benefit for something local or global and in exchange. So, uh, every spring we would do our concerts as a benefit to pay for a peacebuilder, come from some country to take the contact program. So, and, and in exchange, Paula would let someone from my choir come free to do the program. So Manny did the program. I did the program. Leslie did the program. A lot of people over the years did the program because we got, we got a free scholarship and we donated money for somebody from either Rwanda or one year, one year. It was two guys, one from Tibet and one from China. And neither of them had ever met, you know, someone from their country, each other's country. And yet they were all part of China. And, you know, here they were in a peacebuilding program together. And, um, we paid for, uh, a guy from Haiti. He, he still sends me, thank you notes. And, um, and various places in Africa, particularly Rwanda, there were often Rwandans. And I had Rwandans in my choir for many years. I think you know that.

Scott: Yeah, I remember seeing that, I think on Facebook, since I've known you, you've had some Rwandans.

Mary Cay: Yeah. And that's because they, they came here to study, uh, for their master's and doctorate at Antioch University in Keene, New Hampshire. And, um, there's a strong connection with Rwanda and that, um, uh, environmental studies department, but that, that is done now. We won't be getting anymore, but over the years, I think we maybe had a half dozen Rwandan singing in the choir. Wonderful people. And we learned so much from them. We sang Rwandan songs and it was a wonderful connection. So, but over the course of the years, more and more people from my choirs took the contact program. You know, we, and when the contact program was happening, they invited us to come and do a concert for them. So we would, people from both of my choirs would come together, my Massachusetts one, one in Vermont, and we would do this big concert for people from all over the world. Often we were singing songs in languages that they knew, you know, and it was always a really exciting concert. And we and then we, you know, talk with all the people, you know, afterwards. And it was really a high point for my choir. And so we had this experience of meeting all these peacebuilders from all over the world, people from my choir learning deeply about peacebuilding in these three week programs. And, and I did the program and I really helped promote it, I think in my choirs, you know, with our scholarships and yeah. Making connections with, and, and also we would earmark that Paula would help me do this. She would earmark it for some particular person from a particular country. In other words, it didn't go into this big scholarship fund. We were helping a particular person. So then when we all came and did a concert, we got to meet that person and that person could come to us and thank us, you know, for helping them come here and how much it meant to them. And so we'd have that really nice connection. So, um, but Paula, Paula, um, retired, she's quite, I mean, she's probably in her late seventies, if not 80. Um, very, uh, amazing powerhouse of a woman.

And, um, and she retired and then another person took over that program and now COVID happened. So everything's online. Nothing's happened on campus, the summer program isn't happening, you know, it's different world.

Scott: Um, so this three week program is just consists of seminars with all these people and peacebuilders from around the world. Would you, do you feel like your time in the he three week program, do you feel like it was just an affirmation of what you already did or do you feel like, um, do you feel like it revolutionized for you to have new ideas or I don't know what I'm trying to say. Yeah.

Mary Cay: No it was really more of an affirmation.

Scott: So you found you were already doing a lot of those things and yet a lot of this work already.

Mary Cay: Yeah. I remember meeting this guy from, um, New York who was also a musician and he was trying to get into peacebuilding somehow. But, um, and you know, he, some, I think we had lunch one day and he found out, uh, you know, I have these choirs and I lead these camps in other countries. And then I have a hospice choir and, you know, all these different things. He goes, you're doing everything I wanted to, how did you figure this all out? You know, one thing just leads to another, and it's just one thing opens up the next door, you know? And it wasn't like I set out planning to do all these things, but they doors kept opening and yeah. They made sense.

Scott: Yeah. Yeah. Cool. Okay, great. That, that feels in a lot of questions I had about that topic. Um, the rest of the questions I feel like, um, are just random ones. And then I had a few questions about your life in the 80s, like between your return and the time you started community choir work and Village Harmony work. Um, first, and this could have been in the email you sent me, but I didn't find it in the transcripts. Do you remember, um, your first Croatian dance teacher? Phyllis, do you remember her last name?

Mary Cay: Cohen.

Scott: Cohen. Okay. Yeah. I don't know why it didn't have that.

Mary Cay: I have, I have this really cute picture. Maybe I'll scan it and send it to you. This is a Christmas card with a photo of all of us little Croatian dancers.

Scott: Oh, if you don't please scan it. If you don't mind, that would be amazing. Yeah.

Mary Cay: I think I'm about nine years old. This is me. Little blonde braids. And, um, I remember every one of these girls, they were all my neighbors and friends and three of these girls are Croatian.

Scott: Yeah. Your neighbors. Did Phyllis have, um, Balkan heritage or did she just jump on the Balkan craze at the time? Yeah.

Mary Cay: Yeah. Like, um, and, uh, I guess this, this, this in the 60s. Yeah. She and her husband got really into folk dancing and there was a famous book, dance teacher. Um, Dick Crum. Yeah.

Scott: I wrote a little bit about him and my Chapter Two.

Mary Cay: Yeah, that's right. I remember that seeing that reference. So Dick Crum was from Minnesota. So, um, I think he helped get folk dancing going there. And, um, and Phyllis wanted to start a kids group and, you know, invited all those little Croatians girls and they invited me to be part of it. And, and, um, you know, we would perform at the festival of nations in St. Paul and at the, at the state fair. And it was a big deal for a little nine-year-old, you know, from a little small town Minnesota, and, and yeah, it's really cool. And we had costumes and one year we were going to perform for Christmas in the Croatian Brotherhood Hall. And we made these, we had our costumes, but then we made these like Christmas trees that we tied around. [laughs] And then we decorated them and they were kind of hanging in front of us cone hats. And then the local news station came and was filming us. And we were dancing. We were dancing and singing and, and my cone hat went like this and I was poking them. And I kept going like this. I'll never forget that ... I mean I was like nine years old, you know,

Scott: That's fun! My next thing when you, when you talked about your time in Yugoslavia before, I've heard a lot about like, especially the island camp you went to and some of your field work, but you had mentioned of singing in a Byzantine choir, which I, it really sparked my interest. Can you tell me, I think you just mentioned it, like in a sentence or two, can you tell me a little more about how you got connected with that and some of the things that you did?

Mary Cay:

Oh, when I moved to Belgrade, I was working, um, with, uh, ethnomusicologist, Radmila Petrović at the musikologi Institute at the Serb academy of science and art sort of academia Nauke udmenosti science and and art. Yeah. And, um, and another professor who worked in that Institute, his name was Dmitri Stefanović. He had a Byzantine choir and he had done his doctorate at Oxford. He spoke very fluent English. Anyway, he recruited me, he said, come sing with us. And, um, he was lovely, lovely person. And we just did all this kind of early Byzantine chant. And we would go around and sing in ancient monasteries all over Serbia. So it was like my ticket to being able to visit these monasteries in like the best way to sing in them.

Scott: Yeah. Yeah. It was. Um, when you say Byzantine, you know, I know the history, but did you all sing in Serbian is a very, is the Serbian Orthodox liturgy very similar?

Mary Cay: I sang in Old Church Slavonic.

Scott: Yeah okay. Okay.

Mary Cay: Yeah. Most of the texts were in Church Slavonic, which is not a spoken language. It's like Latin, you know, it's the Slavic version of... Uh, it's a church language.

Scott: Sure, sure. And, um, would you say you did that almost your whole time in Belgrade?

Mary Cay: And we toured, so I got, you know, we went to the Zagreb and sang there on a beautiful church and then just all over Serbia. It was a, it was a nice experience really. And, you know, there, uh, one time, a few, a bunch of years ago, I was, I was googling Dmitri's name. And I found out that this guy who teaches Russian at Middlebury College in Vermont, he was, he had a Russian choir and he was singing. Some of Dimitri's works is like, music he had gotten from Dmitri. And I'm like, and I wrote to him and I said, hi, I'm so amazed that, you know, Dmitri Stefanović and how did you get his music? And he wrote back and he goes, don't you remember? We were Fulbrighters the same year? I didn't remember. He was, uh, and he was there to study, I think Byzantine art.

Scott: Okay. Was he around? Was he in the choir the same time as you were?

Mary Cay: No. No. Okay. Okay. I think he was in Serbia, the year I was in Croatia, we would have only met at the initial Fulbrighter meetings.

Scott: Which is probably short.

Mary Cay: Right. But he probably saying with Dmitri that, that first year, and then the next year I came there.

Scott: I see. I see. Cool. Um, and then when you returned from the Balkans, you mentioned you worked at the Balkan Art Center. Um, you said it really wasn't what you thought it would be or something like that, but what are, what are some of the things that that center did and like, what are some of the things that you did there?

Mary Cay: You know, that center, they did research in the Balkan communities around New York, and they had a folk dancing, uh, scene every Friday night. And they, once a month, they had live music from some different culture, uh, of musicians around New York City. Um, yeah, originally when, um, they invited me to come work there. They had a project that had to do with old 78s and kind of cataloging them. And anyway, those projects never got off the ground. And mostly my work for them tended to be secretarial. I wasn't that interested. It Didn't pan out the way that I thought it was. So, but, so I left that job and I immediately got a job working for the Yugoslav News Agency at the UN, like a bilingual secretary.

Scott: Oh, I missed this part!

Mary Cay: I don't think ever talked about it.

Scott: Yeah. How, um, how long did you do that? Just what's that between Columbia?

Mary Cay: Yeah. You know, it was, um, probably a year, probably a year. And it was through the time when Tito died because whoa, I had to answer the phone all lot. And a lot of people were calling and crying on the phone about Tito dying.

Scott: Oh, wow. That's very neat. I mean, not, you know, that, you know, that's, I don't know you were working for the UN.

Mary Cay: It wasn't the UN. That's where it was located. It was the Yugoslav News Agency.

Scott: Kind of like liaison between, you know, there. Yeah. Nice, cool. Yeah. Um, and then...

Mary Cay: And then I went to graduate school at Columbia, know that I need to get, I needed to do a degree in something that will give me practical skills for a job. I really wasn't interested in becoming an academic ethnomusicologist that didn't interest me. So it was really, um, you know, and I did that program. It was a great program and I had a great job teaching full time and, um, Riverside Church had a refugee English program and loved it. And I taught in various library satellite programs around New York City. And I had a lot, there's plenty of ESL work in New York, And then I moved to Vermont, and there's not much, it's an urban career.

Scott: Sure. Awesome. Yeah. I'm not going to write about all this a lot. I just kind of want to give a sense of what your timeline was, um, and know you taught elementary music for, but where in the timeline was that.

Mary Cay: I moved here in 84 in Vermont... and Peter, I met the Amidons. Peter and Mary Alice, and they said, oh, you should be a music teacher. And I hadn't studied music ed, I studied music, but, uh, and Peter said, oh, come watch me teach. You know, and I loved what he did, you know, just using folk music in the classroom and contra dancing with kids. And, and I went, I can do that. And, um, and a job opened, there was a job opening and, you know, it's like this district with six schools. So I became this like itinerant from school to school. It's a really exhausting job, but I was young.

Scott: Yeah. And you had to eat!

Mary Cay: Yeah. I started doing that job. I did it for two years. Then I got hired at a private school for about six more years. And then I left classroom teaching went in the early nineties, went back to teaching ESL at SIT. There was some, there was a job opening and I, I was not, not very steady. Yeah. But I just did it for a while. And, but meanwhile, I started doing Village Harmony and like '90 and or '89 and started my first choir River Singers in the early 90s then. And, but it was a small thing. It was like this side thing I did, you know, mostly I was teaching. And, um, but at a certain point when I decided to give up my day job, I decided to go full-time into leading my choirs and playing for contra dances on weekends. So, and I had started, uh, the choir in Massachusetts as well. And so I kind of, it was this big leap of faith. Like, can I support myself being, you know, I, a musician on the weekends. And uh, oh. And I also did, uh, I worked as an artist in residence in schools quite a bit. And back Leslie's daughter. The elementary school that they went to. Yeah. You know, and there is a beautiful video of that school. I think Leslie mentioned it that maybe I'll send you this copy of the DVD because this one Claire Oglesbee who ran this little two room school house was a visionary. And she, every year her class took on another culture. I mean, took on you, the classroom became that other culture. And this particular year that these filmmakers studied her classroom there, they were studying India. And then, and you'll see me in this film in two different ways. I bring my ESL students to, to meet with these little kids and sing with them because I had this whole repertoire of songs I did with these kids. Cause I worked with them every spring for a month, creating a concert and doing a big concert with dancing and singing. And I had so much support from Claire. She was wonderful. And, and

so Leslie's daughter, Claire was... she's in this film. And she she's very memorable in the film because she wants to play Gandhi and the boys are aggressive and they don't even listen to her. And she starts crying and she's like first grade, she's like six years old and big Claire, the teacher, she used moments like this so beautifully for conflict resolution. And she just sits down with the all these six years old, six year olds and they do conflict resolution, you know? And she, you it's all on this film. So yeah, it's, it's a beautiful film and it's a really inspiring film, you know, especially if you're into peacebuilding, cross-cultural communication, all that stuff. This, this film has it all in it. And I feel really lucky that I got to be part of the whole thing, like the music part and the ESL part and just, it was magical. And, um, and, uh, like after it was all done and the film was out in the world, they did, uh, they did it, um, like an Academy Awards and they rented a limousine and they, uh, they, um, all the kids met at the school and they got shuttled to the church in the limo. And so they all got to get out of a limo and go into the church and then they gave all these prizes out, you know, and I got this prize for the best soundtrack.

Scott: Cool!

Mary Cay: Most of the soundtrack that you hear, if you hear singing happening, uh,

Scott: Your instruction! This just sounds like an amazing, inspiring teacher for sure

Mary Cay: Yeah. If you send me your address, I'll send you that DVD and you come, I think it'll be very inspiring for you as you train teachers.

[interview break]

Scott: So you went to Sarajevo. Was this when you were a student or when you were doing Village Harmony?

Mary Cay: It was when I was doing research to start Village Harmony in Bosnia, I went over in 2005 and I, I had various leads from people. People to contact in terms of finding teachers to teach at this camp. And I was really committed to, um, number one, having someone from Pontanima come. I was really committed to having someone come and teach village styles. And, um, so I knew about this ethno choir at the university in Sarajevo that was called ethno ambient or something. No, I can't remember exactly what it's called. And, um, one of the leaders of it was this professor, Tamara Karača Beljak, and she's very nice. And she introduced me to all her graduate students and she asked me to tell them about my life and what I did. And she sort of presented me as someone who is an ethnomusicologist, but shows to use ethnomusicology in a different way than just an academic way. And, um, so she asked me to talk about the work I do in schools and my choirs and this camp and all these things and the students all asked questions. And, and anyway, that that's how, um, so for those first two camps in '06 and '08, I used the other teacher who led that ethno choir Branka Vidović. And, um, but then when I went back, 10 years later, Branka would have been quite old at that point. And I decided I wanted a couple of the young women who sing in the choir. So I again met with her and her students. And she did that same kind of thing where, you know, have Mary Cay tell you about, you know, your life. And, um, and I wanna, I want you all to like, broaden your horizons about, what's possible to do with ethnomusicology, you know, that it's not just collecting academic work and analyzing it, but you

can use it in these kind of peacebuilding ways, you know? So she, um, and that's when I met Zorana and Lejla and she recommended them to me and yeah. So then they came and taught us and they were great. Yeah,

Scott: That's really neat. I do have one more question that I did skip over. Um, the first interview, you mentioned that you returned back to Yugoslavia in 1983. Um, did that, can you tell me about that trip a little bit, or did you go just to visit friends or did you go perform or sing?

Mary Cay; Um, let me think... I think I went to Macedonia and I went to Pece Atanasovski's camp... Dance camp. And then I met my friend, Kate, who had, did I ever tell you about Kate Nation? She was a Fulbrighter with me. She lives in Pennsylvania now. Um, Kate lived in Europe a long time. She speaks a lot of languages. She's gifted with language, but she came the year after me. She came on an ethnomusicological, a Fulbright. So when I was at Belgrade, she was in Zagreb and then the next year she went to Belgrade, she kind of followed my footsteps, but we got to be really good friends. And, um, uh, so we, and she was living in Italy at that point, I think. And so we met and...no she was living in Germany. And so we met in Dubrovnik and we traveled up the coast together and we, I went back to Germany with her and, yeah, anyway, it was just kind of... Kate had been on a lot of adventures with me and we both speak the language. And, um, we just, we love being there. And she's Montenegrin... she's half Montenegrin half Italian and she's the kind of person who I swear. She just sleeps on a language book and then she wakes up speaking it. Kind of like that she speaks fluent, Italian, French, German, Croatian, and English. She's just, and, uh, so that, I think it was basically I to go to Pece Atanasovski's camp one more time. I think I'd been a couple of times in the 70s too. He was the person back in that era who was leading it, you know, folklore camps, you know, I think probably Goran got his idea to do it from him.

Scott: Yeah, I got it. Okay, cool.

Vahidin Omanović

Interview Transcript

December 22, 2021

Scott Sexton: Good afternoon. It's good to see you again. Um, I'm happy that you agreed to do this interview. I'm excited to talk with you. First, did you see the participation form? And if so, do you have any questions about it?

Vahidin Omanović: Oh, of course I did. I, I sent it to you this morning. Okay. And no, I don't have any questions. I trust you one-hundred percent.

Scott: Okay. Super, super. So the purpose of this interview is to gain insight on the stories and experiences of the career of Mary Cay as a peacebuilder and as a choral music educator, her work with Balkan choral music. I hope to gain additional perspective on the role of the choral director as a peace builder. Um, so we're gonna, uh, just examine Mary Cay's life and career. And, um, I know you have been a large influence on her and you have worked with her. So, first...in what capacity, how do you know Mary Cay Brass? Like how long have you known her and when did you meet and how did you meet? I

Vahidin: I think we met, oh my God. It's like 27 years ago. I think it was back in '99. I was participating in SIT, in Brattleboro in a program called contact. And, uh, they announced for the celebration event that we will have a very special, uh, choir. And that's where Mary Cay came and she brought her choir actually, uh, had, uh, songs from different countries. Of course, for me, as a Bosnian guy it was very interesting to hear Americans for the first time American choir, uh, singing songs from, from my country. And I was amazed like how great they were and how they were, you know, pronouncing it and singing it as if I was in the middle of, of Sanski Most (Bosnia). And then we, we met and talked and I learned that Mary Cay actually had a long history with the Balkans and with Balkan music. And then I came back to Brattleboro to study and, uh, I, you know, started to feel kind of homesick. Even though Vermont looks very much like Bosnia, but then I heard that there is, um, a Balkan dance uh, night organized in, Brattleboro And I went and there was Mary Cay, uh, playing Balkan music. And so it was very helpful for me to, to have these, uh, evenings where I could really feel at home and dance and, and sing and, uh, meet people who were, uh, into Balkan music. And, yeah, so I would say from there we, we became friends and, uh, also started to, to talk more about, you know, what was going on in Bosnia and also about my, my own path, what I wanted to do when I go back. And, um, actually even before, when I was about to, to start the Center for Peacebuilding, the, the very first donation that was made to, to us was by Mary Cay's choir. And, uh, actually I used this money to, to register and to, to establish an organization. So Mary Kay has a huge place in, uh, in our work here in Bosnia.

Scott: Wow. That's incredible. Um, so let's... let's sidetrack for a little bit. Um, tell me more about you and what you do, and maybe, um, I know you have CIM (Bosnian peacebuilding center) and when was CIM started?

Vahidin: It was started back in 2004. So right after I finished my, my school in, uh, in Brattleboro and, uh, yeah, it's, it's called Center for Peacebuilding. And basically we work on, or we work on reconciliation among people, uh, in, in Bosnia and also trying to, to work on, uh, on the, the kind of individual, but also collective healing of our society. So since 2004, we've done many projects that dealt with facing the past reconciliation healing dialogues, but also many focusing on, um, youth activism and, uh, helping the, the Bosnian youth to really take on the leadership, uh, role and, and help the, the, the society to really move on. And, um, yeah, in the last five years, we, we have a farm with people got enough opportunities, and, uh, this is an idea that should help us become self-sustainable. And, uh, now we are focusing also more on environmental issues and the, the, the, the fight for, against the climate change and trying to see how we can not only build peace and, and, um, trust people, but also how we can help and teach people to, to deal with the environment in a, in a healthy and sustainable way.? Oh, sorry. Can you hear me? Can you hear me, Scott?

Scott: Yeah. Hello? I'm here.

[pause... internet went out]

Vahidin: What I was sharing about?

Scott: CIM's work? Yes. Yes. I heard everything. I heard everything about that. So I think that just brings us to the next question I was saying. Okay. Um, I was saying that you and Mary Cay, um, successfully led, through a collaboration with Village Harmony and CIM, you led two different music camps. Can you tell me more about, um, how you guys had that idea, maybe, um, maybe the beginnings, um, of how that started?

Vahidin: Oh, I would say since we met, this was, this was a wish. And, uh, when I learned about village harmony in Mary Cay's, uh, work with Village Harmony, I really loved the, the, the idea and I, from the, from the beginning, I, I believed strongly that music is a great connector for different people. You know, not necessarily people in conflict, but also for people in conflict at music. Uh, it's a great connector and I've been using in our peace work with peace camps or with International Peace Week. I've, I've been using music, you know, on purpose with, because I realized that music was a big, big, um, healing tool. If I, if I may say, uh, in, in a peacebuilding, uh, work. So... If I remember correctly, when, when, uh, Mary and I, we met maybe in 2014 or '13, I don't remember exactly, but, uh, she proposed that she would organize, um, uh, a music camp here in Bosnia and, uh, you know, I was already, uh, for it. And, uh, by knowing how music can be a connector, we established a choir, uh, I believe it was 2000...maybe '13 or '14 that we called, uh, Harmonija. And, uh, we with intention to, to be interreligious and international choir, meaning that we would have, uh, singers from different ethnic and religious background, but also that our repertoire would be also, um, in, uh, how to say, um, that we would sing songs from different traditions, different cultures, different countries. And, um, so it, by, by this time, um, I met Mary Cay and then she, she proposed, she would do music camp. And of course I was so happy and so eager actually to, to bring her because I wanted also to show to the Bosnians that there are, um, people around the globe who actually love our music. And, uh, I knew that for the Bosnians, it would be, you know, a big thing to see American, uh, choir singing Bosnian or Balkan songs. And then, uh, with the first, uh, music camp that we, that had... Mary Cay also,

she wanted, so that participants would, uh, uh, do something around peacebuilding work. So we did several workshops if I remember correctly. And, uh, the feedback was really good from the participants. And then when the second, uh, music camp happened, uh, that, that became kind of part of the, uh, a normal part of the program. You know, there was nothing, uh, new about it, but again, the, the reactions of the participants were really good. And, uh, it was, for me was also very important that, uh, participants understand, you know, our context and for Mary Kay, because she lived here before the war, and she, she knows, uh, big deal about what happened during the war here. So she was also, she wanted that participants understand the, the, the, the heaviness, but also the beauty, the challenges, the difficulties, but of, you know, both like the positive and the negative sides of, of how life is, um, is being lived here. So I would say it was, um, we also had Bosnian participants with the choir, which really added to the, uh, group dynamic. And then with the, the homestays, uh, participants had even more chance to really be on their own with the local culture, which, you know, based on the feedback that we got from, uh, both and, and the American group, you know, this was the best fit, you know, and I mean, we knew we kind of, that's why we planned, but still, I think it, uh, it was beyond our expectations, uh, how people reacted to, to this kind of experience. Yes. And then, uh, for Bosnian learning American songs from different, uh, parts of United States or different parts of, uh, different cultures within the United States was also very, I would say eye-opening for the Bosnian participants, because they always, you know, they, they, we know what we know about United States is what we see Hollywood movies and this was totally, uh, different, uh, picture that we got from the USA.

Scott: Yeah. What a wonderful cultural exchange! So what, you know, you talked a little bit about the camps. What are your favorite, uh, memories and experiences with Mary Cay? I know you've known her for a long time and you probably have so many, do you have any memories or experiences that just really stick out... Any quick stories you can tell me that were just like "wow" moments for you?

Vahidin: Uh, well, the first time when, uh, when I watched Mary Cay with her choir the first time, you know, I didn't have, like... I've heard, they were singing Balkan music, but I'm like, you know, okay, whatever. People try to sing many things, but when Mary Cay showed up with her harmonica, with her accordion and she was standing there and she was like, okay, so now... "dah, dah, dah". And they started to sing. I was like, what the f***! They were really good. And this was, oh my God, this, yeah, you don't have to show this to anyone! [Both laugh]. But that was, that was the moment when I'm like, oh my God, they were so good. And they really, they sounded like Bosnians, you know, and the energy, you know, sometimes you also have people, they sound like natives, but the energy is missing. But every time when, when I heard her choir at SIT, but then she also invited me several concerts that she had in, um, what was the name... Something, I forgot the name mm-hmm. Uh, but this was a place where she would have her Christmas, uh, concerts and, uh, spring concerts. And I remember going there and, you know, the, the Georgian songs for beautiful American songs, beautiful, you know, Arab songs were beautiful, but then when they sang Bosnian songs, I was just amazed. It was really like, oh my God. So yeah, this is, this is one then, uh, I mean, there's so many stories... Yeah. She, she also, she came with, uh, with her choir to perform in, I believe it was Amherst. And, um, you know, I was probably the only Bosnian there and I had to give a speech and, uh, I think they, they sang before the speech. And I remember thinking, you know, I was so proud, uh, to be the only

Bosnian there, or to be Bosnian there after they sang Bosnian music so beautifully. And, you know, people reacted to it in a, in an amazing way. So it was really, I felt that Mary Cay was building home for me personally. So like, this is, this is the, the, the memory I have also another memory is when, um, we met, I think it was after her father died. We met, uh, few days later and I was very humbled to be with her at this time to, to kind of, you know, I dunno if I can say, you know, to help her go through it, but definitely it was a beautiful, beautiful, uh, moment to be together and to listen to, to the stories of, of her parents and, uh, yeah, to just be there and to, to share her soul, I would say with her, and then in Bosnia, I mean, there's so many... There's so many stories about Bosnia, you know, from, uh, from the, the food we ate from. Uh, I dunno when we met in, in Sarajevo before the first music camp happened, we met in Sarajevo she came and I remember, um, meeting her in a, in old town in Sarajevo was like meeting somebody, you know, a family member. So, and then this is what I generally, uh, feel when I think of Mary Cay. It's really, it's like my family member who lives in Vermont.

Scott: Of course. Yeah. Awesome.

Vahidin: I mean, we never went clubbing or like, so... [laughs]

Scott: [laughs] That's funny! Um, really just one more question, because, uh, you talked about her influencing your life already, but my last question is this, um, how do you think that Mary Cay has contributed to the world of music education and peace building?

Vahidin: Can you repeat this one more time? How did she contribute?

Scott: Yeah. Just in your thoughts and your perspective, how do you think she contribute...or has contributed to the world of music education and the world of peacebuilding?

Vahidin: Um, well, I, I don't know who, like how much she started the, the Village Harmony or when she came there or, but, uh, what she is doing in the, in music camps is a huge contribution to both, to the, to the music world and also to the peacebuilding world. And, uh, I would say to the, cross-cultural like really destroying the cross-cultural boundaries with music. You know not, uh, not only showing their cultural differences or their cultural similarities, but really, uh, destroying the boundaries and the stereotypes and the prejudices that we might have about each other. And, um, I think she is, um, that's, that's who she is, you know, the, the big peacebuilder in her heart, the big musician. And, uh, this combination for me is like, wherever she goes, she leaves traces like this, am I being too abstract?

Scott: No, no, this is great!

Vahidin: Okay. I'm smart. Right?

Scott: Of course you are!

Vahidin: [both laugh] you know, when, uh, I think it was the second music camp in Bosnia and, uh, she, uh, she taught us the "Ukuthu;a" song, like in Sanski Most with our choir, I try to, to, to have some African music also. And, but the, the, the choir leader didn't feel comfortable because

it's a different language and all of this blah, blah, blah... And, uh, Mary Cay taught us this song. That is so powerful. That is so it's like what we would say here, blood boiling, when you hear it, it's like, oh my God, it's, it's almost like it's divine, you know? And, um, so another impact that Mary Cay, uh, did with our choir was that she really encouraged our choir leader to do songs from different cultures, you know, with different languages with, um, before the first music camp it was a big struggle between, you know, uh, the, the, the leadership of the choir, because that's why we established the choir. So we would have international and interreligious. And then after the first, uh, music camp that Mary Cay had with us here was the really opening this door. And our choir leader then realized, okay, it's not, you know, big deal. I can do it. Or I dunno, what was the reason why she didn't feel comfortable? It's not that she didn't like songs, or I think it's more about, you know, language barriers... So this was a big, big, big impact, uh, on the, on the choir leader from our side, which I'm so grateful for today.

Scott: Yeah. Super, thank you. This has all been great information. Um, before we go, do you have anything else that you would like to add?

Vahidin: I mean, there's so many things like I'm trying to, to say something that will be helpful for your paper. But also so that whoever reads the paper will really understand how, how Mary Cay for me is like, uh, really God-sent angel to connect people with music and singing. Okay. So I'll conclude with this.

Scott: Thank you, Vahidin! This is all great stuff. So, um, thank you for letting me know about your part of the story.

Vahidin: Yeah. Well, thank you. Thank you for doing this. It's really great. I really appreciate that you are doing this biography. Yeah, because I think she, she deserves much, much more.

Scott: Oh, for sure.

Vahidin: But this is gonna be great to have. Well thank you!