

(re)Sounding

Feb 1 - May 25, 2020
Bennington Museum



Tiffany Family, Safford Street, Bennington, Vermont.
Photographer unknown, ca. 1885 (altered 2020).

(re)Sounding

Created by ----- **Seven Count**
(Angus McCullough
Jake Nussbaum
Adam Tinkle)

In collaboration with ----- **Jamie Franklin**
Callie Raspuzzi

Compositions by ----- **Laura Cetilia**
Kristen Gallerneaux
Seven Count
Molly Herron

Exhibition opening ----- **February 1st, 3-4:30pm**

Live performance (free) ----- **May 23rd, 2pm**

Exhibition closing ----- **May 25th**

Bennington Museum
75 Main Street
Bennington, Vermont

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Introduction ----- Seven Count

The three of us share a common memory from our childhoods: wandering around a museum and staring at instruments stuck inside glass cases. As youngsters, we intuitively knew that those ancient flutes, drums, and didgeridoos were meant to make sounds, potentially strange and exciting sounds. And so we shared a common dream—to hold those instruments, to play them and play with them.

(re)Sounding channels those desires through a collaborative improvisation between the Bennington Museum, musicians, scholars, and composers. Collectively, the exhibition organizers and participating musicians investigate what happens when historically significant instruments are treated as instruments rather than relics.

The process began with informal sessions in the archives, where we learned that some instruments had grown more interesting with age, others needed a little tune up, and still others had become so fragile that even touching them would threaten their integrity. One thing was clear about them all: there was something magical in their materiality and in the stories attached to them. The ways they had aged and endured (or not) had imbued their sounds with qualities we had never before heard.

(re)Sounding takes a manifold approach to sharing the excitement. First, we are making and commissioning new music with the instruments in the collection. We have composed a piece as Seven Count, and we have also invited composers Laura Cetilia, Kristen Gallerneaux, and Molly Herron to contribute their own. Second, we are presenting live improvised performances with these instruments. Improvisation is a way of being in the present with our bodies, our instruments, each other, and our environment. Presenting improvisation is a way for us to ask: what can these instruments do right now? What can they say in the moment of performance that might be different from what any composition can predict? This improvisational ethos is foundational to our entire approach to working in the Bennington Museum and collaborating with its staff.

Third, we are exhibiting the instruments in the gallery along with historical ephemera and photographs. We couldn't figure out how to let you all play them without the risk of damaging them (we know you want to, and we trust you, but rules are rules). So for us, this was the next best thing: to present the instruments with sound rather than allowing them to sit silently behind glass. Alongside them, we are also placing historic, period-accurate recordings. Like the instruments and photographs, we present these recordings as historical artifacts.

Lastly, we have written an essay and gallery guide that critically addresses the histories of these objects and the museum (you're holding it now). In the naivete of childhood, we desired only to play the instruments and invent our own stories around their origins. As adults, we have become more aware of the politics of historical museums and the importance of truth-telling, not just storytelling. It was essential for us to learn how and why this collection came to be, and to consider how it might create a sense of historical belonging for certain people while silencing that sense in others.

Each aspect of *(re)Sounding*—improvisational performance, composition, exhibition, archival research, and writing—is a filter through which we can listen to the collection and a mode through which we aspire to shift its course.

With Thanks to

Barbara George, The Estey Organ Museum

Alison Nowak and Robert Cane

Mark Mulherrin, guitarmaker

Doug C. Cox, violinmaker

Jim and Pat Ellis, the Cooperman Company

Jane Robbins Mize

Tim Rommen

Tyler Resch

Compositions in Exhibition

A Hidden Resonance ----- Laura Cetilia

Despite being the first Mexican-American woman to have composed music on these particular instruments, unearthing a sound familiar to my individual practice was surprisingly not as difficult as I had first anticipated. Somehow, my touch was able to bring about in them a ringing sympathetic to my own voice, my own story.

Discovering sonorities within the disparate medley of a dulcimer, autoharp, and one-of-a-kind tin banjocello came naturally, as if these instruments were waiting to be played together by me—collectively detuning and warping into our misfit ensemble beneath their glass coverings over many decades.

I am grateful for the trust and inspiration of the museum and curators for inviting me to coax and briefly hold onto this secret and timeless resonance—an experience that will forever reverberate within me.

About Face ----- Seven Count

Composing for the drums, fife, and cornet challenged us to reckon with the military origins of the instruments we have been playing since childhood: the drums, saxophone, and trumpet. Their historical counterparts felt familiar, though heavy with resonances of war, like some haunted versions of our most trusted tools. It was a moment of realization: we have always been in relation to legacies of militarism and white masculinity in our musical practice, beginning in school, where we learned to play music in the regimented atmosphere of groups that were organized by the same instrumentation as Civil War marching bands. In making *About Face*, we tried to stay close to all of the instruments' fraught histories, and to the ghosts and ancestors who played them before us.

Ring the Rattle ----- Kristen Gallerneaux

Ring the Rattle—the title a nod to Tenor Saw’s 1985 dancehall classic “Ring the Alarm”—is an electronic composition. Samples include nineteenth-century wood rattles, conch shells, and an Estey field organ. Using analog synthesis and Ableton Live, the embedded sonic potential of these instruments was explored at a granular level. Samples were fed into generative and time shifting filters, which transformed basic sounds into ambient soundscapes and drones. An expanse of space emerges through heavy dub echo. Rattles become the rally of handclaps and organ trills are propelled into deep bass percussion. The conch sounds off throughout as an alien voice.

Historically, the conch and rattle have lived multiple lives. Conch trumpets—once living creatures—have been used since the Bronze Age for their harmonic, amplified tones in religious ceremonies. Their spiritual properties include dispelling negative energy from a space. On plantations, they were used by slaves to announce secret late-night meetings to plan uprisings. Conch shells travelled with people to rural America from far-flung places, where their expansive resonance was useful in calling farm workers in for meals.

The origin of wood rattles—sometimes called ratchets—is unclear. While they existed for several centuries as noisemakers, in the seventeenth-century night watchmen began to use them to “raise the alarm” to trouble. In the 1880s, they were used by British police to signal for help or to indicate that a crime was in progress. Police soon adopted whistles for their longer sonic reach. During World War I, wood rattles were issued to soldiers. Unable to safely use their voice or a whistle without removing their gas masks, rattles like these were effective in signaling the threat of poisonous gas attacks.

In “Ring the Alarm,” Tenor Saw opens with the lyrics “Ring the alarm, another sound is dying.” The song itself is built on the embryonic “Stalag 17” riddim, first used by Ansel Collins and named after the Billy Wilder film.

PAGEANT

OF BENNINGTON

CLARK'S WOODS TO-NIGHT AT 8

Band Concert ON THE
GROUNDS 7:30 to 8:00

PERFORMANCES

Tomorrow -- Tuesday
Afternoon at . . 3:00

AND

Wednesday at . 8:00

SCENES REPRESENTING THE HISTORY OF BENNINGTON

from the arrival of the first settlers to
the present time, including the

BATTLE OF BENNINGTON

Reserved Seats.....50c and \$1.00
Admission Tuesday and Wednesday.....50c
Automobile Spaces.....\$5.00
Boxes\$12.00

The Pageant of History: Instruments in the Bennington Museum's Collection ----- Seven Count

For years these instruments have rested silently in the collections upstairs, displayed in glass cases among the everyday and exceptional objects of Bennington's history, and meticulously cared for by the museum staff as they creep out of tune. Like all the objects in this museum, they have been catalogued, indexed, and exhibited for what they teach of a specific—and inevitably partial—story of the past. But these instruments were not made to be preserved behind glass, and beneath their historical patina they retain a fundamental purpose: to be sounded in the present. These are magical tools, made from centuries-old materials, that can communicate across times and worlds and connect us to one another.

Cracks in the bell and snapped piano wires might appear as failures, time's inevitable decay, but they are the material reminders that history, like sound, is an embodied process. History is not observed at a distance but heard in the eardrum and felt in the bones. Museum spaces are rarely calibrated to this form of historical knowledge, and we are thankful to the Bennington Museum and its staff for collaborating with us to lift the instruments from their pedestals (at least for a moment), and then hold, strike, blow, buzz, shake, rattle, vibrate, impact, animate, harmonize, strum, bow and pluck, knock, whisper to and whistle through, resonate, nudge and nuzzle them.

The clap of the watchman's rattle, the twang of the banjo, and the thump of a bass drum are resonances which, like the objects which make them, are tethered to history. Sounding and listening are practices bound up in legacies of people, place, and power. The journeys these instruments have taken, into being and into the museum's collection, are part of those legacies. An African mbira did not magically appear in Bennington; it followed a specific geohistorical path to arrive here, one that was possible only after Columbus mistakenly landed in the Caribbean, began the colonization of the "new world," and opened the door for the creation of the transatlantic slave trade. The brass valves of a trumpet did not shape themselves to the diatonic scale; they were crafted with those specific notes in mind, amidst the European Enlightenment's desire for an ordered and universalized collection of musical scales, pitches, and tunings. What circumstances help explain how a Panamanian conch shell ended up in the hands of Bennington farmers in 1836, who then used it to call each other in from the fields?

The objects here sound out histories of war, empire, nationalism, spirituality, technological innovation, gender inequality, and colonialism. More broadly, they insist on the importance of music and collective sounding as essential practices in the making of identity, community, and history. They emerge out of a shared past that is unstable, contested, noisy, and filled with silences. *(re)Sounding* explores the ways in which these instruments can summon that shared past into *this* room, into *(this)* time.



Callie Raspuzzi, collections manager, and Adam Tinkle record the bell from the railroad engine *Hiland Hall*. Bennington Museum, December 5, 2019.

In 1875, in the wake of the Civil War and within a newly unified and traumatized nation, a group of wealthy white men formed the Bennington Historical Society. They desired to found a museum that would document and memorialize Bennington's history, and create a battle monument that would proclaim the town's importance to the nation's origin. Identifying that desire is essential to explaining how these instruments, and not others, ended up in this room.

The Historical Society's first project was to create the Bennington Monument, commemorating the 1777 Battle of Bennington and marking its significance in the Revolutionary War. After a highly contested and politicized planning process, the Historical Society's monument committee commissioned a 300-foot stone obelisk that echoed the neoclassical architecture of the nation's capital. The monument cast the battle as an essential moment in the nation's birth and framed the revolution as a mythic struggle for universal freedom from colonial rule.

In reality, this freedom was incomplete. The American revolutionaries were also fighting to protect their financial interests, particularly the profit generated by the labor of enslaved people, which the new Constitution explicitly allowed (Nicole Hannah-Jones, *The 1619 Project*). Despite *The Declaration of Independence's* claim that “all men are created equal,” people of color and women were virtually excluded from participating in the new democracy. And for the women who did have the privilege of citizenship, life’s possibilities were structured unequally along gendered lines. These truths had no place in the Historical Society’s initial work, which was to write Bennington’s history—and, by extension, America’s— as the struggle of white men divinely ordained to seek freedom, wealth, and power. The majority of instruments the Society went on to collect and preserve would, on their surface, tell a similar story.



Bennington City Band, ca. 1910. Photograph by Frederick Dunham Burt.

Four decades later, members of the Historical Society and other prominent Benningtonians organized the Bennington Historical Pageant, a day-long celebration of the settling of Bennington, and the town's role in the Revolutionary War. The Pageant was a public performance of local history enacted by townsfolk, part of a national trend that embraced theatre, music, and sound as experiential and participatory modes of knowledge production. Over the course of the day, Benningtonians reenacted battles, performed theatrical renditions of daily life in Revolutionary days, sang songs, and made merry, all in the name of history.



Bennington Historical Pageant, 1911. Photographed by Wills Thomas White.

In addition to live musical accompaniment drawing on European composers like Schubert, Liszt, and Verdi, the day's performances featured white Vermonters in period garb reenacting battles and scenes from everyday colonial life. Some, like Samuel L. Robinson, Fannie Carrier, and Maurice Rudd, played the roles of their own direct ancestors, celebrating their blood ties to the first European settlers. Others dressed in redface and impersonated Native Americans, whose history of persecution by and resistance to white settlers was in direct conflict with these Benningtonians' burgeoning sense of nationalism. It's not hard to imagine how these performances would have sounded, in particular the ways that white people in redface would have tried to sound "savage," echoing the imagination and appropriation of Native American sound-making that American soldiers had become known for during the Revolution (Vine Deloria, *Playing Indian*). Military reenactments, like the Pageant, reinforced these cultural understandings of identity and space, and linked the pioneer era, violence against Native peoples, and resistance to British rule in a grand narrative of divine conquest.

Program Excerpt:

"The lights now show a woman of the eighteenth century. She bids her man God speed, as he makes his lonely way to a forest lookout to scan the wilderness for the tell-tale camp fire of the Algonkins or Hurons. He signals back that he sees their smoke. The boy runs to the nearest settlement.

Rangers, marching through the clearing, disappear in the forest gloom. Drums, sombre, heart-wrenching, keep the step. The woman with her child, her eyes blurred, watches the soldiers passing.

The Dance Chorus exults. Men and women die—but the frontier line ever advances.”



Bennington Historical Pageant, 1911. Photographer unknown.

The Historical Pageant celebrated Bennington's role in the nation's violent origins, and many of the drums and horns exhibited here were preserved for the same reason. Some were literally used in battle, where amidst a backdrop of horse hooves, shouts, and gunfire, they boosted morale, communicated across long distances, and kept marchers in synchrony as they were commanded around the battlefield. But the same instruments, and others like them, were also used in peacetime by local bands in commemoration of the battles in which they had been used. Groups like the Bennington City Band and Farmers Cornet Band, consisting almost exclusively of white men and including many veterans, sounded nationalist and regional sentiment as they performed in town parks, bandshells, and gazebos, or as they marched down Main Street. These bands structured themselves after military regiments, even performing the same tunes they had played on the battlefield. Like the Pageant, their performances were complete with costumes and synchronized movement, articulating Bennington's place in national history by sounding it as the triumph of white men.

“As the music of the finale sounds, come the Dancers with the flags of the Thirteen Colonies. High up on the hillock, suddenly the lights show the shining figure of Columbia. At her consent, Vermont adds another flag to the group. . . . As the Stars and Stripes are borne in, the Chorus sings the National Anthem, and light floods the Battle Monument, far down the hill at the left of the audience. The lights dim. In the darkness 'Taps' is sounded, and the Pageant is over.”



Bennington Historical Pageant, 1911. Photographed by Wills Thomas White.

In 1928, the Bennington Historical Association (formerly the Historical Society) established the Bennington Museum in a former Catholic church, which is still its home today. Upon its creation, the museum issued an open call for historic objects and documents of all kinds, but that call went out to communities already invested in the Historical Society's work. Those same Benningtonians who celebrated their ancestors' roles in the town's origin would now secure their own places in the story, designating which parts of their lives would be collected, preserved, and put on display. The process was piecemeal and haphazard, resulting in an instrument collection that centered similar themes to the Historical Pageant, portraying history as the progress of white people and the sounds they made—as settlers, soldiers, empire-builders, as guardians and peacemakers, as the “rightful” inheritors to land and power, and as the keepers of history.

**AGED COWBELL
GIVEN MUSEUM**

Came from Canada with
Burgoyne's Army,
Says Legend

TAKEN AT BATTLE

Obtained by Joel Stratton, Bennington County Soldier in Revolution

Dr. P. A. Matteson has just presented to the Historical Museum an interesting old relic of the early period of the American Revolution. It is an old hand-wrought cowbell, similar to those still in use in many places. According to tradition, the bell was taken from a cow which belonged to General Burgoyne's expedition by Joel Stratton of Bennington, great-great-grandfather of Dr. Matteson. During all the

The date of its origin is not known. It is the British than likely British in origin, and its name is in reality the name of some regiments. While it is a fact of history, from its interest doubt that it was taken and treasured though in its mission of historical just

Bennington Banner,
August 22, 1930.



A drum in the Bennington Museum collection, with inscription that reads: "Owned and played by Hiram Matteson, Shaftsbury, Vt. 1799 - 1849."

Like the Bennington Historical Pageant, *(re)Sounding* treats history as a performance for the present that conceals certain truths and exaggerates others. The irony is not lost on us that, as exhibition organizers, we are creating our own account of events. In fact, Angus McCullough, one of this show's organizers, is a direct descendent of prominent Bennington businessman Trenor Park, whose grandchildren donated many of the objects in the museum's collection. All too often history is written by white men in power like Trenor Park in order to reflect their own identities and interests. Seven Count would like to avoid the same mistake, and that begins by accounting for the erasures in history that earlier generations of white people have made. We have blindspots, but we are listening for the silences in previous tellings of history.



Seven Count playing at the Bennington Museum, January 9, 2020.



Laura Cetilia playing at the Bennington Museum, January 14, 2020.

There is not a single instrument in the museum's collection belonging to the Abenaki and Mahicans, the native people who lived in this region for thousands of years before being systematically and violently displaced from their homelands. What would this place have sounded like in the long epoch before these displacements? What are the sounds of native resistance to settler-colonialism? What instruments are significant to Abenaki and Mahican histories or in their everyday life? As it currently exists, the museum's collection is unable to speak to these questions. Instead, it speaks to the disinterest of early-twentieth-century Benningtonians in asking them.

Also largely missing, with a few notable exceptions, are instruments of people of the African diaspora, whose sonic practices and traditions survived and evolved under the brutal institution of slavery and spread throughout the country, and who took up residence in Bennington both as enslaved and free people. We've located only a single instance in the museum's collection of a person of color playing music in a portrait of The Bennington Cornet Band circa 1870. Cross-referencing a Cornet Band roll call sheet from the time (which was itself rescued from a time capsule during the demolition of the old Bennington Elementary School building in the 1950s) with census records, we were able to identify the man as George Henry, a Bennington resident and a possible veteran of the Civil War. As a person of color, Henry's participation in the Cornet Band would have been highly unusual, which only makes his presence that much more remarkable (see image on page 18). But we have no further details of his story, no handwritten notes describing Henry family lore, newspaper articles depicting his role in the band, or aging tomes tracing his family ancestry. We are left to imagine the meaning that playing music held for him.

As the images exhibited here attest, public music-making in Vermont in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was not only overwhelmingly white, it was overwhelmingly male. Very few instruments in this collection would have typically been played by women, and those that were, like the museum's two square pianos, were designed for domestic use in wealthy estates. But while the instruments here tell one story about women making music, the excerpt from *the Vermont Business Directory* (1894) on the next page reveals another, that Bennington's private music teachers in the late 1800s were almost exclusively women.

Mowers and Reapers.

(See Agricultural Implements.)

Music and Musical Instruments.

Hawks Chas. A., 11 E. Main,	Bennington
SQUIRE FREDERICK N., 39 E. Main,	"
Adams Warren A., Factory Point,	Manchester
Matson Wilfred H., agent for Cluett & Sons, of Troy,	
North Pownal,	Pownal

Music Teachers.

Burt Emma Miss, (pianos and organs,) 44 School,	Bennington
Butterfield Oscar F. Mrs., (piano,) h 29 Pleasant,	"
Clark Alice Miss, (piano,) 15 Depot,	"
Goldsmith Tillie P., Miss, (piano and organ,) 83 E. Main,	"
Hall Florence Miss, (piano,) West Main,	"
Hicks Adeline H., r 59 Bennington Center,	"
Cheney Simeon P., (vocal,) r 14,	Dorset
Simonds John B., r 20,	Peru

News Dealers.

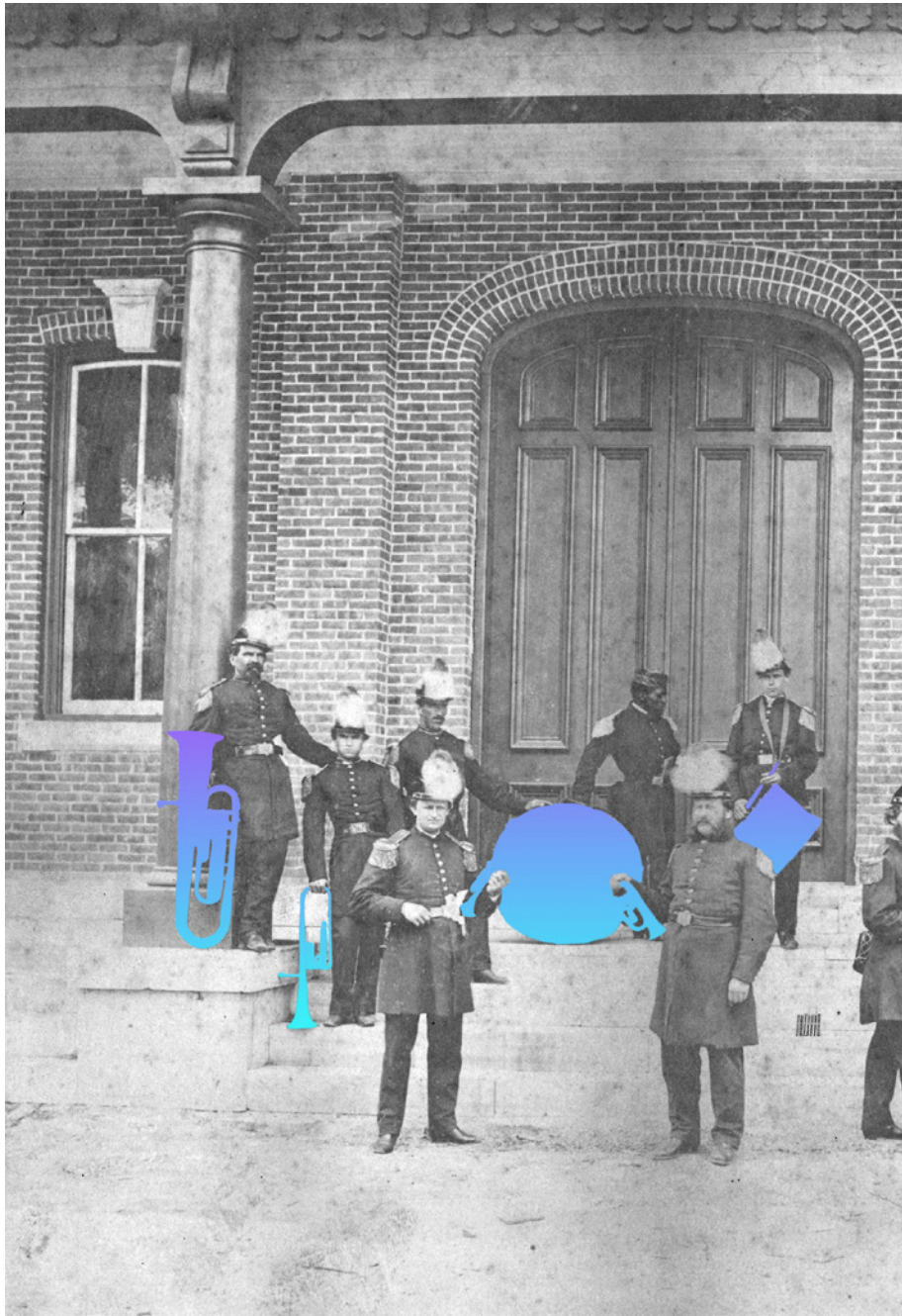
(See also Books and Stationery.)

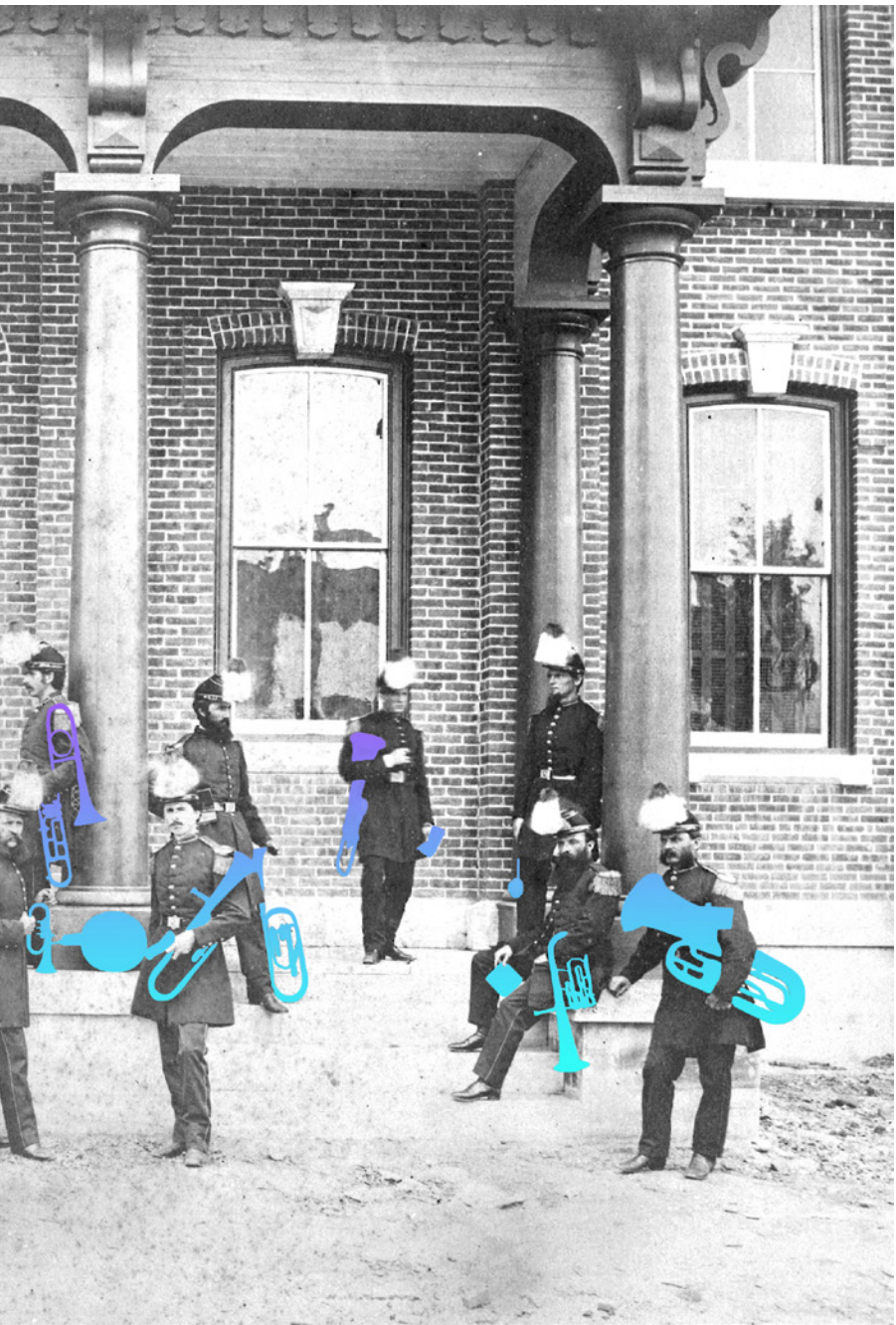
Higgins Thomas,	Arlington
Eddy Almon. 18 E. Main.	Bennington

Excerpt from the Vermont Business Directory and Gazetteer, 1894.

The museum's collection also preserves little evidence of people making music in informal settings. Folk music, which was subject to less stringent social constraints than upper-class domestic music or public marching music, is still present here in objects like the banjo and tin guitar. But we are again left to imagine the singing, dancing, and partying that they accompanied and whether or not those gatherings offered counterpoints to the buttoned-up, gendered, and racialized norms of upper-class life.

And what does it tell us that the museum has acquired no instruments dated later than the 1920s? Certainly, the museum's collecting practices have changed over the years, as has its relationship to "history." Sound and music, meanwhile, remain an ongoing, essential part of life, and the diverse communities of people who live in this region together in harmony and dissonance continue to create and recreate their world through sound. Why does this collection's timeline end where it does?



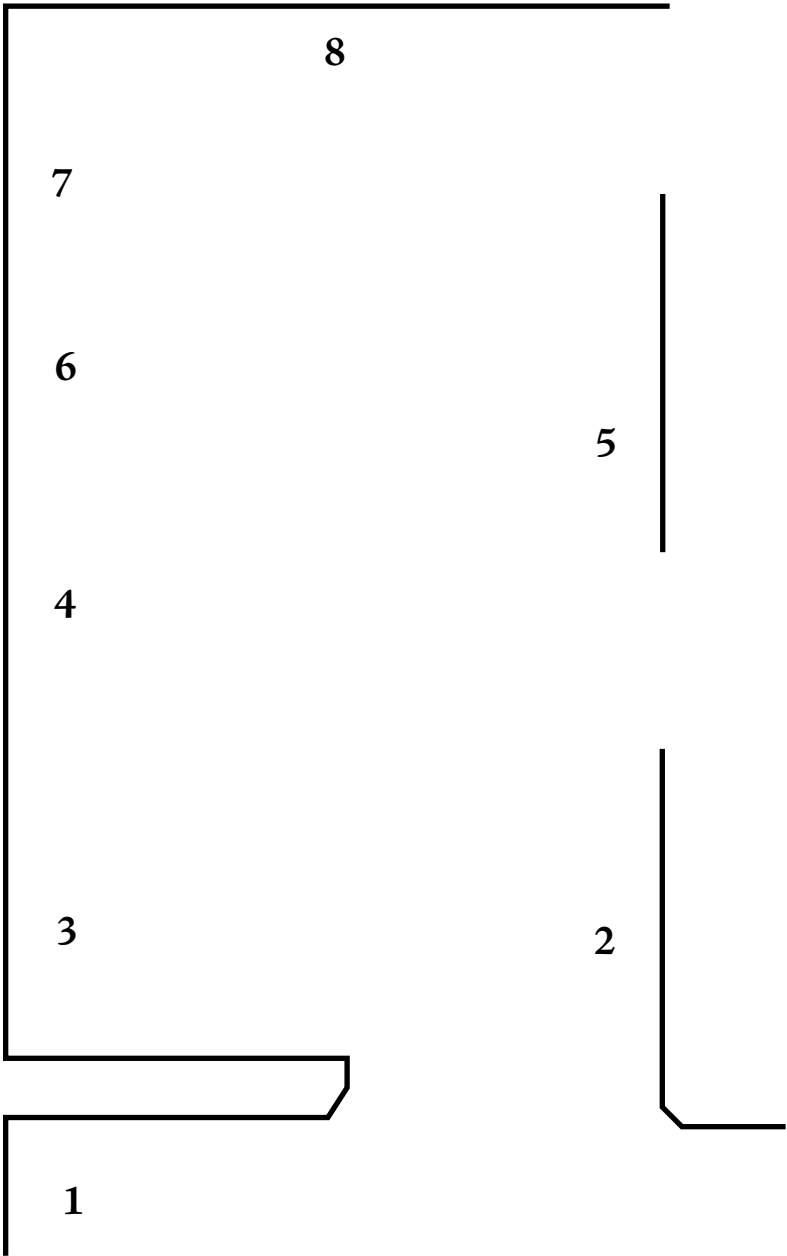


Albumen print of The Bennington Cornet Band, photographed ca. 1870.
George Henry, back row, third from left.

All these silences make the exceptions and outliers that much more powerful. A conch shell blast clues us in to the trade and travel that linked Bennington to Panama, as well as to Bennington's association with the expansion of American empire. The melody of an mbira recalls histories of enslaved people and free people of color in Bennington. A square piano invites us to sit with the dissonant gender dynamics of the nineteenth-century American family.

Any collection of instruments will suggest that history sounded a certain way. But it can also be used to sound it otherwise. *(re)Sounding* aspires to reopen the museum's intake valves, if only for a breath. New compositions, commissioned specifically for this collection, alter and contradict our understandings of how historical instruments sound. Archival research brings sonic histories to the surface that might otherwise be lost. That research is then folded back into the museum's archival record for future generations. Like breathing, the work of *(re)Sounding* is reciprocal, pulling the contemporary backwards into the past as we animate old objects with new life. The histories outlined here, we hope, do not foreclose alternative possibilities but instead create the conditions for their emergence.

Exhibition Map



Instruments and Objects on View

1

Church Bass, ca. 1810. Gift of Rev. & Mrs. Joseph H. Robinson.

Sheet Music, 1844. Bequest of John Lathrop Burdette.

Tuning Forks, 1866. Gift of Mr. Merritt B. Morgan, Rev. Isaac Jennings, D. D.

On Headphones: "Young Convert," composed by Jeremiah Ingalls, performed by the Old Sturbridge Singers. Folkways Records 32377, 1964.

For parishioners in New England's early Congregational churches, singing hymns was a crucial way of being together in sound. Such hymns are the first music in the English colonies of which there is direct documentation: The first book printed in New England was the *Bay Psalm Book* of 1640, a testament to the deep connections between sound, spirituality, and community.

Early Puritans sang their hymns *a capella*; their strict theology forbade musical notation and instrumental accompaniment. But within a few generations, their ministers began to fear that congregations were struggling to fulfill a key social function (and symbol) of social harmony and consonance: to sing sweetly in tune and in time. Gradually over the subsequent century, Puritans created a dynamic and inventive musical culture. The **sheet music** and **bass viol or church bass** here were part of that culture, and both can be understood as technological aids in the making of musical and spiritual community. Musical notation was introduced in New England in the 1720s to aid parishioners in "singing by rule" (i.e. sight-reading from a page), and by the Revolutionary Period, New England's first composers—sometimes called the "Yankee Tunesmiths"—were composing sacred music in three and four parts, often with complex harmony and counterpoint.

Around the same time, churches began to loosen earlier Puritan antipathies to instrumental music, and some congregations began to acquire "church basses" to accompany their choirs. These "yankee viols" were often constructed on the model of European cellos and contrabasses by self-taught craftsmen, who worked from surmise and rare exemplars brought over from Europe. This bass viol was used at Bennington's Old First Church from the turn of the nineteenth century—the heyday of the church bass. On headphones, listen to the Old Sturbridge Singers perform a tune from this era, "Young Convert," by Vermont composer Jeremiah Ingalls (1764-1838). This recording begins with the melody on bass viol, as Ingalls might have played it in the Congregational Church in Newbury, Vt., where he was choirmaster between 1791 and 1805.

2

Mbira, ca. 1806. Gift of Rev. and Mrs. Joseph Robinson.

Banjo, 1850-1900. Gift of Mr. Weston Hadden.

On Headphones: “Gomo Ramutare,” Matemai Mbira Group live on KEXP. Recorded Aug 3, 2009.

Little is known about the origins of this **mbira** (or *sanza*, or *kalimba*)—all names given to it by the museum after it was mistakenly identified by its donors as a “tuning fork”—though it was reportedly used during a dedication ceremony at Bennington’s Old First Church in 1806. Mbiras are native to sub-Saharan Africa, where they remain a central part of a variety of musical styles and traditions. On headphones, you can hear a modern mbira performance by Newton Cheza Chozengwa, a master musician, singer, and instrument maker from Zimbabwe, accompanied by his Matemai Mbira Group.

The appearance of an mbira in Bennington in 1806 can only be explained in relation to the transatlantic slave trade, which brought over twelve million enslaved Africans to the Western Hemisphere between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. Some enslaved people managed to smuggle their instruments aboard ship, and many continued to practice the music and song of their homelands despite violent suppression by their white owners. Could this mbira have come to North America that way? Or was it traded for by white slavers? Regardless, enslaved people ensured the survival of their culture upon arriving in America, reconstructing and performing on the instruments of their homelands, holding secret, community music-making practices like the ring shout, and innovating musical forms that hybridized their traditions with those imposed by Christian slaveholders (Johari Jabir, *Conjuring Freedom*).

The modern **banjo**, which is often imagined as a quintessentially American instrument (and typically associated with white rural folk genres), actually derives from instruments made by Caribbean slaves, who modeled them after African instruments like the kora. The banjo exhibited here was likely handmade, and, like the tin guitar and church bass, is evidence of amateur music-making in New England in the mid-nineteenth century. By that time, the banjo had achieved national popularity through its use in minstrel shows that appropriated and ridiculed black music for white audiences (Wesley Morris, *The 1619 Project*).

This banjo and mbira resound with complex histories of slavery, race, and racism in the United States. While Vermont is typically understood as an abolitionist state (and, by the 2010 U.S. census, 95.2% white), it is no less a part of those histories. In fact, it is plausible that this mbira was brought to Bennington by a legally owned slave. In 1780, David Avery took over as pastor of Bennington's Old First Church and brought a female slave with him. By this time, Vermont had abolished slavery in its constitution, but abolition here was partial and underenforced (Harvey Amani Whitfield, *The Problem of Slavery in Early Vermont*). Avery served as pastor for three years, and while a handful of parishioners left the church in protest, Avery's slaveholding remained largely unchallenged by the town despite the constitutional ban. Was the mbira left behind by the enslaved woman, or possibly by Avery? Or did it belong to one of the free people of color in Bennington, who were able to live as citizens in the state of Vermont, though denied many of the same privileges as whites?

There are scant records to support these theories, but imagining their possibility can help us understand the complexities of Vermont's role, and sometimes complicity, in American slavery. Slaves lived in Bennington, as well as free people of color, and their history is inseparable from the town's. This banjo and mbira are reminders that the history of music in Bennington, too, is inseparable from the history of enslaved people. It is therefore fitting that the mbira was used at the dedication of the Old First Church. An African instrument, used to consecrate a quintessentially white Protestant space, underscores the legacy of black music here.

3

A Hidden Resonance, 7 minutes 57 seconds. Laura Cetilia, 2020.

Tin Cello/Guitar, ca. 1800s. Gift of Roberts Post, G. A. R., Rutland.

Dulcimer, 1867. Given in memory of Harry Leroy Spicer.

Autoharp, 1894. Gift of Mr. Weston Hadden.

Archives are full of puzzles. While some objects arrive at the museum with their contexts and uses clearly understood, this **one-of-a-kind tin instrument** offers scant clues, except that it was the work of a skilled tinsmith and may have been used in the Union Church in Danby, VT. But why build a cello out of tin? For its sonic properties, or for some other reason? Was it decorative or meant to be played? It was restored by Mark Mulherrin, a North Adams-based instrument builder and artist, whose educated guesses about the instrument suggested that, because of its flat fingerboard, it would be best suited to a banjo bridge. This instrument greets us after its long, silent intermission as a found object—one which presents possibilities for re-sounding that may or may not have anything to do with the intentions of its maker or early users.

The **autoharp** and **dulcimer** appear to us now as antique oddities, but in their day they were seen as modern innovations in instrument design. With their quiet volume levels well-suited to accompanying singers, both instruments were tuned to include just a consonant subset of pitches. Each included an innovative layout of pitches quite unlike that found on the piano, with the autoharp in particular featuring buttons that “automatically” select the most frequently used chords—an arrangement designed to aid and assist in the learning and performance of popular tunes. Over the decades in storage, both instruments have slipped far out of their intended tuning. The new tunings function as markers of time, written with the slow stretching of wire and slippage of pegs.

Three women playing string instruments

Photograph by Madison Ellsworth Watson. Circa 1895.

Five men playing music on a porch

Photograph by Madison Ellsworth Watson. Circa 1895.

4

Ring the Rattle, 9 minutes, 20 seconds. Kristen Gallerneaux, 2020.

Estey Folding Organ, 1940s. On loan from Estey Museum, Brattleboro, VT.

Conch Shells, 1836 & 1840. Gifts of Tirzah J. Sweet, Mrs. Lucy Haynes Lowe.

Wood Rattles, ca. 1800s. Gifts of Hall Park McCullough, Mr. Clarence A. Daley.

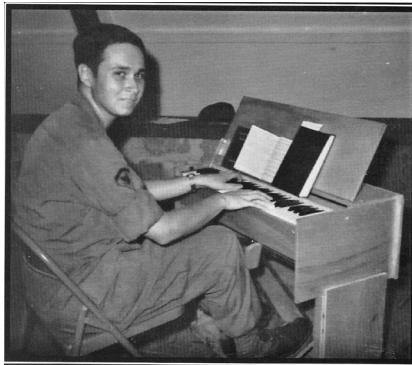
One of these **conch shells** was supposedly brought to Bennington from Panama (then a department of Colombia, which was newly independent of Spain) by Joshua Wales Monroe in 1836. It was used on the Monroe farm to call workers in for their meals, which was not entirely uncommon. From Kristen Gallerneaux's *Ring the Alarm: Conch trumpets—once living creatures—have been used since the Bronze Age for their harmonic, amplified tones in religious ceremonies. Their spiritual properties include dispelling negative energy from a space. On plantations, they were used by slaves to announce secret late-night meetings to plan uprisings. Conch shells travelled with people to rural America from far-flung places, where their expansive resonance was useful in calling farm workers in for meals.*

Jacob Estey founded the Estey Organ Company in nearby Brattleboro, Vermont, in 1863 after two decades of working in the organ business. Estey mass-produced organs with the intent of making the instrument an affordable consumer object, or, as the Estey Organ Museum states, “democratizing American music.” But the Estey Organ Co. was also a uniquely Christian enterprise, emerging from a missionary impulse to spread God’s word throughout the expanding world (Dennis G. Waring, *Manufacturing the Muse*). In the late 1880s, Estey began producing the **acclimatized folding organ** for missionary work, specifically designed to “withstand the climatic challenges of the tropics.” Just as European settlers violently colonized the “New World” under divine auspices, their American descendents, inspired by a similar faith, pushed colonial enterprises throughout Africa, Asia, South America, and the Pacific Islands. Music was an essential part of their toolkit.

This technology of sonic colonialism, the acclimatized folding organ, would later become a staple in American combat zones overseas, as in the photograph here of an American chaplain using the organ to missionize to Japanese prisoners in World War II or in the testimonial of George Barton, who reported playing it out of the back of his combat jeep in Vietnam.



Military chaplain preaches to Japanese prisoners of war at Kadena, Okinawa during WWII. Accompanist plays Estey acclimatized organ. *ROS Quarterly*, 2018.



George Barton, playing a similar folding organ while on deployment in Vietnam. *Organist's Association Facebook group*, March 29, 2019.

The appearance of Vermont's Estey organs in missionary and military contexts around the world not only indexes the expansion of American empire but also the collusion of Christian ideology with American militarism, a process which was heard as much as it was seen and felt.

Rattles like these were also a tool in military encampments, used as alarms for night watchmen and, though they are small in size, produce extremely loud noises. Each handle attaches to a small gear, which interacts with a flexible wooden tongue. As the rattle is swung around, the tongue is flexed and then slaps against the next gear face, causing a loud, repetitive pop akin to machine-gun fire.

5

Square Piano, 1848. Gift of Mr. and Mrs. James S. Dennis.

Portrait of Francis Hart Vail, 1889-1894. Gift of Mrs. John Baker.

Tiffany Family playing music, ca. 1880. Museum purchase.

This **square piano** was rumored to be the first piano in Vermont and was owned by Governor Isaac Tichenor's family in the 1850s. Its square design is intended to fit comfortably in the parlor of an upper-class home, where it could be played for company or practiced in private. The square piano—an ornate piece of functional furniture—sheds light on an era before the piano was displaced as the home's "entertainment center" by the phonograph, radio, and ultimately television. Before modern recorded media, sounds were more rigidly associated with their musical sources, and disparate kinds of music-making more rigidly associated with space and identity. While all-male brass bands performed in public, musical performances by women of privilege (outside of church) were often relegated to private spaces like the parlor, where they were seen as the entertainment. This can partially be attributed to the patriarchal notion of the time that women should only pursue music as a hobby or recreation rather than as a creative expression.

However, women of privilege were constantly challenging constraints on their music-making, undermining and breaking out of their roles as domestic entertainers (Ruth A. Solie, *Music In Other Words*). Thus, while the museum's collection contains scant evidence of women making music, what we have been able to find comes to us by an outspoken feminist photographer, Mary Robinson Sanford. Sanford was a political activist who had a cottage in Bennington, and in the late nineteenth century she traveled the Capital Region documenting landscapes and making portraits of (almost exclusively) white, wealthy women—women at home, in carriages, in the parlor, with their families, on the porch, teaching in school, and, in the case of **Frances Hart Vail, at the piano**. While Robinson's photograph gives us a limited view of the presence of music in the lives of women of privilege, her larger body of work extensively documents and centers Victorian-era women when others focused on the role of men. Sanford eventually moved to Greenwich Village in New York, where she became an active member in the Socialist Party, abandoning photography and spending her remaining years in the struggle for economic justice (Anthony Marro, "The Two Worlds of Mary Robinson Sanford").



Francis Hart Vail, photographed by Mary Robinson Sanford, 1889-1894 .

6

Albumen print of Bennington Cornet Band

Photographer unknown. Posed on the steps of the Bennington Courthouse on South Street. Ca. 1870.

Second Regimental Band in Bennington

Photographer unknown. June 15, 1861.

Second Vermont Regimental Band at Camp Griffin

Photograph by George H. Houghton. Dec. 11, 1861.

East Arlington Cornet Band

Photograph by D.L. Bulkley. May 30, 1911.

Knights of Columbus Band

Photograph by Frederick Dunham Burt. Ca. 1910.

Hunters' Rest

Photograph by Wills Thomas White. Cardboard cutout of police officer on left. Ca. 1910.

Flint-lock Musket, ca. 1755. Loaned by the Richards Kellogg Estate.

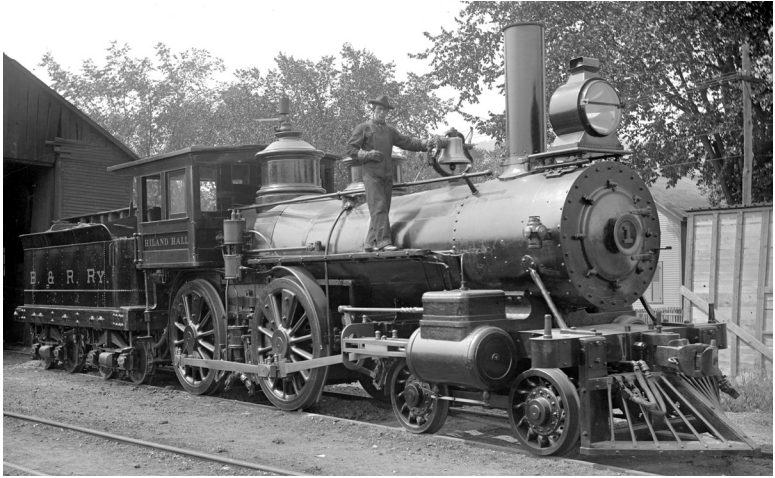
Train Bell, 1848. Gift of Vera Bull Hull.

On Headphones: “The Liberty Bell March,” composed by John Philips Sousa, performed by the New York Military Band and released on Edison Blue Amberol cylinder, 1917.

Bells and guns were among the first instruments of settler-colonialism. They were essential tools in the violent dispossession of land from native peoples, and sonic technologies of enforcement and regulation. Early settler accounts suggest that gunfire, arriving with the colonists, would have been the loudest man-made sound ever heard in the region. In addition to their capacity to do physical harm, the report of guns was used to cause terror, issue warning signals across great distances, and maintain dominion over newly stolen lands. Within established European settlements, the tolling of church bells called residents in for service and issued town-wide warnings, demarcating territories of safety and “Christian civility.” If you were in earshot of the bell, you were safe, protected from the imagined “savage wilderness” of what would later be called New England (Richard Cullen Rath, *How Early America Sounded*).

Centuries later, in the mid-1800s, similar tactics of sonic displacement helped expand settlers' control of the American West through the railway system. The sounds of bells, steam engines, whistles, and the din of rifles fired from moving trains at grazing buffalo were sonic trademarks of westward expansion (Rebecca Solnit, *River of Shadows*). Leading the train, the locomotive bell proclaimed “progress,” unification, and regimentation. Trains were a crucial tool for leveraging violence in the industrial push to connect the two coasts. They cut across native boundaries with straight lines and armed escorts, drawing a map of a new, interconnected nation with the relentless force of iron and steam.

This particular **bell** is from a small part of that system, used on the first locomotive on the Bennington-Rutland railroad, which was established in large part by Trenor Park. He named the engine that carried this bell the *Hiland Hall*, after his father-in-law, a former governor and U.S. Representative of Vermont. Park, who moved to Bennington in 1864, owned a controlling interest in the Panama Railroad company, which he sold for a fortune during the construction of the Panama Canal. The Canal and railroad would secure the U.S.'s place in international trade and generate massive



Engineer polishing the bell on *Hiland Hall*. Photographed by Wills Thomas White, ca. 1899.

amounts of revenue, literally opening the channels for the expansion of American empire. Park died in 1882 in Aspinwall, Panama, while traveling from North Bennington to his townhouse in San Francisco. Two generations later, his descendents contributed many of the family's possessions to the Bennington Museum's collection.

Trains ushered in a new kind of time, literally referred to as Railway Time, which kept the pace of trade and progress, instituting time zones that unified the land between stations. The bell that tolled at noon in the Bennington station was understood to be linked to many others tolling across the country. Rather than the specific, localized safety offered by the church bell, a train bell resonated with one's national belonging (or lack thereof). Railway Time was imposed without regard to other ways of knowing time, enforcing a new kind of standardization that is now so ubiquitous it is almost invisible. Globe-spanning systems like GPS, stock markets, and the Internet are its modern offspring; the device in your pocket tells time the way it does because of trains. Other ways of marking time, in rhythm with the land, sun, moon and stars, fall outside the boundaries of this externally-imposed concept of "official" time. The standardization of musical tuning across all twelve musical keys, known as Equal Temperament, marks a similar kind of shift, that can be observed in the construction of musical instruments like trumpets and saxophones, which themselves resemble industrial technology in their pistons, valves, and bells.

8

About Face, 7 minutes. Seven Count, 2020.

Captured Snare Drum, 1757. Gift of Mr. James C. Colgate.

Bass Drum, 1875. Gift of Mrs. Nellie Bentley.

"Puffer" Snare Drum and Drumsticks, 1861. Gift of Mrs. Louis Puffer.

Metal Fife, 1863. Gift of Mrs. Mabelle Beard Hayner.

Upright Cornet, 1852. Gift of Mr. Percy E. and Duane R. Bassett.

War and bloodshed have a special significance in national memory and in the memories of the people who experience it firsthand. One of the oldest instruments in the collection is this **painted snare drum**, dated 1757, and possibly captured in the French and Indian Wars. For decades, the museum presented the drum as having been used in the Battle of Bennington in the Revolutionary War, but that story recently crumbled under scrutiny from museum staff. Yet this origination myth holds power, and might be why the drum has survived for so long.

Beside it is **Norman Puffer's snare drum**, which he used during his service in the Civil War. Puffer enlisted in 1859 at age eleven, joining the regimental band of the Second Vermont Infantry. He tried to send his drum home with a friend after he arrived on the front, but his friend got drunk and misplaced it. Thirty-five years later in 1898, long after his second tour of duty, Puffer miraculously came across an article in a Massachusetts paper advertising the drum. He immediately wrote to the *North Adams Review*: "I desire very much to get this drum now, not for its intrinsic value or because I have any use for it, other than as a relic, for I have long since given up drumming..." For Puffer, the drum's memorial significance overtook its capacity to make sound. Perhaps it was the last material link connecting him to his experience in the war.

This **silver fife** also returned from the Civil War in the possession of Warren Beard, who was gifted it upon his discharge from Company H of the 16th Regiment of Volunteers on August 10th, 1863. Beard served in the horrifically bloody Battle of Gettysburg, in which 23,000 Union and Confederate soldiers died. Like Puffer to his drum, Beard must have been particularly attached to this small but powerful noisemaker, whose shrill blasts likely carried throughout the battlefield, connecting its player to comrades both living and dead.

Echoes of that conflict continue to sound through the music of military-style wind and percussion bands. The ancestors of today's marching and school bands formed in huge numbers in communities large and small, across the U.S. after the Civil War. Among them was the Sunderland Cornet Band, whose **bass drum** is on display here. Puffer and Beard were among the Union veterans who went on to play in Bennington's local cornet bands, bridging their wartime experience with civilian life. These bands, in their marching style, matching uniforms, hierarchical organization, and musical repertoire, projected a militaristic sense of order and uniformity into public space. They evolved into the tightly coordinated party bands of the early twentieth century, who substituted military uniforms for matching suits and marching drums for a trap kit. In turn, those bands became the ancestors of the white-gloved ballroom big bands of the twenties and thirties, the predecessors of swing. Across this evolution, the style and substance of ensemble performance carries with it vestiges of military uniformity and discipline, projecting a public masculinity that is erect, obedient, and anonymous.

Brass instruments, like this **cornet**, are emblematic of technological innovation in the mid-1800s, and of changes in how music was made and performed. Metallurgy and metal-shaping techniques were rapidly improving in the 1800s, allowing for thinner walls, tighter bends, and more precise valves. In the earlier half of the century, band instruments like this cornet had their bells pointed to the sky. But, by the beginning of the 1900s, a forward facing bell became the norm, signaling the brass instrument's transition from a military to a popular context. It is easier to hear oneself play an upright instrument, and the angle of the bell seems well-suited to project sound in all directions during a march or on the battlefield. A forward-facing bell is built to project towards an audience in front of the band. Compare the bells in the images of the Vermont 2nd Regimental Band with the Bennington City Band a decade later.

Portrait of Nelson Wilcox

Age 14. Drummer boy, Company A, 4th Vt. Volunteers.

Photographer unknown. Circa 1861-1865.

Participant Biographies

Cellist and electronic musician **Laura Cetilia** is a performer, composer, educator, and presenter. A daughter of mixed heritage, she is at home with in-betweenness. As a composer, her music has been described as “unorthodox loveliness” by the *Boston Globe* and her debut solo album was hailed as “alternately penetrating and atmospheric” in *Sequenza 21*. *The Grove Dictionary of American Music* describes her electroacoustic duo Mem1 as a “complex cybernetic entity” that “understands its music as a feedback loop between the past and present.” Mem1 has held artist residencies and toured extensively throughout the U.S. and Europe. In her viola/cello duo, Suna No Onna, Cetilia has worked closely with and premiered works by composers André Cormier, Jürg Frey, and Antoine Beuger, among others.

As a product of the now-dwindling public school music program, Laura believes in the right to accessible music education and is a Resident Musician at Community MusicWorks, a non-profit organization that provides free after-school music education programs for children in urban neighborhoods of Providence, R.I. There, she teaches cello, is a co-director of the media lab, and is the curator of the Ars Subtilior experimental music series. She is also a proud mother of one.

Seven Count is Jake Nussbaum, Angus McCullough, and Adam Tinkle. Our collaboration began with explorations in collectively improvised music and since 2016 has expanded its scope to include gallery installations, publications, a mobile pirate radio station, and one sonic tea ceremony. We weave tapestries of acoustic sound and sampled recordings, creating a conversation between our musical voices and our music libraries. To pay tribute to the masters, to seek deeper understanding of the music that inspires our search, and to reckon with the familiar contemporary experience of being bombarded by disparate media shards, we cast a spell of sympathetic magic over the yawning archive, folding threads of other times and places into the present moment.

Kristen Gallerneaux is an artist, curator, and sonic researcher holding a PhD in Art Practice & Media History from UC San Diego, an MS in Folklore, and an MFA in Art. She is also the Curator of Communication and Information Technology at The Henry Ford Museum in Detroit, Michigan, where she continues to build upon one of the largest historic technology collections in North America.

Gallerneaux has most recently presented her multimedia lecture performances at Whitechapel Gallery, Unsound Krakow, Moogfest, and Pop Kultur festivals. She is a regular contributor to *The Wire*, *The Quietus*, and *ARTnews*. She has published on wide-ranging topics like mathematics in midcentury design, the visual history of telepathy research, the world's first mousepad, and car audio bass battles in Miami. Her book, *High Static, Dead Lines*, is available via Strange Attractor Press and distributed by MIT Press in the US.

Composer **Molly Herron** “thinks deeply about motion, energy, and the physics of sound” (NPR). Whether writing for baroque strings, flower pots, or newly designed instruments, her work achieves “a wonderful consideration of counterpoint and sound in time” (*Seen and Heard International*).

Herron's upcoming projects include an album of new works for viola da gamba ensemble and a large scale project on the climate crisis for the ensemble Contemporaneous. Her work has been featured at the MATA Festival, American Composers Orchestra's SONiC Festival, Fast Forward Austin, Berlin Film Festival, and Sundance Film Festival.

She has written for Sō Percussion, The Brooklyn Youth Chorus, Contemporaneous, Quince Contemporary Vocal Ensemble, and the String Orchestra of Brooklyn, among many others. Her work has been supported by MATA, The New York Foundation for the Arts, The Brooklyn Arts Council, the Copland Fund, Avaloch Farm New Music, and Exploring the Metropolis.

Herron received her Masters of Music degree in 2012 from The Steinhardt School at New York University. She is currently a Taplin Fellow in composition at Princeton University.

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Three women playing string instruments.
Photographed by Madison Ellsworth Watson, 1892 (altered 2020).

