

Biography

Steven Feld

Steven Feld is an anthropologist, filmmaker, musician, and sound artist, and Distinguished Professor of Anthropology Emeritus at the University of New Mexico. Recipient of a John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation Fellowship in 1991, he was elected a fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1994, and in 2003 received a John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship. His research has also been supported by the National Science Foundation, the National Endowments for the Humanities and for the Arts, the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and other foundations.

Feld's academic research principally concerns the anthropology of sound, a term he coined in 1972 to extend the anthropology of music and language into a more critical sensory and aesthetic focus on voice and poetics, all-species sound relations, media and technologies, and environmental and ecological acoustics. From 1975-2000 he pursued anthropology of sound studies in the Bosavi rainforest region in Papua New Guinea, researching relations of environmental ambient sounds, bird calls, weeping, poetics, and song. This work is represented in articles, the book Sound and Sentiment, (recipient of the J.I. Staley Prize from the School of American Research), as well as the Bosavi-English-Tok Pisin Dictionary (compiled with Bambi Schieffelin and five Bosavi collaborators). It is audible on LPS and CDs like Voices of the Rainforest, Rainforest Soundwalks, and the box set retrospective Bosavi: Rainforest Music from Papua New Guinea, which Time Out New York called "anthropology that is truly wonderful to behold."

Based on this research Feld expanded the framework of the anthropology of sound in the early 1990's to acoustemology, a term coined from at the conjunction of acoustics and epistemology to refer to sound as a way of knowing. The concept circulates widely following the "Waterfalls of Song" essay he contributed to Senses of Place, a 1993 SAR Advanced Seminar volume he organized and co-edited with Keith Basso. For his work in anthropology of sound and acoustemology Feld was awarded the Koizumi Fumio Prize in Japan and *Doctor honoris causa* degrees by the University of Eastern Finland and the University of Athens.

From 1987 Feld took up a second research project on the global anthropology of "world music," researching equity, representation, ethics, and power disparities between indigenous musicians and in the world of rock stars and the music industry. His essays "Notes on World Beat," "From Schizophonia to Schizmogogenesis," "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music," and "pygmy POP: A Genealogy of Schizophonic Mimesis," have been widely circulated, anthologized, and translated. This "world music" work is also featured in Music Grooves, his 1994 collection of essays and dialogues with Charles Keil (recipient of the 1995 Chicago Folklore Prize).

Since 2000 Feld has engaged a third research project, on the history and culture of bells, with European research and recording in France, Finland, Norway, Greece, Italy, and Denmark, and additional research in Japan, Ghana, and Togo. This work on animal, church, carnival, and musical bells is represented in multimedia works like the CD/DVD series The Time of Bells; The New York Times "Best of Season" CD Bells and Winter Festivals of Greek Macedonia; collaboration with Nicola Scaldaferrri for the CD-book Santi, Animal e Suoni; and the book-CD-DVD Skyros Carnival with photographer Dick Blau and Greek anthropologists Panos Panopoulos and Agapi Amanatidas.

Feld's fourth major project, since 2004, studies urban diasporic acoustemology and jazz history in Accra, Ghana, focusing on Ghanaba, the man who introduced the African "talking drum" to African American jazz drummers in the 1950s; on Accra Trane Station, a group that plays music inspired by John Coltrane on African instruments; and Por Por, a jazz-inspired music for honking squeeze-bulb car horns performed by union bus and truck drivers. This work is presented in ten CDs, five feature-length films, and the 2012 book, Jazz Cosmpolitanism in Accra, recipient of the 2013 Elliott Skinner Prize from the Association for Africanist Anthropology. Other highlights from the Accra project are the Smithsonian Folkways CD Por Por: Honk Horn Music from Ghana, to honor Ghana's 50th anniversary of independence in 2007, as well as performance tours in Africa, Europe, and the USA with Accra Trane Station, and their CDs Tribute to A Love Supreme, Meditations for John Coltrane, Another Blue Trane, Topographies of the Dark, Bufo Variations, Ghana Sea Blues, Afrifonica/Pyrasonix. The group's 2017 CD, Harmattan, received an honorable mention for best new jazz release by The New York City Jazz Record.

Feld's writings have been translated to French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, German, Greek, Russian, Turkish, Serbian, Chinese, and Japanese. He has lectured or performed at more than 250 universities, galleries, and museums worldwide, and has delivered numerous keynote addresses or distinguished lectures. He has also appeared on radio and TV programs in the US, Canada, Europe, Asia, and the Pacific.

In 2003 Feld founded VoxLox, a documentary sound art label; its first title was Iraqi Music in A Time of War: Rahim AlHaj in New York. Since 2004, VoxLox has released more than thirty CDs and DVDs including Feld's series The Time of Bells, as well as Suikinkutsu: A Japanese Underground Water Chime, and expanded to media book collaborations like Exposures: A White Woman in West Africa (photographs by Virginia Ryan, text by Feld), and, with Nicola Scaldaferrri and Lorenzo Ferrarini, an English edition of their 2012 Italian CD-book The Sound of the Trees: Collaborative Media Research on an Italian Festival.

Although principally associated with sound research and sound art, Feld has also worked for many years in the fields of photography and film, producing work for festivals, galleries, and museums. The Castaways Project, in collaboration with visual artist Virginia Ryan, was featured at Manchester's Whitworth Gallery and Italy's Spoleto

Festival in 2007-8. His feature-length documentary film, A Por Por Funeral for Ashirifie, won the Prix Bartók at the 2010 International Festival Jean Rouch in Paris. The entire Jazz Cosmopolitan in Accra series is distributed by Documentary Educational Resources. A 1974 student of anthropologist and filmmaker Jean Rouch, Feld also became his US translator, and a 2004 collection of his work as editor and translator is Jean Rouch: Ciné-Ethnography.

Feld retired from thirty-five years of university teaching in 2015. He taught Anthropology and Music for ten years each at the University of Texas at Austin and at the University of New Mexico, taught visual and sound communications for five years at the Annenberg School of Communications, University of Pennsylvania, and for shorter periods taught Anthropology at the University of California, Santa Cruz and New York University, and Music at Columbia University. He also taught in visiting positions in Music at the Universities of Bergen and Oslo, in Anthropology at the University of Sydney, and in both fields at the University of California, Berkeley. From 2016-2020 he was a Senior Scholar at the School for Advanced Research. In Fall 2020 he taught at the Center for Experimental Ethnography at the University of Pennsylvania and in spring 2021 through the ArTeC Chaire Internationale program at the University of Paris at Nanterre.

Feld spent 2016-2017 as a visiting artist at Skywalker Sound, collaborating with acclaimed designer Dennis Leonard to create Voices of the Rainforest in 7.1 cinema surround sound for concerts and galleries. Following a 2018 return to Bosavi in Papua New Guinea, Feld and filmmaker Jeremiah Ra Richards created a film and collaborated with Leonard to expand the 7.1 soundtrack, leading to a 2019 Voices of the Rainforest CD, BluRay and photobook collaboration. In 2020 VoxLox released the second volume in its new intermedia CD-DVD- photobook series: Cool Running: The Story of Ghana's Honk Horn Lorries and Por Por Music, a collaboration by Feld with Accra photographer and oral historian Nii Yemo Nunu and German photographer Hannah S chreckenbach.

Projects in progress for 2023 include New Voices of the Rainforest, a follow-up Bosavi film collaboration with filmmaker Jeremiah Ra Richards and anthropologist Bambi Schieffelin; Horn to Horn Honkout, a CD collaboration with the La Drivers Union Por Por Group and The Texas Horns, a blues-jazz brass band from Austin, Texas; and La recherche comme composition, a book of lectures presented in Paris, in collaboration with French anthropologists Jonathan Larcher, Dammien Mottier, and Florence Brunois.

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