

Songs of resilience: communicating climate hope in the carbon landscape

Angela Connelly¹, Jo Collinson Scott² and Joanne Tippett³

¹Manchester School of Architecture, Manchester Metropolitan University (UK), ² University of the West of Scotland (UK), ³ University of Manchester

¹angela.connelly@mmu.ac.uk, ²jo.collinson-scott@uws.ac.uk,

³joanne.tippett@manchester.ac.uk

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Popular music has an impact on carbon emissions and, as an industry, music needs to orient itself towards more sustainable practices (Brennan et al., 2019; Mair et al. 2019). Yet popular music also has the capacity to connect to people on an emotional level; listeners often have deep emotional connections to popular music songs and music is a key part of most people's lives (e.g., Anderson, 2002). Music psychologists note the impact that listening to music has on mood regulation and improve wellbeing (e.g. Västfjäll et al., 2012). Scholars have begun to trace how climate change is conveyed through popular music noting the potential education potentials that some artists have taken to communicate climate change (e.g., Wodak 2018; Prior 2022). However, compared to the visual arts, the role of music in helping us to think through a future under a changing climate is less well-traversed despite the economist Jacques Attali arguing that "music is prophecy... It makes audible the new world that will gradually become visible" (Attali, 1977: 11). Indeed, the practice of songwriting demonstrates how the process of writing, and the impact of eventual performances, can inspire people to think differently about controversial topics (Urie et al., 2019).

This paper describes the results of a research project which co-created popular music songs with young people to their engagement with a formerly ravaged landscape. The young people worked with academics, established songwriters, and the Wildlife Trust for Lancashire, Manchester, and North Merseyside (LWT) to imagine a future for the Carbon Landscape in the context of climate change. The Carbon Landscape is a post-industrial urban landscape located in Greater Manchester (UK) that was shaped by harmful coal and peat extraction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in which restoration activities are now taking place. Through co-creating songs, the project explored young people's perceptions of past, present, and future climate change. The project also provided the opportunity for young people to connect with different generations in their local communities and the Carbon Landscape partnership to talk about climate change through the medium of music.

Two songs and accompanying videos resulted from the project, which will be shown during the presentation. 'The Undoing' reflects ecological resilience and the return of nature to a heavily scarred post-industrial landscape; it ultimately points to hope about our ability to respond to climate change with an uplifting chorus that notes that 'we are green light, entangled'. The companion song 'Traceless' has alternating lines which juxtapose feelings of anxiety about the climate against more hopeful messages about human ability to address the climate crisis: 'it is futile, we are strong; this is a home, we are gone'.

The paper is authored by an interdisciplinary research team including a musicologist and songwriter, an environmental planner, and a social scientist. We respond to the conference theme through offering songwriting as a means of 'explor[ing] the vital role of effective communication in fostering hope and driving positive action in the context of climate change'.

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