

# Musical Interlude—“The Scholar” and “Rakish Paddy” with Janice Waldron: A Reflection on Authentic Connection Through Musicking with a Friend

Gareth Dylan Smith  
Boston University (USA)



*The Scholar and Rakish Paddy* by Janice Waldron (whistle) and Gareth Dylan Smith  
(bodhrán and guitar) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ioecw7MgiIo>

This short tribute is based on a presentation I gave at the 34th MayDay Group Colloquium in Xalapa, Mexico (Smith 2023a). I was and remain profoundly grateful to be included as a panelist at this event along with colleagues Christopher Cayari, Roger Mantie, Danielle Sirek, and Evan Tobias. I know many of us in the room, perhaps most of us, had connected with Janice and/or with her work, so I felt humbled to be doing this as I certainly did not think my relationship with Janice was more special than anyone else's. Janice intentionally, lovingly, and humorously built a network of authentic connections with others and I feel fortunate to be one of the people with whom, iteratively and deliberately, she built a relationship. Hopefully what I have written mirrors in some ways others' experiences or triggers some fabulous memories of hanging and learning with someone who I think was one of the best of us. What follows is a short reflection on connection, with and through Janice Waldron. Janice inspired me to be me; which she did for a whole generation of scholars. And she did so with gusto, tremendous generosity of spirit, a smile on her face, and a huge twinkle in her eye.

I am a profound introvert, to which I imagine some readers can relate. I have a pretty hard time at parties. Growing up, it made me think that was something fundamentally flawed about me. I mean, now I'll partake of the nuts and wine, but I can't stand the small talk and shouting over music I didn't choose and to which I am constitutionally incapable of dancing. But while I dislike parties, I love conferences like the MayDay Group Colloquium, because instead of small talk we have actual conversations about really interesting stuff people have learned loads about and that they're eager to share, and they're usually equally keen to listen to me try to articulate the things I've been attempting to wrap my head around for months or years on end. (Sometimes, even better, there are no conversations—I can just listen to papers and then scuttle away to my hotel room to hide and think; which I've noticed goes over less well at parties.)

Janice was a world champion at listening and presenting, and of course I never really thanked her for either, but I'm hoping she sensed my gratitude or at the very least my joy at her repeated sincere affirmation of what I was doing. I'm optimistic she knew I was grateful, since I read like a book and have all the poker face of a delirious puppy. Janice listened, responded, and celebrated others with gusto, and she went full-send into her own projects, drawing others in as she did so. I honestly didn't really care that much about the learning and community of Irish traditional musicians and Scottish pipe band musicians that I heard Janice talk about

(Waldron 2013, Waldron and Veblen 2020), but I did love hearing Janice talk about them. And I loved that Janice loved it. Janice of course LIVED it too, with her own music making, to which I'll return shortly.

I remember attending my first sociology of music education symposium in Ireland in 2009. I was nervous and intimidated, in part because my supervisor, Lucy Green, was giving the opening keynote (see Green 2014); and because I felt I had precisely no idea what I was doing. It was at Mary Immaculate College in Limerick, and two senior scholars in the field, Janice Waldron and Ruth Wright, announced there was going to be a competition over the course of the week to produce the best limerick about sociology of music education. As a newbie—I was still about two years out from completing my doctorate—I was eager to impress and to take part. But also, limericks are kind of my love language (I have written literally thousands, on just about everything I've ever thought about). And in 2009 I was hitting my stride, so this was fortuitous and exciting. I could say with certainty that I was one of the worst sociologists in the room—something about which I remained confident 14 years later in Xalapa—but I had a feeling I was among the most committed and nimble limerick-ists there.

Fast forward four days, and I won the limericks competition. Not only did I win it, but Ruth and Janice had invented a whole new category on account of the sheer number of limericks I'd composed. I'd written nine sociology of music education poems, each diligently weaving and rhyming a slew of theoretical frameworks and notable authors together into five-line stanzas. My prize was a box of dark chocolates that upon closer inspection were more than a year out of date. Nevertheless, I was filled with pride and felt mystified that no one else seemed to understand what a massive deal this was. (I would have liked to share one or more of the limericks here, but the sticky notes on which I wrote them have been lost to the mists of time/to the recycling receptacles at Mary Immaculate College.)

Janice got it though. As did Ruth. They got *me*. Janice saw that limericks—along with the sociology that I'd butchered to create them—mattered to me. She told me through her actions that *I* mattered. Janice understood me, or she was starting to, and she was going to keep investing. This initial ISSME encounter in 2009 made me feel I could trust Janice. And we need people we can trust. At conferences like the MayDay Group Colloquium, a lot of us go out on a limb, put our edgiest or most vulnerable scholarly selves forward, and take risks. Janice had just told me through her actions—quite intentionally too—that I should feel free to

be me. Janice embodied this ethos by not taking herself or her work *too* seriously. She perfectly blended eudaimonia and hedonia—fulfilment and fun; she was here to learn and to grow and to help others do so too, and she was determined to have a good time doing it. I am convinced Janice believed this to be a moral imperative.

I encountered this mischievous mix in Janice again a few years later when she and co-conspirator Stephanie Horsley invited me to write a chapter for the *Oxford Handbook of Social Media and Music Learning* (Waldron et al. 2020). I politely declined as I had nothing at all to say on the topic, and to underline precisely why I felt they should leave me well alone, I said that all I'd be able to contribute would be a self-deprecating essay about how mortifyingly poorly I was managing social media accounts for, at the time, the International Society for Music Education, the Association for Popular Music Education, the *Journal of Popular Music Education*, and the International Symposium on the Sociology of Music Education. Janice immediately wrote back and said that sounded perfect for the book! She and Stephanie accepted the chapter for publication, including a first page comprised entirely of haiku (Smith 2020).

My favorite encounter with Janice was at her home in Amherstburg, Ontario, in summer 2022. As Janice and I chatted over copious quantities of red wine, she encouraged me to write a paper I was brewing but uncertain about, based on Parker Palmer's (1998) work about being one's authentic self as a teacher. I was reflecting on some free improvisation I'd done with students the previous semester and how the process seemed to affect them quite profoundly. It felt a bit self-indulgent and quite possibly was, but Janice assured me, just as she always modeled, that people respond to authenticity—and may be more likely to feel they can be themselves too. This in turn enables intra- and interpersonal connections that are affirming, rewarding, fulfilling, and fun. Austina Frances Lee (2023), in her doctoral dissertation, captures this phenomenon as one whereby “teachers ... approach students with an inquisitive spirit that inspires authentic interactions through which students [and junior scholars like me] express themselves in whatever way is natural for them, knowing they are seen, heard, and valued” (26–27).

So, I wrote the paper and submitted it to *TOPICS*. I was apprehensive and vulnerable, but felt safe because of the trust Janice had established with me. I'm reminded of choral conductor James Jordan's (1999) assertion that “the mortar of music [and, I would argue, much scholarship] is human trust (of self and others)

(7). I felt assured Janice would shepherd the paper through a caring and constructive review process.

A handful of months later Janice passed away and I thought about just leaving the paper, but then thought if she'd believed in it—which she'd told me she did, and that she'd thought it could be interesting and even valuable for others to read—then I figured it was worth pursuing. I waited what I hoped might be an appropriate amount of time after Janice's passing to check in with MayDay Group colleagues about this article perhaps being somewhere in the review process, and the peer feedback that landed some months later was astonishingly refreshing. The comments were challenging, affirming, and reassuring. I felt mentored, nourished, and pushed to do better. I could feel Janice's spirit in the reviewers' remarks. The paper was later published (Smith 2023b), generously and caringly nurtured to fruition by Danielle Sirek, Warren Churchill, and Matt Koperniak.

This reminded me that, despite what google scholar citations counts and all the other metrics of success in our field tell us, we are an inherently collaborative bunch. Janice knew all this about collaboration and trust. She didn't tell me explicitly; instead, she lived it and made sure we could see—and hear—her. I don't think I ever knew Janice to be *quiet*.

The deepest connection I felt with Janice came when I was at her house last summer and we made music together. We'd tried to play before, online with Roger Mantie, using Jamulus software—and it kind of worked, but was mostly sort of a disappointing curiosity. In person, we sat down in Janice's basement together and the music flowed with ease. We played for maybe an hour, with Roger also there on Janice's computer screen, and it was seamless. I grinned like a child. It was beautiful. I am gutted and grateful that was the last time I got to hang with Janice. I felt robbed when she died, but thankful that she'd shared so much and so fully while she was here.

I felt like Janice and I had just started getting to know one another; we had established an authentic connection, the kind where people “demonstrat[e] a willingness to be vulnerable as their authentic selves are exposed—and challenged—through activities of musical [or in this case also scholarly] and emotional risk-taking” (Hendricks 2021, 4). Janice reminded me that the people with whom we work and connect, and those whom we work to affect and impact, are everything that's important, really. We get to connect with them, with and through musicking and thinking and writing, but it's ultimately all about *people*.



Sociology teaches us that too, of course—as Roger Mantie (2023) eloquently articulated in his article about what we should expect from a sociology of music education.

When pandemic lockdowns hit North America in March 2020, Janice was the first person to contact me about making music together. For Janice, even a global pandemic was an opportunity to connect meaningfully with others. She sent me two sets of tunes she'd recorded on flute and whistle respectively. She wasn't that happy with either of them and said she'd send better recordings, but she never did. After Janice left us, I spent some time with the whistle recordings of "The Scholar" and "Rakish Paddy" and played guitar and bodhrán along with them, eventually recording and layering my tracks on top of her tunes; and also performing a version at the MayDay Group Colloquium in Xalapa, June 2023.

Here are two versions of Janice's "The Scholar" and "Rakish Paddy", along with me:

- [with guitar and bodhrán accompaniment](#);
- [and with just bodhrán accompaniment](#).

I rehearsed a little ahead of performing with Janice's recording at the MayDay Group Colloquium, but I found the more I tried to memorize her organic tempo fluctuations and breathing, the more annoyed with myself I became for getting distracted and missing the idiosyncrasies of her playing. I found (as is always the case) that if I just relaxed and listened intensely and responded in real time, I got closer to Janice and we gelled. So that's what I did at the conference—sat, listened, and responded. It was a little strange in the context of a conference panel presentation, but the audience applauded for far longer than I could have expected. I was choked up and emotional. It felt like the most perfectly fitting tribute I could have paid to a dear friend, colleague, mentor, and fellow music-maker. It felt cathartic and right and good. Janice, I love you and miss you. Thank you.

## About the Author

Gareth Dylan Smith is Assistant Professor of Music, Music Education at Boston University in Boston, USA. His research interests include drum kit studies, popular music education, sociology of music education, and punk pedagogies. His first love is drumming. Recent music releases include the *Ignorant Populists* EP with Build a Fort. Gareth is working on a duets collection titled *Permission Granted*, a concept album with Stephen Wheel called *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Rock*, and a new

wave record with Black Light Bastards, alongside an on-going improvisatory drum kit duo with Martin Urbach. Gareth's recent scholarly publications include *A Philosophy of Playing Drum Kit: Magical Nexus*. Gareth is founding co-editor of the *Journal of Popular Music Education*, a past president of the Association for Music Education, a former board member of the International Society for Music Education, and serves on the steering committee of the International Society for the Sociology of Music Education.

## References

- Green, Lucy. 2014. To construe and to construct... What do we mean by “the sociology of music education,” and what’s the point of it anyway? In *Music education as critical theory and practice: Selected essays*, edited by Lucy Green, 3–16. Routledge.
- Hendricks, Karin, and June Boyce-Tillman. 2021. Music, connection, and authenticity. In *Authentic connection: Music, spirituality, and wellbeing*, edited by Karin Hendricks and June Boyce-Tillman, 1–12. Peter Lang.
- Jordan, James. 1999. *The musician’s soul*. GIA Publications.
- Lee, Austina Francis. 2023. Toward cultural competence in music education: Critical reflection and culturally responsive care. Doctoral diss., Boston University.
- Mantie, Roger. 2023. What should one expect from a sociology of music education? *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 22 (1): 112–38. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act22.1.112>
- Palmer, Parker. 1998. *The Courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher’s life*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Smith, Gareth D. 2020. Reports from the field: Confessions of a Facebook punk, or how not to do social media. In *The Oxford handbook of social media and music learning*, edited by Janice Waldron, Stephanie Horsley, and Kari Veblen, 235–44. Oxford University Press.
- Smith, Gareth D. 2023a. Remembering Janice Waldron. *The 34th MayDay Group Colloquium*, University of Veracruz, Xalapa, Mexico.
- Smith, Gareth D. 2023b. The courage to teach free improvisation in and through a graduate music education class. *TOPICS for Music Education Praxis*. [http://topics.maydaygroup.org/articles/2023/Smith\\_2023.pdf](http://topics.maydaygroup.org/articles/2023/Smith_2023.pdf)
- Smith, Gareth Dylan. 2023. Musical interlude: “The Scholar” and “Rakish Paddy” with Janice Waldron—A reflection on authentic connection through musicking with a friend. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 22 (4): 80–86. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act22.4.79>

Waldron, Janice. 2013. User-generated content, YouTube and participatory culture on the Web: Music learning and teaching in two contrasting online communities. *Music Education Research* 15 (3): 257–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14613808.2013.772131>

Waldron, Janice, Stephanie Horsley, and Kari Veblen, eds. 2020. *The Oxford handbook of social media and music learning*. Oxford University Press.

Waldron, Janice, and Kari Veblen. 2020. The Pipes, the Pipes Are Calling: Scottish Canadian pipe bands as Canadian wind bands. Canadian Winds. *The Journal of the Canadian Band Association* 18 (2): 6–10.

Smith, Gareth Dylan. 2023. Musical interlude: “The Scholar” and “Rakish Paddy” with Janice Waldron—A reflection on authentic connection through musicking with a friend. *Action, Criticism, and Theory for Music Education* 22 (4): 80–86. <https://doi.org/10.22176/act22.4.79>