

UNDERSTANDING THE MAGIC OF THE ETHNO EXPERIENCE



Key findings of
Ethno Research
2019-2022



Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY



OVER THE PAST 30 YEARS...

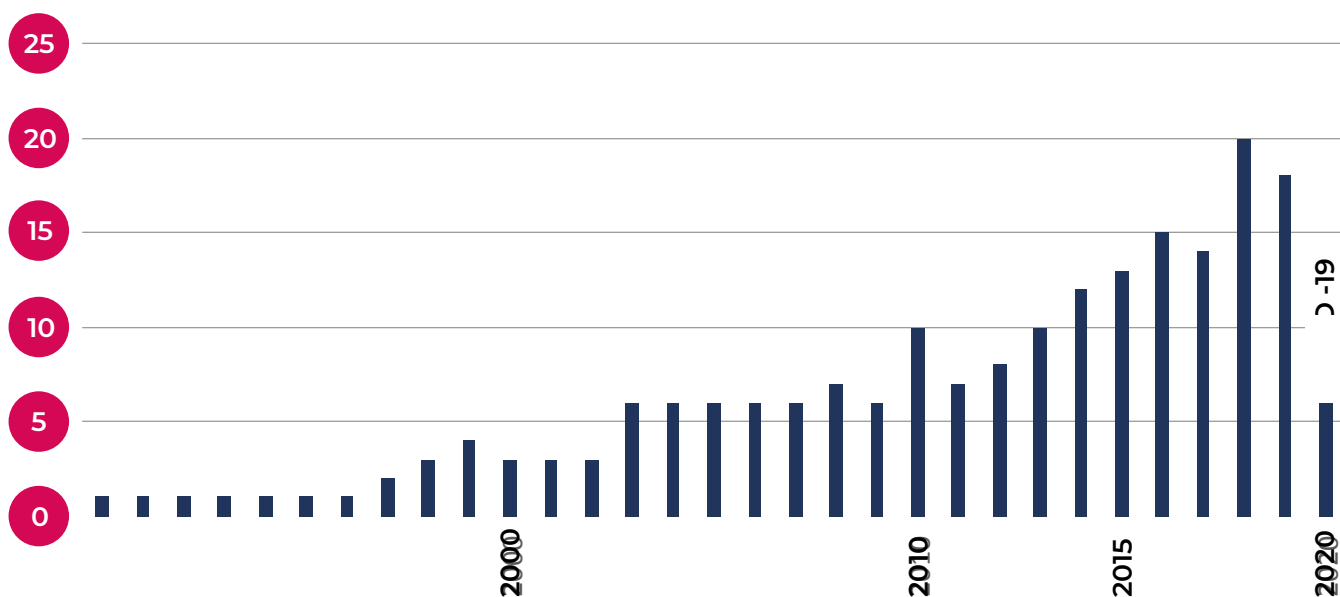
an increasing number of young musicians from myriad cultures have been coming together in locations around the world for music residencies called Ethno gatherings. For all the diversity of cultures and places and participants, there are striking similarities in their lived experience. Many refer to it as **'magic', 'life changing',** or **'transformational'**.

From 2019-2022, Ethno Research has looked over the entire breadth of this project and identified twelve key elements that make Ethno into a potent formula for engaging intercultural musical encounters.



ENGAGING
 MEETING
 CONNECTING PLAYING
 EMPOWERING
 ENJOYING RESPECTING
 LEARNING **CREATING**
 PERFORMING REFLECTING GROWING

Number of gatherings





06

Engaging



07

Meeting



08

Playing



09

Connecting



10

Empowering



11

Respecting

CONTENTS



12

Enjoying



13

Learning



14

Creating



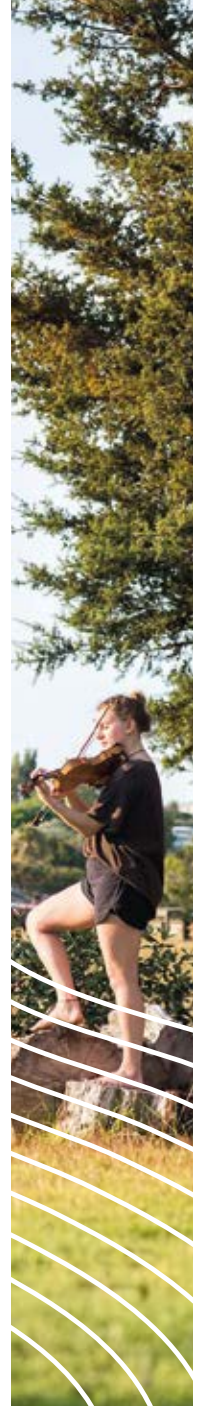
15

Performing



16

Reflecting



17

Growing

ENGAGING

Ethno attracts young musicians who are curious and open-minded, eager to learn unfamiliar music in new ways by engaging with fellow musicians from other styles and cultures. While representing different skill levels, they all arrive with a genuine passion to learn, play, and connect.

“ Through the songs and the music you can understand how other cultures express themselves – it’s a great way to understand others. (Jaya)

”





MEETING

Ethno offers encounters between diverse peoples, languages and cultures in countless ways. These encounters are predominantly harmonious and enriching, but also demand of the participants the will to negotiate difference and embrace dissonance, stretching skills and minds beyond their everyday comfort zones.

“ *I think going through this world tour of music is actually a beautiful experience to travel sonically and have this open-mindedness about taking down any barriers, any preconceptions or notions, and just getting into the music, in whatever language or style.* **(Alicia)** ”

PLAYING

From the first moment participants arrive until the time the last one departs there is music playing, from early morning until deep into the night: in the scheduled learning and performance settings, but also in the common rooms, in the kitchen, on the porch, on the bus Everyone shares in the joy, the fun, the playfulness of making music for and with each other.

“ I’m there just to enjoy, I love music, I love playing.
(Jakob)

”





CONNECTING

The intensity of the gathering quickly leads to a sense of community, of family, of tribe. Most participants comment on how quickly close and selfless relationships develop at Ethno, and how they recognise more similarities than differences in a culturally diverse group. These connections reverberate long after the gathering, forming a powerful global network through face-to-face encounters and digital platforms.

“ *Ethno creates a really strong feeling that the things that connect us are stronger and more important than the things that set us apart. (Keon)* ”

Understanding the 'Magic' of the Ethno Experience Key findings of Ethno Research 2019-2022

EMPOWERING

With its deliberate minimising of hierarchical structures and stimulating distributed leadership, Ethno gives participants confidence, a strong sense of agency, and empowers them. Everybody has their moment to shine: sharing a song from their culture, contributing a creative idea, or playing a solo on stage.

“ *Ethno has boosted my confidence massively and been great for my personal development. I met many lifelong friends who believe in my music and accept me as I am. I feel respected and appreciated. (Elsa)* ”





RESPECTING

Ethno is structured in a dynamic way that is conducive to participants gaining a profound appreciation of other people and their cultural backgrounds. This goes beyond limiting prejudice: it involves valuing others for who they truly are, being present with full attention. In that way, participants jointly build a learning community that will enable them to approach people and situations after the gathering with greater understanding.

“ There’s not a moment I’ve felt like an outcast or anything just because I came from a different place and no one knows me. **(Jaden)**

”

Understanding the ‘Magic’ of the Ethno Experience Key findings of Ethno Research 2019-2022

ENJOYING

Ethno is hard work and long hours. In spite of exhaustion (and maybe partly because of the euphoria tiredness can cause), there is an overwhelming sense of joy among the group. First, there is the suspension from everyday concerns and the freedom to pursue a passion full-time. Secondly, there is the pleasure of creating something new with a group of like-minded musicians. Third, there is the sharing of new music and friendships with new audiences.

“ There was a lot of happy, creative, interesting people. We did lots of fun things that everybody enjoyed. (Khadija)

”





LEARNING

Song sharing in a peer-to-peer setting is at the core of the Ethno experience. The sessions are structured, but quite distinct from formal music education: various participants take on a leading role in teaching a piece of music with cultural significance to them. Often, these are beyond the musical comfort zone of other participants, inviting them to stretch their musical skills and imagination to new levels. The artistic mentors gently guide the process with minimal interference, enabling group members to take charge.

“ *Ethno was a big change in my life. I developed leadership skills that I thought I didn't have, and now I enjoy helping other people to develop theirs too. It has been the best learning experience.*
(Li-Hua)

”

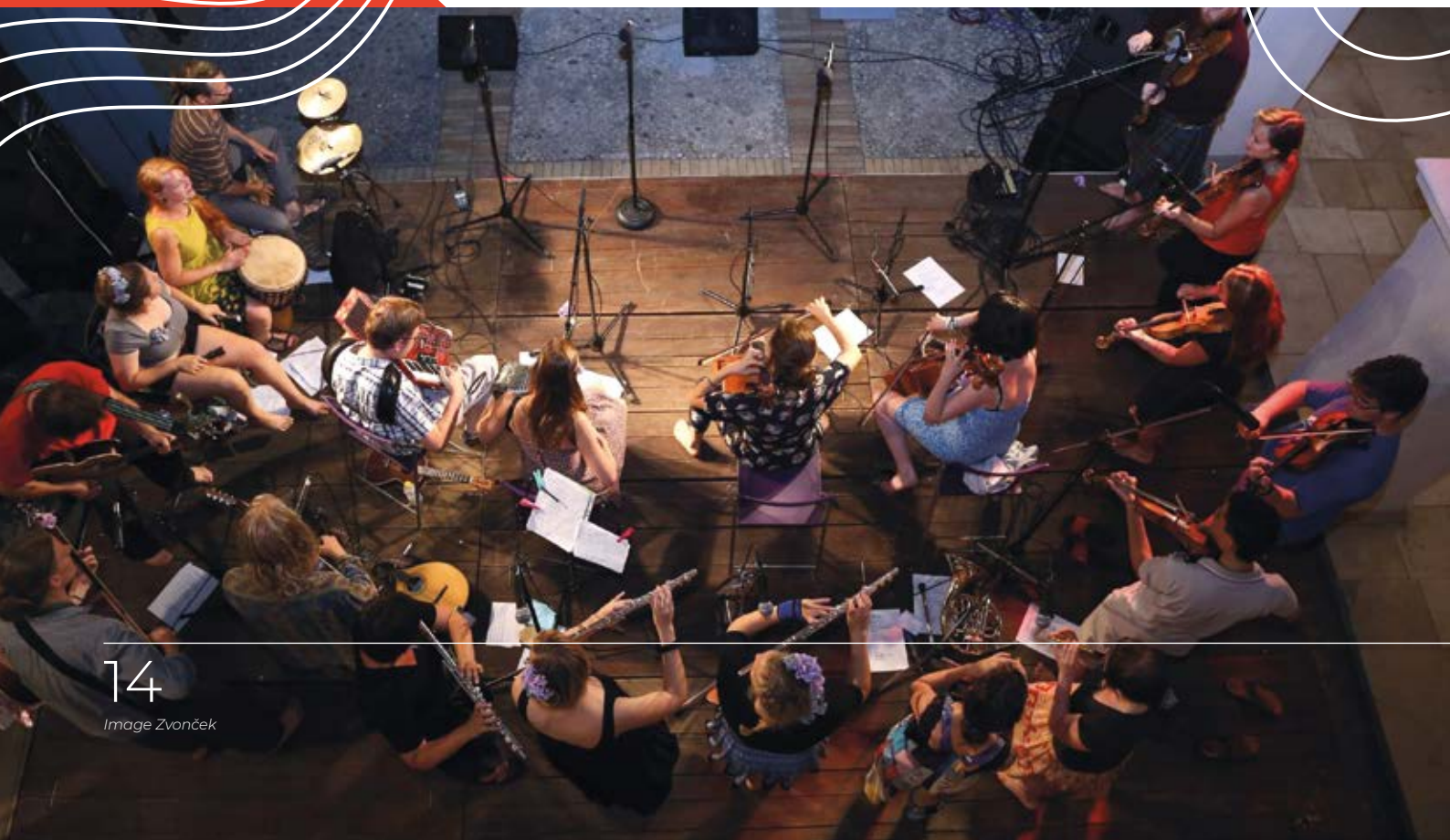
Understanding the 'Magic' of the Ethno Experience Key findings of Ethno Research 2019-2022

CREATING

Ethno is not just about replicating existing pieces of music, it is about creating something new as a group: exploring possibilities, taking risks, and finding joint solutions. With the entire ensemble as the starting point, this leads to a distinct Ethno-sound, enabling individuals and instrument groups to put their stamp on the final product.

“ We were playing a piece by the lakeside. Then people came in with their instruments. Everyone was improvising from their own musical background the result was rather unique. (Flora)

”





PERFORMING

Performing is a celebration of the sense of joy and togetherness Ethno creates, and an opportunity to share with local audiences. The preparations for the performances represent a major shift in the dynamics of the gathering. After leisurely sharing and learning songs and creating new interpretations and arrangements, the focus moves to preparing for a festival performance, tour, or recording.

“ I felt like, wow, I am a part of this big, awesome group of people that are performing at this festival, which I fell in love with. **(Linus)**

”

REFLECTING

Exposure to many cultures and ideas inevitably invites reflection on who you are as a musician, a member of society, and as a human being. While there is little opportunity for dedicated reflection during the gathering, everyone leaves full of new impressions, and processes these in their own way and at their own pace.



It's something that has affected me deeply inside, and really kind of changed my whole being. (Tomas)

It changes your view on life. (Carina)





GROWING

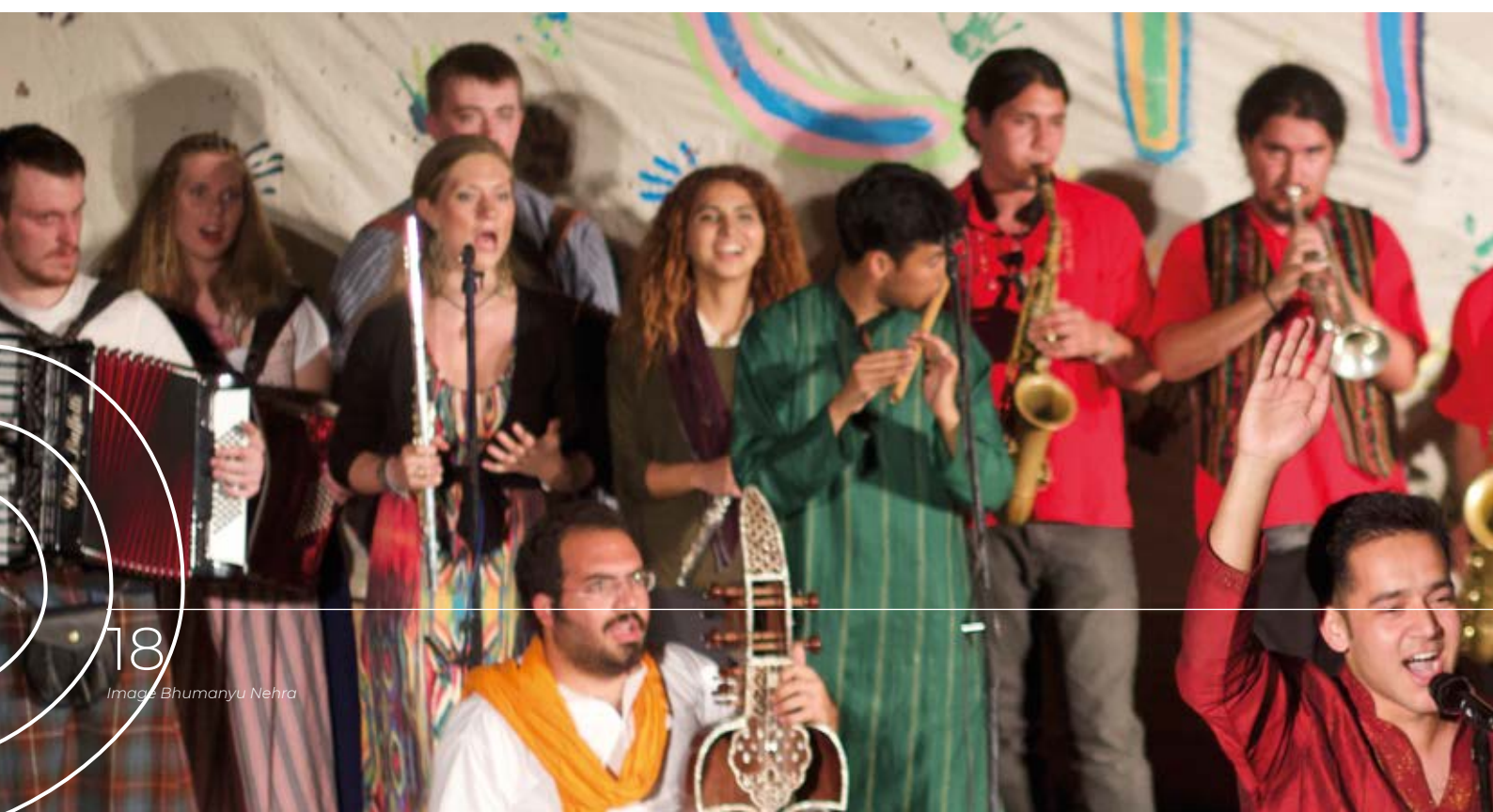
Many participants have described their experience at Ethno as transformational or life-changing. Growth through Ethno ranges from gathering new repertoire and professional skills to increased intercultural understanding and a clearer picture of self and others, as well as informing personal and career choices.

“ I know it has affected me a lot in the way I go into situations with people, the way I view the world and the world has opened up in such a great way.
(Kaia) ”

IN CLOSING

Whilst there are many ways to analyse the workings of Ethno we feel that these twelve elements represent a transparent, insightful and succinct way of illuminating the workings and success of the Ethno approach. Such insights can serve to support the future growth and development of the project by acting as a tool to encourage discussion and reflection.

ENGAGING
MEETING
CONNECTING **PLAYING**
EMPOWERING
ENJOYING **RESPECTING**
LEARNING **CREATING**
PERFORMING **REFLECTING** **GROWING**



ETHNO RESEARCH

Ethno Research comprised an international team of 20 researchers led by the International Centre for Community Music at York St John University. Research findings were drawn from participant observation at 11 Ethno gatherings, over 330 interviews, online social media analysis, onsite and video observations, surveys, and questionnaires. The complete catalogue of research reports is available at www.ethnoresearch.org.



Understanding the 'Magic' of the Ethno Experience Key findings of Ethno Research 2019-2022

ETHNO RESEARCH

This report is also available as an animation, which you will find on the 'International Centre for Community Music' [YouTube channel](#).



Est.
1841

YORK
ST JOHN
UNIVERSITY



Co-funded by
the European Union



Report Prepared by: Sarah-Jane Gibson, Lee Higgins, and Huib Schippers

Illustrations: Daniel Stirrup **Design:** www.ellenlonghorndesign.co.uk