BIOGRAPHY: Steven Feld

Steven Feld is Senior Scholar at the School for Advanced Research in Santa Fe, New Mexico. An anthropologist, filmmaker, musician, and sound artist, he is also 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 the Koizumi Fumio Prize for Ethnomusicology and 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 monograph *Sound and Sentiment* (1982, 2nd edition 1990, 3rd edition 2012, and 1991 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 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.

From 1987 he 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 Schizmogenesis," "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 the early 2000s 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 Scaldaperi for the CD-book Santi, Animali 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 African introduced talking drums 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 of Ghana, a US government gift to Ghana for the 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 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 some 200 universities, galleries, and museums worldwide, and has delivered numerous keynote addresses or distinguished lectures, including the Ernest Bloch Lectures in Music at University of California, Berkeley, the Annette Weiner Memorial Lecture at New York University, the Rayson Huang Lecture at University of Hong Kong, the Sigmund H. Danziger, Jr. Lecture in the Humanities, University of Chicago, the Centennial Lecture, University of Alberta, Canada, the Bruno and Wanda Nettl Distinguished Lecture in Ethnomusicology, University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, and the Roger Covell Lecture, University of New South Wales, Australia. 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 twenty-five 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 art, Feld has also worked for many years in the fields of documentary 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.

Feld’s most recent feature length documentary film, *J.C. Abbey: Ghana’s Puppeteer*, made in collaboration with Accra’s Anyaa Arts Kollektif, toured internationally to campuses and festivals through 2016 and 2017. For the 2016-1017 academic year he was a fellow at the Center for Advanced Study in Behavioral Sciences at Stanford University, working on a sequel to *Sound and Sentiment* titled *Vocal Knowledge*. Through 2016 and 2017 he was also a visiting artist at Skywalker Sound, collaborating with acclaimed sound editor Dennis Leonard to recompose 25th anniversary editions of *Voices of the Rainforest* in 7.1 cinema surround sound for concerts and galleries. Presently Feld and Jeremiah Ra Richards are creating a film to match the 7.1 soundtrack, and will return to Bosavi to follow up the story of the forest sound world in early 2018. The film will premiere at the Margaret Mead Film Festival at the American Museum of Natural History in October 2018. A Blu Ray DVD edition, 2nd edition CD, and world festival and concert tour will follow in 2019.

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