

# Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities

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Volume 11  
Issue 1 *Controlled Burn*

Article 8

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2022

## Solidarity Sing Alongs: Music as a Disruptive Force in the 2011 Protests in Madison, Wisconsin

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### Keywords:

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### Recommended Citation

Mazack, Clare (2022) "Solidarity Sing Alongs: Music as a Disruptive Force in the 2011 Protests in Madison, Wisconsin," *Tapestries: Interwoven voices of local and global identities*: Vol. 11 : Iss. 1 , Article 8. Available at: <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/tapestries/vol11/iss1/8>

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# Solidarity Sing Alongs: Music as a Disruptive Force in Madison, Wisconsin

*Clare Mazack*

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## *Abstract*

Protest music, when created and shared with intention and rooted in a social movement, can act as a force of disruption to systems of power. This paper focuses on the disruptive nature of the Solidarity Sing Alongs during the 2011 protests in my hometown of Madison, Wisconsin, that occurred in response to Governor Walker's proposed Act 10, which cut funding for education, healthcare, pensions, and childcare, as well as attacked collective bargaining rights and other union abilities. The Solidarity Sing Alongs act as a case study of how music, as a part of the protests, interrupted the political powers that targeted the rights of people in Wisconsin. The disruptive power of the Solidarity Sing Alongs is evident in four main ways. First, they forged connections between past and present social movements, specifically through the reuse of old labor movement songs. Second, the location of the rotunda in the Wisconsin State Capitol was intentionally chosen as a public, central gathering space that holds political significance. Third, the decentralized leadership and organization of the Sing Alongs ensured that it was rooted in the values of the people, in direct opposition to the hierarchical structures of leadership that capitalism enforces. Finally, the Solidarity Sing Alongs created a strong network of politically active community members. With an understanding of these disruptive qualities, the paper also acknowledges some of the limitations of the Solidarity Sing Alongs, specifically the lack of connections to struggles beyond the labor movement, and a lack of racial diversity among attendees. These limitations are reflective of issues in broader progressive movements in Madison, emphasizing the need for deeper cross-struggle solidarity between movements. By exploring both the strengths and limitations of the Solidarity Sing Alongs, and ultimately understanding the important role they played in the 2011 Wisconsin protests, I assert that protest music can continue to be a disruptive force when thoughtfully incorporated into movement strategies.

## *Bio*

Clare Mazack (she/her) is graduating with majors in American Studies and Educational Studies, and a minor in Environmental Studies. She is originally from Madison, Wisconsin, where she was a part of the 2011 protests discussed in this paper. She would like to dedicate this paper to her neighbor Phyllis Noble (1942-2017), who was an inspiration to always live with intent, reflection, and music.

## *Keywords*

Solidarity Sing Alongs, Wisconsin 2011 protests, disruption, social movements, protest music, cross-movement solidarity, Wisconsin State Capitol

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