

Music Research Seminars, University of Manchester

2023-24

This year's music research seminars take place at 4.30pm each Thursday in the Martin Harris Centre for Music and Drama, room G16. Refreshments will be provided at 6pm.

All are encouraged to attend, regardless of department, programme level, or disciplinary focus. If you wish to attend any session via Zoom, please email roddy.hawkins@manchester.ac.uk to register your interest before 3pm on the day.

Thursday 12 October

"A little space, in the way, like a window": Queer dramaturgy, temporality and Sondheim's musicals'

Speaker: Sarah Whitfield (Royal College of Music)

Compulsory heterosexuality is rarely more evident than the 'resolutely heterosexual form of the Broadway musical' (Wolf, 2011, 198). Queer composers and writers have found spaces in the form of the musical to agitate and to resist or reshape what has previously been imagined as possible. Indeed, Stephen Sondheim's professional career can be mapped across the fight for LGBTQ+ rights in the US. Although the late composer-lyricist profoundly resisted attempts to see his own identity or story in any of his works, his musicals resolutely push against chrono normative [straight] time structures. Elizabeth Freeman argues Queer temporalities can be seen as 'points of resistance to [the heterosexual] temporal order' (2010, xxii). This paper explores some of Sondheim's works through this lens of Queer dramaturgy and musicology, attending to both the limitations and possibilities of this expanded musical time.

Thursday 19 October

'Marking, Crossing and Blurring Boundaries in (Experimental) Music History'

Speaker: Stephen Graham (Goldsmiths College, University of London)

Co-hosted by the States of Flux research group

In this talk, Stephen Graham reflects on the historiographical dimensions of two recent book projects -- *Twentieth-Century Music in the West* (CUP) and *Becoming Noise Music* (Bloomsbury) -- and discusses the wider lessons they may offer for how we do music history amidst renewed demands for inclusivity of perspective, music and method.

Thursday 26 October

'50 Years of Live Electronics'

Speaker: Simon Emmerson (De Montfort University)

Co-hosted by the MANTIS Festival and the International Conference for Music and Sonic Arts

Simon Emmerson has been at the heart of live electronics in British contemporary music and beyond since the 1960s. In this talk he presents examples of his live electronic music and discuss how changing technology has created new possibilities for the composer. Starting out in the world of VCS3 synths, amplification, tape delays and a 'theatre of technology'; through early samplers and software, the arrival of live digital processing modules (SPX90, Alesis Quadraverb), midi controllers; through to laptops, Max/MSP, interactivity ... but this is not just about the technology: it's about the expressive possibilities that are opened up as a result. Emmerson has mostly worked with live

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musicians and wants to explore how we interact with changing technology through composing and performing together.

Thursday 9 November

'The Extended Artist: Collaborating with Machines'

Speaker: Maria Sappho (University of Huddersfield)

Maria Sappho presents her work in developing the AI 'Chimere', a multi-modal machine being designed for and with creative communities. The talk will provide an overview of the techno-moral issues at the centre of the rise of these machines in socio-creative spaces, and discuss processes for human-machine collaboration both in Maria's own AI composition and her instrument-building practices.

Thursday 16 November

'Rituals of Resistance, 'Culture Wars,' and Social Activism: The Cultural Politics of Barcelona's and Budapest's Scenes of Improvised Music'

Speaker: Ádám Havas (University of Barcelona)

Drawing on an ongoing postdoctoral research project that employs (auto)ethnography, qualitative interview techniques, and comparative historical methods, this talk explores tensions linked to racialized cultural hierarchies, geocultural distinctions, and identity politics in the jazz and free improvisation scenes of Budapest and Barcelona. Comparing these two scenes located in different parts of Europe sheds light on contemporary debates surrounding identity politics, race, migration, 'Eurowhiteness' and illiberal cultural politics.

Thursday 23 November

'One Composer, Three Voices'

Speaker: Leo Geyer (Freelance composer)

Leo Geyer explores the three concerns that drives his composition. This includes music inspired by the natural world, incorporating sonorous "earthly" sounds and structures based on ripples and spirals. In complete contrast, Geyer's second voice explores an unhinged jazz-infused world driven by music for winds and percussion. Finally, Geyer creatively engages with pre-existing music through re-scorings, restorations and re-imaginings, resulting in chamber music to large-scale film projects.

Thursday 30 November

'Sound and Nature in Early Nineteenth-Century Germany: *Der Freischütz* and the Romantic Science of Johann Wilhelm Ritter'

Speaker: Mark A. Pottinger (Manhattan College)

In this presentation, Prof. Pottinger explores the work of Johann Wilhelm Ritter (1776-1810), a German physicist, philosopher, and chemist, who researched 'invisible light' – or the area beyond the visible light spectrum – and was also fascinated by music and the visualisation of sound. Specifically, the presentation focuses on Ritter's musical aesthetics in relation to the sound of Nature in Carl Maria von Weber's romantic opera *Der Freischütz* (1821). Set within the mid-seventeenth century, following the ravages of the Thirty Years' War, a time of great political uncertainty in German-speaking lands, *Der Freischütz* presents a set of humble characters who

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continually look to Nature to provide direction to their lives. Be it the eclipse of the moon or the rise of the morning sun, all of Nature is interpreted to reveal hope or despair for the individual. This is an operatic work that reveals Nature's assurance in a world devastated by war and uncertainty, which further highlights the cosmopolitan and universalist desire within the opera and within Nature itself. By connecting Ritter's own musical aesthetics with that found in *Der Freischütz*, the opera can be seen as something more than a simple Volksoper (i.e., a light work for entertainment) or even a German nationalist text but a work engaged with the very same experimental philosophy that defined romanticism for an entire generation: an imaginative way of perceiving the inner workings of Nature as a space of renewal and life-affirming certainty.

Thursday 7 December

Panel: 'On opera and genre, globally'

Speakers: Amanda Hsieh (University of Durham), Charlotte Bentley (University of Newcastle), José Manuel Izquierdo König (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile), Jacob Olley (University of Cambridge)

In this roundtable our speakers take a global music history approach to interrogate the generic boundaries of opera, to challenge the rather outdated assumption that opera is all about complete and discrete works. Instead, with references to case studies spanning Asia (both East and West), Latin America, and Europe, we focus on the rich and multifaceted histories of translation, adaptation, and reformulation. Collectively, we argue, to place the spotlight on the generic boundaries of opera is to invite productive ways of thinking through broader topics of localisation and transculturation in and outside of Europe.