

Music Research Fora - Semester 1, 2025-26

Research fora take place on **Thursday afternoons, 16.30-18.00** most weeks during teaching weeks. All are encouraged to attend, regardless of department, programme level, disciplinary focus or musical taste. Wine and soft drinks will be provided at 6pm and we invite you to stay afterwards and get to know one another (and our guests).

Our speakers represent some of the most exciting practitioners and scholars working in both music research and the music industry. Do please come along, and feed your inspiration.

Week 1: 2nd October

No forum

Week 2: 9th October – JOHN CASKEN THEATRE (post talk reception in G16)

Do I Really Mean It? Musical Responses to Ambiguities in Visual Art

Jim Aitchison (Falmouth University) in collaboration with the Quatuor Danel

Composer Jim Aitchison discusses the process of composition behind his Piano Quintet No. 1, *Margarete*, a work created in response to Anselm Kiefer's painting *Margarete* (1981), and the issues faced when responding to external artwork both powerful and not unproblematic. The lecture explores how music might engage with visual art, ambiguity, and process, drawing on Aitchison's long-standing practice of responding to artists such as Antony Gormley, Doris Salcedo, Gerhard Richter and Anselm Kiefer. Members of the Quatuor Danel and pianist Richard Whalley will be present to illustrate the discussion with live extracts from the quintet.

Week 3: 16th October – JOHN CASKEN THEATRE (post talk reception in G16)

Composing (with) Empty Spaces: Panels, Formats and Forms of New Music

Jack Sheen in conversation with Dr Roddy Hawkins (University of Manchester)

This conversation circles around *Hollow propranolol séance (ii)* (2021) and other post-Covid compositions by Sheen, including different iterations of *Croon harvest*. Central to his recent compositional work is the exploration of the post-experimental potential of variation form. The classical and the experimental often make for curious bedfellows, and in Sheen's work these variations resonate through an abiding interest in panels of sound that exist at the edge of audibility. Those edges and boundaries themselves become fuzzier when the same compositional ideas are composed for different performance formats, distributions and technologies, especially between concert platform and sound installation. In turn, these questions of form and format – and their emptiness – intersect with the spaces in the contemporary world around us: the spaces we pass through, inhabit, ignore or seek out, including the very spaces where contemporary classical music is (or could be) experienced.

Week 4: 23rd October – JOHN CASKEN THEATRE (post talk reception in G16)

Living Traditions in the Twenty-first Century: Views from Corsica and Georgia

Professor Caroline Bithell (University of Manchester), with guests from Corsican ensemble Spartimu

Caroline will open this session by offering insights into her ethnographic research into multipart singing traditions in the Mediterranean island of Corsica and the small Caucasian country of Georgia. With markedly different histories but tantalising sonic resonances, these two musical treasure houses may be compared and contrasted in interesting ways. In both places, traditional forms of music-making – preserved for centuries through the oral tradition – have

undergone cycles of revival and revitalisation, aided in recent times by their inclusion in UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Both Corsica and Georgia now act as magnets for amateur singers from different parts of the world eager to learn directly from culture-bearers. How has this trend complemented local revival initiatives aimed at safeguarding the national heritage and ensuring its future sustainability? In what ways has music from the past found new footholds and functions in the twenty-first century? Following on from their lunchtime concert and masterclass, singers from Corsican ensemble Spartimu will join the conversation to help unpack these questions and more.

Week 5: 30th October – JOHN CASKEN THEATRE (post talk reception in G16)

Queer Nightlife Matters: Community Care and Collaborative Research in Times of Crisis
Dr Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispirota (University of Birmingham)

Queer nightlife matters in more ways than one, and from its organizers we can learn much about community and caregiving in times of crisis. From Stonewall to the AIDS crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic, queer nightlife venues have been crucial for a community that often lacks access to spaces where they can safely gather, find community, and organise for their survival. This lecture explores how and why these nocturnal life-worlds matter, surveying several historical examples of nightlife-driven responses to queer crises before moving to more recent developments related to pandemic closures and resurgent fascism. In doing so, the lecture will also explore nightlife studies, participatory research methods, "care" as a political concept, and the many inflections of "grassroots" community organizing.

READING WEEK (no forum)

Week 7: 13th November – G16

Meet our PhDs!

During this session, several PhD students in the music department from various disciplines, and at various points in their research, will introduce their projects in quickfire 'elevator pitches'. There's lots of interesting music research going on behind the scenes in the Martin Harris Centre; this is your chance to hear about some of it, and to meet some of our elusive postgraduate researchers. There will be plenty of time for questions, conversation, and mingling, and this experience should be especially beneficial to master's students considering further study who have questions, or who are looking for inspiration. All, though, are warmly invited to come and support our presenters, and to meet new people in the department. See you there!

Week 8: 20th November

No forum

Week 9: 27th November – G16

No forum

Week 10: 4th December – G16

The Kingma System Flute: A Tool for Composer-Performer Collaboration
Carla Rees (Royal Academy of Music)

The Kingma System Flute is an instrument with enhanced capabilities, both expressively and technically. It is an ideal agent for composer-performer collaboration, enabling practitioners to explore the flute in new and innovative ways. This talk will outline the additional capabilities of

the Kingma System and explore some case study works, including *Attente* by Sam Hayden, which will be performed at the International Anthony Burgess Foundation on 5th December.

Week 11: 11th December – G16

Between court, periphery and experimentation: Monza's theatre, 1778-1796

Dr Alessandra Palidda (University of Manchester)

Music theatre has often been associated to the landscape and audience of large urban centres, the 'operatic capitals' of Europe and beyond; yet the study of what we might describe as 'operatic peripheries' has proved to be equally precious and revealing in terms of both cultural and sociopolitical history. In this context, the talk will focus on the opera house built in 1778 by the Habsburg governors in the town of Monza (Northern Italy), in the green suburbs of the nearby capital of Milan, tackling issues of repertoire, management and sociability. Despite its peripheral character and conspicuous absence from opera historiography, Monza's theatre will emerge as an unexpected centre of experimentation, importation and adaptation, as well as an important sociocultural pole, also enriching our understanding of the operatic geography of the time.

Week 12: 18th December – G16

Dr Gayle Murchison (College of William and Mary)