

Audiences, Publics, Experience: Rethinking Music Reception

Thursday 6th & Friday 7th March 2025

**G11, IAS Common Ground, UCL SOUTH WING,
GOWER STREET, LONDON, WC1E 6BT**



Conference convenors

Professor Georgina Born FBA, University College London

Dr Joseph Browning, City University of London

Dr Christabel Stirling, Royal College of Music

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Introduction

There is a growing need for new interdisciplinary thinking about the reception of music and the kinds of experience music creates. Recent research in music and sound studies, often focused on ‘listening’, is fragmented across various methodologies and theories which need to be brought into dialogue – ranging from philosophical to empirical, psychological to anthropological, and quantitative to qualitative.

Moreover, musical experience is itself undergoing fundamental transformations, especially through cultural and technological shifts brought about by the influence of artificial intelligence, machine listening, recommendation algorithms, online platforms, and participatory technologies. Equally important are intensifying institutional mandates to ‘engage’ and ‘develop’ audiences, while concerns around the environmental impacts and ethics of music consumption in the Anthropocene, as well as issues of equality, diversity, and inclusivity, have become even more magnified post-COVID.

Drawing together musicology, anthropology, psychology, and sound, media, and cultural studies, the conference aims to progress foundational research on music reception today, to deepen our understanding of musical experience, and to establish a new interdisciplinary framework.

Day 1	Theorising Musical Experience
8.45-9.15	Arrival & Registration: Coffee, Tea, Pastries
9.15-11.15	<p>1) Foundational Questions in Music Reception Studies Chair: Georgina Born Tomás McAuley, ‘The Conception of Reception History’ Tariq Jazeel, ‘Anokha Emerging: The Asian Underground, New Ethnicities, and Diversity Conservatism’ Sebastian Klotz, ‘From Music Reception to Connectedness’ Georgina Born, ‘Musical Experience – Beyond Reception, Sound/Listening, Addressivity and Personalization’</p>
11.15-11.40	Tea & Coffee Break
11.40-13.00	<p>2a) Sonic Collectivity/Sonic Subjectivity Chair: Christabel Stirling Bill Dietz & Amy Cimini, ‘First, When There’s Nothing...’ Marie Thompson, ‘Creating “the Next Generation of Listeners”: Music Streaming and the Family Form’</p>
13.00-14.00	Lunch Break (please note: lunch catering is limited to conference speakers; suggested lunch venues will be mentioned during the conference)
14.00-16.00	<p>2b) Sonic Collectivity/Sonic Subjectivity Chair: Sanne Krogh Groth Christabel Stirling, ‘Gender, Affect, and Time in UK Sound System Music’ Matthew Gelbart, ‘Genre Audiences as Subjective Collectivities’ Luis-Manuel Garcia-Mispireta, ‘Thickening Something: Convergent Music, Affect, and Sociability on the Dancefloor’</p>
16.00-16.15	Tea & Coffee Break
16.15-17.30	<p>Keynote Address: Ana María Ochoa Gautier ‘Strategic Inaudibility, the Acoustic Labor of Empire and the Historiography of the Anthropocene’ Chair: Naomi Waltham-Smith [Please note: the keynote will not be included in the livestream]</p>
17.45-19.00	Reception

Day 2	Late (Neo)liberal Listening: Transformations in Musical Experience
8.45-9.00	Arrival; Coffee, Tea, Pastries
9.00-11.00	3) Theorising Technological Listening: Streaming, AI, Prosumption Chair: Marie Thompson Eric Drott, 'Historicizing the Music User' Robert Prey, 'Aspirational Self-Labour and Listening Practices Amongst Young Brazilians' Richard Bramwell, 'Violence, Vulnerability and Verse'
11.00-11.15	Tea & Coffee Break
11.15-12.45	4) Sonic Experience in the Anthropocene Chair: Ana María Ochoa Gautier Nicola Dibben, 'Fiddling While Earth Burns? The Role of Music Listening in Environmental Values, Beliefs and Ecological Worldviews' Joseph Browning, 'Unsong: Hearing Multispecies Voices in the Anthropocene'
12.45-13.45	Lunch Break (please note: lunch catering is limited to conference speakers: suggested lunch venues will be mentioned during the conference)
13.45-15.45	5) Sonic Experience as Activism Chair: Amy Cimini Tom Western, 'On Anticolonial Antiphonies and Sonic Geopoetics' Sanne Krogh Groth & Nils Bubandt, 'Sonic Activism: Equivocating Noise and Politics Through Aesthetic-Anthropological Fieldwork in Java' Robert Adlington, 'Composing Democracy in the Post-Truth Era'
15.45-16.00	Tea & Coffee Break
16.00-17.00	6) EDI, Audiences, Policy Chair: Joseph Browning Christina Scharff, 'Making Sense of Inequalities: Changes and Continuities' Naomi Waltham-Smith, 'Just Listening?'
17.00-17.50	Lecture-Performance Bill Dietz, 'Listening to Listening, Composing Listening'
17.50-18.00	Closing Remarks: Christabel Stirling, Joseph Browning, Georgina Born

Abstracts

Day 1 - Theorising Musical Experience

Panel 1 - Foundational Questions in Music Reception Studies

The conception of reception history

Tomás McAuley

What is the relationship between the conception and the reception of music? In this paper, I examine the idea – an idea that I take to be common yet undertheorised – that a change in the conception of music equates directly to changes in both the substance and the reception of music. I start by way of an etymological detour in the history of the word reception, beginning with the first known use of the Latin word *receptio* in Plautus' *Comedy of Asses* (*Asinaria*, c. 211 BCE), moving through early astrological and medical English and German uses of related terms, and on to the more recent idea of a reception history of music. I compare these uses to the Latin origins and later history of *conceptio*, focusing on their shared roots in *capere* (to take, seize, or capture) in order to ask in particular how the reception history of music relates to the intellectual history of music. In this, I take as a case study a particularly influential change in conceptions of music in German-speaking lands in the much-fabled (and sometimes derided) 'years around 1800.' In this example, I note, both the reception history and the intellectual history of music are not about passive afterlives of musical practices but rather uncover the active taking and creating of musical experience. I conclude by offering a tentative outline for what I call a conception history of music, a term that hovers between reception and intellectual histories, seeking to capture and to draw together the forms of coming-into-being described by both.

Anokha emerging: The Asian Underground, new ethnicities, and diversity conservatism

Tariq Jazeel

This paper tracks the relationship between Britain's 'Asian Underground' music scene and re-configurations of Britishness in the mid- to late-1990s, through to the more contemporary tightening of border regimes and draconian policies around immigration in the UK. In so doing, it opens questions about the 'audience, reception, and experience of music' to an approach that aims to map the social, spatial and political effects of music as it circulates in

and through the world. The paper examines the role that a small, British Asian, weekly London club night, *Anokha*, played in the precipitation of an ‘emergent structure of feeling’ that would ultimately shift national conversations about what Britishness signified at the turn of the last millennium. The paper places British Asian club and music aesthetics in a broader terrain of avant-garde cultural production and representational politics that ultimately helped to incorporate Britain’s second generation of South Asians inside the national narrative and polity. It goes on to speculate on the role this proliferation has played in facilitating forms of political closure with respect to migration, race and bordering that have emerged from a generation of conservative British South Asian (and second-generation immigrant) politicians enabled by these forms of incorporation.

From music reception to connectedness

Sebastian Klotz

In this presentation, I would like to address (1) the crisis of (music) sociology in the wake of Actor-Network-Theories which has affected reception studies. I argue that “reception” has remained tied to a communication model borrowed from information theory and to hermeneutic approaches, (2) how emerging concepts in music psychology and music cognition studies (ecological theories, the 4E framework, theories of musical engagement, music & mental imagery studies, enactivism, the joint action paradigm) tend to side-line wider sociological and philosophical issues but have implications for reception studies, 3) “audience studies” as a novel field that responds to the situation as illustrated above but which, symptomatically, avoids the charged concept of “reception”, 4) how streaming platforms perform and implement a radical relationality to which we need to respond critically. These industry-driven variants of (consumer) behavior and of audiencing represent new technical and discursive realities and create new perceptive situations.

Finally, I propose to amplify oscillations between these fields and applications vis-à-vis music reception, coupled with a weaker theoretical ambition to allow new receptive entanglements to unfold. Recent concepts such as “being-with-music” (Eric Clarke), belonging and togetherness can be considered as soft and opaque approaches that move away from a subjective fixation on meaning in favour of distributed and embodied processes. They address dimensions of the musical experience and of connectedness that might help re-assemble reception in an integrative fashion.

Musical experience – beyond reception, sound/listening, addressivity and personalization

Georgina Born

This paper offers headlines from my own agenda for transforming our understanding of music reception, which I hope will resonate with others' thinking. Musicology has been susceptible to two problematic approaches: formalist textual determinism allied to ideas of the implied listener, and 'reception history' reduced to the history of critics' discourses. Against this background I outline five dimensions of a prospective framework for (re)conceptualising musical experience: 1) That music reception can't be reduced to a focus only on sound and listening and should instead employ ideas of music's multiple mediations and music as assemblage; 2) that musicology has neglected developments in cultural and media studies since the 1980s (Hall, Martin-Barbero) that take as foundational the non-identity of text/assemblage and reception; 3) that the cultural studies approach prompts us to move productively beyond Bakhtinian notions of 'addressivity' by attending to the potential gap between projected and actualised audience; 4) that together these perspectives challenge currently hegemonic approaches in music psychology/cognition/neuroscience that invoke universal and ahistorical models of musical subjectivity; and 5) that the dominant modes of musical experience proffered by streaming platforms and their machine-learning-based recommender systems instrumentalize several tendencies above, intensifying the commodity fetishism to which music has been subject, diminishing embodied and social experiences of music, and yet – via the interventions of data science – re-engineering the social through musical experience in ways we are yet to comprehend.

Panel 2 - Sonic Collectivity/Sonic Subjectivity

First, when there's nothing...

Amy Cimini & Bill Dietz

A foundational assumption in the work of Maryanne Amacher is the notion of “unnamed sensibilities,” capaciousness of sensoria beyond normative (self-)understanding. For Amacher, these “unnamed sensibilities” could co-emerge with enormous sensitivity and emotion, but also have a strong collective, social valence which she ardently sought in the modes of listening she brought into being. In this collaborative talk, we think with “unnamed sensibilities” outside the sonic arts in order to ask how this capaciousness expresses itself in the quasi-events of everyday sonic experience, that is, for example, in the time-spaces of work, consumption, domesticity, transit and so on. Beyond the context of Amacher's practice,

how might thinking with “unnamed sensibilities” shift our understanding of the relations between quotidian sonic experience and identity, identification, recognition? We embrace an experimental, patchworked narrative approach that dramatizes the spatiotemporal weirdness and near-imperceptible but complex, composite embodiments that “unnamed sensibilities” might conjure. Through this, we question a politics that would identify or valorize them, as some kind of avant garde, and think together and what ways of knowing shimmer in this capaciousness.

Creating “the next generation of listeners”: Music streaming and the family form

Marie Thompson

In sound and music studies, an influential narrative has emerged in which music’s technologies of mediation have structured listening around ‘neoliberal’ values: the promises of personalisation and self-control offered by, for example, music streaming services and noise cancelling headphones, are taken as emblematic of neoliberalism’s treatment of the atomised individual as the primary economic and political unit. While individual freedom and responsibility are undoubtedly integral to neoliberal economic philosophy, what is typically omitted by these accounts is the persistence of the family as a foundational compact. Drawing upon Melinda Cooper’s incisive examination of the convergence of U.S. neoconservatism and neoliberalism, I aim to highlight the implication of the family form in ‘personalised’ sound and music technologies. Focusing primarily on streaming platforms’ household subscription services, the family, I argue, is figured as an intended listener, appearing as a composite of individuals with varying degrees of freedom and a discrete, functional unit. While references to the family listener might be explained away as a strategy to expand consumption or a hangover from the advertising imaginaries of twentieth-century media, I propose that the emphasis on the household takes on renewed significance in the context of a protracted crisis of care affecting advanced economies in the Global North. Amidst this crisis, both the family and music have been figured as cost-effective ‘solutions’ to pressures arising from the re-organisation of the welfare state, the diminishment of the wage, the increased disciplinary power of debt, and the externalisation and commodification of reproduction.

Panel 2 (continued) – Sonic Collectivity/Sonic Subjectivity

Gender, affect, and time in UK sound system music

Christabel Stirling

A key challenge in conducting qualitative research on live music audiences is the question of how to navigate between multiplicity and singularity. On the one hand, music's social formations are neither stable nor bounded and, moreover, there is no tight 'homology' between musical genre categories and social categories. On the other hand, overemphasising the unstable character of socio-musical affiliations understates the 'inner circles and weighty histories which give each seemingly fluid surface a secret order' (Straw 2001: 248). In my ethnographic research, I have sought to make sense of how—despite instances to the contrary—genre-audience relationships repeatedly become marked by reified social categories of class, race, gender, sexuality, age, and their intersections, to the point that a socio-musical articulation that is highly contingent and historically specific comes to be experienced as 'natural'. This paper takes the UK sound system music lineage as an example, exploring the processes by which particular genres (e.g., lovers' rock, dubstep) have become sites around which powerful gendered social relations and atmospheres coalesce. Drawing on feminist affect theories, I probe the capacity for such gender dynamics to transmit intergenerationally, arguing that music's live socialities and affective qualities—e.g., bodily posture, movement, erotic expression, aura, and energy—are key facets of the assemblage that gender gets inscribed in and 'routed' through. Emphasising the role of these and other 'non-sonic' mediations (spaces, technologies, discourses) in the gendering of musical audiences in this lineage, I question the potential of these 'non-sonic' components, if altered, to initiate socio-musical transformation.

Genre audiences as subjective collectivities

Matthew Gelbart

Since the nineteenth century, musical genres have become increasingly linked to specific audience communities, which have been defined along lines such as gender, class, race, age, national identity, education level, and/or political alignment. This kind of associated audience for a genre corresponds fairly closely with pre-existing, recognized social categories. But some audience communities have also been defined by more slippery criteria such as a personal preference for music with "meaningful" words, or a love of the timbre of a certain instrument. It is immediately noticeable that these latter criteria are more "subjective." They depend less on pre-existing structures and may make their own subcultures that cut across

more commonly understood social categories. Nevertheless, even the definitions of groupings such as “French,” “Black,” “middle class” and so forth are far more contentious and subjective than many who harness their power suggest. Furthermore, all links between perceived audience communities and specific musical genres are more subjective than they might initially appear, since the correlations are often quite difficult or impossible to measure. Instead, genre audiences are built on perceptions from within and without these communities. This paper teases out some of these strands and asks what kind of uses genre-audience correlations have had historically or might productively have.

Thickening something: Convergent music, affect, and sociability on the dancefloor

Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispireta

How is it that “the one rush of hearts”—that swirl of feelings and music and sweaty bodies on a crowded dancefloor—can thicken into something that feels like communion and community? In this talk, I turn to the nexus of sound, feeling, and togetherness to investigate how collective listening and dancing can give rise to a sense of inchoate sociality— that is, something like a “we” coalescing under the surface of shared musical experience. While the idea that “music brings people together” is a common trope that is especially pervasive in electronic dance music scenes (EDM), accounts vary as to how music exerts such socially binding force. In club cultures, partygoers often use the term “vibe” to describe how they understand music to work in these contexts, bringing dancers into a sort of synchronicity of feeling. By understanding “vibe” as a subcultural conceptualization of affect, I explore how music-driven emotional convergence intersects with scholarship on musical entrainment, emotional contagion, ritual practices, and resonance.

Keynote Address

Strategic Inaudibility, the Acoustic Labor of Empire and the Historiography of the Anthropocene

Ana María Ochoa Gautier

What happens to the notion of reception as constitutive of sound circulation when the sounds being deployed, heard and recorded are strategically concealed from a larger population as "classified information"? This talk explores the notion of the inaudible as a strategic sonic deployment of the U.S. Empire in the Caribbean in the early to late mid Twentieth Century. I build on the work of Jessica Schwartz who has studied the relationship between auditory surveillance and classified information as crucial to the development of an "aural culture" around nuclear testing during the Cold War that generated "new aesthetic sensibilities to hear the inaudible." However, the deployment of the inaudible as an aural strategy of empire was not limited to the Cold War. It began to be generated through extractive media as crucial to the infrastructure of empire that the United States built in the early Twentieth Century in the Caribbean. This talk explores the implications of this acoustic labor of empire in rethinking the problem of the inaudible as threshold and its implications for a historiography of the anthropocene.

Day 2 - Late (neo)liberal listening: Transformations in Musical Experience

Panel 3 - Theorising Technological Listening: Streaming, AI, Prosumption

Historicizing the music user

Eric Drott

Among the notable aspects of the music AI company Endel, one that is easily overlooked is the careful language it uses to describe its service. The music it offers individuals to help them focus better, sleep better, and improve their overall well-being isn't referred to as music; instead the company refers to its generative output as soundscapes. Nor are its clients listeners or audiences; rather they are cast as users—of the service, to be sure, but also of music. Endel is not alone in subsuming listening in the broader category of music use. Most online music platforms frame music in similar terms, either explicitly or implicitly. This paper aims to interrogate the figure of the user. It does so by historicizing this figure, tracing its antecedents back through copyright and property law on the one hand and computer and systems engineering on the other. By situating the user within this longer historical context, I hope not only to better understand what is at stake in the contemporary reframing of listening as use, but also consider what implications would follow were we to center music use in our accounts of music reception.

Aspirational self-labour and listening practices amongst young Brazilians

Robert Prey

This talk will draw on early-stage research conducted with young music listeners in the southern Brazilian port city of Porto Alegre. Analysis of the first round of walk-through interviews picked up on how these heavy 'users' of online music platforms were employing music in the labour of self-transformation; both directly to develop aspirational taste profiles, and indirectly, as background support for other modes of aspirational labour. In this talk I will reflect on this ongoing research through the concept of *aspirational self-labour*. I will also discuss how this mode of using music may contribute to theorising 'technological listening'.

Violence, vulnerability and verse

Richard Bramwell

Recent years have seen the criminalisation of black popular music genres, such as grime and UK drill (Schwarze and Fatsis 2022). Scholars in both the UK and US have challenged the use of music videos, released via social media, in criminal trials and critiqued the ‘street-illiterate’ use of lyrics by the police, crown prosecution service and courts (Ilan 2020). This paper will examine the use of social media music videos by young people and the criminal justice system to represent, interpret, navigate, and police violence and vulnerability.

The paper draws on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in multiple field-sites, across England, over the course of one year and 31 semi-structured interviews with research participants. Alongside expressing concerns about violence in social life, we found that young men and boys use rap music genres to articulate their experiences of vulnerability and perform digitally mediated masculinities. The paper will explore the ‘offline’ social relations that are produced through these music videos and critique the interpretative practices of the police officers who decode the videos to facilitate their use in court. There is a tension between scholarly defences of rap as art and the value placed upon authenticity by the young people who produce and use these music videos. The paper will conclude with some thoughts regarding the subjectivities produced through the consumption and production of music videos that are distributed through social media while being embedded in very specific local geographies, relations, and events.

Panel 4 - Sonic Experience in the Anthropocene

Fiddling while Earth burns? The role of music listening in environmental values, beliefs and ecological worldviews

Nicola Dibben

Climate change is one of the most serious threats to global health, wellbeing and security we face (IPCC, 2014). Given that music contributes to climate change (Brennan & Devine, 2020) we need to ask - how should we make and study music in this crisis? In this paper I probe the role of music listening, beyond its direct environmental impacts, by investigating whether music listening influences people’s environmental values, and if so how. I situate this question in a musical-environmentalist listening context of music in science communication, public engagement, environmental activism, and of music which addresses environmental topics (Allen, 2021; Dibben, 2022). And I argue for a theoretical framework of listening

encounters (and modes of aesthetic experience), as the means by which we come to live key cultural constructs and their interrelationships (e.g. the natural and technological, and the human, non-human, and more-than-human). Given the paucity of empirical evidence to help build and substantiate such a theoretical framework of musical-environmentalist reception I illustrate this with findings from an audience-study carried out in collaboration with Scottish musician Erland Cooper during the launches of his two nature related albums *Carve the Runes...* (2024) and *Folded Landscapes* (2023). Evidence from a 10-month audience survey, in depth and vox-pop interviews reveals the meaning making processes by which audiences find nature- and place-related meanings in their encounters with his music, the relationship of this to audience members' ecological values, beliefs and worldviews, and the way in which environmental thinking and musical encounter animate each other.

Unsong: Hearing multispecies voices in the Anthropocene

Joseph Browning

What has song become in the Anthropocene? Exploring this question, I take as my starting point Tomlinson and Denning's concept of 'song formations', social and sonic assemblages that 'create the conditions for a new experience of history' (2021: 121). Transposing this notion to what I call 'unsong', I consider how the reception of multispecies voices – heard as lost, threatened, requiring protection – has made possible a distinctive historical experience of planetary ecological crisis. I aim, however, to move beyond well-worn tropes of the silencing of the Earth to hear instead the 'patchy Anthropocene' (Tsing 2016) in which the planet is re-voiced and re-heard in unpredictable ways. To do this, the paper moves between two registers: one explores dominant and emergent ideas in late liberal culture about the nature of sonic experience in the Anthropocene; the other sets the voice of a particular creature, the Ring-necked Parakeet, at play as a productively unruly antagonist in these public imaginaries and scholarly debates, not simply exemplifying current settlements but setting them aflutter. I follow the parakeet across several different scenes of reception, where its voice is variously heard as invasive noise, caught up in 'extinction listening' (Hui 2021), captured as data for machine listening, and remediated in the ecological listening of an augmented reality installation. By tracing these divergent ways of hearing the parakeet's voice, I draw attention to the negation, disappearance, and excluded outsides of 'song' in the Anthropocene, bring into earshot a cacophony of heterogeneous multispecies voicings woven with variegated silences, and consider what new experiences of history 'unsong' might make possible.

Panel 5 - Sonic Experience as Activism

On anticolonial antiphonies and sonic geopoetics

Tom Western

This paper listens to anticolonial antiphonies: an ongoing praxis of political reverberation and relay that carry across time, space, and language, connecting decolonial movements across time and space. And it thinks that in relation to sonic geopoetics, or the ways that sound creates geographies. It narrates both these ideas through ongoing work into forms of spatial and sonic resistance in Athens, Greece – yet an Athens that always contains and is connected to struggles elsewhere around the Mediterranean and beyond. By hearing antiphonies and geopoetics together, I hope to offer some thoughts on how sound joins and produces communities and publics that defy colonial cartographies and classifications.

Sonic activism: Equivocating noise and politics through aesthetic-anthropological fieldwork in Java

Nils Bubandt and Sanne Krogh Groth

Based on fieldwork over a seven-year period with Indonesian noise and experimental musicians at performances both in Java and at European music festivals, we study what we call their sonic activism. With the term sonic activism, we challenge ourselves to move beyond universal ideas about noise and politics, respectively. In trying to uncover how noise and politics are entangled in and beyond the Global South, we suggest the need to be equivocal, in the sense of Viveiros de Castro (2004), about what “noise” and “politics” are in the first place. Our first controlled equivocation is therefore about “noise”. If noise music on the North Atlantic Rim emerged as a negation of the hegemony of diatonic music and a protest against an aesthetics of silence, what, we ask, is the aesthetic appeal of noise music in Indonesia, a place where microtonal and polyrhythmic music is considered high taste and where noise - in its broadest sense - is rarely considered disruptive? In short, what is noise music, if it is not a negation? Our second equivocation is about “politics”. How, we ask, can we understand noise music as political, when many of the musicians we work with see themselves as social activists and yet deny they are political? In the term “Java-futurism” we find the beginning of an answer. The paper seeks to understand these equivocations of noise and politics through an approach we call aesthetic-anthropological, an approach which straddles musicology, sound studies, and anthropology in ways that are at once methodological, analytical, and theoretical.

Composing democracy in the post-truth era

Robert Adlington

Musicians have long been interested to explore democratic principle through their musical practice – for instance, through pluralistic compositional textures, the creation of egalitarian ensemble relationships, or the active involvement of audiences. Such experimentation has often served to advertise musicians' commitment to progressive social values, and their rejection of the hierarchical and exclusionary practices of old.

In recent years, however, as the potential of democratic process and institutions to be hijacked by powerful forces has become widely recognised, musicians have increasingly approached democracy as the occasion for anxiety, disillusion and doubt. Expanding upon the arguments in my book *Musical Models of Democracy* (OUP, 2023), this paper will examine case studies from the fields of modern composition, improvised music and networked laptop performance that highlight the fault-lines and dilemmas that attend all democratic arrangements. In so doing, these case studies reflect democracy's acutely contested status in the present-day, as shared reference points for the negotiation of difference are challenged in the name of individual liberty, and personal preference mediated through internet algorithms comes to shape all social experience.

Reflecting the conference themes, my discussion will give particular attention to how an audience is positioned within these performances. In different ways, each case study draws to the fore the tension between the 'democratic' relationships experienced by composer and performers, and the spectatorial status of the audience, raising questions about democracy's exclusionary aspects, how democracy manifests as spectacle, and the potential and constraints of the sonic for experiencing different models of democracy.

Panel 6 - EDI, Audiences, Policy

Making sense of inequalities: changes and continuities

Christina Scharff

This presentation reflects on changes and continuities in how classically trained musicians think, talk and feel about inequalities (in relation to gender, race, and class) in the classical music profession. Drawing on qualitative research from 2012/13, 2019, and 2024, the paper will delineate different forms of engagement with inequalities, ranging from the 'unspeakability' (Gill, 2014) of inequalities in the early 2010s and 'inequality talk' (Brook et

al., 2021) in the late 2010s to the more recent phase (2024), which seems to be characterized by a marked divergence between awareness of inequalities and attempts to tackle them on the one hand, and ongoing and entrenched power imbalances on the other. I will argue that an understanding of how inequalities are made sense of and experienced on the ground matters to how we engage with policy makers. When inequalities were unspeakable, it was important to raise awareness and put them on the agenda. During times of ‘inequality talk’ and a heightened awareness of inequalities, there was a need for reflection on what works, and what does not work, in terms of tackling existing power hierarchies. The current phase of an ongoing divergence between increased awareness of inequalities on the one hand, and the lived experiences of ongoing inequalities on the other, raises a different set of challenges in the collaboration with policy makers.

Just Listening?

Naomi Waltham-Smith

Racial profiling of audiences means that those who enjoy listening to certain musical genres are at disproportionately greater risk of suspicion by the police and of prosecution for crimes to which no other evidence links them. A Metropolitan Police operation code-named Project Alpha, which began in 2019, has involved the large-scale surveillance and profiling of vulnerable data subjects, targeting in particular youth of colour who consume drill and related musical genres. In my contribution, I discuss my ongoing collaboration with law-reform charity JUSTICE and grassroots organizations that seeks to engage prosecutors, judges, and policymakers to combat the stereotyping and criminalizing of those who listen to and participate in creating Black musical genres such as drill. This project actively spotlights listening as a critical, yet often overlooked, component in policymaking—one that music and sounds studies scholars might seek to transform by shifting how music and sound are heard by a variety of audiences as policy is shaped, made, and implemented. Generalizing from this imbrication of listening in policy, I turn to how the very processes by which policy is developed call for more egalitarian, sustained, and critically reflective modes of listening. Dissent, critique, and despair cannot simply be tuned out as “noise.” I conclude by suggesting that restoring trust in democracy demands the institutionalization of a just listening, embedded in the mechanics of government across multiple scales.

Closing Lecture-Performance

Listening to Listening, Composing Listening

Bill Dietz

Far from the almost manically reflexive attention to art's production, art's reception remains considerably underthought. Still to this day, inherited assumptions about reception's passivity and inarticulacy are common, as are its adjacent gendered and racialized implications. For the past 20 odd years, Bill Dietz has pursued an aesthetic practice that not only examines how various extant listening paradigms are politically, discursively, and semiotically situated, but one which intervenes into and re-situates those practices.

In the form of a participatory lecture-performance, Dietz will guide us through his various attempts to formulate a practice that starts from reception itself, a practice dedicated to "composing listening."

Speaker Biographies

Robert Adlington is Head of Research and Doctoral Programmes at the Royal College of Music, London. He previously worked at the University of Sussex, the University of Nottingham, and the University of Huddersfield. He has written books on the composers Harrison Birtwistle and Louis Andriessen, and on the musical avant-garde in 1960s Amsterdam. These books are: *The Music of Harrison Birtwistle* (2000), *Composing Dissent: Avant-garde Music in 1960s Amsterdam* (2013), and *Louis Andriessen: De Staat* (2017). His edited books include *Red Strains: Music and Communism Outside the Communist Bloc* (2013) and *New Music Theatre in Europe: Transformations Between 1955-1975* (2019). His latest book *Musical Models of Democracy* (OUP, 2023) explores how progressive musicians of the past 60 years have engaged with varied ideas of democracy.

Georgina Born is Professor of Anthropology and Music at UCL. Previously she held Professorships at the Universities of Oxford (2010-21) and Cambridge (2006-10). She also had a professional life as a musician in experimental rock, jazz and free improvisation. Her work combines ethnographic and theoretical writings on music, sound, television and digital media. Her books include *Rationalizing Culture* (1995), *Western Music and Its Others* (ed. with D. Hesmondhalgh, 2000), *Music, Sound and Space* (ed., 2013), *Interdisciplinarity* (ed. with A. Barry, 2013), *Improvisation and Social Aesthetics* (ed. with E. Lewis and W. Straw, 2017), and *Music and Digital Media: A Planetary Anthropology* (2022). She currently leads the ERC-funded research program 'Music and Artificial Intelligence: Building Critical Interdisciplinary Studies' (2021-26).

Richard Bramwell is Lecturer in Media and Communication at Loughborough University. His research interests are focused around the areas of black British vernacular popular cultures. He was awarded his PhD in Sociology by the London School of Economics and Political Science. Prior to joining Loughborough, Richard was a Senior Research Associate at the University of Cambridge, where he conducted research on the experiences of black men in English high security prisons. Richard's book, *UK Hip-Hop, Grime and the City*, examines the aesthetic, cultural and commercial practices of black and white, working-class youths in London. His research has been published in *Popular Music*, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, *Critical Studies in Television*, and *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*. He was the principal investigator on the AHRC funded research project, *Performing Hip-Hop Englishness*, and is the co-editor of the forthcoming *Cambridge Companion to Global Rap*.

Joseph Browning is Senior Lecturer in Music in the Department of Performing Arts, City St George's, University of London. His work explores the intersections between music studies, the environmental humanities and anthropology, and appears in journals including *Ethnomusicology*, *Ethnomusicology Forum*, the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, *Organised Sound* and *Twentieth-Century Music*. His current research is an ethnographic study of the UK contemporary music scene, exploring how ideas about musical organicism and vitalism – which imagine music as patterned or animated like the natural world – relate to debates around environmentalism, biopolitics and the role of contemporary music in today's society. Other interests include cultures of creativity and reception within late capitalism, and processes of cultural encounter in cosmopolitan musical scenes. His research examines these issues in a range of genres and settings, including music for the Japanese shakuhachi, Western art music, contemporary classical music, and sound art.

Nils Bubandt is Professor of Anthropology at Aarhus University specializing in Indonesia, where he has conducted fieldwork for over 30 years. His research focusses on more-than-human worlds and multispecies aesthetics in a time of environmental crisis. Nils Bubandt is co-editor (with Mark Graham) of the journal *Ethnos*. Publications include *The Empty Seashell: Witchcraft and Doubt on an Indonesian Island* (2014), *Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet* (2017) and *Rubber Boots Methods for the Anthropocene* (2023). He is PI of the research project *BLUE: Multispecies Ethnographies of Oceans in Crisis* and a member of the research project *Java-futurism: Experimental Music and Sonic Activism in Indonesia*. With Sanne Krogh Groth, he will in September 2025 start the research project *Aesthetics of Extinction: The Asian Songbird Crisis Revisited*.

Amy Cimini is musicologist, violist, teacher and Associate Professor of Music at UC San Diego. She works on questions of power, community and technology in 20th & 21st century experimental music, sound art and auditory culture. She is the author of *Wild Sound: Maryanne Amacher and the Tenses of Audible Life* (Oxford University Press 2021) and co-editor of *Maryanne Amacher: Selected Writings and Interview* (Blank Forms Editions 2020) with composer and theorist Bill Dietz. In other writing, she explores race and digital art curation; debates about feminist music theory, embodiment and epistemology; listening, surveillance and border militarization and other topics. As a violist, Amy makes solo music that critically explores archives and soundscapes in the San Diego-Tijuana borderlands. Her first solo album, titled *See You When I Get There*, will be out in Spring 2025 on the Relative Pitch Imprint. She is also happy to play in Yvette Janine Jackson's Radio Opera Workshop and the San Diego-based noise band Necking.

Nicola Dibben is a musicologist and Professor at the University of Sheffield, UK, specialising in music cognition, popular music studies and music digitalisation. She is particularly interested in using empirical methods to understand how constructs such as our relationship to the natural world are encountered and shaped through music. Much of this work focuses on popular music, and in 2011, after publishing the monograph *Björk* (2009), she collaborated on the artist's multimedia album-app *Biophilia* - the first album for tablet computer. Nicola is former editor of the academic journals *Empirical Musicology Review* and *Popular Music* and her other books include the co-authored *Music and Mind in Everyday Life* (2010) and *Sounds Icelandic* (2019). More recently her interest in digital transformations has been focused on music in XR, synthetic media and co-developing assistive AI music generation technologies with computer scientists and studio musicians.

Bill Dietz is a composer and writer. His work on genealogies of reception and the "political aesthetics of listening" is often presented in festivals, museums, and academic journals, but also in apartment buildings, magazines, and on public streets. Alongside his artistic work, he has served as artistic director of Ensemble Zwischentöne (2006-2014) and of Overtoon - Platform for Sound Practitioners (2022-2025). He has published two books of listening scores: one on his Tutorial Diversions series, for home performance (*Eight Tutorial Diversions, 2009–2014*, 2015); and the other, made up of "concert pieces," based on historical and contemporary audience behavior (*L'école de la claque*, 2017). In 2013, he co-founded Ear | Wave | Event with Woody Sullender. With Amy Cimini, he co-edited *Maryanne Amacher: Selected Writings and Interviews* (2020), and he is co-author, with Kerstin Stakemeier, of *Universal Receptivity* (2021). He is co-chair of the Music/Sound Department in Bard College's Milton Avery Graduate School of the Arts in New York.

Eric Drott is Professor of Music Theory at the University of Texas at Austin. His research spans a number of subjects: contemporary music, streaming music platforms, music and social movements, French musical cultures, genre theory, digital music, and the political economy of music. He is the author of two books, *Music and the Elusive Revolution: Cultural Politics and Political Culture in France, 1968-1981* (2011) and *Streaming Music, Streaming Capital* (2024). He is also co-editor with Noriko Manabe the *Oxford Handbook of Protest Music* (parts of which are already available online). In 2020, he received the Dent Medal from the Royal Musical Association.

Luis Manuel Garcia-Mispireta is an Associate Professor in Ethnomusicology and Popular Music Studies at the University of Birmingham (UK). His research focuses on urban electronic dance music scenes, with a particular focus on affect, intimacy, stranger-

sociability, embodiment, sexuality, creative industries and musical migration. He is a member and resident DJ of Berlin's queer intersectional rave collective, 'Room 4 Resistance'. Garcia-Mispireta is currently developing a project on "grassroots" activism and queer nightlife collectives; he also has a new monograph out, entitled *Together Somehow: Music, Affect, and Intimacy on the Dancefloor* (Duke University Press, 2023).

Matthew Gelbart is Professor of Music at Fordham University. He is the author of two books, *The Invention of "Folk Music" and "Art Music": Emerging Categories from Ossian to Wagner* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), and *Musical Genre and Romantic Ideology: Belonging in the Age of Originality* (Oxford University Press, 2022) and of numerous articles and chapters on nineteenth-century European music and twentieth-century popular music. His work has been tied together by an interest in how we make meaning in music through categories and identities.

Sanne Krogh Groth is Senior Lecturer and Manager of Research and Research Education in Musicology at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies, Lund University. She is the editor of *Seismograf Peer* and from 2019 to 2024 also director of Lund University's Sound Environment Centre. Trained as a music historian, Groth's research concerns historiographic, aesthetic and political issues within the fields of contemporary music, electronic music and sound art. Currently, she is focusing on noise and experimental music in Indonesia and is PI of the research project *Java-futurism. Experimental Music and Sonic Activism in Indonesia* which she conducts with Nils Bubandt. Publications include *Politics and Aesthetics in Electronic Music* (2014), *The Bloomsbury Handbook Sound Art* (co-edited with H. Schulze) (2020) and *Negotiating Noise* (with J. G. Mansell) (2021).

Tariq Jazeel is Professor of Human Geography and Faculty Associate of the Sarah Parker Remond Centre for the Study of Racism and Racialisation at UCL. His work is positioned at the intersections of postcolonial theory, critical geography and South Asian studies. He has written on the spatial politics of various forms of cultural production, including literature, art, architecture and music. His books include *Sacred Modernity: nature, environment and the postcolonial geographies of Sri Lankan nationhood* (LUP 2013), and *Postcolonialism* (Routledge 2019). With Dr. Tom Western, he has co-edited a forthcoming special issue of the journal *Social Text*, entitled 'Sound Carriers', which focuses on sound, music and de- / anti-coloniality, and he is currently writing a book on the recent history and politics of Asian Underground music.

Sebastian Klotz is a musicological generalist with leanings toward systematic and transcultural issues. He holds the Chair of Transcultural Musicology and Historical Anthropology of Music at Humboldt University Berlin. He is the academic advisor to the Lautarchiv and leader of a long-term editorial project of the letters of Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy (online, open access). In 2017, he founded the *Erich von Hornbostel Audio Emergence Lab* (HAEL) to provide a site for interventionist research and the production of evidence. His research interests range from musical knowledge cultures, ideologies and practices of phonographic recording, explorations of timbre and the anthropology of mainstream popular music to an aquatic musicology. His key lecture topics are musical infrastructures, music's moral geographies, the critical neurocognition of music, and the biopolitics of the singing voice. He is a member of the editorial board of the journal *Twentieth-Century Music* and was co-curator of the exhibition *[Sound] – Listening to the World* (Humboldt Forum, Berlin). His most recent essay "Musical Affordances and the Gestalt Legacy: enriching music perception" was published in the journal *Gestalt Theory*, 45, 1-2.

Tomás McAuley is Assistant Professor and Head of School at the University College Dublin School of Music. Together with Nanette Nielsen, Jerrold Levinson, and Ariana Phillips-Hutton, he co-edited *The Oxford Handbook of Western Music and Philosophy* (2021) and his monograph *The Music of Philosophy: German Idealism and Musical Thought, from Kant to Schelling* is forthcoming with Oxford University Press. Previously, he held postdoctoral positions at the University of Cambridge (British Academy Postdoctoral Fellowship) and Indiana University and served as founding chair of the Royal Musical Association Music and Philosophy Study Group.

Ana María Ochoa Gautier is a professor in the Newcomb Department of Music, the Department of Communication and the Department of Spanish and Portuguese. Her work is on histories of listening and the decolonial, on sound studies and climate change, and on the relationship between the creative industries, the literary and the sonic in Latin America and the Caribbean. Her current projects explore the bioacoustics of life and death in colonial histories of the Americas and the relationship between sound, climate change and the colonial. She has been a Distinguished Greenleaf Scholar in Residence at Tulane University (2016) and a Guggenheim Fellow (2007-2008). She has served on the advisory boards of the Society for Cultural Anthropology, and the Smithsonian Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage. Her book, *Aurality, Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Duke University Press, 2014) was awarded the Alan Merriam Prize by the Society for Ethnomusicology. She is also the author of *Músicas locales en tiempos de globalización* (Buenos Aires: Norma 2003) and *Entre los Deseos y los Derechos: Un Ensayo*

Crítico sobre Políticas Culturales (Bogotá: Ministerio de cultura, 2003) and numerous articles in Spanish and English.

Dr. Robert Prey is Associate Professor of Digital Culture at the Oxford Internet Institute, University of Oxford, and a senior lecturer at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. Dr. Prey studies the relationship between technology, capitalism and culture. Robert's current focus is the creative labour of musicians as they adapt to online platforms around the world. He is principal investigator of the European Research Council-funded project "The Platformization of Music: Towards a Global Theory", or 'PlatforMuse' (2023-2028).

Christina Scharff is Professor of Culture & Subjectivity at King's College London. Christina has done research on young women's attitudes towards feminism, media representations of feminism, as well as work and inequalities in the classical music profession. Christina is author of two monographs, *Repudiating Feminism: Young Women in a Neoliberal World* (Ashgate 2012) and *Gender, Subjectivity, and Cultural Work: The Classical Music Profession* (Routledge 2017). She is also co-editor of several edited collections and numerous journal articles.

Christabel Stirling is a musicologist specialising in ethnographic approaches to music and sound art in contemporary urban environments. She is currently a British Academy Postdoctoral Fellow at the Royal College of Music working on a project called 'British Sound Art Since 1980: Recovering a Genealogy, Transforming a Field'. Before that, she was a postdoctoral researcher on the ERC-funded project SONCITIES at Oxford University, having completed her PhD there in 2019 with a thesis entitled 'Orbital Transmissions: Affect and Musical Public-Making in London'. Her research has been published in the *Journal of Sonic Studies*, *Contemporary Music Review*, and several edited book collections.

Marie Thompson is Senior Lecturer in Popular Music at The Open University, UK. She is the author of *Beyond Unwanted Sound: Noise, Affect and Aesthetic Moralism* (Bloomsbury, 2017). From 2020-2024 she led the Arts and Humanities Research Council project *Tinnitus, Auditory Knowledge and the Arts*. Thompson is also a founding member (with Annie Goh) of *Sonic Cyberfeminisms*, a project that uses the legacies and histories of cyberfeminism to critically and creatively interrogate the relationships between gender, technology and auditory culture.

Naomi Waltham-Smith is Professor at the University of Oxford and Douglas Algar Tutorial Fellow at Merton. An interdisciplinary scholar working at the intersection of music

and sound studies with deconstruction, decolonial theory, and Black radical thought, her work focuses on the politics of listening. She is the author of four monographs: *Music and Belonging Between Revolution and Restoration* (Oxford UP, 2017), *Shattering Biopolitics: Militant Listening and the Sound of Life* (Fordham UP, 2021), *Mapping (Post)colonial Paris by Ear* (Cambridge UP, 2023), and *Free Listening* (Nebraska UP, 2024). She has been awarded fellowships at the Penn Price Lab for Digital Humanities, Akademie Schloss Solitude, and Hanse-Wissenschaftskolleg—where she will be going next week for the remainder of the year to complete her next book. This project, which draws on archival research funded by the British Academy, excavates an almost “unheard-of” concept of listening in the history of political philosophy and praxis in a bid to illuminate today’s democratic malaise and resurgence of reactionary nationalisms.

Tom Western’s work builds creative geographies that seek to imagine futures beyond the colonial past and present. Tom works primarily in Athens, where he’s involved in various forms of creative and collaborative research and movement building. He is currently finishing his first book – titled *Circular Movements: Writing Anticolonial Futures from Athens* – and has recently published work in *Social Text*, *Society and Space*, *The Journal of Creative Geography*, and *Migration and Society*. Tom is based at UCL as a Lecturer in Social and Cultural Geography.