

THE POLITICS OF MUSIC AND SOUND

Graduate Student Conference

DUNTON TOWER
ROOM 2017

Presented by the
Music and
Culture Graduate
Student Society

FRIDAY, MARCH 13th
NOON-6:30PM
AND
SATURDAY, MARCH 14th
8:30AM-5:30PM

KEYNOTE BY
DR. KIP PEGLEY

Dr. Kip Pegley is Queen's National Scholar and Professor of Music in the Dan School of Drama and Music at Queen's University, Kingston. He is the author of *Coming to You Wherever You Are: MuchMusic, MTV and Youth Identities* (Wesleyan University Press, 2008) and co-editor of *Music, Politics and Violence* (Wesleyan University Press, 2012). His recent work explores the connections between sound, trauma, and politics and has appeared in the *Journal of Military, Veteran and Family Health* (2015), *Singing Death: Reflections on Music and Mortality* (Routledge, 2017), *Music and War in the United States* (Routledge, 2019), *MUSICultures* (2019), *Music & Politics* (2023), and the *Canadian Journal of Communication* (2024).



**Carleton
University**

School for Studies
in Art and Culture

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Land Acknowledgement

The Music and Culture Graduate Students Society would like to acknowledge that Carleton University is located on the unceded and unsurrendered territory of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, whose presence here and care for this land reaches back to time immemorial.

The purpose of this acknowledgement is not only to honour, uplift, and uphold the voices and values of the Nations across Turtle Island, but also to acknowledge Canada's history of genocide, aggression, and oppression of lands, cultures, and people. This acknowledgement also recognizes how Canada continues to perpetrate harm and violence against Indigenous nations living on Turtle Island today.

The purpose of a land acknowledgement is to extend beyond recognition, encouraging a sustained, individual and collective effort that is rooted in reflection and action. We urge non-Indigenous people to challenge and dismantle colonial mindsets, actions, and tactics in ourselves, our systems, our institutions, and our artistic landscapes. Our intention today as we acknowledge this land and its original peoples, is to encourage reflection, action, and education. From our purview, we believe that music and the arts can be powerful vehicles for decolonization, action, and healing.

Welcoming Remarks

Welcome to our annual Music and Culture Graduate Symposium! We are excited to present speakers from Queen's University, University of California, University of Iowa, University of Alberta, Western University, Concordia University, McGill University, University of Toronto, University of Ottawa, Carleton University, and independent researchers.

Our conference committee chose the theme of "Politics of Music and Sound," to examine the role of sound in shaping and responding to varying political landscapes, movements, and challenges. This conference engages in the political implications of music and sound around themes of care, embodiment, gender, nationalism, protest, and peace.

We encourage all presenters and attendees to reflect on our own positionalities, privileges, and unconscious biases within our work and in relation to all the research we will encounter together over the course of the conference. **With this in mind, we encourage presenters to consider their audience thoughtfully: if any of your material could be regarded as "sensitive content," we encourage you to acknowledge this at the start of your presentation.** Our intention is to provide a safe and inclusive setting wherein every presenter and attendee feels comfortable and respected. We sincerely thank you for your thoughtfulness, understanding, and collegiality. We look forward to exploring the important role and impact of music and sound that will be showcased throughout the conference.

We would like to also extend a special thanks to all members of the MCGSS Conference Committee who helped make our symposium possible:

Sinéad Almeida (Co-president), Ella Latta Suazo (Co-president),
Kim Farris-Manning, Sarah Corbett, Sara Beth Lyons,
and Fahimeh Naji

Event Details

Location

The conference will take place in Dunton Tower, Room 2017, Carleton University (1125 Colonel By Dr, Ottawa, ON). Dunton Tower is the tall tower, brown building in the centre of campus by the library. Entering from the tunnels or the second floor outdoor entrance, take any elevator up to the 20th floor.

Please see this link for a map of campus:

<https://carleton.ca/campus/wp-content/uploads/2023-carleton-universitymap-illustrated.pdf>

Getting Here

Carleton University is located at 1125 Colonel By Drive in Ottawa. You can access Carleton by public transit: lines 7, 10, 111, and O-Train Line 2. Note: Many people choose to use public transit or Uber/Lyft to get to campus. If you are using Uber/Lyft, enter "Carleton Dunton Tower" as your drop off point. Dunton Tower is about a five-minute walk from the city bus stop near the Carleton Residence Commons.

Campus Parking

The closest parking lot to Dunton Tower is P1 (see url above for map, it is labeled P1 in a green box at the top left). The daily weekend rate is \$6 per day and on weekdays the rate is \$4.50/hour with a 4 hour limit.

On Friday, a day pass at P5A is \$13.50. This parking lot is across campus, it will take 10-15 minutes to walk to Dunton Tower from this parking lot.

Food Options

Light refreshments will be provided on Friday, March 13th. After Friday's session, all are welcome to dinner at Margarita's Latin Fusion (873 Bank Street) which is accessible by the line 7 bus, towards St. Laurent.

On Saturday, March 14th, there will be light refreshments as well as a catered lunch.

Please note there is a coffee shop (Bridgehead), on Level 2 of the MacOdrum Library (Friday 8-6, Saturday 10-5:30), located in the Quad, to the right of Dunton Tower when exiting outdoors on level 2.

Any event questions can be emailed to mcgss@cunet.carleton.ca

Schedule: Friday, March 13th

12:20-12:30 Opening Remarks by MCGSS

SESSION ONE: Politics of Care

Chair: Dr. James Deaville

12:30-13:00 “Exploring Everyday Musical Practices in Long-Term Care: Emotional Labour and Care Ethics” - Sinéad Almeida, Carleton University

13:00-13:30 “Music, Movement, and Aging: A Dalcroze Eurhythmics Case Study on Senior Well-Being at NYSC in Toronto” - Di Zhang, University of Ottawa

13:30-13:45 Break

SESSION TWO: Exploratory Music

Chair: Professor William Echard

13:45-14:15 “Connecting With Audience Through Improvisation: The Case of Gabriela Montero” - Sarah Corbett, Carleton University

14:15-14:45 “Experimental Music Resources for Public High School Classrooms” - Louise Concepcion, University of Alberta

14:45-15:00 Break, move to Kailash Mital Theatre

SESSION THREE: Lecture Recital

Chair: Dr. James McGowan

15:00-16:30 “Dibike Giizis Nagamonan (Moon Songs)” - Beverley McKiver, independent composer and Ryan Baxter, Western University

16:30-16:45 Break, move back to Dunton Tower

SESSION FOUR: Place, Sense, Listening

Chair: Dr. Ellen Waterman

16:45-17:15 “Exploring Musical Identities Through Listening and Soundwalks” - Melissa Hambleton, Western University

17:15-17:45 “The Creation of a Musical Work that Arouses a Synesthetic Experience” - Tom Lachance, McGill University

17:45-18:30 “Situating Through Story: Carrying, Listening, to Place” - Kim Farris-Manning, Carleton University

18:30 Wrap up of Day 1

All are invited to a pay-your-own way dinner at Margarita's Latin Fusion (873 Bank Street) from 6:45pm!

Schedule: Saturday, March 14th

8:45-9:00 Opening Remarks by MCGSS

SESSION FIVE: Music and Gender

Chair: Dr. Anna Hoefnagels

9:00-9:30 "Gender Disparity in Brass Sections Across the United States and Canada" - Sara Beth Lyons, Carleton University

9:30-10:00 "Only Boys Aloud: The Politics of Listening, Gendering Children's Voices and Inclusion/ Exclusion" - Bronwyn Thies-Thompson, Concordia University

10:00-10:30 "Fairuz, Gender and Lebanese Nationalism" - Alex Strong-Saad, McGill University

10:30-10:45 Break

SESSION SIX: Music and Nationalism

Chair: Dr. Jesse Stewart

10:45-11:15 "When Resistance Becomes a Product: The Political Paradox of Bella Ciao" - Claudia Peverini, University of Iowa

11:15-11:45 "Pine Trees In a Perfect Row: Northern Ontario Depictions of Place and Character" - Kalle Mattson, Carleton University

11:45-12:15 "Build Your Conservatories in the Mountains": Rural Phantasm and Musical Pluralism in Türkiye" - Shireen Nabatian, University of California, Santa Cruz

12:15-12:45 "From Vegas to Kolob: Mormon Hymnal Influence & The Killer's Pressure Machine" - Murray Nielson, University of Ottawa

12:45-14:00 Lunch (provided)

SESSION SEVEN: KEYNOTE

Moderator: Ella Latta Suazo

14:00-15:00 "Composing for Conservatives: Campaign Songs in Canadian 2019 Federal Election" - Dr. Kip Pegley, Queens University

15:00-15:15 Break

SESSION EIGHT: Protest and Peace

Chair: Dr. Lyndsey Copeland

15:15-15:45 "Redefining Music as Politics: When Does Protest Music Become Activism?" - Mariana Da Silva Gabriel, University of California, Davis

15:45-16:15 "The Party is the Most Precious Thing: Revolutionary Music, Pedagogy, and Ideology in 1970s Canadian Marxist-Leninist Movements" - Isaiah Chadney, University of Toronto

16:15-16:45 "Polarization, Hope and (Key)Change: On Songwriting for Peace" - Ella Latta Suazo, Carleton University

16:45-17:00 Wrap Up of Day 2

Abstracts

Session 1: Politics of Care

Sinéad Almeida (Carleton University): “Exploring Everyday Musical Practices in Long-Term Care: Emotional Labour and Care Ethics”

Experiencing music spontaneously in daily routines shapes everyday life in a long-term care home in Ottawa, Ontario. This musical exposure may include a care worker singing a familiar tune during morning routines or a spiritual care worker using personal piano skills to lead spiritual music-based sessions. While person-centred models like the Butterfly approach encourage everyday music use as part of “exceptional” caregiving, music use does not appear in formal job descriptions for care workers. Instead, caregivers draw on existing musical knowledge and emotional labour to enact ideals of person-centred care.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at The Glebe Centre, including interviews with care staff and participant observation, this paper explores how everyday uses of music by care staff constitute a form of emotional labour that remains largely underacknowledged despite being essential to relational and individualized care for residents living with dementia. Engaging with feminist ethics of care (Tronto 1994; Held 2005), and music in everyday life (DeNora 2000), this paper examines how care workers might navigate the gap between institutional prescription, such as formal music therapy, and limited resourcing.

Through examples of musical interaction between staff and residents, as well as my own observations, I show how music creates meaningful connections, supports more individualized care environments, and promotes well-being. This paper argues that everyday music use is inherent to person-centred care models, yet the labour involved remains largely invisible. By making this work visible, this research shows the politics of everyday music use in care settings and argues for recognizing care workers’ musical expertise as skilled labour worthy of training, support, and institutional acknowledgement, particularly as person-centred care models expand into settings with limited resources for music-based programming.

Di Zhang (University of Ottawa): “Music, Movement, and Aging: A Dalcroze Eurhythmics Case Study on Senior Well-Being at NYSC in Toronto”

As the global population ages, creative and embodied approaches to health have become increasingly vital. While pharmacological treatments offer limited relief, music-based interventions open new pathways for enhancing cognitive, emotional, and physical well-being. This study explores how a Dalcroze Eurhythmics Music and Movement program supports senior well-being in Toronto through rhythm, improvisation, and embodied interaction.

Drawing on mixed methods—including questionnaires, field observations, and interviews with participants over 60 years old who attended ten weekly sessions at North York Senior Centre Toronto (including individuals living with dementia)—the research investigates how musical movement enhances social engagement, mood, and motor coordination. By integrating qualitative insights, the study bridges neuroscience and community practice, drawing on recent literature in auditory–motor synchronization and neural entrainment to explain how music and movement engagement supports the aging brain.

The paper introduces the concept of musical practice of community care, recognizing the emotional and social contributions of musicians and facilitators as essential to community well-being. Ultimately, it reimagines the future of music as a practice of collective healing, creativity, and intergenerational connection—demonstrating how the arts can play a crucial role in health and community.

Session 2: Exploratory Music

Sarah Corbett (Carleton University): “Connecting With Audience Through Improvisation: The Case of Gabriela Montero”

Gabriela Montero is an active concert pianist from Venezuela. Montero performs standard classical works, but is also known for her improvisation and composing skills (“Biography” 2025). Montero invites her audience to participate in the improvisation process by inviting a volunteer to name, and sing a song, or theme for Montero to improvise upon. Although improvisation is not primarily associated with Western classical music, this practice has a strong presence in its history (Hill 2017, West 2022). It is known that musician-composers, especially during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, improvised music in public performance (Best 2018, Moore 1992, Vigran 2020). Robin Moore interpreted how social changes (1992) affected the practice of improvisation in Western art music, whereas other scholars emphasize the impacts of *Werktreue* (Ayerst 2021, Kharatyan 2024). I argue that Gabriela Montero’s performance style showcases the potential for improvisation as a tool to connect audience members and performers. I analyze video recordings of Montero’s improvisatory performances and make note of the way she interacts with the audience along with their reactions. The comment section of the videos serves as an additional forum to gauge reception. Improvised performances do not inherently create a connection between audience members and performers. Rather, Montero’s improvisation practice is specifically based in the inclusion of audience members

Louise Concepcion (University of Alberta): “Experimental Music Resources for Public High School Classrooms”

High quality music education programs and content should be available for students and teachers in every school to contribute to a well-rounded education. Unfortunately, factors including underfunding, a lack of resources, and diminishing interest and motivation contribute to a misunderstanding of the value of music education [1]. With regard to music education more specifically, 86% of Canadians agree that music education is beneficial and should be delivered in an equitable manner [2].

In an attempt to create resources for teachers that align with the provincial curriculum, this paper will introduce a research-creation project on the topic of experimental music to high school aged students, delivered as a half-day workshop. Experimental music is still relatively new as a genre and very little resources exist on teaching experimental music [3]. Along with a lesson plan, this paper will elaborate on the package’s components, including a slide deck, and accompanying exercises and activities. This project focuses on creating a program to teach experimental music in the classroom, expose students to new music they might not otherwise discover, and identify new opportunities to continue music engagement. Through the experimental music pathway, this paper seeks to look past traditional notions of music and cultural norms and trigger critical conversations in the classroom about awareness, accessibility, inclusivity, and being culturally responsive, while fulfilling general music learning objectives outlined in curriculum.

[1] Canadian Union of Public Employees. “Ontarians Blame Ford’s Underfunding for School Cuts: Poll.” September 24, 2025. <https://cupe.ca/ontarians-blame-fords-underfunding-school-cuts-poll>.

[2] MusiCounts. “86% of Canadians Think Music Education Is Beneficial to Children and Should Be Delivered Equitably to Schools, MusiCounts Survey Finds.” November 25, 2025. <https://musiccounts.ca>.

[3] Snyder, Philip. “Experimental Music In Higher Education: Toward A Pedagogy Of Creativity.” Theses and Dissertations, January 1, 2018, 22. <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/etd/4718>.

Session 4: Place, Sense, Listening

Melissa Hambleton (Western University): “Exploring Musical Identities Through Listening and Soundwalks”

Engaging in arts-based practices provides unique ways of deepening educational experiences that benefit educators and students alike (Eisner, 2004). This paper draws on an arts-based mini research project, created for a graduate course, that involved listening practices through soundwalks, soundscape composition, and musical improvisation. Through the project, I explored my relationship to land and my positionality as a white educator of settler heritage, with the intention of creating a land acknowledgement beyond words. These sound-based explorations disrupted some elements of my prior formal music training, creating new opportunities for creative practice as a music learner. At the same time, I became aware of the limits of my own understanding and interpretations of sound in relation to place, which led to uncertainty about my initial intention of creating a personal land acknowledgement. Taking an autoethnographic approach, in this paper I analyse artifacts from the arts-based project to deepen my understanding of my musical identity development and the intersections of my researcher and practitioner identities. I employ a border crossing framework (Giroux, 2005) to explore shifts between identities of musician, music teacher, researcher, and learner, and to examine how listening and improvisation experiences may challenge traditional approaches to music learning and growth.

Tom Lachance (McGill University): “The Creation of a Musical Work that Arouses a Synesthetic Experience”

This research-creation project examines how a composer can convey their own synesthetic experience to a listener through a musical work. Although long perceived as rare, synesthesia—the ability to associate different senses, such as sounds and images—is now recognized as more widespread according to recent research. Composers such as Scriabin and Messiaen attempted to explore this phenomenon, but their efforts were limited by the lack of robust scientific data at the time. This project builds on advances in musical cognition and perception to guide the listener toward a synesthetic experience.

The central hypothesis is that understanding the sensory and cognitive mechanisms underlying synesthesia, as well as the perception of musical form, can enable the creation of a musical work that fosters rich and recurrent sensory associations. The objectives are first to identify the interactions between the senses involved in synesthetic experience, particularly during auditory perception, and their effects on mental processes. Next, the project analyzes how listeners’ auditory reflexes and perceptual schemas influence the structure of a work designed to evoke such associations. Finally, these observations will inform the guidance of the listener through a musical work that allows interpretive freedom, with the aim of comparing listeners’ perceptions to the composer’s original intentions.

Being in the first stages of the research, the presentation will focus on different strategies used in recent compositions (... *al fine*. for chambre orchestra, 2025 and *Ad mare victoria*, for chambre ensemble) to arouse cross-modal correspondences between musical and extramusical material.

By mobilizing scientific data, this project contributes to a deeper understanding of sensory correspondences, enriching contemporary artistic practice and offering a new pathway for composers and artists exploring synesthesia.

Kim Farris-Manning (Carleton University): “Situating Through Story: Carrying, Sensing, Listening to Place”

This lecture-recital will begin with the examination of how story, through experiential multisensory modes of transmission, shapes understandings of place. Adopting a multivocal approach to storytelling, memory, imagination and knowledge-sharing demonstrates how story functions simultaneously as archive and activation. My research draws on Q’um Q’um Xiiem Jo-ann Archibald’s ethical principles of Indigenous storywork, Dylan Robinson’s critical listening, Sa’iliemanu Lilomaiva-Doktor’s concept of place, and Lawrence English’s relational listening.

I will share a research-creation work in progress that my colleague Ella Latta Suazo and I are developing as part of our Sound Studies course this term. Drawing on our exploration of Sarah Pink’s sensory ethnography as a methodological approach, Ella and I engage in a joint telling, retelling, construction, and reconstruction of one of Ella’s emplaced sonic memories. I am interested in how elements of story (emotion, knowledge, memory, etc.) are affected by processes of transmission, translation, transduction, and transposition. Building upon an elastic, relational approach to place and to storytelling, my research asks the question ‘how does a story change when shared in dialogue versus through broadcast’?

The audience will be invited to engage with a spatialized installation of the story, transmitted via haptic and auditory transducers and excitors that resonate through different objects. We will then regroup for an informal discussion about our collective and individual multisensory experiences of sharing and receiving emplaced memories, adding a secondary layer of dialogue and broadcast that may inform mine and Ella’s continued research and project development.

End of Day 1

Session 5: Music and Gender

Sara Beth Lyons (Carleton University): “Gender Disparity in Brass Sections Across the United States and Canada”

Professional brass sections in major symphony orchestras across the United States and Canada have historically demonstrated a preference for male-identifying performers in hiring practices, which has persisted in present-day organizations (Himonides et al., 2023). In my paper, I will analyze the gender composition of a total of six professional orchestra brass sections (“brass” referring to trumpet, French horn, trombone, and tuba). I aim to locate and define inequities concerning the representation of women in the professional brass playing profession in current times, propose systematic causalities, and highlight the multi-generational preference of male brass performers in both educational and professional classical music industries in the United States and Canada. My data analysis will concern the current membership three, non-governmental, brass-sections in major symphony organizations in each country; in Canada, the National Arts Center Orchestra, the Vancouver Symphony Orchestra, and the Toronto Symphony Orchestra; and in the US, the National Symphony Orchestra, the New York Philharmonic, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. I will also provide data collected on the educational institutions referenced in professional biographies, as well as individual instructors mentioned, to highlight how gender disparity is enforced in educational music institutions. Using numerical data analysis, I will present the perceived difference in gender parity rates when comparing professional musician membership in the referenced institutions. I will also compare the data of the two countries that occupy a similar geographic area and language, and question what cultural differences in each country enable or disable women-presenting brass musicians in the professional orchestra world.

Bronwyn Thies-Thompson (Concordia University): “No Girls Aloud: The Politics of Listening, Gendering Children's Voices, and Liturgical Choirs”

This presentation examines how sound and listening function as political practices in the governance of cultural institutions, focusing on the gendering of children’s voices in elite liturgical choirs. I interrogate how pre-pubescent children's voices come to be heard as gendered and how these auditory distinctions acquire cultural legitimacy and legal authority.

A recent legal dispute over access to a prestigious Berlin boys’ choir serves as an example of these broader dynamics. In 2019, a nine year-old German girl attempted to sue a prestigious boys’ choir in Berlin for gender discrimination. While she was eventually granted an audition, she was ultimately rejected due to her singing not conforming to the music director's conception of how a boys choir sounds. The court found sufficient evidence of a distinctive “boys’ choir sound” and determined that the artistic freedom of the choir to maintain their “distinct acoustic pattern” superseded the girl’s individual right to membership in the choir. In this context, claims about preserving a distinctive “boys’ choir sound” were granted legal force, revealing how auditory perceptions are stabilized as objective criteria. The law’s deference to sonic tradition demonstrates how listening can be mobilized as a mechanism of governance, allowing heritage discourses to override equality claims.

This presentation explores how children’s voices become timbrally distinguished and gendered, and how this process has been demonstrated (in British studies) to be deeply linked with enculturation, much more than physiology. However, the most prestigious and famous liturgical children’s choirs today remain male-only institutions, often employing listening and sound perception alongside heritage discourses to legitimize the maintenance of gendered barriers to these choirs. Rather than treating sound as a neutral phenomenon, this presentation calls attention to how the act of listening is harnessed as a form of political judgment that may structure inclusion and exclusion

Alex Strong-Saad (McGuill University): “Fairuz, Nationalism and Agency”

Fairuz (born Nouhad Haddad) is one of the most accomplished and recognized musicians of the Arab world. She rose to international fame during the late 1950s for her participation in Lebanese nationalist movement, embodying the sound and image of Christian femininity in the region. The singer became an icon during Lebanon’s civil war, performing music that addressed the common hardships and experiences of ordinary Lebanese people. In the limited existing scholarship, Fairuz’s agency as an Arab-Lebanese woman and symbol of Lebanese nationalism remains a contentious issue. Ongoing debates also suffer from a lack of musicological inquiry, with scholars neglecting to engage with Fairuz’s music as a site of agency.

In this talk, I review the specificities and limitations of Judith Butler’s theory of agency, drawing from feminist author Saba Mahmood’s scholarship to reexamine Fairuz’s history. Musical and sound-based analysis of popular Lebanese songs are central to this critical reinterpretation. In investigating the musical expression, lyrical meaning, and performance practice of prominent recordings, I demonstrate the affordances and constraints of Fairuz’s personal and political agency. My findings are further complimented by interviews conducted with Monica Asly, a frequent collaborator and session musician of Fairuz from 1980-2001. Ultimately, I argue against prevailing orientalist assumptions that construe Fairuz as a passive subject within the Lebanese nationalist movement. Through an analysis of her artistry, style and life as a musician, I offer a divergent and necessary retelling of the Lebanese Diva’s story, offering a fresh perspective on the role of music and gender in the Lebanese national struggle.

Session 6: Music and Nationalism

Claudia Peverini (University of Iowa): When Resistance Becomes a Product: The Political Paradox of Bella Ciao”

Bella Ciao, the song associated with the Italian Resistance and a symbol of political protest, began as a working-class and anti-capitalist song, expressing explicit criticism of economic conditions, exploitation, and capitalist power relations. Bella Ciao has always enjoyed widespread global circulation, and although it continues to be sung in protest contexts, it is now also reused in industry products.

This paper addresses the contradiction between the song’s anti-capitalist origins and its contemporary use within profit-oriented circuits. The research questions how the political meaning of Bella ciao is transformed when a song born in opposition to economic exploitation becomes a global cultural commodity. The main goal is to analyze whether these processes lead to a depoliticization of the song or if rather they produce new forms of political meaning through dynamics of re-signification.

The study combines historical and musicological analysis with perspectives from memory studies and popular music studies. Contemporary performances of Bella Ciao in political demonstrations, media productions, and covers or remixes are examined.

Through these analyses, it can be observed that the commercial dissemination of Bella Ciao creates an unresolved conflict and tension between resistance, memory, and profit. The commercialization of the song creates a structural tension, in which the capitalist system absorbs antagonistic symbols without completely eliminating their critical potential, and tends to operate as a space for ideological negotiation rather than as a univocal political message. This paper hopes to serve as a useful case study for understanding the relationship between protest music and cultural commodification.

Kalle Mattson (Carleton University): “Pine Trees In A Perfect Row: Northern Ontario depictions of place and character”

The emigration of Canadian popular musicians to the United States, both geographically and artistically, is a common phenomenon in popular music and has been integral to the success of many artists. “During the 1960s Canadian-born but American-based artists produced some of the most important American popular music of the period.” (Edwardson, 2003) Musicians such as Joni Mitchell and Neil Young, who moved from Canada to the United States, found fame due to their iconic music that was written about specific American geography and place. “Two of the anthems of the "Sixties generation" in North America - "Woodstock" and "Ohio" - were written by introspective folk singers raised in small Canadian towns.” (Wright, 1988) But why have so few musicians chosen to depict or mythologize their own home country?

Portrayals of small town Canada within popular song are few and far between compared to the American histories, genres and even industries that mythologize the concept of the American small town in music. In popular music genres from country to folk, the small town has come to stand in as a symbol for values such as self-reliance, tradition and simplicity within the art that describes it. Despite the lineage of talented artists and musicians born in Canada, this format or genre has rarely been applied to Canadian towns in Canadian popular music.

This short lecture recital will showcase new songs from summersets’ upcoming full-length album “Pine Trees In A Perfect Row,” and will speak on popular music songwriting practices such as prescriptive writing (Webb, 2014) and destination writing (Pattison, 1995) as techniques and tools that summersets has used to depict distinctly a Canadian and Northern Ontarian small town identity and experience through place and character.

Shireen Nabatian (University of California, Santa Cruz): “ ‘Build Your Conservatories in the Mountains’: Rural Phantasm and Musical Pluralism in Türkiye”

Worldwide, the architects of nationalist projects and the “burning souls” (Livingston 2014) of folk music revivals have long turned to imagined rural pasts as wellsprings of cultural authenticity. Such imaginaries frequently emerge in moments of political crisis, functioning as responses to cultural loss, social fragmentation, or the failure of nationalist projects. At Müzik Köyü (Music Village), a summer music seminar founded in 2017 in Türkiye, amateur and professional musicians alike derive belonging, emplacement, and meaning through music-making in rural locations around the country while negotiating two seemingly opposed political orientations: the Turkish state’s nationalist investment in folk culture on one hand, and anti-nationalist commitments to pluralism and diversity on the other. Both positions draw upon a phantasmic vision of rural Anatolia as the pure source of authentic folk music, revealing how shared cultural imaginaries can underwrite competing political projects.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted at Müzik Köyü in 2023 and 2024, this paper examines musicking as a form of political and ideological engagement. I analyze participants’ musical practices through the lenses of the phantasm (Agamben 1993; Favero 2003; Girgis 2007), diasporic intimacy (Boym 2001), and Alevi cosmology as expressed in frequently performed song forms such as nefes (hymn; lit. “breath”), deyiş (lit. “saying”), and unattributed folk songs like “Heredîya.” These musical-poetic forms articulate an affective orientation toward longing, non-arrival, and ongoing seeking—an orientation that resists the fixing of culture within nationalist frameworks while remaining grounded in historically marginalized traditions.

This affective stance helps to explain both the centrality of Alevi repertoire at Müzik Köyü and its resonance among participants from diverse backgrounds. More broadly, this paper situates music seminars as politically consequential environments, demonstrating how phantasmic yearnings shape musical practice as a response to contemporary political landscapes well beyond the Turkish context.

Murray Nielson (University of Ottawa): “From Vegas to Kolob: Mormon Hymnal Influence & The Killer's Pressure Machine”

With their 2021 album *Pressure Machine*, The Killers' period of relative stealth Mormonism came to an end. The band's religious affiliation had not been kept a complete secret though many secular fans were surprised, a sentiment encapsulated by Audrey Vieira's article "Fans Horrified to Learn The Killers Tricked Them Into Enjoying Mormon Rock," (2022). Hailing from Las Vegas, Nevada in the early 2000s, their early and mid career albums featured upbeat tracks void of profanity while *Pressure Machine* alternatively, as a concept album, features graphic themes and spoken dialogue. The song "West Hills (III)" is a traditional SATB choral arrangement and features a melody akin to "If I Could Hie to Kolob;" one of the most popular hymns in the Latter-Day Saints' hymnal.

Mormonism is one of the fastest growing religious sects in America. The Utah Legislature consists primarily of Mormons with upwards of 86% of sitting members active in the church, while the state's congressional seats and statewide political offices are 100% Mormon (Davidson, 2021). In a state where only 60% of the general population identify as Mormon these numbers represent how prominent and influential the Mormon church is with global population projections predicted of 265 million by the year 2080 (Stark, 2014).

Did The Killers intentionally deceive fans? Would their audiences have been as keen to support the group had they known a percentage of ticket and album sales would be given to a church with deeply entrenched views of bigotry, racism and misogyny through tithe? Incorporating Linden's (2016) methodology of insistence for lyrical analysis this paper explores The Killers' discography, examining the band's use of LDS themes, the manner in which the band straddled secular and religious genres, and how the convergence of religion, political power and music led to their success.

Session 7: Keynote

Kip Pegley (Queen's University): “Composing for Conservatives: Campaign Songs in the Canadian 2019 Federal Election”

Though the concept of the permanent campaign—the idea that politicians are constantly in campaign mode—is not new, the advent of social media has further blurred distinctions between governing and preparing for the next election. Playlists, memes, political songs, and user generated content constitute and fragment political discourses, extending campaigning beyond the remit of party insiders to social media elites and partisans. This research, written in collaboration with Dr. Rebecca Draissey-Collishaw (University of Sheffield), explores the campaign songs that featured in Canada's 2019 federal election. Unlike the two previous Canadian federal elections, which saw politicians transform licensed songs into rally anthems, curate Obama-inspired Spotify playlists, and mobilise Web 2.0 technologies to extend the reach of their campaigning, 2019 featured a return to more 'traditional' campaign songs, either commissioned or pre-existing, that communicated and contained key political messages. I focus particular attention on the Conservative Party of Canada's decision to commission an original campaign song, calling upon songwriter Jim Vallance (Aerosmith, Michael Bubl , Bryan Adams) to write "Get Ahead." While the impetus was to both target and expand their voter base while avoiding legal complications of licensing existing songs, unforeseen challenges accompanied this original work. Through this example I consider how these songs function in an era characterised by rampant partisanship and normalised social media usage. This case study offers context for unravelling the complex interactions of sound, politics, elections, and old and new medias in the negotiation of political discourses.

Session 8: Protest and Peace

Mariana Da Silva Gabriel (University of California, Davis): “Redefining Music as Politics: When Does Protest Music Become Activism?”

In periods of political turmoil, when governments fail to serve the interests of the people and their grievances go unheard, communities turn to art and music to express anger, dissent, and demands for change. Music has always played a fundamental role in politics and collective struggle, yet scholarship often treats protest music and activism as synonymous. This paper argues that they are distinct political categories requiring careful theoretical differentiation. Drawing on work in musicology, sociology, and human rights theory, I attempt to develop a framework for understanding when and how music functions as political action. I examine competing definitions of protest music, highlighting tensions between lyrical content, artistic intent, performance context, and audience reception. By interrogating definitions of protest music alongside theories of activism, I propose that protest music becomes activism not through expression alone, but through its organized deployment within movements making specific political claim. Through examples ranging from H.E.R.’s “I Can’t Breathe” to José Afonso’s “Grândola, Vila Morena,” I demonstrate that protest music operates on a spectrum rather than within fixed categories. I then situate these theories within human rights activism, where music can both expose human rights violations and enact the very freedoms that authoritarian regimes seek to suppress. Protest songs create a powerful medium for human struggle and create the conditions for activism, but its status as activism remains contingent and open to debate.

Isaiah Chadney (University of Toronto): “The Party is the Most Precious Thing: Revolutionary Music, Pedagogy, and Ideology in 1970s Canadian Marxist-Leninist Movements”

This paper examines the role of music within Canadian Marxist-Leninist and anti-revisionist movements during the 1970s, focusing on the Communist Party of Canada (Marxist-Leninist) under Hardial Bains, as well as related organizations such as En Lutte! and the Canadian Communist League (Marxist-Leninist). I demonstrate that within this context, revolutionary music began to function as a form of political pedagogy, collective ritual, and ideological reinforcement embedded within developing party infrastructure. My analysis centers on the adaptation of existing folk melodies and international socialist songs into explicitly political repertoires, exemplified by the CPC(M-L)’s transformation of the traditional Canadian folk song “Land of the Silver Birch” into “Death to the Traitors!,” and situates these practices within Maoist and Hoxhaist prescriptions for mass-oriented revolutionary culture.

Drawing primarily on party-affiliated recordings, songbooks, and contemporary polemical materials (Canadian Cultural Workers’ Committee 1979; Cardew 2006), the paper situates Canadian Marxist-Leninist musical practice within transnational networks of political music-making, including collaborations between the CCWC and figures associated with English composer and Communist Party of England (Marxist-Leninist) co-founder Cornelius Cardew, the Progressive Cultural Association, and People’s Liberation Music. Supplementary archival materials and secondary scholarship contextualize the circulation and institutional use of music within conferences, youth camps, and political education initiatives, reinforcing music’s function as a structured component of political practice rather than peripheral cultural expression (Tilbury 2008; Harris 2016). By foregrounding music’s role within ideological and organizational frameworks, this paper contributes to broader discussions of music, politics, and cultural production in twentieth-century Canada.

Ella Latta Suazo (Carleton University): “Polarization, Hope and (Key) Change: On Songwriting for Peace”

“There are crucial differences between a heterogeneous society divided along several ethno-linguistic or religious divisions, and a polarized society with two large groups that are hostile to each other” write Abartli and Rosenberg in their article “United we stand, divided we rule: how political polarization erodes democracy” (2021). As Canadians, we are increasingly seeing polarization in our political landscapes, most pressingly from our neighbour, the United States of America. Canadians may be worried for our own storied “heterogeneous society” falling into a similar state of turmoil and instability. The field of Peace and Conflict studies deeply explores identity-based conflicts and how polarization heightens the differences between “in-groups” and “out-groups”. These insights bring crucial analysis and tools for understanding and dismantling the politically polarized lives we find ourselves leading in 2026. However, Peace and Conflict studies, along with many academic disciplines, require time and intention to bring knowledge and ideas outside of the institution for the benefit of all. In her piece “Poetry is Not a Luxury,” renowned poet and feminist activist Audre Lorde wrote “[t]here are no new ideas. There are only new ways of making them felt” (1984, pg. 39). When considering the impacts of polarization and wondering how music can help bring about change and peace, songs can be used as vehicles of feeling to communicate relevant knowledge and calls to action. This brief lecture recital explores how songwriting can become a communication tool for peacebuilding ideas from Peace and Conflict studies through the author’s song “Us, Here, Now.” This hopeful song speaks to our isolated lives, challenges listeners to reflect on how they may be complicit in polarizing attitudes, and how they may break the mold to reach across different chasms of “us” verse “them.”

End of Day 2



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