


CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS



**MUSIC,
CRISIS,
MEMORY**

**AN INTERNATIONAL
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**SCHOOL OF ARTS AND CUTURES, NEWCASTLE UNIVERSITY
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Lou Aimes-Hill

“Familiarity Breeds Content: Tom Rosenthal, Viral Nostalgia, and a ‘Home’ for Coronamusic”

In 2015, independent British musician, Tom Rosenthal recorded a cover of the 2009 Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros track, ‘Home’ as a favour for his close friend and film maker, Adrian Bliss. Five years later as the Coronavirus pandemic isolated country after country, this wistful, ‘unintentional’ cover was picked up and edited by a young Australian TikTok creator to soundtrack her own lockdown video content, adding to the growing body of COVID-19 ‘cultural products’ that Hansen et al (2021) have coined, ‘Coronamusic’.

‘disseminat[ing] like a pandemic’ (Jenkins et al 2013), the fifty-four second edit of Rosenthal’s cover prompted a single release under the pseudonym, ‘Edith Whiskers’ and has now soundtracked over 2.5 million Instagram reels and 1.7 million TikTok videos alone; each communicating their own theme or journey with nostalgic, sentimental video content. ‘Intrinsically a relation to the past’ (Weinstein 1998), this Covid content is reflective of observations by Huang et al (2023) who note that pandemic induced loneliness predicted an increased consumption of nostalgic music and media in pandemic times, whilst further supporting Reynolds (2011) assertion, that the pull of nostalgia has always been driven by ‘a collective longing for a happier, simpler, [...] world that was familiar’.

This paper explores the influence of mediated virality and the pertinent popularity of ‘Home’. I propose that cover versions in the pandemic era, exist not simply as a facsimile of earlier recordings, but as a vital means of socio-emotional collectivity, further contending that ‘coronacovers’ merit consideration as a subgenre of Coronamusic itself.

Iga Batog

“Beyond Catastrophe: Contemporary Music and Affirmative Responses to Ecological Crisis”

Climate change and the accelerating loss of biodiversity are among the most pressing issues of our time, reshaping not only ecological systems, but also cultural imagination and artistic practice. In recent decades, contemporary music and sound art have increasingly addressed the themes of extinction, altered animal behaviour and multispecies vulnerability. Meanwhile, theoretical discourse on the Anthropocene is often dominated by catastrophic and apocalyptic narratives. As Rosi Braidotti argues, these narratives can hinder creative and political agency. This paper offers an alternative, affirmative interpretation of musical responses to ecological crisis, drawing on posthumanist philosophy. Viewing music as a space where crisis and memory converge, I argue that sound can serve as both a record of ecological loss and a medium for reimagining relationships of care, responsibility, and multispecies coexistence. This exploration is facilitated by an analysis of two contemporary compositions: ‘Birdsongs’ by Rafał Rytorski, and ‘Primal’ by Sól Ey. The paper examines how musical strategies and aesthetic attitudes articulate extinction and environmental transformation beyond purely catastrophic frames. Through a combination of philosophical reflection, close listening, and contextual analysis, the paper illustrates how contemporary music can promote an affirmative politics of change. This opens up an imaginative space for considering the ecological crisis not just in terms of mourning and anxiety, but also as an opportunity to reconsider humanity’s role in the world and its relationships with other species.

Robert Bromley

“In Search of a New Possibility: Multi-Idiomatic Practice and Hybrid Sound-Worlds in American Primitive Guitar”

This paper explores the critical and creative trajectories of a peculiar and unorthodox strand of experimental folk music known as American primitive. Founded during the postwar folk revival by avant-acoustic guitarist and bricoleur John Fahey, this eclectic microgenre fuses vernacular, classical, and non-Western influences with avant-garde tactics to form unruly sound-worlds and radical assemblages: ciphers of cultural oddments that explore memory and imagination, ‘proceeding laterally, not literally, to discover missed opportunities and roads not taken’ (Boym 2017).

Responding to a contemporary resurgence of folkloric esoterica—what Stephen Prince (2024) of the hauntological folk project *A Year In The Country* calls ‘wyrd culture’—this paper offers first-hand insight into the multi-idiomatic practices and hybrid sound-worlds of American primitive. Reflecting on my 2022 album *Into the Ether*, I argue this microgenre can be effectively understood via Svetlana Boym’s (2001) concept of off-modernism: a mode of cultural production that straddles the boundary between artistic and critical practice, resisting linear narratives and tunnel vision.

Contemporary society is caught in the coils of what Zygmunt Bauman (2017) calls ‘retrotopia’: a nostalgic impulse that situates the ‘lost/stolen/abandoned but undead past’ as its cynosure. From Vladimir Putin’s Soviet nostalgia to Nigel Farage’s Reform Party and Donald Trump’s MAGA movement, politics increasingly trades in fantasies of restoration and revival, often in service of the tribal and the familiar. In an era marked by division and perpetual polycrisis, forward momentum is dwindling; when progress has fallen out of fashion and return is impossible, what remains is a lateral mode of movement.

Against such dictatorships of nostalgia, American primitive emerges as a radical folk tradition oriented towards new possibilities, affinities, and lines of flight. This paper therefore explores themes of estrangement and dialogue; errancy and exaptation; the utopian uncanny and oneiric soundscapes; and forms of prospective nostalgia and nostalgic dissidence.

Ergin Bulut

“Artistry for Dignity, Education for Legitimacy: Crisis Ordinaire and the Political Economy of Roma Musicianship in Western Turkey”

Based on the initial findings of an ongoing ethnographic project, this presentation examines how Roma musicians in Bergama, Western Turkey narrate and navigate educational dispossession through Lauren Berlant’s notion of “crisis ordinaire” and Ghassan Hage’s framework of the political economy of being. For Roma musicians, systemic state failures and discriminatory labour markets constitute a chronic, structural crisis where the promised genre of the middle-class good life has dissolved. Dropping out of schooling is framed not as failure but a practical necessity and an indirect rejection of cruel optimism. In their narratives, Roma musicians foreground their family’s celebrated artistic lineage (a successful genre) while marginalising painful school experiences (a failed genre). This memory work functions as reparative labour, enabling a life that is practically

and symbolically satisfying. Yet, while embodied cultural capital around skills and reputation provides a degree of viability, it lacks the universal convertibility of institutionalised cultural capital and the security of formal employment. Facing this conundrum, some musicians hope their children receive better education, even as they doubt its payoff. This ambivalence reveals a struggle within a political economy of being: artistry secures dignity, education promises legitimacy. These strategies expose the symbolic violence of credentialism and the unequal distribution of viable lives, where domination operates not only through economic dispossession but through the cruel allocation of “reasons for being.” That is, system exerts power not just by keeping people poor, but by forcing them into the “reparative labour” of constantly validating their own existence against a world that doubts their worth as much as they doubt its promises.

Richard Elliott

“Chillingham Cattle, Bamburgh Castle, Fawdon Rowntree’s Fruit Pastilles’: Specificity, Memory and Community in a North-East English Song”

Songs are repositories of experiences with objects, events and processes. They are also dynamic objects that act as memory prompts. To explore the dual aspect of songs-about-objects and songs-as-objects, this paper explores ‘Cuddy’s Cave’ by Nev Clay. Clay is a Newcastle-based singer-songwriter who has been performing on the local scene for over three decades, occasionally releasing new songs on EPs and singles. He’s also been a mentor to many other musicians in the area, including Richard Dawson (subject of my talk at last year’s British Popular Culture(s) conference).

My analysis of ‘Cuddy’s Cave’ as a dynamic object—an object understood as both static and changeable—begins with a description of its lyrical content, a list of people, places, events and objects associated with north-east England. Having established it as a ‘list song’ that does considerable cultural work, I analyse the song’s evolution over several years, from early concert performances and recorded demos through a definitive version included on Clay’s 2024 album *So Little Happened for So Long*, and then the song’s continued itinerary as a piece of crowdsourced memory work. In handing over his composition to the local community to revise, Clay has shown how songs can act as both repositories of collective memory and prompts to engage in new memory work and community-based creative acts.

My discussion of ‘Cuddy’s Cave’ will be informed by Nev Clay’s account of the song, by a literary framework that includes work by Joe Brainard, Georges Perec, Adair, Roland Barthes and Gilbert Adair, and by my own thoughts on the poetics of specificity.

Elizabeth Fair

“Music after Bereavement: Exploring Perspectives on Music and Loss when Grieving”

Music often plays a key role in remembrance rites such as funerals and wakes (Viper et al., 2022). Its link to memory retrieval (Jakubowski & Ghosh, 2021), alongside its role in emotional regulation (Groake & Hogan, 2016) and reducing loneliness (Schäfer et al., 2020), also suggest it may play a significant role in grief after a bereavement. However, there is little research on the role of personal musical engagement after a bereavement, and the impact of this on emotional wellbeing. In this

study, sixteen participants completed a 45-minute semi-structured interview, three once-monthly journal entries, and a final interview. Initial data analysis indicates that participants used music to remember and reflect on their losses. Musical memories were often positive; participants reported that remembering, and sometimes continuing to engage in, musical activities they had engaged in with the deceased was often comforting. The meaning participants ascribed to music also deepened after a loss, with one participant describing a particular track as “not just a song anymore”. However, some music-triggered memories caused a complicated emotional reaction for participants; most gave examples of where music had been received as harmful or distressing. These results align with existing research on music and wellbeing after a bereavement, providing further explanation of why and how music might support emotional wellbeing after a bereavement (O’Callaghan et al., 2013; Merrill et al., 2022). Results suggest that bereavement care should aim to facilitate the exploration of, and engagement with, music which holds meaning for bereaved individuals, whilst being sensitive to the changes which may occur in musical behaviours and reactions to music after a loss. This extends previous research on music’s role in remembrance rites, suggesting music’s role in memory retrieval during grief goes beyond funerals to its everyday use.

Luiz Ribeiro Fonseca

“From the Pristine Crisis to the Chaotic Sublime: A Critique of Jonathan Gilmurray’s Ecological Sound Art”

The creation and systematisation of the term ecological sound art is often attributed to the scholar and sound artist Jonathan Gilmurray (2017; 2018). For that, the author offers an “Ecocritical Framework for Sound Art” (Gilmurray, 2018, pp. 94-98) based on a set of exhaustive questions regarding topics such as sense of ecological connectedness; disembodiment of the binary divisions between nature and culture, technology and organic structures, and human and environment; presence of humans and non-humans; relation with the listener; cultivation of an enhanced ecological sensibility; and carbon footprint.

This framework decides whether certain installations and experimental compositions should be seen and heard as (1) explicit ecological sound art, (2) implicit ecological sound art, (3) marginal ecological sound art, or (4) non-ecological sound art. Heavily based on works from the Global North, Gilmurray’s framework highlights the need to differentiate ecological sound art from what is being discussed in literature and art history – the dominant fields of ecocriticism scholarship, according to the author.

Nevertheless, the goal of establishing a field ends up calcifying and reducing what this same field can be. In my work, I seek to destabilise the term by asking the following: How do sound artists and musicians conceptualise environmentalism in their practices? Does it overcome music as something connected to melody, harmony, etc? Is ecology a term used in other regions? Should we only look at pieces that celebrate an “untouched” nature, or incorporate projects that approach economic, humanitarian, and existential disasters? How to connect different global crises with sound practices?

To establish this critique, the presentation will consist of an (1) introduction to the most important aspects of Gilmurray’s thesis. Following this, (2) two works will be analysed as a challenge to the author’s assumptions and a guide to a more open ecological sound art and music: *Healing Sounds*,

by Shirley Krenak (2025, Brazil), and Murmullos o la herida de la naturaleza, by Alejandro Castillejo-Cuéllar (n.d., Colombia).

Anna Glew

“Nostalgia and Ukrainian Popular Music after the Russian Full-Scale Invasion”

Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, the topic of war has been extensively covered by Ukrainian popular music across a range of genres including hip-hop, rock, pop, and electronic. While the issue of language (Ukrainian vs Russian) in song writing was a topic of heated debates in Ukraine even before February 2022, the full-scale invasion has taken them to a new level. It has been observed that after February 2022 some musicians have produced Ukrainian-language versions of their own popular songs that were originally written in Russian. Many of such songs were written in the 1990s and early 2000s, when many Ukrainian musicians performed in Russian in order to benefit from the Russian market. In the post-2022 context, there is now a whole generation of Ukrainians who grew up in the 1990s and 2000s listening to Russian-language songs but now feel that they cannot go back to them (for ethical reasons, or due to war-related trauma), and as a result switch to their translated versions. Additionally, since 2022 some Ukrainian musicians have written new songs in Ukrainian language that recreate the feel of the 1990s and early 2000s, offering their listeners a further opportunity to leave their Russian-language nostalgic past behind and relive it in Ukrainian.

The proposed paper will explore the role of popular music in the re-shaping of the past and the identity construction in the context of war. For analysis, I will utilise my database of war-themed Ukrainian popular songs created or popularised from 24 February 2022 (Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine) until the present. While Ukrainians use a range of platforms to listen to popular music (such as Apple Music and Spotify), YouTube is used here as the main platform for analysis, in view of its accessibility to all strata of the population, and its additional value as a source of music videos and audience’s comments accompanying the songs.

Ieva Gudaitytė

“Listening Back to be Remembered: Digital Community Radio Practices in Wartime Ukraine”

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine has exposed the fragility of both material and living memory: destroyed archives and libraries, killed artists, knowledge from the occupied territories cut off from information exchange. In an almost instantaneous grassroots response, local musicians and music lovers joined broader shifts to preserve, but also search for gaps in, Ukrainian cultural memory and history.

This paper, based on broader fieldwork with online community radio practitioners in Ukraine, explores how such alternative sound media offer ways to listen to both the more distant and immediate pasts. From the re-releases of the niche 90s new wave and post-punk recordings to podcasts on Ukrainian poetry; rediscovering folklore music tradition; or archival recordings from the national radio and television studios, hosts and DJs recontextualise various aural traditions in contemporary popular and electronic music culture. By becoming an ad-hoc archive, and a platform to recontextualise historical recordings and musical traditions, analysed stations engage with two

questions: how can the lesser explored pasts of Ukrainian music – and its absence in the mainstream public memory – connect the systematic epistemic pressure from the imperial centre(s) with the war; and how can the aural side of life at war be remembered in the future.

Read through Carolyn Birdsall’s notion of “earwitnessing”, Gascia Ozunian study of sonic memories of Armenian genocide survivors, Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier’s decolonial approach to the aural epistemologies, Maria Sonevsky’s work on the indigenous archival silences from the Crimean War, and Diana Taylor’s critique of an object-centric archival practices, I argue that such animation of sonic memories is a way to relisten to the past from the wartime perspective in search for the useful knowledge – and a practice of sound-based epistemic justice seeking.

Ryoka Hagiwara

“Musical Memory and Power in Japanese American Internment Camps”

After Japan’s attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941, Executive Order 9066 was issued by the US government, initiating the relocation and incarceration of around 120,000 people of Japanese descent. These people were interned in ten internment camps across the United States mainland, all under the operation of the War Relocation Authority, or the WRA, which was also formed in 1942 for this purpose. In 1943, “loyalty questionnaires” were administered across the camps, which asked for allegiance to the United States and for willingness to serve in the US armed forces. Those labelled as “disloyal” as a result were segregated to Tule Lake Camp, which functioned as a high-security segregation centre.

During their incarceration, musical practices formed an integral part of everyday life under conditions of racialised human rights violations, displacement, and surveillance. This paper examines how these musical practices in the camps have been selectively archived and framed in wartime and post-war discourse, focusing primarily on camps such as Manzanar and Tule Lake, asking how power determines which sonic responses to crisis are preserved and celebrated, or forgotten.

Drawing on ethnomusicological approaches to memory, affect, and music, I analyse archival documents, oral histories, media representations, and post-war commemorations to trace how the musical practices in the camp have been narrativised over time. I argue that dominant accounts prioritise and emphasise practices associated with resilience and adaptability while marginalising expressions linked to anger and grief, especially explicitly Japanese musical traditions. This selective remembering produces an uneven memory of internment that suppresses the violence that structured everyday life in the camps.

Situating Japanese American internment within wider debates on crisis and the politics of remembrance, this paper aims to highlight how musical memory can sustain communal identity while countering the sanitisation of historical trauma.

Bennett Hogg

“Loss, Remembering, and Place in the Sechs Bagatellen für Streichquartett of Anton von Webern”

The premature death of Webern's mother in 1906 profoundly affected the composer, a loss compounded when the family estate, Preglhof, was sold in 1912. Writing to Berg in 1912 Webern connects most of his compositions with his mother's death. The *Sechs Orchester Stücke* Op. 6, composed Summer 1909 at Preglhof, carry an explicit programme, including a funeral march referenced in a later unpublished setting of his poem "Schmerz immer blick nach oben" from Summer 1913, explicitly mourning his mother's death. This was originally the central movement of *Drei Stücke für Streichquartett* (1913), but was dropped when the first and third movements were combined with an earlier *Vier Stücke für Streichquartett* into the *Sechs Bagatellen* Op. 9 (1913). The *Vier Stücke*, like Op. 6 were composed at Preglhof, whereas *Drei Stücke* were composed after its sale.

The paper proposes, developing Julian Johnson's 'maternal landscape' of loss in relation to Webern's music, an overdetermination of place, mourning and remembering in what became *Sechs Bagatellen* Op. 9. Preglhof's 'maternal landscape' is established as a site of remembrance, a privileged site of remembering/recording through the composing there of Op. 6 and the *Vier Stücke*. The loss of this site in 1912 compounds remembering into almost overwhelming loss. When the first and third of *Drei Stücke*, composed the following year, were combined with *Vier Stücke* into the *Sechs Bagatellen* the song "Schmerz immer" - the most explicit record of loss - was discarded. Its place, between the first and third pieces, was taken by the *Vier Stücke* composed at Preglhof. *Vier Stücke*'s documented association for Webern with the 'maternal landscape' of loss - Preglhof - comes to occupy the place of explicit mourning of "Schmerz immer", withdrawing from the public and specifically vocal utterance of loss, into a culturally characteristically innerlich 'autonomous' musical space.

Taichi Imanishi

Workshop

This interactive workshop explores the relationship between music, memory, and empathy through improvisation. Focusing on how musical practices can evoke personal, cultural, and collective memories, the session invites participants to consider how these memories shape listening, performance, and cross-cultural understanding—particularly in contexts of conflict or division.

Led by Dr Taichi Imanishi (drum kit performer and musical director), the workshop centres on improvisation as a means of recalling, reinterpreting, and reimagining musical memory. While grounded in jazz-based practices, it welcomes participants from all musical traditions. Those wishing to perform will be invited to submit a short form in advance, outlining their instrument(s), musical background, and any culturally significant material or memory they wish to explore (for example, musical traditions connected to regions in conflict).

Selected participants will present brief improvised or semi-structured performances (up to three minutes), conceived as “living memories in sound.” These may draw on remembered melodies, stylistic references, or imagined reconstructions of musical encounters. Each performance will be followed by an open discussion with both performers and audience members, reflecting on how memory was evoked, transformed, or shared, and how this shaped emotional and empathetic responses.

Through this performative-reflective cycle, the workshop positions improvisation as a dynamic space where memory becomes a catalyst for dialogue, connection, and mutual understanding. Designed as an informal closing session, it fosters a relaxed, inclusive environment encouraging participation, conversation, and shared reflection across disciplinary and cultural boundaries.

Emma Longmuir

“‘I like to be a time traveller’: Echoes, Portals and Shared Memory in Annie Lennox’s 2025 Work”

2025 was a monumental year for Annie Lennox. Five years since making her musical comeback during the COVID-19 pandemic, Lennox performed her first full pop set since 2019 at the Royal Albert Hall in March 2025. She also released her visual memoir, 'Retrospective' and went on an accompanying promotion tour of in-conversation events in September 2025. These were opportunities for Lennox to reconnect with her audience beyond musical performance. 'Retrospective' gave her a 'new' voice via a visual and written medium, and in-conversation events allowed audiences to hear Lennox speak about key points in her life and career; some of which her audience have lived through 'with' her via a shared memory of past songs and past live performances.

A linear chronology is presented within 'Retrospective' as it follows Lennox's life up to the 'present day'. Within some conversations though, Lennox remarks upon the strangeness that time is measured 'as if it was a linear thing!' ('Annie Lennox in conversation at Emmanuel Centre', September 2025) alongside describing music and photographs as 'portals'. These thoughts seemingly parallel ideas around 'weird time shifts' (Gardner, 2020) found within popular music and in Lennox's later life performances.

This talk will focus on Lennox's claim that she 'like[s] to be a time traveller' (The Guilty Feminist, 2025). It will consider how her creative and curatorial methods expand upon renewal processes which are present musically in Lennox's work prior to 2025. I will explore how Lennox utilises music, images and narratives as 'portals' which allow herself and her audience to travel through time and memory in non-chronological ways. I will consider how this may further narratives of 'agelessness' (Longmuir, 2023) in Lennox's later life work and how these 'portals' reflect Lennox's work being as much 'about everybody' (Auster, 2021) as it is about herself, allowing her audience to time travel with her.

Gareth Longstaff

"I had forgotten... I remember it all too well" - Queer Archives, Fabulated Memories and Loss in the music of Taylor Swift

Narratives and experiences of love, desire, grief and loss underpin popular music. Popular songs also form the symbolic and emotional constituents of the everyday rituals and customs that we simultaneously remember and forget. In moments of abundant joy or inexplicable grief we often listen to songs that articulate and capture our 'ordinary affects' (Stewart, 2007) and how they link to 'Evocative Objects' (Turkle, 2007). In this setting the potential for moments of the ordinary to become an intense encounter also align to the dialectics of individual and collective remembering and forgetting (Brainard, 1975; Adair, 1986; Longstaff, 2026).

In this paper these ideas will be situated in relation to ‘fabulated moments’ of ‘ordinary intensity’ in Taylor Swift’s music and its connection to an ongoing project and book ‘I Had Forgotten’ that I am working on at Bishopsgate Institute and Archive in London. Here the contours of a queer archive have allowed me to develop a fabulated methodological technique to engage with my own archive and the ‘Swiftian’ space of Swift’s music. Here I argue that an ordinary topography or queer orientation (Ahmed, 2006) of desire, love, grief and loss in flux occur. As her lyrics weave together the ‘ordinary’ lives and memories of others (‘marjorie’, ‘betty’, ‘dorothea’), spaces and geographies (Musso & Franks, Hampstead Heath, The Lake District, Rhode Island, Tupelo, Coney Island), and objects (a Scarf, a Cardigan, a Trampoline, a Wallet, a wilted corsage, a Grocery Store Receipt) they speak to my own queer archive of objects, ephemera and memories. Here, I have used these subjective moments of encounter to develop an affirmational and fabulated method where each object is catalogued through an entry which begins with ‘I Had Forgotten...’. This mobilises queer theoretical, methodological and archival work to a space between Swift and the memories and desires that we have forgotten and that we remember in those spaces between nostalgia and grief.

Oskar Cox Jensen

“Dismembering Songs”

To re-member is, allegedly, to put back together. Osiris – a good outcome; Humpty-Dumpty – a failure. Yet in the long history of song, collective and enduring memorisation more often comes at the expense of various limbs or organs – from grace notes (a flesh-wound) to verses (a full-on amputation). Titles, lyrics, origins are often dispensed with, while such music-hall numbers as remain common currency in the twenty-first century do so as rump choruses only. Think of ‘Daisy Bell’ or ‘My Old Man’; alternatively, try, if you can, to remember any of the verses to ‘Rule, Britannia!’ (the title of which, like that of ‘Home! Sweet Home!’, has largely ceded its punctuation to the ravages of time).

In this twenty-minute paper, I want to think about this process of dismembering across more than five hundred years of cantological history. It is more than gradual erosion; rather a dramatic, discrete, and often astonishingly successful surgical procedure conducted by a society that not only preserves and extends the lifetime of any number of mainstream songs, but calls into question what a song needs and, ultimately, is. Why does this happen? Is it a good thing? Can it inform the songs we write today? Where do the bits that fall off go? And what, if anything, do we gain by thinking of this process, not in terms of variation history, but as radical acts of dismemberment?

Tinashe Donaldson Jera

“Layered Memories: Music, Crisis, and the Politics of Remembering in Zimbabwe and South Africa”

The paper will explore how popular music acts as an important sonic store and memory in times of protracted national disasters. It proposes that in post-colonial situations where authoritative historical accounts are challenged or split, music works as a sonic palimpsest- overlaying communally shared experiences of trauma level, betrayal and unsolved mourning into official histories as enforced by the state. In a comparative examination of the influence of music on

political memory during times of crisis in the two countries of Zimbabwe and South Africa, the study focuses on comparing the effects of music on political memory, its support, and its contradiction. Politics of denial of the state that is personified by the muted memory of the Gukurahundi massacres, has marginalised musical memory to subaltern vernacular. In this case, protest music played by leaders such as Lovemore Majaivana is a way of having a hidden counter-archive of trauma. The institutionalised memory of South Africa, through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on the other hand, has established a publicised but hostile site of remembrance. Musical reactions to such crises as the Marikana massacre now enact an affective form of criticism, which publicly compares the state to its democratic commitments with its failures. Using the concepts of the archive and repertoire by Diana Taylor and the embodied memory theories, the paper illustrates a situation in which music assumes a leading role as a means of communal grief and political opinion in case of failures of the official channels. This contrastive compares two opposite ways of musical memory-work, one involves secret maintenance in the face of repression (Zimbabwe), and another is active, conflictual bargaining in the context of a formal democracy (South Africa). Finally, this study throws light on how music does not simply demonstrate the crisis, but it constitutes the means through which societies bury, recall, and morally account to the unresolved past of postcolonial disenchantment.

Simon Kannenberg

“Holocaust Music through the Lens of Trauma Studies”

Although the Holocaust plays a major role in literature and the arts, comparatively few compositions refer to the genocide. The connection can be made explicitly, as in the case of Schoenberg's *Survivor from Warsaw*, which directly addresses and depicts events in a German concentration camp that are claimed to be authentic, or implicitly, as in the case of Stockhausen's *Gesang der Jünglinge im Feuerofen* (*Song of the Youths in the Fiery Furnace*), which merely opens up a field of associations that can be interpreted as a reflection on the murder of the Jews.

Trauma studies, which are widespread in Anglo-American research, are dedicated to investigating traces of trauma in cultural phenomena. They have found their way into musicology relatively late. The central question is what role music or individual works play in relation to individual or collective trauma. Different functions could be, for example, the representation, remembrance and processing of an initial trauma. The creation of collective group identities can also be a purpose of artistic trauma representation. Surprisingly, the Holocaust has hardly played a role in musicological trauma studies to date. This paper explores the analytical potential of cultural studies trauma studies for the investigation of music that explicitly or implicitly refers to the Holocaust, using representative examples.

Isaac Montagu

“Mikra as Memory: Psalm Chant in Sephardic Jewish Communities”

Following the collapse and mass migration of MENA Jewish populations across the 20th century, for displaced communities, the synagogue acts as a central space for recreating their lives “back home”. Central to such spaces is reading scripture to traditional chants, a practice known as mikra

(literally, reading, equivalent to recitation). Yet mikra is deeply under-researched, overlooked in favour of a focus on poetry and maqam. This paper will show how the distinct melodies for mikra in different communities are central to identity formation, and act as ephemeral objects of memory for migratory communities. It will demonstrate how synagogue ritual can be a space for exercising agency and connecting within the community, whether or not for people normatively considered strictly “religious”. Finally it will explore the current and future standing of such musical material in post-migration new generations, after the loss of traditional pedagogies of rote memorisation-based childhood education. This is based on extensive fieldwork in insular Sephardic religious communities— Isaac has attended services at over 150 different synagogues across 11 countries, and interviewed hazzanim (cantors), rabbis, and lay synagogue members about their melodies and migration journeys.

Francesca Perrotta

“Docu-Torio and Cultural Memory: Remembering and Reflecting through Music in Julia Wolfe’s Her Story”

Julia Wolfe (b. 1958), whose musical language is situated within the post-minimalist tradition, is one of the most established American composers in the contemporary music landscape. Her oratorio output introduces elements of significant innovation and transformation with respect to the conventions of the oratorio genre, to the extent that it has inspired the coinage of a new term: docu-torio. This neologism encapsulates the idea of a hybrid genre combining documentary practice, historical narration, and music, while retaining a fundamentally oratorical structure.

Steel Hammer, Anthracite Fields, Fire in My Mouth, and Her Story are the oratorios conceived by Wolfe between 2009 and 2022, all of which are united by an in-depth research process focused on key historical moments connected to the social and labor history of the United States in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Her Story, a 2022 oratorio for orchestra and women’s chamber choir, traces the struggle for women’s suffrage in the United States, as well as the many obstacles women faced in their fight for the recognition of their rights, beginning with the protests of the suffragettes.

Wolfe’s music functions as a powerful medium through which American cultural haunting is both expressed and experienced, drawing on folklore, mythology, and ritual to evoke a supertemporal connection between past and present.

Starting from an analysis of Her Story, supported by testimonies collected during one of its few live performances to date, this paper discusses the potential of the oratorio genre as a tool for social reflection and examines music’s capacity to operate as an object of cultural memory and as a vehicle for engaging with themes of memory, history, and inheritance.

Yasmin Pezeshki

“Sonic Counterpublics in the Shadow of Suppression: K-pop Memory and Everyday Crisis in Iran”

This paper examines how Iranian K-pop fans mobilise music, memory, and digital intimacy to navigate a form of crisis that is chronic rather than episodic: the slow, atmospheric pressure of

political repression, gendered restriction, economic precarity, and recurrent internet shutdowns. Drawing on ethnographic interviews, digital fieldwork, and affect-centred analysis, it explores how K-pop becomes a medium through which young Iranians remember, reframe, and at times strategically forget experiences of fear, loss, and uncertainty.

For many Iranian fans, K-pop is not merely entertainment but a lifeline: a sonic archive of personal and collective memory, a therapeutic practice during moments of acute and ongoing crisis, and a space for imagining alternative futures. Fans describe songs, choreography, and fandom rituals as anchors that help them process grief, maintain emotional continuity, and cultivate forms of care within an unstable environment. At the same time, state censorship and surveillance shape what can be remembered publicly, prompting fans to develop covert, VPN-mediated practices of circulation and remembrance. These practices form what I term sonic counterpublics: affective, digitally dispersed communities that resist erasure by producing their own memory infrastructures.

By situating Iranian K-pop fandom within broader discussions of music, crisis, and memory, this paper argues that musicking becomes a mode of survival and subtle resistance. It demonstrates how global pop circulates unevenly yet meaningfully across contexts of constraint, and how young listeners transform K-pop into a repository of emotional history, political imagination, and everyday resilience.

Qingqing Qiu

“Making Crisis Audible at the Keyboard: Piano Performance as Memory Work During China's Cultural Revolution”

Music is often discussed as a resource for mourning and remembrance, but the politics of how memories are made audible becomes especially sharp in moments of state-led crisis. This paper examines Chinese piano music from the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) as a way of understanding crisis memory: not only a repertoire of historical backdrop but also a set of music-related practices—arranging, teaching, concert programming, and embodied performance—through which public remembrance and forgetting were organised.

Drawing on two contrasting piano case studies from the early 1960s and the post-1976 period, the study shows how compositional "syntax" plays a role in memorial work. In the earlier revolutionary style, formal design, a pentatonic focus, and layered textures create a rhetoric of mobilisation, turning individual piano effort into a clear image of collective action. In later works, continuity, timbral imitation, and a more adaptable phrase rhetoric reshape cultural memory as lyrical remembrance rather than proclamation, highlighting a shift in the emotions that could be expressed after the crisis.

Methodologically, the paper combines archival contextualisation with close musical analysis and performance-informed listening. Particular attention is paid to the expression of pianistic gesture, including tempo, rhythmic pattern, articulation, dynamics, and pedal resonance, as an interface between musical structure and lived experience. These details matter because they are precisely where crisis is translated into sound: where grief is redirected into public affect, where loss is stabilised into narrative, and where identity is negotiated through the performance at the keyboard.

By situating Chinese pianism within the politics of music, this study suggests that piano music serves as both a vessel for memory and a disciplinary tool, facilitating communal remembrance while shaping what can be expressed, voiced, or creatively reimagined.

Declan Tuite

“Impossible Choirs: Negotiating Prosthetic Memories Through Ambisonic Composition at Sites of Irish Institutional Silence”

Sites of institutional confinement in Ireland, Magdalene Laundries, Mother and Baby Homes, and state prisons, contain embedded memories of enforced silence, regulated vocalisation, and acoustic control. While visual documentation proliferates, their sonic dimensions remain underexplored.

This paper examines *Macalla* (Irish for resonance/echo), a practice-based spatial audio project investigating how music accesses and shapes memories at sites of institutional confinement. Building on DeNora's framework of music as a technology of memory work and Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memories", the project treats institutional buildings as musical objects and spaces of remembrance, enabling contemporary listeners to experience affective connections to historical events they did not personally witness.

Macalla comprises of four choral pieces; *Ciúnas* (Quiet/Stillness), *Leanbh* (Child), *Cá?* (Where), and *Ná* (No). Individual vocal notes recorded in studio conditions were reintroduced to acoustically and thematically significant sites: Kilmainham Gaol, a former Magdalene Laundry, churches, and civic offices. These studio voices were replayed and re-recorded through Ambisonic microphones, creating virtual choirs where site materials, granite walls, ceramic tiles, actively participate in composition. By employing non-lexical vocables, the pieces transform voice into pure sonic material, allowing architectural acoustics themselves to generate affective impact without prescribing narratives.

Following Connerton's emphasis on embodied memorial practices, *Macalla* augments heritage acoustics by prioritising emotional over literal truth. The project creates impossible sonic configurations, women singing across walls designed to isolate them, voices filling spaces meant to suppress them, asking not "how did it sound?" but "how might it have sounded if these voices had been allowed to join?" Realized as an immersive VR experience with head-tracked Ambisonic rendering, listeners navigate spatial environments and direct their own sonic encounters. Drawing on Assmann's framework, this approach activates dormant acoustic properties within institutional architectures, demonstrating music's capacity to transform sites of institutional violence into spaces of communal mourning and collective memory.

Frances Wilkins

“Grappling with Loss in History and Modernity: Gaelic Psalm Singing in North-West Scotland”

In Presbyterian communities in the Highland and Western Isles of Scotland, Gaelic psalm singing has, since the years following the 1560 Scottish Reformation, formed a backdrop to a spectrum of occasions. From the happiest of times - such as during weddings and communions, to the most

devastating - wakes, funerals, and at times of loss due to emigration and war, Gaelic psalm singing has been a constant presence in the lives of many Hebridean and West Highland men and women.

Today it is no exaggeration to say that Gaelic psalm singing as a musical act of worship is facing an existential crisis. With the depletion of Gaelic language church services and the secularisation and Anglicisation of many once buoyant Gaelic-speaking communities, there are increasingly fewer opportunities to hear and learn the psalms. As a result, the art of precenting {putting out the line) is becoming a dying art while the singers' psalm tune repertoires are contracting with the lack of opportunities to become fully immersed in the music. Singers are experiencing not only a historical sense of loss, through collective and individual cultural memories that date back many years, but now there is a new feeling of loss as the tradition is further eroded with no clear answer as to how it might be revived.

In this paper, I examine loss and crisis as experienced by Gaelic singers through the act of psalm singing. By exploring the stories of singers who have been interviewed and recorded as part of the Seinn Spioradail research project (2018-2026), I examine the role of Gaelic psalm singing in their pasts and presents as they grapple with crises both old and new.

Onur Yuce

“Erased Echoes: Queer Musical Theatre and the Politics of Amplification in Neo-Ottoman Turkey”

This paper explores how amplification-understood as a sonic, spatial, and ideological mechanism-shapes both the survival and disappearance of queer memory under authoritarian cultural regimes. Drawing on my experience composing and directing *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*, performed over 150 times in Turkey between 2020–2023, I examine how drag theatre becomes a contested archive of erased Ottoman histories, especially those involving queerness, sensuality, and pluralism.

In contemporary Turkey, the government champions a narrow, curated vision of Ottoman heritage: the warrior, the devout Muslim, the patriarch. Ottoman figures and practices that embodied gender nonconformity, homoeroticism, or cosmopolitan aesthetics-such as *köçek*, *zenne*, or palace homo-sociality-are excluded from this narrative. *Constantina Pole* reclaimed these lost echoes through amplified voice, camp aesthetics, and musical storytelling. But while initially allowed in public venues, the production faced informal censorship: withdrawal of hall permissions, media silence, and moral panic campaigns.

Amplification here becomes the core battleground. Without physical stages, lighting, microphones, or audiovisual production, performance loses its capacity to be seen, shared, or archived. Simultaneously, digital platforms-normally seen as alternatives-mirror these exclusions through algorithmic suppression and surveillance. The government does not ban queer stories outright, but it silences them by denying access to the very infrastructures that allow stories to be heard.

Through this case, I argue that queer musical theatre in Turkey becomes a site where crisis is managed through the withdrawal of amplification itself. What remains is a drag performance unamplified, undocumented, and unarchivable, yet still resonating, however faintly, as cultural memory and political resistance.