MUSICOLOGY + MUSIC THEORY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

Fall 2025

Events are held on Mondays in the Imig Music Building (S101), 2:30-4 p.m.

Sept. 22

"King Arthur's 'scattered remains'? Toward a New Edition of Purcell's Opera"
Rob Shay, CU Boulder College of Music

Purcell's music for King Arthur—his 1691 operatic collaboration with John Dryden—exists in a problematic state. The scribe of the earliest extant score abandoned the project before completing Act I. Six later manuscript scores (c. 1698-1710) reveal inconsistencies and some careless errors, raising questions about the sources they were copied from and the reasons they were produced. Some movements survive only through their inclusion in printed collections.
King Arthur was revived in 1692, and several of its songs were in print by that year. Thoughts of a 1695 revival may have prompted Dryden to reissue the printed wordbook, but there is no record of any performances. Writing that decade, Roger North—a prominent writer about music and other matters—described King Arthur as "lost," a comment that has not been given its due. Accepting it at face value elevates the importance of the next revival in 1698, more than two and half years after Purcell's death. If North was right, the Theatre Royal must have determined that King Arthur could be reassembled even in the absence of Purcell's authoritative score.
The results of my collation of the early King Arthur sources suggest that a distinct version of the opera emerged in 1698. The copyists of the six scores mentioned above had varying goals in mind: some targeted collectors' libraries while others seemed more concerned about performances. I have placed the six into a new hierarchy and identified two lines of filiation. One appears to prioritize fidelity to the late composer and must be weighted appropriately in current efforts to refine the musical text of the opera.

Sept. 29

"The Development of 19-Century Music Celebrity: Heroes, Villains and (Dis)enchantment"
Shaena Weitz, University of Bristol

Deep within the heart of music history lies what philosopher Lydia Goehr described in her 1992 book "The Imaginary Museum of Musical Works" as the Beethoven paradigm, a complex set of principles and practices such as the work concept and the idea of genius that developed in roughly the first half of the 19th century. This paradigm and its many parts not only transformed music as a practice in the West and eventually the world over but also continue to inform music as an academic field. While this transformation has been examined from a philosophical viewpoint, the material and discursive conditions that supported it remain much less understood. In particular, it is the role of celebrity that has remained hidden from our understanding.
Celebrity in this context is not a kind of person but a way of thinking and modeling the world that came to the fore at the same time the Beethoven paradigm was being constructed, and as I will argue, is convergent with it. This convergence is perhaps most visible in the constructed existence of contemporary musical villains—the dangerous stars of yesteryear such as Daniel Steibelt or Frédéric Kalkbrenner—vanquished by Beethoven's music-conceptual triumph. As villains, they are dastardly and evil; as enemies, they are simultaneously too socially powerful and too musically weak.
Central to these villain narratives are damaging stories that "unmask" the moral failures of the villains. For example, the pianist and composer Frédéric Kalkbrenner (1784–1849) was ridiculed for faking an improvisation and then teaching his son to fake an improvisation. He was accused of duplicitous dealings with publishers and even espionage. These accusations are especially intriguing because they, like most of these musical villain stories, appear to be false themselves—stories of dubious origin aimed to discredit him.

More complex is that these fabricated stories remain attractive to our emotions today, circulating on classical blogs, YouTube comments and in scholarship as well. The idea that we might have feelings about people we have never met—that we might love them or loathe them—is called a parasocial relationship, or one-sided intimacy from afar. This is a central but little-examined feature of celebrity, and I will argue, the Beethoven paradigm. Using Kalkbrenner fraud stories as an inverse reflection of a posture that has been normalized as a universal, this presentation will analyze the development of parasocial relationships in the 19th century in dialogue with recent work on celebrity intimacy, including Robert van Krieken's 2018 study "Celebrity Society" and Chris Rojek's 2022 book "Celebrity Culture," and examine their effects on evidence, historical and modern emotions and music practice today.

Oct. 6
"Thinking With the Hand: Marie Jaëll's Intersections Between Physical Technique and Metaphysical Theology"
Tekla Babyak

Marie Jaëll (1846–1925), a French pianist, pedagogue and composer, proposed in her 1904 treatise that one should "think with the hand" to allow for a "decentralization of thought" when playing the piano. How might pianistic techniques enable cognitive processes to be distributed across the brain and hands? Taking Jaëll's solo piano suite "Eighteen Pieces After Reading Dante," composed in 1894, as my case study, I aim to broaden the scope of music theory to encompass analysis of pianistic gestures in tandem with harmonic and formal parameters.
The first part of Jaëll's suite, "What We Hear in Purgatory," indicates that certain notes are to be played by the right hand and then silently transferred to—and sustained by—the left hand. I interpret these long-held pitches as an embodied allegory of Purgatorial theology: the hands cling to previously struck keys as the penitent soul dwells upon bygone life. The second part, "What We Hear in Paradise," calls for a complete absence of rubato. Thus it requires finger independence to achieve rhythmic evenness, which I interpret as symbolizing peaceful eternity in Heaven.
I conclude that resonances between physical gesture and metaphysical theology emerge from Jaëll's work.

Oct. 20
"Dyeing Timbres and Painting Passions in Couperin's 'Folies françoises'"
Saraswathi Shukla, CU Boulder College of Music

Modern harpsichordists have described the instrument's limited capacities, going so far as to enumerate the possible nuances of the harpsichord or compare it to a monochromatic spectrum, like a grayscale. Eighteenth-century French composers, however, seem to have felt differently. Evidence points to the French clavecinistes finding the instrument to be a source of rich color and expression in the right hands.
Contrary to his statements about the limitations of the instrument in "L'Art de toucher le clavecin," François Couperin was one of the most vocal proponents of this perspective. He opens his third book of "Pièces de clavecin," published in 1722, with a clear statement about the nature of expression at the harpsichord. The 13th ordre offers the typical arsenal of literary and cultural references to everyday life, but unusually, the penultimate movement of the ordre, "Les folies françoises," stages a miniature masked ball. In this masquerade, human qualities, vivid stereotypes and deep emotions are personified and paired with evocatively colored cloaks described by dyers' pigments.
Here, Couperin unites specialized artisanal savoir-faire, the theories of Le Brun and the philosophical principles of Descartes in "Les folies françoises." By bringing his understanding of art, artisanal knowledge and philosophies of life to the harpsichord and to the amateur harpsichordist, Couperin reveals as much about his status as a musician at the French court as about what he thought the harpsichord could and should express.

Oct. 27

“A Klezmer Fiddler in Transylvania: My Experience”

Zoë Aqua

From 2021 to 2023, Zoë Aqua spent two years as a Fulbright research grantee in Cluj, Romania, studying Transylvanian folk music pedagogy. In this presentation, she will share stories and insights she gained from working with folk musicians there. Drawing from her experience with both multigenerational musical family dynasties and revivalists, she will compare and contrast the musical scene in Transylvania with the klezmer revitalization in North America.

Nov. 3

“Viking Music”

Jameson Foster, CU Boulder College of Music

Existing scholarship on the music of Scandinavia’s Viking Age (8th to 11th century) has typically taken a pessimistic approach because of the absence of written music from the era. Given musicology’s heritage, the primacy granted to written music above all other artifacts is not surprising. But especially in the context of historical music cultures such as the Viking Age, the focus on the lack of notated music can create a deceptive picture of a region and people without music.

Further, with Scandinavia occupying a marginal position in European history both geographically and culturally, often seen as the “other” European community, discussion of Viking Age music has prioritized difference over commonality compared to other early medieval European music practice. The assumed absence of music from the region has contributed to stereotypes of historical Scandinavians as Europe’s barbarous others.

To the contrary, the rich archaeological, literary and ethnographic record of the Viking Age shows a deeply musical people and a history that may illuminate how Scandinavian culture developed in tandem with—and in contrast to—continental Europe and beyond.

Nov. 10

“From Seoul to Los Angeles: Transcultural K-pop Fandom and the Politics of Affective Affinity”

Stephanie Choi, CU Boulder College of Music

When K-pop idols perform in the United States, an informal festival begins among fans. They share homemade merchandise with one another, bring official lightsticks, prepare banners for all audience members and eagerly record the performance to share later on social media. This distinctive set of fandom activities originated with Korean fans as a way of enhancing fandom solidarity and media visibility, thereby supporting idols and their companies in maximizing profits.

Yet fans are consumers—why, then, would consumers concern themselves with a company’s profits, and why would American fans emulate these Korean fan practices? Drawing on Morimoto and Chin’s 2013 theory of transcultural fandom, this paper explores K-pop fandom in South Korea and the United States, examining how American K-pop fans share affective affinities with Korean fans and become a politicized body through transactions of intimacy that extend beyond the K-pop sphere.