

MUSICOLOGY + MUSIC THEORY COLLOQUIUM SERIES

Spring 2026

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

Feb. 2: Zoe Weiss (University of Denver)—“Unprofessional: The Viola da Gamba and the Power of Amateur Music Making”

Feb 9: Phil Chang (CU Boulder)—“Louis Couperin’s Seventh *prélude non mesuré* as a Nexus for Music-Theoretical Inquiry”

Feb. 23: Kim Goddard Loeffert (Virginia Tech)—“Vignettes in Musical Analysis, AI and Universal Design”

March 2: Wendy Heller (Princeton)—“Performing Dissimulation in *Jingju*: Mei Lanfang and the Cross-Cultural Aesthetics of Feigned Madness”

March 9: Agustina Checa (CUNY Graduate Center)—“‘Rewind Before Pressing Play.’ Digital Songs on Magnetic Tape and Praxis Against Neoliberal Remembrance in Argentina”

March 30: Daphne Leong (CU Boulder)—“What Counts as Meter?”

April 6: Takako Fujioka (Stanford)—“How We Deal with Musical Timing: Beat and Meter, Tempo Change and Plasticity”

April 13: Tal-Chen Rabinowitch (University of Haifa)—“Impacting Social Interactions through Music and Interpersonal Synchrony”

Feb. 2: Zoe Weiss (University of Denver)—“Unprofessional: The Viola da Gamba and the Power of Amateur Music Making”

The social life of the viola da gamba (or viol) has been central to its history from the Renaissance to the present day. Seventeenth-century English consort music, written for an ensemble (“consort”) of viols, is decidedly more participatory than performative—the musical lines themselves foreground the social relationships among the players: enacting equality, friendship, wit, humor, and discourse. This repertory is still prized today by both amateur and professional viol players but is only rarely performed. Viol playing and consort music have both been well organized and cultivated in North America by the Viola da Gamba Society of America (VdGSA), which currently boasts 1000 members, the vast majority of whom are amateurs. While many examples of participatory music making come from folk and popular traditions, viol consort music is unusual for being a notated tradition firmly within the sphere of Western classical music, and one which requires a significant investment of time and resources to gain access to.

My research traces how the VdGSA has fostered a community which actively blurs distinctions between amateur and professional musicians and promotes life-long engagement with music making that deemphasizes monetary remuneration, strong hierarchies, and status. Instead, the VdGSA prioritizes the social, relational, and communal aspects of music making, even in its professional instantiations. The ideal of the viol consort is an explicitly articulated metaphor for how the Board of Directors operate and run the organization with time set aside during board meetings for literal music making. Drawing on archival research as well as surveys and interviews, I show how the organization’s largely deliberate choices about foregrounding the social and democratic aspects of viol playing and consort music have allowed it to flourish, even as similar societies have struggled.

As a case study, the VdGSA offers a valuable model for how classical music can be productively “de-professionalized” to create healthy and meaningful musical experiences. I argue that the practice of consort music itself, a stubbornly messy, social, and non-media friendly endeavor, offers an important antidote to classical music’s narrower definitions of musical value.



Feb 9: Phil Chang (CU Boulder)—“Louis Couperin’s Seventh *prélude non mesuré* as a Nexus for Music-Theoretical Inquiry”

In this public music theory lecture open to all, I examine Louis Couperin’s unmeasured prelude no. 7 as a case study explored by various sub-disciplines of music theory: harmony and counterpoint, rhythm and meter, analysis and performance, and cognition and perception. The prelude’s unique notational format—and thus its sonic identity—frame this investigation.

Feb. 23: Kim Goddard Loeffert (Virginia Tech)—“Vignettes in Musical Analysis, AI and Universal Design”

This lecture presents a series of analytical and methodological vignettes drawn from recent work at the intersections of musical analysis, artificial intelligence, and pedagogy. Short case studies are used to surface shared questions about modeling, analytical practice, and disciplinary boundaries.

The lecture opens with an analytical reading of *Kansas Rapture* for saxophone quartet by Forrest Pierce, using topic theory to examine a contemporary work written for a familiar yet analytically under-theorized ensemble. It then turns to Taylor Swift’s *Blank Space*, drawing on Nicole Biamonte’s (2018) work on rhythmic functions in popular music. These two analyses serve as entry points into broader collaborative work with John Peterson (James Madison University) on *Modeling Musical Analysis* (Oxford University Press, 2025) and its successor project, *Modeling Popular Music Analysis* (in progress).

The latter portion of the lecture shifts from analysis to AI, copyright, and pedagogy. Drawing on collaborative work with Emmett O’Leary (University of Tennessee, Knoxville), the lecture addresses current debates about how analytical, pedagogical, and creative uses of AI complicate existing legal and ethical frameworks. The lecture concludes with practical reflections on AI and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), sharing ways that AI tools can support accessibility in course design and assessment.

March 2: Wendy Heller (Princeton)—“Performing Dissimulation in *Jingju*: Mei Lanfang and the Cross-Cultural Aesthetics of Feigned Madness”

The climax of the *Jingju* (Peking Opera) entitled *Yuzhou feng* (Cosmic Blade) features a familiar operatic convention: Zhao Yanrong, a young widow, feigns madness before her father to avoid being forced to becoming the emperor’s concubine. This was Mei Lanfang’s favorite role because it demanded that he display multiple emotions in close succession—Zhao’s true feelings, the appearance madness, while also expressing the “incommunicable suffering” of her inner psyche. Mei’s observations about multilayered expression recall descriptions of Anna Renzi’s renowned performance in Francesco Saccati and Giulio Strozzi’s *La finta pazza* (Venice, 1641). While operatic mad scenes typically push rhetorical boundaries, exposing the musical or gestural limits in any given style, feigned madness requires the protagonist to both dissimulate and perform dissimulation. Claudio Monteverdi’s novel aesthetics of feigned madness, described in a famous series of letters, challenged the fundamental premise of the new genre, envisioning an innovative form of musical mimesis in which words—rather than being the mistress of the music—were severed from semantics and affect. The convention is no less subversive in *Yuzhou feng*, where Lanfang’s rendition of Zhao’s feigned mad scenes extends the highly controlled musical and dramatic conventions that are central to the performance of *dan* roles in Peking Opera.

After a brief consideration of feigned madness in on the early modern European stage, my paper explores Mei’s virtuosic interpretation of Zhao Yanrong’s feigned madness in *Cosmic Blade* as captured in the film of the opera, focusing on the musical, gestural, and narrative markers of a simulated insanity, considering both the visual manifestations of the pretense (self-mutilation, auditory hallucinations, and erotomania) and the musical markers of insanity (excessive ornamentation, registral extremes, melodic distortions), which illuminate the norms of the genre, especially with regard to female deportment. I conclude with a consideration of the representation of both feigned and genuine madness in the Shanghai Peking Opera Company’s production of *The Revenge of Prince Zi Dan*, an adaption of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, which illuminates some of the similarities and differences in the European and Sinitic approach to theater. In the end, there *is* a method to madness.

March 9: Agustina Checa (CUNY Graduate Center)—“‘Rewind Before Pressing Play.’ Digital Songs on Magnetic Tape and Praxis Against Neoliberal Remembrance in Argentina”

“A return to the past is not always a moment that frees remembrance, but a forward-looking capture of the present,” Argentine literary critic Beatriz Sarlo once wrote. In Argentina, memory has been a deeply political subject since the return to democracy in the 1980s. While right-wing and left-leaning governments have made efforts to emphasize particular historical narratives and obscure others, grassroots collectives deployed specific strategies to protect their own—with the resources they have at hand. Increasingly in the last decade, cassette tapes have been tasked with telling the stories of independent music scenes (of a myriad of styles) from cities across the country. Moving away from the trite framework that examines the resilience or resurgence of analog media around market-driven nostalgia, in this presentation I examine cassette tapes with digital songs as forward-looking rather than merely past-evoking objects. I study contemporary tapes as sovereign mediums that enable grassroots, community-aimed, acts of tangible and non-algorithmic music documentation in a time of link-sharing and metaphorical storage clouds. What can we learn from the paradoxes of using decades old magnetic tape to preserve songs made for the Internet? What does this particular return to the past capture about the present of independent music making in Argentina’s current return to neoliberalism?

March 30: Daphne Leong (CU Boulder)—“What Counts as Meter?”

This presentation challenges assumptions of prominent theories of meter, to wit, preferences for isochrony and measurement, for sound as indicative of meter, and for meter as a mode of attending. Motivated by examples that range across folk song and dance, popular and improvised music, and notated art music, and that represent the creation of meter as well as its reception, the presentation proposes a broader view of what meter might be. This view is theorized with multi-level, potentially metrical systems comprised of timepoint series in varied temporal spaces. The timepoint formalization is balanced with theories of meter as continuous motion, and the viewpoint as a whole is set in the context of cross-cultural studies and cultural neuroscience.

April 6: Takako Fujioka (Stanford)—“How We Deal with Musical Timing: Beat and Meter, Tempo Change and Plasticity”

We rely on a sense of time to plan and play music. It requires organizing representations between internal and external timing processes for successful prediction, real-time monitoring, and adjustment. Using simple metronome listening tasks, my research has shown that an internal sense of beat and meter, and the anticipation of upcoming tempo changes, are represented in the brain in a distributed manner. I will explain how these timing processes involve the auditory cortex and motor system areas, and how beat-related neural activities enhance motor excitability and show training effects in older adults and chronic stroke survivors. Furthermore, I will discuss a recent study examining how individuals differ in their sense of beat when listening to multiple metronomes that are loosely aligned.

April 13: Tal-Chen Rabinowitch (University of Haifa)—“Impacting Social Interactions through Music and Interpersonal Synchrony”

A growing body of research highlights the potential of music and interpersonal synchrony to enhance social and emotional interactions. Musical interaction—particularly when individuals collaboratively make music—has been linked to increased group cohesion, cooperation, and emotional empathy. Similarly, interpersonal synchrony, where individuals coordinate their movements or actions, has been shown to foster social bonding, trust, and emotional connection. These positive outcomes are well-documented, and understanding the underlying mechanisms offers valuable insights into their broader social significance. However, despite the extensive literature on their benefits, relatively few studies address potential negative consequences associated with musical engagement and synchrony. Concerns include the possibility of fostering blind obedience, conformism, reduced creativity, or even aggression toward out-group members under certain conditions. This duality suggests that musical and rhythmic interactions may not be inherently beneficial but are influenced by contextual and sociocultural factors. In this talk, I will explore the theoretical frameworks explaining the mechanisms behind these dual outcomes, integrating sociological perspectives to elucidate how and when music and synchrony promote positive or negative social effects. I will present empirical evidence supporting these notions, including recent preliminary data from ongoing experiments in my lab. These findings contribute to understanding the conditions that enhance the beneficial impacts of musical and rhythmic engagement on social cohesion while mitigating potential drawbacks.

