

## Music Department

### Colloquium series Fall 2025

Thursdays | 4:30–6:00pm | Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003 (unless otherwise noted)

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This lecture series showcases new work by performers, composers, and scholars in ethnomusicology, musicology, music theory, sound art, and cultural history. The colloquia also invite dialogue with professionals working in the arts, music journalism, and in librarianship. A brief reception follows each formal presentation, offering a chance for collegiality. See our department website for a list of past colloquium visitors. All meetings take place in person.

**FALL 2025**, 4:30–6:00pm, Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003 (\*unless otherwise noted)

Sep. 18 Irene V. Jackson-Brown (PhD, Wesleyan University, 1974)

“Lift Every Voice and Sing”: A Conversation with a Gospel Music Research Pioneer”

\*Sep. 24 David P. Nelson (PhD, Wesleyan University, 1991; Adjunct Assoc Professor of Music, Wesleyan)

“T. Ranganathan: A Centenary Celebration”

\*4:30PM WEDNESDAY, RING HALL

Oct. 9 Society for Ethnomusicology papers

Abiodun Adisa (Graduate student, Wesleyan University): “Afro-Asian Cross-Cultural Encounters: Nigerian Drummers and South Korean Samulnori”

Aibek Baiymbetov (Graduate student, Wesleyan University): “Performing the Kyrgyz Epic Manas in Contemporary Times: An Endeavor to Preserve the Oral Tradition”

Garrett Groesbeck (PhD candidate, Wesleyan University): “Scrambling the Genre Logic of Spotify in ‘anime music’”

Oct. 16 Society for Ethnomusicology papers

Susana Gyamfuaa Agyei (Graduate student, Wesleyan University): “Beyond Missionary Legacies: Examining the Musical Practices in Ghanaian Methodist Worship”

Emmanuel Abeku Ansaeku (Graduate student, Wesleyan University): “Cultural Identity and Future Directions in Ghanaian Choral Music: A Synthesis of Tradition and Innovation”

John Wesley Dankwa (Assistant Professor of Music, Wesleyan University): “Colonial Residue or Sheer Love for Music? G.F. Handel in Ghanaian Choral Art Music”

Oct. 30 Marie Comuzzo (ACLS/Mellon Innovative Dissertation Fellow and PhD Candidate, Brandeis U.) and

Rachel Mundy (BA, Wesleyan University; Associate Professor of Music, Rutgers U.)

“Whales, Moths, and the Scales of Life and Death”

\*Nov. 12 Elliott Sharp (composer, guitarist)  
"Feedback: Translations From The irrational"  
\*4:30PM WEDNESDAY, RING FAMILY PERFORMING ARTS HALL

Nov. 20 William Brooks (BA, Wesleyan University, 1965; Emeritus Professor, U. of Illinois and U. of York)  
"The Pragmatist thread in American Music" CANCELED

### Biographies and Abstracts

Dr. Irene V. Jackson-Brown received her PhD in ethnomusicology from Wesleyan University in 1974 with her dissertation, Afro-American Gospel Music and its Social Setting: with Special Attention to Roberta Martin. She has carried out research on spirit possession and altered states of consciousness in Haiti and Jamaica, was an assistant professor at Yale University and Howard University and a Fellow at the Yale Institute of Sacred Music, and is the Founder and CEO of Jackson-Brown Associates. In 1981 she published Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Collection of Afro-American Spirituals and Other Songs, a groundbreaking hymnal in the Episcopal Church. In 1985, she published twin pioneering edited collections that helped define the burgeoning field of African diasporic studies: More Than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians; and More Than Drumming: Essays on African and Afro-Latin American Music and Musicians. She later founded the applied gerontology practice, [The Art of Eldercare](#). We will have a conversation with Dr. Jackson-Brown about her extraordinary career informed by her graduate work at Wesleyan.

### Select bibliography (Irene V. Jackson-Brown)

1974. Afro-American Gospel Music and its Social Setting: with Special Attention to Roberta Martin. PhD dissertation, Wesleyan University

1975. "Black Women and Music: A Survey," *Minority Voices* 2 (2): 15-27; repr. in Filomena Chioma Steady, *The Black Woman Cross-Culturally*, Schenkman.

1976. (compiler) Afro-American Religious Music: A Bibliography and a Catalogue of Gospel Music. Greenwood Press.

1977. "Music Among Blacks in the Episcopal Church: Some Preliminary Considerations," *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 49 (1): 21-35.

1978. (ed.) Lift Every Voice and Sing: A Collection of Afro-American Spirituals and Other Songs. Church Hymnal Corp.

1979. (ed.) More Than Dancing: Essays on Afro-American Music and Musicians. Greenwood Press.

1980. (ed.) More Than Drumming: Essays on African and Afro-Latin American Music and Musicians. Greenwood Press.

1981. (ed.) The African American Experience in Worship and the Arts. Prism 15, Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

1982. "The Zombification of America's Elderly: Stopping the Abuse," *CSA Journal* 40: 22-25.

David Nelson (Ph.D. '91) learned from T. Ranganathan from 1973-1987. He has taught at Wesleyan since 2000. He is Adjunct Associate Professor of Music and Global South Asian Studies. He teaches Music 110 (Intro to South Indian Music), Music 212 (Solkattu), Music 433 (South Indian Percussion) and Music 463 (Teaching Music to

Children in Local Schools. He is a regular performer at the Cleveland Tyagaraja Festival, where he was honored with the title “Kala Seva Mani” in 2013. He was also honored by the Nanganallur Cultural Academy in Chennai 2017 with the Palghat R Raghu memorial award for excellence in mrdangam. He is the author of two books, Solkattu Manual: and introduction to the rhythmic language of South Indian Music (2014) and Konnakol Manual: an advanced course in Solkattu (2019), both published by Wesleyan University Press.

**Abstract:** T. Ranganathan (1925-1987) was the first Visiting Artist in Wesleyan’s World Music program. This talk presents an overview of his career as an influential performer and teacher beginning with his work teaching Robert E. Brown in 1959, then moving to his first years at Wesleyan, then California Institute of the Arts, and back to Wesleyan in 1975. It includes photographs, recordings, and comments from colleagues and students.

Abiodun Adisa is a second-year master’s student in the ethnomusicology program at Wesleyan University. He is a member of Sight and Sound De’Lafrique and DrumsView Concept in Nigeria (a contemporary drum ensemble). His research focuses on African drumming, cross-cultural drumming practices in Nigeria, and Afro-Asian cross-cultural encounters, specifically Nigerian drummers and Korean Samulnori.

Aibek Baiymbetov, first year PhD student in Ethnomusicology, received his master's degree in Ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University. Aibek's research interests lie in the study of oral traditions, especially the Kyrgyz epic Manas, rituals studies, and musical traditions of Central Asia. He is also a filmmaker whose documentaries focus on cultural heritage, music and climate change.

Garrett Groesbeck is a koto player and PhD candidate in ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University. He received his MM as a Japanese Ministry of Education (MEXT) scholar at Nagoya College of Music. From 2017 to 2019 he worked at the organization Japan Folk Festival, arranging cultural events worldwide. His writing can be found in Ethnomusicology and Japan Forum, and he is co-editor of the Society for Ethnomusicology student journal Rising Voices. He recently completed dissertation fieldwork in Tokyo conducting ethnographic interviews with composers of anime music, supported by the Japan Foundation and Fulbright-Hays.

Marie Comuzzo is an ACLS/Mellon Innovative Dissertation Fellow and a Ph.D. Candidate at Brandeis University. Marie’s research examines how sound mediates the relationship between humans and whales and the political power that recognizing whales’ vocalization as music has in ecological conservation and multispecies kinship within and beyond Western imaginaries. They also hold a Master’s in Musicology from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, a Master’s in Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies from Brandeis University. She has presented at conferences in the United States, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and has been invited to give talks in the US, NZ, and Italy.

Rachel Mundy’s work is concerned with the way animal musicality has defined modern notions of life and rights for a generation of listeners shaped by ecological crisis. This is an interdisciplinary question that brings musical science into conversation with Western beliefs about race, gender, nation, and other forms of difference. In a series of nationally recognized books, articles, and public lectures, Mundy has explored these questions through cases that connect human rights to animal voices.

**Abstract:** In this talk Marie Comuzzo and Rachel Mundy share contrasting vignettes about two species’ voices, the whale and the moth, to ask how claims to audible personhood shape matters of life and death in a more-than-human world. While whales have entered the human cultural sphere through their singing, moths often

remain invisible and unheard, better known for their habit of flying into flames than for their tiny voices. By moving from the charm of whales, what scholars name “charismatic megafauna,” to the decidedly “uncharismatic microfauna” of moths, we aim to highlight the interconnectedness of a systemic politics of hearing personhood.

Our journey begins in Polynesia, where in 2024 a treaty granted whales legal personhood. This change reflects a continuum of intergenerational kinship where whales and humans’ ancestry merge. Here whale personhood is not only expressed through law but also through sacred sonic exchanges. By calling to whales—breathing into shells, blowing conch trumpets, and playing the Nguru (a whale tooth flute)—Māori empower their connection to the ocean at the same time that they ask their ancestors for guidance and protection.

From water to air, we move to an episode in the life of a group of larval *galleria mellonella*, the greater wax moth, who ate their way out of a plastic bag in 2017 en route to a European laboratory. We trace these insects from a discourse of silent self-sacrifice that dates to the 13<sup>th</sup> century to a much more recent discussion about their potential to reshape discussions around plastic waste. Along the way, we hope these two vignettes allow us, and our audience, to think about how the “people” of law can come to exist through aural aesthetics, performance of value, and modern claims of identity, reminding us that the most protected lives are interdependent with those that are most overlooked.

Elliott Sharp leads SysOrk, Orchestra Carbon, Terraplane, and Tectonics and pioneered use of fractal geometry, chaos theory, and genetics in musical composition and interaction. His opera *Port Bou* premiered October 2014 at Issue Project Room and his suite *Tribute:MLK Berlin '64* opened the 2014 Berlin Jazz Festival. *Storm Of the Eye* appears on violinist Hilary Hahn's Grammy-winning album *In 27 Pieces* and *Turing Test for the Neue Vocalsolisten Stuttgart* premiered at the Venice Biennale in 2012. Sharp has been featured at festivals Big Ears, New Music Stockholm, Darmstadt, Donaueschingen, and Au Printemps and is the subject of the documentary film *Doing The Don't*. Sharp was awarded the Berlin Prize for Music Composition for 2015; a Guggenheim Fellowship in 2014; a Fellowship from the Center for Transformative Media in 2014. In 2003, he received a Fellowship from the Foundation For Contemporary Art. Sharp's collaborators have included Radio-Sinfonie Frankfurt; Nusrat Fateh Ali Khan; actor Steve Buscemi; Ensemble Modern; singer Debbie Harry; blues legends Hubert Sumlin and Pops Staples; pianist Cecil Taylor; multimedia artists Christian Marclay and Pierre Huyghe; and Bachir Attar, leader of the Master Musicians Of Jajouka.

**Abstract:** The title of this colloquium is also the title of Sharp's new book on Wesleyan University Press. Sharp will read selections from the book and employ creative digression to touch upon his current compositional strategies and projects. Feedback is a wide-ranging meditation on music, sound, artificial intelligence, consciousness, contemporary culture and politics, and the life of the touring musician. In Feedback, Sharp engages in speculative thought about how consciousness might have arisen and what the future holds for humanity with the advent of an Artificial Intelligence that is certainly artificial but might not exactly be intelligent. The "Improviser's Mind" is discussed in the context of post-quantum physics, probability, socio-acoustics, and Butoh dance.

William Brooks (Wesleyan '65) taught at the University of Illinois and the University of York until his retirement in 2021. A composer and musicologist, his work focuses on the history and implications of experimentalism, broadly conceived, and on a pragmatic approach to popular music.

**Abstract:** Pragmatism is often assumed to have come into existence with the writings of William James. But much recent work has extended pragmatist thought—if not the term—back to previous thinkers, especially in America. And similarly, much recent writing has developed links between pragmatism and music, especially music sometimes referred to as “experimental.” This talk will reach back to Jonathan Edwards, slide forward on slopes provided by Methodism, and touch in passing on music by William Billings, Anthony Philip Heinrich, Charles Ives, and John Cage. The twenty-first century I leave to you.