

Wesleyan University

Music Department Colloquium Series Abstracts

Fall 2021

unless otherwise indicated, colloquia are presented at 4:30PM at <https://wesleyan.zoom.us/j/95014609023>

9/23 Fifty Years: A Celebration of Wesleyan University's PhD in Music
George Starks (Drexel University, emeritus) and Mark Slobin (Wesleyan University, emeritus)

In celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of Wesleyan's first PhD in Music, George Starks (PhD '73) and Mark Slobin will discuss the foundational vision and goals of the program in relation to the general intellectual and musical climate of the era.

George L. Starks Jr. PhD ('73) is Professor Emeritus of music at Drexel University where he was the director of the highly acclaimed Drexel University jazz ensemble for 35 years. Starks served as associate editor of the *International Jazz Archives Journal*; as contributing editor to *The Black Perspective in Music*; as Black Scholar-in-Residence at LeMoyne College; as a member of Call and Response, a think tank on African American music; as a Carnegie Hall Advisory Scholar, and as a member of the Board of Directors of the Philadelphia Clef Club of Jazz and Performing Arts. He has received grants from the NEA and the NEH, been the recipient of the Legacy Award from the African American Museum in Philadelphia, and the recipient of the prestigious Benny Golson Jazz Master Award from Howard University.

Mark Slobin, Winslow-Kaplan Professor of Music, Emeritus, joined Wesleyan's Music Department in 1971. He is the author or editor of many books, on Afghanistan and Central Asia, eastern European Jewish music, film music, American music, and ethnomusicology theory, two of which have received the ASCAP-Deems Taylor Award. He has been President of the Society for Ethnomusicology and the Society for Asian Music. He retired in 2016 after 45 years at Wesleyan and lives in Manhattan.

Memorial Note: Wesleyan's first PhD in ethnomusicology was awarded to **Ashenafi Kebede** in 1971 for his dissertation *The Music of Ethiopia: Its Development and Cultural Setting*. A published novelist at age 26, Dr. Kebede was active as both an ethnomusicologist and a composer throughout his career. He served as director of the Center for African American Culture and Professor of Music at the Florida State University from 1981 until his untimely passing in 1998 at the age of 60.

9/30 7:00PM Screening and discussion of *Kattumaram (Catamaran)*

Swarnavel Eswaran (Michigan State University)

Hari Krishnan (Wesleyan)

Anuja Jain (Wesleyan)

reservation required: <https://wesleyan.universytickets.com/w/event.aspx?id=3977&r=b8eaf7189d9d4749930f17bfd26de32e>

Kattumaram (Catamaran) is part of an emerging queer cinema from South Indian, it depicts a conservative fisherman who gradually comes to accept his Tsunami-orphaned niece's relationship with a woman. Director **Swarnavel Eswarana** and Professor of Dance **Hari Krishnan** will join Assistant Professor of Film Studies **Anuja Jain** for a post-screening discussion.

Dr. Swarnavel Eswaran Pillai is an Associate Professor in the Departments of English, and Media and Information at Michigan State University. He graduated from the Film and Television Institute of India (FTII), a premier film school in Asia, and the prestigious University of Iowa, where he received his doctoral degree in Film Studies. His research areas include the history, theory, and production of documentaries and short films, and the specificity of Tamil cinema and its complex relationship with Hollywood as well as popular Hindi films.

10/7 *Agiagnaq atuqtuuraq: a musical instrument that you file.*

Heidi Senungetuk (Emory University)

Heidi Senungetuk talks about her work as a violinist and ethnomusicologist, with special attention to her work “*Qutaaruaqtuit: Dripping Music*,” an installation included in the art exhibit *Soundings: An Exhibition in Five Parts*.

Dr. Heidi Aklaseaq Senungetuk (Kingikmiut Inupiaq) is a violinist and ethnomusicologist who explores forms of Inupiaq music and dance and interpretations of Indigenous contemporary music and art. Senungetuk contributed to the award-winning book *Music and Modernity Among First Peoples of North America* (Wesleyan University Press, 2019), and currently serves Emory University as a Visiting Assistant Professor of Music.

10/14 *Unplanning the Sonic City: Sonic Urbanism in Beirut*

Gascia Ouzonian (University of Oxford)

Sensorial approaches to architecture and urbanism have been celebrated as extending spatial practices from the realm of form-making to that of sense-making. In examining sonic urban practices in Beirut, a city that has been described by local architect-planner Antoine Atallah as both a “victim of urbicide” and a city of “perpetual transformations”, I propose that in the twenty-first century, the acoustic city might emerge *not* as a figure of salvation of architecture from its formalist concerns; nor as a route through which to re-examine the city; and neither as a platform for creating alternative experiences of the city—even if these may be laudable and fascinating pursuits. Rather, in the context of profound global flux, one in which cities emerge as sites of intense and often violent political and economic contests, the acoustic city might instead serve as a figure of profound instability, and might be most fruitfully examined as a site through which various forms of power, citizenship, belonging and community are negotiated. In this talk, which emerges from my book I explore these ideas in connection to the work of Beirut artists including Nathalie Harb, Nadim Mishlawi, Joe Namy, Mhamad Safa, and others whose work brings new insights into the sonic city as a site of contests and uncertain belonging.

Gascia Ouzonian is Associate Professor of Music at the University of Oxford, where she directs the 5-year, European Research Council-funded project [Sonorous Cities](#). She is the founder and artistic director of the label [Optophono](#), which publishes interactive music and sound art, and author of [Stereophonica: Sound and Space in Science, Technology, and the Arts](#).

10/21 “We Are The Bears!”: How An Historically Black University Marching Band Constructs Community Through Music-Making

Marvin McNeil (Wesleyan University)

The notion of “community” and the ways that the term is employed has been debated in music scholarship with scholars such as Kay Kaufman Shelemay and Fredara Hadley challenging the field to offer more discussion on music’s role in community formation. This paper adds to the discussion with special attention on a historically Black college and university (HBCU) marching band and its role in constructing community through performance. Drawing on ethnographic field-research from the 2019 Morgan State University Homecoming weekend in Baltimore, Maryland, this project explores music’s role in constructing community through the lens of the “The Magnificent Marching Machine.”

Mirāsīs: Secret Custodians of Hindustani Music
Suhail Yusuf (Wesleyan University)

Mirāsīs are low caste Muslim accompanist musicians. Stigmatized by colonialists for being associated with courtesan performers, they have been discriminated against and marginalized within their own religion and society. However, adaptive and innovative strategies enabled Mirāsīs to dominate Hindustani music for much of the 20th century. This was possible in part by hiding their social identity and resisting identifying their communities as “Mirasi,” a term that has taken on a pejorative use in written documentation, such as census reports and journal articles, in both colonial and post-colonial India. As an eighth generation Mirāsī musician myself, this paper presents a new study on the social status of Mirāsīs. I draw on ancient Indian philosophical and religious writings to propose a new theory—an alternative narrative to Mirāsīs’ subordinate role as accompanists in Hindustani music. By presenting the art of accompaniment as a dialogue between practicing musicians and a learned legacy, I reposition Mirāsīs as the custodians of Hindustani music. This role has in fact been recognized by solo instrumentalists and vocalists, many of whom apprenticed by accompanying instrumentalists. In reconnecting Mirāsīs with the heritage they carry for many Indian musicians, this theory is itself offered as a form of resistance to colonialist stigmatization. It also allows me to excavate unanswered questions related to caste. A respectable future for Mirāsīs is reimagined in which they celebrate their identity with the term, “Mirasitude.”

Suhail Yusuf and **Marvin McNeil** are PhD candidates in ethnomusicology in the Wesleyan Music Department.

11/4 Resonance & Resemblance

Suzanne Thorpe (Columbia University)

For her talk, Dr. Thorpe will present her project *Resonance & Resemblance*, a sonic meditation and critical research project composed with the resonant features and acoustic ecology of a quarry pool in Garrison, NY. She will discuss how she adopted a process she terms *eco-logical musicking* to initiate a musicking experience that stressed multiplicity, intersubjectivity and distributed power. Thorpe holds that this critical tactic highlights ontoepistemologies that critical theorist Denise Ferreira da Silva proposed dissolve hegemonic qualities of separability, determinacy and linearity to negate toxic divides. Thorpe situates her work with a cohort of composers and sound artists who privilege messy poetics and mischievous juxtaposition to invite emergent and non-reductive experiences. She will discuss how these works resist narratives of division and autonomy and amplify a distributed, pluralistic and co-constructed milieu.

Suzanne Thorpe is an artist-scholar whose creative research intersects electronic music, feminist and ecological theory. Thorpe holds an MFA in Electronic Music & Media from Mills College, a PhD in Integrative Studies from the University of California, San Diego, and is currently a Mellon Teaching Fellow at Columbia University. She creates compositions with a variety of media and technology, and performs electroacoustic flute. Weaving together traditional and creative research methods she studies past and present music-making sites as critical frameworks that animate social and political concerns with a focus on tactics that resist hierarchical social organization, normative identity articulation and material separation. In addition, Thorpe is cofounder and director of TECHNE, a nonprofit arts-education organization dedicated to supporting young women in their ability to dismantle social and cultural barriers in technical learning environments.

11/11 Capturing that Philadelphia Sound: A Technical Exploration of Sigma Sound Studios

Toby Seay (Drexel University)

Professor Seay will discuss the role of Sigma Studios in the evolution of music recording and production drawing on examples from the Sigma Sounds Studio Collection he supervises. Sigma Sound Studios was the first recording studio to offer 24 track recording and console automation. While the Sigma facility was most closely associated with the development of Philadelphia soul, its client list ranged from Aretha Franklin to ZZ top.

Toby Seay's research focuses on music production and engineering practices that result in sonic signatures and audio recording preservation standards, specializing in multi-track materials. At Drexel University, he is Professor of Recording Arts and Music Production in the Music Industry program and the Project Director of the Drexel

University Audio Archives, which is home to the Sigma Sound Studios Collection. His long career in the music industry as a musician, recording engineer, technical consultant, and audio preservationist has included recording artists such as Dolly Parton, Randy Travis, Delbert McClinton, Ringo Starr, David Wilcox, Kirk Whalum and many others.

**11/18 Archival and Tribal Collaborations: Working Together on Preservation, Access, and Intellectual Property Rights
Judith Gray (American Folklife Center)**

Every audiovisual archival collection comes with one or more stories – from the time the documentation was gathered at a specific place with specific people to the one or more places where the documentation travelled over the course of time, possibly accruing some things while other items were detached. Some of those stories are definitely problematic. But those stories from the past are not the last word with an archival collection, particularly when there are opportunities to collaborate with the communities of origin. What was history becomes a resource, a new story, for the present and into the future. Preservation contributes to access, and both are understood in the light of intellectual property rights. Drawing on experiences with the recordings now in the archive of the American Folklife Center and with the communities with which I have had the privilege of collaborating, I will talk about the power of even the oldest recordings to contribute to cultural heritage work in Native communities.

Judith Gray is coordinator of reference services for the American Folklife Center in the Library of Congress. She went to the Library from Wesleyan, where she had worked with the World Music Archive. Becoming part of the Folklife Center's Federal Cylinder Project team, she participated in the cataloging and dissemination of copies of early wax-cylinder recordings to tribal communities of origin, and has since been a point of contact and assistance for tribal archivists, linguists, historians, performers, historic preservation groups, and family members seeking recordings of their cultural heritage. As an active member of the Association for Tribal Archives, Libraries, and Museums, the Society for Ethnomusicology, and the International Association of Sound and Audiovisual Archives, Gray has had continuing opportunities to collaborate with communities of origin and to participate in both national and international conversations regarding archival ethics and responsibilities.

12/2 TAK Ensemble: Current Work, on and off stage

Laura Cocks, Marina Kifferstein, Madison Greenstone and Ellery Trafford (TAK Ensemble)

This presentation focuses on the music TAK champions and their approaches to fostering engagement within and outside of the music community through performances, workshops and TAK editions, their in-house media label, which creates broadly accessible platforms for audience engagement with a host of new music media. TAK will speak to current and recent collaborations, and their shifted context outside of live performance.

TAK ensemble is a chamber quintet consisting of Laura Cocks (flute), Madison Greenstone, (clarinet), Marina Kifferstein (violin), Ellery Trafford (percussion), and Charlotte Mundy (voice). The quintet is dedicated to the commissioning of new works and direct collaboration with composers and other artists. Regarded as “one of the most prominent ensembles in the United States practicing truly experimental music” (I Care If You Listen), TAK delivers energetic performances “that combine crystalline clarity with the disorienting turbulence of a sonic vortex” (WIRE Magazine).
