

Music Department 2024-2025 Colloquium Series

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

FALL 2024

Vulnerability in Fieldwork: beyond methodologies

Thursday, September 19, 2024 at 4:30pm

Boger 112

Preview of papers to be delivered at SEM 2024 by members of the Wesleyan Music Community

Garrett Groesbeck

Anime Music in the Concert Hall: vulnerability and compositional training in the era of digital streaming
The closing scene of Todd Field's acclaimed film *Tár* depicts its disgraced titular character, former principal conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic, now reduced to conducting video game music in an unspecified country in Southeast Asia. The final shot pans across an audience of fans in colorful cosplay, wigs and costumes meant to imitate characters from video games and Japanese animation, or "anime." In addition to the character's individual loss of status, this scene highlights the vulnerabilities surrounding orchestral music worldwide: what does it mean when formerly low culture styles begin to encroach on the European orchestral canon's one-sacrosanct position? Composers of video game music, such as Final Fantasy's Nobuo Uematsu, and anime, such as frequent Hayao Miyazaki collaborator Joe Hisaishi, have in recent years begun conducting orchestra tours of North America and Europe. In this paper, I explore "anime music," a term widely deployed in anglophone media but with no exact equivalent in Japanese, as a way of approaching the complex relationship between conservatory-style musical training and transnational popular styles in the era of digital streaming. Based on ethnographic fieldwork with members of the Japan Composers and Arrangers Association (JCAA), as well as autoethnographic approaches to my own status as a "failed composer" and compositional training in Japan and the United States, I bring Behar's (1996) concept of vulnerability into dialogue with Halberstam's (2011) *The Queer Art of Failure*, which highlights the possibilities for new insights afforded by moments of ostensible inadequacy or defeat

Lily Henley

The Sephardic Life-Cycle Songs: Vulnerability and Revitalization in Virtual Space(s)
Sephardi life-cycle songs, aural narratives of Sephardic cultural identity and practice, are a deeply endangered musical practice. The majority of these songs were created and widely performed during the heyday of Ottoman Sephardic culture. In the world of Sephardi cultural and linguistic revitalization, language and music are inseparably intertwined: this canon of music is one of the few major repositories of Ladino-language vernacular texts. In the contemporary moment, these songs have helped form a bridge between individuals in a Sephardi diaspora rapidly assimilating to various local cultures and an endangered sense of collective cultural memory. Jan Assman and John Czaplicka (1995) note that "The entire Jewish calendar is based on figures of memory. The flow of everyday communications such as festivals, rites, epics, poems, images, etc., form 'islands of time.'" Because of the wide geographic dispersal of the diaspora, Ladino language classes and other linguistically-centered cultural activities often take place in virtual settings online. I argue that in these spaces there is a new diasporic coming-together which is taking place across time zones, interweaving disparate Sephardi communities in a kind of modern parallel to those of the former Ottoman Empire. Furthermore, the life-cycle repertoire plays a part in reclaiming collective memory, and technology affords recontextualization. Nevertheless, the nature of using virtual settings as an antidote to the relative placelessness of modern Sephardi culture highlights the true extent to which this tradition is vulnerable, and how contemporary practitioners are confronting that vulnerability.

Anya Shatilova

Echoes of Empire: A Vulnerable Study of Balalaki and Dombra Players in the United States
The first balalaikas and domras, plucked lutes from the Russian Empire, came to the United States in the early 1900s. Popularized by newly arrived émigrés, these musical instruments spread within the diasporic community, becoming a material and sonic marker of belonging to the Russian imperial cultural heritage. In the current times, marked by a heightened need for reevaluation of Russian culture's imperial and colonial legacies, how can one vulnerably conduct research with the diasporic community who identifies with the imperial past? Drawing from Ruth Behar's notion of vulnerability of both the observed and the observer

(1996), this paper reflects on my fieldwork and historical research of balalaika and domra players in the United States amid Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. In thinking about my research with heritage musicians whose families emigrated from the different parts of the Russian Empire, including present-day Poland, Ukraine, and Belarus, I am attuned to their cultural memories and self-perception. Rather than treating the historical past as a buffer, I contemplate the vulnerability of my interlocutors and their histories, where the vanished empire remains the only cultural home their families had and left behind. I also consider my positionality and emotional involvement with the communities I studied and the tensions that emerged from the academic agenda of my project and the current geopolitical situation. This reflective exploration aims to spark a broader conversation on ways to imbue historical ethnomusicology with the same vulnerability inherent in our participant-observation ethnographic practices.

Crafting Hindu Identities Through Music and Dance in South India and the Diaspora
Thursday, September 26, 2024 at 4:30pm
Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003

Preview of papers to be delivered at SEM 2024 by members of the Wesleyan Music Community

Jayendran Pillay

Articulating Hindu Identity in South Africa Through Tevaram Performance

This scholarly exploration examines the enduring cultural phenomenon of tevaram, the sacred Tamil hymnody in praise of Siva, attributed to revered saints Appar, Sundarar, and Sambandar. Preserved among Hindu South Africans since the arrival of predominantly village-based indentured laborers between 1860-1911, this musical tradition showcases a unique communal, group-oriented performance style distinct from the prevalent classical paradigm in India. The departure from Indian conventions prompts a nuanced exploration of the diasporic capacity to sustain an antiquated singing mode over time, primarily reliant on oral transmission. Fidelity to tevaram within the South African community raises considerations about temporal dynamics and forced alterations impacting oral memory, challenging assumptions about authenticity in diasporic musical practices. This study delves into the intricate dynamics of cultural preservation, questioning whether the South African diaspora acts as a repository for tevaram, recognized as the oldest surviving songs in India outside the recited Sama Vedas. The divergence from induced alterations in India introduces a multifaceted layer of complexity. Adding to this texture is the revival of tevaram songs in the 1960s in South Africa, coinciding with a local printing that included the first and last verses—an epochal juncture in the transmission of this venerable musical tradition. Utilizing recordings from both India and South Africa, the study vividly demonstrates divergences in tevaram performance based on the same skeletal melodies, shedding light on the dynamic evolution of tevaram within distinct cultural contexts.

Balraj Balasubrahmaniyan

Harmonizing Divinity: Analyzing Hindu Ideology in Three Songs from Tamil Film Tiruvilaiyadal

This cultural analysis delves into the intersection of cinema and spirituality, specifically focusing on three songs from the 1965 Tamil film "Tiruvilaiyadal." Directed by A.P. Nagarajan and scored by K.V. Mahadevan, the film has garnered acclaim for its nuanced portrayal of divine interventions. The primary aim of this study is to explore the intricate expressions of Hindu ideology within these songs. An exhaustive analysis dissects elements such as lyrics, musical compositions, character delineations, original singers, South Indian Karnatak music nuances, and visual representations, scrutinizing their alignment with fundamental Hindu philosophical principles. A.P. Nagarajan adapted three narratives from the seventh-century epic "Tiruvilaiyadal Puranam," revolving around characters like Banapathirar, a devotional singer, Hemanatha Bhagavathar, a classical musician, and Lord Śiva, appearing as a firewood vendor. The songs seamlessly interweave with the storyline, elevating the cinematic narrative through exceptional musicality. This scholarly pursuit selectively examines songs based on thematic relevance, subjecting each to rigorous analysis to decipher lyrical nuances, musical intricacies, and cinematic context. The study conscientiously contextualizes the manifestation of Hindu ideology within the broader cultural and historical milieu of the film. Through this comprehensive analysis of select songs from "Tiruvilaiyadal," the research aims to contribute insights into cinema's potential as a powerful conduit for articulating and disseminating Hindu philosophical tenets. Employing a multidimensional analytical approach, the study unravels intricate threads binding the cinematic narrative to the rich tapestry of Hindu spirituality.

Bianca Iannitti

The Contours of a Legacy: Examining the T. Balasaraswati Dance Tradition in the United States

Upholding a person's memory following their passing is an important custom practiced cross-culturally. This rings true to the anxiety felt after the untimely death of world-renowned Bharatanatyam dancer Smt. T. Balasaraswati (1918-1984). This prompted concerns about the future of Bala's art form and legacy in the United States, which she thoughtfully nurtured for 20 years. Bala's exposure to teaching in a Western academic environment garnered her a dedicated following of American students, many of whom continue to perform and teach Bala's style of dance to this day. Bala's decision to train American students exhibits the kind of agency one has over the construction of their artistic legacy, filtering what is culturally and artistically relevant, while also negotiating external forces like geographic, religious, and cultural differences. Through primary resources, theories on legacy building and agency, and interviews with Bala's American students, this presentation examines how Bala's legacy is manifested and preserved and the contribution she has made to the construction and celebration of Indian performing arts and identity in the United States. This presentation argues that the mobilization of Bala's artistic legacy can take on several forms, whether tangible or intangible, conscious or unconscious, and/or formal or informal. How much agency does a person have in the casting of one's legacy? What kinds of ethnomusicological implications arise when an artistic legacy is transplanted outside of its traditional, socio-cultural context? In what ways is their legacy preserved and enacted for future generations?

Bridging Two Worlds: The Gamelan Compositions of I.M. Harjito

Marc Perlman (Brown University)

Thursday, October 3, 2024 at 4:30pm

PAC 100

Presented in conjunction with the American Indonesian Culture and Education Foundation's production *Gamelan in the World: A concert of traditional and hybrid compositions of I. M. Harjito* to be presented in Crowell Concert Hall at 7:30 on October 4th.

Modernism, as we know it in Western music, inspired innovative developments in many non-Western traditions, including those of Indonesia. Often these innovations represented sharp breaks, in which basic features of the traditional music were abandoned, either to be replaced by techniques imported from the West, or by locally-devised—but equally radical—departures from the norm.

But the spectrum of creativity in many non-Western traditions is quite wide, and along with 'revolutionary' creativity there can be innovation that maintains more or less of the tradition's fundamental character. In the *gamelan* music of Central Java, the compositions of I. M. Harjito occupy various positions on this spectrum. Some fully embody the aesthetics of the canonical compositions, while others observe them from an angle, as it were. His most radical departures, interestingly enough, take the form of cross-cultural collaborations, where Harjito melds the *gamelan* aesthetic with instruments from other traditions.

In this presentation, several examples illustrating the range of Harjito's compositional approaches are analyzed and placed in the context of his artistic development over the past quarter-century.

Marc Perlman is Associate Professor of Music at Brown University. He has been a Fellow of the Society for the Humanities at Cornell University and has also taught at Tufts University, and in Indonesia, where he was founding editor of the *Journal of the Indonesian Musicological Society*. His scholarly writings have appeared in the journals *Ethnomusicology*, *Asian Music*, *Musical Quarterly*, *Postmodern Culture*, *Music Perception*, *Indonesia*, *Social Studies of Science*, and in the revised edition of the *New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*. He has also published in *Rhythm Music Magazine* and the *New York Times*. He is a past president of the Northeast Chapter of the Society for Ethnomusicology.

Vina in Voice in Vina

Karakul S. Subramanian (Brhaddhvani, Research and Training Centre for Music of the World)

Thursday, October 10, 2024 at 4:30pm

Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003

Presented as the opening of the CFA's 48th annual Navaratri Festival October 10 – October 13.

Vina is a historic name in India, a national instrument. But a recent evolution into the current form has brought a different perspective to the raga classification through a scheme of 72 melas attributed to Venkatamakhi (fl.c 1630). Technically it is called 'Saraswathi Vina'. In the performance parlance it is just called vina.

In the colloquium, I will be presenting a perspective on vina, as a vina player, still toiling with ideas of improving upon its use in different platforms as its chances of concert platform appearances have dwindled greatly. Although the reasons for such a state can be pointed out by scholars, what I intend highlighting here are: 1. My observations, experiments in using this instrument to its full advantage, through a fretting system I have devised to adhere to the just intonation, with minor adjustments to bring to a state of accuracy in the tonal positioning of the 24 frets, resulting in octaval unity. 2. The techniques in playing vina to go beyond the stylistic boundaries to make use of this instrument to its full potential, contextually relevant. 3. The concepts of vina in voice and voice in vina, meaning a metaphorical interplay of vina in the body, akin to the 'cakras' in the body from the point of view of yoga and the vina characteristics in singing voice.

Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer Subramanian belongs to the 9th generation in a family of traditional vina players whose ancestors played vina as a part of temple worship at Brihadambal temple in Thirugokarnam and court musicians in Pudukkottai, in the pre-independent era in South India. His grand uncle and adoptive father Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer and his grandfather, Karaikudi Subbarama Iyer, made history as Karaikudi Veena brothers between 1910-1936. His adoptive father, a national celebrity, was his guru although he started learning vina from his mother Lakshmi Ammal from his boyhood. He holds a bachelor degree in Chemistry and masters in English literature. Later pursued his Ph.D in Ethnomusicology at Wesleyan University. He was awarded the doctorate in 1985. He served as a Reader and later as a Professor at the department of music at the University of Madras between 1985 and 2002. He founded Brhaddhvani, the research and training centre for musics of the world, Chennai in 1989. As a graded artist in All India Radio he had performed vina and had performed duets with his sister Rajeswari Padmanabhan and Ranganayaki Rajagopalan, both celebrities as prime disciples of his adoptive father. He had also accompanied Dr. T. Viswanathan in several concerts in the US. He is best known for his music educational pedagogy Correlated Objective Music Education and Training (COMET).

Wesleyan Music Community Preview of SEM Papers

Thursday, October 17, 2024 at 4:30pm

PAC 101

Preview of papers to be delivered at SEM 2024 by members of the Wesleyan Music Community

Sara Feili

Diaspora and Iranian Music: The Activities of Iranian Women Musicians in New York City

Following the 1979 revolution in Iran, many musicians migrated abroad due to the restrictions imposed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, particularly on cultural activities, including music. More recently, migration has significantly increased due to censorship and political issues. Regarding the diaspora and Iranian music, the focus has often been on Iranians in Los Angeles, United States (Hemmasi 2020), while insufficient attention has been given to the diaspora of Iranian musicians in New York City, especially women musicians. This shows the need for a more extensive examination and description of women's musical activities in this city. I argue that the impact of female musicians on Iranian culture and identity, the challenges they face in the New York music scene, and their experiences of success and failure in this industry underscore the importance of studying and analyzing this subject. The method of this article includes interviews with women musicians living in New York City and attending their concerts. The research findings prove that women's musical activities in New York City have distinct characteristics and challenges. I explore how the role of women musicians in preserving and enhancing Iranian cultural identity, their impact on the local community, and their contributions to cultural exchanges between Iranians and non-Iranians.

Christine May Yong

Roots, Trunk, Branches, Leaves: Situating the Practice of Malaysia's Wayng Kulit Kelantan

The Madang as a Core Concept in Sustaining Site-Specific Expressive Ecologies of Korean Drumming and Dance

Donna Kwon (University of Kentucky)

Thursday, October 24, 2024 at 4:30pm

Boger 112

The *madang* is a key space and concept for Korean drummers and dancers. This presentation will trace its importance in helping to cultivate and sustain vibrant, expressive ecologies in a rapidly globalizing Korea. Centering on a Korean p'ungmul group, Kwon will first examine how practices of transmission and performative ritual are critical to sustaining a site-specific expressive ecology. She will offer some examples of how these practices inspire meaningful, site-focused expressions of folk culture in national and transnational spaces.

Donna Lee Kwon is associate professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Kentucky and the author of the book, *Music in Korea: Experiencing Music, Expressing Culture* (2011). Her second book, *Stepping in the Madang: Sustaining Expressive Ecologies of Korean Drumming and Dance*, will be coming out this Fall 2024 on Wesleyan University Press. Her current project explores Asian/Asian American voice and vocality from a transpacific and multivocal lens.

Real Time/Dead Time

Tung-Hui Hu (University of Michigan)

Thursday, October 31, 2024

Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003

Presented in conjunction with Drift/Loop, a 24-hour performance Ensemble that will be presented in Olin Library from noon to noon on November 1 and 2.

Even as algorithmic feeds glue us to a global cycle of real time, they also produce a sense that time is something to be scrolled through, wasted, even killed. This is why it's so hard to slow down, and why we feel so exhausted: we are told that everything is changing, that a future is just around the corner, but really we are stuck in a standstill.

Starting from a brief history of how Cold War computing seemed to rewrite our sense of liveness and delay, this talk considers the strange condition of time under digital capitalism through artworks and performances that explore the new aesthetic forms of today, such as buffering, looping, and doomscrolling. The talk will conclude with Hu's own inquiries into recording and capturing time in his writing practice, including an in-depth look at his text scores for the

performance installation DRIFT/LOOP (with composer Paula Matthusen, visual artist Olivia Valentine, printmaker Raluca Iancu, and others), premiering at Wesleyan on November 1-November 2.

Tung-Hui Hu is a poet and a theorist of digital media. He is the author of five books, most recently *Digital Lethargy: Dispatches from an Age of Disconnection* (MIT, 2022), *A Prehistory of the Cloud* (MIT, 2015), and *Greenhouses, Lighthouses* (Copper Canyon, 2013). Awarded fellowships from the American Academy in Berlin and the American Academy in Rome, he is an associate professor of English and the Helen Zell Writers' Program at the University of Michigan.

This colloquium is made possible with funds from the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life.

Lessons Learned from Kenny Barron

Noah Baerman (Wesleyan University)

Thursday, November 7, 2024 at 4:30pm

Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003

Presented in conjunction with a concert featuring the music of Bill and Kenny Barron that will be presented on November 10 in Crowell Concert Hall at 3:00 PM.

Kenny Barron is one of the preeminent living jazz pianists with hundreds of recording credits, more than a dozen Grammy Award nominations, the National Endowment for the Arts Jazz Master Fellowship. His influence on younger generations has manifested both through the impact of his work as a performer and composer and through direct mentorship over a quarter century as Professor of Music at Rutgers University and subsequent stints teaching jazz piano at Manhattan School of Music and Julliard. He has performed on

multiple occasions at Wesleyan, both with his own trio and in collaboration with his older brother Bill (1927-1989), a saxophonist, composer, and scholar who served as Chair of the Music Department at Wesleyan. Noah Baerman, Director of the Wesleyan Jazz Ensemble and Private Lessons Instructor in Jazz Piano was mentored by Kenny Barron for six years. Baerman's own concepts as a jazz artist and educator show a significant debt to Barron's, including aspects of both musicianship and personal comportment that they never overtly discussed. In anticipation of Baerman's November 10 Wesleyan concert of music by Bill and Kenny Barron, he will discuss a variety of the musical and extra-musical traits that represent the younger Barron's legacy. This discussion culminates a series of student workshops supported by the Zack Rosen Fund.

Thina Sizwe: Music, Social Change, and Prisoner Resistance in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle in South Africa

Janie Cole (University of Connecticut)

Thursday, November 21, 2024 at 4:30pm

Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003

Drawing on the wider socio-political context of South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle, this talk explores music's critical role as resistance for political prisoners held in apartheid prisons over three decades (1960-1990), especially at the maximum security prison on Robben Island where activists including Nelson Mandela were imprisoned from the 1960s on, and in the women's jails, such as Number 4 at the Old Fort in Johannesburg. Based on extensive new interviews with former political prisoners, new struggle repertoires and original archival work, it examines the harrowing prison conditions and the development of musical activities in these apartheid jails to reveal how Black music performance – from indigenous African genres like isicathamiya, maskanda, and umzansi to Cape jazz, traditional migrant work songs, classical, rock, reggae, mbaqanga, and Indian ragas – provided resistance, critique, community, therapy, memory and identity for political prisoners, transcending political, linguistic and ethnic differences to unite an oppressed people against a common enemy. Women's narratives and songs expose the deadly gender-based violence that underlay structures of state violence and express their fight against both racial and gender oppression and dehumanizing prison experiences, which differed sharply to a male-centered struggle world, thus raising broader questions about cultural expression as advancing social change and the uses of music by individuals suffering and protesting the violation of human rights under oppressive patriarchal regimes at the intersections of music, resilience, power, violence, gender, race, trauma and human rights.