
Music Department

Colloquium series Spring 2025

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

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.

Spring 2025, 4:30–6:00pm, Adzenyah Rehearsal Hall 003

- Feb. 6 **Roger Matthew Grant** (Professor of Music, and Dean of Arts and Humanities, Wesleyan University)
 “The Colonial Galant Style: Eighteenth-Century Music from Chiquitania, Bolivia”
- Feb. 13 **Yvette Janine Jackson** (Assistant Professor in Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry, Department of Music, Harvard University)
 “Radio Opera Workshop: Transformation of Sound and Process”
- Feb. 20 **Joshua Lubin-Levy** (Director, Center for the Arts, Wesleyan University)
 “‘E.G. [Evening Gown] Orgy’: Jack Smith And Abstract Gender in the 1960s”
- Feb. 27 **Nathaniel Mitchell** (Visiting Assistant Professor of Music, Wesleyan University)
 “On Meter and the Social Dynamics of Cueing in Bill Monroe’s ‘Muleskinner Blues’”
- Apr. 1* **Oliver Muco Nicholson** (Composer, performer, producer)
 “Creative Troubadourism: Cultural Identity and the Interpretation of Medieval Music”
(*Tuesday, Ring Hall)

Biographies and Abstracts

Roger Mathew Grant is Professor of Music and Dean of Arts and Humanities at Wesleyan University. His research focuses on eighteenth-century music and the history of music theory, and his journal articles have appeared in *Critical Inquiry*, *Representations*, *Music Theory Spectrum*, and the *Journal of Music Theory*. His first book, *Beating Time and Measuring Music in the Early Modern Era*, won the [Emerging Scholar Award](#) from the Society for Music Theory. His most recent book, *Peculiar Attunements: How Affect Theory Turned Musical*, was selected for the “Year’s Work in Critical and Cultural Theory” for 2020. His current projects concern eighteenth-century music by Indigenous composers from Jesuit missions in South America; his first article on the topic, titled “Colonial Galant,” was published in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* and won the 2024 SMT Outstanding Publication Award.

Abstract: During the middle decades of the eighteenth century, Indigenous musicians in rural South America created a distinctive musical style music under conditions of Jesuit colonization. These musicians had been forcibly relocated to mission communities in the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru, which is now eastern Bolivia.

There, they participated in vibrant scenes of choral and orchestral performance; they trained and retrained each other in apprenticeship systems of singing, conducting, composition, and instrument building. Today a substantial corpus of their music is preserved in Bolivian archives. The extant repertoire includes several large-scale operas and liturgical compositions attributed to teams of Indigenous composers. In this talk, I offer a systematic analysis of this repertoire and its distinctive style, which I call “colonial galant.” I argue, first, how the style of this repertoire is genuinely galant and very much a part of the eighteenth-century European intellectual and aesthetic movement that shares that name. I also define the colonial galant style as a distinct sub-set of the galant and demonstrate its particular features. I hope to show that close scrutiny of this colonial repertoire can help us reframe the historiography of European art music.

Yvette Janine Jackson is a composer and installation artist whose early experiences with tape splicing, analog synthesis, and computer music led to her work as a sound designer for theatre. Building on these experiences, she developed her unique aesthetic of narrative soundscape composition and radio opera. Jackson’s projects often draw from history to examine relevant social issues. Her album *Freedom* is described as “one of the most unique releases to chronicle the Black American experience” (*The Wire*). Recent projects include solo modular synth performance for King Britt’s Blacktronika stage at the Big Ears Festival; *T-Minus, A Radio Opera* commissioned by the International Contemporary Ensemble; *Extant*, for bass clarinet, cello, and game engine at ZKM Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe; and *Hello, Tomorrow!* for orchestra and electronics co-commissioned by American Composers Orchestra and Carnegie Hall. Her Radio Opera Workshop ensemble premiered *Left Behind* at the Venice Music Biennale and gave the U.S. premiere at UC Irvine for the Gassmann Electronic Music Series. Jackson’s permanent installations *Underground (Codes)* and *Destination Freedom* can be experienced at Wave Farm in Acra, New York, and the International African American Museum in Charleston, respectively. Jackson is an assistant professor in Creative Practice and Critical Inquiry in the Department of Music at Harvard University.

Abstract: Composer Yvette Janine Jackson explores her relationship with radio opera as a compositional and performance practice. She will highlight the ways she synthesizes radio drama, electroacoustic music, and soundscape composition to create immersive sonic narratives through her solo works and the Radio Opera Workshop ensemble. This presentation will examine her use of text, spatialization, and repetition as creative tools, while sharing examples of the collaborative and technological processes that shape her works.

Joshua Lubin-Levy

Abstract: The scandal surrounding Jack Smith’s film *Flaming Creatures* (1963), with its overt display of naked bodies writhing in ecstasy and agony, marks a turning point in the history of 1960s sexual liberation—one that often overshadows the artistic experimentation at the core of Smith’s practice. This talk will look to the live performance work that predates Smith’s renowned film (still banned in New York State) in order to consider the entanglements of Smith’s better known filmmaking with his relationships across the avant-gardes of painting and music (including the work of Tony Conrad, Henry Flynt, Marian Zazeela, and others) to think about an alternative legacy for how Smith came to animate a queer world where “image” and “sound” come together.

Nathaniel Mitchell is a Visiting Assistant Professor of Music Theory at Wesleyan University whose research explores the cognitive foundations of musical creativity in genres ranging from eighteenth-century opera to bluegrass and video games. He received his Ph.D. in Music from Princeton University, where his dissertation on musical form in eighteenth-century opera was awarded the Holmes / D’Accone dissertation fellowship from the American Musicological Society. In 2023, his article “The Volta: A Galant Gesture of Culmination” was awarded the Roland Jackson prize by the American Musicological Society. Additional research has appeared in *Music Theory Online*, the *Oxford Handbook of Public Music Theory*, *SMT-V*, and *SMT-Pod*.

Abstract: “Muleskinner Blues,” the signature song of bluegrass patriarch Bill Monroe, is at once central to the bluegrass canon and yet metrically enigmatic, featuring a flexible timing structure that fluctuated wildly between performances. This article engages in a longitudinal study of 165 performances of “Muleskinner Blues” across Bill Monroe’s career to explore how the musicians that rotated through his band, the Blue Grass Boys, cognitively grappled with the song’s flexible structure. Through a series of analytical vignettes, I will detail the distributed cognitive system that drives performances of “Muleskinner Blues,” giving special attention to musical

cues as tools for calling collective attention to structurally important moments of action. Additionally, I show how the song's flexible meter was weaponized by Monroe in acts of musical hazing, antagonizing his musicians in the high-stakes environment of a live performance. Through these analyses, I show how the song's peculiar meter centered Monroe musically, structurally, and socially, transforming "Muleskinner Blues" into a potent vehicle for the masculine ideology of the father of bluegrass music.

Michael Johnsen is a circuit designer, performer, and researcher from Pittsburgh, USA. His recent research concerns the circuit-level understanding of David Tudor's "folkloric" homemade instruments and related lutherie. This work has resulted in restoration, cloning, and performance with vintage circuits, as well as publications/lectures. His own performance work is characterized by a relative lack of ideas per se, and an intense focus on observation, the way a shepherd watches sheep. As a performer/builder of live-electronics he cultivates an integrated menagerie of custom devices whose idiosyncratic behaviors are revealed through their complex interactions, producing teeming chirps, sudden transients and charming failure modes; embracing the dirt in pure electronics. He has shown work at arter (istanbul), singuhr (Berlin), INA GRM (Paris), Getty [LA], MdM Salzburg, Kagurane (Tokyo), MoMA, SF Cinematheque, Radio France, Idiopreneurial Entrephonics, Kitchen (NYC), High Zero (Baltimore), and Musique Action. He co-edits ubu.com/emr, designs synthesizers for Pittsburgh Modular, and may be reached at johnsen.rahbek@gmail.com.

Abstract: Starting in the mid 60s, david tudor made up a homemade electronic music by following his ears and his all-absorbing mind. he wanted new instruments and began a unique self-education which embraced Brazilian hobby mags, engineering journals, and countless trips to junk surplus outlets. simultaneously secretive and social, he benefited from generous friendships with lowell cross, gordon mumma, and fred waldhauer of bell labs. his musical methods were as idiosyncratic as the tools he constructed. this talk will explain his instruments, the way they made his music, and the way his music made his instruments.

Oliver Muco Nicholson is a multi-instrumentalist, specializing as a vocalist. He also plays the piano, viola and the koto. He has performed his original compositions in the United Kingdom, Burundi, Rwanda, Portugal, and the United States, including opening for Sudanese-Canadian artist Emmanuel Jal and Rwandan singer Meddy Saleh as well as collaborations with musicians from East Africa including DeeJay Pius and Amalon. His solo work, which he releases under the name 'Muco' has been streamed over 1.5 million times worldwide and has been described as "charming", "compelling", featuring a "kaleidoscope of contrasts" by Come Here Floyd. DNÜ says Muco finds "a balance between being haunting and spiritual", with "dreamy production making room for stunning vocals". Earmilk calls his songwriting "dazzling" and "wistful" with music which "brushes away all your thoughts, leaving just enough space for its alluring lyrics." <https://olivermuco.com/>

Abstract: This session explores the interplay of cultural identity and creative interpretation in the reimagining of medieval music. Drawing upon my dual heritage as a British-Burundian musician, I have developed a practice I term "creative troubadourism," blending historic folk traditions with contemporary sensibilities. Through my reinterpretations of medieval songs - particularly in Old and Middle English - I aim to bridge the temporal divide, crafting performances that resonate with modern audiences while honoring their historical roots. My work seeks a dialogue between musical and linguistic traditions, integrating a diverse range of instruments (autoharp, lyre, koto, and viola) and languages (Swahili, Kirundi, French, and Modern, Old and Middle English). Central to my compositional interests are how disparate cultural tools and world instruments can work together to find new ways of understanding and performing the music of the past. This session invites reflection on how the revival of medieval music, when informed by personal heritage and cross-cultural exploration, can challenge traditional notions of authenticity and inclusivity in historical performance. I am seeking to stimulate discussion on approaching medieval music as a living art form, a space for both historical engagement and creative reimagination.