



Music History and Historical Materialism Reflections and Possibilities

Friday, 13 April 2018

Abstracts and Speaker Biographies

Keynote Paper

Benjamin Korstvedt (Clark University, USA)

Bloch, Music, and Historical Materialism: Why Now and Why for the Future?

This keynote will address the critical possibilities that begin to emerge when music, as both a social practice and an aesthetic phenomenon, is approached by means of a historical materialism that is fully cognizant of Bloch's insights, particularly into the implications of "Ungleichzeitigkeit." I am interested in thinking seriously about what historical materialism, taken in a strict sense, means for the critical study for music and in reflecting on the consonances and dissonances this might produce when crossed with a more conventionally Blochian approach. Examples of how such a project might proceed, differences from usual approaches, resistances to be faced, and the new paths of understanding it offers will be considered. The talk will conclude by suggesting that the richest opportunities for critical work of this sort lie just on the edge of the coming future.



Biography

Benjamin Korstvedt, Professor of Music at Clark University, is a musicologist and author of *Listening for Utopia in the Musical Philosophy of Ernst Bloch* (Cambridge UP, 2010). Historical materialism is the common thread that connects many of the areas in which he researches and publishes. These range from the textual history of Bruckner's symphonies and studies of music as published and performed text to inquiries into the social dimensions of musical taste and the cultural politics of the sublime.

Beth M. Snyder (University of Surrey)

Why Musical Creativity Matters: Marx, Bloch, and a Non-Hedonic Theory of Artistic Value

Neither Marx nor Engels ever completed a systematic treatment of aesthetic issues (though Marx had, on two separate occasions, planned to do so); nor did either devote more than a few words to music in those aesthetic writings that have survived. Despite this, we can excavate from their comments on the intimate relationship between artistic practices and social and economic structures, a non-hedonic theory of the value of creative praxis—one that privileges art's ethical import over its aesthetic dimension. This non-hedonic theory, which has been taken up by and transformed in Marxist intellectual Ernst Bloch's philosophy of music, has much to contribute to our understanding of the value of creative activity.

In this paper, I begin with a brief examination of Marx and Engels' own contribution to the discourse regarding why artistic value matters. This preliminary discussion serves as a point of entry into Bloch's provocative theory of music's significance to social progress, which radically expands on Marxist non-hedonic theory and is unusual in its emphasis on music's central role in the realization of human potential. In investigating Bloch's arguments about the value of musical activity to individual and communal well-being, I pay particular attention to two aspects of his thought: the materialist underpinnings of his philosophy and the mechanisms by which Bloch grants artistic activity real ethical import. I conclude by suggesting ways that Bloch's theory speaks to 21st-century music historians who are attempting to rethink the relationship between music and society.

Biography

Beth Snyder is an Associate Tutor in the Department of Music and Media at the University of Surrey, having spent the previous year as a Visiting Lecturer (of music) at Scripps College and (of philosophy) at California State University, San Bernardino. Motivated by an interest in music's role in the construction and critique of national identity and in the establishment of cultural legitimacy, her current research explores the political uses of Greek myth on the East German opera stage.

Naomi Woo (University of Cambridge)

The Role of Performance in the Musical Philosophy of Ernst Bloch

Although the musical philosophy of Ernst Bloch is beginning to gain more notice within the study of musicology, very little attention has been placed on the relevance of Bloch's work to the study and practice of performance. In fact, Bloch's musical philosophy not only relies on performance—and indeed his own descriptions of music are often ephemeral, experiential, and sensual—but is also particularly well-suited to understanding it. Furthermore, the utopian promise that Bloch sees in music has much in common with the act of performance; indeed, performance studies scholars outside of music have theorised productively about the relationship between performance and utopia. In this paper, I focus on exploring the performative dimensions of Bloch's philosophy, taking seriously his belief that the site of musical meaning lies not in musical structure and form but in its material and physical presence. In particular, I suggest that his belief in music's potential to contain social meaning *relies* on such a physical understanding. Using piano music—and my own performance—as a case study, I suggest that Bloch offers tools for finding musical meaning in the sensuousness of the performing body and the phenomenology of the performer.

Biography

Naomi Woo is a pianist, conductor, and researcher, with a particular interest in contemporary music. Performance highlights in 2017-2018 include conducting Holst's chamber opera *Savitri* (ADC Theatre), performing *Carnival of the Animals* alongside pianist Tom Poster (West Road Concert Hall) and assisting conductors Sir Mark Elder and Jac Van Steen with the Cambridge University Orchestra. Currently Gates Cambridge Scholar and PhD candidate in musicology at Clare College, Naomi also holds a BA in mathematics & philosophy from Yale University, and degrees in piano performance from the Yale School of Music and Université de Montréal.

Ben Earle (University of Birmingham)

Music and Utopia in Fascist Italy

Progress towards an adequate historical account of twentieth-century Italian music has long been blocked by the vulgar-Adornian proposition (widely adopted, and not just in Italy) that works of musical modernism are always inherently critical with respect to reactionary politics, indeed inimical towards capitalist society in general. The interpretative stakes are particularly high when it comes to the music composed under fascism, which, in striking contrast to other 'totalitarian' regimes of the period, invested heavily in modernist culture of all kinds. Recent revisionism has dismissed as wishful thinking the once firmly established notion that Italy's fascist modernists were politically subversive. In fact, their creative aims were fully aligned with the thinking of powerful figures in the regime. So where does that leave us in regard to the non-modernist music of the period, generally dismissed as merely 'fascist', but in truth no more or less 'fascist' than that of the modernists? Though he notably avoids much discussion of Italy in his *Erbschaft dieser Zeit* of 1935, Ernst Bloch's celebrated theory of non-contemporaneity can be useful in separating out the competing socio-economic pressures behind the fierce polemics between pro- and anti-modernist elements in Italian music of the late 1930s. But especially striking in Bloch is the conviction, directly contrary to the vulgar-Adornian position, that the Left cannot afford to dismiss precisely that which appears most archaic and irrational in fascist culture. With this idea in mind, the present paper will put forward a new reading of Italian music of the 1930s, searching for traces of utopia in the kind of anti-modernist and populist fascist cultural production usually regarded as beyond the pale of musicological discussion.

Biography

Ben Earle is Senior Lecturer in Music at the University of Birmingham. He is the author of a monograph *Luigi Dallapiccola and Musical Modernism in Fascist Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2013), and of numerous journal articles, book chapters and review articles on twentieth-century Italian and British music. Recent work includes an article on Frank Bridge in the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* and a chapter on Puccini and fascism for *Puccini and His World*, ed. Arman Schwartz and Emanuele Senici (Princeton University Press). A critical edition of the full score of Arthur Bliss's 1944 ballet *Miracle in the Gorbals* is forthcoming from Novello & Co.

Charlie Shrader (University of Pennsylvania)

'The labor of the madman': Marx and the Charlatan Keyboardist

Though remarkably few of Karl Marx's writings contain commentary on aesthetics in general and music in particular, one of Marx's main examples for the distinction between productive and unproductive labor centers on the economy of the piano. In the *Grundrisse* and *Theories of Surplus Value*, Marx uses the archetypal figures of pianist, piano builder, and piano owner to map a complex relationship of labor and value. Strikingly, he classes the pianist's labor as not only unproductive of capital (as it is merely exchanged for revenue), but also comparable with 'the labor of the madman who produces delusions.'

Few musicologists have engaged with Marx's provocation concerning music, value, and the medium of the piano. In view of this I propose to discuss music and labor embodied in an additional historical-aesthetic archetype: the 'charlatan' keyboard musician in Europe around the year 1800. The decades surrounding this year saw a swell in traveling musicians, especially enterprising virtuoso keyboardists, who impressed audiences by taking advantage of rapidly developing keyboard technology as well as improvements in music publishing. Some of these musicians also faced charges, brought by a burgeoning class of aesthetic critics, of a noisy fakery, akin to the theatrics of charlatan peddlers of panaceas. In analyzing this historical convergence of aesthetic, commercial, and technological discourses, I suggest that these peripatetics enacted music as a slippery form of affective labor in a way that both thrilled and discomfited their audiences. This Marxist reading of the charlatan allows us to rethink nineteenth century economies of music and, by focusing on terms of labor, asserts Marx's continuing viability to scholars.

Biography

Charlie Shrader is a PhD candidate in musicology and Benjamin Franklin Fellow at the University of Pennsylvania. His dissertation, 'Romantic Economies of Music: Toward an understanding of musical labor in nineteenth-century Germany, Austria, and France,' explores the intersections of commercialism, aesthetics, and music technologies in a variety of European settings. He has previously presented work to the research cluster 'Declassifying the Classics' at the Orpheus Instituut in Ghent, Belgium, and is something of a singer and a charlatan pianist in his spare time.

Peter Mondelli (University of North Texas)

Rethinking Alienation through Music in Benjamin's Paris

The idea of alienation has long been a truism in Marxist thought. In volume one of *Capital*, Marx explains it as a by-product of two related forces: first, the separation of workers from the labour process, and second, the reification of the commodity that creates social relationships between objects and material relationships between people. For many Marxists, the solution to the problem of alienation has been curiously lapsarian, insofar as many seek a redemptive return to true human sociability through political change. Walter Benjamin's late writings, in contrast, hint at a different perspective. In 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire' (1938), he investigates the poetics of sociability mediated by objects, seeing new forms of human interaction emerging from within the world of nineteenth-century commodity capitalism.

My paper continues Benjamin's project by re-examining alienation alongside the material history of music in Second Empire Paris. To do so, I turn to one of the era's most popular musical commodities: piano arrangements of operas. By examining extant evidence of their production, sale, and domestic use, I will argue that these commodities undermine Marx's conception of alienation in two related ways. First, analyses of their production and consumption too often stretch Marx's ideas about the labour process by forcing us to reconsider where labour stops and consumption starts. Second, the anthropomorphic discourse surrounding both the scores themselves and the instruments on which they were performed exemplifies a phenomenon Benjamin describes as a 'commodity soul': these objects are too deeply imbedded in their social contexts to be considered merely materials. Like Benjamin, I see this combination of forces resulting not in alienation in Marx's sense, but in the possibility of an all-too-human form of material sociability.

Biography

Peter Mondelli has served as an Assistant Professor of Music History at the University of North Texas since 2012. His research explores the impact of print and commodity capitalism on nineteenth-century French opera. He holds degrees from Columbia University and the University of Pennsylvania. His articles have appeared in *19th-Century Music*, *Acta Musicologica* and *The Opera Quarterly*. His first book – *Opera, Print, and Capital in Nineteenth-Century Paris* – is forthcoming.

Emily X. X. Tan (University of Oxford)

Nature, Alienation, and 'Ahistorical' Transcendence in Richard Strauss's *Daphne* (1938)

The history of musical autonomy in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries parallels the history of the liberal subject (Eagleton 1990). In particular, the autonomous musical object offered an environment for this conception of the subject to find expression, even while the historical context surrounding the production of such artworks became increasingly withdrawn from any social manifestation of the liberal ideal, a universal humanity (Paddison 2001).

The title character of Strauss's opera *Daphne* typifies the bourgeois liberal subject of the twentieth century. She considers herself a free individual insofar as she is not beholden to the authority of her father and participates only on her own terms in the activities of her society. Daphne's desire for communion with an idealised and apparently external universal is shown in her love for nature, and at the opera's end she is transformed into a tree. It may appear, then, that *Daphne* projects a narrative of redemption for the liberal subject.

However, representing the liberal subject to itself, the musical object is also bound by the joint doctrines of self-sovereignty and universalism that are both the bourgeois liberal's strength and its downfall. In this paper, I suggest that Daphne's transformation, which on the surface appears redemptive, actually reveals the corruption at the heart of the bourgeois liberal subjectivity. The ideological truth that equates an ostensibly ahistorical universal (the music associated with nature in the opera) with an ostensibly ahistorical human consciousness (the liberal subject), is manifest in a totalising aesthetic alienation that exposes the social situation of bourgeois music in the twentieth century.

Biography

Emily X. X. Tan is a doctoral student and Clarendon Scholar at the University of Oxford where she is funded jointly by the Clarendon Fund and the Merton College Music Award. In 2016 she was awarded the Society for Music Analysis TAGS prize, and in 2018 she will be taking up a short-term DAAD research grant at Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München.

Nicholas Till (University of Sussex)

The Origins of Opera and the Politics of Early Modernity

Opera was born in Florence in the year 1600. In my current research project I'm asking the questions: Why opera? Why there? Why then?

In the third act of Monteverdi's *Orfeo* (Mantua, 1607) Orpheus, attempting to cross the river Styx to rescue Eurydice, seizes Charon's boat to ferry himself across the river. Orpheus's daring elicits a comparison to the voyages of Jason and the Argonauts and the flight of Daedalus and Icarus from a chorus of Infernal Spirits. Cited in classical and medieval times as warnings against the sins of hubris or curiosity about forbidden knowledge, during the sixteenth century Jason and Icarus became symbols of intellectual enquiry, risk and discovery, and were eventually often identified with Galileo by his contemporaries.

I have established substantial connections between the inventors and patrons of early opera and distinctive aspects of early modernity such as the scientific revolution and colonial exploration and conquest. But what are the politics of Galilean thought? Why should those who supported Galileo also have supported the new art form (and also have been patrons of Caravaggio)? Why were the progenitors of opera such ardent Francophiles in Medicean Tuscany? Were they also closet republicans? Is opera a 'bourgeois' art form (Adorno)?

In this presentation I will lay out some of the methodological challenges of establishing a historical-materialist reading of the origins of opera in relation to the ongoing 'transition from feudalism to capitalism' debate.

Biography

Nicholas Till is a historian and theorist working primarily on opera and contemporary music and theatre. He is Professor of Opera and Music Theatre at the University of Sussex, and is the author of *Mozart and the Enlightenment* (1992), and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Opera Studies* (2012) and *Beckett and Musicality* (2014). In addition to his work on opera he has written about sound art, site-specific performance, minimalism, Victorian popular culture, and the relationship between musical skill and labour theories of value.

Noah Zeldin (University of Chicago)

Towards a Socialist Production of Music: Hanns Eisler and Cornelius Cardew

The history of twentieth-century Western art music was marked by an extreme division of labor in the production of an artwork-commodity for an increasingly miniscule audience of specialists. In this paper, I examine the work of composers Hanns Eisler (1898-1962) and Cornelius Cardew (1936-1981) and argue that in attempting to counteract this tendency, they began to develop alternative, socialist models of musical practice.

After studying with Arnold Schoenberg and then rejecting his teacher's aesthetic agenda, Eisler dedicated himself to composing what he called 'applied music.' Such music was composed for particular audiences and purposes, like stage works by Bertolt Brecht and agitprop troops, and was designed to be performed by non-professionals, mainly union and worker-based ensembles, which were prevalent in interwar Germany.

After Eisler's death, British composer Cornelius Cardew pursued a similar artistic path. Cardew had enjoyed success as a composer and performer of contemporary music, but by the late 1960s, his artistic activities directly contradicted his increasingly hardline leftist politics. In his magnum opus, *The Great Learning* (1968-1971), written chiefly to be performed by non-musicians, Cardew further developed compositional materials, while simultaneously combating the division of labor in musical practice.

In their common rejection of specialization in the production and consumption of music – and even the very separation of producer from consumer –, Eisler and Cardew provided models of a decommodified and substantially less hierarchical, i.e. socialist, musical practice, which moved away from the 'sheer material fetishism' (Albrecht Betz's term) of much of twentieth- and twenty-first-century Western art music and towards reinvigorating it with renewed social relevance.

Biography

Noah Zeldin is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Germanic Studies at the University of Chicago; he graduated from Northwestern University in Chicago with a Bachelor of Music in Composition in 2011. His dissertation focuses on the learning-pieces [*Lehrstücke*] of dramatists Bertolt Brecht and Heiner Müller and composers Hanns Eisler and Cornelius Cardew. In addition to his scholarly endeavors, Noah continues to pursue practical work in both music and theater.

James Davis (University of Birmingham)

Thomas Adès's *Arcadiana* and Postmodernity

For many decades, the social and the economic were almost completely occluded from Anglophone accounts of music history. In the 1990s, some seeds of change – albeit of varying scope and theoretical sophistication – began to emerge, and some more critically engaged work started to be produced. However, for many it has been business as usual. Epistemologically dubious and positivistic 'asocial' music analysis still has a disturbing level of institutional dominance, feeding into broader music histories which frequently seem to conceive themselves as catalogues of style cut off from the social environment. In the realm of twentieth- and twenty-first-century music studies, the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' have been co-opted to justify such style-orientated music histories (Gloag 2012). This is unfortunate, especially considering the tireless efforts of the Marxist literary theorist Fredric Jameson to use these terms to situate cultural trajectories in relation to twentieth-century shifts in the mode of production (Jameson 1984, Jameson 1991, Jameson 2002) – efforts which have sometimes been misrepresented so as to justify music histories based upon 'style' alone (Metzer 2003 and Metzer 2009). In contradistinction to such histories, this paper will use Thomas Adès's much-praised early string quartet *Arcadiana* (1995) as a case study to show how Jameson's linking of the terms 'modernism' and 'postmodernism' to shifts in the mode of production can help us to craft epistemologically informed music histories which account for the sociality of musical material.

Biography

James Davis is a PhD researcher at the University of Birmingham. His PhD is concerned with the political nature of Luciano Berio's output. On top of the study of late twentieth-century modernist composers, he has research interests in 20th- and 21st-century philosophy, Marxism and Japanese popular culture.