

Spring Meeting

Northern California Chapter of the American Musicological Society

April 11, 2026

Stanford University

9:30: coffee and pastries (provided)

10:00–11:30: Paper Session 1: Music and Politics

Session chair: Sean Keenan

Mariana Da Silva Gabriel (UC Davis), ‘Fado in the Free World: Cultural Diplomacy, and the Sound of Portugal in Cold War North America’

Kolawole Rasheed (UC Santa Cruz), ‘#EndSARS Lekki Massacre: The National Anthem as Performative Demand and the Failure of Recognition’

Soren Edward Nyhus (UC Berkeley), ‘Early Music and Jazz: The German *Jugendmusikbewegung* Between History and Modernity’

11:45–12:45: Paper Session 2: Improvisation and material culture

Session chair: Erica Buurman

Sean Keenan (UC Santa Cruz), ‘David Moss *Dense Band*: Structuring Improvisation in the Studio’

Theodora Serbanescu-Martin (Cornell), ‘Liszt as Necromancer: Morgues, Dead Hands, and the Thermodynamics of Romantic Pianism’

12:45–1:40 lunch (provided)

Business meeting: 1:40–2:00

2:00–3:30: Paper Session 2: From Berkeley to Nashville: Broadcast Sound, Musical Cartographies, and Collaboration in America

Session chair: Chris East

Matthew Gilbert (Stanford), ‘Singing Maps & Musical Geographies’

Grant Knox (San José State University), ‘Exploring William Grant Still's Collaborative Partnership with Artie Shaw and his Orchestra’

Ian Mahanpour (UC Berkeley), ‘Towards a Radiophonic Ethics: Broadcasted Soundscapes in The World Ear Project 1970–1973’

Abstracts

10:00–11:30: Paper Session 1

Mariana Da Silva Gabriel (UC Davis), ‘Fado in the Free World: Cultural Diplomacy, and the Sound of Portugal in Cold War North America’

Amália Rodrigues, the most celebrated Portuguese fado singer of the twentieth century, brought fado to the world stage—performing in major venues from Japan, Brazil to the concert halls of California. She was welcomed and loved and came to be the voice and face of Portugal. But the Portugal she was representing was waging colonial wars in Africa and imprisoning and killing its own citizens. Yet on the world stage, Portugal appeared as something else entirely. This paper examines how fado and Amália Rodrigues were co-opted by Portugal's Estado Novo dictatorship as cultural diplomacy, and how that co-option manifested in North America. Drawing on concert programmes, press coverage, and diplomatic context, it traces how a carefully constructed image of Portugal travelled across the Atlantic and was received by American and Canadian audiences between the 1950s and 1970s. Most of these performances took place during the Cold War, a period in which the United States was acutely alert to both fascism and communism and yet welcomed Amália and other *fadistas* repeatedly into its most prestigious concert halls. But I also ask what lay underneath that image. Drawing on recent biographical evidence, the paper argues that Amália was not a passive instrument of the regime. The same international stature that made her useful to the Estado Novo also afforded her a degree of protection.

Kolawole Rasheed (UC Santa Cruz), ‘#EndSARS Lekki Massacre: The National Anthem as Performative Demand and the Failure of Recognition’

This paper examines the political and symbolic significance of singing the Nigerian national anthem during the #EndSARS protests,

with particular focus on the events of October 20, 2020—now known as the Lekki Massacre—at the Lekki protest site in Lagos, where unarmed protesters were killed. While existing scholarship has analyzed the #EndSARS protests from various perspectives, the invocation of this national symbol has largely been treated as incidental or merely expressive. This paper argues instead that the singing of the national anthem was a performative demand for recognition—a philosophical concept of mutual affirmation hereby each affirms the other as a full and equal human subject—directed at the Nigerian military apparatus, which sees itself as a distinct caste. Drawing on theories of recognition by Georg W. F. Hegel and Frantz Fanon, I conceptualize the singing of the anthem as an attempt by protesters to collapse the hierarchical divide between soldiers and civilians by appealing to a shared national identity, and so compel recognition from the advancing soldiers. However, the soldiers nonetheless opened fire, killing at least twelve unarmed singing protesters, revealing the limits of symbolic appears when recognition is structurally mediated by relations of domination. Extending Fanon’s claim that recognition fails wherever humanity is hierarchically organized (by race), this paper argues that recognition can also fail within racial sameness. I situate this failure of recognition within the colonial origins of the Nigerian military, arguing that at its foundation, it was oriented toward enforcement rather than service to the Nigerian people.

Soren Edward Nyhus (UC Berkeley), ‘Early Music and Jazz: The German *Jugendmusikbewegung* Between History and Modernity’

This paper looks at several surprising essays by members of the German *Jugendmusikbewegung*, or youth music movement, that challenge dominant conceptions of how jazz was received in the Weimar Republic. A collection of youth groups characterized by attempts to resurrect older forms of music as uniquely capable of reproducing the *Gemeinschaft*, or community, lost in the modern

world, the *Jugendmusikbewegung* approved of contemporary music only insofar as it upheld these community-building principles, with Hindemith's *Gebrauchsmusik* being a particularly lauded example. Jazz, radio, and recording technologies could be easily viewed with suspicion as products of alienated, individualistic modernity. However, by analyzing essays from 1931 by the musicologists and educators Richard Baum and Wilhelm Twittenhoff, the latter of whom would become especially involved in music education policy under the Nazi government, the relationship between early music and jazz becomes more complicated than the politics of many of the movement's members would suggest. Neither the avant-garde potential Kurt Weill saw in jazz, nor its danger as supposed racial contaminant, nor Theodor Adorno's critiques of its hidden commodity form find their way into these essays. Instead, both writers use recourse to the *Jugendmusikbewegung's* performance-centered approach to music history to defend the potential of jazz both in and against its historical moment, with Twittenhoff even making direct parallels between jazz and early music. These essays clarify the *Jugendmusikbewegung's* stance on the relationship between music and the time of its creation and shed new light on the context behind Adorno's now-canonical writings on jazz.

11:45–12:45: Paper Session 2

Sean Keenan (UC Santa Cruz), “David Moss *Dense Band*: Structuring Improvisation in the Studio”

Berlin-based percussionist, vocalist, and composer David Moss worked extensively within the downtown New York experimental/improvising music community during the 1980s, but remains an under-recognized figure for his involvement in that scene. He often worked directly with guitarists Fred Frith and Arto Lindsay, trombone player George Lewis, and saxophone player John Zorn. I focus on the 1985 recording of the David Moss Dense Band to illuminate a unique way of structuring improvisation, and highlight

the confluence of musicians working downtown. Prior to his involvement with the downtown scene in New York, Moss spent much of the 1970s at Bennington College in Vermont, performing with trumpeter Bill Dixon's ensemble, and providing musical accompaniment for dancer Steve Paxton, who is known for developing contact improvisation. Dense Band brought together a mix of improvising musicians associated with the downtown community, many of them incorporating elements of free jazz, extended technique, and post-punk “no wave” aesthetics into their playing. The Moers record label, which began to focus much attention on the downtown scene during the 1980s, commissioned the album and corresponding performance for their 1985 festival in Germany. Moss worked with Frith for the record, who helped to organize a group of musicians, and provided direction in the studio. The album was engineered by Martin Bisi in Brooklyn, who often worked with downtown musicians for unconventional projects. Dense Band exemplifies a way to compose, and more specifically, structure improvisation, using the tools particular to a recording studio.

Theodora Serbanescu-Martin (Cornell), “Liszt as Necromancer: Morgues, Dead Hands, and the Thermodynamics of Romantic Pianism”

This paper reinterprets Franz Liszt's pianism through nineteenth-century scientific, medical, and occult discourses concerning vitality, decay, and preservation. Rather than treating his technique as anti-materialist mystification, I argue that Liszt's pianism engaged contemporary theories of energy, deadness, and reanimation — what I term a Romantic necromancy of the keyboard.

Situating Liszt within vitalist performance theory, particularly François Delsarte's morgue-based studies identifying the hand as a “thermometer of life,” I reframe Liszt's outstretched hand and what he termed the “main morte” technique as practices of cultivated deadness. These techniques emerged alongside broader transformations in body management: the rise of public morgues, new cooling technologies

suspending decay, and thermodynamic theories reading labor and vitality from bodily surfaces. Pianistic technique, I argue, participated in this epistemic field, staging the keyboard as a site where heat, exhaustion, relaxation, and rebound were experimentally negotiated — an ecology of aesthetic production in which virtuosity transformed bodily expenditure into renewed creative force.

Drawing on literary parallels from Gautier and Dickens, as well as palmistry, astrology, and the sartorial mythology of Liszt's black cloak, I offer performance-based analyses of *Réminiscences de Don Juan*, *Deux Légendes*, and *Mazeppa*. Don Juan's *ossia* cadenza, for instance, stages physical engulfment between the hands, aligning virtuosity with seduction, excess, and lethal consequence. Ultimately, Liszt's technical scripting positions the piano as a medium of reanimation.

Bringing together history of science, performance studies, and musicological work on Romantic culture (e.g. Davies, Brittan, Tresch), this paper offers a materialist reappraisal that resists both abstraction and uncritical mysticism.

2:00–3:30: Paper Session 3

Matthew Gilbert (Stanford), 'Singing Maps & Musical Geographies'

Musical life in the United States is often sounded and heard geographically. Cities function as metonyms for genres—think Nashville and country music or New Orleans and jazz—while entire regional identities are conjured up by particular timbres or musical motifs derived from representations in media, e.g. “the West” can be brought to mind through little more than a jangly minor guitar chord or the whistling from *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly* (1966). As the folklorist Alan Lomax once put it, “the map sings.” But why? How exactly did geography acquire the power to explain American musical life? What do singing maps allow us to hear? What might they silence?

This paper offers some preliminary answers by returning to academic debates from the first half of the twentieth century, when American folksong first emerged as an intellectual object for folklorists. I offer a brief survey of musical maps from the late 1920s through the early 1960s to track the formation of a burgeoning musical geography of and for the United States in the twentieth century. By contextualizing the history of “regionalism” as both a scholarly agenda and an artistic movement, I further demonstrate how folklorists and musicologists mapped musical life in the U.S. according to racialized and class-based schemas developed as part of a broader search for an American cultural identity. Finally, the paper explores how California's function as an imaginary folkloric destination within the U.S. tests the limits of twentieth-century folklorists' musical geographies.

Grant Knox (San José State University), 'Exploring William Grant Still's Collaborative Partnership with Artie Shaw and his Orchestra'

Commonly referred to as the “Dean of African-American Composers,” William Grant Still's symphonic music is often defined as a pioneering achievement for the expression of Black musical aesthetics in the high-brow gymnasium of the twentieth-century American symphonic repertory. However, an undercurrent of Still's compositional journey is the collaborative partnerships with figures such as W.C. Handy, Paul Whiteman, Verna Arvey, and countless others. These partnerships, though often brief in duration, and sporadically participated in throughout his lifespan offered Still the opportunity to hone his craft, explore new ideas, and maintain a steady income.

This paper explores the unique collaborative partnership between William Grant Still and Artie Shaw, where Still served as an arranger for Shaw's reimagine jazz orchestra from 1940-1941. During this partnership, Still arranged and orchestrated twenty works for Shaw's orchestra—the most robust output of any of his compositional collaborations, expanding upon themes of multiculturalism and a fusion of jazz and classical styles that had been previously introduced

in his own writing. This mutually-beneficial partnership provided William Grant Still a playground to continue expanding his horizons, while offering Shaw a brilliant and experienced voice to bring new life to his compositions.

Ian Mahanpour (UC Berkeley), ‘Towards a Radiophonic Ethics: Broadcasted Soundscapes in The World Ear Project 1970–1973’

In 1970, composers Charles Amirkhanian and Richard Friedman of the Berkeley based radio station KPFA began broadcasting The World Ear Project (WEP). As noted by scholar Michael Palmese, this Californian initiative was one of the earliest projects to champion the edifying aspects of soundscape recordings, with the genre only later gaining international prominence under the aegis of R. Murray Schaffer’s World Soundscape Project (WSP). While Palmese attempts to place the WEP as a “countercultural,” more politically engaged alternative in the history of soundscape recording, I contend that the WEP was far more ambivalent towards the category of “politics.” Adding to a growing body of work concerning the political agendas of early soundscape recordists, I argue that the WEP’s first round of broadcasts from 1970–1973 attempted to shift interest away from the specific (and potentially political) content of soundscape recordings towards an individual aesthetic/political relation to sonic material in general. This individual listening regime, while similar to the work of Hildergard Westerkamp, differs in that it relied upon what Fred Turner would call a “network” function of the radio broadcast to facilitate atomized sonic relations as technocratic rather than as explicitly political; as a result, this technologically mediated listening collapsed the site of political consciousness from the external sound object into the object of listening itself. The WEP’s soundscape broadcasts—many of which were supplied directly from listeners—treated this object of listening as something to “better,” helping fashion an ethical disposition for highly individual, globally conscious citizens of the 20th century.