

PACIFIC SOUTHWEST CHAPTER
• OF THE •
AMERICAN MUSICOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Spring Meeting

May 2, 2026

California Polytechnic State University, San Luis Obispo

Program

All events held in Room 218 in Building 45 (the Davidson Music Center)

** – Denotes eligibility for the Ingolf Dahl student paper award.*

8:30am–9:00am Registration / Breakfast Reception

9:00am–10:00am **Session I – New Perspectives on Musical Commodification**
Chair: Stephen S. Hudson (Occidental College)

“Copyright at a Crossroads: Music, Technological Advancement, and the Structural Limitations of U.S. Law”

*Emmie Head (University of California, Los Angeles) **

“‘Post Modern Pimp Ho’?: RuPaul Catalyzing and Prototyping Bitch Tracks as Class Mobility”

*Donovan Alcones (San Diego State University) **

10:00am–10:15am Break

10:15am–11:45am **Session II – Analyzing New Music**
Chair: Bernard Gordillo (UC Riverside)

“The Blend of Music, Visual Art, and Portraiture in Anna Clyne’s *Color Field* (2020)”

*Alyse Murray (California State University, Long Beach) **

“‘The Space In My Mouth’: Voicing Queer/Trans Liminalities in Angélica Negrón’s *The Island We Made* (2021)”

*Morgan Bates (University of California, Los Angeles) **

“Monoculture and Myth: Simon Steen-Andersen’s *TRIO* and the Role of The Institution in New Music”

*Brandon Lincoln Woo Snyder (University of California, Irvine) **

11:45am–1:15pm Lunch Break (90 minutes)

1:15pm–2:45pm **Session III – Meaning and Identity in Classical Music**
Chair: Daniela Smolov-Levy (Occidental College and UCLA)

“Clara Schumann's Pianistic Bouquets: Sartorial Self-Fashioning and the Gendered Contradictions of Organicist Technique”

Theodora Serbanescu-Martin (Cornell University)

“Musical-Rhetorical Figures of Violence, Pain, and Healing in the Opera *Sémélé* and the Character Pieces for Viola da Gamba by Marin Marais”

*Eric Tinkerhess (University of Southern California) **

“Sound on Trial: Trauma, Perception, and Listening to Epistemic Instability in *Anatomy of a Fall*”

*Isabelle Krieger (University of California, Los Angeles) **

2:45pm–3:00pm Break

3:00pm–4:30pm **Session IV – American Musical Institutions and Identities**
Chair: Joel Haney (California State University, Bakersfield)

“Stokowski Ritzes Philadelphia: Disciplining Audiences at the Beginning of the Depression”

Derek Katz (University of California, Santa Barbara)

“The Silent Jewish Underscoring of Abridged English-Language Opera: Samuel Chotzinoff, David Sarnoff, and the NBC-TV Opera Theatre”

Daniela Smolov Levy (Occidental College and the University of California, Los Angeles)

“Who is Scored to Save the World? Topics, Tropes, and Musical Representations of Superheroes in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (2018–2024)”

Janet Bourne (University of California, Santa Barbara)

4:30–5:00pm Business meeting (all PSC-AMS members are invited to attend)

5:00–6:00pm Wine and Cheese Reception

Chapter Officers

Joel Haney – President *Stephen S. Hudson – Vice President*

Elizabeth Lindau – Secretary *John Koegel – Treasurer*

Kate Hamori – Student Representative to the AMS Council (2025–27)

Tiffany Ta – Student Representative to the AMS Council (2024–26)

A special thanks to Alicia Doyle and Alyson McLamore (Cal Poly SLO) who have organized local arrangements, and to Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo for hosting our meeting.

Abstracts

Abstracts are listed in the order that they appear on the program.

“Copyright at a Crossroads: Music, Technological Advancement, and the Structural Limitations of U.S. Law”

Emmie Head (University of California, Los Angeles)

In May of 2025, Shira Perlmutter, the fourteenth Register of Copyrights appointed by the Librarian of Congress, was fired by order of the Trump administration after she issued a lengthy pre-publication draft of the third part of the Copyright and Artificial Intelligence (AI) Report which concerned the training of generative AI models. In that report, Perlmutter describes the high stakes and potential consequences for the use of copyrighted works in AI training, ultimately attempting to balance such consequences with public interest: technological innovation should flourish while not threatening thriving artistic communities in the United States.

Perlmutter’s firing and the consequent abandonment of finalizing the publication of her report, which would limit the ways in which AI models can utilize pre-existing copyrighted materials, reveals a substantial disregard for the potential harms that expedited development of artificial intelligence has on music making. In this paper, I use Perlmutter’s report and subsequent deregulatory measures of copyright, such as the White House’s July 2025 “America’s AI Action Plan,” to explore where musicians’ rights and affordances meet the structural limitations of the law.

It is policy-oriented moves such as these which have already begun to drastically impact the roles of AI in music making. I argue that the United States’ legal system is inherently constructed to prioritize expedient development of industry at the detriment of human-oriented artistic innovation. Drawing on scholarship by Eric Drott, Olufunmilayo Arewa, and Katherine M. Leo, I highlight both the ways in which pre-existing legal infrastructure burdens music making but also the ways in which new infrastructure furthers such challenges.

“Post Modern Pimp Ho’?: RuPaul Catalyzing and Prototyping Bitch Tracks as Class Mobility”

Donovan Alcones (San Diego State University)

Bitch House anthems, colloquially known as “bitch tracks,” were first heard in Chicago with the music of Candy J, recorded under the pseudonym “Sweet Pussy Pauline.” Her records, like “Desirable Revenge (The Saga of Sweet Pussy Pauline)” (1988), musically realized her experiences as a trans woman through exaggerated vocal performances of sexually explicit lyrics layered on top of Chicago-styled house music. Later, Candy J’s music was embraced by New York’s queer nightclub and ballroom scenes, evident in New York drag queen RuPaul Andre Charles’s hit single, “Supermodel (You Better Work)” (1992), a transformation of the bitch track that solidified his supermodel drag persona. Alyxandra Vesey deemed the mainstream success of RuPaul’s single as a critical turning point in the professionalization of drag, stating that his career serves as a model for the upward mobility of amateur drag queens. Vesey points to RuPaul’s competition reality TV program, RuPaul’s Drag Race,

as exemplary of her interpretation, noting that RuPaul and his production team tasks contestants to create bitch track-like lyrics to “Supermodel”-esque tracks.

To examine RuPaul’s transformation of the bitch track, I adopt Frederic Jameson’s theory of literary genres as a mode of utopian wish fulfillment and Black queer scholar Ashley R. Hall’s subversive reclamation of the term “bitch.” By applying these frameworks, I propose that RuPaul, through “Supermodel,” serves as a musical and socioeconomic catalyst, shifting the function of the bitch track from self-expression to the commodification of a drag identity. The allure of RuPaul’s mainstream success also encouraged amateur drag queens to regard “Supermodel” as a musical prototype, constructing their own drag identity and class status. Using “Supermodel” and “Desirable Revenge” as case studies, I draw upon Bruno Alcalde’s theory of musical hybridization to analyze these tracks through the categories of function, style, and lyrics. Contemporary iterations of the genre reinforce RuPaul’s ongoing influence as a prototype through the recordings of Alaska Thunderfuck 5000 and Monet X Change, notable alumni of *RuPaul’s Drag Race*. Through this research, I aim to reveal the mainstream trend of appropriating underground music as a vehicle for class mobility.

“The Blend of Music, Visual Art, and Portraiture in Anna Clyne’s *Color Field* (2020)”
Alyse Murray (California State University, Long Beach)

English composer Anna Clyne (b. 1980) writes music that is inspired by her background as a painter. Clyne paints various images on canvas as part of her pre-compositional process; the swirling hues inspire aural color and musical structure. In a 2024 interview, Clyne states that she is fascinated by the intersection of music and art: “light, gesture, texture, color, and form are all elements that have the potential to translate between the two artforms.” Her appreciation for the visual arts is further emphasized through admiration of other artists and encapsulation of their principles in musical works.

Clyne’s *Color Field* (2020) is a symphonic composition premiered by the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra in October 2021. The movements, “I. Yellow,” “II. Red,” and “III. Orange” are inspired by the Abstract Expressionist artist Mark Rothko. Rothko’s *Orange, Red, Yellow* (1961) comes from his “color field paintings”: fifty works that demonstrate the complexity of different shades and their combinations. Clyne reorders the three colors of Rothko’s painting to illustrate this blend of hues: motives from the “Yellow” and “Red” movements are combined to create the final “Orange” movement. In addition to Rothko’s work, the music also derives from Serbian origin—a deliberate choice to honor the dedicatee of *Color Field*, philanthropist Melanie Sabelhaus. Both “Red” and “Orange” quote the Serbian folk song “Tamo daleko,” use changing time signatures, and include reeds and horns in a nod to traditional Balkan instrumentation.

This presentation will explore how Clyne translates colors and the emotional states associated with them into sound. Research in color psychology by Andrew J. Elliot and Markus A. Maier (2014) has shown that yellow is associated with serenity and stagnation, while red is passionate and quick. Clyne’s melodic and rhythmic choices directly correlate to these psychological findings. I will situate Clyne’s work among others inspired by Rothko, including Morton Feldman’s *Rothko Chapel* (1971), Adam Schoenberg’s *Finding Rothko* (2006), and Daniel Bjarnason’s *Over Light Earth* (2013). These works are examples of what Joshua S. Walden (2018) has called musical portraiture: the personal characterization of music through abstract images pertaining to identity.

“‘The Space In My Mouth’: Voicing Queer/Trans Liminalities in Angélica Negrón’s *The Island We Made* (2021)”
Morgan Bates (University of California, Los Angeles)

One year into the COVID-19 pandemic, composer Angélica Negrón, filmmaker Matthew Placek, and drag performer Sasha Velour brought their artistry into conversation through Opera Philadelphia's short film *The Island We Made*. Set in a mid-century Staten Island house, audiences experience an alinear plot depicted by a character at various stages of life receiving care from an omnipresent, genderqueer drag "mother." The opera's score features a voice coming from an unknown body, and its lip-synced source changes regularly against consistent drone and harp accompaniment. Through these points of instability, namely through lip-synced vocal performance and character ambiguity across roles and bodies, audiences are invited to find their own senses of grounding and "home."

In this paper, I argue that the sonic, spatial, and temporal liminalities presented in *The Island We Made* evoke an emotional response that I call "erotics of belonging." Drawing upon phenomenological writings by Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1945) and Sara Ahmed (2004, 2006), as well as queer scholarly takes by Jack Halberstam (2005) and Mitchell Morris (2013), I break down audience reliance upon the stability of performance conditions, asserting that deconstruction of audience expectations yields possibilities for connection with the plot, characters, and themes presented in the opera-cinema. Further, these liminal sites portray specifically queer/trans experiences of longing and belonging that cannot be fully realized under cisheterotemporal order. Liminality thus heightens the sensorial and emotional impacts of the opera, encouraging audience members to deconstruct their performance expectations and reimagine their social worlds through a queer/trans lens.

"Monoculture and Myth: Simon Steen-Andersen's *TRIO* and the Role of The Institution in New Music"

Brandon Lincoln Woo Snyder (University of California, Irvine)

Recent discourse in music and TV journalism regarding the rise and fall of "monoculture" signals a current societal fascination in how institutions play a role in shaping an understanding of culture. Within the field of New Music, a similar examination has emerged, moving away from a focus on a "canon" of composers and compositions, and towards a network of material conditions and behaviors that afford New Music to be created. Simon Steen-Anderson's *TRIO* (2019) reflects this context. Created entirely from the digitized archives of the SWR Broadcast Orchestras, this 48-minute work for orchestra, big band, choir, and video, navigates history along non-chronological axes of logic as a way of framing New Music culture beyond listing a canon of composers and compositions.

In this paper, I argue that *TRIO* uses musical frameworks to supplant composer-centric and chronology-centric expressions of New Music history. Through a score analysis, I outline how *TRIO* organizes material from the SWR's archive along six musical parameters: harmony, rhythm, melody, gesture, and historical context, with the explicit exclusion of organization by chronology (from oldest to newest). These organizing frameworks render the identity of individual pieces and composers as unrecognizable, while foregrounding the role of the broadcast institution, the conductor, and the historical context of each moment in the piece. I conclude with a brief study of *TRIO*'s audience reception as a way of reflecting on the meaning of "New-ness" in the New Music community today, and how that meaning is highly interested in the methodologies by which history is written.

"Clara Schumann's Pianistic Bouquets: Sartorial Self-Fashioning and the Gendered Contradictions of Organicist Technique"

Theodora Serbanescu-Martin (Cornell University)

This paper reframes Clara Schumann's pianism through a vitalist-materialist lens,

arguing that her performance practice, sartorial style, and corporeal negotiations expose the gendered contradictions at the heart of Romantic organicism. Drawing on diaries, letters, treatises, photographs, and compositions, I present Clara as a figure in tension with dualistic cosmologies that cast women as vessels for masculine genius — revealing a distinctly feminine form of musical *Werktreue* forged through both resistance and self-effacement.

I first situate Schumann within nineteenth-century debates on vitalism, organicism, and materialism, rereading her father Friedrich Wieck's *Clavier und Gesang* as a technology of "soul-discipline" shaped by Enlightenment pedagogies — from Rousseau's *Letters on Botany* to Linnaean taxonomy. These frameworks, for all their reforming tendencies, contributed to discourse positioning women as simultaneously closer to nature and monstrously artificial: organic specimens requiring endless cultivation and correction.

I then follow this literary ecology into Clara's own embodied practices: her botanical collecting and its connections to both Romantic poetry and scientific taxonomy; her mourning dress and its gendered symbolism; and her corseted posture as a form of feminine self-fashioning. Central here is the scandalous visibility of Clara's pregnant body on the concert stage — including at landmark performances such as the premiere of Robert Schumann's *Piano Concerto*. For ordinary nineteenth-century women, public appearance during pregnancy was unthinkable: a profound social transgression. That Clara performed, toured, and commanded critical acclaim while visibly pregnant — repeatedly, across eight pregnancies (something that has not been discussed before) — speaks to the unique cultural exemption her extraordinary career afforded her, even as it heightened the contradictions her body was made to bear. Through cloth and camera lens, she transmuted widowhood into authorship, assuming masculine artistic authority even as her body remained a site of abjection, risk, and spectacular negotiation on the nineteenth-century stage.

By bringing together performance studies, material culture, and feminist historiography, this paper repositions Clara Schumann not as a passive, obedient transmitter of canonical works, but as an active agent who shaped nineteenth-century musical authority. More broadly, it invites a reconsideration of how organicist aesthetics were lived, embodied, and contested in Romantic performance practice — and how they have reverberated since.

"Musical-Rhetorical Figures of Violence, Pain, and Healing in the Opera *Sémélé* and the Character Pieces for Viola da Gamba by Marin Marais"

Eric Tinkerhess (University of Southern California)

Recent research in musical rhetoric demonstrates that theorists in France such as Marin Mersenne considered rhetoric analogous to music primarily in terms of *actio*: a singer and an orator both express passions using their own voice (Psychoyou, 2006, 2014, Gibson, 2008, Redwood, 2015). Figures and *elocutio* are rarely mentioned. However, Legrand (1998) shows that French baroque composers used the same figures defined by seventeenth-century German theorists. Thus, this paper analyzes musical phrases in Marin Marais's oeuvre as musical-rhetorical figures, particularly those expressing violence, pain, and healing.

In the prologue to *Sémélé*, during a sacrifice in honor of Bacchus, maenads (known in mythology for dismembering Orpheus) dance in a fury to the same melody found in the character piece "La fougade" ("The Land Mine"). In "Le tableau de l'opération de la taille" ("The Tableau of the Bladder Operation"), text underlay describes tying the patient down, a painful incision, removing bladder stones, and blood flowing. The following piece "Les relevailles" ("The Recovery") is a suite in three movements filled with dance rhythms. In a manuscript copied by Villeneuve, the movements have

different titles: "Paysane" ("Peasant"), "Gigue," and "Air." Arbeau describes dance as a kind of "mute rhetoric," and Ratner defines dances as "characteristic figures." As such, this paper presents a new analysis of Marais's music in terms of musical-rhetorical figures, while specifically considering *actio*: in a sense, by enacting these notated figures in the viol pieces, Marais and the violists da gamba who play his music become the characters depicted in the music, experiencing through musical rhetoric the violence, pain, and healing they contain.

"Sound on Trial: Trauma, Perception, and Listening to Epistemic Instability in *Anatomy of a Fall*"

Isabelle Krieger (University of California, Los Angeles)

Justine Triet's *Anatomy of a Fall* (2023) presents trauma not as a knowable truth, but as a crisis of sonic and visual perception. The film's minimalist yet narratively significant diegetic score is the key to understanding how knowledge is shaped and later deferred in the film by music, noise, and voice. Rather than sound functioning as an expression of narrative ambiguity, this paper argues that *Anatomy of a Fall* constructs listening as a compromised epistemological practice compromised by trauma, where truth remains perpetually deferred. While film music studies address affect and embodiment in film, this paper moves toward an understanding of listening when it is a cognitive act under pressure, one that governs inference, credibility, and memory. I argue that the film's "earworm" music, the distorted steel-drum cover of 50 Cent's "P.I.M.P.," functions as an anempathetic sonic event that overwhelms dialogue and spatial coherence, rendering the domestic space as acoustically hostile and resisting narrative containment. In addition, Daniel's piano practice throughout the film is also a procedural site of listening, where repetition, hesitation, and imperfect recall model trauma's impact on perception. Drawing on work on auditory subjectivity (Chion), embodied listening (Kassabian), and trauma theory (LaCapra), this paper proposes traumatic listening as a framework for analyzing cinema wherein sound neither clarifies nor obscures truth, but continually destabilizes it. Through close analyses of key sonic moments, I argue that *Anatomy of a Fall* renders trauma audible as an unresolved epistemic condition rather than a unique narrative event.

"Stokowski Ritzes Philadelphia: Disciplining Audiences at the Beginning of the Depression"

Derek Katz (University of California, Santa Barbara)

At an April 1926 concert of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Leopold Stokowski mocked his audience's habit of arriving late to concerts and leaving early by having his players straggle onto stage as the performance began and starting to leave before the concert had concluded. This was merely the first (and most entertaining) of a series of incidents concentrated between 1928 and 1930 in which high-profile conductors openly engaged with symphony audiences over issues of punctuality, noise, applause and reactions to modern music. Thanks to an increasingly robust network of syndicated local correspondents, wire services and journals like Pierre van Rensselaer Key's *Musical Digest*, these controversies became news throughout the English-world and led to changes in institutional policies and programming practices that persist today.

Journalistic discussions of these incidents, drawing in critics, audience members and orchestra members called into question the role of celebrity conductors and the types of communities formed by audiences and orchestras. Authority could be vested in conductors, performing organizations or halls, and audiences could be rebuked or negotiated with. One element hidden by journalistic reports was that many concert audiences were strongly sorted by gender, and that most of the best-publicized incidents involved mostly female listeners.

The stakes of these discussions were raised by technological developments and new types of ensembles. At the same time that Stokowski was lecturing his audience about applause, the Philadelphia Orchestra was beginning radio broadcasts, both allowing for disembodied listening to an invisible orchestra and freeing audiences from the authority of conductors and halls. Meanwhile, there was also a brief boom in conductorless orchestral playing, with new ensembles in New York and Washington, D.C. and experiments during subscription concerts in Cincinnati and Chicago.

These debates presented competing concepts of the relation of concert culture to modern life. At the extremes, New York's Conductorless Symphony Orchestra presented itself as the horseless carriage of instrumental ensembles, and as an experiment in democratic cooperation, profit-sharing and inclusion of women players, while Stokowski announced plans for a Temple of Music in which listeners would be isolated in dark stalls and listen in silence.

“The Silent Jewish Underscoring of Abridged English-Language Opera: Samuel Chotzinoff, David Sarnoff, and the NBC-TV Opera Theatre”

Daniela Smolov Levy (Occidental College and the University of California, Los Angeles)

The following narrative seems complete: the NBC-TV Opera Theatre (1949-64) – a television program offering abridged English-language versions of mostly well-known European operas and newly commissioned operas in English designed for TV – promoted a new type of accessible entertaining opera (Ward-Griffin, Levy). The NBC Opera can thus be seen as part of the mid-century “cultural explosion” driven by Cold War politics, in addition to being a continuation of the longstanding American tradition of affordable opera in English (“opera for the people”).

But this is not the whole story. As is well known, many Jews were involved in the mid-twentieth-century American art and entertainment scene. Most of the cultural products they created or curated had no Jewish content, designed as they were to appeal to the broadest possible public. The NBC Opera is representative of this trend: the program's prime mover, Samuel Chotzinoff, and its main backer, David Sarnoff, were both Jewish, as were its other major participants, while none of the operas presented had any significant Jewish elements. Not only that, the program's biggest hit, *Amahl and the Night Visitors*, is a Christmas tale.

I suggest, however, that beyond the general cultural populism of the period, there was another important, but hitherto almost entirely overlooked, influence on the existence and methods of the NBC Opera: the Jewish background of its main personnel. Drawing on memoirs, archival sources, and contemporary scholarship, I show how Chotzinoff's experiences with the Yiddish theater and opera, as well as both his and Sarnoff's upbringing in a Jewish (and Yiddish) cultural and political sphere, informed their motivations for, and approach to, adapting prestigious culture to maximally appeal to audiences.

I thus argue that the NBC Opera's overall aesthetic has a kind of silent – but significant – Jewish underscoring. The transformation of the operatic sound of cantorial singing into the operatic voices of television opera in English can also be heard as a sonic representation of Jewish cultural and social aspirations, a metaphor for the assimilation of Jewish immigrants in America as they translated Old World traditions for a New World context.

“Who is Scored to Save the World? Topics, Tropes, and Musical Representations of Superheroes in the Marvel Cinematic Universe (2018–2024)”

Janet Bourne (University of California, Santa Barbara)

“It’s not usually the brown girls... who save the world,” remarks Pakistani-American Kamala Khan (Ms. Marvel) in *Ms. Marvel* (2022). Her comment underscores our society’s picture of superheroes: male, white, attractive, able-bodied, heterosexual (Cocca 2020). Historically, these superheroes have been scored with themes of major-march superhero topic (Halfyard 2013). For the first ten years of the Marvel Cinematic Universe (MCU), every main character was a white man, and many—like Captain America—were scored with this topic. However, 2018 onward, more MCU movies/shows featured women and/or people of color (Axios 2022), including Black Panther, Captain Marvel, The Falcon, and Ms. Marvel. These superheroes do not fit the white/male/able-bodied/etc. cliché; so, how are they musically scored?

Using superheroines and superhero(ines) of color from the 2018–2024 MCU franchise as a case study, this paper examines how their musical representation engages intersectionality through a systematic analysis of recurring scoring techniques. Building on topic theory and thematic development, I argue that the topical “clothing” of musical themes can signify—even emphasize—different axes of characters’ socio-economic identities and power relations, specifically regarding race and gender. When topics are troped (unrelated topics brought together), they create emergent meanings representing intersections of these characters’ identities. Extending Hatten’s (2014) topological dimensions to media, I show how composers employ what I call a *tropological formula*, blending conventional major-march topic with culturally or gender-coded musical topical markers to articulate race, gender, and/or ethnicity. Moreover, this paper considers the ways in which online fan communities actively interpret these scoring choices. Looking at comments/discussions on Reddit, YouTube, etc. (e.g., Wellman 2024) and drawing on media psychology (Dill 2013) and fan studies (Booth 2018), I situate my musical analysis in how this tropological formula influences how audiences recognize, contest, or reinforce/own these sonic representations, demonstrating how musical identity is not only constructed by composers but also negotiated by listeners. I close with a large-scale topical and thematic analysis of *Falcon*, *Ms. Marvel*, and *The Marvels* (2023).

Topics and tropes shape and reflect evolving narratives within culturally (and commercially) influential franchises—sites of musical meaning where representation is both constructed and contested.