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Keynote lecture: *Musical encounters: Towards social and intercultural perspectives on music*

Wednesday 08.06 at 09.00 Venue: Bergen University College, room TBA

Keywords: Relational, encounter, social, intercultural, performance, identity

Abstract: The core insight of Nicolas Bourriaud's 'relational aesthetics' is that art is not addressed solely to the individual but creates relationships between its spectators. The same is true of music but musicologists have neglected it. Neither approaches grounded in the patterning of tones in motion nor those based on constructions of subjectivity – neither old nor 'new' musicology – address the ways in which choral singing or free jazz affirm community and shared values. Yet one of music's most important roles lies in the construction and negotiation of relationships at both individual and group level. Music's ability to shape real-time social interaction, facilitate the construction and negotiation of personal and collective identities, and both symbolise and enact human relationships extends far beyond such explicitly relational practices of music as therapy and conflict transformation.

When Ingrid Monson speaks of 'an interactive, relational theory of music and meaning', she means an understanding of music as the interaction of human agents and not simply a sonic practice. For Georgina Born the word denotes a musicology that 'addresses different orders of the social in music and their complex interrelations'. Coming from music history and theory rather than from ethnomusicology or anthropology, I see 'relational musicology' as an opportunity to fuse the relational dimensions of music with a more traditional musicological emphasis on close reading of notated or acoustic texts coupled to thick, contextualised description, and in this lecture I attempt to stake out the field through a series of linked case studies that spread out from the idea of musical encounter.

People encounter one another in the interactions of ensemble performance, negotiating relationships that are as much social as musical, and slipping between symbolic role play and performative presence in much the same way as residents of Second Life (and what is music but a virtual world?). People deploy the symbolic and performative resources of music in order to negotiate problematical identities, as did Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, the English-born and bred composer who – in the words of an acquaintance – was 'only black outside', and who carved out a virtual world of his own at the interstices of classical music and an Africa more imagined than real. Again, musicians who attended the 1889 and 1900 Expositions universelles in Paris, of whom Debussy was just one, left musical traces of their attempts to embrace the other through a transformation of the self – or, in some cases (of whom Debussy was arguably one), to replicate the patterns of orientalist appropriation familiar from the writings of Edward Said.

In this lecture I aim to weave these, and other, case studies into a methodologically coherent approach that traces the social dimensions of performative and intercultural encounters. But the past, as L. P. Hartley said, is another country, and the potential of relational musicology for rethinking the familiar becomes clearest when it is focussed on the time, place, and repertoires of which traditional musicology forms both a celebration and a monumentalisation: late eighteenth-century Vienna. As Hartley went on to say, they do things differently there.

Key questions addressed by the lecture:

How might music elucidate the dynamics of encounter, and vice versa?

How might our views of music's meaning change if we thought of it as social practice rather than sound design?

How can we analyse music as social action and yet retain the traditional musicological practices of close reading?

Recommended Reading:

David MacDonald, 'Carrying Words Like Weapons: Hip-Hop and the Poetics of Palestinian Identities in Israel', *Min-Ad: Israel Studies in Musicology* 7:2 (2009)

(http://www.biu.ac.il/hu/mu/min-ad/8-9-II/07_McDonald_Carrying-Words.pdf)

Nicholas Cook, 'Anatomy of the Encounter: Intercultural Analysis as Relational Musicology'. In *Critical Musicological Reflections: Essays in Honour of Derek B. Scott*, ed. Stan Hawkins (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 193-208 (PDF copy sent to participants on request, please write to Olav.Tveitane@uib.no)

Georgina Born, 'For a Relational Musicology: Music and Interdisciplinarity, Beyond the Practice Turn', *Journal of the Royal Musical Association* 135: 2 (2010), 205-43

(<http://www.ams-net.org/neworleans/handouts/Georgina-Born-Relational-Musicology.pdf>)