

Third International Symposium on Musical Topics and Topic Theory

May 21-23, 2026

University of Northern Colorado Campus

Greeley, Colorado, USA

From its contacts with worship, poetry, drama, entertainment, dance, ceremony, the military, the hunt, and the life of the lower classes, music in the early 18th century developed a thesaurus of *characteristic figures*, which formed a rich legacy for classic composers. Some of these figures were associated with various feelings and affections; others had a picturesque flavor. They are designated here as *topics*—subjects for musical discourse.

—Leonard G. Ratner (1980)

The University of Northern Colorado is proud to once again host this conference dedicated to exploring and celebrating scholarship devoted to musical topics and topic theory. We encourage submissions from scholars, scholar-performers, and students in the areas of topic theory (in its broadest sense) and its many potential applications: music analysis, music and meaning, and performance as applied to a diversity of musics including, but not limited to, Western art music, music and film, popular music, video-game music, etc. Performance-based scholarly presentations are welcome.

The conference will be in person, enabling delegates to engage fully in idea exchanges, networking, and social interactions. Virtual presentations may be considered under special circumstances; however, fully virtual attendance will not be a possibility.

Submission due dates have been moved up by a month this year to allow a longer planning period for those traveling long distances. It is hoped that this will facilitate international travel.

Individual Paper Presentations

To submit an individual paper, please submit an abstract with a maximum of 350 words. Undergraduate students must also submit a letter of support from their primary research advisor. Paper presentations will be 20 minutes long, followed by a 10-minute question and answer session. Abstracts should include the title of the paper but omit author details. In the body of the email, please include author details (including whether author is a professional or student and, if a student, level of study), institutional affiliation (where relevant), email address, paper title, and any technological requirements, including PowerPoint or Keynote projection, piano or keyboard.

Individual Lecture Recitals

To submit an individual lecture recital, please send an abstract with a maximum of 350 words and a link to an audio sample to demonstrate the proficiency of the performer. The duration of this recording should be a minimum of 2 minutes, but no longer than 5 minutes. Preference will be given to submissions that include a recording of the proposer performing works from their presentation. When this is not possible, the submitted example must be of a comparable style, genre, or historical period. Undergraduate students must also submit a letter of support from their

primary research advisor. Lecture recitals may range in length from 30-45 minutes and should offer an appropriate balance of lecture and performance elements. Various constraints limit the number of lecture recitals that may be programmed. Applicant should specify the length of the presentation in their abstracts. Abstracts should include the title of the paper but omit author details. In the body of the email, please include author details (including whether author is a professional or student and, if a student, level of study), institutional affiliation (where relevant), email address, paper title, and any technological requirements, including PowerPoint or Keynote projection, piano or keyboard.

Submission materials should be sent to Dr. Melanie Lowe (m.lowe@vanderbilt.edu) no later than **January 1, 2026** (U.S., Eastern Standard Time Zone). Please specify “International Symposium on Musical Topics and Topic Theory submission” in the email subject. Dr. Lowe will be chairing this year’s program committee as we are committed to sharing the selection process rather than performing it in-house. Once the program selection has been made, presenters will be notified as to where to send additional inquiries.

Submissions will be evaluated anonymously according to three criteria: the relevance of the author’s central arguments to existing scholarship, the extent to which the paper offers an original contribution to the scholarly community, and the clarity and coherence in which the argument is presented. All submissions must be connected to topic theory in its broadest sense.

Deadline for submissions: January 1, 2026

Notifications of acceptance will be sent to presenters on or about February 1, 2026.

Preliminary program will be available by mid-April 2026.