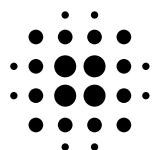


# 2<sup>ND</sup> INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON MUSICAL TOPICS AND TOPIC THEORY



**THURSDAY–SATURDAY, MAY 22-24, 2025**

University of Northern Colorado  
Greeley, CO  
U.S.A.

# 2<sup>ND</sup> INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON MUSICAL TOPICS AND TOPIC THEORY MAY 22–24, 2025

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Hosted by  
University of Northern Colorado  
Greeley, CO, U.S.A.

## ***PROGRAM COMMITTEE:***

Olga Sánchez-Kisielewska (University of Chicago, IL)  
Dan Obluda (Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO)  
Melanie Lowe (Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN)

## ***ORGANIZING COMMITTEE***

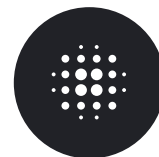
Janice Dickensheets (University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO)  
Jessica Castleberry (University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO)  
Marie Sumner Lott (Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA)

## ***STUDENT ASSISTANTS***

Marci Trapp  
Natasha Monroe  
Reggie Winters

Presented with the Support of the UNC School of Music  
and the College of Performing and Visual Arts  
Dean: Christina Goletti  
Director of the School of Music: Carissa Reddick

# SCHEDULE



**DAY 1**

*Thursday, May 22, 9am-6pm*

*Registration, Breaks, and Sessions will be held in Frasier 90*

**8:00–9:00**

*Check in & Registration*

**8:45–9:00**

*Welcome*

## ***SESSION 1: 9:00–10:30***

### **TOPICS IN FORM, GENRE, AND EXPRESSION**

Session Chair: Carissa Reddick

#### **Jacob Eichhorn**

Twelve-Tone as Topic: Satire, Politics, and Postwar American Concert Music

#### **James Donaldson**

Genre Theory, Topic Theory, and Shostakovich's Serialism

#### **Wesley J. Bradford**

Bitter Rage, Beautiful Song: Topics, Form, and Expression in Maslanka's *Symphony No. 10*

***BREAK: 10:30–11:00***

## ***SESSION 2: 11:00–12:30***

### **IMAGES OF SKIES AND WOODS**

Session Chair: Deborah Kauffman

#### **Sarah Clemmens Waltz**

The Starry Sky Above Us: Beethoven's Star Topic

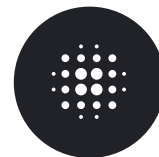
#### **Joep Janssens**

Moods of the Woods in the Bourgeois Home: Musical Topics of the Forest in Nineteenth-Century Piano Music

#### **Kaitlyn Grella**

Communing with Nature: The Dual Articulation of the Pastoral Topic in Wagner's *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg*.

# SCHEDULE



**DAY 1**

*Thursday, May 22, 9am-6pm*

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***LUNCH: 12:30–2:00***

***SESSION 3: 2:00–3:30***

## **NARRATIVE, RHETORIC, AND TROPES**

Session Chair: Melanie Lowe

### **Dorian Bandy**

Topic Theory and the Baroque: Reframing Associative Rhetoric in Music of the 17<sup>th</sup> and Early 18<sup>th</sup> Centuries

### **Martin Čurda**

Musical Topics, Formal Functions, and Narrative trajectories in Mozart's Piano Concerto K. 488

### **John Warren**

Topics, Tropes, and Form in Amy Beach's Opus 80, *Theme and Variations* for Flute and String Quartet

***EVENING RECEPTION 4:00–6:00***

Join us at the Kress Cinema and Lounge. Light hors d'oeuvres provided.

Mocktails, cocktails, beer, and wine available for purchase.

817 8<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Greeley, CO 80631

# SCHEDULE



**DAY 2**

*Friday, May 23, 9am-6pm*

*Registration, Breaks, and Sessions will be held in Frasier 90*

**8:00–9:00**

*Check in & Registration*

## ***SESSION 1: 9:00–11:00***

### **A “BRAHMSIAD”**

Session Chair: Jonathan Bellman

#### **Jonathan Guez**

Ecstasy, Timelessness, and the Topic of Authentic Cancellation

#### **Yan Zou**

Topics and Performane in Brahms’s Ballade Op. 10 No. 1

#### **Joey Grunkemeyer**

Shadows of *Coriolan*: Musical Topics in Brahms’s *Tragic Overture*

#### **Cristina Gonzalez Rojo**

A Sonata Form That Calls for Topic Theory: Analysis of Brahms’s Piano Quartet No. 1 in G Minor, Op. 25/I *Allegro*.

***BREAK: 11:00–11:30***

## ***SESSION 2: 11:30–1:00***

### **BRAZIL, MIDDLE EARTH, AND BROADWAY**

Session Chair: Sarah Clemmens Waltz

#### **Rafael Lopes dos Santos**

Musical Topics and Soundscapes: a study based on *Salvador* by Egberto Gismonti

#### **Janice Dickensheets**

Uncovering the Musical Tapestries in *Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*

#### **Jessica Castleberry**

18<sup>th</sup> Century Dance Topics in Lin Manuel Miranda’s *Hamilton*: Historical Allusions and Social Critiques

# SCHEDULE



DAY 2

Friday, May 23, 9am-6pm

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***LUNCH: 1:00–2:30***

## ***KEYNOTE ADDRESS***

***2:30–3:30***

**MELANIE LOWE**

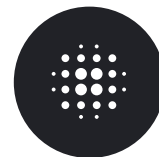
### **A Topical Tale of Two Improvisations: Mozart's Variations on Themes by Paisiello and Gluck**

During a private concert at Vienna's Burgtheater on 23 March 1783, Mozart improvised variations on the aria "Salve tu, Domine" from Giovanni Paisiello's opera *I filosofi immaginari* followed by variations on the arietta "Unser dummer Pöbel meint" from Gluck's *Die Pilgrime von Mekka*. The Paisiello variations, K. 398/416<sup>e</sup> were published soon after the concert, but Mozart waited more than a year to publish the Gluck variations, K. 455. We have no way of knowing how closely the published sets resemble his extempore playing and Mozart may well have fashioned such improvisations in his mind beforehand, but the Paisiello set is undoubtedly more virtuosic and theatrical while the Gluck set appears to have been more deliberately composed. To make the case that the Paisiello Variations *are* Mozart's actual extemporized improvisations, and that the Gluck Variations are Mozart's *composed* "improvisations," this keynote address tells the topical tale of these two variation sets.

## ***EVENING RECEPTION 4:00–6:00***

Join us at Yetters Brewing Company. Snacks and food truck available.  
They also have mocktails, cocktails, and wine along with their signature brews.  
1011 9<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Greeley, CO, 80631

# SCHEDULE



**DAY 3**

*Saturday, May 24, 9:30am-6:00pm*

*Registration, Breaks, and Sessions will all be held in Frasier 90*

**8:30–9:30**

*Check in & Registration*

## ***SESSION 1: 9:30–11:15***

### **TOPICS ON THE GLOBAL STAGE**

Session Chair: Wesley Bradford

#### **Zhen Peng**

A Topic Theory Perspective on the Xipi Yuanban in Peking Opera

#### **Ryszard Lubieniecki & Barbara Pabjan**

Topics of Nineteenth-Century Music in Twenty-First-Century Society:  
Results of an Empirical Study

#### **Hannah Aelvoet**

The Folklorism of Flanders (Lecture Recital, 45 minutes)

***BREAK: 11:15–11:45***

## ***SESSION 2: 11:45–12:45***

### **SHUFFLING OFF THE MORTAL COILS**

Session Chair: Jessica Castleberry

#### **Joe Davies**

Dancing with Death: Toward a Topical Lexicon of the Romantic Gothic

#### **Jonathan Bellman**

Chopin Dreams of Hamlet

# SCHEDULE



**DAY 3**

*Saturday, May 24, 9:30am-6:00pm*

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***LUNCH: 12:45–2:00***

***SESSION 3: 2:00–3:30***

## **TOPICS IN THE *FIN DE SIÈCLE***

Session Chair: Martin Čurda

**Timothy R. McKinney**

On Serenade as Topic in Hugo Wolf's *Italienisches Liederbuch*

**Anqi Wang**

Charles Griffes's Piano Sonata: Exploring Stylistic Contrasts and Formal Unity through Topic Theory

**Michael Oravitz**

Structural and Extramusical Narrativity in Debussy's *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune*

***PRE-DINNER HANG 4:00–6:00***

For any who want to continue sharing and talking, gather at 477 Distillery!  
825 9<sup>th</sup> St. Unit B, Greeley, CO 80631.

**On behalf of the University of Northern Colorado  
we would like to thank you for attending and supporting  
The 2<sup>nd</sup> International Symposium on  
Musical Topics and Topic Theory.**

**We hope to see you next year!**



# KEYNOTE ADDRESS



*Melanie Lowe*

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**Melanie Lowe** is Associate Professor of Musicology at Vanderbilt University. Her research focuses on constructions of musical meaning, from topic theory in 18<sup>th</sup>-century music to the uses of classical music in 21<sup>st</sup>-century media. Her book *Pleasure and Meaning in the Classical Symphony* (Indiana University Press) explores why the public instrumental music of late 18th-century Europe has remained accessible, entertaining, and distinctly pleasurable to a wide variety of listeners for more than two centuries. By placing listeners at the heart of interpretive activity and theorizing their real-time engagement with musical topics, Lowe offers an alternative to more traditional composer- and score-oriented approaches to meaning in the symphonies of Haydn and Mozart. Her chapter on “Amateur Topical Competencies” in the *Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory* engages with chamber-music players and consumers to argue that topical discourse was the springboard for structural understanding and thereby directly impacted a work’s commercial success in the 18<sup>th</sup>-century musical marketplace. Taking topics to the political arena, Lowe’s article “Difference and Enlightenment in Haydn” challenges readings that promote Haydn’s “Oxford” Symphony and “Gypsy” Trio as monuments to Enlightenment principles of tolerance and equality, proposing instead more nuanced interpretations that reveal a politically pragmatic Haydn. And her chapter on “Topics and Tropes in Mozart’s Variations for Keyboard” will be published this summer in the *Oxford Handbook of Musical Variation*. Her keynote address today stems from research on this subject. Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Music History Pedagogy*, Lowe is deeply committed to the scholarship of teaching and learning. While topic theory makes an appearance in most of her publications on pedagogy, her article in the *Journal of the Haydn Society of North America* advocates expressly for “Teaching Topics with Haydn (alongside that Other Guy).” Lowe is also invested in asking why differences and similarities among people are of consequence in musical thought, a weighty question that gave rise to her co-edited volume *Rethinking Difference in Music Scholarship* (Cambridge University Press). Entwining multiple strands of her musicological endeavors, Lowe’s current book project, under contract with W. W. Norton & Co., explores the deep grooves of meaning carved by the flow of Bach’s enigmatic *Goldberg Variations* through three centuries of time.



### TWELVE-TONE AS TOPIC: SATIRE, POLITICS, AND POSTWAR AMERICAN CONCERT MUSIC

Jacob Eichhorn  
Rochester, NY

Johnson (2017) argues that tonality becomes topic in early modernist art music. Building upon his claim and the scholarship on twentieth-century musical topics (Frymoyer 2017; Donaldson 2021), I argue that twelve-tone becomes topic in postwar American concert music. Many tonalist composers felt the political and cultural pressures of Cold War attitudes toward nationalist music: “the move to define ‘American’ in stark opposition to ‘Soviet’ precipitated the polarization of music- stylistic choices and a shift in attitudes toward cultural nationalism” (Ansari 2018, 163). Hubbs (2000) observes at the midcentury a “bursting of Coplandian tonality and ascent of university-based complexity music...[due to] a new positioning of serial composition as emblematic of artistic freedom” (169). Tonalist composers—Barber, Fine, Piston, Wilder, Bernstein—deploy twelve-tone melody amidst a largely tonal landscape for the purpose of topical signification.

In this paper, I use two of Bernstein’s staged works—*Candide* (1956/74) and *West Side Story* (1957)—as case studies. I provide an adaptation of Mirka’s semiotic model (2014), which accounts for the variable experience of listeners, the topic’s markedness within a new context, and emergent social meanings through satiric and ironic parody (Uno Everett 2004). Since twelve-tone technique is a technique and not a style, I posit that a set of overlapping similarities (Wittgenstein 1953) coalesce into an iconic association and communicate specific reference to a Schoenbergian melodic sensibility: a loose, disjunct, aggregate melody (Brown 2015); declamatory rhythms; a sparse texture; and a tonal, rather than anti-tonal, row construction (von Hippel and Huron 2020). However, not all listeners possess a mental rolodex of twelve-tone melodies; I argue that the inexperienced listener’s exposure to twelve-tone technique and atonality comes in the form of genre films (Wright 2023)—the new home to musical modernism. Through its iconic resemblance to expressionist dodecaphonic music and monster movie soundtracks, the twelve-tone topic imports meaning into its new context: “the monster often embodies a kind of dystopian projection, a means of figuring unintended consequences of the system, which take musical shape as tonality gone awry to the point of incomprehension” (Neumeyer and Beuhler 2001, 23).

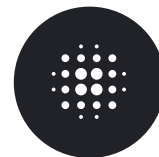


## GENRE THEORY, TOPIC THEORY, AND SHOSTAKOVICH'S SERIALISM

James Donaldson  
University of Oxford, UK

Applying topic theory to music of recent decades faces a problem. The sheer number of possible topics—from the winter topic (Lavengood 2023) to space rock (Echard 2017) to tonality itself (Johnson 2017)—creates an information overload, at risk of rendering the insights of the topic-theoretical apparatus increasingly obsolete. This problem is not unique to topic theory; specifically, it parallels the proliferation of music genres, exemplified by Spotify's genre lists numbering in the thousands. Genre theory, developed with reference to the study of literature, film, and popular music, has faced these issues head-on. This paper argues that topic theory can benefit from specific insights from genre theory. Building on this work—and Mirka's definition of a topic as “musical styles and *genres* taken out of their proper context and used in another one” (Mirka 2014, 2)—this paper argues for adapting a *relational* approach to genre to musical topics, emphasizing the instability of and relations between genres (Derrida 1979, Frow 2006).

I use a case study of the first movement of Shostakovich's String Quartet No. 12 (1968) to demonstrate this in practice. I read the generic distant between the serialism topic and a group of familiar eighteenth-century topics onto the form of the movement. Initially, the serialism topic appears alone; gradually, however, the twelve-tone material transforms the traditional tonal versions of the waltz and learned style into their Schoenbergian (i.e., twelve-tone) subtopics. This analysis leads to wider historical conclusions: I suggest that, rather than viewing Shostakovich's use of twelve-tone rows as somehow second-rate to examples from the West, viewing the serial rows as topics suggests a more distanced treatment of serial music, contributing more to form through musical meaning rather than as generating harmony. Ultimately, these conclusions provide a different perspective on the role of twelve-tone music in 1960s Soviet composition.



### **BITTER RAGE, BEAUTIFUL SONG: TOPICS, FORM, AND EXPRESSION IN MASLANKA'S *SYMPHONY NO. 10***

Wesley J. Bradford

University of Louisiana at Lafayette, LA

David Maslanka's music is a staple of wind band and percussion literature, but analyses of his works are comparatively few, and are often written specifically for performers or conductors. Yet the complex and expressive content of Maslanka's work holds great potential for analytical scrutiny. This paper begins an exploration of the compelling music of David Maslanka through an analysis of the first movement of his *Symphony No. 10: The River of Time*.

Premiered in 2018, *Symphony No. 10* is the composer's last work. The first movement, "Alison," uses a progressive tonal structure with clear, contrasting musical topics to express, in Matthew Maslanka's words, "bitter rage at the coming loss and a beautiful song full of love." The tension and release created by Maslanka's music through its various musical topics and formal functions maps effectively onto Matthew Maslanka's description of this movement's affect. In this analysis, I relate various 18th and 19th century topics to Maslanka's 2018 symphony for wind ensemble. As noted by Schumann, I establish the modern use of topics through a discussion of "each figure's relation to its traditional forebears and demonstrate how the topic is used and altered in the music itself."

In this movement, the intersection of formal function and topics also aligns with the movement's expressive content. I apply descriptive formal functions adapted by Matthew Arndt from the work of both William E. Caplin and Arnold Schoenberg.

My analysis blends these formal functions with topic theory to analyze the shifting expressive content of Maslanka's symphony, following the path from bitter rage to beautiful song.



## **THE STARRY SKY ABOVE US: BEETHOVEN'S STAR TOPIC**

Sarah Clemmens Waltz  
University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA

Beethoven's transcription of the phrase "The Moral Law within us and the Starry Sky above us... Kant!" is mainly taken as evidence that he knew something of Kant. However, it comes into Beethoven's conversation book of 1820 as a bit of note-taking after reading an article on cosmology in the *Wiener Zeitschrift*. From this we can deduce at least a modicum of interest in recent developments in astronomy. Moreover, Beethoven's first subsequent composition was WoO 150, *Abendlied unterm gestirnten Himmel* (Evening Song under a Starry Sky). In it a "starry sky" topic seems evident that goes beyond the typical high-register "twinkling" that represents starlight in works like Zumsteeg's melodramatic ballads, or even in Beethoven's earlier *Adelaide*, Op. 46. WoO 150's starlight, beginning with thick-textured repeated triadic sonorities in triplet rhythm, sometimes ascending through the pitches of the arpeggiated triad into high registers, adds a representation of the infinite – widely spaced, high-register sustained chords that similarly accompany the words "Such' ihn über Sternenzelt! Über Sternen muss' er wohnen" in the Ninth Symphony.

This paper will investigate whether there is evidence for a more widely practiced "star" topic (perhaps a version of the "sublime" topic, quite distinct from the "moonlight" topic that has also been associated with Beethoven's music). It will also examine the degree to which Beethoven's representations of the infinite in the "starry sky" topic are in keeping with the new cosmology of the period. Improved telescopes had upended the old cosmology in Beethoven's lifetime, particularly via discovery of the new planet Uranus (1781) but also of comets and deep-sky objects. This led to a seismicological shift in thinking about what was "out there" in the sky, completing the move from the sphere of "fixed stars" to the idea of an infinite, growing, and changing universe. Particularly in its use of the "natural" triad, Beethoven's "starry sky" topic connects backward to the "sunrise" topic identified by Elaine Sisman and forward to the "ethereal instrumentation" of high strings and winds in nineteenth-century instrumental writing noted by Emily Dolan and Thomas Patteson (*Oxford Handbook of Timbre*).



### **MOODS OF THE WOODS IN THE BOURGEOIS HOME: MUSICAL TOPICS OF THE FOREST IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY PIANO MUSIC**

Joep Janssens

University of Graz, Austria

My paper identifies and historically contextualizes musical topics of the forest in a vast body of nineteenth-century piano music. While previous scholarship on the musical forest has focused on individual works within the canon, I draw attention to an often overlooked—yet extensive—repertoire of bourgeois domestic piano music. I propose that this repertoire provides suitable material for topical analysis, as existing research suggests a relationship between topical recognizability and the commercial success of amateur music (Lowe 2014).

In response to deforestation in an industrializing Europe, the forest became a prominent topic in German Early Romantic literature, offering an imaginary non-urban counterworld that had substantial influence on musical topics. Paralleling the rise of forest tourism and mass-produced amateur piano scores, the subsequent boom in sylvan character pieces in the second-half of the nineteenth century reflected the commercialization of forest Romanticism. Therefore, a means of experiencing the ‘forest’ in the urban environment was to perform and listen to these topic-saturated piano pieces.

Some forest topics are iconic (e.g. hunt), others indexical (e.g. archaic styles). However, as authors of German literary Romanticism aestheticized the sounds of the forest, they obscured the distinction between music and natural sounds. Since a fundamental sylvan topic (*Rauschen*) I have identified pertains to these aestheticized sounds, Monelle’s distinction between iconic and indexical becomes less clear-cut. Moreover, unlike forest topics like the omnipresent hunt—which are signified by the same concrete musical means—these forest murmurs are signified with different structural means, albeit causing the same sounding effect: the mitigation of metrical sharpness. Consistent with the idea of a ‘universe of topic’ as noted by Monelle and Agawu, composers combined elements of pre-existing nineteenth-century styles (Dickensheets 2012) to signify the contrasting topics of the literary romanticist forest.

I have grouped the occurrence of these forest topics into four ‘moods of the woods’: Supernatural-Fantasy, Murmur-Silence, Recreation-Idyll, and Love-Intimacy. I argue that these four moods, though different in their ambience, all refer to a detachment from urban bourgeois reality. They offered an idealized ‘sylvan universe’ that could be experienced on the piano at home.





## **COMMUNING WITH NATURE: THE DUAL ARTICULATION OF THE PASTORAL TOPIC IN WAGNER'S *DIE MEISTERSINGER VON NÜRNBERG***

Kaitlyn Grella  
Columbus, OH

If there is any one unifying element among the symbolism in Wagner's dramatic works, it is the centrality of nature and its associated themes. Musically speaking, this means the frequent occurrence of the pastoral topic in Wagner's leitmotivic networks. As Raymond Monelle has shown, topics such as the pastoral contribute as much to the semantic meaning of Wagnerian leitmotifs as the inner workings of the drama. Still, little research has foregrounded Wagner's use of the pastoral and other topics. The most concentrated application, as Thomas Grey recently noted, comes from F.E. Kirby, whose study on expression in Wagner's music highlights how leitmotifs at their initial appearance often draw on topics to establish their associated meanings. Despite its rich detail, the study only considers the motives at their first appearance, rather than tracking how their topical configurations develop alongside the drama. In this paper, I use *Die Meistersinger von Nürnberg* as a starting point for a more in-depth exploration of Wagner's topical techniques, beginning specifically with the pastoral topic, which is pervasive throughout the work. My analysis reveals two distinct yet interrelated subcategories of the pastoral, both of which strengthen the sense of community at the heart of the drama. First is the rustic, which celebrates the external unity of the community through its vibrant, folk-like character. Second is the poetic, which focuses inwardly on the individual experiences of love and inspiration through the lens of the natural world. The latter subcategory is the primary language of the artist-hero Walther, whose art, according to Simon Williams, functions to awaken the folk to their oneness in nature. The pastoral topic, as Robert Hatten summarizes, favors musical simplicity over complexity. Abiding by this principle, I distinguish between the two pastoral subcategories based on their simplicity in harmony and rhythm, showing that, while the two share features of harmonic simplicity, the rustic employs simple, dancelike rhythms, while the poetic favors rhythms that obscure the prevailing meter, creating a sense of timelessness. Additionally, I show how their distortion in the music of Beckmesser serves to reaffirm his status as an outsider to the community.



## **TOPIC THEORY AND THE BAROQUE: REFRAMING ASSOCIATIVE RHETORIC IN MUSIC OF THE 17<sup>TH</sup> AND EARLY 18<sup>TH</sup> CENTURIES**

Dorian Bandy

McGill University, Montreal, Canada

The emergence of topic theory over the past four decades has occasioned striking advances in the scholarly discourse surrounding music of the late 18th century. Although the theory has recently been used to elucidate the styles and works of later composers (an enterprise that has even reached music of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries), this expansion has moved primarily into the realm of later rather than earlier music, leaving baroque repertoire largely unexamined from the perspective of topic theory—a lacuna all the more surprising given the extent to which baroque music draws on topicalized, associative references.

This presentation charts a course for the search for topics in music of the 17<sup>th</sup> and early 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Many topical devices used throughout baroque music are familiar from “universes of topics” that operate in later repertoire as well, such as time signatures, dance rhythms, and instrumental mimicry; however, baroque music also presents a number of cases in which the subjects of associative reference—ranging from musical forms such as da-capo arias to embellishments and even rudimentary cadential patterns—might usefully be considered within the conceptual framework of topic theory even though they fall outside the remit of topics as usually defined. Drawing examples from compositions by Heinrich Schütz (1585-1672), Heinrich Biber (1644-1704), Nicola Matteis (1650-1714), Johann Jakob Walther (1650-1717), Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750), George Frideric Handel (1685-1759), and Francesco Maria Veracini (1690-1768), this presentation argues that the prevailing definition of topics may itself require a reframing if it is to encompass the mechanics of topical reference in pre-classical repertoires. The presentation closes with a brief consideration of the ways in which the expansion of topic theory into baroque music might feed back into both analytic and performed interpretations of topics in later repertoires as well.





### **MUSICAL TOPICS, FORMAL FUNCTIONS, AND NARRATIVE TRAJECTORIES IN MOZART'S PIANO CONCERTO K. 488**

Martin Čurda

University of Ostrava, Czech Republic

Topic theory has uncovered an extensive 'thesaurus of characteristic figures' (Ratner), which should be consulted by any musician or listener who aspires for stylistic competence appropriate to the repertoire at hand. However, this thesaurus should not be used simplistically (for 'spotting topics' and mechanically linking conventional signifiers to ready-made signifieds).

One of the most intriguing questions concerns the 'logic' underpinning the succession of topics in a classical sonata or concerto (which may contain dozens of topical references). On a technical level, topics intersect with formal functions within a more or less predictable formal design (Caplin, Hepokoski & Darcy). Hermeneutically speaking, topics may be associated with the oppositional forces of order and transgression, the fundamental ingredients of a narrative unfolding in time (Almén).

Significant advancements have already been seen in this area. Robert Hatten (*Musical Meaning in Beethoven*) has described various 'expressive genres' (such as 'tragic to triumphant') and 'topical modes' (military, pastoral, comic etc.) capable of suggesting different 'archetypal plots'. Byron Almén (*A Theory of Musical Narrative*) has shown the manifestation of four 'narrative archetypes' in selected musical works. More recently, Hatten has discussed musical narrativity within the broader framework of his *Theory of Virtual Agency*.

This paper seeks to contribute to this discourse with a case study examining Mozart's Piano concerto K. 488 (with references to other works where relevant), attempting to address questions such as the following: What kind of dramaturgical/narrative trajectory does emerge from the succession of musical topics in this piece? How is it related to the formal functions of individual parts of the sonata/ritornello form? How do rhetorical features (questions, interruptions, hesitations) contribute to the emerging sense of subjective agency?

On a personal note, this paper reflects my broader effort (as teacher and researcher) to put established methodologies in the service of an integrative model of music analysis, which is rigorous enough to test and advance the methodological tools at hand, and intuitive enough to be taught to musicians in music academies, who often find conventional formal analysis somewhat too abstract.



## **TOPICS, TROPES, AND FORM IN AMY BEACH'S OPUS 80, *THEME AND VARIATIONS* FOR FLUTE AND STRING QUARTET**

John Warren

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

Amy Beach's Opus 80, *Theme and Variations* for Flute and String Quartet, first premiered in 1916 and published in 1920, represents a transitional period from a compositional style steeped in late European Romanticism towards a more eclectic palette incorporating elements of impressionism and modernism. The addition of the flute to the strings, a novel and intriguing choice, adds an exotic element to the standard string quartet and intertextual linkages to Debussy. Beach leverages this quality by giving the flute distinct thematic material that competes with the primary theme performed by the strings, resulting in a dramatic double theme and variations set.

This paper delves into the striking interplay between the competing thematic material, a key aspect that engages the listener's attention. It explores how musical material is developed and varied motivically, rhythmically, harmonically, and timbrally, emphasizing this interplay and their respective stylistic modes. Particular attention will be given to the expressive features that Beach develops throughout the variations and how musical topics (topoi) and intertextual references are employed to provide contrast, stylistic growth, and tropological meaning. The use of musical topics provides a narrative structure, guiding the listener through the composition. Following James Donaldson's recent adaptation of William Caplin's work, individual topics like the lament, fugato, etc., also provide formal functions without common-practice tonality, providing structural coherence within each variation and suggesting an alternative reading of the entire composition. Embedded within the seemingly conventional variations scoring is a cyclical multi-movement work built from a creative array of idiomatic topoi and a mythologizing of the European classical tradition by a self-taught American woman composer.

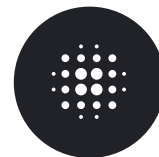


### ECSTASY, TIMELESSNESS, AND THE TOPIC OF AUTHENTIC CANCELLATION

Jonathan Guez  
University of Houston, TX

The final cadence of the “Sanctus” from Brahms’s *Missa Canonica* violates a fundamental principle of tonal harmony: its structural dominant seventh chord moves, not to a root-position tonic chord, but to a root-position subdominant chord, which only then cedes to tonic. This paper investigates the use of this peculiar tonal retrogression, which emerges in the mid-nineteenth century in Brahms and other composers. I argue that it should be understood as a tonal signifier of the religious, the self-transcendent, or the spiritually ecstatic. Because it cancels the more typical, energy-laden authentic cadence in favor of the more restful plagal close, I name it the topic of “authentic cancellation”.

I trace the topic from Brahms’s mass movement forwards through a series of examples by Wagner, Mahler, Richard Strauss, Grieg, Sibelius, Elgar, Rachmaninoff, Puccini, Wolfgang Zeller, who wrote the score to Dreyer’s 1932 film *Vampyr*, and Carl Davis, who wrote the score to the BBC’s 1995 series *Pride and Prejudice*. At each appearance, it suggests a similar network of signifieds: religiosity, self-transcendence, abnegation and weightlessness. My analyses are geared toward illustrating how these connotations resonate with existing interpretations of particular works, adding a layer of topical richness to readings by Kerman, Scruton, McCreless, Monahan, Hatten, and more. Finally, I suggest that some of the associations afforded by the topic arise from its voice leading: in particular, its treatment of 4<sup>+</sup> (which, despite a tonal obligation to descend, is transformed into a blissful, if momentary, consonance) may be understood as producing the feeling of weightlessness that it has been heard to convey.



### TOPICS AND PERFORMANCE IN BRAHMS'S BALLADE OP. 10 NO. 1

Yan Zou

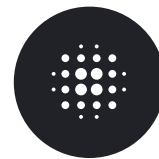
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Johannes Brahms found creative inspiration and spiritual support in Johann Gottfried von Herder's *Stimmen der Völker in Liedern*, which is vividly reflected in his Ballade Op. 10 No. 1, based on the Scottish narrative poem "Edward" from Herder's collection. This period also marked the beginning of Brahms's unrequited love for Clara Schumann. The imagery and narrative structure of the poem entirely govern the musical composition. Four key symbolic topics—questioning/sorrow, deception, wandering, and curse—serve as the central musical materials and metaphors in the piece. These topics are constructed through Brahms's ingenious integration of influences from earlier composers and his own distinctive creative voice.

For example, in the son's response starting in measure 8, Brahms skillfully juxtaposes B-flat major with G minor and displaces five-note groupings against the 4/4 meter, embodying the 'Veri simile, sed falsum' of deception. This design represents one of the most intricately crafted topics in the ballade. Undoubtedly, these topics also metaphorically reflect Brahms's inner struggles and his feelings for Clara Schumann.

The tonal and structural design of the piece further enhances its poem-inspired imagery. The use of D minor, the interplay between natural and harmonic minor in Section A, the rapid shifts between major and minor in the central section, and the inverted reprise of the two main themes in the recapitulation all evoke the essence of the poem. Additionally, the study will explore the impact of these topics on musical performance, with a particular focus on Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli's recording.

This research proposal aims to analyze the symbolic and structural features of Brahms's Ballade Op. 10 No. 1 through the lens of the four central topics and to examine how the narrative structure and poetic imagery of "Edward" shape the composition. These elements, combined with Brahms's masterful structuring, culminate in a work that stands as one of the finest musical poems of the 19th century.



### SHADOWS OF *CORIOLAN*: MUSICAL TOPICS IN BRAHMS'S *TRAGIC OVERTURE*

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While the music of Brahms is often understood in comparison to Beethoven or through musical topics, scholars have yet to combine these approaches when analyzing Brahms. Sholes has written at length about allusion as narrative in Brahms's music, and theorists like Hatten, Monelle, and Dickensheets have broadly discussed musical topics in Brahms. I undertake a comparative analysis of Brahms's *Tragic Overture* and Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture*, arguing that the latter served as a topical and formal model for Brahms. My methodology consists of sonata form analyses informed by Sonata Theory, topical analyses guided by Mirka, Agawu, Monelle, and Dickensheets, and a study of the *Coriolan Overture*'s reception history.

Beethoven's *Coriolan Overture* was regarded as an exemplar of musical tragedy in the nineteenth century – having been discussed by E.T.A Hoffman and Richard Wagner. Because the inspiration for the piece was misattributed to Shakespeare, there was an increase in romantic mystique surrounding the work. Moreover, the *Tragic Overture* is the closest Brahms came to composing programmatic music. Regarding the *Tragic Overture* and its companion, the *Academic Festival Overture*, Brahms said “One is laughing and the other is crying.” Through a comparative formal and topical analysis, I highlight the similarities found between the *Tragic* and the *Coriolan*. Both expositions begin in the minor mode, progress to a major-mode second theme, and end with a minor-mode closing theme. Additionally, both possess “reversed recapitulations,” in which the recap begins with the major-mode second theme, leading to tragic closure on the minor-mode first theme. Both overtures also share a similar progression of topics. Beethoven moves from *tempesta* and march topics, to a singing style second theme, followed by an *ombra* closing theme. “Modernizing” these topics, Brahms incorporates the heroic style, a descendent of the march, alongside the folk song topic, a 19th century variant of the singing style. Throughout the musical discourse of the *Tragic Overture*, the topics seem self-consciously aware of their relationship to the *Coriolan*. At times they accept this relationship, and at other crucial moments, they push back against it. The result is a tragic work that paradoxically conforms to and rejects its model.

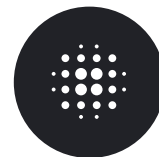


### **A SONATA FORM THAT CALLS FOR TOPIC THEORY: ANALYSIS OF BRAHMS'S PIANO QUARTET NO. 1 IN G MINOR, OP. 25/I. *ALLEGRO*.**

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This paper presents a topical analysis of the first movement of Brahms's Piano Quartet Op. 25. By acknowledging the particularities of musical topoi in Brahms's discourse (Agawu 2009), this analysis highlights the essential role of a topical understanding for a historically sound interpretation of his work (Monelle 1992, Moseley 2007, Taruskin 2010, Floros 2010, Grimalt 2020). The lack of continuity as well as the formal disproportions in this Quartet have been made explicit by several scholars and composers, such as Clara Schumann, Joseph Joachim, Klaus Velten, Carl Dahlhaus, or James Webster. For Eduard Hanslick, this non-continuity was sufficient to evaluate the Op. 25 as a less convincing piece. For Walter Frisch, in an exhaustive analysis that highlights the particularities of the work, this lack of continuity makes the quartet unqualified as a paradigmatic example of Brahms's developing variation technique. In this paper, this already argued heterogeneity will be approached as an opportunity to explore the work from the point of view of topic theory.

The topical richness of the work will be presented through paradigmatic charts, including topoi like 'Ombra', 'Tempesta', 'Folk-like Song', and 'Horn Calls', to later identify an overarching dramaturgy or expressive genre (Hatten 1994) for the movement. Topical transformations and their expressive implications are also discussed, such as 1) the externalization process undergone by the various 'singing styles', 2) the motivic transformation from 'piano' to a 'plucked-string' reference in the exposition, and 3) the metamorphosis of the exuberant 'folk-like' song in the second group of the exposition to its intimate, inner version in the recapitulation. By integrating a topical analysis together with the harmonic and structural ambiguities of the movement, the expressive meanings of the work are brought to the forefront of Brahms's studies.



### **MUSICAL TOPICS AND SOUNDSCAPES: A STUDY BASED ON *SALVADOR* BY EGBERTO GISMONTI**

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In this study, we investigate the relationship between Musical Topics and soundscapes through an analysis of the piece *Salvador* by Egberto Gismonti. This composition first appeared in the artist's discography in 1969, influenced by the *Afro-Sambas* of Brazilian guitarist and composer Baden Powell (1937–2000). Based on an analysis of five recordings of the piece released between 1969 and 1989, we examine how Afro-Brazilian topics are present in the musical structure and how they contribute to the representation of soundscapes. To this end, we reflect on how musical topics can relate to Schafer's (1977) concept of soundscapes. Seeking to understand the connections between music and the various spaces and environments that surround us—or that we experience—we adopt a perspective aligned with Ingold (2011), who considers sound as a medium for perception, acknowledging its communicative potential, particularly in relation to a subject, a physical space, and a community. In this sense, following Agawu (1991), we argue that a study based on musical topics can reveal interpretations and meanings that integrate or reference specific contexts. Drawing from the works of Salles (2016) and Costa (2017), we specifically address the topics *Canto de Xangô* and *Berimbau*, which in *Salvador* are characterized through the guitar performance. We consider their general characteristics, their role within the piece, and their various connections to sociocultural contexts. Additionally, we discuss the piece's association with the samba genre and how it serves as a structural foundation or backdrop that enables an interweaving of musical topics. Thus, we argue that, considering the contexts, experiences, or prior knowledge of this culture and the local reality of Brazil, these sonorities—marked by specific characteristics—can constitute representations of environments and spaces related to Afro-Brazilian culture. Furthermore, musical topics can serve as a solid analytical approach for studies on soundscapes in music, allowing for discussions on a range of musical and contextual elements related to the analyzed works.





### **UNCOVERING THE MUSICAL TAPESTRIES IN *LORD OF THE RINGS* AND *THE HOBBIT***

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Topic theory has gained acceptance as a method of uncovering contextual meaning in music of the common-practice period, yet until recently it has not been widely applied to analysis of movie music. Since film composers have long tapped into nineteenth-century musical styles, this discontinuity seems counterintuitive. Audiences have been conditioned for over three hundred years to associate specific musical styles (topics) with extra-musical meanings providing a ready-made stylistic palette for film music. Specifically, nineteenth-century styles associated with fascinations with the supernatural (demonic style and fairy music) and the ancient (chivalric, bardic, and heroic styles) have been extremely influential, dominating musical scores in fantasy and sci-fi movies.

Howard Shore's six Middle Earth scores are particularly fascinating when viewed through the lens of topic theory. While the numerous leitmotifs of the first trilogy are examined by Doug Adams in his 2010 publication, *The Music of the Lord of the Rings*, he does not discuss these themes in terms of nineteenth-century topoi, nor does he explore the ways in which those musical styles provide a virtual map to the culture and political structure of Middle Earth. Other scholarship likewise ignores the importance of topics within these musical scores.

In creating the worlds of Middle Earth, Tolkien took great care to create entire histories for each race, linking them through the various ages in a complex web of relationships. Shore builds upon this history with well-worn Romantic *topoi* and folk idioms, layering styles in such a way as to create complex symbolism, consequently gifting each race with a musical world that uniquely illustrates not only its own history, but also its inter-connections to the numerous other races of Middle Earth. From the simplicity of the Hobbit's Shire Theme to the complex diversity of Elven and Human leitmotifs and multifaceted symbolisms in the music of Lothlorien and Mordor, Shore's extensive layering of musical styles in the *Lord of the Rings* and *Hobbit* trilogies results in an historical and emotional musical tapestry through which audiences truly enter the realm of Middle Earth and experience it in all its complex beauty.





### **18TH CENTURY DANCE TOPICS IN LIN MANUEL MIRANDA'S *HAMILTON*: HISTORICAL ALLUSIONS AND SOCIAL CRITIQUE**

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According to Lin-Manuel Miranda, *Hamilton* is “a story of America then, told by America now.” America “then” is apparent in the historical setting and libretto, while the musical past is limited primarily to a string quartet timbre and synthesized period instruments. Three songs, however, employ eighteenth-century musical styles: “Farmer Refuted,” “A Winter’s Ball,” and “Your Obedient Servant,” each set as a court dance—Minuet, Gavotte, and Waltz-Minuet respectively. While writers such as Elisa Harbert, Jeremy McCarter, and even Miranda himself have acknowledged the historical flavor of these dances, a failure to consider the eighteenth-century semiotic codes that underlie these dance topoi means that many aspects of Miranda’s character definition and social commentary are missed entirely.

Throughout *Hamilton*, Miranda employs the Minuet (formerly known as “the queen of all dances,” signifying elegance, decorum, and good breeding) and Gavotte (associated with courtship, and perhaps a certain coy artificiality) to underscore plot elements defined by aristocratic mores and antiquated social contracts. In “Farmer Refuted,” a minuet profiles a feminized enemy, while—via juxtaposed rap—establishing three central dichotomies that shape the narrative: the old world vs. the new, conservative vs. enlightened ideologies, and the past vs. the present. A gavotte, briefly deployed in “A Winter’s Ball,” introduces a “domestic” Hamilton, alludes to a love triangle, and highlights Angelica’s socially mandated façade. The patriots’ ironic engagement with outmoded codes of honor and justice is evoked in the waltz-minuet “Obedient Servant,” which accentuates the tragedy of political hubris to which Hamilton and Burr succumb. Miranda’s deployment of these dance types, in the context of their original cultural implications, results in a reading that critiques social conventions—class, race, and gender politics—of the eighteenth century and present, while also underscoring the role of antiquated social ideologies in shaping our emergent national culture. The strategic placement of these historic topics within the work’s modern musical dialect allows Miranda to illuminate the temporal dissonance of the onstage encounter between past and present, an encounter that—when coupled with Miranda’s multi-racial casting and progressive libretto—offers a potent critique of Broadway historicization itself.



### **A TOPIC THEORY PERSPECTIVE ON THE XIPI YUANBAN IN PEKING OPERA**

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This study explores the application of Topic Theory to the Ban-qiang Structure (板腔体) of Peking Opera, a flexible system organized around Ban (板, beats or rhythmic patterns) and Qiang (腔, melodic modes or tunes), attempting to integrate Western analytical approaches while preserving the living characteristics of Chinese traditional music. Since Leonard Ratner introduced Topic Theory in 1980s, it has been used to analyze non-Western music, yet it remains unexplored in Chinese traditional music.

Ratner categorized topics into "types" and "styles". In Peking Opera, the Ban-qiang Structure supports narrative and performance through various Ban-forms (板式). The formulaic features and their use across different operatic works align with these definitions. Additionally, their improvisatory nature, coupled with the elements of stylized physical gestures (身段), vocalizations, ornamentations, and tonal inflections, allows Ban-forms to conceptually transcend the framework of Topic Theory, while their improvisatory characteristics draw parallels with the schemas of galant style.

This study selects the Xipi Yuanban, or the "original Xipi Ban-form" (西皮原板), from the Dan (旦角, female roles) vocal style in Peking Opera as its case study. Unlike Western compositions, which rely on fixed scores, traditional Chinese music does not prioritize precision in notation, posing certain challenges for research. To address this, the study uses the aria "Your father enlisted in the army and has not been heard from" (儿父投军无音信) from the Peking Opera *Fenhe Bay* as a case study, transcribing five recordings to reconstruct the original notation of Xipi Yuanban. This study examines the characteristics of Ban-qiang forms within and beyond the framework of Topic Theory through literature review, transcription, and comparative analysis. It highlights that both Chinese and Western music in the early 18th century were rooted in performance practices. Over time, Chinese traditional music, represented by Peking Opera, developed into stylistic schools distinguished by vocal ornamentation, while Western improvisation evolved into virtuosity under the influence of industrial modernity.



### TOPICS OF NINETEENTH-CENTURY MUSIC IN TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY SOCIETY: RESULTS OF AN EMPIRICAL STUDY

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Musical topics—complex semantic units that connect music with extra-musical meanings—have traditionally been identified by experts. However, musical meaning is also shaped through social negotiation over time. This study examines whether musical topics from nineteenth-century program music remain recognizable today, exploring how listeners collectively construct and sustain musical meaning.

We focused on **program music**, which explicitly evokes extra-musical associations and narratives, making it ideal for studying the **social construction of meaning**. Unlike **absolute music**, which relies on formal structures, program music incorporates widely shared cultural references, reinforcing the role of collective understanding. By analyzing how modern audiences interpret these compositions, we assess the persistence of shared interpretive codes and the influence of cultural context.

An empirical study was conducted with **1,000+ participants** (young people from different types of secondary schools, including vocational, general, and music schools). They listened to seven excerpts:

- Orchestral program music: *Inferno* from *Dante Symphony* (Liszt), *Romeo and Juliet* love theme (Tchaikovsky), first movement of *Symphony No. 6 'Pastoral'* (Beethoven).
- Songs for voice and piano: *Lullaby* from *Songs and Dances of Death* (Mussorgsky), *Im wunderschönen Monat Mai* from *Dichterliebe* (Schumann), *Frühlingstraum* from *Winterreise* (Schubert).
- Orchestral absolute music: Final movement of *Symphony No. 4* (Brahms).

Pieces were grouped into **thematic pairs**: death (Liszt & Mussorgsky), love (Tchaikovsky & Schumann), and pastoral (Beethoven & Schubert). Participants were asked to interpret the meaning in music in relation to musical structures and the extramusical meanings (topics) embedded within the composition. The study also examined demographic differences, considering variations in musical training, cultural background, and listening habits, as well as differences in decoding musical topics based on these factors.

Our results show that musical topics remain recognizable, indicating the persistence of shared interpretive codes and highlighting that the decoding of topics is related to the recognition of specific features of musical structures. We developed hypotheses on **popular culture's role in topic recognition**. By analyzing the interplay between historical musical topics and contemporary cultural influences, we explore the mechanisms underlying topic recognition. We examined **specific musical structures as meaning carriers**, identifying recurring **motifs**, **harmonic progressions**, and the **timbre**, which contribute to topic perception.



### THE FOLKLORISM OF FLANDERS

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In the nineteenth century, Flanders, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium, grappled with the search for its own identity in response to French linguistic dominance (Davies & Dubinsky 2018: 317). Central to this struggle was the emancipation of the Flemish (= Dutch) language, mirroring the broader aspirations of contemporary national movements. This quest for identity extended into the realm of music, where Flanders – along with Belgium as a whole – occupied a rather ambivalent position between the dominant musical influences of France and Germany. By the mid-nineteenth century, Flanders came to be described – particularly in French cultural circles (e.g. *Jésus-Christ en Flandres* by H. de Balzac, 1846) – as both exotic and distinctly northern. Whether or not the imagined Flemish church bells and fairs were truly representative of its cultural essence, one undeniable feature of the region was its strong oral tradition, shaped in part by high illiteracy rates well into the nineteenth century.

One of the most renowned Flemish composers, Peter Benoit (1834–1901), wrote a piano cycle *Contes et Ballades* in Paris in 1861, drawing inspiration from folk tales of his Flemish childhood. In this cycle – which was advertised in the Parisian press as exotic and northern – Benoit employed a contemporary musical vocabulary, evoking a range of nineteenth-century musical topics. The pianist, through characteristic harp-like strokes, assumes the role of a bard, while the frequent use of declamatory style echoes the oral tradition of recitation (cf. Dickensheets 2012: 113–114). Across the cycle, listeners encounter knights, church bells, sylphs and gnomes.

This lecture-performance, part of ongoing research at the Royal Conservatoire Antwerp, examines *Contes et Ballades* to explore the following questions: can we speak of a distinct Flemish folklorism in music? Is there evidence of a uniquely Flemish musical language, shaped by its cultural and historical context? Or was it merely the French, who once needed their northern neighbours to be almost as exotic as the ones from the south (cf. Parakilas 1998: 138)? Furthermore, if elements of oral tradition should be considered fundamental, how does this knowledge interact with the performance – to what extent does declamatory style become a basic attitude, stretching beyond recitativo sections?



## **DANCING WITH DEATH: TOWARD A TOPICAL LEXICON OF THE ROMANTIC GOTHIC**

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Musical topics and the Romantic Gothic might seem at odds with one another: the former rooted in recognisable stylistic figurations (see Ratner 1980; Agawu 2000; Hatten 2004), the latter characterized by excess, transgression, slippages between the real and the unreal, the sublime and the grotesque (see Davies 2024; Hirsch 2016). Yet depictions of death provide a meeting point. As the literary scholar Andrew Smith observes, the Romantic Gothic revolves around the “paradox” of “how to write the gothic [becoming] subsumed by the problem of how to write about death” (Smith 2016). At times death is bound up with eerie presences and ghostliness, those familiar aspects of the Gothic; in other moments, it manifests in darker, more disturbing outbursts. This paper grapples with this “paradox” vis-à-vis the music of Franz Schubert. In what ways do topical depictions of death – from funeral marches to *danse macabre* – evoke or put pressure on ideas of the Gothic? To what extent are topics subject to distortion or metamorphosis, detached from their eighteenth-century associations? And what might Schubert’s music offer for navigating the relationship between topical identification and aesthetic categories that captivated the imagination of the time? The paper encourages fresh ways of hearing the topical resonances in Schubert’s music – of where and how they convey meaning – while engaging topic theory as a mediator between the musical, the literary, and the visual. It thus contributes to the widening application of topical analysis as a means of moving between the musical surface and the history of ideas.



### CHOPIN DREAMS OF HAMLET

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Fryderyk Chopin, following one report, had intended to call his G Minor Nocturne, Op. 15 no. 3, “After a Performance of *Hamlet*,” but later changed his mind, saying “Let them figure it out for themselves.” The idea of extramusical inspiration for Chopin’s music discomfits many, owing perhaps to a longstanding aesthetic bias against program music, but among the observable connections between the piece and Shakespeare’s play are the *religioso* funeral music and trumpet calls in the final sections of both play and Nocturne. Still, any potential parsing of this piece means that there was, as Chopin supposedly implied, something there to “figure out.” Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (as Mieczysław Tomaszewski and others have observed) spoke directly to Poles, Chopin included; the melancholy personality and indecisive mooning of Shakespeare’s young Dane were considered so typically Polish that Hamlet was sometimes called “The Polish Prince.” These were traits Chopin knew himself to share, moreover, so it would not be implausible for Hamlet to have emerged in Chopin’s Nocturne, or in a later work, or both.

Like the other three Ballades, Chopin’s Ballade No. 4 in F Minor, Op. 52, announced its narrative character in the title Chopin gave it. Still, it has perplexed even those confident about assigning plots to the first three. A close reading, one based on the vocabulary of Narratology, is needed; topics, forms, keys, and rhythmic figures, all of which enable the identification of affects, moods, and perhaps even a plot, require consideration. Such a reading suggests that the Fourth Ballade is organized much like the First Ballade, Op. 23 in G Minor, which contemporaries felt was based on Adam Mickiewicz’s narrative poem *Konrad Wallenrod*. Dramatically, Mickiewicz’s poem had outlines similar to *Hamlet*: a gloomy, indecisive protagonist, a stalwart lady-love who comes to a tragic end, and a disastrous reckoning. Numerous facets of the Fourth Ballade suggest that Chopin approached, or returned to, Shakespeare’s masterpiece with both a more advanced compositional toolset and an even deeper identification with the drama, resulting in a much more expansive treatment of the subject than that of the Op. 15 G Minor Nocturne.





## ON SERENADE AS TOPIC IN HUGO WOLF'S *ITALIENISCHES LIEDERBUCH*

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The words of a song might prompt a musical topic in several ways. A waltz topic might be a direct depiction of the words in a diegetic sense, as when characters hear or dance a waltz, or in a non-diegetic sense, as when a waltz is mentioned by the impersonal narrator. A topic also might be an allusive or indirect response to the words, as when Hugo Wolf introduces a waltz topic in “Abschied” from his Mörike songbook while the protagonist celebrates his victory over a critic, yet there is no mention of a waltz in the words. In the current paper I examine the varied styles that may be grouped under the general topical heading “serenade” that appear in Wolf’s *Italienisches Liederbuch*. I focus on the musical ingredients forming a serenade topic, the topic’s relationship to the words, and the wide range of moods—from comic to tragic—serenade topics can project. I begin by identifying elements introduced at diegetic references to performing or listening to a serenade. Rolled or repeated chords in the piano evoking guitar idioms and rhythms suggesting strumming or strolling are common. Also frequent are drone basses, an element of Leonard Ratner’s musette/pastoral style (1980). The horn figures of hunt style might occur as well, suggesting the outdoors or companionship. Singing style could occur within either piano or voice, though as in Wolf’s songs more generally, the singer’s line might or might not be “lyrical.” Central to the discussion will be an exegesis of changes in style in songs that first narrate the circumstances leading to a serenade and then introduce serenade elements as the serenade is performed or described. I next examine Wolf’s use of serenade elements in songs that bear no specific reference to serenades in their texts. I will distinguish Wolf’s use of serenade topics from his general use of associative motives of the type identified by Eric Sams (1983) and differentiate the serenade elements Wolf uses from those identified by Matthew Boyle (2024) in his recent study of serenade topics in nineteenth-century Italian opera.



### **CHARLES GRIFFES'S PIANO SONATA: EXPLORING STYLISTIC CONTRASTS AND FORMAL UNITY THROUGH TOPIC THEORY**

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Charles Griffes (1884–1920) occupies a pivotal position in early twentieth-century American music, celebrated for his ability to synthesize structural coherence with stylistic heterogeneity. His works draw from Romantic, Impressionist, and culturally diverse idioms, while being profoundly enriched by extramusical influences such as poetry, painting, and theater. Inspired by the Victorian Aesthetic Movement and its ideal of “art for art’s sake,” Griffes wove natural and multicultural elements into his compositions, crafting a distinctive musical voice that harmonizes stylistic contrasts within a unified formal structure.

The Piano Sonata epitomizes Griffes’s ability to reconcile stylistic contrasts within a unified framework. This study uses topic theory to analyze Griffes’s sophisticated deployment of Romantic, Impressionist, and Baroque topoi. Thematic transformation serves as a unifying principle, enabling recurring themes to sustain cohesion while accommodating stylistic diversity. In the first movement, themes in singing style enriched with chromaticism and fluid textures align with Romantic ideals. Impressionistic techniques, such as synthetic scales and tonal ambiguity, create atmospheric soundscapes, while chant-like themes juxtaposed with unresolved tritones in the second movement balance serenity and tension. The third movement incorporates Baroque dance idioms, including the gigue and tarantella, intertwining contrapuntal textures with dynamic rhythms. Griffes juxtaposes languid, rubato-infused passages with fervent, bacchanalian episodes inspired by folk dance rhythms here, intensifying the expressive drama and dynamic tension of the sonata. This interplay of thematic recurrence and stylistic variation intensifies the work’s dramatic tension and emotional trajectory.

As Janice Dickensheets observes, topics not only articulate nuanced emotional and cultural meanings but also provide formal cues that guide the progression of a composition.<sup>1</sup> J. Peter Burkholder highlights how stylistic heterogeneity, achieved through the juxtaposition and integration of contrasting topics, can articulate form and amplify expressivity.<sup>2</sup> In Griffes’s Piano Sonata, these perspectives converge, illustrating how topical contrasts provide vital cues for understanding the work’s architectural coherence while enriching its emotional trajectory. By analyzing how Griffes employs topics to shape both expression and form, this study demonstrates the multifaceted role of topical gestures in articulating the Piano Sonata’s cohesive and dynamic architecture.





### STRUCTURAL AND EXTRAMUSICAL NARRATIVITY IN DEBUSSY'S *PRÉLUDE À L'APRÈS-MIDI D'UN FAUNE*

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Debussy's orchestral masterpiece *Prélude à l'après-midi d'un faune* (1894) possesses both a long-range pitch-structure "abstract" narrative as well as a loose extramusical narrative. The work was inspired by Stéphane Mallarmé's eponymous *L'après-midi d'un faune*, a poem that reinvents the ancient mythological figure Pan as a first-person protagonist who reminisces upon whether or not an erotic experience was dreamed or real. Given the work's use of similar but continuously evolving thematic material, and given certain scholars' desires to find highly-direct correspondences between the poem and the musical work (Bruhn, 2000; Code, 2001), a wide range of formal readings exist, as Brown (1993) has noted. Debussy himself suggested a non-literal congruence between the poetry and the music (Vallas, 1933), and this presentation does likewise, combining particular pitch-structural facets of the work with more general section-specific musical topics that are suggested in the work's gestures, topics that loosely complement the Attic and erotic themes of the poem (Bellman: 2014).

Unique presentations and resolutions of the C-sharp/D-flat-to-G tritone, a dissonant interval immediately experienced as a boundary interval in the alluring opening solo flute melody, recur at key formal junctures in the work (see Austin: 1970). These recurrences complement a loose narrative that is formed by a strand of contrasting extramusical topics that align with the work's subtly-contrasting larger sections. Previous studies (Barraqué, in Austin: 1970; Howat, 1986) generally agree on the locations of the larger sectional divisions, but do not attempt to read a broader structural narrative into the work based on the work's prominently featured C-sharp/D-flat-to-G tritone and its strategic dissipation at key junctures. Select analysts (aside from Code and Bruhn) perhaps avoid close narrative readings given Debussy's own above-cited stance on his compositional approach to *Faune* and his implicitly voiced distaste for tone-poem-esque musical works in his 1903 critique of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony. Debussy's approach transcends the play-by-play attributes of the traditional tone poem, instead fashioning a loose narrative that intermingles facets of the traditional Attic myth with Mallarmé's protagonist's erotic reminisces, imprinting a subtle yet unmistakable sense of coherence upon the listener.