



***International  
Symposium***

***On Musical Topics***

***and Topic Theory***

***May 31 - June 1, 2024***

***University of Northern Colorado***

***Greeley, Colorado***

***U.S.A.***

**International Symposium on Musical Topics and Topic Theory  
May 31-June 1, 2024**

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

**Program Committee:**

Sarah Waltz (University of the Pacific, Stockton, CA)  
Dan Obluda (Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO)  
Melanie Plesch (Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia)

**Organizing Committee:**

Janice Dickensheets (University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO)  
Melanie Plesch (Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia)  
Julian Hellaby (Coventry, UK)

**Student Assistants:**

Jessica Castleberry  
Morgan Hall  
Marcy Trapp  
Natasha Monroe  
Jaidan Ursich

**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 Overview**

Note: During breaks, coffee and tea will be offered in the Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall (CCRH)

In the mornings, snacks will be offered in the Campus Commons Green Room

### **Friday, May 31**

8:00-9:00 Check in & Registration Outside of CCRH

Snacks available in Green Room; Coffee & Tea available in CCRH

8:30-8:45 Welcome, CCRH

8:45-10:45 Session 1 CCRH & CC2300

10:45-11:00 Break

11:00-12:30 Session 2 CCRH & CC2300

12:30-2:00 Lunch

2:00-3:00 Plenary Address CCRH

3:00-3:30 Break

3:30-5:00. Session 3 CCRH

5:00-7:00 Reception – High Brau Tap House

### **Saturday, June 1**

8:30-9:00 - Snacks available in Green Room; Coffee & Tea available in CCRH

9:00-10:30 Session 4 CCRH & CC2300

10:30-10:45 Break

10:45-12:15 Session 5 CCRH

12:15-2:00 Lunch

2:00-3:00 Keynote Address CCRH

3:00-3:30 Break

3:30-5:00 Session 6 CCRH

5:30-7:30 Cocktails at 477 Distillery

## Facilities

Campus Commons: 1051 22nd St., Greeley, CO 80639

Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall (CCRH): From the lobby follow Signs to the Backstage area, enter through the door to the right of the theatre entrance. From outside, enter through the loading dock doors.

Campus Commons Green Room: Follow Signs to the Backstage Area (follow the hall past the loading dock to the left)

Campus Commons Room 2300 (CC2300): In the lobby, upstairs – next to the upper theatre doors.

High Brau Tap House: 915 16th St, Greeley, CO 80631

Walk about 6 blocks north of Campus Commons up 10<sup>th</sup> Ave., turn right on 16<sup>th</sup> street

477 Distillery: 825 9th St unit b, Greeley, CO 80631

About a block and a half south of the hotel on 9<sup>th</sup> ave. (Note: address is 9<sup>th</sup> street, but entrance is off of 9<sup>th</sup> ave)

Please note: Streets run east and west in Greeley; Avenues run north and south.

Hotel: Hilton Doubletree a Lincoln Park: 919 7th St, Greeley, CO 80631

## **Friday, May 31**

*Check in, Registration, & Snacks: 8:00-8:30*  
CCRH, CC Green Room, CC Loading Dock

*Welcome: 8:30-8:45 - CCRH*  
Director Carissa Reddick & Janice Dickensheets

*Session 1: 8:45-10:45 (Split Session)*

### **Topical Strategies in Form & Pedagogy**

Room CC2300 Campus Commons (Session ends at 10:15)

Session Chair: Michael Oravitz, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Musical Topics and Second-Order Formal Functions in Post-Tonal Music”  
James Donaldson, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

“Towards a Phraseology of Musical Topics”  
Olga Sánchez-Kisielewska, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

“Teaching Musical Topics to Undergraduates: How Music Carries Meaning”  
Sara Haefeli, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY

### **Topics in Rock and Pop Music**

Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall

Session Chair: Janice Dickensheets, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Spiritual Quest in the Formal Structures and Topical Signifiers of ‘Lamplight Symphony’”  
Elizabeth Romero, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Heritage Imaginaries of K-pop - using musical topics and visual tropes in the enactment of cultural heritage”  
Netta Huebscher, University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

“The 12 String Guitar in Rock: A Unique Connection of Sound with Affect”  
Leo Welch, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Searching for Heroes and Villains and other Tropes in the Beach Boys SMiLE!”  
John Warren, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

*Break: 10:45-11:00*  
Coffee & Tea in CCRH

*Session 2: 11:00-12:30 (Split Session)*

**Topics in Film and Video Games**

Room CC2300 Campus Commons

Session Chair: Dan Obluda, Colorado State University, Ft. Collins, CO

“This Sounds Familiar...”: A Model for Tropes in Video Games”

Ben Major, Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, UK

“Be Afraid. Be Mildly Afraid. Fear as Unease within the Super Mario Bros. Sound”

Austin Wilson, Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

“Images and Topics in the Soundtrack Album of the *Squid Game* Series”

Lydia Lee, Oregon State University, Eugene, OR

**Topics after 1900**

Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall

Session Chair: Deborah Kauffman, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Virtuosity and its Facets in Polish Piano Concertos of the 21st Century”

Malwina Marciniak, Feliks Nowowiejski Academy of Music, Bydgoszcz, Poland

“*Fin de Siècle* Russian *Topos* and Rimsky-Korsakov’s ‘The Golden Cockerel’”

Jaidan Ursich, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Japanese ‘Ma’ as a Topic”

Anqi Wang, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

*Lunch: 12:30-2:00*

Suggested Restaurants are all about a 6 block walk north on 16<sup>th</sup> Street between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> avenues and on 17<sup>th</sup> street between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> avenues

*Plenary Address: 2:00-3:00*  
Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall  
Session Chair: Janice Dickensheets

**“Musical Archaism and the Idealized Past”**  
Jonathan Bellman, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

*Break: 3:00-3:30*  
Coffee & Tea in CCRH

*Session 3: 3:30-5:00 (Joint Session)*

**Death, Lament, and Balladry: Topical Voices of the Virtuosi**  
Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall  
Session Chair: Marie Sumner Lott, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

“Death Laughs Last: Chopin’s Scherzi and the Danse Macabre”  
Jessica Castleberry, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“A Lisztian Hand Confounds the Balladry - A Look at Embodied Approaches to Ballade No. 2 in B minor”  
Danny Huang, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

“The Twentieth-Century Lament Topic: Nikolai Medtner’s Antimodernist Elegies”  
Lucy Liu, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX.

*Reception High Brau Tap House: 5:00-7:00*

915 16th St, Greeley, CO 80631  
Catered by Pelligrini Cucina Italiana

## **Saturday, June 1**

*Snacks in the Green Room: 8:30-9:00*

Campus Commons Green Room

*Session 4: 9:00-10:30 (Split Session)*

### **17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> Century Topics**

Room CC2300 Campus Commons

Session Chair: Sara Haefeli, Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY

“Rethinking Sensibility”

Keri Hui, Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

“Topical Tropes in Mozart’s Sonata in D, K. 284”

Melanie Lowe, Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

“Violons en basse as Theological Topic”

Deborah Kauffman, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

### **Nationalism in Hispanic Topics**

Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall

Session Chair: Julian Hellaby, Coventry, UK

“Use of Folk Argentine Topics as an Alternative Idea of Nation in *Las horas de una estancia* op. 11 by Alberto Ginastera”

Hernan Gabriel Vazquez, Instituto Nacional de Musicología “Carlos Vega,” Buenos Aires, Argentina.

“The Fandango as Inherited Topic and Stylistic Intermediary in Ernesto Halffter’s *Sonatina* (1928)”

David Heinsen, Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

“Mazurka, Flamenco/pre-flamenco and Guitar topics in Manuel M. Ponce's *Mazurca (española)*”

Jesús Herrera-Zamudio and Bernardino Rodríguez-Espejo, Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico

*Break: 10:30-10:45*

Coffee & Tea in CCRH



*Session 5: 10:45 – 12:15 (Joint Session)*  
*Lecture Recitals*

**Topics in Performance & Pedagogy**

Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall

Session Chair: Janice Dickensheets

“Opaque No More: A Taxonomy of Musical Gestures to Elucidate Expression and Structural Clarity in the Music of Charles Wuorinen”

Carl Bolleia, William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ

“Performing Robert Ramskill’s Preludes for Piano”

Julian Hellaby, Coventry, UK

*Lunch: 12:15-2:00*

Suggested Restaurants are all about a 6 block walk north on 16<sup>th</sup> Street between 8<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> avenues and on 17<sup>th</sup> street between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> avenues

*Keynote Address: 2:00-3:00*

Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall

Session Chair: Janice Dickensheets

**“*Topoi* and *Pathosformeln*: Theorising Recurrence and Meaning in Music,  
Literature and Art History”**

Melanie Plesch, Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, University of Melbourne, Melbourne,  
Australia

*Break: 3:00-3:30*

Coffee & Tea in CCRH

*Session 6: 3:30-5:00 (Joint Session)*

**Topical Voices of Brahms & Schumann**

Campus Commons Rehearsal Hall

Session Chair: Jonathan Bellman, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Topic and Narrative in Robert Schumann’s *Walzer*, Op. 124, No. 4”

Timothy McKinney, Baylor University, Waco, TX

“Chivalric Style and Beyond”

Marie Sumner Lott, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

“Brahms and the Hunting Topic - A Tale of Two Hunts”

Drew Stephen, University of Texas San Antonio, San Antonio, TX

*Cocktails at 477 Distilling: 5:30 – 7:00*

825 9th St., Unit b

Entrance is on 9<sup>th</sup> ave. between 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> street, across from the park

A block and a half from the hotel.

**Abstracts**

**Keynote**

**“*Topoi* and *Pathosformeln*: Theorising Recurrence and Meaning in Music, Literature and Art History”**

Melanie Plesch

The University of Melbourne

This presentation examines points of contact, intersections, parallels, and divergences between topic theory, Ernest Curtius’s methodology for the analysis of literary *topoi*, as presented in his *Europäische Literatur und Lateinisches Mittelalter* (1948), and the concept of *Pathosformel* coined by art and cultural historian Aby Warburg and developed throughout his works from 1905 to 1929. An awareness of these complementary conceptualizations contributes to a more comprehensive and inclusive cultural history.

I explore some of the affordances of a transdisciplinary approach, especially in terms of our understanding of representation, stereotyping, self-representation, identity construction, the global exchange of topics and a decolonial approach to music analysis and history.

**Plenary**  
**“Musical Archaism and the Idealized Past”**

Jonathan Bellman  
University of Northern Colorado

The emergent Romantic movement brought with it—first in literature and painting—a new consciousness of the past, one colored by a rosy, nostalgic hindsight. This was an Edenic past unspoiled by the corrupting influences of contemporary life, a past of pure faith, pure love, nobility and heroism in battle, free of the unavoidable compromises and complex moral choices of real life. In music, these associations came to be expressed by a constellation of archaic gestures that evoked both Catholic and Lutheran church music, knightly valor and resolve, and a romantic devotion that recalled courtly love, steeped as it was in the ideals of chivalry and even Marianism. This would not have been mistaken for the actual music of former centuries, but they borrowed elements from various historical music and incorporated them into the contemporary common practice vocabulary in amounts sufficient to evoke the Golden Age yearning found in the other arts without shocking or disorienting listeners. These archaisms were more topics than dialects, and were less suited to entire works or movements than as contrasting sections within them, fostering fleeting images and passing daydreams.

**Presentations**

**“Musical Topics and Second-Order Formal Functions in Post-Tonal Music”**

James Donaldson  
University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

This paper explores the potential role of topics in contributing to formal functions in post-tonal music, expanding upon issues raised in a recent article (Donaldson 2023). Although Caplin concludes that the form-functional role of topics “is rather tenuous” (2005), he highlights the potential role of multiple topics from Agawu’s and Monelle’s topical universes. The lack of clear tonality, harmony, and cadences in post-tonal music would appear to exacerbate the problems of any link, though. This paper proposes that, in lieu of other clear form-functional devices, topics *can*, in certain instances, contribute to an understanding of a passage’s formal function.

Following Roland Barthes’s (1957) understanding of second-order meaning, I propose that formal functions can be expressed through topics via their (1) signifieds or (2) signifiers. First, a topic’s originally associated harmonic characteristics can suggest its original formal function, even if such characteristics are not present. I demonstrate this with examples of the musette from Stravinsky and Prokofiev. Second, topics can acquire a formal function through an accumulated use through a social-cultural medium, independent from any associated harmonic or tonal characteristics. Accompanied by examples by Ligeti, Gubaidulina, and Julius Eastman, I demonstrate the ending “function” of the chorale through an association with the *Choralphantasie* genre and the hymn’s frequency in closing a Christian service. Given the difficulty of engendering a sense of ending in post-tonal music, I suggest that the latter category

is one way that an ending function can be expressed in this idiom. With examples from Bartók, Stravinsky, and Berg, I show how the fanfare combines these two categories. I end by speculating on how this understanding of formal functions might reflect aspects of “middlebrow modernism” (Chrowrimootoo 2018), since understanding form through topical convention requires a degree of (socio-)cultural capital.

### **“Towards a Phraseology of Musical Topics”**

Olga Sánchez-Kisielewska  
University of Chicago, Chicago, IL

Scholars have argued that topics have “no syntax” (Agawu 1991) and that their relation to formal function is “fragile” (Caplin 2005). Even the description of this Symposium aligns topics with “musical surface,” as opposed to “musical structure and process.” This paper will reconsider the relation between topics and form by focusing on frequent pairings of styles found in similar formal contexts—with the hymn topic ca. 1800 as a case study. I understand these musical processes as syntagmas (sequences of signs that together create meaning), a term from semiotics frequently applied to media studies.

The hymn topic appears in three common syntagmas in instrumental music, each operating at a different structural level. The first, which I dub the “solemn-to-lyrical,” is typical of slow movements that begin as hymns but inevitably dissolve into a more effusive singing style. This intensification of expression tends to occur in a two-stage, nested process: within the phrase and between phrases. The second strategy places the hymn topic after *tempesta* in sonata developments or secondary themes. This musical storm clearing migrates from opera and pastoral symphonies into non-programmatic works, endowing the remission of turbulence with spiritual associations. The third strategy is specific to a group of two-tempo finales by Paul Wranitzky and Jan Dussek, in which a hymnic adagio reappears in the middle of a fast movement. I interpret this design as a musical metaphor for Schiller’s cyclical journey of human growth.

Although the frequency and consistency of these topical sequences does not raise to level of grammar, it does provide an expressive *phrasicon* of conventional strategies that determine the succession of topics and their formal locations. These syntagmas provide a path to emancipate topics from their role as “ancillary compositional devices” (Allanbrook 2014), challenging old dichotomies between structure and expression or syntax and semantics.

### **“Teaching Musical Topics to Undergraduates: How Music Carries Meaning”**

Sara Haefeli  
Ithaca College, Ithaca, NY

In the tenth edition of *A History of Western Music (HWM)*, Peter Burkholder devotes a slim paragraph to the discussion of musical topics, noting that Mozart’s audience would have known the difference between topics and styles just as listeners today recognize the differences between various pop genres. He notes that topics “serve as subjects for musical discourse” and

that understanding them helps us understand Classic-era works and the “meaningful network of references” they employ (541). The subject of topics appears four times after this brief introduction, in discussions of Mahler, Stravinsky, Ives, and Schnittke—each time with a nod back to Mozart.

I claim that this brief discussion does not help the reader recognize topics nor understand how they function in musical discourse. In this talk, I will discuss my proposal for the eleventh edition of *HWM* and a new proposed chapter: “Classical Period Forms and Conventions.” This chapter addresses the question, How is it that music can carry meaning? The chapter will introduce the notion that music is a sign system that is meaningful either through resemblance to an object (such as in a bugle call) or through co-occurrence with meaningful words or gestures. Starting with vocal examples (including “Non più andrai” from *Marriage of Figaro*) will help students understand the connection between the musical figure and its significance. I will discuss how the chapter will turn to instrumental examples, using Glenn Gould’s Webern-esque interpretation of Mozart’s Piano Sonata No. 11, K. 331 as a case study of the role of the performer in the interpretation of topics. This more extensive handling of topic theory in the textbook will not only help students recognize and understand the “meaningful network of references” in Classic-era compositions, but will also make them aware of how music carries meaning in highly-conditioned contexts.

### **“Spiritual Quest in the Formal Structures and Topical Signifiers of ‘Lamplight Symphony’”**

Elizabeth Romero

University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

“Lamplight Symphony” from Kansas’ second album, *Song For America* (1975) tells the story of an old man’s grief over his wife’s recent death and his incredible experience of encountering her apparition. Its composer and chief song writer for Kansas, Kerry Livgren, sought to incorporate a model of conflict and resolution as a driver of Narrativity. “Lamplight Symphony” contains these as sections I term (C) and (R) respectively. Upon further analysis of this song and others by Kansas, I identify a third section which I call presentation (p). An important tool for differentiating P, C, and R sections is the use of topical signifiers. Livgren’s musical language was inspired by composers who incorporated topics such as Chopin as well as much of the psychedelic pop of The Yardbirds and the Kinks. William Echard (2017) defines signifiers found within the latter music.

The P section of “Lamplight Symphony” begins with an overture, sighing gestures, and evocations of medieval chant with its parallel fourths and A to E Dorian mode changes. The idea of modes as topics was pioneered by David Kozel, and modes along with overtures are common in P sections.

The C section contains the most topical signifiers as it musically depicts the man’s journey. Phrygian and angel topics precede his and her spirits parting with chromatic lines in contrary motion. She is portrayed by celestial piano arpeggios under a vocalise style violin melody. The R section mirrors the P section and is demarcated by the return of the previously heard overture, with a slight modification to depict the man’s spiritual healing. It sounds an octave lower without sighing gestures but still evoking medieval idioms. Though the lyrics

reflect a calmer demeanor, the music ends on a distant sonority, suggesting the great surface level separation of the earthly and heavenly realms.

**“Heritage Imaginaries of K-pop - using musical topics and visual tropes in the enactment of cultural heritage”**

Netta Huebscher

University of Gothenburg, Gothenburg, Sweden

Since the early 2010s, the global popularity of South Korean idol pop (K-pop) has been booming among non-Korean-speaking audiences of every age and nationality. Attributing this unexpected rise to government policy and digital ingenuity, accounts of K-pop have so far tended to ignore the fundamental questions of its aesthetic and affective traction. With its fractured and decentralized assembly lines and acute stylistic syncretism, K-pop is indeed an eclectic musical hybrid that resists formal generalisations and defies notions of authorial integrity. At the same time, it has nevertheless developed a distinctive aesthetic that revolves around “concepts”, an industry term denoting the thematic packaging of songs in reference to various literary and cinematic tropes. While this occurs mainly through visual expressions such as music videos, mood samplers, and off-stage footage, in this paper I argue that K-pop’s deployment of tropes is not only visual but often also musical, drawing on the signifying capacities of specific musical topics. A case in point is the musical topic of the imaginary Levant, whose historic role in Western orientalism has already been critically assessed. Numerous K-pop productions evoke this topic through sounds that allude to instruments, melodic motifs, and rhythmic patterns that may be associated with certain stereotypical perceptions of “oriental music”. While these sounds are often accompanied by matching costumes and scenography, in some cases they have been juxtaposed with the recurrent K-pop trope of the invocation of Korean cultural heritage. Hearing these musical allusions as topics rather than attempts to represent the Levant or faithfully reproduce any of its supposed musical practices, I propose that they are more productively understood as a rhetorical device, and consider how they may be understood within the wider context of K-pop’s cultural heritage assemblages.

**“The 12 String Guitar in Rock: A Unique Connection of Sound with Affect”**

Leo Welch, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

The association of a musical instrument’s sound with the character of a piece is well-known. For example, in the 1600s the horn, first connected to royal hunting, moved into the concert hall while still being associated with the hunt. In 60s rock music, the 12-string guitar also evolved as an instrument, and its unique sound became coupled with specific affects within rock’s more experimental musical designs.

Like the horn, the 12-string guitar developed from modest roots, but in the 1960s, it became one of the instruments of choice for a newly evolving style of rock. The Byrds’ cover of Bob Dylan’s “Tambourine Man,” featuring Roger McGuinn’s electric 12 string guitar, launched a unique folk-rock style that was independent from the traditions of Rhythm and Blues. Into the

Psychedelic and Progressive Rock Eras, as bands like Led Zeppelin and Genesis created music of deep mysticism, the 12-string guitar's sound often characterized this expansion of musical meaning.

This new style of rock music depended upon the delicate timbre of the 12-string guitar. With its higher octave strings, it created a harp-like, otherworldly sound that meshed perfectly with rock music's new sensibilities. Accordingly, new techniques, unique structures, and unusual harmonies often defined this new music. Over time, the 12-string style became one of sophistication, where musical meaning was often supported by lyrical subtlety.

This presentation will explore the commonalities that developed into what may be argued is an important subset of psychedelic and progressive rock, defined as much by the instrument and its timbre as by any other single characteristic.

Musical examples will be presented in their entirety via video clips, and the presenter will have a 12-string guitar available if there are questions related to this distinctive instrument.

### **“Searching for Heroes and Villains and other Tropes in the Beach Boys SMiLE!”**

John Warren

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

In 2011 after decades of anticipation, the Beach Boys released a complete collection of recorded material from their long mythologized 1967 album *SMiLE!* in the form of *The SMiLE! Sessions* boxed set. While some music scholars such as Philip Lambert, Daniel Harrison and others have focussed primarily on formal concerns using the typical canonical tools like harmonic analysis, few have written about the expressive aspects of the album as a whole or its individual songs. In the context of 1960s popular music and the prevailing psychedelic aesthetic, *SMiLE!* was produced in an experimental spirit drawing from a wide variety of intersubjectively defined musical styles, genres and conventions, assembled according to what has been referred to as Beach Boys' songwriter Brian Wilson's 'cartoon consciousness.' Building from the previous work of William Echard's 2017 monograph *Psychedelic Popular Music: A History through Musical Topic Theory*, I will argue that Brian Wilson's modular approach to composition resulted in the troping of a range of conventional musical topics, which at times produces a conflicted narrative. A variety of topoi ranging from 18th century sacred chorales, to a cappella barbershop quartet arrangements, to 20th century Hollywood cowboy themes, will be identified at the album level, with greater attention paid to the album's most well-known song "Good Vibrations." Unlike British popular music groups such as the Beatles who were embracing the more "exotic" elements of psychedelia in the recording studio, "Good Vibrations" was built from layers of familiar Americana presented in sonic form, which I hypothesize led to the song's record-breaking success in terms of album sales and radio airplay.

## **“This Sounds Familiar...”: A Model for Tropes in Video Games”**

Ben Major

Royal Holloway, University of London, Egham, UK

Video games are both connected to, and distinct from, other forms of media. Like all media, video games also create, iterate, and develop tropes, in which music and sound are particularly important. Scholars have begun using topic theory as a foundation to discuss musical tropes in games but are hampered by using inconsistent terminology. This paper presents a definition and a model for understanding tropes unique to games.

To propose a unified definition of video game tropes, this paper synthesizes prior research in topic theory (Monelle, 2006; Agawu 2009; Allanbrook, 2014; Hatten, 2014) as the basis for an analytical model. I also delve into game studies (Perron, 2014), and game music research (Atkinson, 2019; Yee, 2020; Bradford, 2020; Lind, 2023) to examine how tropes and their interrelated terms have been used in current game scholarship. I then define video game tropes as being ludo-narrative and present a model for identifying these tropes and their sounds as they are found in games. The proposed model identifies three game elements—sonic, ludic, and narrative—as well as three elemental levels—unit, topic, and process—to account for the myriad formulations and functions of tropes in games.

With a basis in topic theory, this research seeks to clear up the terminological confusion about the term trope in video game discourse. It also assists in the analysis and categorization of tropes as encountered in games. By using the proposed ludo-narrative trope model, researchers can identify game-specific tropes and isolate their constituent elements. This leads to increased understanding of the effective building blocks of the shared lexicon between developers and players. Ultimately, this expanded topic theory approach reveals a fundamental aspect of the communicative and aesthetic dimension of games: how meaning is conveyed to gamers.

## **“Be Afraid. Be Mildly Afraid. Fear as Unease within the Super Mario Bros. Sound”**

Austin Wilson

Michigan State University, East Lansing, MI

Prior research on how emotions are depicted in video games has largely been limited to the study of role-playing games targeted at somewhat older players (Anatone 2023). Little scholarly analysis has been done on how family-friendly video games portray complex emotions. I demonstrate how *Super Mario Bros.* music contextualizes its portrayal of fear within its jovial identity, presenting fear as elements of unease within its light-hearted musical formulae.

First, I build on prior work to establish some characteristics of the broad, cartoonish *Mario* style including easily singable melodies frequently using chromatic lower neighbors (8-bit Music Theory 2017), mostly diatonic harmonies with some chromatic embellishing chords (Lerner 2014; 8-bit Music Theory 2018), extensive use of dance topics (Lerner 2014; Reale 2021), and juxtaposition of different topics, styles, or moods (Lavengood and Williams 2023; Grasso 2020; Schartmann 2015).



Next, following Schartmann (2015) and Hatten (1994) and content by 8-bit Music Theory (2016), I establish elements of “spooky” *Mario* music including emphasis on the note a tritone away from tonic, temporary blurring of the meter, playing with expectations of resolution, chromatic chords that temporarily destabilize tonic, sonorities containing multiple dissonant intervals, and use of “spooky” timbres.

Then, building upon research by Cheng (2013), Roberts (2014), and van Elferen (2016), I compare *Mario* music’s approach to fear to characteristics of horror game music such as the potential absence of melodic and harmonic components, dissonant and/or atonal sounds, industrial or other noises, use of instruments as frightening diegetic sounds, and use of horror film tropes.

The examples in this paper portray fear as unease within the broader *Mario* sound by showing that comedic musical elements permeate even the games’ haunted levels. As a result, *Mario*’s fearful music remains more mildly unsettling than “anxiety”-inducing or “potentially threatening” (Roberts 2014, 149; van Elferen 2016, 41).

### **“Images and Topics in the Soundtrack Album of the *Squid Game* Series”**

Lydia Lee

Oregon State University, Eugene, OR

The relationship between the visual components of a film and the film score has often been described as one of music being subservient to picture, for example Gorbman’s concept of “inaudibility” (Gorbman 1987 and Buhler 2019). But what about situations in which music is primary, such as listening to a film’s or series’ soundtrack album after having watched the film or series? My paper will consider how remembering the image in the Netflix TV series *Squid Game* after having watched the film shape the way one hears the soundtrack. In this paper, I argue that remembering the film can function as a visual sign (together with music) to invoke meanings in soundtracks.

I identify topics in both the quoted music and the original soundtracks by applying Raymond Monelle’s concepts of indexical and iconic topic (2006). Through these concepts, I demonstrate that topics in *Squid Game* evoke not only certain emotions but also make use of specific cultural aspects. The topics underlying the quoted music are interpreted differently from their original eighteenth-century conventions, as the musical meanings communicated through the clips in *Squid Game* have to do with specific elements of Korean culture. For example, the Haydn Trumpet Concerto played through a loudspeaker calls on the knowledge of a specific Korean game show, Jang-hak Quiz, to associate the music with the topic of competition. In similar ways, topics of childhood, identity, and threat are communicated through the soundtrack and memory of images. Through my investigation, I hope to more clearly describe the process of a listener comprehending a film’s soundtrack after having seen the film. This study will add a previously-unexplored perspective to the discourse on the relationship between sound and image in film.

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### **“Virtuosity and its Facets in Polish Piano Concertos of the 21st Century”**

Malwina Marciniak

Feliks Nowowiejski Academy of Music, Bydgoszcz, Poland

Virtuosity is a feature profoundly inscribed in the very existence of the instrumental concerto genre. In early stages of its development defined within remits of the *brillante* (virtuoso) style assumptions, it peaked in the Romantic period, to later be influenced by new articulatory and performance techniques in the 2nd avant-garde of the 20th century. This paper will draw on the concept of virtuosity based on theories of musical *topoi*, from Ratner's reflections on the *brillante* style (1995) later supplemented by Keefe (1998) and Ivanovitch (Mirka 2016), to discussions of virtuosity in the Romantic era (Dickensheets 2012, O'Dea 2000), Joseph Kerman's concept of *virtù* (1999), and new forms of piano virtuosity in the 20th century.

I will then proceed to focus on the virtuosity phenomenon in Polish piano concertos of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I will attempt to formulate the scope of its influence with regard to afore-quoted semiotic theories, and describe its transformation, expansion and evolution – giving rise to questions regarding its functions in the musical work, and challenges faced by virtuoso soloists today.

During the lecture, I will present audio samples and perform excerpts from piano parts of concertos referred to. Materials presented herein constitute an excerpt from the author's doctoral dissertation on contemporary piano concertos in the context of genre transformations and theories of the musical narrative (2023).

## **“Fin de Siècle Russian Topos and Rimsky-Korsakov’s ‘The Golden Cockerel’”**

Jaidan Ursich

University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

Russian composers, including Glinka and The Mighty Five, helped establish a *fin de siècle* Russian nationalistic style in art music through the implementation of idiomatic folk music gestures and other commonly employed musical elements. Scholars, including Richard Taruskin, Barry Bilderback, and Pieter Van Den Toorn, have identified many of these elements, however, they have not provided clear codification of a Russian topic. Likewise, the music of Nikolay Rimsky-Korsakov has been largely ignored when compared to that of his contemporaries, though most research indicates he was heralded as a nationalistic composer.

The purpose of this research was to create an initial working lexicon of the Russian style through a synthesis of the musical elements identified in the extant scholarship with those derived from an analysis of Rimsky-Korsakov’s *The Golden Cockerel*. Among the most important of these lexiconic elements are pentatonic and octatonic scales (particularly when connected to a rotation of thirds), the Russian submediant, interpretations or mutations of folk music, and orientalism. While these gestures on their own are not specifically Russian, when used in conjunction with each other, they generate a strongly nationalistic *topos*.

*The Golden Cockerel*, a musical and theatrical satire of Alexander Pushkin’s 1834 fairytale, is particularly suited to an exploration of this *topos*. Its use of folkloric theme mutations and allusions to traditional rhythmic patterns, orientalism, the Russian sub-mediante, and pentatonic and octatonic-flavored melodies demonstrate Rimsky-Korsakov’s adherence to this nationalist style. Analysis of the work also reveals its colorful intersections between fantasy and the human world to be an ironic social commentary.

Most importantly, this initial lexicon, provides a tool for future scholarship that will be able to refine the definition of the topic through comparisons of other works by Rimsky Korsakov and his contemporaries and potentially provide insights into Stravinsky’s unique brand of nationalism.

## **“Japanese ‘Ma’ as a Topic”**

Anqi Wang

Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ

The Japanese “Ma” encapsulates a momentary pause, an interval, or emptiness, representing essential time and space for life to breathe and connect. In traditional Japanese music, rooted in Noh Theater and instrument playing like Shakuhachi and Koto, “Ma” embodies traits like *senu-hima* (“no-action”) and *riken* (“detached seeing”). “Ma,” as a shared understanding or a topic, extends to contemporary music, as seen in composers like John Cage, Toru Takemitsu, and Toshio Hosokawa. Cage highlights “empty” space as relative to silence, allowing sounds to emerge. Takemitsu integrates silence, akin to life’s rhythms, while Hosokawa connects it with a generative space between sounds, demanding active listening.

“Ma” shapes compositions of Japanese composers, evident at micro and macro levels, influencing rhythm, form, sonority, dynamics, and gestures. My study aims to provide the

audience with insight into Japanese contemporary music through my analysis of “Ma” from the perspective of topic theory. The primary musical example I will focus on is Hitomi Kaneko’s *La réverbération*. Kaneko crafts a sonic landscape of “Ma” where silence becomes a reverberation of time itself. The composition opens with a soft, almost inaudible low D note, gradually growing stronger as dynamic markings synchronize with lengthening rests. Additionally, the concept of “Ma” in time manifests through the nuanced tempo shifts in sonority and the symmetrical formal structure, characterized by minimal sonority alterations at the outset and conclusion, contrasted by swift changes and melodic layering in the middle section. The interplay between absence and presence in spatial terms is deftly conveyed through the dynamic interaction of tension and relaxation in dynamics, timbre, registers, and gestures. For instance, register change, and its corresponding performing gestures lead to an intentional absence of gestures in the lower register during the development section, accentuating the interstitial spaces within the composition.

### **“Death Laughs Last: Chopin’s Scherzi and the Danse Macabre”**

Jessica Castleberry

University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

Frédéric Chopin’s scherzi are frustratingly difficult to parse. Although there is a general consensus that Chopin transformed the genre itself, the question of precisely how, or into what, or how the literal meaning of “joke” is relevant, is consistently avoided. Since they first appeared, writers have used such terms as disturbing, demonic, fantastical, portentous, ironic, scornful, even oneiric to describe them, but the inquiries tend to stop there. Topical analysis confirms these descriptors, identifying many constituent gestures as signifiers of the *Macabre Style*, the constellation of topics that evokes mortality: futile resistance to death; reluctant, grieving obedience to death’s dictates; eventual acceptance, and the promise of mercy and bliss.

The B $\flat$  minor sonata, Op. 35, is surely Chopin’s most substantial essay in the *Macabre Style*, which makes its scherzo movement a natural starting point for an examination of Chopin’s conception of the genre. Stylistic analysis reveals a dense concentration of musical gestures shared with *Ombra*, Demonic Style, and Lullaby—all subcategories of the *Macabre* topos. More specifically, the defining language of this work is rooted in the Danse Macabre, the medieval metaphor for confrontation with inexorable death, and a topic that became widely associated with the scherzo itself. In fusing these styles, Chopin paints a sonic *memento mori* that oscillates between the relentless pursuit of death as a final dance led by legions of reanimated corpses, and the oneiric, consolatory strains of a lullaby gently rocking its charges toward eternal sleep. Ultimately, in this sonata, the scherzo—immediately followed by the most famous funeral march in the repertoire—symbolizes the final struggle in death’s grip. The numerous stylistic parallels with the other scherzi, then, strongly suggest that the scherzo genre itself, for the morbidly fearful Chopin, was an expression of the bitterest reality of the human condition: dust to dust.

## **“A Lisztian Hand Confounds the Balladry - A Look at Embodied Approaches to Ballade No. 2 in B minor”**

Danny Huang

University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, OH

As a pianist, Liszt impressed his listeners beyond the limits of sound and into their gestural and rhetorical imaginations. His studies with Czerny cultivated a pianistic rhetoric of approaching musical ideas, evidenced by Liszt’s sketches and improvisational practices. One technique is using rubato to transform programmatic inspirations. While scholarship has overwhelmingly investigated these issues during Liszt’s “Virtuoso Years”, few have explored them in his Weimar era. My paper explores the significance of Liszt’s evolving virtuosity in shaping his identity as a post-Beethovenian composer of “Philosophical Epics.”

I argue that Liszt’s virtuosity reciprocates the Weimar Classicists’ aesthetics of *Kunstballade*. This paper reviews Liszt’s writings, his student’s reminiscences, and Goethe’s poetic theories to explore how Liszt’s virtuosity in the 1830s and 1840s shaped his piano writing in the 1850s. Using the Second Ballade as a litmus test, I analyze Claudio Arrau’s 1969-to-1983 recordings of the piece. I observe his interpretations of the storm, pastoral, and heroic topics through narrative and lyric modes. I compare Arrau’s style of rubato, touch, and pedaling to his programmatic analysis, which references the myth of Hero and Leander. Referring to Roland Barthes’ “Musica Practica”, the case studies evaluate the embodied engagement with and longevity of this interpretive tradition. Liszt’s virtuosity unifies narrative and lyric time in their play of semiotic codes akin to Goethe’s theory of “Ur-Ei” for Ballad performances. By treating these materials as bookends of a long, storied tradition, this paper explores evidence and dissemination of embodied knowledge for performers accessing a historical lineage.

## **“The Twentieth-Century Lament Topic: Nikolai Medtner’s Antimodernist Elegies”**

Lucy Liu

Texas Tech University, Lubbock, TX

In recent decades, topic theorists have broadened their analytical scope from 18<sup>th</sup> - century music to early-20<sup>th</sup> -century modernist composers’ appropriation of historical topics, ranging from Schoenberg to Stravinsky and beyond (Frymoyer 2017, Johnson 2017, Schumann 2021). These authors read the modernists’ reworkings as ironic, for the process of inserting an “old” signifier into a new language “defamiliarizes” its conventional associations and emphasizes a composer’s distance from the past.

In contrast, I investigate contemporaneous antimodernist composers’ non-ironic treatment of topics—using the “lament” as a test case, because its schematic structure has stayed relatively stable for four centuries. With origins in the late-16<sup>th</sup> century, it flourished in Baroque opera, monody, and ground bass compositions, becoming a convenient vehicle for highly chromatic writing.

While Bernhard 1657, Rosand 1979, Williams 1988, and Caplin 2014 have described the topic’s outer-voice morphology and intra-unit temporal functions, to my knowledge a weighted typology of its essential, frequent, and idiomatic features does not exist. Thus, drawing on a corpus that spans Monteverdi to Mozart, I first offer a multi-parametric description that

encompasses Bass line, Harmonization, Meter, Tempo, Melodic gestures, Texture, Larger formal considerations, and Cadential possibilities.

Pivoting to a case study, I isolate the Russian émigré composer Nikolai Medtner's adaptation of the lament as representative of antimodernism's sincere engagement with the past. Medtner's Two Elegies (op. 59) and elegiac songs (opp. 18/19/28/29) exhibit densely contrapuntal and dissonant writing when employing the schema, which places him within the Monteverdi/Purcell/Bach tradition of text setting. That is, Medtner does not defamiliarize but intensify the topic's passionate, anguished affect: he extends his processors' compositional techniques such as destabilization of the opening tonic, non-standard harmonizations of middle stages ( $\text{^7-b7-46-b6}$ ), and tonic-subdominant reciprocity's larger-scale ambiguity of key. By examining Medtner's dissonant yet controlled counterpoint, a facet of antimodernism's sharpening of ancient modes of expression is uncovered.

### **"Rethinking Sensibility"**

Keri Hui

Hong Kong Baptist University, Kowloon Tong, Hong Kong

Musicologists have increasingly questioned the categorization of sensibility or *Empfindsamkeit* as a topic, emphasizing sensibility's nature being, according to eighteenth-century understanding, a personal character that shaped moral values, individual consciousness, musical imagination, and social connections. As Matthew Head puts it in *The Oxford Handbook of Topic Theory* (2014), "sensibility... was not a musical topic, a style, or a period but the capacity to experience sensations and feelings and thus a foundational concern of art." Given sensibility was a broad phenomenon with localized manifestations, particularly in France, England, and Germany and thus cannot be reduced to the notion of *Empfindsamkeit*, recent research has also proposed treating sensibility as a quality that could be signified by different signifiers and topics. The idea of sensibility's relationship to Romanticism being only evident in literary culture remains challenged, and Enlightenment studies have further reframed the eighteenth century as not just the age of reason but also one of sensibility, even in scientific discourses. In light of the idea that sensibility was a force underpinning the Enlightenment, this paper delves into the culture of sensibility as one characterized by the cultivation of human receptivity, examining how sensibility, a frequently ruminated and debated subject, was understood by poets, novelists, philosophers, politicians, physicians, religious thinkers, and of course, artists. Instead of proposing to expand the topical universe of sensibility or limit the exploration of sensibility by clinging to the idea of a "sensibility" topic with rigid boundaries, it invites listeners to explore how topic theory and various musical topics—both existing ones and ones that have yet to be identified and formulated—may help us understand eighteenth-century sensibility and its impact better.

## **“Topical Tropes in Mozart’s Sonata in D, K. 284”**

Melanie Lowe

Vanderbilt University, Nashville, TN

Inspired by Robert Hatten’s tantalizing assessment of the Classical character variation as a “laboratory for experimentation with topical troping,” this paper offers an analysis and interpretation of the tropological processes in the Andante theme-and-variations finale of Mozart’s “Dürnitz” Sonata, K. 284. The A-section of the rounded binary theme presents unmistakably as a gavotte, but in the B-section, Mozart exploits the oxymoron that lies at the heart of the gavotte’s identity: the dance’s pastoral character is also courtly and flirtatious. The first note of m. 12 is held too long, as it were. What “should” be a half cadence in quarter-note harmonic rhythm is undone by the sighing melody that lingers teasingly on its upper note for more time than the gavotte topic can allow. The extra beat requires an extra *measure* to “fix,” throwing off the phrase rhythm and disrupting the gavotte’s essential symmetry. Mozart leaves this “extra” bar empty so that a pregnant pause immediately follows the indulgent sigh, a brief but unmistakable surfacing of the sensibility style. Mozart retains this rhythmic disruption in all twelve variations, generating progressive amplification of the gavotte’s tropological potential. Following the culmination of spectacular quadruple tropes in Variations 8-11, the final variation, an Allegro minuet, presents a retrospective of the topics and textures explored throughout the set. Notably missing, however, is the gavotte itself. The paper’s conclusion offers an interpretation of this conspicuous drop in tropological processes at the end of a variation set that would otherwise seem a masterclass in topical troping.

## **“Violons en basse as Theological Topic”**

Deborah Kauffman

University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO

French composers from the end of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth made regular use of the accompaniment technique of *violons en basse*, in which a high string part is used as the true bass, thereby restricting the entire musical texture to the range of a violin or viola. Through examining texts of *airs* and the personages who sang them, I have established the use of *violons en basse* in French Baroque opera as a musical topic, one that often evokes a locus of associations around the pastoral. The technique was not used solely in opera, but also in sacred music, where it is seen regularly as early as the 1680s and 90s.

An examination of the texts of a number of *airs* and choruses from French Baroque sacred music that make use of *violons en basse* helps to identify associations evoked by this technique within a sacred context. Topical references in sacred works share some direct correlations with those seen in opera, most particularly in connection with the pastoral. *Violons en basse* was also used in sacred music as a method of depicting allegorical figures such as Faith, Hope, Charity, and Justice. Another association is redemption, in which texts referring to sin are set in contrast to the suggestion of Divine Grace, an allegorical figure evoked by the ethereal quality and high range of the *violons en basse* setting.

The use of *violons en basse* in sacred music is found earlier than in opera, offering a view of its development as a topic. The more it was used, the more its topical associations gravitated toward familiar images of the pastoral: innocence, youth, and the purity of nature.

**“Use of Folk Argentine Topics as an Alternative Idea of Nation in *Las horas de una estancia* op. 11 by Alberto Ginastera”**

Hernan Gabriel Vazquez

Instituto Nacional de Musicología “Carlos Vega,” Buenos Aires, Argentina.

In 1941, Alberto Ginastera received his first international commission, resulting in the creation of *Estancia* op. 8 for the American Ballet Caravan. This work not only marked the beginning of Ginastera’s international recognition but also solidified his connection with Argentine folk music. In 1943, Ginastera composed three works, including *Obertura para el “Fausto criollo”* op. 9 (based on a poem by Estanislao del Campo), *Cinco canciones populares Argentinas* op. 10 (based on traditional texts) and *Las horas de una estancia* (“Times of Day on a Ranch”) op. 11 (based on poems by Silvina Ocampo). While all three works reference rural Argentina, opus 11 distinguishes itself through its music materials, the literary style of the poems, and the dedication.

This paper proposes an interpretation of the song cycle *Las horas de una estancia* as an aesthetic-ideological statement by Ginastera, addressing two significant issues in Argentina’s political and intellectual landscape at the time. Firstly, it explores how the musical content and selected texts relate to ongoing discussions about ideas of nation and tradition within the intellectual sphere. Secondly, it examines certain musical configurations and the dedication to soprano Concepción “Conxita” Badía, linking the work to the community of Spanish exiles in Argentina and their local allies. Throughout, Ginastera’s deliberate use of topics from Argentine musical nationalism is evident, particularly when comparing the relationships and reuse of musical material between the opus 10 and opus 11 song cycles.

This analysis employs a framework derived from social history and topic theory to delve deeper into the contextual significance of Ginastera’s compositional choices, shedding light on the broader socio-political implications of his work within the Argentine cultural landscape.

**“The Fandango as Inherited Topic and Stylistic Intermediary in Ernesto Halffter’s *Sonatina* (1928)”**

David Heinsen

Ohio State University, Columbus, OH

The fandango, perhaps the most famous dance associated with Spain, comprised an important element of musical discourse in 18<sup>th</sup>-century European art music, as evidenced by numerous studies that examine the popular genre as a conventionalized musical topic (Giuggioli 2017; Pessarrodona and Ruiz Mayordomo 2016; Bellman 2012). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, aesthetic hallmarks of Spanish neoclassicism supported the revival of the fandango, functioning as an



inherited form that distilled traditions from the country's Golden Age into a new vision of musical nationalism (Christoforidis 2018; Palacios 2008). Recent research addresses this kind of topical continuity connecting historical past to contemporaneous present, which accounts for compositional innovations that significantly transform the topic's correlations (Schumann 2021; Donaldson 2021; Frymoyer 2017).

In this paper, I analyze a topical token of the inherited fandango in Ernesto Halffter's ballet *Sonatina* (1928), arguing that his idiosyncratic stylization of the topic generates meanings that not only diverge from 18<sup>th</sup>-century practice, but also play an essential role in the composer's negotiation of a modern nationalistic idiom. I situate my analysis in dialogue with the early development of the ballet, when Halffter changed the location of the token from one musical context to another (Menéndez Sánchez 2001): from a suite of Baroque dances where the token functions as an indistinct marker of neoclassicism that mitigates its potential "Spanishness;" to an intermediary between two solo dances that invoke divergent conceptions of Spain in the Baroque keyboard sonatas of Domenico Scarlatti and the modernist Andalusian style of Manuel de Falla (Piquer Sanclemente 2006; Acker 1997). Given that Halffter chose this latter position by the ballet's premiere, I argue that the inherited fandango token assumes a unique role as an inclusive signifier of national identity, where its intermediary position reconciles different representations of Spain into a uniquely modern synthesis.

### **"Mazurka, Flamenco/pre-flamenco and Guitar topics in Manuel M. Ponce's *Mazurca (española)*"**

Jesús Herrera-Zamudio and Bernardino Rodríguez-Espejo  
Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico

Originally written for guitar and later arranged for the piano by Ponce himself, the *Mazurca (española)* was dedicated to the Spanish guitarist Andrés Segovia, as the Mexican composer did with other of his emblematic compositions for guitar. Of the three main topics identifiable in the piece, two of them are included in the title of the piano version: the Mazurka and the Spanish style. In Ponce's piece there are typical elements of the Polish dance, for instance the triple meter and the accent shifted to the weak beats of the bar. Chopin used the mazurka genre as a symbol of his native country and frequently used modal resources. In his *Mazurca (española)*, Ponce also used elements of national—not of Polish or Mexican, but Spanish—music. Several of these national elements are related to Flamenco/pre-flamenco music, such as the Phrygian mode, typical ornamentations (i.e. appoggiaturas and *floreos*), and passages which recall *cante jondo* vocal melodies with guitar accompaniment.

Since the times of Isaac Albéniz, the use of the guitar as an element of inspiration for piano compositions was very frequent, but the case of the *Mazurca (española)* is uncommon: in 1932, Ponce signed a *Mazurka* for guitar in Paris, and published its piano version in 1937. Several elements of the first version of this piece—for example some chords, the extension range of the melody, ornamentations, the use of parallel intervals and chords of more than four sounds (which imply the use of the arpeggio to be played)—make it idiomatic for the guitar. In the piano version, these elements were retained and became reminiscent of the guitar.

This paper presents a study of how Mazurka, Flamenco/pre-flamenco and Guitar topics coexist in this work and it includes some interpretative considerations (piano and guitar), which arise from this approach.

**“Opaque No More: A Taxonomy of Musical Gestures to Elucidate Expression and Structural Clarity in the Music of Charles Wuorinen”**

Carl Bolleia

William Paterson University, Wayne, NJ

The music of Charles Wuorinen is often regarded as being cold, opaque, and marked as difficult to listen to. His music, however, is filled with wide-ranging expressivity that his commitment (and reputation) as a staunch modernist seemed to overshadow. By curating a taxonomy of musical gestures in Wuorinen’s music, I demonstrate how listening, learning and interpreting with topics in mind can aid in the understanding, communication and reception of one of Wuorinen’s most important yet overlooked principles: a continuity with the diatonic past. Performances include excerpts from *The Self Similar-Waltz* and a excerpts and a complete performance of *The Blue Bamboula*.

**“Performing Robert Ramskill’s Preludes for Piano”**

Julian Hellaby

Coventry, UK

British composer Robert Ramskill (b. 1950) is best known for his educational output and his skilful orchestral arrangements for the BBC. However, he has also composed concert music, his *Preludes for Piano* (2022) being a recent addition. Following a well-established pathway, the 24 preludes cover every major and minor key and they are avowedly accessible in style. Recent work on the interface between topic theory and performance has made me ever more alert to this aspect of musical communication and it is evident that the preludes draw on a variety of popular topics including dance types (such as waltz and tango), and styles (such as blues, hymnody, close harmony, pictorialism) whilst others include a clear narrative element with inspiration found in literary works as diverse as Jorge Luis Borges’ *La muerte y la brújula* and Lewis Carroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. Given the extraordinary diversity of the preludes – unified nonetheless by a “composerly idiolect” (Agawu, 2009, p. 43) – the challenge to the pianist is not just to overcome the considerable technical demands of the keyboard writing but, in the absence of any established performance tradition, to identify the topic and/or narrative character of each prelude and project this in performance so that in the words of Robert Hatten, we are not “merely conduits through which a preconceived set of notational instructions is ... transmitted but creative interpreters who bring to bear their stylistic competency” (2018, p. 219).

In this recital I will introduce and perform four of the preludes: C minor ( ... ‘*la muerte y la brújula*’), F major ( ... ‘*how shall I sing that majesty*’), G-sharp minor ( ... ‘*nuestras vidas son los rios*’), and E-flat minor ( ... ‘*won’t you join the dance*’).

## **“Topic and Narrative in Robert Schumann’s *Walzer*, Op. 124, No. 4”**

Timothy McKinney  
Baylor University, Waco, TX

The first of three *Walzer* movements from Robert Schumann’s *Albumblätter*, op. 124, presents fascinating manipulations of the waltz paradigm that forge a musical narrative and invite the performer or listener to ponder its meaning. Other than the consistent oom-pah-pah of the accompaniment, the opening of this ternary waltz is far from the invitation to dance we might expect from the genre. Originally intended for *Carnaval* and perhaps ironically marked “Lebhaft,” the A section sounds angry and even menacing with its A minor key, forte dynamic, sforzando accents, angular melody, and augmented-sixth and Neapolitan sixth chords. The first eight-bar phrase begins with a three-bar cadential progression, highly irregular from a hypermetrical standpoint for the genre and strongly suggesting that we are entering a story *in medias res*, after the action precipitating this baleful opening has taken place. The initial harmony is an augmented-sixth chord (F-A-C-D#), though on the downbeat we hear only the bass F and melody A. The contrasting B section begins on this same F-A dyad, yet with a direct modulation to F major. The music becomes more on-topic as the dynamic drops to piano, the harsh intervals of the opening motive (an enharmonic variant of one of Schumann’s Sphinxes) are reconfigured and softened, and an echo of a more archetypal waltz ensues. “Echo” is the operative word here, as the music suggests a shift into memory or fantasy, perhaps a reminiscence prior to the event prompting such an angry response or perhaps a denial of it. The return of the A section is identical to the first, returning us to the wrathful present by again pivoting on the F-A dyad. In addition to presenting my own analytical reading of musical narrative in this atypical waltz, I will review previous scholarly commentary and several readings recorded by professional performers.

## **“Chivalric Style and Beyond”**

Marie Sumner Lott  
Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA

In a 1995 article on the “chivalric style” of Schumann and Brahms, Jonathan Bellman explored a particular compositional technique developed by these composers to evoke a heroic vision of the Middle Ages. In songs and choral works that set texts dealing with valiant knights crusading on horseback and the pageantry of chivalric tournaments and ancient military grandeur, Schumann and Brahms used distinctive galloping rhythms, clarion triadic harmonies, and a quasi-modal progression of diatonic chords to evoke the pre-modern era in the ears and minds of listeners. Subsequent writers about Medievalism in nineteenth-century music have identified the style in a wide range of Medievalist works by other nineteenth-century composers, but Brahms’s use of this style, particularly in his instrumental music, has yet not been the subject of additional, more thorough, examination and interpretation.

Brahms’s portrayals of the Middle Ages changed over the course of his career, from his youthful Romantic idealization of Minnelieder in the piano sonatas op. 1, 2, and 5 composed in 1853, to a more sophisticated combination of topics in his mature chamber and symphonic

works. When Brahms evoked the Middle Ages in music of the 1860s and '70s, he did so in part to highlight tensions between his musical ideals and the musical and cultural heritage that he sought to preserve and advance. Significantly, his first essay in each of the major Beethovenian genres (piano sonata, string quartet, symphony) includes a striking reference to the Middle Ages, not all of them in the “chivalric style,” among gestures that evoke more recent musical icons (Schumann, Chopin, Beethoven, Schubert). The Piano Quintet, op. 34, provides a hitherto unexplored case study, in which Brahms’s expert interweaving of different topics and styles demonstrates his devotion to the music and ideals of Schubert and Schumann in particular.

### **“Brahms and the Hunting Topic - A Tale of Two Hunts”**

Drew Stephen

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The hunting topic is deeply rooted in the practices and sounds of the eighteenth-century courtly European hunt. For Haydn, Mozart, and their audiences, there was a clear connection between the hunting topic and an activity enjoyed by the nobility and staged for their entertainment. This connection weakened over the nineteenth century as hunting practices changed and the elaborate courtly hunts of the past were less frequently staged. The hunting topic maintained its connection to past traditions yet also gained new meanings derived from poetry, folksong, and folklore. The changes created new possibilities for composers but also created challenges for listeners today who are unfamiliar with the full range of cultural meanings conveyed by the hunt in the nineteenth century.

I address this problem by considering two works by Brahms that evoke the different meanings of the hunting topic. Brahms wrote the Serenade Op. 11 1858 at the court of Prince Leopold III in Detmold. The hunting topic in the Serenade reflects the prince’s passion for the activity and an assertion of the court’s aristocratic authority and power. This differs from the Horn Trio Op. 40 which was written in Baden-Baden in 1865 where aristocratic hunting restrictions were abolished to enable the participation of amateur huntsmen who used simpler methods and maintained their connection to the hunt through songs and literature. Despite expressive meanings associated with nostalgia, loss, and melancholy, the Trio is frequently misinterpreted within the conventions of the courtly hunt and thus misunderstood. I demonstrate how social settings and context produce different meanings in both works by considering hunting practices as they were understood in the nineteenth century. This empowers today’s listener to hear and understand both works in relation to the rich associations that the music would have conjured for Brahms and his audience.