

IMS Study Group “Global History of Music”



Study Session 2025

Silences and Echoes in the Archives

IMS Intercongressional Symposium, Valencia, 11 July 2025, 9am–12noon

Facultat de Filologia, Traducció i Comunicació, Universitat de Valencia

This session asks and discusses how researchers deal with the metaphorical “silences” or limitations of their source materials, grapple with unknowns, and glean traces of past musical practices or sound-worlds, while considering how the constitution of the archive and its structural exclusions can be understood. The idea of “echoes” in the archive might be understood as the circulation and narrativisation of events across different historical periods, cultural geographies, and discursive domains, including the ways in which historical events are remembered and resound in the present.

Within musicology and ethnomusicology, a number of scholars are constantly contemplating new ways of engaging with and critically interpreting records of the past, particularly those produced in the contexts of colonial and imperial histories. For example, Philip Burnett, Erin Johnson-Williams, and Yvonne Liao have recently examined the interface of sound and silence in written records of colonial interactions (“[Music, Empire, Colonialism: Sounding the Archives](#)”, *Postcolonial Studies* 26, no. 3 (2023): 345–59).

Beyond these disciplines, the challenges of vanishing points in the historical record have also been addressed by approaches including reading against or along the archival grain (Inga Clendinnen, Ann Laura Stoler) or critical fabulation (Saidiya Hartman). Practitioners of “Historically Informed Performance” have also long engaged in practices of reconstruction and elaboration, fully aware of the transient nature of the art-form that they study – especially prior to the threshold moments of the advents of reliable sound and video recording. In all these ways, and many more, silences and echoes surround and shape scholarly engagements with the archive.

This Study Session asks the following questions (amongst others):

- What constitutes an archive or an archival source in global music history?
- How do we select our archival sources, and what kinds of factors (for example: conceptual, pragmatic, political) shape our choices?
- Are archival “silences” more likely in certain fields of research compared to others (for example, in chronological or geographical terms), and how can they be mitigated – or, in certain cases, embraced and recognised for an important message that they bring?
- What methods can be employed by global music historians in their approaches to archival research?
- How do we pace archival research, and know when or how to stop searching?
- What is the relationship between sounds in performance and their echoes in the archive?
- How do the echoes of historical voices resonate across different archives and periods, including the present?

SCHEDULE*Friday 11 July 2025*

- 9am–9.10am **Introduction to Study Session**
David R. M. Irving (ICREA & IMF, CSIC), Chair of Study Group
- 9.10am–10.20am **Individual Papers**
Chair: Maria Alexandra Iñigo Chua (University of Santo Tomas)
- Francesco Finocchiaro (Conservatorio 'G. Rossini' Pesaro):
“Echos from the Silents: The ‘Mo Collection’ at the Milan Conservatory”
- Nihan Tahtaişleyen (Orient-Institut Istanbul): “Navigating Methodological Boundaries of the Archival Process” [online]
- Magdalini Kalopana (Department of Music Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens): “Confronting Archival Silences and Echoes: Towards a Dynamic Model of Catalogue Systematisation”
- 10.20am–10.30am *BREAK*
- 10.30am–11.30am **Discussion Panel**
Chair: Jen-yen Chen (National Taiwan University)
- Diana Abbani (Forum Transregionale Studien & MECAM): “Traces in the Sound: Following Baidaphon across Silences, Songs, and Shadows” [online]
- Vanessa Paloma Elbaz (University of Cambridge): “La Voz de Mi Madre en la Mía: Uncovering Sephardi Archives of Self” [online]
- Jann Pasler (University of California, San Diego; Principal Investigator, ERC advanced project MusiCol (“The Sound of Empire in 20th-century Colonial Cultures: Rethinking History through Music”): “Archival Research as Fieldwork in Rabat, Tunis, and Beyond”
- 11.30am–12noon **Final Discussion & Administrative Matters**
Chair: David R. M. Irving (ICREA & IMF, CSIC)

ABSTRACTS

INDIVIDUAL PAPERS

Francesco Finocchiaro

Conservatorio 'G. Rossini' Pesaro

“Echos from the Silents: The ‘Mo Collection’ at the Milan Conservatory”

The ‘Mo Collection’, housed at the Milan Conservatory, is the legacy of Ettore Mo, who worked as a cinema pianist between the 1920s and 30s. As is often the case with atypical musical sources of uncertain epistemological status, this collection of thousands of pieces of stock photoplay music from over fifty Italian and foreign publishers has been overlooked until now, with parts of it being never catalogued in the Italian National Bibliographic System.

This corpus of texts offers us an insight into a (largely forgotten) system of theoretical and practical knowledges behind the use of musical accompaniments for cinema. The collection demonstrates significant potential as a source of cultural information: it resonates with musical motifs internationally associated with stereotypical diegetic situations, including social settings, exotic characterisations, and the codification of gender roles. Its investigation allows us to map the circulation of topoi within a film-music common practice across the silent and sound film era.

Nihan Tahtaşleyen

Orient-Institut Istanbul

“Navigating Methodological Boundaries of the Archival Process”

This presentation examines the limitations in the fieldwork conducted by German ethnomusicologists Kurt and Ursula Reinhard in Turkey between 1955 and 1979, through the audiovisual materials preserved in the Berlin Phonogram Archive. As institutional researchers trained in the German tradition of comparative musicology, unfamiliar with the field and lacking linguistic fluency, the Reinhards attempted to align themselves with the evolving discipline of ethnomusicology. Funded by the DFG and supported by state institutions, they conducted fieldwork in selected regions, excluding certain ethnic and religious groups under the guidance of official intermediaries, with the aim of mapping “Turkish music.” Their publications based on this curated data became the earliest sources on Turkish music in global music history literature. However, these contributions also raise questions about what was excluded or overlooked during the research and archival process. This presentation, from the perspective of a researcher with field experience who has worked with this archive, seeks to explore what the archive contains and what remains unspoken and why, and to reflect on methods of knowledge production that grapple with the endless possibilities these silences entail.

Magdalini Kalopana

Department of Music Studies, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens

“Confronting Archival Silences and Echoes: Towards a Dynamic Model of Catalogue Systematisation”

This paper presents a case study addressing how researchers can confront archival silences and echoes through critical reflection on cataloguing methodologies. Focusing on the typology of thematic and non-thematic catalogues, it builds upon the model of Ludwig von Köchel and 20th-century scholarship by King, Brook, and Viano. Early catalogues of Greek composers (Kalomiris, Mitropoulos) marked the first efforts to align archival source study with global music historiography. Challenges arose when attempting to catalogue a composer’s complete œuvre, exposing gaps (silences) or distortions (echoes) between archival material, catalogue structure, and historiography. Key methodological questions concerned the definition of descriptive fields and the systematisation of works beyond opus-based or chronological models. Drawing from the compilation of catalogues for Dragatakis, Kalogridou, and Sofianopulo, this paper proposes a flexible model that both systematises content and adapts to archival realities—serving as a research tool and pedagogical aid for early-career scholars confronting the complexities of musical archives.

DISCUSSION PANEL

Diana Abbani

Merian Center for Advanced Study in the Maghreb (MECAM)

“Traces in the Sound: Following Baidaphon across Silences, Songs, and Shadows”

In this short intervention, I will reflect on my experience researching Baidaphon, a company that operated between Beirut, Cairo, Berlin, and beyond, and its scattered archive made of sound, gossip, and transregional circulation. Working with phonograph records produced and sold across the Mediterranean, I often encountered silences: missing documentation, invisible voices, and erased political meanings. Much of Baidaphon’s history was only sporadically recorded, with traces dispersed across places and incomplete records. What remains are scattered songs, fragments, and gaps. I will explore what it means to follow sound instead of paper, and how listening closely to what is missing can open up new ways of thinking about archives, memory, and history.

Vanessa Paloma Elbaz

University of Cambridge

“La Voz de Mi Madre en la Mía: Uncovering Sephardi Archives of Self”

Sound often appears as the core for continuity. I call this “Sontinuity” (Elbaz, 2024) explaining sound in embodied experience as archive. Because of the worldwide dispersion of tangible Sephardi archives, I propose thinking beyond familiar formats of archive to methodologically model what might appear as an inexistent archive, or "other archives" (El Guabli, 2023). Through a slowly layered and consistent gathering of objects, sounds, memory, expression, ideas, experiences, and contemporary iterations of creative activations from archival materials, Sephardi cultural circulation, memory and creativity provides a phenomenological archive. Engaging with the idea of voice, and everything contained within it, as archive, uncovers the potentiality of Sephardi archives of self.

Jann Pasler

University of California, San Diego; Principal Investigator, ERC advanced project MusiCol (“The Sound of Empire in 20th-century Colonial Cultures: Rethinking History through Music”)

“Archival Research as Fieldwork in Rabat, Tunis, and Beyond”

Colonial archives across North Africa do not facilitate study of musical life. To locate, navigate, and interpret textual, visual and aural traces and how contexts shape meaning, I pursue research as a kind of fieldwork, characterised by “immersion” (Stoler 2009). This requires being open to messy complexity and contradictions, exploring what’s available, included and excluded, and what insights this might generate. Methodologically, I undertake contrapuntal investigation of state and private, national and municipal (especially in Tunis), European and non-European archives, alongside diplomatic, missionary, education, military, theater, recording, radio, and audio archives—as well as a comparative approach (especially in Morocco) to the categories of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, Political Affairs, Indigenous Affairs, Sultan Affairs, and Historical Monuments. Studied across the empire, this can reveal not only the power French settlers deployed in diverse ways, but also the considerable agency of local elites and, importantly, indigenous musicians, long in the shadows of history.

To facilitate future research, my ERC project MusiCol is creating an annotated, open access collection of its source materials.
