



IMS Study Group “Global History of Music”

Study Day 2026–2027

Technology and Agency in Global Music History

The Study Group “Global History of Music” of the International Musicological Society (IMS) invites proposals for its forthcoming Study Day, to take place online on **Thursday 21 January 2027** with the theme “Technology and Agency in Global Music History”. This event will consider musical and sonic technologies in their broadest sense, asking what role they have played in global histories of music and sound, how they shape methodological and theoretical approaches to the field, and what their implications are for understandings of human and nonhuman agency.

The day builds on scholarship in diverse interrelated fields, aiming to add new perspectives to ongoing debates. Recording technologies have long been central to the history of ethnomusicology, and have more recently been analysed in relation to both the expansion of and resistance to global capitalist and colonial networks (Ospina Romero 2026; Denning 2015), raising crucial questions about the relationships between technology and political agency. Musical instruments and related technologies are meaningful objects—or nonhuman actors—that serve multiple functions beyond simply producing sound, as scholarship in the history of science and critical organology has highlighted (Gribenski 2023; Tresch & Dolan 2013; Bates 2012). Moreover, the material and ecological processes involved in creating musical and sonic technologies have come under increasing scrutiny as products of complex environmental and political histories that involve multiple human and nonhuman actors (Gribenski, Pantalony & Tkaczyk 2025; Williams 2024; Devine 2019). The study of objects and their circulation has long been an important part of global history (Findlen 2021; Gerritsen & Riello 2015), while changing ideas about the agential relationship between humans and things have stimulated a variety of theoretical debates and models such as actor-network theory (Latour 2005) and object-oriented ontology (Bennett 2010; Harman 2018). Digitization has transformed research methods in all fields of musicology, and in global music history it has had a major impact on connectivity and the accessibility of sources. Meanwhile, the unprecedented development and rapid rise of AI promises—or threatens—to reconstitute the field even more radically. Added to all these areas of enquiry are important ethical issues that include the use of technologies as means of extraction, questions of access and profit, and the ownership and repatriation of musical objects (including recordings).

Key questions to be addressed include the following:

- What forms of agency are involved in the development, circulation, and application of musical and sonic technologies across global historical spaces?
- How are musical and sonic technologies connected to the expansion of and resistance to colonialist, capitalist, socialist, or other global networks?
- What role have musical instruments and related technologies played in global encounters and entanglements, and how has agency been (re)configured in these processes?
- What are the methodological and epistemological implications of considering the global history of musical and sonic technologies from material and environmental perspectives?
- How might theoretical understandings of technology and nonhuman agency be enriched by the study of global music histories, and vice versa?
- How have digital technologies shaped the practice and conceptualization of global music history, and what consequences might new developments in AI have for the field?
- To what extent have technologies facilitated extractivist practices in global music history, and how might they serve the goals of open digital access, collaboration, or reparative research?

Proposals are invited for individual papers of 20 minutes (followed by 10 minutes of discussion), or roundtables of 90 minutes (including discussion) with three speakers. Abstracts of 300 words, accompanied by name(s), affiliation(s), and contact details of the author(s), should be sent to globalhistory@musicology.org by **13 November 2026**. Programme committee: Jacob Olley and David R. M. Irving (convenors), Jen-yen Chen, Maria Alexandra Iñigo Chua, and Miranda B. T. Sousa.