

Amplification and Everyday Life Conference

Speaker Biographies and Abstracts

Anthony Gritten

“Do Cacti Really Need Amplification? John Cage’s Ecological Turn”

Throughout his life John Cage toyed with amplification, ranging from the exploration of small, quiet sounds in Cartridge Music through to the dissemination of large, loud sounds around communal spaces in Musicircus. This paper focuses specifically on the use of amplification in a group of experimental works for natural materials. In *Child of Tree, Branches, and Inlets* (1975, 1976, 1977), Cage amplifies certain plants as a means of ensuring sound production during the indeterminate performance improvisation, specifying “cartridges or cartridge-like means involving an ‘alligator’ connection”. Cacti are singled out, despite having the most conventional acoustic envelope of all the plants specified by Cage and despite requiring the most conventional mode of sonic production (like a guitarist or harpsichordist, the performer plucks the spines).

This paper reads Cage’s triptych in the light of contemporaneous ecological and environmental developments (reassessments around the Thoreau centenary, the activism of Carson’s *Silent Spring*, governmental policies following the OPEC oil crisis), the emergence of new forms of technological modernity post-McLuhan, and the experimentation with new mediated subjectivities post-Foucault. The question is whether Cageian amplification during the 1970s resisted the prevailing direction of travel or contributed to the broader scientific search for alternative modes of inhabiting the sonic biosphere above and beyond Cage’s own personal mysticism. The aim is to problematise Cage’s iconic claims that music is “inherent” in everyday life and that amplifications are “extensions of our nervous systems” (the latter claim adopted from McLuhan), using subsequent work on distributed and enactive cognition and on the politics of amplification. While, for Cage himself, turning to amplification may have seemed to solve certain aesthetic and political problems, the twenty-first century requires a different kind of amplified and ecological attunement to plants and to the planet.

Anthony is the Head of Undergraduate Programmes at the Royal Academy of Music, London, UK. His published work includes edited volumes on *Music and Gesture* and on *Performance Technology*, essays on Collaboration, Distraction, Empathy, Entropy, Ergonomics, Listening, Problem Solving, Timbre, and Trust in performance, and articles

on Adorno, Debussy, Delius, Gadamer, Heidegger, Lyotard, Nancy, Stravinsky, and several essays on John Cage.

Leila Tayeb

“Birds in the Park: Amplified Sound and the Construction of Nature in Doha”

One day last winter, while out for an afternoon run in my local Doha park, I noticed that the bird sounds seemed louder than usual. Easily distracted, I veered off the jogging path toward the source of the sound, looking for the speakers from which I knew the birdsong emanated, but which I had never specifically looked for before. For a moment I thought they might be embedded in the grass, a wild thought made less unlikely by the air-conditioning vents that some days poured cool air upwards along the edges of the path. Their location on a set of white poles suddenly became apparent when the sound switched from ambient to directed; the birds—all at once—stopped, and made way for a voice reminding park goers of the rules of “public hygiene” and the fees associated with violating them. After the rules, the birds returned.

The proposed presentation unpacks the construction of bird-filled soundscapes in Doha and situates these acoustic practices in relation to those in other urban contexts. How do the administrations tasked with making decisions about these “natural” soundscapes—which recordings to use, how loud to set them, where and how to position their sources—see their purposes? Are they meant to “calm” park users, or encourage “good behavior,” as local discussion forums suggest? And how do park visitors think and feel about them, as they suspend disbelief or chuckle or don’t notice at all? (One interlocutor describes her toddler’s exclamation at the dissonant experience: “Mama, birds! All gone.”) To get at these questions, I will work with students in my undergraduate Sound and Society class this spring semester, undertaking observations in outdoor parks around the city and in the Hamad Airport’s “Orchard” indoor greenscape. Together we will consider the politics of these urban birdscapes, taking into account Gulf colonial history and neoliberalism in relation to ecological practice, nation branding, and the construction of public space.

Leila Tayeb is Assistant Professor of Performance Studies at Northwestern University in Qatar. She received her PhD in performance studies from Northwestern University and holds MAs in performance studies from New York University and international affairs from The New School. Prior to joining NU-Q, Tayeb held positions as Humanities Research Fellow for the Study of the Arab World at NYU Abu Dhabi and Stanford Taylor Postdoctoral Associate in Music and Islam in the Contemporary World at Cornell University. With a primary focus in performance and politics in contemporary Libya, Tayeb’s writing has appeared in the *Middle East Journal of Culture and Communication*, *Lateral*, and the *Arab Studies Journal*, among others. She is a founding co-editor of *Lamma: A Journal of Libyan Studies*.

Rupert Till

“The Role of Voltage-Controlled Amplifiers in Synthesizers”

Voltage Controlled Amplifiers (VCAs) are fundamental components in analogue and digital synthesizer design, serving as dynamic modulators of signal amplitude and enabling expressive sound shaping. This paper explores the multifaceted role of VCAs within synthesizer architectures, examining their technical operation, historical development, and creative applications in music production.

The study begins by outlining the basic principles of VCAs, detailing how input control voltages govern output signal levels, thus facilitating real-time modulation of loudness, timbre, and envelope characteristics. The integration of VCAs with envelope generators and low-frequency oscillators is analysed, highlighting their capacity to produce nuanced articulation and rhythmic variation in synthesised sounds.

A historical perspective traces the evolution of VCAs from early modular systems to contemporary digital implementations, emphasising key innovations that have expanded their functionality and reliability. The paper reviews seminal synthesizer models, such as the Moog and Roland series, to illustrate how VCA design choices have influenced the sonic identity of electronic music genres.

Empirical analysis is presented through case studies of modern synthesizer workflows, demonstrating how VCAs are employed in synthesis contexts. The research investigates the impact of VCA topology—such as linear versus exponential response curves—on musical expressivity and performance dynamics.

Finally, the paper discusses emerging trends, including the revival of interest in modular synthesizer technology, exploring VCAs as versatile tools for sound designers and musicians, shaping the evolution of synthesizer technology and its creative potential.

This research contributes to a deeper understanding of VCAs, advocating for their continued innovation and integration in future synthesizer development.

Professor Rupert Till is Head of the Department of Music and Design Arts in the School of Arts & Humanities, within the Media, Humanities and the Arts division. In this role, he provides academic leadership across music and design disciplines, overseeing teaching, research development, and strategic planning within the department.

Alongside his departmental leadership, Professor Till is actively involved in institutional governance and international engagement, contributing to senior leadership meetings and initiatives that support global collaboration and recruitment. His work reflects a strong commitment to interdisciplinary practice and the development of creative arts education within a humanities context. Professor Till is based within the School of Arts

& Humanities and works closely with colleagues across academic and professional services to enhance the profile, impact, and international reach of music and design arts.

Sidney König

“(Bad) Monkey Business: The Amplification of Used Gear Products in Guitar YouTube Discourses”

In March of 2023, popular YouTube channel JHS Pedals - run by guitar pedal producer, collector and content creator Josh Scott - released a video comparing a number of \$1.000+ pedals to a \$40, easily available overdrive pedal called DigiTech Bad Monkey, coming to quite similar results. As a direct result of this video, the prices for used Bad Monkey pedals on online market places more than quadrupled over night. This substantial shift in the used gear market in turn led to a plethora of reactions among online guitar communities, many of whom were critical of brazenness of vendors and the presumed gullibility of consumers. My presentation takes this situation and uses it to provide a deeper look into how amplification, both in a literal and metaphorical sense, not only represents a central aspect of guitar culture, but is also one of its most conflict-laden issues. Based on data collected through netnography and approached via discourse analysis, I examine the JHS videos involving the Bad Monkey pedal as well the ensuing reactions (YouTube comments and videos, articles, and price shifts in the used pedal market) as a significant discursive event for the online guitar community. I illustrate how this discursive event not only led to lasting changes in the used pedal market, but also created a new awareness about the growing role and impact of gear-focused YouTube content among content creators, audiences, specialized press, online market places for used gear, and gear producers. I show how the discursive event caused by JHS’s video can be read as an increasing tendency toward reflection among video producers and audiences, regarding the power of grassroots-produced YouTube videos to amplify narratives surrounding particular types of gear, as well as the actual rather than the mythical factors involved in the shaping of amplified guitar tone.

Sidney König is a post-doctoral research associate at the Carl von Ossietzky University of Oldenburg. He is an ethnomusicologist focusing on popular music and subculture through the approaches of narrative research. He has published on progressive rock, German leftwing, rock music, and music and the memory of WWII. His research interests include music and politics, metal studies, guitar culture and music and narrative.

Jayme Kurland

“From the Sewing Machine to the Stratocaster and the Super Amp: Refashioning Women’s Labor at Fender”

How does the history of the electric guitar change when we consider the women who made the electronic components which made them sound? In the midcentury, many electric guitar and amplifier manufacturers relied on women to fabricate the electronic components of their products. Guitar manufacturers Fender, Gibson and Ornstons recruited women workers, as did amplifier manufacturers Peavey, Vox, and Marshall. Women were at the center of the manufacturing of amplification technologies, creating the sounding components of the guitars that would transform music.

At Fender Electric Instruments Company (1946-1965), many women workers specialized in either handwinding and assembling electromagnetic pickups or wiring amplifiers point to point. The combination of these single coil pickups and tube amplifiers embody a nostalgic sound, the sound of early rock and roll. Musicologist Tara Rogers notes in *Pink Noises* that the early Fender instruments had a “distinctive, prized tone” which has been attributed to the “American original inventor” Leo Fender, not the electronics workers in his factory, whose individual and idiosyncratic approaches to their tasks actually account for them.

In this presentation, I will illuminate who the women of Fender were, and examine the skills they brought to their work. Fender’s pickup winding machines were made of sewing machine motors and pedals, equipment that many of the company’s electronics specialists knew well. Oral histories bring the perspectives of these workers into dialog about their labor, revealing how the majority Mexican American women workers who wound pickups for Fender were skilled at sewing, a craft which requires considerable practice, planning, precision, and engineering. The Fender company benefited from their ability to problem solve and fix finicky machines, find better ways to complete their tasks, and recruit and train women from their familial and social spheres. Their expertise both illuminates and complicates fetishistic discourses about their labor.

Jayne Kurland is a Ph.D. candidate in American History at George Mason University, where she is currently writing her dissertation, "Instrumental Women: Amplifying Women's Labor at Fender Electric Instruments Company (1946-1965)". From 2024-2025, Kurland was a Jane and Morgan Whitney predoctoral fellow at The Metropolitan Museum of Art, where she worked with the Museum's new collection of over 500 guitars. A public historian, she has worked in curatorial roles with musical instrument collections at the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Musical Instrument Museum in Phoenix. Kurland earned her bachelor's and master's degrees in music history from the University of Oregon and Arizona State University, respectively. She also serves as the official liaison between the American Musical Instrument Society and the Society for Ethnomusicology. Kurland is the founder of the digital history website InstrumentalWomen.org, which amplifies the contributions of women to the histories of musical instrument manufacturing, past and present.

Elisabeth Pfeiffer

“Amplified Encounters: Integrating Electric Ukulele into an Acoustic Ukulele Ensemble Through Collaborative Improvisation”

This presentation examines a practice-based case study exploring the integration of an amplified electric ukulele within the predominantly acoustic Vienna Ukulele Orchestra, in the context of the Vienna Ukulele CineNights performance series. While the ukulele is often associated with acoustic performance cultures, contemporary popular music practices increasingly embrace electronic modification, amplification, and hybrid sound aesthetics. This research investigates how these contrasting sonic identities can coexist and enrich one another in collaborative improvisatory settings.

The study is guided by three interconnected research questions:

How can the distinctive sonic characteristics, such as sustain, extended dynamic range and the use of effects, of an amplified electric ukulele expand or transform the established acoustic ukulele ensemble sound?

Which musical, technological, and spatial factors enable effective artistic integration between amplified and acoustic sound sources?

How do performer and listener perceptions of volume, timbre, and “noise” influence the balance and aesthetic acceptance of amplified interventions?

Drawing on rehearsal documentation and performer reflections, the project investigates structured improvisation guided by concise musical material arranged on a time-line score and is influenced by the time-based structures of John Cage. This format enables performers to negotiate roles, density, and dynamics in real time while still adhering to overarching form and narrative continuity and enables live negotiation of sonic identities, allowing the ensemble to explore shifts between textural blending, foreground-background dynamics, and deliberate sonic contrast.

The research highlights challenges related to amplification levels, microphone bleed, effects selection, and venue acoustics, as well as creative opportunities such as expanded tonal palettes and new improvisatory roles for the electric ukulele.

This paper contributes to emerging scholarship around the ukulele in various solo and ensemble settings and offers practical insights for educators, arrangers, and performers who wish to expand the ukulele’s artistic possibilities while maintaining ensemble cohesion. Ultimately, this case study demonstrates how amplified and acoustic soundscapes can coexist as complementary partners in a shared musical narrative, supporting inclusive and forward-looking ukulele performance practice.

Elisabeth Pfeiffer majored in classical guitar, both at Lawrence University, Appleton, WI, USA and Hochschule für Musik, Würzburg, Germany. In 2013 she took up a ukulele and never looked back. Since, she has written three method books on strumming and

picking techniques and fretting concepts. Since 2020 she has published various repertoire books for ukulele solo, including transcriptions of Renaissance guitar literature, as well as extensive collections of her own Ukulele etudes. On stage she performs solo arrangements of Pop & Rock Songs, Renaissance Music and Neue Musik. She is working to expand the solo repertoire for the ukulele with her own works and by commissioning compositions. Elisabeth is currently a PGR at the University of Surrey and has been teaching ukulele didactics and performance at the ZHdK Zurich between 2023 and 2025.

Jacob Kingsbury Downs

“Miniaturized Amplification, Enforced Overhearing, and the Phenomenology of ‘Loudcasting’ on British Public Transport”

Smartphone speakers are one of the most ubiquitous yet understudied amplification technologies in contemporary life. In this paper, I examine what has been termed ‘loudcasting’—the practice of playing sound from mobile devices without headphones—on British public transport. Analysing data from a large-scale mixed-methods survey (n > 2,500) and a smaller corpus of in-depth interviews with public transport users in the south of England, I investigate how miniaturized amplification technologies are reshaping sonic–social negotiations in shared transit spaces.

Loudcasting is characterized by sonic leakage: personal sound permeates shared space, subjecting fellow passengers to enforced overhearing. I show that, in perceptual terms, loudcasting represents a distinct sonic phenomenon, differentiated from ambient noise not by volume but by its technological mediation and acoustic signature. Participants often describe how the tinny, timbrally sharp quality of phone speakers—compounded, in the case of short-form streaming, by algorithmic unpredictability—affords forms of perceptual intrusion, producing affective responses ranging from irritation to acute distress. For neurodivergent passengers especially, loudcasting can represent an accessibility concern in everyday life.

Participants also interpret loudcasting through socio-spatial logics, describing how other passengers ‘take up space’ and enact modes of sonic territorialization. The enforced co-presence of public transport—enclosed, inescapable, and often temporally extended—can intensify these situational dynamics. However, I nuance these observations by demonstrating that moral hierarchies distinguish more ‘necessary’ amplification (brief calls, childcare) from more self-serving ‘entertainment’ uses. This suggests that purpose, intention, and perceived self-awareness can mediate tolerance in ways that complicate straightforward framings of loudcasting as antisocial behaviour.

Situating loudcasting within post-pandemic shifts in public comportment, I demonstrate that mobile amplification is becoming a locus for broader anxieties about collective life, attention economies, and the sensory burdens of urban co-existence. Pocket-sized amplification, I argue, operates as a vector for interpersonal friction and social negotiation.

Dr Jacob Kingsbury Downs (he/him) is Departmental Lecturer in Music at the University of Oxford, where he serves as Chair of Faculty in the Faculty of Music and Organising Tutor in Music at Lady Margaret Hall. His research examines how digital sound technologies reshape everyday life, transforming experiences of intimacy and connection in the twenty-first century, and challenging established boundaries between private and public spheres. Current empirical projects investigate the social reality of ‘loudcasting’ on public transport, the intimacy of voice-note communication, and experiences of headphone theatre. His first monograph, *Headphone Listening*, is under contract with Bloomsbury Academic. He makes regular media appearances and, in 2024, was named a BBC/AHRC New Generation Thinker.

Junko Oba

“Wartime Radio, Public Listening Kiosks, and a Curious Trajectory of Radio Calisthenics”

Conjoining radio’s newly developed amplification technologies and the society’s growing interest in public health, exercise routine programs became a popular feature of the early U.S. radio broadcast in the interwar years. Successful programs such as *Tower Health Exercises* sponsored by the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (presently MetLife) not only physically toned ordinary American people’s bodies for longer healthier life (thus more profit to the insurance company) but also raised awareness of the importance of personal healthcare as an individual’s choice and social responsibility.

Since its adaptation from the U.S. model in the late 1920s, Japanese *rajio taisō* (radio calisthenics) took on complex transnational lives, as the exercise routines widely disseminated along Japan’s colonial expansion and diasporic communities. While the original purpose of fostering a healthy lifestyle by exercising everyday still prevailed, wartime iterations of *rajio taisō* as a national and colonial enterprise and the patriotic mobilization campaign inevitably accrued new significances and social implications. In broad Asian contexts, radio calisthenics were typically not performed in the intimate private home and family room—preferred settings for the Metropolitan Life’s *Tower Health Exercises* as seen in their advertisements. *Rajio Taisō* entailed a collective public activity by an assembly of bodies. Group sizes vary from small neighborhood communities to mass games involving thousands, and the large ones tend to be more performative in nature.

In this paper, I will examine the roles of *rajio-tō* (ラジオ塔), public listening kiosks that the Japanese authorities implemented as a distinctive amplification and public address system during Asia-Pacific War, to ensure all nation's participation in the daily exercise routine, and how the system was utilized by the government to own, regulate, and nationalize the nation's bodies through everyday rituals of exercising and embodied listening of radio calisthenics.

Junko Oba (she/her/hers) is an associate professor of music and Asian studies at Hampshire College in Amherst, Massachusetts, U.S.A. She trained as ethnomusicologist and sound archiving technician at Wesleyan University. Her research interests include traditional and contemporary Japanese music cultures; performative identity politics in Asian diasporas, especially in Brazilian expatriate communities in Japan; national and nationalized identity performances in the trans- and post-national world; music and collective memory construction; organology, music instruments building, and material culture of music; and sound archiving. "Listening" and sonic memories have been important elements in all her work, including wartime propaganda, embodied listening, and deaf studies.

Deng Haoxian

"Hearing New & Modern: The Hi-Fi Audiophile Culture in Post-Mao China"

This article explores the shifting connotations of amplification in China—from the public loudspeaker propaganda systems of the Mao era to the personalised practices of auditory pleasure technology following the Reform and Opening-up. The Guangzhou-Pearl River Delta region in southern China, adjacent to Hong Kong, has emerged as a pivotal hub for the expansion of the new amplification-listening culture across the entire nation. This study will build upon Eric Ma's (2012) concept of 'compressed/satellite modernity,' employing multiple research methodologies. These include cultural geography analysis, ethnography of relevant soundscapes and exhibitions, audiophile oral histories and semi-structured interviews, alongside multimodal discourse analysis of Hi-Fi advertisements and magazines. The research aims to explore how Hi-Fi sound aesthetics and technical culture undergo globalised cultural circulation, transmission, and translation before ultimately achieving localisation. Research reveals that loudspeakers from the West and Japan have been reinterpreted through a hierarchy of materials, the myth of Western craftsmanship, aestheticised appearance, and the spectacle of sound effects, thereby embodying the sublime allure of modern technological prowess and the middle-class aspiration for an idealised lifestyle. Moreover, domestic audio and record manufacturers have countered the Western-dominated Hi-Fi listening aesthetic by leveraging nationalist and local cultural narratives as packaging. "Fashao/Fat Siu", The term "fever" in Chinese, originating from Hong Kong audiophiles' material-symbolic localisation describing both the physical heat generated by sound reinforcement systems and the fervent passion for such

equipment. Through years of development, they are now exporting a Hi-Fi commercial culture model of “fashao” with distinctive Chinese characteristics to the Global South.

Deng Haoxian is a doctoral candidate at the School of Communication of Hong Kong Baptist University. His research interests encompass media culture and globalisation, gender studies, Science, Technology and Society (STS) in Chinese context, and global communication. He has published some cultural comments on local newspaper and participated in numerous prestigious academic conferences, including the International Association for the Study of Popular Music (IASPM) and the Association for Asian Studies (AAS). His current doctoral thesis constitutes a historical analysis of the sonic modernity of the technoculture of audiophile in post-Mao southern China.

Reb Lentjes

“Ultra/Sound: The Antiabortion Amplification of Fetal Personhood”

This talk examines how the United States antiabortion movement wields obstetric technology, such as ultrasound and fetal cardiac activity tests, as a tool for subjugating pregnant people. Not only does the antiabortion movement usher these frequencies into the realm of human perception, they also exploit them through a process of sonic vitalism, whereby they assemble a patriarchal construction of fetal personhood through sound’s animating and vitalizing techniques. Through sonic vitalism, the antiabortion movement successfully politicizes and weaponizes acoustic technology, lending credibility to the fiction of fetal personhood and then broadcasting it in the medical, legal, and sociocultural spheres. Drawing from literature in sound studies and affect theory, as well as my original research on antiabortion extremism, my presentation demonstrates how these “sounds of life” forge misleading affective associations based on how the machines are (mis)read and amplified in order to exert biopolitical control. Before and after Dobbs — the SCOTUS ruling that overturned Roe v. Wade — pregnant people have been forced to undergo mandatory (medically unnecessary) testing when seeking abortion care: according to the Guttmacher Institute, 13 states require an ultrasound to be performed before an abortion; six of these states require the provider to display and describe the image. 15 states require a fetal cardiac activity test to be performed, and three of them require the provider to play sounds generated by the test. Building on Marie Thompson’s theorization of “uterine audiophilia”, this paper demonstrates that prenatal technology bolsters not only neoliberal responsabilization narratives in regards to pregnancy, but also the antiabortion agenda of amplifying the fiction of fetal personhood. Antiabortion sonic vitalism engenders not only a discursive construction of the fetus-as-person, but also a lived reality in which pregnant people are literally denied healthcare, every day, because of the legal and medical ramifications of sonic vitalism’s misogynist misconstrual.

Rebecca "Reb" Lentjes is an activist-scholar writing about the antiabortion movement's weaponization of sound, music, and affect. Their work is published and forthcoming in

journals including American Studies, American Music, Resonance, The Journal of Interdisciplinary Voice Studies, and Scholar & Feminist Online. She has presented her research at national meetings of the American Anthropological Association, American Musicological Society, American Studies Association, and National Women's Studies Association. Outside academia, Reb is a case manager and peer counselor for three abortion healthlines.

Asha Ward

“Beyond Loudness: Case Studies of Amplification as Inclusion for Children with Diverse Abilities”

This paper examines the role of amplification technologies, specifically microphones and looper pedals, in supporting speech, language development, and social wellbeing for children in Special Educational Needs (SEN) settings. Through a series of detailed case studies, the research explores how these tools enable children with diverse physical and cognitive disabilities to foreground their voices and sonic identities in ways that challenge normative expectations of communication.

Drawing on Yvon Bonenfant’s work on alternative voices and the power of non-normative vocal timbres (2025), this paper argues that amplification does more than make voices louder by celebrating difference, expanding expressive possibilities, and inviting audiences to engage with sounds often silenced in dominant regimes of power. By incorporating the children's voices alongside proxy voices from educators, practitioners, and caregivers, the research maps the layered benefits and limitations of these practices, from therapeutic gains to shifts in classroom sociality. It also considers the ethical and aesthetic implications of amplifying unconventional vocalizations, positioning them as virtuosic acts that resist cultural policing of the voice.

Ultimately, this paper contributes to debates on amplification as a technology of the self and as a mediator of identity, inclusion, and sonic agency. The study situates amplification within the social model of disability, framing it as a cultural and technological intervention that reshapes participation and agency. The research foregrounds observing individual and relative ability rather than focussing on compensating for impairments or generalising virtuosity. It demonstrates how music technology can transform everyday educational soundscapes, offering new ways to listen, feel, and value voices that trouble normative boundaries.

Dr Asha Ward is a Postdoctoral Researcher in Creative Technology at Arts University Bournemouth, specialising in the design and evaluation of accessible musical and creative technologies for individuals with complex needs. Her research spans modular accessible musical instrument toolkits, digital storytelling systems for autistic children, and bespoke hardware for vocal looping and live performance. Drawing on interdisciplinary methods from music technology, participatory design, and disability studies, her work investigates how creative technologies can reshape communication,

wellbeing, and identity in educational and therapeutic contexts. Asha's recent projects explore amplification as a tool for inclusion, examining how microphones and looping devices can support children with diverse abilities to express their sonic identities and challenge normative expectations of communication. She has published across themes of inclusive practice, sound, and co-design, and is committed to developing technologies that foreground agency, celebrate non-normative voices, and expand expressive possibilities for marginalised users.

Onur Ali Yüce

“No Signal: Amplification, Spatial Censorship, and the Politics of Queer Disappearance in Turkish Drag Theatre”

This paper examines amplification as both a material infrastructure and a political condition shaping the visibility, circulation, and suppression of queer performance. While amplification is conventionally understood as the acoustic enhancement of sound, this study extends the concept to encompass the spatial, technological, institutional, and discursive conditions that enable performance to resonate within public culture. Focusing on *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical*, staged in Turkey during the rule of the Justice and Development Party (AKP), the article argues that contemporary censorship increasingly operates not through explicit bans on artistic content but through the withdrawal and regulation of amplification itself.

In the Turkish context, queer performance is rarely prohibited outright. Instead, access to publicly funded venues, stage infrastructures, audiovisual documentation, and institutional endorsement is gradually constrained. Without these amplifying structures, performance cannot be professionally recorded, circulated widely, or sustained beyond the ephemeral moment of staging. Amplification therefore functions as a gatekeeping mechanism that determines which bodies are permitted to resonate within the public sphere. Recent legislative proposals seeking to penalise the public “praise” or “encouragement” of LGBTQ+ identities further extend this dynamic by shifting regulatory attention from the content of expression toward the affective and symbolic amplification of queer visibility.

Situating the Turkish case alongside comparable dynamics in Russia and Egypt, the article proposes that contemporary authoritarian cultural governance increasingly manages resonance rather than speech itself. When amplification is withdrawn, performance does not disappear entirely but persists in diminished circuits of memory, informal documentation, and embodied transmission. In this sense, the queer body becomes an unamplified archive of survival. By reframing amplification as a political threshold between presence and disappearance, the article contributes to ongoing debates in sound studies, performance studies, and media infrastructure scholarship concerning the governance of cultural visibility.

Dr Onur Ali Yüce is a composer, scholar, and theatre practitioner working at the intersection of musical theatre, queer performance, and cultural politics. He completed his PhD in Musical Composition at Royal Holloway, University of London, following a Master's degree in Ethnomusicology from Hacettepe University and professional music studies at Berklee College of Music. Based in the UK, he currently works as a Lecturer in Performing Arts and holds a Global Talent Visa in the arts. As a composer and playwright, he has written and composed music for more than seventeen theatre productions, including works staged at the Turkish State Theatres and Tatbikat Theatre. His research examines gender, censorship, and mythology in contemporary Turkish theatre, with particular attention to drag performance and LGBTQ+ representation. His original musical *Constantina Pole: A Drag Queen Musical* explores queer cultural memory through camp, myth, and performance.

Hicham Chami

“Amplifying Distance, Amplifying Intimacy: Regimes of Audibility in Jebli Musical Life”

This paper examines sound amplification as a social technology that reorganizes musical space, proximity, and belonging in northern Morocco's Jebala region. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork with a Jebli ensemble across two contrasting performance contexts—a rural tent wedding and an urban cultural festival—I analyze how different amplification regimes produce radically different forms of musical experience.

At a countryside wedding, amplification operates as everyday infrastructure and collective labor. Modest sound systems—speakers, microphones, generators, cables, and self-managed sound setup enable an all-night performance shaped by kinship, audience requests, and shared affect. The rudimentary amplified setup collapses boundaries between performers and listeners, fostering what locals describe as *majma' l-ḥbāb* (“a gathering of the beloved”), in which music sustains communal intimacy, memory, and a sense of home grounded in rural place.

By contrast, a festival performance by the same musicians relies on high-powered PA systems and professionally managed sound reinforcement that prioritize projection and control over interaction. Despite technological sophistication, this amplified environment produces distance rather than connection, constraining musical form and weakening the sense of musical belonging.

Placing these settings in dialogue, the paper argues that amplification does not simply make sound louder. It actively shapes temporal flow, spatial relations, and the conditions under which musical proximity and affiliation can be felt or denied. In Jebala, amplification emerges not as a tool of sonic domination, but as a fragile and negotiated means of sustaining presence and intimacy at the margins.

Hicham Chami is an ethnomusicologist and visiting scholar at Brandeis University in Boston. He earned his PhD in Ethnomusicology from Columbia University, where he developed a research focus on sonic circulation, heritage politics, and the entanglements of sacred and popular performance, with an emphasis on Morocco's Jebala region. His upcoming monograph, *Jebli Music Culture: Soundings from a Moroccan Periphery*, is based on extensive fieldwork and explores how marginalized communities mobilize music as a site of memory, devotional expression, and cultural resistance. Chami's publications have appeared in *The World of Music Journal*, the *Journal of Folklore Research*, *Turath: The Journal of Cultural Anthropology*, and edited volumes on performance and decolonial thought. Prior to joining Brandeis, he was a Postdoctoral Associate at Yale University's Institute of Sacred Music.

Gayas Eapen

“DJ Trucks, Street Sound, and Violence: Amplification in the Age of Spreadable Media”

In the streets of north India, DJ trucks and their owners dominate the sonic and—to a large extent—the social field, particularly during celebratory events and religious observances. Large, metallic trucks—often used to transport construction materials or industrial goods—are retrofitted with a combination of "bass" and "top" speakers, often favoring the low-end sound. These on-the-move dance clubs transform the neighborhood and street space instantly; the DJ figure (“operator”), the driver of the truck, and the owner (who gets contracted and provides security for these night events) work together for the sound trucks to appear on busy urban streets. While these modified trucks have now been around for a couple of decades, their recent popularity and significance as technologies of amplification can be ascribed to Hindutva's ascent, particularly in the northern Indian cities and suburbs. Hindutva, scholars agree, is the religious political ideology of Hindu supremacy, manifesting in everyday acts of violence against religious and caste minorities as a means to enact social control. Sound trucks, and their booming presence on street space, have become objects of fascination for younger men from landowning classes, particularly as these enable collective expression of masculinity, caste, and religious identity within specific regional contexts and dynamics. As they move about crowded streets and neighborhoods, these loud trucks and the following processions mark and consolidate collective spaces and sensory thresholds in everyday life and routines. Increasingly, these communally contested sonic forms have been mobilized towards Islamophobic expression, both in content and form (Purohit, 2023; Prakash, 2022).

For this presentation, I will outline ethnographic findings from fieldwork and interviews into the practice of DJ trucks and associated sonic cultures, in cities and towns of Rajasthan and Haryana. I will combine these observations with scholarly and critical work on Hindutva and everyday life (Govindrajan, 2018; Srivastava, 2022), perspectives

and conversations within sound studies (Eidhsheim, 2015; Eisenlohr, 2018), and critical media and infrastructure studies (Larkin, 2014; Thompson and Biddle, 2013), to contextualize the stakes of this sonic practice within the Indian, and specifically North Indian, context. I will argue that DJ trucks are fundamental amplification technologies that articulate alongside intersecting cultural and sonic forms used for religious devotion, entertainment, and celebration in public sites. However, it would be remiss to study them just as such. Given their role in crowd mobilization preceding violent incidents, including riots and pogroms (Iyer, 2022; Baishya, 2021), it is crucial to approach these street sonic technologies as one among many means for drumming up ethno-political sentiments and building consensus for violence. The trucks and their sound complement other techniques of amplification that include spreadable and networked expression on digital platforms that have been noted as critical for mobilizing and visceralizing violence within everyday sites and interactions (Udupa, 2018; Nizaruddin, 2020; Mukherjee, 2020).

Gayas Eapen is a media ethnographer and practitioner. His work engages with media in public, sonic street media, and global digital cultures. He has been published in *Asiascape: Digital Asia* and the *De Geuyter Handbook of Digital Culture*. He is an Assistant Professor of Digital Culture and Design at Coastal Carolina University, USA.

Jeremy Wallach

“Rame-Rame: An Indonesian Aesthetic of Amplified Sound”

Pop karaoke blasting from crackling, overdriven speakers; the distorted chunk of a death metal guitar; the frayed echoes of the call to prayer from scores of mosques sounding simultaneously...for decades observers have remarked upon the ubiquity of heavily amplified sound in the Indonesian urban soundscape, and the ways in which it creates an atmosphere of *rame*, a positively valued aesthetic often rendered as “crowded, noisy, fun.” Writings about this soundscape have been evocative but largely descriptive. What has not yet been attempted is a full inventory of amplified sounds in urban Indonesia, their phenomenological impact, and their relationship to other environmental sounds such as automobile engines whirring, horns honking, and hawkers’ cries.

The proposed paper examines the history of amplified sound in the Indonesian archipelago, a technology introduced by Dutch colonizers in the late nineteenth century. Throughout its history amplification has been a tool of both domination and resistance, of colonial and postcolonial government control and of defiance, at political rallies and underground rock shows. What is consistent in these deployments of amplified sound is an indigenous sonic aesthetic of social effervescence that this paper attempts to examine in a more rigorous fashion than earlier impressionist accounts.

Jeremy Wallach is Professor of Popular Culture at Bowling Green State University. A cultural anthropologist specializing in popular musics, he co-edited a special issue of *Asian Music* (2013); authored *Modern Noise, Fluid Genres: Popular Music in Indonesia, 1997-2001* (Wisconsin, 2008; Indonesian trans., Komunitas Bambu, 2017) and co-edited the volumes *Metal Rules the Globe: Heavy Metal Music around the World* (Duke, 2011) and *Defiant Sounds: Heavy Metal Music in the Global South* (Lexington, 2023). Wallach is a Series Editor of Music/Culture (Wesleyan UP) and has presented his research in Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Indonesia, Italy, Malaysia, the Netherlands, the Philippines, Puerto Rico, Taiwan, Thailand, and throughout North America. His writings have appeared in *Ethnomusicology*, *Indonesia*, the *Journal of Popular Music Studies* and numerous edited collections, including *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Rock Music Research* (2020), *The Oxford Handbook of the Phenomenology of Music Cultures* (2024) and *Theory for Ethnomusicology* (Second Edition, 2019).

Sergio Pisfil

“Touring and the Material Conditions of Live Sound Manufacturing in the 1970s”

In 1970, Bruce Howze, founder of Community Light and Sound, introduced a horn loudspeaker known as the LMF, rated at 155 watts. Two years later, Jim Gamble of Tycobrahe unveiled the BFA amplifier, rated at 2000 watts. The names of these devices (short for “*Loud Mother Fucker*” and “*Big Fucking Amp*”) are emblematic of the cultural milieu in which live sound reinforcement developed during the late 1960s and early 1970s. As has been widely argued, the evolution of live audio amplification was closely tied to a specific rock ethos, particularly the pursuit of ever-increasing onstage volume.

Less discussed, however, is the extent to which live sound technology was shaped not only by sonic ideals but also by another crucial aspect of the rock ethos: touring. Sound systems had to be transported continuously across long distances at a time when trucking infrastructure lacked air-ride suspension, resulting in frequent damage to both electronic components and loudspeaker enclosures. Design decisions were therefore strongly informed by concerns over robustness, modularity, and repairability.

Equipment also had to conform to the spatial constraints of truck bodies and aircraft cargo holds, shaping packaging strategies already at the manufacturing stage. Weight constraints were equally important, affecting both road crew labor and compliance with transportation regulations.. On U.S. highways, for example, weight stations could require overweight trucks to unload equipment, disrupting tour schedules.

Drawing on more than 100 interviews with sound engineers, road crew members, and sound company owners active during this period, this paper argues that the emergence of industry-standard live sound designs cannot be understood solely as an outcome of acoustic optimization. Instead, these standards emerged through the negotiation of material constraints, infrastructural conditions, and everyday touring practices. As

such, this paper reframes live sound amplification as a socio-technical assemblage whose technical forms emerged from the material, logistical, and labor conditions of touring within popular music culture.

Sergio Pisfil is a Lecturer and Researcher at the Universidad Peruana de Ciencias Aplicadas and Visiting Research Fellow at the University of Huddersfield. He holds a PhD in Music from the University of Edinburgh. His work has been published in journals such as *Popular Music and Society* and *IASPM Journal*, as well as in edited volumes including *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Rock Music Research* and *The Oxford Handbook of Progressive Rock* (forthcoming). He is co-editor of *Researching Live Music: Gigs, Tours, Concerts and Festivals* (Routledge, 2022) and is currently co-editing the forthcoming *Intellect Handbook of Global Music Industries* and a special issue for *Rock Music Studies*. He is also the co-founder and editor of the *Journal of Live Music Studies* (Intellect) and a member of the Executive Board (Treasurer) of the Peruvian Association for Musicology (ASPEMUS).

Karen Nicholson

“Flying the P.A.’: Changes in Speaker Design and Their Impact on Music Touring”

This paper will explore how design changes in large sound systems impacted audio technical practice and music touring. It will use historical ethnography, material culture research, and interviews with contemporary practitioners to investigate the everyday experience of touring personnel within historic and contemporary arena and stadium music tours.

During the late 1960s, the popularity of rock and pop touring productions and the expertise of those who produced them resulted in industry-led developments in stage technologies. As events increased in size, pioneer tour audio vendors such as Clair Brothers, Hanley Sound, McCune Sound, Tycobrahe Sound Company (all USA), and WEM (UK) began to engineer and manufacture amplification equipment to meet the demands of the growing festival, arena, and stadium concert industry. To resolve the need for louder and better-quality sound, audio companies and crews began to trial suspended arrays and column-stacked speaker system configurations. By the 1990s, these innovative directions in audio for large concerts had become industry standards.

Thus, this paper will examine how creating speakers that could be rigged and/or hung from the stage architecture or venue roof impacted the everyday labour of crews on the road, the performance, and the wider concert experience. By analysing the impact of ‘flying pa’ across the wider ecosystem of music touring, it will highlight how 1960s-1970s experiments in amplification technology contributed to broader technological, visual, and experiential change within arena and stadium live music events.

The presenter is a PhD student in the Department of Music at Royal Holloway, University of London, UK, and a recipient of the Royal Holloway Social Purpose Studentship. Supervised by Professor Tina K. Ramnarine, her research explores gender and practice in the ecosystems of pop and rock music tours. In 2022, she completed an MA in History of Design/Performance at the Victoria and Albert Museum/Royal College of Art, London. Professionally, she is a costume practitioner and has toured with some of the most globally recognised performers in rock and pop, including Beyoncé, Muse and U2.

Luigi Monteanni

“No Signal: Audio Cables as Amplification’s Neglected Materiality”

In this paper, I theorise the “negativity” of audio cables as a point of departure for investigating what I call neglected materiality. This term describes forms of infrastructural materiality that are essential to specific practices yet remain forgotten, unnoticed, or unloved.

Drawing on ethnographic data gathered since 2019 in urban amplified-music contexts, alongside qualitative material from magazines, blogs, websites, and social media produced by musicians, sound engineers, audiophiles, and instrument manufacturers, I show that audio cables appear in discourse and practice only marginally, and most often negatively. They are described as broken, lost, stolen, tangled, noisy, or inconvenient. Despite being fundamental to amplified music, their depersonalised and easily replaceable nature renders them largely invisible, when not resented.

I argue that this negativity and invisibility - rooted in the principle that cables function “correctly” only when they remain unheard - parallels a broader realm of ordinary musical experiences that go unnoticed in both practice and scholarly research. This produces a significant gap in the literature on music technology and the materiality of music making. Examining the negativity of cables therefore becomes a means to reconsider the relationships between actors and materialities that are obscured by such neglect, and to understand how material and social constraints channel, limit, or inflect the possibilities of musical creativity.

To develop this argument, I examine cable negativity through three analytic lenses: (a) peripheral work, where cables metonymically evoke the invisible labour of technicians and infrastructural operators; (b) vector, where cables stand for the relational ties that connect musicians, engineers, and technological systems; and (c) magic, where they embody the opacity and inscrutability of networked technologies for practitioners. I ultimately suggest that approaching the audio cable as a neglected aural technology opens new perspectives on the relational, political, economic, and cultural dimensions of amplified music practice and production.

Luigi Monteanni is a PhD candidate in music studies at SOAS, BFE conference liaison and a winner of an AHRC CHASE scholarship, studying the relationships between contemporary transnational pop music genres and regional music. He is analysing the indigenization of extreme metal in Bandung, Indonesia and working on a theory of sonic models and ecosystems. In March-September 2025 he was a visiting researcher at CRiSAP London, where he created a triptych of sound works to test and produce new sonic models and listening protocols.