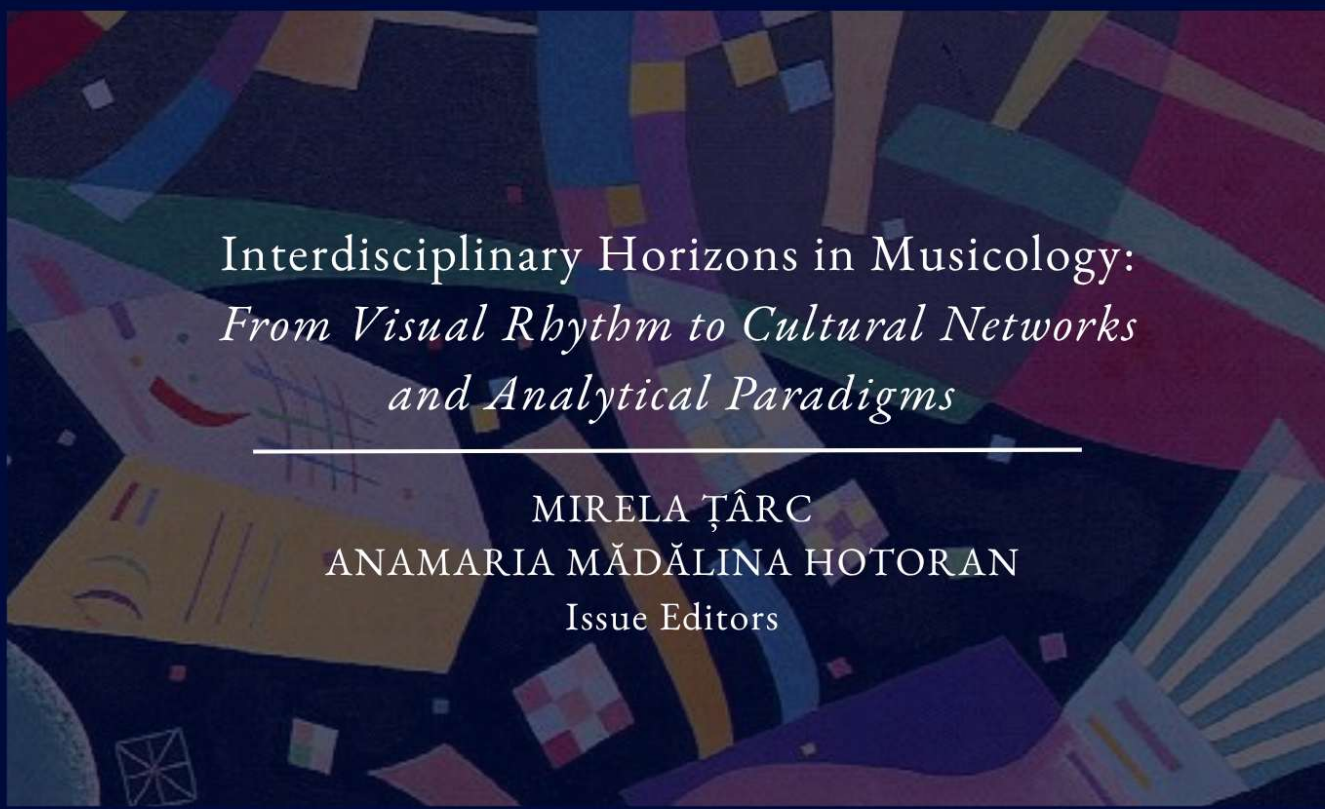
# Musica Academica

SCIENTIFIC JOURNAL

VOLUME 3, ISSUE 1/2026



## Interdisciplinary Horizons in Musicology: *From Visual Rhythm to Cultural Networks and Analytical Paradigms*

MIRELA ȚÂRC
ANAMARIA MĂDĂLINA HOTORAN
Issue Editors

ISSN: 3061-5364
ISSN ONLINE: 3090-9902
ISSN-l: 3061-5364

# *Musica Academica*

*Scientific Journal*

*Volume 3, Issue 1/2026*

## Interdisciplinary Horizons in Musicology: *From Visual Rhythm to Cultural Networks and Analytical Paradigms*

Issue Editors:
Mirela Țârc
Anamaria Mădălina Hotoran

*Musicological research journal affiliated with the*
***Doctoral School of Interdisciplinary Studies***
*within the University of Oradea, Romania*

**Founding Editor in Chief (Redactor şef)**

MIRELA ŢÂRC
*University Professor, PhD., habil., University of Oradea., merceanmirela@yahoo.com*

**Managing Editor (Director editorial)**

ROMEO RÎMBU
*University Professor, PhD., habil., University of Oradea*

**Permanent Editorial Board (Redactori)**
ANAMARIA MĂDĂLINA HOTORAN
*Associate Professor, PhD., Emanuel University of Oradea*

LOREDANA MUNTEAN
*Associate Professor, PhD., habil., University of Oradea*

LAURA VERONICA DEMENESCU
*University Professor, PhD, habil., "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad*

**Editorial Advisory Board (Colectiv editorial)**

SVETLANA BADRAJAN
*University Professor, PhD., Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts, Faculty of Musical Art, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova*

G. DOUGLAS BARETT
*Assistant Professor, PhD, Syracuse University, New York, U.S.A.*

ELENA CHIRCEV
*University Professor, PhD., habil., "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

GABRIELA COCA
*University Professor, PhD., habil., Babes–Bolyai University, Music Department of the Faculty of Reformed Theology and Music, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

PETRUŢA-MARIA COROIU
*University Professor, PhD, Habil., Transilvania University of Braşov, Faculty of Music, Romania*

OLEG GARAZ
*Assoc. Professor, PhD, Habil. „Gh. Dima" Naţional Academy of Music, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

KATALIN KIM
*Senior Research, Fellow Deputy Director of the Institute for the Musicology RCH, Head of Department for Hungarian Music History, Hungary*

VICTORIA MELNI
*University Professor, PhD., Master of Arts, Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts, Faculty of Musical Art, Chişinău, Republic of Moldova*

AYANGIL RÛHÎ
*University Professor, PhD,, Eşkisehir Anadolu University, Turkey*

LEON STEFANIJA
*University Professor, PhD, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia*

ÁKOS WINDHAGER
*PhD Senior Researcher, Hungarian Academy of Arts, Research Institute of Art Theory and Methodology, Hungary*

PATRICK ZUK
*University Professor, Cultural Studies and Music Director (Arts and Humanities) Institute of Advanced Study, Durham University, UK.*

**Editorial Review Board (Consiliul de referenți)**

IOAN ARDEREANU
*Associate Professor, PhD., "Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad, Romania*

IOANA BAALBAKI
Scientific Researcher II, PhD., *"Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

LARISA BALABAN
*Associate Professor, PhD., Academy of Music, Theater and Fine Arts, Faculty of Musical Art, Chișinău, Republic of Moldova*

ZSOLT GARAI
*Associate Professor, PhD., Emanuel University of Oradea, Romania*

OLEG GARAZ
*Associate Professor, PhD., "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

LUMINIȚA GOREA
*Associate Professor, PhD., University of Oradea, Romania*

HILDA IACOB
*Music Teacher, Ph.D. in Musicology, "S. Toduță" Music College, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

LOREDANA IAȚEȘEN
*Associate Professor, PhD., "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași, Romania*

TATIANA OLTEAN
*Associate Professor, PhD.,"Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

RAREȘ SÎNGEORZAN
*Associate Professor, PhD., "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music & Bassoonist at the Transilvania State Philharmonic, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

CRISTINA ȘOITU
*University Lecturer, PhD., "Gh. Dima" National Academy of Music, Cluj-Napoca, Romania*

GABRIELA VLAHOPOL
*University Professor, PhD., habil., "George Enescu" National University of Arts, Iași, Romania*

***Musica Academica***, a musicological research journal affiliated with the Doctoral School of Interdisciplinary Studies at the University of Oradea, Romania publishes all the papers as **Open Access** articles distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (**CC BY 4.0**). The full terms of this license are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/.
To ensure the highest ethical and professional conduct in research, *Musica Academica* adopts the Code of Conduct and Best Practice Guidelines for Journal Editors and aligns with the COPE Guidelines.
Copyright © 2026 the Authors

Cover designer: A. Mădălina Hotoran.
Cover art: Wassily Kandinsky, *Composition X* (1939).

MUSICA ACADEMICA
*Volume 3, Issue 1/2026*
Published online: 2026 04.11
Issue DOI: 10.61215/MA.2026.vol.3.iss.1

# Interdisciplinary Horizons in Musicology: *From Visual Rhythm to Cultural Networks and Analytical Paradigms*

CONTENTS

***Interdisciplinary Dialogues, History, and Cultural Networks***

Dr. CESNEY PALMER
*Listening to Images: Visual Rhythm, Gestalt Perception, and Synaesthetic Mapping in Musical Composition.* /6

SUSAN M. HOLMES
*Three Names, One Career: Marie Antoinette Crux Gillberg Petersén and Transnational Networks of Eighteenth-Century Female Musicians.* /37

***Philosophy, Cognition, Theoretical Concepts, and Analysis***

STEFANO SCARPA
*Cyclic Form Between Philosophy and Practice: Towards a Definition Through the Organ Repertoire.*/72

YALAN MA
*Enacting Knowing: Buddhist Vijñāna in the Music and Drama of Wagner's Parsifal.*/83

Dr. ROLYND LYON DELLA SYLVAN
*Tonal-Centric Sectional Ternary Design and Messiaen-Derived Post-Tonal Procedures in Toru Takemitsu's Rain Tree Sketch II.*/100

FRANCESCO BRAZIOLI
*Beyond the Linguistic Model: Music, Metaphor, and Intersemioticity.* /122

Contributors' Biographical Notes /131

*Musica Academica*
Volume 3. Issue 1 (2026): 6-36
DOI: 10.61215/MA.2025.vol.3.iss.1.01

# LISTENINIG TO IMAGES: VISUAL RHYTHM, GESTALT PERCEPTION, AND SYNAESTHETIC MAPPING IN MUSICAL COMPOSITION

**DR. CHESNEY PALMER**

Music Lecturer
The University of the Free State[1]
chesneyp@aie.ac

**Abstract**
*This article explores how visual rhythm, as theorised by Rudolf Arnheim and articulated through Wassily Kandinsky's abstractionist framework, can be systematically interpreted into musical composition. While interdisciplinary dialogue between music and visual art has often relied on metaphorical or intuitive correspondences, fewer studies have demonstrated how visual perceptual structures may be operationalised as compositional method. Drawing on artistic research and practice-based inquiry. This contribution may be understood as an examination of visual rhythm as one specific generative operation within the broader mapping framework developed in my doctoral research. Central to the discussion is Arnheim's concept of visual rhythm, observing the movement of the eye through spatial forces, and its translation into temporal musical processes. Through a selected compositional case study derived from Kandinsky's Composition X, the article demonstrates how visual abstraction may function not merely as inspiration, but as a perceptually grounded generator of musical structure. The findings suggest that visual rhythm offers a viable and transferable compositional resource, expanding contemporary approaches to interdisciplinary composition, artistic research, and cross-modal perception.*

**Keywords**
*Visual rhythm, Artistic research, Kandinsky, Synaesthesia, Cross-modality, Music composition*

[1] University of the Free State Bloemfontein Campus is 205 Nelson Mandela Drive, Park West, Bloemfontein, 9301, South Africa. PO Box 339.

## Introduction

The relationship between music and visual art has occupied composers, theorists, and artists for centuries, particularly in attempts to understand how perceptual structures may operate across sensory domains. From eighteenth-century colour organs and the synaesthetic experiments of early modernism to contemporary research in neuroaesthetics and embodied cognition, interdisciplinary discourse has repeatedly explored the possibility that sound and vision may share underlying organisational principles. Yet despite sustained interest in cross-modal relationships, much scholarship continues to approach visual–musical interaction metaphorically, symbolically, or intuitively, rather than structurally or perceptually.

In many interdisciplinary compositional practices, paintings function primarily as inspirational stimuli for musical creation. Musical works derived from visual art frequently rely upon narrative association, emotional atmosphere, or subjective interpretation without clearly articulating how visual structures themselves may generate musical form. As a result, the mechanisms through which visual organisation might become temporally operative within music often remain theoretically underdeveloped. While important scholarship has explored synaesthesia, cross-modal correspondences, and multisensory integration[2], fewer studies have demonstrated how perceptual structures derived from visual abstraction may function systematically within compositional methodology itself.

This article develops aspects of my doctoral research *Exploring Synaesthetic Music Composition using Wassily Kandinsky's Compositions: An Artistic Research Project* (University of the Free State, 2025), with a particular emphasis on the methodological role of visual rhythm in *Colour Sketches*[3]. It aims to address that visual rhythm may operate as a structurally generative force in musical composition. Rather than treating visual artworks as metaphorical prompts, the study argues that abstract visual organisation can be translated into musical processes through

---

[2] Lawrence E. Marks, *The Unity of the Senses: Interrelations among the Modalities*. New York: Academic Press, 1978; Ramachandran, V. S., and Edward M. Hubbard. "Psychophysical Investigations into the Neural Basis of Synaesthesia." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 268, no. 1470 (2001): 979–83; Spence, Charles. *Sensehacking: How to Use the Power of Your Senses for Happier, Healthier Living*. London: Viking, 2021.

[3] Available at https://youtu.be/RsqC9XYE4VA?list=RDRsqC9XYE4VA) Musical score available at: https://www.dropbox.com/scl/fi/xs7t9jzh31t9uafmvimxm/Colour-Sketches-REVISED-_2026.pdf?rlkey=l0hod8jbzkbjq8misjmbathvt&st=z01yey92&dl=0

perceptually grounded compositional strategies. Central to this investigation is the claim that rhythm exists not only within sound, but also within visual perception itself. Drawing on Rudolf Arnheim's theory of visual rhythm and *Gestalt* perception, the article explores how the movement of the eye through spatial tensions, focal points, vectors, and geometric structures may be reinterpreted as musical time, orchestral motion, textural development, and formal organisation.

The study focuses specifically on the orchestral work *Colour Sketches*, a composition derived from sustained engagement with *Composition X* by Wassily Kandinsky. Kandinsky's abstract visual language provides a particularly fertile framework for interdisciplinary translation because his paintings already embody strong directional forces, spatial tensions, chromatic contrasts, and rhythmic distributions of form. Furthermore, Kandinsky's own writings repeatedly suggest that visual abstraction possesses dynamic and musical qualities capable of evoking movement, energy, and inner resonance beyond representational imagery. The article positions *Colour Sketches* not merely as a musical response to painting, but as an instance of artistic research in which composition functions as perceptual inquiry. Visual elements such as point, line, density, colour, and geometric direction are translated into musical parameters including orchestration, rhythm, register, texture, harmonic saturation, and formal pacing. The goal is not to establish universal equivalences between visual and sonic materials, nor to claim neurological synaesthesia as explanatory certainty. Rather, the research seeks to investigate whether perceptual relationships experienced visually may generate coherent temporal structures within music.

Recent scholarship increasingly recognises perception as multisensory, embodied, and dynamically constructed through interaction between sensory systems[4]. Research into cross-modal correspondences further demonstrates that listeners consistently associate auditory qualities such as pitch, brightness, density, and motion with visual dimensions including elevation, luminosity, spatial direction, and colour intensity[5]. These findings suggest that perception may operate through shared organisational tendencies that extend beyond isolated sensory modalities.

---

[4] Leman, Marc. *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

[5] Deroy, Ophelia, and Charles Spence. "Crossmodal Correspondences: Four Challenges." *Multisensory Research* 29, nos. 1–3 (2016): 29–48.

At the same time, the article acknowledges important limitations within cross-modal composition. Perceptual associations remain shaped by culture, memory, embodiment, and individual subjectivity. Colour–sound relationships, for example, cannot be treated as universally fixed systems. The compositional mappings employed within *Colour Sketches* therefore function not as deterministic translations, but as perceptually plausible interpretative relationships. The article consequently resists claims of objective equivalence and instead frames cross-modal composition as a negotiated field between perceptual structure, artistic intuition, and embodied listening. The article also situates this research within broader compositional discourse. While the work differs substantially from spectral composition, important parallels exist with composers such as Kaija Saariaho, Iannis Xenakis, and György Ligeti, whose music similarly foregrounds texture, density, spatiality, and perceptual transformation as structural concerns. Saariaho's evolving timbral fields, Xenakis's architectural and graphical thinking, and Ligeti's micropolyphonic textures all demonstrate compositional approaches in which sound is organised through perceptual behaviour rather than conventional thematic development. However, unlike these approaches, *Colour Sketches* derives its structural logic directly from external visual organisation, allowing the perceptual dynamics of abstract painting to generate musical form.

Several research questions therefore guide this study:

- How can visual rhythm be translated into musical composition through a systematic and perceptually grounded process?
- In what ways may *Gestalt* perception function as a shared organisational framework between visual and auditory experience?
- How can Kandinsky's abstract visual grammar generate orchestral structure, rhythm, texture, and form?
- To what extent may artistic research contribute to interdisciplinary understandings of perception and composition?

This study adopts a practice-based artistic research methodology in which composition functions simultaneously as a site of investigation and as a means of generating knowledge. Rather than treating the visual artwork as a source of illustrative material, the study asks how its perpetual organisation can become operational within musical composition. The investigation therefore focuses on the processes through high visual relationships are identified, abstracted, and subsequently reconfigured as musical relationships.

## Literature Review

The relationship between music and visual art has occupied an important position within aesthetic philosophy, artistic modernism, perceptual psychology, and contemporary artistic research. Across these fields, scholars and practitioners have repeatedly sought to understand whether relationships between sight and sound are metaphorical, structural, neurological, or perceptual in nature. While interdisciplinary engagement between visual and auditory media is longstanding, the systematic translation of visual structure into musical form remains comparatively underexplored. This literature review situates the present study within five interconnected areas of scholarship: abstraction and modernist aesthetics, *Gestalt* perception and visual rhythm, synaesthesia and cross-modal cognition, embodied and neuroaesthetic theories of perception, and artistic research as compositional methodology.

## Abstraction and Modernism

The work of Wassily Kandinsky forms one of the most significant theoretical foundations for interdisciplinary discourse between music and visual art. Kandinsky's writings, particularly *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*[6] and *Point and Line to Plane*[7], proposed that visual forms possess intrinsic expressive and energetic properties capable of producing emotional and perceptual responses independent of representational content. For Kandinsky, abstraction was not merely stylistic reduction but a reorganisation of perceptual experience through point, line, colour, plane, tension, and movement.

Kandinsky consistently drew analogies between visual art and music, regarding music as the artistic medium most liberated from representational obligation. His notion of "inner necessity" suggested that artistic form emerges from internal perceptual and spiritual tensions rather than external imitation. Scholars such as Peg Weiss[8], and Lisa Florman[9] have demonstrated that Kandinsky's abstraction was profoundly shaped by spirituality, Theosophy, symbolism, and musical thinking.

---

[6] Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Translated by M. T. H. Sadler. New York: Dover Publications, 1977.

[7] ———. *Point and Line to Plane*. Translated by Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay. New York: Dover Publications, 1979.

[8] Weiss, Peg. *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.

[9] Florman, Lisa. *Concerning the Spiritual—and the Concrete—in Kandinsky's Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014.

Research into Kandinsky's relationship with music has frequently focused on his connections with composers such as Arnold Schoenberg and the broader modernist aspiration toward synaesthetic unity[10]. However, much of this literature remains interpretative or symbolic rather than methodological. While scholars acknowledge that Kandinsky's visual structures resemble musical organisation, fewer studies examine how his formal vocabulary may function as an operational compositional system.

The significance of Kandinsky within the present study lies precisely in this structural potential. His abstractionist grammar provides a framework through which visual rhythm may be interpreted as temporal organisation. Rather than treating Kandinsky's paintings as inspirational images, this research approaches them as perceptual systems whose internal logic may be reconstructed within musical form.

**Gestalt Theory and Visual Rhythm**

The translation of visual structure into musical organisation depends heavily upon theories of perception, particularly *Gestalt* psychology. *Gestalt* theorists argued that perception operates through organisational principles rather than through isolated sensory fragments. Arnheim's contribution is especially significant because he extends *Gestalt* theory into the analysis of visual rhythm and artistic perception. In *Art and Visual Perception*[11], Arnheim argues that vision is not passive observation but dynamic organisation. The eye moves through spatial tensions, directional vectors, balances, and interruptions, creating what he describes as visual rhythm. Rhythm, in this sense, is not reducible to repetition or symmetry but emerges through perceptual movement across visual space.

Arnheim's theories have particular relevance for interdisciplinary composition because they provide a perceptual framework through which visual relationships may become temporally generative. Rather than translating static images into static musical symbols, visual rhythm may shape pacing, gesture, tension, directionality, and structural continuity within sound. This understanding allows rhythm to be reconceptualised

---

[10] Brougher, Kerry, Judith Zilczer, Ari Wiseman, and Vivian Endicott Barnett. *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005; Rucsanda, Mădălina Dana. "Aspects of the Relationship between Music and Painting and Their Influence on Schoenberg and Kandinsky." *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Braşov. Series VIII: Performing Arts* 12, no. 2 (2019): 91–100. https://doi.org/10.31926/but.pa.2019.12.61.21.

[11] Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974, 74.

beyond conventional musical meter toward a broader theory of perceptual movement.

Kubovy's[12] work on perceptual grouping further reinforces the relationship between visual and auditory organisation. Kubovy demonstrates that grouping principles operate across sensory domains, suggesting that the cognitive organisation of visual information may share structural affinities with musical listening. Similarly, Stephen Palmer's *Vision Science*[13] highlights the extent to which perceptual organisation depends upon relational systems rather than isolated stimuli.

The present study extends these *Gestalt* theories into compositional practice. The manual visual-attention tracing used in *Colour Sketches* are informed by Arnheim's conception of visual movement and *Gestalt* organisation. The traced pathways across Kandinsky's paintings become temporal trajectories within the music, transforming spatial attention into rhythmic and formal structure. In this sense, visual rhythm becomes audible through orchestration, registral motion, motivic fragmentation, and textural pacing.

**Synaesthesia and Cross-Modal Correspondence**

The relationship between colour and sound has long been associated with synaesthesia. Early studies by Georg Tobias Ludwig Sachs[14] documented involuntary multisensory experiences in which colours, sounds, and linguistic forms became perceptually interconnected. Contemporary synaesthesia research, particularly the work of Ramachandran and Edward Hubbard[15], frames synaesthesia as a neurological condition revealing important insights into perception, cognition, and conceptual mapping.

Subsequent research by Marks, Amin et al, and Jewanski et al[16], expanded understanding of multisensory correspondences beyond rare

---

[12] Kubovy, Michael. *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

[13] Palmer, Stephen E. *Vision Science: Photons to Phenomenology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

[14] Sachs, Georg Tobias Ludwig. *Historiae Naturalis Duorum Leopardorum*. Erlangen: Palm, 1812; Jewanski, Jörg, Sean A. Day, and Jamie Ward. "A Colorful Albino: The First Documented Case of Synaesthesia, by Georg Tobias Ludwig Sachs in 1812." *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 18, no. 3 (2009): 293–303. https://doi.org/10.1080/09647040802431946.

[15] Ramachandran and Hubbard. *Psychophysical Investigations* 979–983.

[16] Marks, *The Unity of the Senses* 1978; Amin, Maina, Olufemi Olu-Lafe, Loes E. Claessen, Monika Sobczak-Edmans, Jamie Ward, Adrian L. Williams, and Noam Sagiv. "Understanding Grapheme Personification: A Social Synaesthesia?" *Journal of*

neurological synaesthesia toward broader perceptual associations shared across populations. Spence's[17] extensive work on cross-modal correspondence demonstrates that individuals consistently associate higher pitches with elevated spatial positions, brighter colours with sharper timbres, and denser textures with increased visual complexity. These findings suggest that cross-modal relationships may emerge from shared cognitive tendencies rather than purely subjective experience.

Importantly, Deroy et al[18] caution against reducing all multisensory correspondences to synaesthesia. They argue that many cross-modal associations are probabilistic, culturally mediated, and context-dependent rather than neurologically fixed. This distinction is crucial for the present research, which does not seek to prove neurological synaesthesia but instead investigates perceptually grounded compositional relationships.

The present study therefore adopts a moderated position between subjective synaesthetic experience and universal perceptual mapping. Personal colour-sound associations informed aspects of the compositional process within *Colour Sketches*, particularly in the development of synthetic pitch systems derived from colour analysis. However, these associations were constrained within a broader perceptual framework informed by *Gestalt* organisation and multisensory research. The objective was not autobiographical sensory replication but perceptual coherence.

Cross-modal research also contributes to understanding timbre and orchestration. Palmer, Schloss, and Sammartino[19] demonstrate that aesthetic preference often depends upon perceptual consistency across sensory domains. This insight supports the orchestral strategies employed in *Colour Sketches*, where timbral distribution functions analogously to colour distribution within Kandinsky's paintings.

## Embodied Cognition and Neuroaesthetics

Recent developments in embodied cognition and neuroaesthetics have further expanded interdisciplinary discussions concerning perception and artistic experience. Embodied cognition challenges Cartesian

*Neuropsychology* 5, no. 2 (2011): 255–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-6653.2011.02016.x; Jewanski, Jörg, Sean A. Day, and Jamie Ward. "A Colorful Albino: The First Documented Case of Synaesthesia, by Georg Tobias Ludwig Sachs in 1812." *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 18, no. 3 (2009): 293–303. https://doi.org/10.1080/09647040802431946.

[17] Spence, *Sensehacking,* 2021.

[18] Deroy and Spence, *Cross modal Correspondences,* 38.

[19] Palmer, Stephen E., Karen B. Schloss, and Jonathan Sammartino. "Visual Aesthetics and Human Preference." *Annual Review of Psychology* 64 (2013): 77–107.

separations between mind and body by arguing that perception emerges through bodily interaction with the environment rather than detached cognitive processing[20].

Within music studies, Leman's *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology*[21] is particularly influential. Leman argues that musical understanding is fundamentally sensorimotor: listeners perceive sound not only cognitively but physically through imagined movement, spatial orientation, and bodily simulation. This perspective aligns closely with the present study's treatment of visual rhythm as movement-based perception.

Neuroaesthetic research has also provided important insights into multisensory integration. Studies by Amedi et al.[22], Ferrari and Noppeney[23] demonstrate that sensory processing occurs through interconnected neural systems rather than isolated modalities. Predictive processing models proposed by Clark[24]further suggest that perception operates through continuous cycles of expectation, adjustment, and feedback.

These theories are particularly relevant to this artistic research because they frame perception as active construction rather than passive reception. The iterative compositional process employed in *Colour Sketches* reflects this understanding. Musical decisions were continuously revised through embodied listening and perceptual evaluation, creating feedback loops between visual analysis, sonic experimentation, and aesthetic judgement.

The significance of embodied cognition within this study lies in its reconceptualisation of composition itself. Composition becomes not simply the manipulation of abstract musical materials but a form of perceptual enactment through which visual relationships are reconstructed within sound.

---

[20] Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.

[21] Leman, *Embodied Music Cognition*, 2007.

[22] Amedi, Amir, Lotfi B. Merabet, Felipe Bermpohl, and Alvaro Pascual-Leone. "The Occipital Cortex in the Blind: Lessons about Plasticity and Vision." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14, no. 6 (2005): 306 11. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00387.x.

[23] Ferrari, Valeria, and Uta Noppeney. "Attention Controls Multisensory Perception via Two Distinct Mechanisms at Different Levels of the Cortical Hierarchy." *PLOS Biology* 19, no. 6 (2021): 1–31.

[24] Clark, Andy. "Whatever Next? Predictive Brains, Situated Agents, and the Future of Cognitive Science." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36, no. 3 (2013), 187.

## Artistic Research and Practice-Based Methodology

While the doctoral study examined a broader range of compositional and perceptual questions across seven works, the present article concentrates specifically on the methodological role of visual rhythm in the development of *Colour Sketches*. The article therefore revisits material from the doctoral project through a more focused analytical and methodological lens.

The methodology discussion on *Colour Sketches*, an orchestral composition developed in response to Kandinsky's *Composition X*. The work provides a focused case through which to examine the proposition that visual rhythm can operate as a generative compositional resource. The methodology is consequently concerned less with establishing a universal correspondence between visual and musical phenomena than with examining how a situated act of visual perception can generate musical decisions concerning gesture, rhythm, texture, timbre, register and form.

The process was reflective and iterative. Visual observations generated compositional possibilities, which were tested through sketching, instrumental writing, orchestration and subsequent listening. Musical results in turn informed further interpretation of the visual material. The methodology should there be understood as recursive movement between seeing, mapping, composing and listening rather than as a linear translation procedure.

## Tracing Visual Attention

The first stage involved tracing the movement of visual attention across *Composition X.* This was not undertaken as empirical eye-tracking in the neuroscientific sense, but as a reflective and embodied method for documenting a situated looking. The trajectory of attention was manually recorded in order to identify focal points, directional tendencies, areas of perceptual tension and relationships between larger and smaller visual structures.

The resulting trace was subsequently simplified by isolating the principal trajectories and focal relationships from the pictorial surface. This reduction was important because it shifted the analytical focus from the represented artwork to its underlying organisation. Triangular, rhomboid, directional, and other geometric relationships could consequently be considered as formal structures rather than as pictorial objects.

The reduced visual field was then examined for differences in scale and density. Larger configurations suggested broader formal

relationships, while smaller shapes provided a means of considering local rhythmic and motivic activity. This distinction became particularly important in *Colour Sketches*, where short musical cells are repeatedly redistributed between instrumental groups. Instead of treating motivic development exclusively as linear thematic transformation, the composition uses repetition, fragmentation, and timbral displacement to maintain structural identity while altering perceptual colour.

The eye-tracking sketches therefore served as compositional observations rather than measurements of universal visual behaviour. Their significance lies in documenting a particular perceptual encounter with the artwork and establishing a reproducible point of departure for the compositional process.

**From Visual Rhythm to Musical Organisation**

The second stage translated the observed movement of visual attention into temporal and musical relationships. This process draws particularly on Rudolf Arnheim's conception of visual rhythm, in which rhythm can emerge from the movement of attention through spatial relationships rather than solely from repetition or metric organisation. In this study, visual rhythm is consequently understood as a pattern of perceptual movement through space.

The compositional procedure involved identifying changes in visual direction, density, proximity, and focal intensity and considering their possible temporal equivalents. Rather than assigning a fixed musical meaning to each visual feature, the analysis treated these characteristics as prompts for compositional decision-making. A rapid succession of small visual elements, for example, could suggest increased rhythmic activity, while a larger or more isolated visual structure could generate sustained musical material or a formal point of emphasis.

This approach also allowed spatial relationships to be considered temporally. Movement through the visual field could become movement through musical time; perceptual accumulation could become increasing orchestral density; visual interruption could become a registral or textural rupture; and a focal point could become a musical arrival or climax. Such correspondences were treated as compositional affordances rather than as deterministic translations.

The reduction of the visual material was particularly significant in the construction of *Colour Sketches*. Smaller visual structures became sources for fragmented motivic material, while larger structures contributed to the organisation of broader formal sections. The resulting music therefore derives its continuity not only from thematic

development but also from the recurrence and transformation of perceptual relationships.

**Compositional Mapping and Interpretation**

The final stage involved establishing functional relationships between visual attributes and musical parameters. The mapping process was deliberately interpretative. It did not attempt to establish that a particular shape, colour, or spatial relationship possesses one objectively correct musical equivalent. Instead, visual characteristics were used to generate compositional possibilities whose validity was subsequently assessed through musical coherence and listening.

The principal correspondences operated at several levels. Directional visual movement could inform melodic or registral trajectory; differences in visual density could influence rhythmic activity and orchestral saturation; spatial proximity could inform motivic grouping; contrast could produce differences in orchestration or register; and focal relationships could contribute to formal emphasis. In this sense, the mapping framework functioned as a set of compositional constraints and prompts rather than a formula for generating music.

Colour occupied a related but distinct position within the process. A personalised colour-wheel system was used to associate colours encountered in *Composition X* with pitch materials and thereby generate synthetic pitch collections. These associations were not presented as universal colour–pitch correspondences. Rather, they provided a consistent set of initial conditions from which musical material could be generated and subsequently evaluated within the compositional process.

Kandinsky's theoretical vocabulary provided a further means of articulating these relationships. Point, line, plane, spatial organisation, colour, and focal emphasis were considered in terms of their functional roles within the visual composition and then related to musical parameters such as attack, melodic trajectory, texture, timbre, register, dynamics, and form. The purpose was not to reproduce the visual image acoustically, but to preserve aspects of its organisational logic within a different perceptual medium.

The resulting methodology therefore operates through a sequence of observation, reduction, mapping, composition, and reflection. Its central proposition is that visual rhythm can become musically generative when perceptual relationships are abstracted from the artwork and reconfigured as temporal, rhythmic, timbral, and formal relationships.

## Analysis of *Colour Sketches*: From Visual Attention to Musical Form

The compositional problem was not how to reproduce individual objects in the painting, but how to construct musical processes capable of producing analogous experiences of movement, concentration, interruption, suspension, and release. The resulting work can be understood as an interaction between three forms of organisation: perceptual density, directional movement, and focal emphasis**.** These dimensions operate simultaneously. A visually concentrated region may generate increased musical activity; a directional visual relationship may become a melodic or registral trajectory; and a focal point may become a moment at which orchestral attention is intensified or redirected. The correspondence is therefore functional rather than literal.

### *Density as Temporal Activity*

One of the most significant characteristics of *Composition X* is the uneven distribution of visual information. Areas containing numerous shapes, colours, and intersecting trajectories contrast with regions in which individual forms are more isolated. Rather than interpreting these differences as static representations, *Colour Sketches* treats them as changes in the rate and intensity of musical activity.

This principle is evident in the transition from relatively sparse musical events toward increasingly saturated orchestral textures. The opening does not immediately establish a fully articulated rhythmic environment. Instead, individual events are allowed to occupy considerable perceptual space. As additional layers enter, the listener's attention is required to negotiate increasingly simultaneous streams of information.

The relationship between density and musical activity is particularly apparent in the central sections of the work. Between approximately 03:15 and 05:00, the gradual addition of brass, lower winds, strings, woodwinds, and piano produces an increasingly saturated texture. The process culminates between approximately 05:10 and 06:57, where the full ensemble participates in overlapping rhythmic and harmonic activity. In this passage, orchestral density functions as a temporal analogue for the concentration of visual information within the painting.

This relationship is important because it shifts the notion of visual rhythm away from a simple analogy with musical pulse. Rhythm here emerges through the changing quantity and distribution of perceptual information. The listener experiences acceleration or intensification not

necessarily because the tempo increases, but because more simultaneous events demand attention.

### *Direction, Trajectory, and Musical Motion*

A second dimension concerns the directional organisation of the visual field. The sweeping and curvilinear elements of *Composition X* suggest continuous movement, while sharper and more fragmented forms interrupt that continuity. In *Colour Sketches*, these distinctions become audible through differences in melodic trajectory, articulation, register, and orchestral gesture.

The passage between approximately 01:53 and 02:21 provides an example. Woodwind fragments gradually acquire duration and directional continuity, transforming isolated events into extended melodic gestures. The movement is subsequently redirected by the entrance of the piano between approximately 02:21 and 03:03. Rather than functioning simply as the introduction of another instrumental colour, the piano changes the direction of the listener's attention and marks a transition between larger musical regions.

This process suggests that visual direction can be interpreted musically as a change in the trajectory of attention. A line moving across a visual field does not need to become a melody in a one-to-one sense. Instead, its directional character can prompt a musical process in which the ear is guided toward a new register, timbre, dynamic region, or formal destination.

The same principle operates at a larger scale. Ascending and descending gestures, changes of register, and shifts between instrumental groups establish trajectories through the orchestral space. Musical direction consequently becomes one of the means through which the composition reconstructs the experience of moving through the visual field.

### *Focal Points and the Redistribution of Attention*

The visual analysis also identified areas in *Composition X* that exerted a stronger perceptual pull than their surroundings. In the composition, these focal relationships are realised through changes in orchestral prominence rather than through a fixed musical equivalent.

One example occurs at approximately 03:57, when fragments associated with earlier pointillistic material reappear within the winds and percussion. These short interventions interrupt the surrounding continuity and redirect attention toward isolated events. The effect is significant because the musical texture does not simply accumulate

toward greater complexity; it repeatedly reorganises the listener's attention by bringing peripheral material into temporary prominence.

A related process occurs in the contrast between the opening and the later brass climax. Bars 1–15 begin with sustained orchestral sonorities and minimal rhythmic propulsion. This opening was associated with the large dark region occupying the lower portion of *Composition X*. Rather than interpreting the black area as an absence of material, the composition treats it as a condition of suspension from which subsequent activity can emerge.

The contrast becomes particularly pronounced in bars 116–149, where the passage corresponds to a region of heightened colour and visual activity within the painting (C1-3, see annexure 1). The musical effect is therefore produced not through the literal reproduction of colour, but through a redistribution of perceptual weight: the listener's attention moves from a relatively suspended sonic field toward a highly saturated orchestral event.

### *From Fragmentation to Orchestral Field*

The relationship between local events and larger structures is central to the compositional process. Short musical fragments derived from the visual analysis recur throughout *Colour Sketches*, but their identity is continually modified by changes in instrumentation, register, articulation, and surrounding texture.

The result is a form of motivic continuity that does not depend primarily on conventional thematic development. A fragment can return in another instrumental register or timbral environment while retaining enough of its characteristic contour or rhythm to remain perceptually recognisable. The musical idea therefore behaves less like a conventional theme and more like a recurring visual element whose appearance changes according to its position within the larger field.

This approach can be heard in the redistribution of short figures between instrumental groups between bars 90-139. A gesture introduced by one instrument may subsequently appear elsewhere in the orchestra, creating continuity through recurrence while simultaneously altering its timbral identity. The resulting process is particularly suited to the visual logic of *Composition X*, where small forms coexist within a larger field and where relationships between forms are as important as the forms themselves.

The compositional consequence is that orchestration becomes a means of structural transformation. Timbre does not merely colour an

already established musical object; it changes the perceptual status of that object within the surrounding texture.

### *Orchestral Colour as Perceptual Differentiation*

Colour was another important dimension of the mapping process, but its function within the composition is not reducible to a direct colour-to-instrument substitution. Instead, orchestral colour becomes a means of differentiating perceptual layers.

The vibraphone, for example, frequently occupies a distinctive role in the work, particularly between approximately 06:02 and 06:38 (bars 139-150) and elsewhere in the surrounding texture. Its resonance contributes a sense of luminosity and persistence that allowed it to function as a contrasting layer against denser orchestral sonorities. Muted brass produces a markedly different perceptual effect, suggesting distance, opacity, or interruption when placed against lighter string and woodwind textures. Pizzicato strings and fragmented solo gestures similarly create moments of relative lightness within larger orchestral fields.

These choices should not be understood as universal equivalents of particular colours. They arise from the interaction between the visual stimulus, the composer's perceptual associations, and the practical characteristics of the instruments. Colour therefore operates as a compositional category through which differences in timbral brightness, density, resonance, and prominence can be organised.

This is consistent with the broader methodology of the study, in which cross-modal relationships function as interpretative affordances rather than fixed translations. The same visual stimulus could therefore plausibly generate different musical solutions under different compositional conditions.

### *Independent Layers and Perceptual Grouping*

The work also explores the possibility of allowing several musical trajectories to remain active simultaneously. Between approximately 03:30 and 06:15, individual instrumental lines frequently operate with a degree of independence, creating a layered rhythmic environment in which no single pulse necessarily governs the entire texture.

At approximately 04:50, this becomes particularly pronounced. Individual gestures behave as relatively autonomous strands within a larger orchestral field. The resulting polyrhythmic texture allows several trajectories to coexist without being completely synchronised. This is significant from a perceptual perspective because it places the listener in

a position of selecting and shifting between competing streams of information.

Such writing relates to the *Gestalt* principle of grouping, but the article's concern is not to claim a direct equivalence between visual and auditory *Gestalt* processes. Rather, the composition uses grouping and segregation as practical compositional problems. Similar timbres or rhythmic behaviours can encourage the ear to form a perceptual stream, while contrasting timbres can interrupt that grouping and redirect attention.

Orchestration therefore becomes a mechanism for managing perceptual hierarchy. Flutes and clarinets, for instance, can form a relatively coherent layer through similarity of timbral behaviour, while the introduction of a contrasting trumpet can function as a perceptual interruption. In bars 27–61 (01:18-03:00), the overlapping woodwind textures establish continuity before the entrance of the trumpet at approximately bar 40 redirects attention toward a contrasting sonic event.

### *Cyclic Time and Suspension*

Percussion provides another means of transforming the visual organisation of *Composition X* into musical time. The section between approximately 03:48 and 04:47 makes particular use of snare, vibraphone and woodblock patterns, creating repeated rhythmic cycles against changing instrumental colours.

Rather than functioning primarily as conventional accompaniment, these cycles establish a relatively stable temporal frame within which timbral events can appear and disappear. The resulting perception is one of suspended or circular time: repetition establishes continuity while changes in instrumentation prevent the texture from remaining static.

This is significant for the concept of visual rhythm developed in this article. Visual rhythm does not necessarily imply continuous forward motion. A repeated visual relationship can produce a sense of return, while subtle changes within the repeated structure can sustain perceptual attention. The percussion writing therefore demonstrates how a spatial relationship can become a temporal process without requiring a literal translation of visual material.

### *Visual Rhythm as a Generative Compositional Principle*

Taken together, these examples suggest that the most productive relationship between *Composition X* and *Colour Sketches* occurs at the level of organisation rather than representation. Visual density becomes a means of considering orchestral saturation; directional movement

becomes musical trajectory; focal emphasis becomes redistribution of attention; and visual layering becomes simultaneous musical activity.

The resulting composition therefore does not ask the listener to identify specific objects from Kandinsky's painting. Instead, it attempts to recreate aspects of the perceptual conditions produced by the painting: concentration and dispersal, continuity and interruption, stability and instability, foreground and background, and local detail within a larger field.

This distinction is important to the methodological claim of the study. The visual artwork does not provide a predetermined musical vocabulary. It provides a perceptual environment from which compositional decisions can be generated. The composer remains responsible for interpreting, selecting, testing, and refining the resulting musical material.

In this sense, *Colour Sketches* demonstrates how visual rhythm can move beyond metaphor and become operational within composition. The painting supplies relationships; the compositional process transforms those relationships into temporal and sonic behaviour; and listening provides the means through which the resulting musical structure is evaluated and revised.

The analysis therefore supports the broader proposition of this article: visual rhythm can function as a structurally generative compositional resource when it is treated not as a system of fixed correspondences but as a framework for organising attention, density, trajectory, and perceptual change.

The influence of these visual principles becomes directly apparent within the composition through the following time-stamped examples from the recording of *Colour Sketches.*

Characteristics of the visual field, its distribution of activity, directional movement, contrasts between concentration and sparsity, and shifts in perceptual emphasis were treated as prompts for musical organisation. This process can be heard from the opening of the work.

### *Cognition, Embodiment, and Cross-Modal Interpretation*

The compositional process also demonstrates that the relationship between visual and musical material was neither automatic nor mechanically determined. Visual information was interpreted through memory, learned associations, bodily experience, and compositional intention. The movement from visual observation to musical material therefore involved repeated acts of selection and judgement.

This is particularly evident in the treatment of colour. The colour-to-pitch relationships employed in *Colour Sketches* are not proposed as objective correspondences that would necessarily be reproduced by another composer. They constitute a personalised compositional system through which visual information could generate musical possibilities. Instrumentation, register, rhythmic behaviour, and texture were subsequently determined through compositional experimentation and listening.

The process was similarly embodied. Visual ideas were translated into musical gestures through interaction with instruments, notation, orchestration, and sound. Decisions that originated as visual observations were therefore repeatedly tested through the physical and temporal realities of musical performance. The resulting work represents not a direct conversion from one sensory modality to another, but a series of transformations mediated by compositional practice.

This distinction is important for understanding the role of synaesthetic thinking in the work. The composition does not depend upon the assumption that a visual stimulus possesses one stable musical equivalent. Instead, synaesthetic association functions as a generative condition through which unexpected relationships can be proposed and explored. Visual forms may suggest a timbral quality; a colour may prompt a pitch association; spatial movement may suggest registral direction; and visual density may encourage greater rhythmic or orchestral activity. Each association remains subject to musical evaluation.

The compositional process can therefore be understood as a feedback relationship between perception and creation. Visual observation generates musical hypotheses; musical experimentation tests those hypotheses; and listening subsequently modifies the interpretation of the visual material. In this sense, composition becomes a site of cross-modal inquiry in which perception is neither simply translated nor reproduced, but continually reinterpreted.

### *From Visual Correspondence to Compositional Logic*

Taken together, these examples indicate that the relationship between *Composition X* and *Colour Sketches* operates most productively at the level of compositional logic. It adopts several organisational conditions identified through the visual analysis: the distribution of density, the movement of attention, the coexistence of independent elements, the alternation between activity and suspension, and the use of contrast to establish perceptual hierarchy.

This distinction also clarifies the role of Kandinsky's concepts of point, line, and plane within the composition. These concepts provide a vocabulary through which transformations in visual organisation can be articulated, but the musical work does not depend upon a one-to-one translation of point into sound, line into melody, or plane into orchestral texture. The more significant correspondence occurs when a visual relationship generates a musical process.

The opening percussion, for example, establishes discrete events; the woodwind writing subsequently introduces directional continuity; accumulated orchestral layers increase perceptual density; independent rhythmic strands complicate the field; and contrasting timbres repeatedly redirect attention. These processes collectively demonstrate how visual organisation can become temporally and sonically operational.

*Colour Sketches* therefore emerges not as a sonic illustration of *Composition X*, but as an independent musical work generated through an encounter with its perceptual and organisational principles. The painting provides the initial field of investigation, while composition becomes the means through which its relationships are tested in another sensory medium. The resulting methodology suggests that visual rhythm can function as a generative compositional principle when it is understood in terms of perceptual organisation rather than fixed correspondence**.** Density can become orchestral saturation; visual direction can become musical trajectory; spatial contrast can become timbral differentiation; and the movement of attention can become formal articulation. These transformations preserve neither the visual image nor its individual objects, but rather aspects of the organisational behaviour through which the image is experienced.

### *Colour and Synthetic Pitch Systems*

The germinal musical material for *Colour Sketches* emerged through a personalised colour-wheel system (see figure 5) in which colours from Kandinsky's paintings were associated with specific pitch collections. These colour-pitch relationships generated synthetic scales (see figure 8)that became the basis for motivic construction.

Rather than claiming objective colour-pitch correspondences, the study treats synaesthetic associations as compositional starting points. Subjective photisms informed the initial mapping conditions, but these were constrained within the broader perceptual framework to avoid purely idiosyncratic outcomes. The emphasis remained on musical intelligibility rather than autobiographical sensory replication.

Through this process, colour operated not merely as harmonic symbolism but as a generator of pitch organisation, orchestral timbre, and formal pacing.




*Figure 1: Personal Colour Wheel*

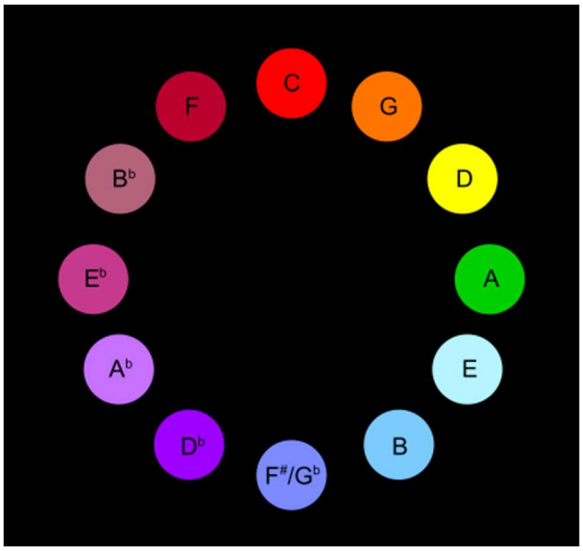



Figure 2: Scriabin's Colour Wheel



*Figure 3: Synthetic Scale based on colours in Composition X.*

**Synaesthetic Mapping and Cross-Modal Perception**

Although the study engages synaesthetic concepts, it does not attempt to demonstrate neurological synaesthesia in a clinical sense. Rather, it explores broader cross-modal correspondences grounded in embodied and perceptual cognition. Research in multisensory perception demonstrates that humans consistently associate higher pitches with elevated spatial positions, brighter timbres with lighter colours, and denser textures with greater visual complexity[25]. These relationships suggest that perceptual systems share organisational tendencies across modalities.

The compositional framework developed here therefore operates through perceptual plausibility rather than universal equivalence. Cross-modal mapping functions as a field of interpretative affordances rather than fixed translation rules.

**Tempo and Movement**

Kandinsky's visual organisation provides a framework for considering how rhythmic qualities may be translated from the visual to the musical domain. Rather than treating the painting's rhythmic character as a direct equivalent of musical rhythm, I interpret its contrasting forms as suggestive of different modes of musical movement. The broad, continuous gestures visible in Figures 4 and 5 (see annexure 1, grids A3, B3, and C3–E3) can be associated with sustained, legato passages, in which musical lines unfold with a sense of continuity and fluidity. Conversely, the angular and fragmented shapes identified in Annexure 1 (B4–5, A5, B1–2, C1–2, and D4–5) lend themselves to more articulated musical treatments, including staccato figures and percussive rhythmic gestures. The resulting compositional approach therefore draws on the painting's visual contrasts as a means of shaping musical articulation, continuity, and rhythmic character.

[25] Spence, *Sensehacking*, 1978.

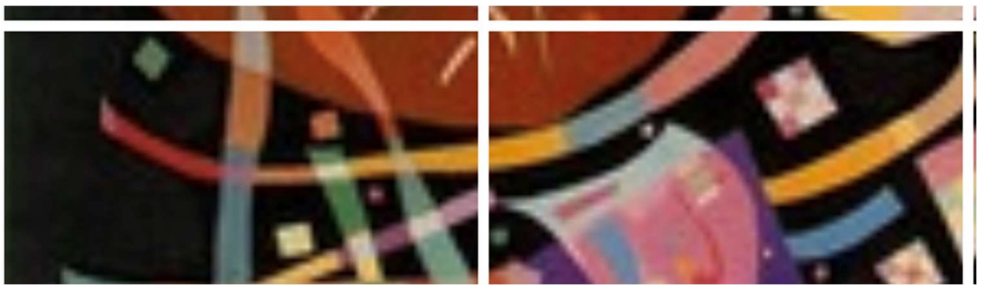


*Figure 4: Sweeping lines in A3-B3.*

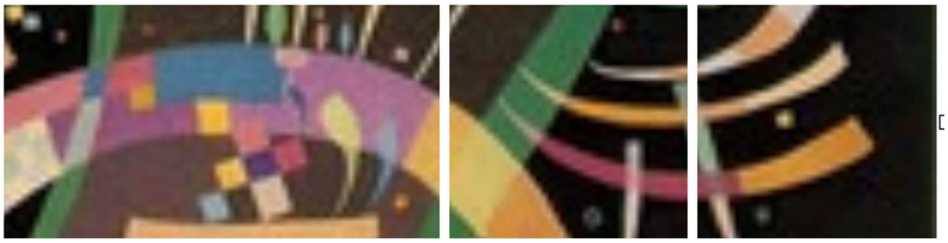


*Figure 5: Sweeping figures from C3-E3.*

**Colour and Harmony**

The chromatic contrasts in *Composition X* provide another point of departure for translating Kandinsky's visual language into musical parameters. Rather than assigning a fixed musical equivalent to each colour, the compositional process treats the painting's contrasting hues as prompts for exploring different harmonic characters. The saturated reds and yellows visible in the work (see Figure 6; Annexure 1, grids A4, C5, B4, B2, C1–2, and D1–2) suggest harmonic fields characterised by brightness, intensity, and forward momentum. These qualities may be realised through major sonorities, registral emphasis, or more active harmonic movement. By contrast, the presence of darker blues and black introduces a markedly different expressive register, one that can be explored through minor sonorities, reduced harmonic activity, and denser or more restrained textures. The resulting harmonic language therefore does not seek to establish a literal colour-to-chord correspondence, but rather uses Kandinsky's chromatic relationships as an interpretive stimulus for constructing contrasting emotional and expressive states.

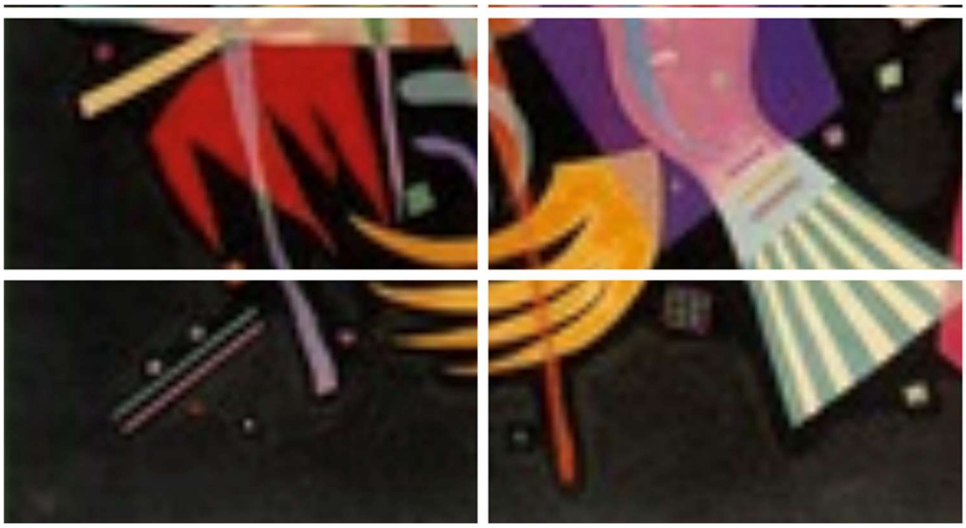


*Figure 6: Jagged reds and yellows in A4, B4 and 5.*

**Contrast and Tension**

The visual dialogue between organic, curvilinear shapes and sharply angular forms in *Composition X* (see Annexure 1, grids A3, B3, and C3; A4, B4–5, B2, C2, and D5) informed the treatment of musical texture as a site of contrast and transformation. Rather than assigning a fixed orchestral equivalent to each visual element, the compositional approach explores how differing textural densities and timbral combinations can project qualities analogous to those observed in the painting. Passages characterised by continuity and fluidity may emerge through sustained instrumental layering, whereas abrupt changes in texture, articulation, or orchestral colour can evoke the disruptive presence of angular forms. These oppositions are further intensified through harmonic instability and moments of dissonance, creating a dynamic interplay between cohesion and fragmentation that reflects the visual tensions embedded within Kandinsky's composition.



*Figure 7: Curvilinear shapes in A3-B3.*

## Listening to Images

The phrase *listening to images* encapsulates the broader conceptual argument of this article. The goal is not to collapse vision and sound into identical systems but to reveal shared perceptual logic between them.

Within *Colour Sketches*, visual rhythm becomes audible through temporal organisation, orchestral colour, motivic fragmentation, and textural pacing. The listener is not expected to *hear* Kandinsky's paintings literally. Instead, the music seeks to recreate perceptual experiences analogous to moving through visual abstraction. This process transforms composition into a form of perceptual reconstruction. Musical structure emerges not from abstract formal systems alone but from embodied engagement with visual movement and spatial tension.

## Implications for Interdisciplinary Composition

The study contributes to contemporary composition by expanding the concept of rhythm beyond meter, pulse, or repetition. Visual rhythm introduces a spatial conception of rhythmic organisation rooted in perceptual movement and attentional flow. This reconceptualisation allows rhythm to function structurally across texture, orchestration, form, and timbre rather than solely within durational frameworks. Consequently, visual rhythm becomes a compositional resource capable of generating large-scale formal organisation.

## Artistic Research and Cognitive Inquiry

The research also contributes to artistic research discourse by demonstrating how composition may function as perceptual inquiry. Rather than merely illustrating theoretical concepts, the compositional process itself generates knowledge concerning multisensory organisation and perceptual structure. This aligns with contemporary perspectives in embodied cognition and neuroaesthetics, which increasingly recognise the active, multisensory nature of artistic perception.

## Limitations and Future Research

The framework developed in this study does not claim universality. Colour associations remain culturally and individually variable, and the perceptual effectiveness of the mappings has not been empirically tested with listeners. Future research may therefore integrate listener-response studies, computational modelling, eye-tracking technologies, and cross-cultural investigations to explore the broader applicability of visual-musical correspondences.

Additionally, computational systems may provide new possibilities for algorithmic visual-to-musical translation, while collaborative interdisciplinary research between composers, psychologists, and neuroscientists may further clarify the relationship between perception and compositional structure.

## Conclusion

This study has argued that visual rhythm may function as a structurally generative force within musical composition when approached through perceptually grounded methodologies. By engaging with the abstract visual language of *Composition X* by Wassily Kandinsky, the research has demonstrated that visual organisation can be translated into orchestral form through processes informed by *Gestalt* perception, artistic research, embodied cognition, and cross-modal mapping. Rather than treating visual art as metaphorical inspiration, the study proposed that perceptual relationships embedded within abstract painting may generate temporal musical structures capable of reconstructing the experience of seeing through sound.

### How can visual rhythm be translated into musical composition through a systematic and perceptually grounded process?

This study aims to demonstrate that visual rhythm may be translated into musical composition through a structured process of perceptual analysis and compositional mapping. Through eye-tracking reduction, geometric tracing, colour mapping, and the analysis of spatial vectors within *Composition X*, visual movement was reinterpreted as orchestral gesture, rhythmic pacing, registral direction, textural density, and formal development within *Colour Sketches*. Rather than relying upon literal representation, the composition translated perceptual behaviours into musical processes. Visual trajectories became melodic motion, chromatic density became orchestral saturation, fragmentation became distributed motivic activity, and spatial suspension became harmonic stillness. The findings therefore suggest that rhythm may emerge not only from metric organisation, but from the movement of perceptual attention itself. Visual rhythm consequently functions as a viable compositional generator when grounded in perceptual structure and embodied listening.

### In what ways may *Gestalt* perception function as a shared organisational framework between visual and auditory experience?

The research demonstrated that *Gestalt* perception provides an important cognitive framework through which visual and musical organisation may

be understood comparatively. Both seeing and hearing rely upon the grouping of fragmented information into coherent perceptual structures through principles such as proximity, similarity, continuity, contrast, and directional tension. In *Composition X*, disconnected shapes and vectors become perceptually unified through spatial relationships. Similarly, within *Colour Sketches*, fragmented orchestral gestures are grouped by the listener into coherent musical structures through shared contour, timbral association, registral movement, and rhythmic identity. The study therefore concludes that *Gestalt* perception functions not solely as a theory of visual cognition, but as a broader model of multisensory organisation through which both visual and auditory coherence emerge relationally.

**How can Kandinsky's abstract visual grammar generate orchestral structure, rhythm, texture, and form?**

The study found that Kandinsky's abstractionist vocabulary possesses latent temporal and structural qualities capable of generating orchestral organisation. Visual points were interpreted as isolated orchestral attacks and percussive articulations, while lines became melodic trajectories and gestural motion. Curvilinear forms informed registral expansion and sustained orchestral flow, whereas angular geometric tensions generated rhythmic instability, interruption, and contrapuntal opposition. Colour relationships were translated into timbral identity, harmonic density, and orchestral brightness. Most significantly, Kandinsky's spatial organisation influenced the formal behaviour of *Colour Sketches* itself. The composition unfolds through accumulative perceptual relationships analogous to the visual experience of navigating abstract space rather than through conventional thematic development alone. The findings therefore suggest that Kandinsky's visual grammar may function as a generative structural system capable of shaping orchestral rhythm, texture, pacing, and form.

**To what extent may artistic research contribute to interdisciplinary understandings of perception and composition?**

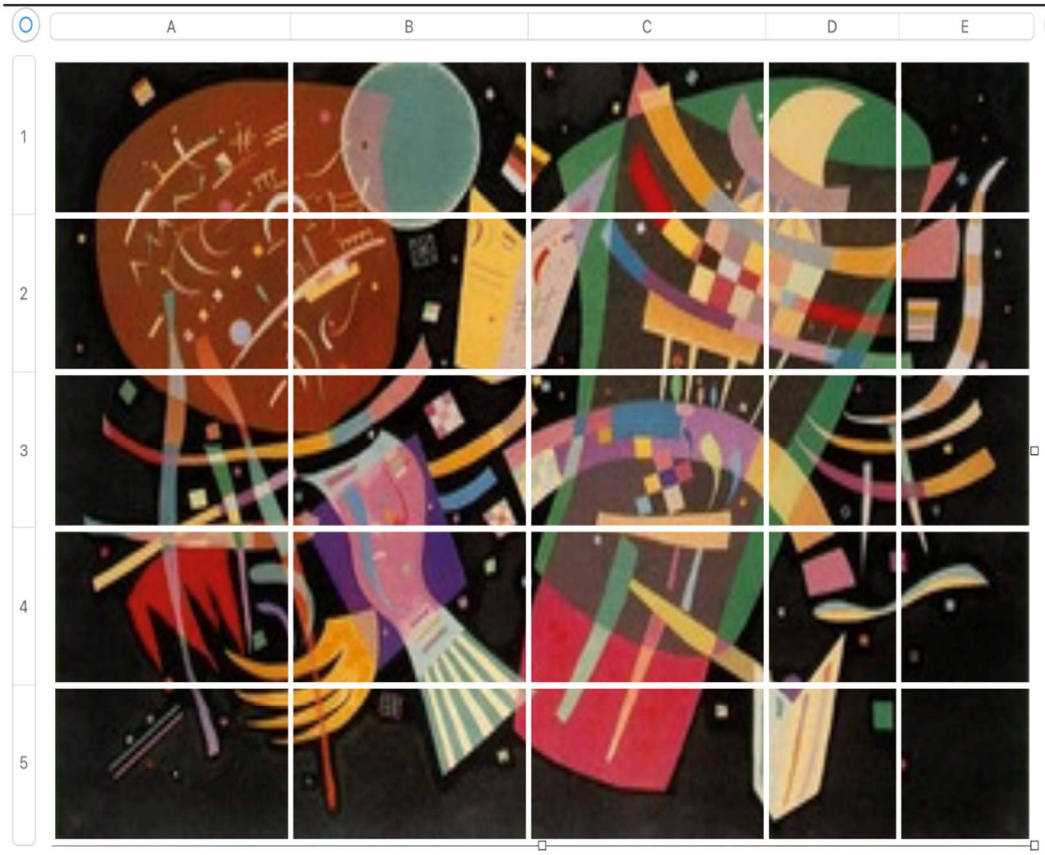
This study demonstrated that artistic research offers a significant contribution to interdisciplinary understandings of perception because creative practice itself becomes a mode of inquiry. Rather than separating theory from composition, the research process unfolded through iterative interaction between visual analysis, orchestration, listening, embodied response, and compositional revision. Knowledge emerged through the act of composing as much as through theoretical reflection. *Colour Sketches* therefore functions simultaneously as artwork, perceptual

investigation, and theoretical proposition. The study concludes that artistic research enables perceptual theories to be explored through sensory experience, allowing relationships between sight, sound, movement, and cognition to become materially and temporally articulated through artistic practice.

At the same time, the research acknowledges important limitations. The mappings between colour, sound, gesture, and form cannot be treated as universally fixed correspondences. Perception remains shaped by culture, embodiment, memory, and individual interpretation. The compositional framework developed in this study therefore does not claim objective equivalence between visual and auditory phenomena, nor does it seek to prove neurological synaesthesia. Instead, it proposes that perceptually plausible relationships may generate coherent compositional systems capable of producing meaningful interdisciplinary structures. Future research may extend this investigation through listener studies, computational modelling, neuroaesthetic experimentation, and cross-cultural analysis.

Ultimately, *Colour Sketches* demonstrates that interdisciplinary composition may move beyond metaphor toward perceptual reconstruction. The work suggests that abstract painting and orchestral music are not merely parallel artistic languages, but interconnected systems of perceptual organisation capable of shaping human experience across sensory domains. By translating visual rhythm into orchestral time, the study proposes a compositional model in which music becomes a medium for listening to images, revealing the profound interconnectedness of seeing, hearing, movement, and cognition.

## Annexure 1




## Annexure 2



## Bibliography

Amedi, Amir, Lotfi B. Merabet, Felipe Bermpohl, and Alvaro Pascual-Leone. "The Occipital Cortex in the Blind: Lessons about Plasticity and Vision." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 14, no. 6 (2005): 306–11. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00387.x.

Amin, Maina, Olufemi Olu-Lafe, Loes E. Claessen, Monika Sobczak-Edmans, Jamie Ward, Adrian L. Williams, and Noam Sagiv. "Understanding Grapheme Personification: A Social Synaesthesia?" *Journal of Neuropsychology* 5, no. 2 (2011): 255–82. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1748-6653.2011.02016.x.

Arnheim, Rudolf. *Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

Brougher, Kerry, Judith Zilczer, Ari Wiseman, and Vivian Endicott Barnett. *Visual Music: Synaesthesia in Art and Music since 1900*. London: Thames & Hudson, 2005.

Clark, Andy. "Whatever Next? Predictive Brains, Situated Agents, and the Future of Cognitive Science." *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 36, no. 3 (2013): 181–204.

Deroy, Ophelia, and Charles Spence. "Crossmodal Correspondences: Four Challenges." *Multisensory Research* 29, nos. 1–3 (2016): 29–48.

Ferrari, Valeria, and Uta Noppeney. "Attention Controls Multisensory Perception via Two Distinct Mechanisms at Different Levels of the Cortical Hierarchy." *PLOS Biology* 19, no. 6 (2021): 1–31.

Florman, Lisa. *Concerning the Spiritual—and the Concrete—in Kandinsky's Art*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014.

Jewanski, Jörg, Sean A. Day, and Jamie Ward. "A Colorful Albino: The First Documented Case of Synaesthesia, by Georg Tobias Ludwig Sachs in 1812." *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences* 18, no. 3 (2009): 293–303. https://doi.org/10.1080/09647040802431946.

Kandinsky, Wassily. *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*. Translated by M. T. H. Sadler. New York: Dover Publications, 1977.

———. *Point and Line to Plane*. Translated by Howard Dearstyne and Hilla Rebay. New York: Dover Publications, 1979.

Kubovy, Michael. *The Psychology of Perspective and Renaissance Art*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Leman, Marc. *Embodied Music Cognition and Mediation Technology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007.

Marks, Lawrence E. *The Unity of the Senses: Interrelations among the Modalities*. New York: Academic Press, 1978.

Palmer, Chesney. *Colour Sketches*. Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra. Conducted by Jeremy Silver. Video recording. YouTube. https://youtu.be/RsqC9XYE4VA.

Palmer, Chesney. *Colour Sketches*. Full orchestral score. Cape Town, South Africa, 2025.

Palmer, Stephen E. *Vision Science: Photons to Phenomenology*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999.

Palmer, Stephen E., Karen B. Schloss, and Jonathan Sammartino. "Visual Aesthetics and Human Preference." *Annual Review of Psychology* 64 (2013): 77–107.

Ramachandran, V. S., and Edward M. Hubbard. "Psychophysical Investigations into the Neural Basis of Synaesthesia." *Proceedings of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences* 268, no. 1470 (2001): 979–83.

———. "Synaesthesia—A Window into Perception, Thought and Language." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 8, no. 12 (2001): 3–34.

Rucsanda, Mădălina Dana. "Aspects of the Relationship between Music and Painting and Their Influence on Schoenberg and Kandinsky." *Bulletin of the Transilvania University of Brașov. Series VIII: Performing Arts* 12, no. 2 (2019): 91–100. https://doi.org/10.31926/but.pa.2019.12.61.21.

Sachs, Georg Tobias Ludwig. *Historiae Naturalis Duorum Leopardorum*. Erlangen: Palm, 1812.

Spence, Charles. *Sensehacking: How to Use the Power of Your Senses for Happier, Healthier Living*. London: Viking, 2021.

Varela, Francisco J., Evan Thompson, and Eleanor Rosch. *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991.

Weiss, Peg. *Kandinsky and Old Russia: The Artist as Ethnographer and Shaman*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995.

© 2026 Chesney Palmer. This is an Open Access article published in the journal Musica Academica by the University of Oradea Publishing House and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). The full terms of this license are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0.

*Musica Academica*
*Musica Academica*
Volume 3. Issue 1 (2026): 37-71
DOI: 10.61215/MA.2026.vol.3.iss.1.02

# THREE NAMES, ONE CAREER: MARIE ANTOINETTE CRUX GILLBERG PETERSÉN AND TRANSNATIONAL NETWORKS OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FEMALE MUSICIANS

**SUSAN M. HOLMAN**

PhD in Musicology
Universität Paderborn[1]
sholman@staff.alquds.edu

**Abstract**
*This study challenges the conventional portrayal of eighteenth-century female musicians as isolated figures by integrating qualitative biographical reconstruction with quantitative social network analysis (SNA). Focusing on four distinct networks centered in Vienna, London, Gustavian Sweden, and Paris, the research uncovers transnational connections among female professional musicians, patrons, and amateurs. These networks reveal their significant yet underrecognized influence on eighteenth-century musical culture.*

*The case study of Marie Antoinette Crux Gillberg Petersén—a previously fragmented biographical subject whose career bridged these musical centers under three separate names—illustrates both the reach of these networks and the archival fragmentation that has obscured them. Interactive network visualizations and prosopographical methods illuminate the structure of these female-driven connections, supporting a re-evaluation of women's role in the musical life of Enlightenment Europe.*

**Keywords**
*eighteenth-century music, female musicians, social network analysis, biographical reconstruction, gender studies, music historiography*

## Introduction

For decades, musicologists have shown that traditional music historiography has marginalized women, often relegating them to the periphery of a musical culture narrated primarily through male composers, institutions, and lineages. Foundational studies by Marcia J. Citron and Karin Pendle exposed the mechanisms by which women were excluded from the musical canon,[2] while later work by Melanie Unseld and others interrogated the musical biographical narratives that shaped historical memory itself. Recent scholarship on mobility, migration, and cultural circulation has further emphasized the relational dimensions of

[1] Universität Paderborn, Warburger Str. 100, 33098 Paderborn, Germany.

[2] Marcia J. Citron, *Gender and the Musical Canon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993, 2000). Karin Pendle, ed. *Women & music: A History*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2000)

eighteenth-century musical life.[3]

Yet despite these historiographical advances, women continue to appear in many studies—implicitly or explicitly—as exceptional or isolated figures rather than as participants in interconnected professional communities. This article challenges that assumption by combining qualitative biographical reconstruction with the systematic framework of quantitative social network analysis (SNA). Rather than treating female musicians as marginal anomalies, it shows that they operated within dense, transnational networks linking performers, composers, patrons, teachers, publishers, and elite amateurs across Western Europe.

At the center of this study is the case of Marie Antoinette Crux Gillberg Petersén (1772–after 1822)—a woman documented in historical sources under three different names. Her career illustrates both the limitations of conventional, individualistic biographical approaches and the necessity of a network perspective. Ultimately, my research calls for a fundamental re-evaluation of eighteenth-century musical culture, recognizing the significant and previously underappreciated influence of female musical networks.

Crux Gillberg Petersén's career fits within broader theoretical discussions of movement and gender in early modern music history. Recent scholarship, particularly in *The Routledge Handbook of Music and Migration*, emphasizes mobility as a defining feature of musical life—not only for prominent male composers but also for lesser-documented performers. Mobility facilitated the circulation of styles, repertoires, and professional opportunities, while complicating the reconstruction of individual careers.[4] However, much of the existing literature on musical mobility has focused predominantly on male actors, leaving the experiences of female musicians comparatively underexplored. Studies such as *Musicians' Mobilities and Music Migrations in Early Modern Europe* highlight transnational movement as a structural feature of the profession, yet women often appear only marginally in these narratives.[5]

---

[3] Melanie Unseld, *Biographie und Musikgeschichte: Wandlungen biographischer Konzepte in Musikkultur und Musikhistoriographie* (Köln: Böhlau, 2014); Melanie Unseld and Christian von Zimmermann, eds., *Anekdote – Biographie – Kanon: Zur Geschichtsschreibung in den schönen Künsten* (Köln: Böhlau, 2013); Melanie Unseld and Fabian Kolb, eds., *Musikwissenschaft und Biographik: Narrative, Akteure, Medien* (Mainz: Schott Campus, 2019).

[4] Wolfgang Gratzer et al., eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Music and Migration: Theories and Methodologies* (New York: Routledge, 2023).

[5] Gesa Zur Nieden and Berthold Over, eds., *Musicians' Mobilities and Music Migrations in Early Modern Europe: Biographical Patterns and Cultural Exchanges* (Transcript Publishing, 2016).

This imbalance reflects not only historical realities but also historiographical traditions that have privileged institutional and compositional histories over performance-based careers.

## 1. Framing the Research: Challenging the Isolation Narrative

### 1.1. Central Question

Were eighteenth-century female musicians truly isolated, or did they cultivate networks that fostered professional interaction, artistic exchange, and social mobility? To address this question, I employed a dual-method approach that integrates qualitative biographical reconstruction with quantitative network analysis (SNA). This combination allows for a more comprehensive understanding of the structural and individual dimensions of these musicians' lives.

### 1.2. Qualitative Biographical Reconstruction

The qualitative component involved extensive archival research, yielding more than four hundred pages of prosopographical profiles. These profiles documented individual careers and uncovered patterns of interaction—such as how musicians encountered one another, collaborated, competed, or remained connected through shared environments and reputational awareness. However, purely narrative approaches have inherent limitations. While individual biographies reveal compelling stories, they often fail to expose the broader structures in which these women operated. To address this gap, I turned to social network analysis, using digital tools such as Gephi to visualize relationships and identify patterns obscured by textual sources alone. By selectively isolating female-to-female connections, the resulting visualizations highlight the strength, density, and geographical scope of these networks.

### 1.3. Dataset and Methodological Integration

I compiled a dataset of fifty-five female musicians active between 1740 and 1800, reconstructing their biographies through extensive archival research, including correspondence, concert programs, pedagogical treatises, and contemporary periodicals. I built databases to track musicians' activities in major cities, capturing details such as dates, genres, and associations. To bridge the divide between individual narratives and abstract network analysis, this study uses a dual-method approach. Qualitative biographical analysis provides the rich contextual detail necessary to understand individual lives and identify potential connections. Quantitative social network mapping, visualized in Gephi,

provides a systematic and rigorous framework for validating and analyzing patterns of interaction within these networks.[6]

This synthesis responds to calls from scholars such as Georgina Born, Andrew Gustar, and Ogul Köker to develop methodologies that bridge the qualitative-quantitative divide in women's music history. Born's work, particularly in *Music and Digital Media*, combines ethnographic qualitative methods with quantitative data analysis to explore global musical practices and offers a model for interdisciplinary studies of cultural production.[7] Gustar's mixed-methods approach, as seen in "A Matter of Perspective," uses statistical analysis to uncover trends in music history that qualitative methods alone might overlook, thereby enriching historical narratives.[8] Köker's research demonstrates the power of quantitative methods in historical musicology while emphasizing qualitative approaches to deepen contextual understanding.[9]

By synthesizing these perspectives, this study advances a robust framework for analyzing the networks of eighteenth-century female musicians.

### 1.4. Evaluating Heterogeneous Source Materials

A critical aspect of this study is evaluating and interpreting fragmented, uneven archival sources. Reconstructing the lives of eighteenth-century female musicians requires navigating materials that offer distinct yet incomplete evidence. Personal correspondence, such as the letters of Leopold Mozart, offers insight into contemporary perceptions, social networks, and direct interactions.[10] However, these sources are inherently subjective, shaped by personal bias, selective reporting, and situational context. While they illuminate relationships, they rarely provide comprehensive or continuous narratives.

---

[6] Mathieu Bastian, Sebastien Heymann, and Mathieu Jacomy, "Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks," *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, March 19, 2009.
(All links are provided in the Bibliography.)

[7] Georgina Born, ed., *Music and Digital Media: A Planetary Anthropology* (UCL Press, 2022).

[8] Andrew Gustar, "A Matter of Perspective: Taking a Distant View of Music History," *National Early Music Association Newsletter*, 8/2 (2024), 91–98.

[9] Ogul Köker, "Two Cultures, Historical Musicology, and Qualitative Research Methods," *International Music and Sciences Symposium Proceedings*, Istanbul, April 17–19, 2019.

[10] See *Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg.* "Mozart Briefe und Dokumente." Online edition.

Concert programs and newspaper reviews provide concrete evidence of performance activity, including dates, locations, and professional collaborations. Yet they remain limited in scope, often reducing performers—particularly women—to brief mentions without biographical context. Their value lies in factual reliability, but they require supplementation to reconstruct broader careers. Encyclopedic and lexicographical sources, such as those by Johann Friedrich Reichardt and later writers like François-Joseph Fétis, occupy an intermediate position.[11] While they aim to consolidate knowledge, they often perpetuate inaccuracies, introduce unverified claims, or reshape narratives to align with nineteenth-century historiographical priorities. As the case study below shows, conflicting names and attributions in these sources underscore the need for caution.

### 1.5. Systematic Cross-Referencing and Archival Silences

The methodological approach adopted here relies on systematic cross-referencing to align names, dates, locations, and professional activities across multiple source types. Only through this triangulation can tentative identifications—such as the unification of Marianne Crux, Mrs. Gillberg, and Fru Gillberg Petersén—be substantiated. This process also reveals the archive's structural silences, in which the absence of evidence reflects not historical reality but patterns of preservation shaped by gender and social hierarchy. By acknowledging these silences, this study highlights the need for critical archival engagement and a re-evaluation of the conditions that have obscured women's contributions to musical culture.

## 2. Qualitative Approach: Reconstructing Lives and Identifying Potential Links

The biographical reconstruction was guided by four central questions: Did professional and amateur female musicians cultivate relationships that fostered mutual support and artistic collaboration? Did female composers engage with one another's work across geographic boundaries? Were these relationships defined by mentorship, competition, or both? Did female networks offer meaningful alternatives to male-mediated pathways to professional advancement? Although individual biographical narratives were diverse and multifaceted, preliminary patterns of interconnectedness began to emerge, revealing both localized clusters and

[11] Johann Friedrich Reichardt, *Musikalische Monathsschrift,* 1–2, edited by Friedrich Ludwig Aemilius Kunzen (Berlin: Berlinische Musikhandlung, 1793); François-Joseph Fétis, ed., *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*. 8 vols. (Bruxelles: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1837).

surprisingly extensive transnational relationships. To explore and validate these nascent observations, I adopted a quantitative social network analysis approach.

Complementing this qualitative data, I developed a dedicated website featuring interactive timelines, geographic maps, and relationship charts. This platform allows users to explore individual life trajectories and identify potential connections visually. Nevertheless, while rich in detail, this qualitative data required the systematic rigor of quantitative methods to move beyond suggestive patterns and definitively map the structure and significance of these networks. The biographical profiles laid the groundwork for understanding the individual trajectories of these female musicians and for my doctoral dissertation, "Harmonizing Histories: Networking 18th-Century European Female Musicians."[12] Across these reconstructed lives, certain figures emerged as nodal points—not isolated stars but hubs within a vibrant web—serving as network centers and chapter headings:

### 2.1. Marianna Martines (1744–1812)

As a prominent Viennese composer, pianist, and singer, Martines's biography reveals close artistic collaborations with figures such as Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782) and Josef Haydn (1732–1809). She played a significant role as a mentor and supporter of other female musicians, bringing together singers, instrumentalists, and composers within the influential Viennese aristocracy. Her regular musical salons fostered these connections and helped sustain a female-centered artistic community.[13]

### 2.2. Elisabeth Mara (1749–1833)

This celebrated operatic soprano's extensive and geographically diverse career spanned numerous European courts, from London to Berlin and beyond. Her professional engagements strongly suggest a far-reaching network of contacts and collaborations, highlighting the mobility and influence of female performers.[14]

---

[12] Susan M. Holman, "Harmonizing Histories: Networking 18th-Century Female Musicians" (PhD diss. Universität Paderborn, 2025).

[13] Irving Godt, *Marianna Martines: A Woman Composer in the Vienna of Mozart and Haydn*, ed. by John A. Rice (Eastman Studies in Music. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010).

[14] Mitgetheilt von O. von Riesemann, "Eine Selbstbiographie der Sangerin Gertrud Elisabeth Mara." *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 32–40 (August 11–October 6, 1875), 32: 497–501; 33: 513–17; 34: 529–35; 35: 545–50; 36: 561–65; 37: 577–82; 38: 593–97; 39: 609–13; 40: 629–633.

### 2.3. The Swedish Court of Gustav III (1746–1792)

Sweden emerged as an unexpectedly vibrant center for female musicianship. Women there actively participated in formal court performances and burgeoning public concerts, reflecting a supportive environment that offered opportunities for female artistic expression through court concerts, opera performances, and teaching positions.[15]

### 2.4. Marie Antoinette (1755–1793)

Beyond her royal notoriety, Marie Antoinette was a significant patron of music. She pursued music personally—playing the harpsichord and singing—and championed more intimate performance settings. Her patronage elevated composers and expanded opportunities and visibility for female musicians in the Parisian and courtly musical spheres.[16]

While these initial qualitative assessments provided invaluable contextual understanding and highlighted potential connections, they lacked the systematic rigor needed to definitively map and analyze the structure of these networks or quantify their significance. This limitation underscored the critical need to integrate robust quantitative methodologies.

## 3. Quantitative Approach: Mapping Female-Driven Networks

To move beyond anecdotal evidence and rigorously examine the structural underpinnings of female musical networks in the eighteenth century, I employed Social Network Analysis (SNA) using Gephi software.[17] By first mapping all connections and then filtering out male ties, this approach isolated female-driven connections, revealing the extent, nature, and influence of women's musical networks. This quantitative methodology complements the qualitative biographical reconstructions, providing a systematic lens for challenging the traditional narrative of female musicians as isolated figures.

The central research questions guiding this quantitative analysis were: Do distinct networks of female musicians and patrons exist independently of male influence? What are the structural characteristics

---

[15] Nils Edvard Personne, *Svenska teatern: några anteckningar*, 7 vols. (Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1913–1927).

[16] Patrick Barbier, *Marie-Antoinette et la Musique* (Paris: Grasset, 2022).

[17] Mathieu Bastian, Sebastien Heymann, and Mathieu Jacomy, "Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks," *Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, March 19, 2009.

of these networks, including density, centralization, and key influential nodes? Are these networks primarily confined by geographical or geopolitical boundaries, or do they exhibit transnational characteristics? Can SNA distinguish between direct personal acquaintances and indirect influence stemming from reputation or shared professional spheres?

Using SNA on the curated biographical dataset, I identified three types of connections. Primary ties: direct mentorship and documented collaborations; Secondary ties: shared patronage and co-performance within the same urban center; Potential ties: contemporaneity within similar musical genres (e.g., opera, home music) and shared geographic locales (e.g., Vienna and Stockholm).

In Gephi, nodes represent individuals, and edges represent relationships. I assigned edge weights based on the strength of evidence—for example, documented correspondence or shared performance venues received higher weights, whereas geographical proximity or secondary connections received lower weights.

The following network metrics were calculated:

- Degree centrality: The number of connections per node, indicating the most socially active and potentially influential female figures.
- Network density: The ratio of actual to potential connections, indicating network cohesion.
- Betweenness centrality: Identification of nodes that connect disparate clusters.
- Modularity: Detection of community clusters within networks.

Gephi generated graphs for four key networks—Marianna Martines (Vienna and beyond), Elisabeth Mara (European courts), Gustavian Sweden, and Marie Antoinette (Versailles and Paris)—as well as an integrated graph combining all four. In these visualizations, node size reflects degree centrality, edge thickness indicates tie strength, and spatial proximity indicates relationship intensity.

While SNA provides a powerful framework for visualizing relationships, its interpretive limits must be carefully acknowledged. The network graphs do not represent objective or complete historical realities; rather, they reflect the surviving and selected data on which they are based.

One of SNA's principal strengths is its ability to reveal patterns that remain obscured in narrative form. Clusters, central nodes, and degrees of connectivity make visible the structural dimensions of relationships, especially across geographic distances. In this study, SNA shows that female musicians operated within overlapping spheres rather than in isolated contexts. However, these visualizations are inherently shaped by

data availability. Well-documented figures—such as widely traveled professional musicians—appear disproportionately central, while amateur musicians or those documented only in private writings may appear peripheral or absent entirely. This creates a form of archival bias, translated into visual form, in which centrality may reflect documentation rather than historical importance.

Additionally, assigning weights to edges—from strong to potential connections—introduces interpretive subjectivity. Decisions about what constitutes a "primary" versus a "secondary" relationship depend on the researcher's evaluation of the sources and cannot always be definitively verified. Therefore, these graphs should be understood as analytical models open to revision, not as fixed representations.

Equally significant is what these networks cannot show. Emotional dynamics, artistic influence, informal encounters, and undocumented mentorships often remain invisible. A lack of visual connection does not necessarily indicate the absence of a relationship but rather the absence of surviving evidence. This limitation is especially relevant when examining female networks, where interactions were less likely to be formalized in institutional records. For these reasons, SNA in this study is not used as a standalone method but in conjunction with qualitative analysis. The visualizations serve as heuristic tools—guiding interpretation and raising new questions rather than providing definitive conclusions. This limitation is particularly evident in cases like the Parisian network, where connections are often mediated through shared environments rather than through explicitly documented interpersonal ties.

## 4. Network Visualizations and Analysis[18]

Applying SNA metrics to the four key networks produced the following visualizations and insights:

### 4.1. Marianna Martines's Network

[18] By removing male actors from network maps, this study identifies the primary, secondary, and potential connections among female musicians, providing a clearer understanding of their relationships and influences.

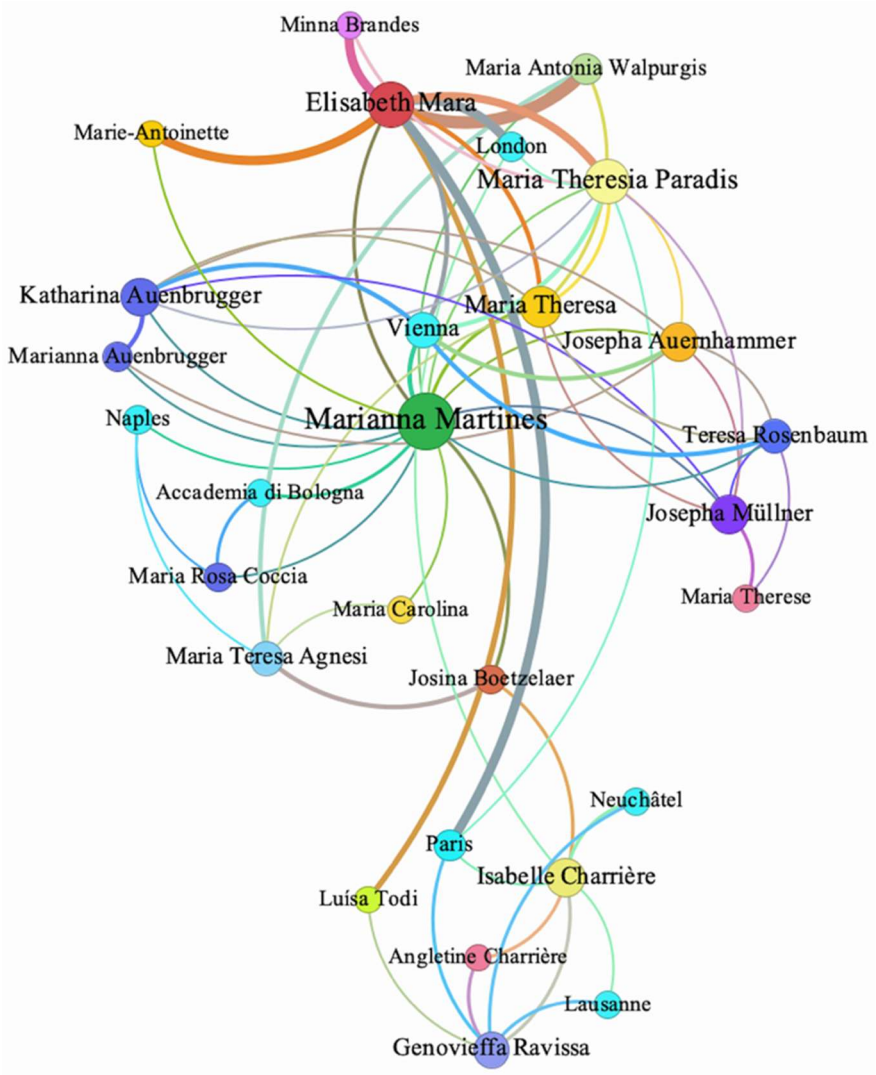



*Figure 1. Marianna Martines and her female connections*

Figure 1 presents a complex, multi-layered network connecting amateur and professional female musicians, composers, and patrons. Centered on Martines, the network extends beyond her immediate geographic and cultural context, suggesting a broader scope of influence for female musicians than might typically be expected in an amateur network. Martines's node, centrally positioned near Vienna, underscores her prominence within this circle. In the visualization, spatial proximity of nodes correlates with the strength of relational ties, often grounded in kinship, documented interpersonal affiliations, or mentorship roles within Viennese social strata.

Secondary clusters connected to Martines include Maria Rosa Coccia

(1759–1833) and Maria Teresa Agnesi (1720–1795), whose closer proximity reflects stronger ties mediated by figures such as Maria Carolina (1752–1814) and institutions such as the Accademia Filarmonica di Bologna. Martines's network reveals a community fostered by salons and aristocratic patronage. The relatively low network density, coupled with lower-weight edges—indicating weaker or potential connections—likely reflects the limited primary-source documentation of amateur musicians' interactions compared with that of their professional counterparts. These musicians engaged in less public activity and left fewer formal records.[19] Elisabeth Mara's position as an outlier in this network anticipates the contrasting structure examined in the next section, where mobility, rather than proximity, becomes the organizing principle.

This network analysis underscores the pivotal role of central figures, such as Martines, in sustaining these connections, while highlighting the importance of secondary figures and institutions in facilitating transnational ties across Europe. It challenges the prevailing notion that the impact of female musicians was limited to their immediate surroundings, revealing instead their considerable influence on a wider, interconnected European stage.

### 4.2. Elisabeth Mara's Network

In contrast, Elisabeth Mara's network is more expansive and densely interconnected. Spanning multiple European courts, it consists primarily of professional female musicians. Figure 2 shows three distinct clusters centered on London, Paris, and Weimar. These clusters are clearly delineated and range from strong personal and professional relationships to tenuous potential links and sporadic interactions. The presence of distinct clusters and higher-weight edges indicates strong, frequent interactions through professional collaborations and shared performance circuits. Node sizes scaled by degree centrality highlight influential figures in this network. The higher density compared with Martines's network reflects a denser web of professional relationships and more extensive documentation, including critical reception and correspondence.[20]

[19] Jennine Hurl-Eamon, *Women's Roles in Eighteenth-Century Europe* (Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010).

[20] John A. Rice, *Music in the Eighteenth Century* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2012).

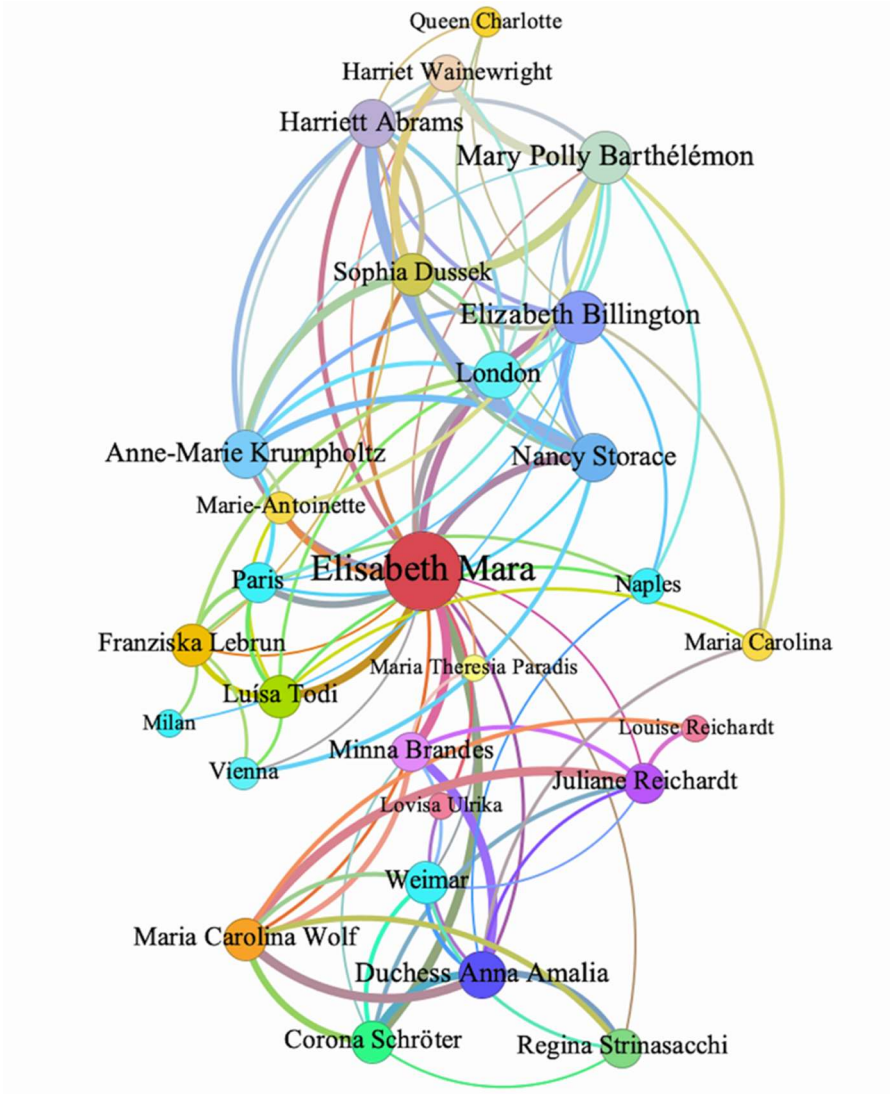



*Figure 2. Elisabeth Mara and her female connections*

This network is both local and transnational, transcending geopolitical boundaries. While many interactions occurred within specific cultural hubs such as Weimar or London, connections also extended broadly across Europe. For example, Mary Polly Barthélémon (1749–1799) and Elizabeth Billington (1765–1818) are linked to London, Paris, and Naples, with Billington also tied to Milan, as is Franziska LeBrun (1756–1791). Moreover, LeBrun is connected with Nancy Storace and Luísa Todi (1753–1833) in Vienna, Paris, and London. Though the Weimar cluster appears more isolated, the overall network spans Western Europe,

bridging Germanic and Austrian territories with Italy, France, and the United Kingdom. This widespread geographical distribution underscores the considerable travel undertaken by many of these women, highlighting a key distinction from the Martines network: professional female musicians were more mobile than their amateur counterparts.

### 4.3. Gustavian Swedish Network

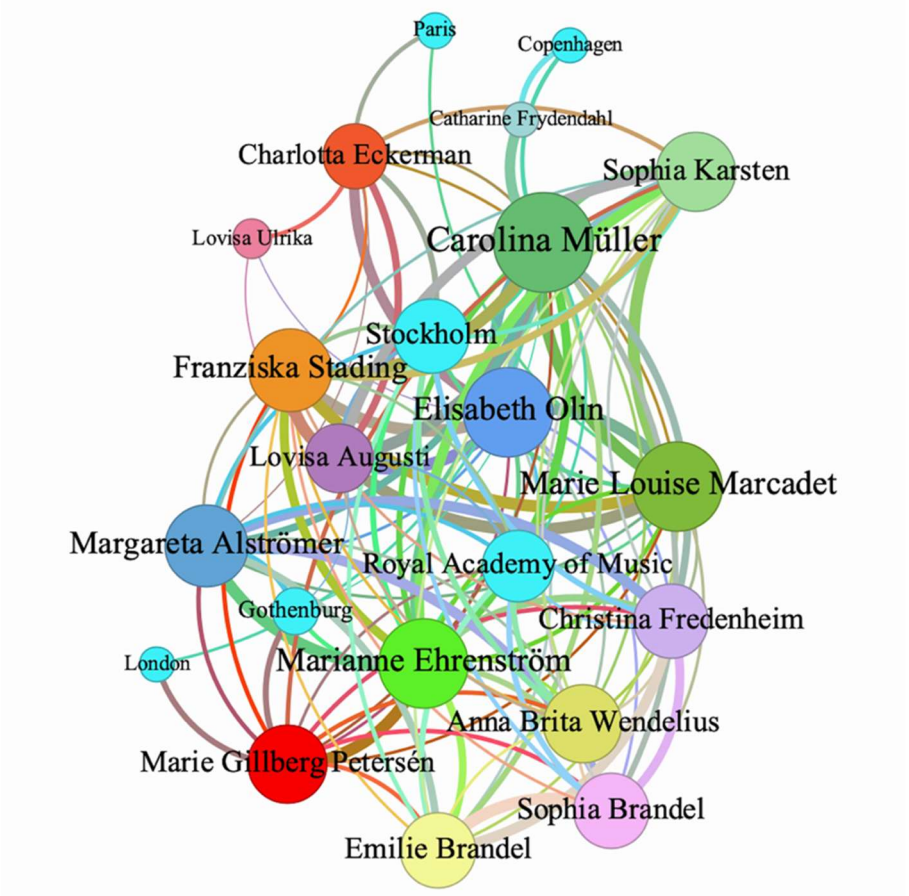



*Figure 3. Gustavian Swedish female musical network*

The network of female musicians in Gustavian Sweden (Figure 3) is distinguished by a unique, cohesive structure with prominent nodes, strong connections, and markedly high density. The significant autonomy of the female musicians within this network suggests that their professional and personal relationships were largely self-sustaining and less dependent on external influences.

The network's insularity implies that, although these women were interconnected and mutually influential within their immediate cultural context, their exposure to and engagement with foreign female musicians

was relatively limited. This contrasts with the more extensive transnational networks of Martines and Mara, in which connections spanned national borders and facilitated a richer exchange of ideas and influences. However, musicians such as Marie Gillberg Petersén, Franziska Stading (1753–1836), and Carolina Müller (1755–1826)—who maintained connections beyond Sweden—may have served as conduits for international influences, potentially introducing foreign elements into the Swedish musical landscape.

Centered on royal patronage in Stockholm and Gothenburg, this network supports the biographical information in the qualitative profiles, which indicate that amateurs performed alongside professionals. Unlike the other networks, the node sizes for amateur and professional musicians are roughly equal, suggesting a more integrated and comprehensively documented musical community. The limited spread of nodes to outlier urban centers indicates that, although geographical mobility existed, primary relational ties remained within Sweden's geopolitical boundaries. This contrasts with the transnational mobility evident in Mara's network and underscores the significant role of royal courts in cultivating and documenting female musical activity.[21]

### 4.4. The Marie Antoinette Anomaly and the Heuristic Value of Network Analysis

Like the Swedish network, Marie-Antoinette's network is characterized by a single cluster, though it is not circular. This network initially posed a methodological challenge: while biographical sources richly document her musical activities and patronage, a clearly defined network of directly connected female musicians did not immediately emerge from traditional qualitative inquiry. Although the network is geographically centered in Paris, this does not imply that female musicians in the area were interconnected. The only definitive primary network identified within this framework is Marie-Antoinette's immediate circle at Versailles. However, applying SNA shifted the analytical perspective: Paris itself emerged as a central intermediary node, rather than Marie-Antoinette (Figure 4). As a node with high betweenness centrality, Paris functioned as a hub that facilitated indirect connections and fostered a shared cultural environment for female musical activity, even without a single unifying individual.

This finding highlights the heuristic value of treating geographical proximity and shared cultural milieus as network-forming elements.

[21] Leif Jonsson and Anna Ivarsdotter, *Musiken i Sverige*, 4 vols. (Stockholm: Fischer, 1993).

Although this network lacks tightly clustered interpersonal connections—especially compared with the Mara or the Swedish networks—it still reflects a distinct mode of network formation. Here, shared urban space, institutional frameworks, and cultural milieus serve as connective tissue among actors whose interactions are not always directly documented.

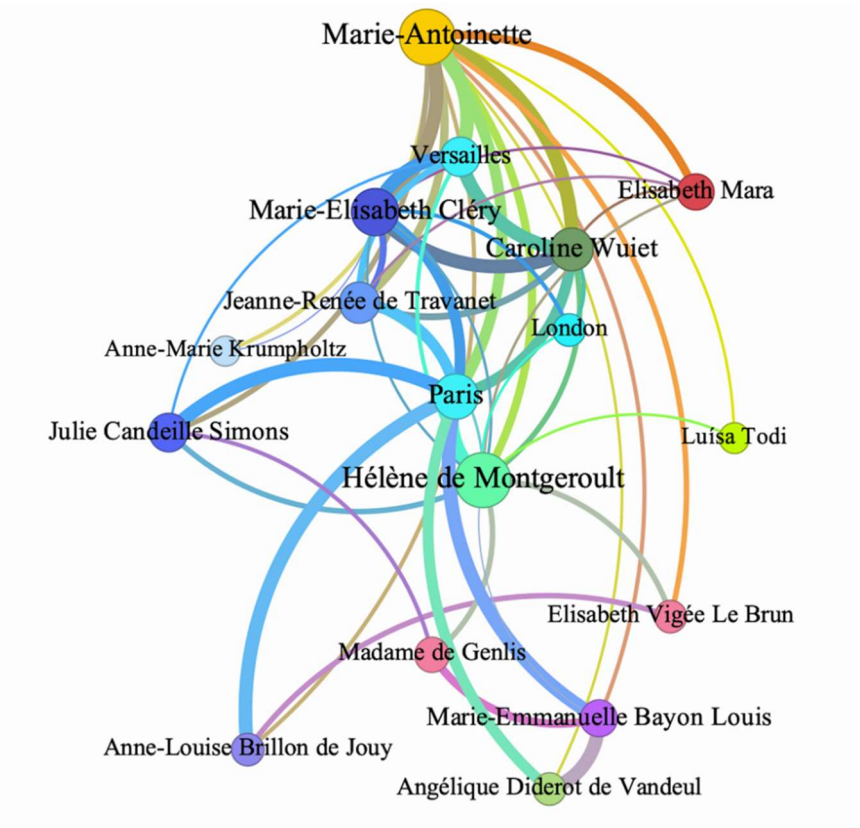



*Figure 4. Marie Antoinette and her female connections*

A closer examination of Marie Antoinette's network, focusing on Paris as the unifying factor rather than the Queen herself, revealed that Paris functioned as an independent cultural hub. Removing Paris as a connecting node (Figure 5) surprisingly left numerous connections intact, demonstrating that Marie Antoinette's influence extended beyond direct personal interactions. Notably, Sophie Gail's connection was lost without Paris, underscoring how geographical context shapes relationship networks.

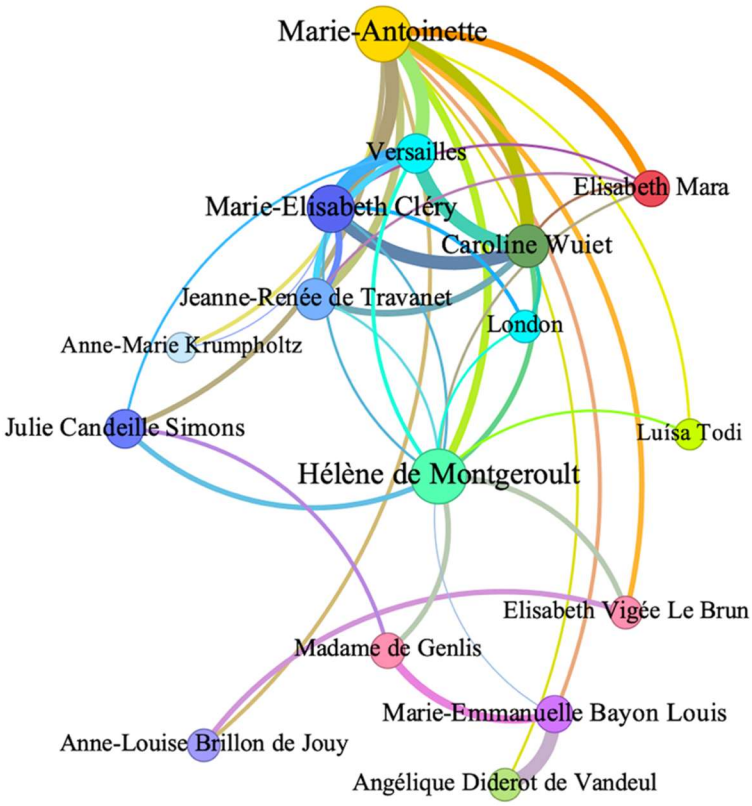



*Figure 5. Marie Antoinette without Paris*

### 4.5. Integrated Network Analysis

These network visualizations provide empirical evidence of female musical networks ranging from localized social structures and shared cultural milieus to expansive professional networks with international reach.

By integrating the four network analyses (Figure 6), a more holistic and interconnected view of the eighteenth-century European musical landscape emerges. The composite network reveals striking interconnectedness that is not apparent when each network is analyzed separately. Previously insular networks, such as those of Gustavian Sweden and Marie-Antoinette, show notable interconnectivity within this broader network. This combined graph illustrates the multifaceted ways female musicians were connected, underscoring the need to blend quantitative rigor with qualitative narratives to capture the complexity of eighteenth-century female musical networks. Together, these approaches reveal a dynamic, interconnected musical milieu that challenges

narratives of isolation and highlights women's significant roles in shaping the musical culture of Enlightenment Europe.

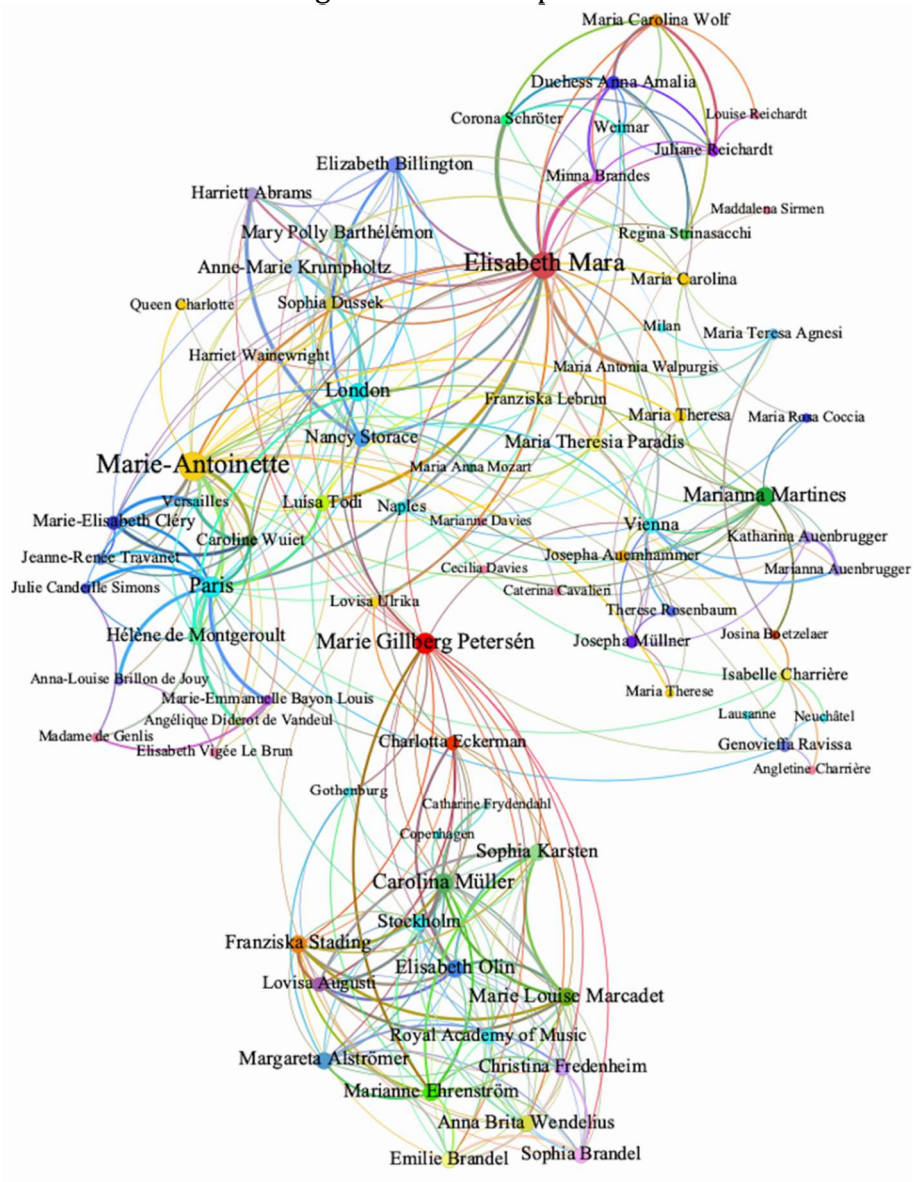



*Figure 6. Integrated network graph (female connections only)*

Although the composite network synthesizes all four, it too must be read as exploratory. Its structure highlights interconnections previously obscured, yet it remains a provisional visualization shaped by the available evidence. Future discoveries may alter its contours, underscoring the open-ended nature of this research. Moreover, the composite map should be understood not as a definitive cartographic

truth but as a heuristic model that illuminates patterns otherwise difficult to discern from textual evidence alone. Its value lies in revealing structural tendencies—points of convergence, unexpected intermediaries, and geographic pathways of interaction—rather than asserting fixed or exhaustive relationships. The network reflects only what the surviving sources allow us to reconstruct; absent data, fragmentary documentation, and uneven archival preservation inevitably shape the contours of the visualization. For this reason, the composite network must be interpreted as an evolving representation—one that invites refinement as new sources surface or future scholars pursue lines of inquiry beyond the scope of my present study.

### 4.6. Digital Companion

To extend the analysis beyond what static figures can convey, the accompanying digital project—"Harmonizing Histories: Tracing Musical Networks-An Exploratory Interface"—serves as an interactive companion to this article. This interface distills research from my extensive doctoral dissertation into an accessible, exploratory environment that foregrounds relationships, mobility, and spatial proximity.[22]

Organized thematically to reflect the article's structure, this digital platform presents each network both individually and cumulatively. Unlike static figures in print, the interactive visualizations can be expanded to full screen, allowing users to examine node relationships, edge weights, and network density in a level of detail unattainable in traditional journal reproduction. The interface traces each network's gradual expansion through sequential visualizations, making visible not only the density and clustering of relationships but also the processes by which connections emerge, intersect, and extend across geographic boundaries. Each musician's profile is directly accessible within the platform, enabling readers to move between the network visualization and the biographical details that underlie it without leaving the interface.

By presenting the profiles of fifty-five female musicians and connections relationally rather than narratively, this digital companion highlights the dense webs of proximity, influence, and circulation that structured women's musical activity. It reveals evolving female musicians as embedded participants in dynamic transnational networks rather than as isolated or marginal figures. Moreover, "Harmonizing Histories" shows how digital humanities methods—particularly SNA and spatial visualization—can reshape musicological historiography by making

[22] Susan M. Holman, "Harmonizing Histories: Tracing Musical Networks—An Exploratory Interface," v. 2.0.

connective structures visible. As such, it serves as both a companion to this article and a methodological model for network-oriented research in historical musicology.

## 5. The Crux Gillberg Petersén Discovery: A Linchpin in the Transnational Network

The interconnectedness of eighteenth-century European musical centers is most clearly illustrated by the case of Marie Antoinette Crux Gillberg Petersén—a musician who, until recently, has appeared in the historical record as three unrelated women. The Swedish amateur musician Marie Antoinette Petersén, the London violinist Mrs. Gillberg, and the Germanic touring virtuosa Marianne Crux are, in fact, the same person. Her career traced a remarkable arc from the courts of Munich and Vienna, through London's concert halls, to the musical salons of Gothenburg.

The present study offers the first systematic reconstruction of her career based on primary sources. It situates her within the transnational female musical networks of the period and demonstrates her function as a bridge between the Habsburg court, the London concert circuit, and the musical salons of Gustavian Sweden.

This tripartite identification was not made in a single archival moment but in reverse chronological order, using three independent lines of inquiry:

1. While researching Swedish female musicians, **Marie Antoinette Petersén** appeared in the membership records of the Kungliga Musikaliska Akademien, where she was inducted in 1801.
2. Separately, London concert records from the mid-1790s reveal a **Mrs. Gillberg**, listed in Simon McVeigh's *Calendar of London Concerts 1750–1800* as performing in four concerts between February and April 1795.
3. Finally, in 1786, Leopold Mozart's correspondence with his daughter Maria Anna mentions **Marianne Crux**, a young violinist from Munich.

The correlation of names, dates, linguistic background, and instrument across these sources made the identification compelling, with confirmation in the Hummel letters below.

### 5.1. Fru Gillberg Petersén in Sweden

The fullest account of Marie's life in Sweden comes from the correspondence of Arvid David Hummel (1778–1836), whose letters to the bibliographer Carl Christoffer Gjörwell Sr. provide an unusually

candid portrait. In a letter dated April 4, 1801, Hummel describes a woman of formidable accomplishments:

> Mrs. Gillberg was born in Germany; I am not aware of in Mannheim. She speaks and writes French, German, Italian, English, and Swedish, the latter to unusual perfection. She plays the violin divinely and the pianoforte quite well. She does not have a beautiful voice, but she has the highest degree of musical knowledge and a lot of method.[23]

Hummel's letter also records Marie's marriage to the miniaturist Jacob Axel Gillberg (1769–1845), apparently in 1794 or early 1795—a date inferred from her first documented London appearance in February 1795, still under Gillberg's name. Gillberg abandoned her in Gothenburg after eighteen months, leaving Marie with an infant daughter and her aunt. She supported herself through performance—a fact that aligns precisely with her documented concert activity in London in the months before her arrival in Sweden:

> A few concerts here, a small pension [boarding house], and two trips to Copenhagen have enabled Mrs. Gillberg to do without her husband, from whom she hopes to be divorced by the King's grace. Mrs. Gillberg is completely incorruptible and spends time as a friend in the most distinguished houses here in the city."[24]

By September 1801, a second Hummel letter records her performing at a Masonic concert in Gothenburg under a different name entirely: "Mrs. M. Ant. Crux (formerly Mrs. Gillberg, but now, to her honor, legally separated from her husband) let herself be heard in several excellent

---

[23] "Fru *Gillberg* är född i Tyskland, jag vet om icke i Mannheim. Hon talar och skrifver fransyska, tyska, italienska, engelska och svenska, detta senare till ovanlig perfection. Hon spelar gudomligt violin och ganska väl pianoforte. Hon har ej en skön röst, men hon eger musikens kännedom i högsta grad och mycken methode." Hummel to Gjörwell, April 4, 1801. (Quoted) Wilhelm Berg, *Anteckningar om Göteborgs äldre teatrar*, 2 vols. (Göteborg: Wald. Zachrissons, 1896, 1898), 2: 144, no. 2. (All quotations use diplomatic transcription with minimal or no editorial intervention).)

[24] "Hon ritar och eger all fruntimmerstalanger till fullkomlighet, äfven den att dansa. Kapitenen och porträttmålaren *Gillberg*, som är en bedragare och vautrien i alla ordets bemärkelser, lärer under sina utländska resor gift sig med denna förträffliga flicka, och lemnade henne här, efter 1½ års vistelse, med sin tant Några konserter här, en liten pensionsinrättning och tvenne resor till Köpenhamn ha satt fru Gillberg i stånd att umbära sin man, från hvilken hon genom konungens nåd hoppas blifva skild. Fru Gillberg är alldeles oförvitlig och umgås som vän i de förnämsta hus här i staden." Ibid.

pieces on the violin."[25] The reversion to her maiden name—Crux—is the pivotal link between her Swedish and Germanic identities. Shortly after this concert, she married the affluent merchant Johan Andreas Petersén (1771–1808), whose family owned the Lorensberg estate, and was inducted into the Royal Music Academy under the name **Marie Antoinette Petersén**.[26]

Her friendship with the memoirist Marianne Ehrenström adds further detail. Ehrenström recalls Petersén in terms that confirm both Petersén's London career and her extraordinary abilities:

> She [Petersén] was a virtuoso in the fullest sense of the word, and as a pupil of the celebrated Cramer, she played the violin to perfection and had made a name for herself in London, where she gave several concerts and won complete success. She also had a beautiful voice, which she used with expression and taste.[27]

Ehrenström's identification of Cramer as Petersén's teacher—presumably Johann Baptist Cramer, one of London's foremost pianists in the 1790s—adds a previously undocumented biographical detail that further strengthens the London connection.

## 5.2. Mrs. Gillberg in London

Marie's London career is reconstructed primarily from McVeigh's *Calendar of London Concerts* and H. C. Robbins Landon's *Haydn: Chronicle*

---

[25] "På Frimurarekonserten, gifven efter detta tal, afsjöngs kantaten, och fru *M. Ant. Crux* (fordom fru Gillberg, men nu till hennes heder lagligen skild från sin man) lät höra sig uti åtskilliga, förträffliga stycken på violin. Af sångstyckena blef trio först sjungen af fruarne Crux, *Lamberg* och mäklare *S. F. Kindbergs* fru, född *Vigoreux*. Den första arian sjöngs sedan af fru Kindberg och arian till drottningen med recitatif af fru Crux." Hummel letter to Gjörwell, September 19, 1801. (Quoted) Berg, *Anteckningar om Göteborgs äldre teatrar*, 2: 152.

[26] See Det Gamla Göteborg: Göteborgs historia. "Lorensberg;" and Kungl. Musikaliska Akademien, "Protokoll 1801: October 21, 1801," 377 [5]. Marie's husband, Johann, was inducted the same year. Gustaf Hilleström, "Lista över Musikaliska Akademiens ledamöter," taken from *Kungl. Musikaliska akademien. Matrikel 1771–1971* (Stockholm: Nordiska musikförlaget, 1971).

[27] "Hon var virtuos i detta ords hela utsträckning, och elev till den ryktbare Cramer spelade hon på ett fulländadt sätt viol och hade gjort sig ett namn i London, der hon gifvit flere konserter och vunnit en fullständig framgång. Hon hade äfvenledes en vacker röst, som hon använde med uttryck och smak." Arvid Wolfgang Nathanael Ahnfelt, "Ur Marianne Ehrenströms hågkomster," in *Ur svenska hofvets och aristokratiens lif* (Stockholm: O.L. Lamm, 1880), 121–184.

*and Works*, with additional support from contemporary press notices.[28] She performed in four concerts between February and April 1795, all during Joseph Haydn's second London visit and within the Salomon concert series.

Her debut at the King's Theatre on February 23, 1795, drew two distinct reviews. The *Morning Chronicle* praised "a delicate, though rather feeble tone, a brilliant shake, and great neatness of execution," singling out her performance of an Adagio by Giovanni Battista Viotti (1755 –1824), which was played "in a chaste and charming style."[29] The *Sun* was even more enthusiastic, calling her "really a musical wonder" and noting "remarkable neatness and precision in her execution," adding that she played the *Double Stop* with considerable skill. Revealingly, the review describes her as "by birth a Swede," reflecting the archival confusion about her origins.[30]

She appeared again at Haydn's sixth Salomon concert, directed by Viotti, on April 13. Afterward, the *Morning Chronicle* notes that she had "secured" the audience's favor "by the delicacy of her performance."[31] Her third appearance, on April 20, was at the "New Musical Fund" concert at the King's Theatre—a charity benefit for retired musicians, widows, and orphans—where she shared the stage with Nancy Storace (1765–1817).[32]

Her fourth and final London appearance, on April 23, was a benefit concert in her own name at the New Rooms, with tickets available at "Mad. Gillberg's, 10 Duke-street, Portland Place."[33] The address places her in the Marylebone district, then a center of London's musical life.

The significance of the Storace connection extends beyond a single shared program. Storace's network intersected with many of the most prominent female musicians active in London during the 1790s, including Harriet Abrams (1758–1821), Sophia Corri Dussek (1775–1831), Anne-

---

[28] Gillberg's London schedule can be found at Simon McVeigh, *Calendar of London Concerts 1750–1800* (Database. Goldsmiths, University of London), [Gillberg—<Mrs>].

[29] *Morning Chronicle*, February 24, 1795; quoted in Thomas B. Milligan, *The Concerto and London's Musical Culture in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Ann Arbor, MI.: UMI Research Press, 1983), 139.

[30] *Sun*, February 24, 1795; quoted in H. C. Robbins Landon, *Haydn Chronicle and Works*, 5 vols. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), 3: 293.

[31] *Morning Chronicle*, April 15, 1795; quoted in H. C. Robbins Landon, *The Symphonies of Joseph Haydn* (London: Universal Edition & Rockliff, 1955), 543–544.

[32] See McVeigh, *Calendar of London Concerts 1750–1800*, [Gillberg—<Mrs>], Storace – <Signora>Nancy [Anna]], #3742.

[33] *Morning Herald*, April 20, 1795; quoted in Landon, *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*, 3: 304. It is worth noting that Duke Street in Portland Place in the Marylebone district (now known as Hallam Street), should not be confused with Duke Street, St. James's. See London Ancestor, "Map of Marylebone."

Marie Krumpholtz (1766–1823), Elisabeth Mara, and Harriet Wainewright.[34] Marie's appearance alongside Storace at a high-profile charity concert, in only her third London performance, suggests a level of professional standing that her brief London career might otherwise obscure. Ehrenström's retrospective judgment that Madame Gillberg "overshadowed the celebrated violinist Giarnowiki, who was in London at the same time," belongs to the realm of personal memoir, but press notices confirm that her reception was genuinely strong.[35]

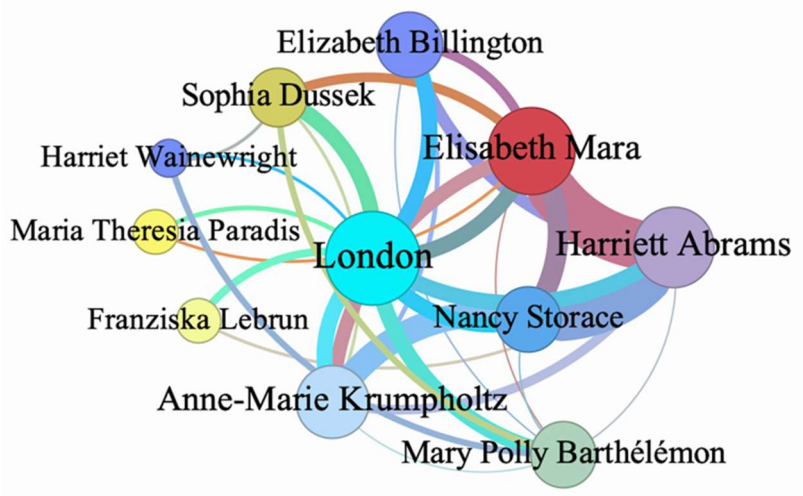



*Figure 7. Mara's London network (Chapter 2) before the Gillberg Petersén discovery*

Figure 7 shows the London network as it stood before the discovery—a dense cluster centered on London as the geographic node, with Elisabeth Mara and Harriet Abrams as the two largest individual nodes, and the others forming a tightly interconnected professional community.

Marie Gillberg Petersén is entirely absent—not peripheral, not marginal, but simply missing, because at that stage of the research, she had not yet emerged as a unified identity. Figure 8 shows what her

[34] See my cross-referencing database at Susan M. Holman, "18th-Century Musicians: London Performances."

[35] "Il n'est pas possible de metre plus d'âme dans l'adagio, plus de vivacité et de précision dans l'allégro. C'était une réunion de talens et de grâces personnelles. Jamais l'archet n'a été conduit par un plus beau bras, et jamais l'art de la musique n'a été traité avec plus de modestie." Ehrenström, *Notices Sur la littérature et les beaux-arts en Suède*, [256] Section 2: 77. While Giarnowiki may have been a celebrity of his time, there is limited information available about him. One of the few references to him can be found in the autobiographical novel by Alexandre Dumas, *La femme au collier de velours*, nouvelle édition (Paris: Michel Lévy frères, 1873), 79.

discovery adds: a new red node entering the network from the lower right, primarily connected to Storace through documented concert performances from February to April 1795. The network does not merely grow—it gains a figure whose full career, once reconstructed, reaches back into the Habsburg court and forward into the salons of Gustavian Sweden, drawing connections that no single archive could have revealed.

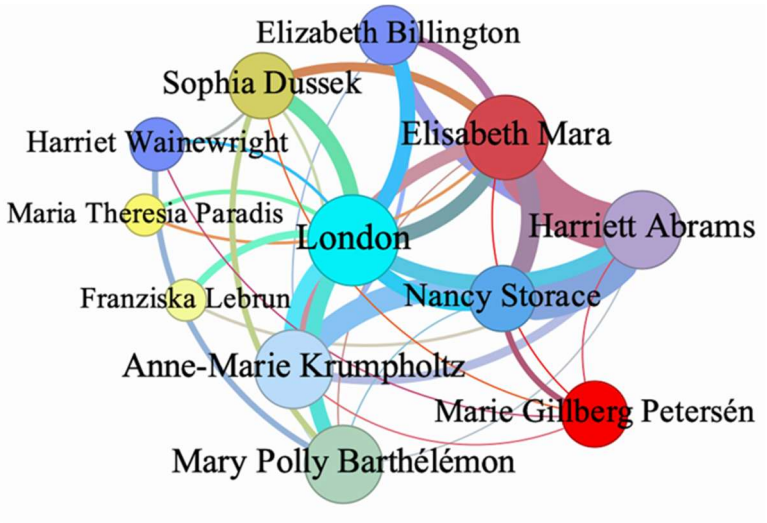



*Figure 8. The London network after Gillberg Petersén's tripartite discovery*

### 5.3. Demoiselle Crux in the Germanic Territories[36]

Marie, or Marianne, Crux came from a family of performers. Her father, Peter Antoine Crux (1750/1756–1823), was a ballet master; her mother, Johanna Antonia née Habert, was a ballerina who died when Marie was a toddler.[37] The family was based in Mannheim before relocating to Munich in 1778, when Elector Carl Theodor moved his court and appointed Peter the royal Bavarian ballet master.[38]

Marianne's education reflected both her father's progressive principles and the family's professional milieu. According to Felix

[36] Johann Friedrich Reichardt, "Demoiselle Crux," in *Musikalische Monathsschrift,* 1–2, ed. by Friedrich Ludwig Aemilius Kunzen (Berlin: Berlinische Musiklandlung, 1793), 14.

[37] Pia Mlakar and Pino Mlakar, *Unsterblicher Theatertanz: 300 Jahre Ballettgeschichte der Oper in München*, 2 vols. (Wilhelmshavien: Noetzel, Heinrichshofen-Bücher, 1996), 1: 123; and Karl Maria Pisarowitz, "Parerga zur Cruxiade," *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum* 15, no. 3–4 (1967): 11–13.

[38] Carl Maria von Weber: Gesamtausgabe, "Crux, Peter Anton;" and Kurpfälzer Meile der Innovationen, "1743–1778 Die Mannheimer Schule."

Lipowsky's *Baierisches Musik-Lexikon* (1811), she was raised "as a man in the morning and as a woman in the afternoon."[39] She studied singing with Dorothea Wendling (1731–1811), piano with a tutor identified only as Strizl, and the Mannheim violin technique with Kapellmeister Ignaz Fränzl (1736–1811).[40] She then continued her violin studies in Munich under Johann Friedrich Eck (1767–1838), later performing his solo concertos at her first and last London concerts.[41]

Reichardt's account in the *Musikalische Monathsschrift* shows that her reputation as a violinist preceded her London debut by several years.

> One of the most interesting phenomena in the musical world is Dem. Crux from Munich. […] Her violin playing made her famous as early as the age of ten, and now, at seventeen, she has achieved a level of virtuosity that one would expect as little from her age as from her gender. As delicate and nobly feminine as her performance is in touching and pleasant pieces, as powerful, confident, and accomplished is her performance in lively movements. […] As a singer, Madem Crux promises to be one of the most interesting vocalists. She has a beautiful, bright-sounding voice of extraordinary flexibility, and she performs with a warmth, delicacy, and precision that does as much honor to her heart and taste as to her singing master.[42]

Reichardt notes that she traveled to Berlin with her father, a renowned ballet master and exceptional dancer, whom the King had invited to the court festivities. But she had already performed twice at court as a violinist and singer, earning the greatest acclaim.[43] During her concert tours, Marianne Crux visited various cities, including Frankfurt am Main, Mainz, and Mannheim, significantly expanding her network.[44]

---

[39] Felix Joseph Lipowsky, ed., *Baierisches Musik-Lexikon* (München: Giel, 1811), 61.

[40] Fétis, *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie*, 3: 225

[41] Ibid.; McVeigh, *Calendar of London Concerts* [Gillberg—<Mrs>] #s 3704, 3743.

[42] "Eine der interessantesten Erscheinungen in der musikalischen Welt ist die Dem. *Crux* aus München. […] Ihr Violinspiel hat sie schon von ihrem zehnten Jahre an berühmt gemacht, izt in ihrem siebzehnten Jahre hat sie es zu einer Virtuosität gebracht, die man eben so wenig von ihren Jahren als von ihrem Geschlechte zu erwarten pflegt. So ganz zart und edel weiblich ihr Vortrag in rührenden und angenehmen Stücken ist, so kräftig, sicher und vollendet ist ihr Vortrag, in lebhaften Sätzen. […] Von Seiten des Gesanges verspricht Madem. *Crux* eine der interessantesten Sängerinnen. Sie hat eine schöne helle klingende Stimme, von ungemeiner Biegsamkeit, und trägt mit einer Wärme, Feinheit und Genauigkeit vor, die ihrem Herzen und Geschmack eben so viel Ehre macht als ihrer Singemeisterinn." Reichardt, *Musikalische Monathsschrift*, 14.

[43] Ibid.

[44] Lipowsky, 61.

The biographical connection to the Mozart family is documented in Leopold Mozart's correspondence. In August 1786, Leopold wrote to his daughter Maria Anna that Peter Crux was taking Marianne to Augsburg to witness a manned balloon flight.[45] Three months later, in November 1786, Leopold wrote again: Marianne and her father were traveling to Vienna.[46] In January 1787, she journeyed to Prague with Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart and her maternal aunt, Elisabeth Barbara Quallenberg, and gave a concert on January 22 at the Palazzo Teatro of the Counts of Thun.[47] Later that year, she performed before Emperor Joseph II in Vienna, demonstrating her abilities on the violin, voice, and piano.[48]

The story of Marianne Crux in the Germanic territories ends at this point, as musicologist Volker Timmermann notes a lack of information about Marianne's life after 1807.[49] However, Ehrenström's *Notices* (published in 1826) record the end of Petersén's performing career with characteristic feeling: "It is with real sorrow that I learn that Mme Péterson has totally renounced her instrument and her lovely voice. What a sacrilege! What an irreparable loss!"[50] Although dates are omitted, her narrative implies that this decision was made contemporaneously.[51] Given the publication date, this retirement can be placed no later than 1826, with Petersén still alive.

### 5.4. Identifying Biographical Discrepancies

The trail becomes unreliable after 1792. Gustav Schilling's lexicon alleges that Marianne continued performing after marrying a "Mr. Hollmann" in 1794, achieving success as "Madame Hollmann" in various Germanic cities

---

[45] Leopold Mozart to Maria Anna Mozart, August 25, 1786, "Mozart Briefe und Dokumente," No. 981. The letter also notes that Fränzl had charged 1,600 florins for her violin lessons—a figure reflecting her father's investment in her career.

[46] Leopold to Maria Anna, November 9, 1786, "Mozart Briefe und Dokumente," No. 999.

[47] Volker Timmermann, "Crux, Marianne," *Lexikon Europäische Instrumentalistinnen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*, hrsg. von Freia Hoffmann, 2007. Elisabeth Barbara née Harbert was the wife of the virtuoso clarinetist Johann Michael Qualenberg (1726–1786), a member of the Electoral Palatine court orchestra (see Wolfgang Mozart's letter to Gottfried von Jacquin, January, 15, 1787), 2, no. 24, "Mozart Briefe und Dokumente," No. 1022; and Lipowsky, *Baierisches Musik-Lexikon*, 261.

[48] Fétis, 3: 225.

[49] Volker Timmermann, "Crux, Marianne," *Lexikon Europäische Instrumentalistinnen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*.

[50] "C'est avec un véritable chagrin que j'apprends que Mme *Péterson* a totalement renoncé à son instrument et à sa jolie voix. Quel sacrilège! Quelle perte irréparable!" Marianne Ehrenström, "Theatre et Musique," in *Notices Sur la littérature et les beaux-arts en Suède* (Stockholm: Ecksteinska Boktryckeriet, 1826), [256] Section 2: 77.

[51] Ehrenström, [256] Section 2: 77.

before a nobleman from Holstein took her to his estates, after which she abandoned music entirely.[52] Eduard Bernsdorf repeats this account and adds a return to Hamburg in 1807.[53] However, no primary sources verify any of these claims—no concert notices, correspondence, or independent documentation of a "Marianne Hollmann" exists. This narrative is almost certainly an erroneous parallel biography, a phantom figure created by the same archival fragmentation that originally separated Crux, Gillberg, and Petersén in the first place.

Felix Lipowsky and François-Joseph Fétis, writing independently, both refer to a husband named "Gilbert" or "Gelbert"—corruptions of "Gillberg"—confirming they were describing the same marriage.[54] By contrast, the Hollmann narrative appears to be a mistaken overlay: a third woman conflated with the second identity of a woman already conflated with a first.

### 5.5. Network Implications

The transformation of Petersén's position in the composite network map illustrates the analytical significance of the discovery with unusual clarity. Before her London and Germanic identities were identified, her node in the Swedish network was modest—anchored in Gothenburg and Marianne Ehrenström. Evidence of her presence in Swedish primary sources amounts to three mentions (Figure 9).

[52] Gustav Schilling, et al., eds., *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen wissenschaften oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst* (Stuttgart: Löflundt, 1835), 3: 616.

[53] Eduard Bernsdorf, ed., *Neues Universal-Lexikon der Tonkunst*, 3 vols. (Dresden: Schäfer, 1856), 1: 637.

[54] Lipowsky, 61 (Gilbert); Fétis, 3: 225 (Gelbert).

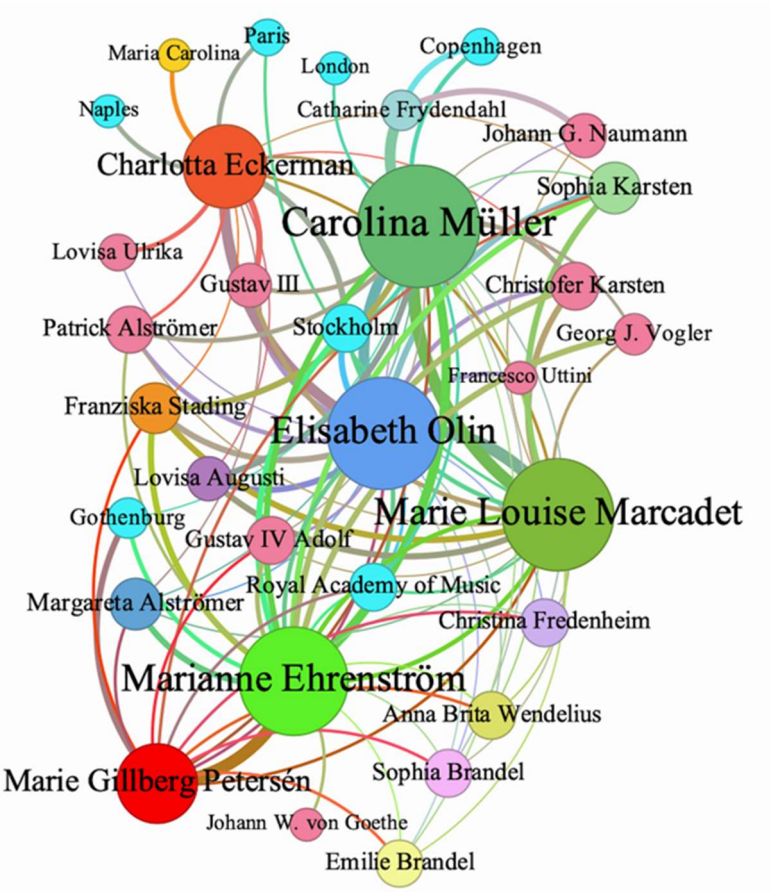



*Figure 9. The Swedish network before the Gillberg Petersén discovery*

Marie's profile, however, highlights her connections in Sweden, London, and various Germanic cities. The updated map illustrates the dramatic expansion of her network, informed by this newfound information. After integrating the full tripartite identity, her node surpasses that of her peers in size, and her links to the wider world expand the network exponentially (Figure 10). This extended network opens up a plethora of possibilities for relationship research.

The visualization accentuates the interconnectedness of the European musical milieu in the late eighteenth century and underscores the importance of comprehensive research in uncovering obscured dimensions of historical figures' lives

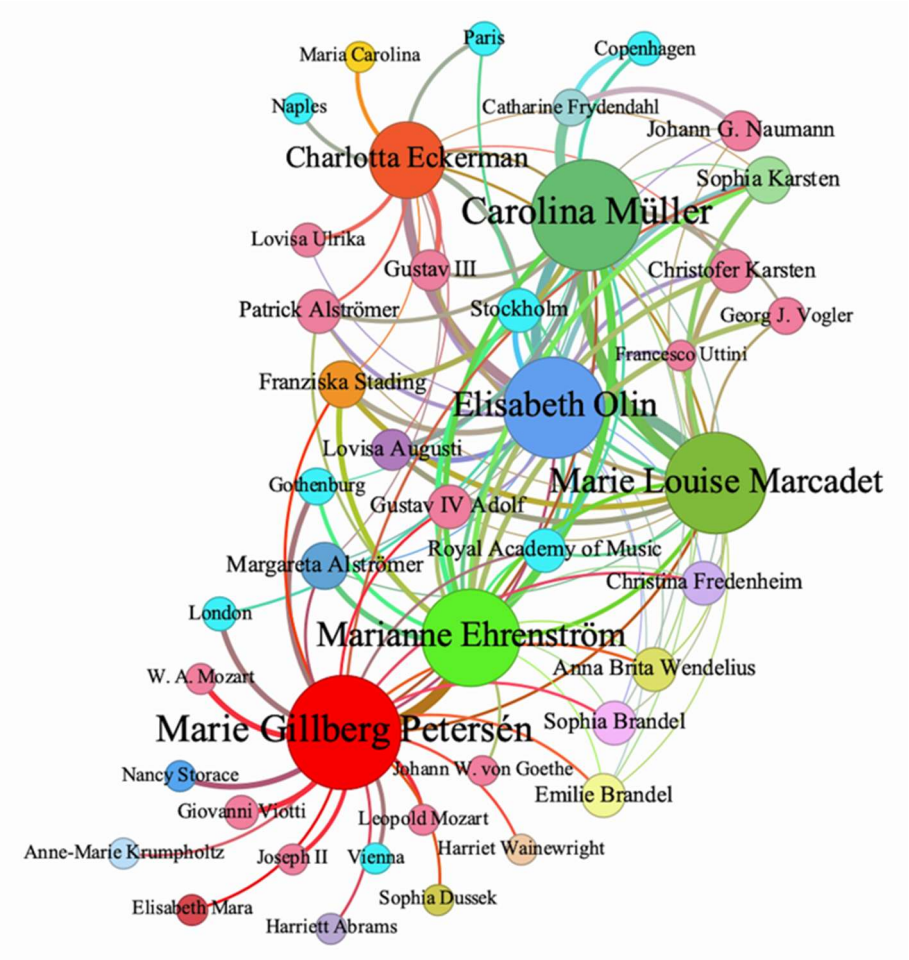



*Figure 10. The Swedish network after the Gillberg Petersén discovery*

Gillberg Petersén's betweenness centrality—her role as a bridge between otherwise disconnected clusters—ranks among the highest in the combined network (Figure 11). She connects the Viennese orbit of the Mozarts and the Habsburg court to the London professional network of Haydn, Storace, and Viotti, and links that network to the amateur musical world of Gustavian Sweden. No other figure in the dataset simultaneously fulfills all three functions.

This repositioning is not merely a visual effect. It reflects a methodological argument: nationally bounded archival research systematically undercounts the influence and reach of mobile women because their careers are documented across multiple national archives, indexed under different names, and cataloged—when cataloged at all—without cross-referencing. The case of Petersén does not demonstrate her exceptionality; rather, it reveals that the archive has been asked the wrong

questions. How many other women in this dataset remain similarly fragmented, their multiple identities scattered across separate filing systems, waiting to be read as one?

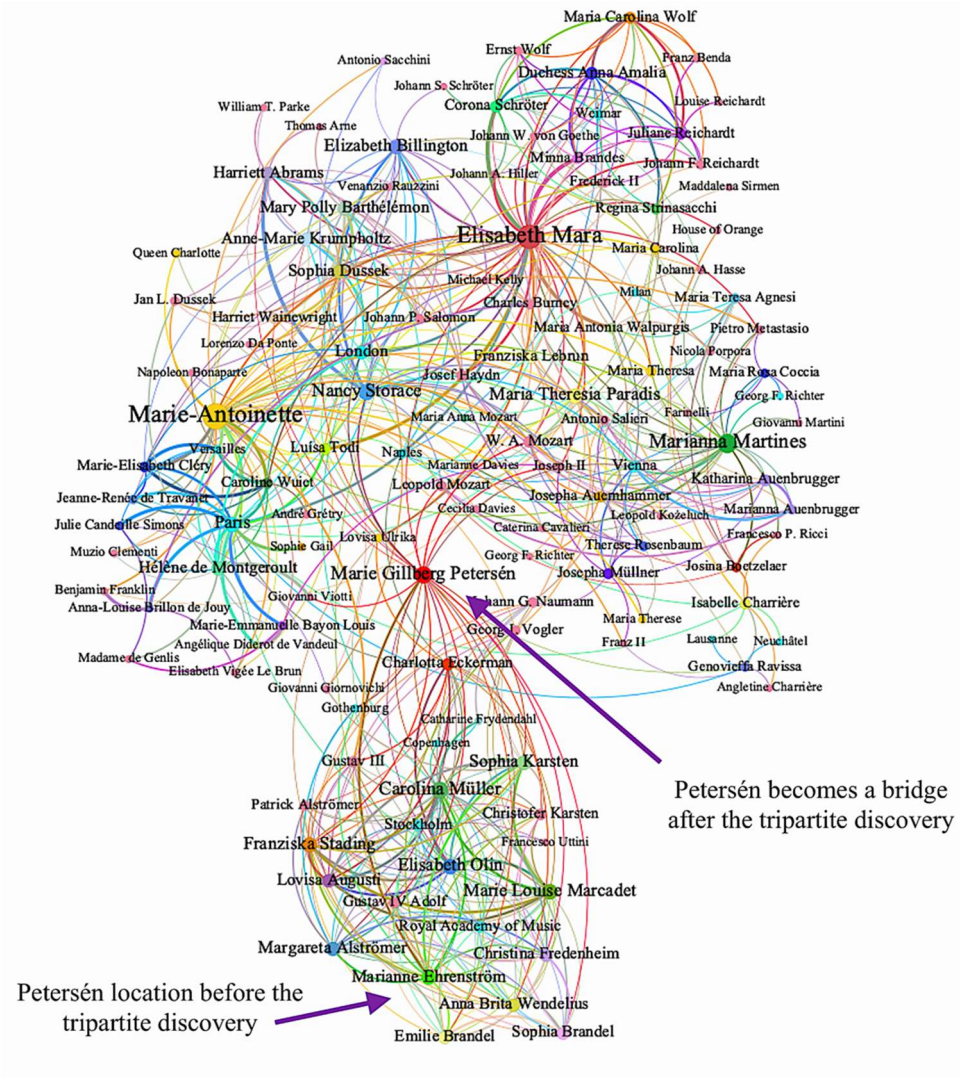



*Figure 11. Gillberg Petersén as the bridge linking all four networks*

## 5.6. Implications for Musicological Method

The findings of this study carry implications that extend beyond the recovery of a single career.

The most immediate issue is methodological. Integrating prosopographical biography with social network analysis does not simply add a new tool to an existing toolkit—it changes what questions can be asked.

Nationally bounded archival research, organized around individual biography and single-language sources, is structurally ill-equipped to recover women whose careers crossed borders under different names. The Petersén case does not demonstrate her exceptionality. It shows that the archive rewards the researcher who approaches it relationally rather than individually, and that the isolation narrative—the persistent assumption that female musicians were peripheral, disconnected, exceptional—is in part an artifact of method rather than of history.

The second implication concerns agency. Crux Gillberg Petersén did not drift between musical centers; she navigated them deliberately, building a career through mobility, performance, and strategic reinvention in each new context. Her example, set alongside those of Mara, Martines, and the women of Gustavian Sweden, suggests that female musicians across this period were active shapers of their professional worlds rather than passive recipients of male patronage or institutional permission. The networks they formed—through teaching, performance, correspondence, and shared repertoire—were neither accidental nor marginal. They were structural.

The third implication is archival. If one researcher, following three independent lines of inquiry, can recover a tripartite identity that has remained fragmented for two centuries, the question is not whether other such cases exist but how many. The answer will not come from any single national archive or biographical tradition. It will require the kind of cross-referencing—of names, dates, instruments, languages, and locations—that this study has attempted to model. Shared digital databases, collaborative prosopographical projects, and network-oriented methodologies are not peripheral to this work. They are the condition of its possibility.

## Summary

This study demonstrates that eighteenth-century female musicians were not peripheral figures in European musical life but active participants in dynamic networks characterized by mutual support, professional collaboration, and transnational reach. The four networks examined—centered on Marianna Martines in Vienna and beyond, on Elisabeth Mara's European touring career, on the royal patronage structures of Gustavian Sweden, and on the musical world surrounding Marie-Antoinette—differ substantially in structure, density, and geographical scope. Yet they share a common feature: women at their centers made deliberate choices to build and sustain professional lives despite the constraints they faced.

The recovery of Marie Antoinette Crux Gillberg Petersén's tripartite identity offers a concentrated illustration of both the networks themselves and the archival conditions that have obscured them. Her career connected the Habsburg court, the London concert circuit, and the

amateur salons of Sweden—three worlds that traditional musicological methods, organized around national archives and individual biography, lacked the means to connect. The prosopographical and network analysis approach developed here provides that mechanism, and the Petersén case suggests it will yield further recoveries.

As the Petersén case demonstrates, mobility can both enable professional opportunity and fragment biographical identity—scattering a single career across national archives, multiple names, and separate historiographical traditions until the woman herself disappears. Her case underscores the need to combine biographical reconstruction with relational methodologies to capture the full scope of women's participation in eighteenth-century musical life. These insights resonate with recent theoretical approaches to mobility, gender, and musical networks.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The dataset of fifty-five musicians, while carefully selected, is not comprehensive; the networks reconstructed here are inevitably shaped by the survival of sources, which systematically favor professional over amateur musicians, published over manuscript activity, and urban over provincial life. The weighting of edges in the Gephi visualizations involves interpretive judgments that are open to debate. Moreover, although geographically diverse, the four networks examined remain weighted toward Western Europe; the musical worlds of Eastern Europe, the Iberian Peninsula, and the broader Atlantic remain largely outside the frame.

Future research might profitably extend the network analysis approach to other artistic fields—literature, visual arts, theater—where similar patterns of female collaboration and mutual support may await recovery. Developing shared digital databases for eighteenth-century women's musical activity would substantially accelerate this work. Most immediately, the Petersén identification invites further archival investigation: the Germanic sources remain fragmentary, the London period brief, and the Swedish years incompletely documented. There is more to find.

## Bibliography

Ahnfelt, Arvid Wolfgang Nathanael. *Ur svenska hofvets och aristokratiens lif*, 121–184. Stockholm: O.L. Lamm, 1880.

Barbier, Patrick. *Marie-Antoinette et la Musique*. Paris: Grasset, 2022.

Bastian, Mathieu, Sebastien Heymann, and Mathieu Jacomy, "Gephi: An Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks," *Proceedings of*

*the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media*, March 19, 2009. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v3i1.13937.

Berg, Wilhelm. *Anteckningar om Göteborgs äldre teatrar*. 2 vols. Göteborg: Wald. Zachrissons, 1896–1898.

Bernsdorf, Eduard, ed. *Neues Universal-Lexikon der Tonkunst*. 3 vols. Dresden: Schäfer, 1856.

Born, Georgina, ed. *Music and Digital Media: A Planetary Anthropology*. London: UCL Press, 2022.

Citron, Marcia J. *Gender and the Musical Canon*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993, 2000.

Ehrenström, Marianne. "Théatre et Musique." In *Notices Sur la littérature et les beaux-arts en Suède*, 184–262. Stockholm: Ecksteinska Boktryckeriet, 1826.

Fétis, François-Joseph, ed. *Biographie universelle des musiciens et bibliographie générale de la musique*. 8 vols. Bruxelles: Meline, Cans et Compagnie, 1837.

Godt, Irving. *Marianna Martines: A Woman Composer in the Vienna of Mozart and Haydn*. Edited by John A. Rice. Eastman Studies in Music. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2010.

Gratzer, Wolfgang, Nils Grosch, Ulrike Präger, and Susanne Scheiblhofer, eds. *The Routledge Handbook of Music and Migration: Theories and Methodologies*. New York: Routledge, 2023.

Gustar, Andrew. "A Matter of Perspective: Taking a Distant View of Music History," *National Early Music Association Newsletter*, 8/2 (2024), 91–98. https://oro.open.ac.uk/102219.

Hilleström, Gustaf. *Kungl. Musikaliska akademien. Matrikel 1771–1971*. Stockholm: Nordiska musikförlaget, 1971.

Holman, Susan M. "18th-Century Female Musicians: London Performances." Database. Version 1.0. Zenodo, 2026. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19856521.

Holman, Susan M. "18th-Century Female Musician Timelines." Database. Version 1.0. Zenodo, 2026. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19864588. Holman, Susan M. "Harmonizing Histories: Networking 18th-Century European Female Musicians." PhD diss. Universität Paderborn, 2025. https://doi.org/10.17619/UNIPB/1-2502.

Holman, Susan M. "Harmonizing Histories: Tracing Musical Networks—An Exploratory Interface." Version 2.0. Zenodo, 2026. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.18936088.

Holman, Susan M. "Networking 18th-Century Female Musicians." Database. Version 1.0. Zenodo, 2026. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19864786. Holman, Susan M. "Swedish Operan Cross-Reference." Database. Version 1.0. Zenodo, 2026. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19864975. Hurl-Eamon, Jennine. *Women's Roles in Eighteenth-Century Europe.* Santa Barbara: Greenwood, 2010.

*Internationale Stiftung Mozarteum Salzburg.* "Mozart Briefe und Dokumente." Online edition. https://dme.mozarteum.at/briefe-dokumente.

Jonsson, Leif, and Anna Ivarsdotter. *Musiken i Sverige*. 4 vols. Stockholm: Fischer, 1993.

Köker, Ogul. "Two Cultures, Historical Musicology, and Qualitative Research Methods," *International Music and Sciences Symposium Proceedings*, Istanbul, April 17–19, 2019. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335082658.

Kungl. Musikaliska Akademien. Universitet Bibliotek, Uppsala (S-U). Alvin Digitalt Kulturarv. —Marie Antoinette Crux Gillberg. *Protokoll*, October 21, 1801: 377 [5]. https://bit.ly/alvin_portal_record-535587.

Kurpfälzer Meile der Innovationen. "1743–1778 Die Mannheimer Schule." https://www.meile–der–innovationen.de/innovationen/1743–1778–mannheimer–schule.

Landon, H. C. Robbins. *Haydn: Chronicle and Works*. 5 vols. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976.

Landon, H. C. Robbins. *The Symphonies of Joseph Haydn*. London: Universal Edition & Rockliff, 1955.

Lipowsky, Felix Joseph, ed. *Baierisches Musik-Lexikon*. München: Giel, 1811.

London Ancestor. "Map of Marylebone." http://www.londonancestor.com/maps/bc–marybone.htm.

McVeigh, Simon. *Calendar of London Concerts 1750–1800*. Database. Goldsmiths, University of London. http://datatodata.com/in–concert/LC18.

—. [Gillberg – <Mrs>]. https://datatodata.com/uri/in-concert/lc18/name/GILLBERG~?format=

—. [Storace – <Signora>Nancy [Anna]]. http://datatodata.com/uri/in-concert/lc18/name/STORACE~?format=.

Milligan, Thomas B. *The Concerto and London's Musical Culture in the Late Eighteenth Century.* Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1983.

Mlakar, Pia, and Pino Mlakar. *Unsterblicher Theatertanz: 300 Jahre Ballettgeschichte der Oper in München*. 2 vols. Wilhelmshaven: Noetzel, Heinrichshofen-Bücher, 1996.

Pendle, Karin, ed. *Women & music: A History*, 2nd ed. (Indiana University Press, 2000).

Personne, Nils Edvard. *Svenska teatern: några anteckningar*. 7 vols. Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1913–1927.

Pisarowitz, Karl Maria. "Parerga zur Cruxiade." *Mitteilungen der Internationalen Stiftung Mozarteum* 15, no. 3/4 (1967): 11–13. https://digibib.mozarteum.at/ismretroverbund/periodical.

Reichardt, Johann Friedrich. *Musikalische Monathsschrift,* 1–2, edited by Friedrich Ludwig Aemilius Kunzen. Berlin: Berlinische Musikhandlung, 1793.

Renders, Hans. "The Limits of Representativeness: Biography, Life Writing, and Microhistory." In *Theoretical Discussions of Biography: Approaches from History, Microhistory, and Life Writing*, ed. by Hans Renders and Binne de Haan, 103–18. Leiden: Brill, 2014.

Rice, John A. *Music in the Eighteenth Century*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2012.

Schilling, Gustav, Gottfried Wilhelm Fink, and Ferdinand Simon Gassner, eds. *Encyclopädie der gesammten musikalischen wissenschaften oder Universal-Lexicon der Tonkunst*. 7 vols. Stuttgart: Löflundt, 1835.

Timmermann, Volker. "Crux, Marianne." (2007). *Lexikon Europäische Instrumentalistinnen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts*. Edited by Freia Hoffmann. Online version. Sophie Drinker Institut, 2008–2024. https://www.sophie-drinker-institut.de.

Unseld, Melanie. *Biographie und Musikgeschichte: Wandlungen biographischer Konzepte in Musikkultur und Musikhistoriographie*. Köln: Böhlau, 2014.

Unseld, Melanie, and Christian von Zimmermann, eds. *Anekdote – Biographie – Kanon: Zur Geschichtsschreibung in den schönen Künsten*. Köln: Böhlau, 2013.

Unseld, Melanie, and Fabian Kolb, eds. *Musikwissenschaft und Biographik: Narrative, Akteure, Medien*. Mainz: Schott Campus, 2019.

von Riesemann, Mitgetheilt von O. "Eine Selbstbiographie der Sängerin Gertrud Elisabeth Mara." *Allgemeine Musikalische Zeitung* 32–40 (August 11–October 6, 1875), S. 32: 497–501; 33: 513–17; 34: 529–35; 35: 545–50; 36: 561–65; 37: 577–82; 38: 593–97; 39: 609–13; 40: 629–633. https://mdz-nbn-resolving.de/urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb11311513-5.

Weber, Carl Maria von. "Gesamtausgabe." Digital edition. https://www.weber-gesamtausgabe.de.

zur Nieden, Gesa, and Berthold Over, eds. *Musicians' Mobilities and Music Migrations in Early Modern Europe: Biographical Patterns and Cultural Exchanges*. Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2016.

© 2026 Susan Homan. This is an Open Access article published in the journal Musica Academica by the University of Oradea Publishing House and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). The full terms of this license are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0.

*Musica Academica*
Volume 3. Issue 1 (2026): 72-82
DOI: 10.61215/MA.2026.vol.3.iss.1.03

# CYCLIC FORM BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE: TOWARDS A DEFINITION THROUGH THE ORGAN REPERTOIRE

**STEFANO SCARPA**

PhD Candidate,
Roma Tre University[1]
stefano.scarpa01@gmail.com

**Abstract**
*This paper addresses a fundamental problem in music theory: the concept of 'cyclic form', widely used in the analysis of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century instrumental music, lacks a satisfactory definition. The existing literature, from major reference works (Macdonald in Grove, Finscher in MGG) to specialist monographs (Larson, Proksch, Van Alphen, Taylor, Strucken-Paland, Deruchie), offers a range of analytical frameworks that are either too narrow or too broad, and none arrives at a definition general enough to apply across different repertoires and historical contexts. This deficiency is not accidental: it reflects a deeper epistemological problem. The term 'cyclic form' is not a neutral analytical label but a philosophically loaded one, emerging in the nineteenth century not because the compositional practice was new – cyclic procedures are traceable from early polyphony through the Baroque – but because Romantic aesthetics provided it with an organicist conceptual framework. Understanding what cyclic form is requires moving across three levels of inquiry: historical musicology, philosophical aesthetics, and performance practice. The organ repertoire, systematically absent from most studies, serves as the primary analytical field. The instrument's radical variability in manuals, touch, timbre and registration forces the performer to take explicit interpretative positions on the structural function of thematic return, making the theoretical question unavoidable. The paper concludes that cyclic form is best understood not as a formal schema but as an abstract, historically situated principle whose definition remains genuinely open. Recognising this openness is itself a theoretical result.*

[1] Università degli Studi "Roma Tre", Department of Philosophy, Communication and Spectacle, Rome, Italy. E-mail: stefano.scarpa@uniroma3.it

**Keywords**
*Cyclic form, interdisciplinary musicology, organ repertoire, organicism, performance practice, philosophy of music*

## Introduction

The history of music theory is full of concepts that work in practice before they are understood in principle. "Cyclic form" is one of them. For nearly two centuries, the term has guided the analysis of a vast repertoire – from Beethoven to Franck, from Liszt to Sibelius – without ever receiving a definition stable enough to be applied consistently. Scholars use it, composers have pursued it, performers interpret it. Yet, asked to say precisely what it is, there are big hesitations.

This paper takes this hesitation seriously. The inconsistency in the existing literature reflects a genuine epistemological difficulty. Cyclic form is not the kind of concept that yields to purely musicological analysis, because the question it raises (notably, what makes a work formally unified across its movements) is ultimately a philosophical one. Answering it requires moving across disciplinary boundaries and accepting that some of those boundaries have been drawn too narrowly.

The contribution is structured in three parts. The first surveys the existing literature such as reference works and specialist monographs and identifies the common limitations of the available definitions. The second addresses the epistemological core of the problem: why the concept of cyclic form is philosophically loaded and what traditions of thought are needed to analyse it? The third turns to the organ repertoire as a case study, combining analytical observation with the perspective of a performing organist. A brief conclusion draws together the main findings and indicates the directions that future research will pursue.

## 1. The term and its definitions

A musicological inquiry into cyclic form naturally begins with the existing literature. A useful starting point is provided by the major music reference works. Two entries, among many, deserve particular attention.

Hugh Macdonald, in *Grove Music Online*, defines cyclic form as a compositional principle "in which a later movement reuses thematic material of an earlier movement."[2] More generally, he adds, it "describes

[2] Hugh Macdonald, "Cyclic form," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed June 2, 2026, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000007001.

those works where thematic links bind more than one movement."[3] These two parts of the definition, while complementary, are not equivalent. The first identifies a specific compositional procedure, while the second gestures towards a broader principle of thematic coherence whose boundaries remain undefined. Macdonald does not address this tension explicitly, nor does he propose criteria for distinguishing between the two. The historical examples he provides, from seventeenth-century sonatas through Bach and Mozart to Beethoven, Franck and the Romantic tradition, make the problem plain: if cyclic form can be equally applied to pieces of very different periods and style, the term is meant to lose its analytical precision and therefore utility. What we are left with is a definition simultaneously too narrow to account for the variety of ways in which cyclic thinking manifests across history, and too broad to serve as a reliable analytical tool.

The entry compiled by Ludwig Finscher for *MGG* is more ambitious. The German term *Zyklus* is analysed in both its formal and historical dimensions, and the general definition is correspondingly richer: a cycle is "a group of self-contained entities (works or movements) which are related to each other in form and content in such a way that a greater unity unfolds, and the form and content of the cycle mutually illuminate each other."[4] The definition proceeds along two lines. In the broader sense, cyclic form designates any collection of works unified by a common idea or musical function – but this approach proves problematic since it would include works as heterogeneous as Bach's Well-Tempered Clavier, where the unifying principle is purely tonal and systematic.[5] In the narrower sense, the term applies to multi-movement instrumental works in which the basic alternation of fast and slow movements is enriched by changes of intensity, character, time signature and key.

This second path is the most promising, and Finscher traces its development through the German Romantic tradition. Its roots lie in the reception of Beethoven's innovations: E.T.A. Hoffmann, reviewing the Fifth Symphony, was among the first to articulate how its themes function not as isolated fragments but as interconnected elements contributing to a unified whole. Mendelssohn, fascinated by Beethoven's linking strategies in the quartets Op. 130 and 131, realised the same idea in his

[3] *Ibid*.

[4] Ludwig Finscher, "Zyklus," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart online*, 1998, accessed June 2, 2026, https://www.mgg-online.com/articles/mgg16281/1.0/mgg16281.

[5] *Ibid*.

string quartets Op. 13 and Op. 12.[6] The Wanderer Fantasy by Schubert, following Finscher, is "the prototype of this four-movement form in a single movement with thematic development from a central theme", and Liszt's Piano Sonata in B minor "takes up Schubert's idea on a higher level, combining it with Liszt's developed technique of motivic transformation."[7] Schönberg and Sibelius appear as the tradition's later heirs.

Finscher's entry represents a significant step forward: it is historically grounded, attentive to national traditions, and sensitive to different levels of cyclic organisation. Yet the fundamental tension remains unresolved. The broader and narrower senses of the term coexist without a unifying criterion, and the historical narrative does not ultimately answer the question of what cyclic form is as an analytical concept. The organ repertoire, notably, is absent.

Turning to specialist monographs, the situation only apparently becomes clearer. As early as 1955, David Larson observed that cyclic form should be understood not as a rigid formal category but as a flexible principle: "Cyclic form is not so much a well-defined form as it is an idea, a principle."[8] His historical account traces cyclic procedures back to the fourteenth century, while acknowledging that the principle reaches its fullest development in the late nineteenth century, when Romantic composers "employed the cyclic principle to bring to their works that unity and oneness for which they longed."[9] More recently, Andrew Deruchie has described cyclic form as "the practice of reintroducing or developing themes or motives from earlier movements in later ones and thereby establishing large-scale, inter-movement formal relationships."[10] While useful as a starting point, this definition sets aside the question of historical origins and deeper aesthetic implications.

Christiane Strucken-Paland, in her detailed study of Franck's violin sonata, brings the discussion closer to the organ repertoire at the heart of this paper. Following d'Indy's theory, she notes that cyclic technique "contains nothing new in itself; its significant presence can already be

[6] See Benedict Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory. The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), Chapter 4-5.

[7] Finscher, "Zyklus".

[8] David Larson, *The composer's quest for unity: Development of Cyclic Form*, NCID AN00085725, 2, no. 1/2 (1955): 49.

[9] *Ibid*.

[10] Andrew Deruchie, "Saint-Saëns First String Quartet, Cyclic Form and the Aesthetics of Charm," *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 17 (2020): 75.

found in many works of Beethoven."[11] This raises a question that will be addressed below: whether the cyclic principle should be understood as a codified invention of d'Indy, or as a far older compositional practice that d'Indy merely theorised.

Henri Peter Van Alphen identifies two complementary uses of the cyclic principle: direct quotation of earlier material, which he calls the "motto", and transformation of thematic material, a procedure developed to its fullest extent in the music of Beethoven. Both uses, he argues, "have different functions in a composition, although both have the effect of promoting unity between movements."[12]

Benedict Taylor draws a distinction that sharpens the analytical vocabulary considerably. He differentiates between a work that is simply a cycle and one that is properly in cyclic form, defining the latter as "a particular type of cycle in which the connections between the individual parts are intensified and made explicit."[13] This subtle distinction proves useful precisely in those cases where the boundary between loose thematic recall and fully integrated cyclic architecture is not easy to determine.

Finally, Bryan Jeffrey Proksch most thoroughly problematises the historical question underlying all the above. Dissatisfied with terms such as cyclic form, thematic unity, or organic coherence – all carrying implicit associations with Romantic aesthetics – he opts for the deliberately neutral expression "cyclic integration", defined as "the manner in which movements of a multi-movement cycle relate to one another."[14] By avoiding terminology bound to a specific aesthetic tradition, Proksch demonstrates that cyclic integration as a compositional practice was not born with Romanticism, but can be traced through the Classical period, the Baroque, and beyond.[15]

What this survey reveals is a field that is rich but fragmented. Each scholar shows part of the problem: none arrives at a definition general enough to apply across different repertoires and historical contexts, and at the same time precise enough to be used as an analytical tool for a concrete piece. The reason for this, as the next section argues, is not a lack

---

[11] Christiane Strucken-Paland, "La ciclicità nella 'sonata per violino' di César Franck: una revisione critica del concetto di 'principe cyclique' di Vincent D'Indy," *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia*, 41, no. 1 (2006): 135.

[12] Henri Peter Van Alphen, "The Structure of Franck's D Minor Symphony and its Historical Antecedents" (master's thesis, University of Cape Town, 2007), 9.

[13] Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory*, 6.

[14] Bryan Jeffrey Proksch, "Cyclic Integration in the Instrumental Music of Haydn and Mozart" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2006), xv.

[15] *Ibid*.

of analytical rigour, but a deeper epistemological difficulty embedded in the concept itself.

## 2. An epistemological problem

The first step towards understanding the definition difficulty is historical. As Proksch has demonstrated, cyclic procedures are not a Romantic invention. They can be traced back since the birth of polyphony. What changes in the nineteenth century is not the practice, but the conceptual framework brought to bear upon it.[16] Romantic aesthetics endowed musical form with an organic dimension that earlier theoretical traditions had not systematically developed. Themes were no longer understood as melodic units to be deployed and varied, but as living entities: they are born from a germinal idea, then they develop, transform and return altered by their passage through the work. Taylor, writing on Mendelssohn, captures this shift with precision, noting how the organic metaphor becomes central to the Romantic understanding of musical coherence.[17] Cyclicity, in this sense, resonates with broader patterns of experience: the alternation of seasons, the return of the same within difference. The term "cyclic form" is not a neutral analytical label but carries a philosophical charge that precedes and exceeds its musicological usage.

This observation opens a deeper question. The organicist conception underlying Romantic cyclic thinking has its roots in the German Classical philosophy – in Kant's *Critique of Judgement* and in Hegel's aesthetics. In Kant, the domain of aesthetic experience is governed by a peculiar mode of cognition that he describes as "schematising without a concept:" the imagination produces representations that exceed conceptual determination, generating a sense of unity that cannot be reduced to a rule or a schema.[18] Applied to music, this framework suggests that a truly cyclic work cannot be captured by any fixed formal template: its unity is felt rather than calculated, and resists the kind of schematic definition that the musicological literature has repeatedly attempted. Hegel, for his part, insists that the work of art must constitute a self-sufficient whole in which every part is necessary to every other – an idea that the Romantic composers absorbed, whether directly or through the

[16] *Ibid*., 3.

[17] Taylor, *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory*, 31-35.

[18] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, trans. Alfredo Gargiulo, intro. Paolo D'Angelo, 12th ed. (Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2020), §49, §65.

cultural atmosphere of their time, and that gives the cyclic principle its philosophical resonance.[19]

The implication for the present inquiry is significant. The inconsistency documented in the previous section – the coexistence of too narrow and too broad definitions, the unresolved tension between procedure and principle – is not a defect of the existing scholarship. It is, rather, a symptom of the concept's fundamental resistance to schematisation. The cyclic principle manifests characteristics that align it with Kant's notion of the aesthetic idea: a representation that sets the imagination in free play, opening fields of meaning that no concept can exhaust.[20] To define cyclic form would be to betray its nature. What is needed instead is a more precise formulation of the question, one that acknowledges the philosophical complexity of it while remaining anchored to concrete analytical practice. That anchoring is the task of the next section.

## 3. The organ repertoire as a case study

The epistemological problem outlined in the previous section becomes more visible in a repertoire that the existing literature has almost entirely overlooked: the organ. Despite being historically one of the richest fields for the development of cyclic procedures, organ music is conspicuously absent from the scholarship on cyclic form. The partial exception is the music of César Franck, whose major organ works have attracted some analytical attention in connection with the cyclic principle. Yet even here, apart from Strucken-Paland's monograph,[21] the scholarly focus tends to fall on Franck's chamber and orchestral output, with the organ works treated as a secondary confirmation of conclusions reached elsewhere. Beyond Franck, the silence is almost total.

This silence is not without consequences. Among all instruments, the organ is the one that varies most radically from one instrument to another: the number of manuals, the touch, the timbre, and the available registrations differ so significantly that no two performances of the same work can be entirely equivalent. This variability bears directly on the interpretation of cyclically organised works. How should a recurring theme be presented to remain recognisable across movements? How can

[19] See Carl Dahlhaus, "Eduard Hanslick und der musikalische Formbegriff," *Die Musikforschung* 20 (1967); Carl Dahlhaus, *Analisi musicale e giudizio estetico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987).

[20] Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, §49.

[21] Christiane Strucken-Paland, *Zyklische Prinzipien in den Instrumentalwerken César Francks* (Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 2009).

thematic return be made structurally audible through registration, manual changes, articulation? When a cyclic return coincides with a climactic moment, is a gradual crescendo sufficient to convey its architectural significance, or does it require something more deliberate? These are not merely practical questions, but they force the performer to take an explicit position on what cyclic form is and what it is for. The instrument, in other words, makes the theoretical problem unavoidable.

The *Prélude, Chorale et Fugue* by César Franck (1884) offers a particularly illuminating example. The work is cyclically organised around three distinct themes, each introduced in its respective section. In the closing pages of the Fugue, these three themes are superimposed simultaneously, creating a moment of extraordinary formal density in which the cyclic principle is not merely recalled but structurally fulfilled. The following example, transcribed for organ by the author of this contribution, shows this convergence.




*Figure 1. Franck, Prélude Chorale et Fugue, "reprise" movement, Bars 332-335, organ transcription by Stefano Scarpa.*

While the theme of the Chorale stands in the upper voice, surrounded by the rhythm characteristic of the Prélude, an augmented version of the same theme gives the solemn ground of the bass. In this frenetic counterpoint, the chromatic subject of the fugue reappears in the middle voice, bringing the cyclic architecture to its fullest realisation.

This moment poses concrete interpretative challenges that illuminate the theoretical problem. The three themes must remain individually recognisable while merging into a single texture: a balance that requires precise decisions about registration, voicing and articulation. The performer must construct a "local" definition of cyclic coherence each time the work is performed on a different instrument.

This example also exposes the theoretical difficulty from a specific angle. The simultaneous superimposition of the three themes – or better, of two themes and the reminiscence of the rhythm of a third one – is not a simple act of thematic recall, but something qualitatively different and more demanding. The definitions proposed by Macdonald, Finscher, Deruchie and even Taylor do not fully capture what happens in these bars: a moment in which the cyclic principle ceases to be a structural device and becomes, in Kantian terms, an aesthetic idea, a convergence of meaning that exceeds any conceptual formula. The analytical gap is not incidental; it is precisely here, where the music resists description, that the epistemological problem becomes most audible.

The organ repertoire also invites a broader historical reflection. Given the assumption that cyclic procedures may be identified well before the Romantic period, following a hypothetical "franckian style" as a research guide, other organ pieces – at times unexpected regarding their period and geographical origin – seem to show similar formal strategies. One of them surely is the *Recercar* by the Sicilian author Bernardo Storace (1637-1707), rooted in the tradition of polythematic ricercari typical of Baroque southern Italy. The ricercare is divided into three parts, each of them presenting a different theme; the last part, climax of an ingenious architecture, reintroduces all three themes at the same time, developing them until the end in counterpoint with each other. This form clearly anticipates, *in nuce*, the cyclic form used during Romanticism, but as argued, lacks the organicist theoretical background that is explicitly expressed only in the nineteenth century.

The structural parallel with Franck is striking. In both cases, the formal climax coincides with the simultaneous superimposition of all previously introduced thematic material: what for Storace appears as a purely compositional discovery, in Franck is the deliberate fulfilment of an organicist logic. What separates them is not the formal procedure but the philosophical framework that surrounds it: Storace achieves cyclic density as a counterpoint strategy, Franck (theorised *a posteriori* by d'Indy) elevates the same procedure to the status of a compositional and philosophical principle. This contrast confirms the central thesis of the present paper: the cyclic principle is older than its Romantic theorisation,

and any adequate definition must account for both its historical breadth and its philosophical specificity.

The historical perspective, however, exceeds the scope of the present contribution and will be addressed in future research. It is sufficient here to note that the organ repertoire, far from being a marginal field, may prove central to a more complete understanding of cyclic form across its full historical range.

## Conclusions

This paper has argued that the concept of cyclic form presents a problem that is at once terminological, epistemological and practical. The survey of the existing literature has shown that no definition currently available is general enough to apply consistently across different repertoires and historical contexts. This is not a contingent limitation of the scholarship: it reflects the nature of the concept itself, which resists schematisation in the same way that, in Kant's aesthetic framework, genuine artistic unity resists reduction to a rule.

The organicist tradition that gave cyclic form its theoretical weight in the nineteenth century also explains why a purely musicological approach proves insufficient. The concept carries a philosophical charge that cannot be unpacked without moving across disciplinary boundaries. An interdisciplinary approach, bringing historical musicology, philosophical aesthetics and performance practice into dialogue, is not a methodological preference, but a necessity imposed by the object of study itself.

The organ repertoire has served here as the concrete field in which this necessity becomes most visible. The instrument's radical variability forces the performer to construct, each time and on each instrument, a working definition of cyclic coherence, making explicit what other repertoires allow to remain implicit. The example of Franck's *Prélude, Choral et Fugue* illustrates how the cyclic principle, at its most developed, achieves a density of formal integration that exceeds any purely procedural description. Finally, the preliminary observation concerning Storace's *Ricercare* suggests that the historical range of the phenomenon may extend well beyond the Romantic period that theorised it.

What this paper ultimately proposes is not a definition of cyclic form, but a more precise understanding of why the definition remains elusive and of what kind of inquiry would be needed to advance it. That inquiry, necessarily interdisciplinary and grounded in the full breadth of the organ repertoire, is the work that lies ahead.

## Bibliography

Dahlhaus, Carl. "Eduard Hanslick und der musikalische Formbegriff." *Die Musikforschung* 20 (1967).

Dahlhaus, Carl. *Analisi musicale e giudizio estetico*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1987.

Deruchie, Andrew. "Saint-Saëns First String Quartet, Cyclic Form and the Aesthetics of Charm." *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*, 17 (2020): 75.

Finscher, Ludwig. "Zyklus," *Die Musik in Geschichte und Gegenwart online*, 1998, accessed June 2, 2026, https://www.mgg-online.com/articles/mgg16281/1.0/mgg16281.

Gorodeisky, Keren. "Unity in Variety: Theoretical, Practical, and Aesthetic Reason in Kant." In *The Imagination in German Idealism and Romanticism*, edited by Gentry G. and Pollok K., 86-105. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.

Hoffmann, Ernst Theodor Amadeus. "Review of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony." Translated by Martyn Clarke. In *E.T.A. Hoffmann's Musical Writings*, edited by David Charlton. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Judgement*. Translated by Alfredo Gargiulo. Introduction by Paolo D'Angelo. 12th ed. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 2020.

La Rocca, Claudio. "Schematizzare senza concetto: Immaginazione ed esperienza estetica in Kant." *Rivista di Estetica* 37, no. 1 (1997): 3-19.

Larson, David. *The composer's quest for unity: Development of Cyclic Form*. NCID AN00085725, 2, no. 1/2 (1955): 49.

Macdonald, Hugh. "Cyclic form," *Grove Music Online*, 2001, accessed June 2, 2026, https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/grovemusic/view/10.1093/gmo/9781561592630.001.0001/omo-9781561592630-e-0000007001.

Proksch, Bryan Jeffrey. "Cyclic Integration in the Instrumental Music of Haydn and Mozart." PhD diss., University of North Carolina, 2006.

Strucken-Paland, Christiane. "La ciclicità nella 'sonata per violino' di César Franck: una revisione critica del concetto di 'principe cyclique' di Vincent D'Indy." *Rivista Italiana di Musicologia*, 41, no. 1 (2006): 135.

Strucken-Paland, Christiane. *Zyklische Prinzipien in den Instrumentalwerken César Francks*. Regensburg: Gustav Bosse Verlag, 2009.

Taylor, Benedict. *Mendelssohn, Time and Memory. The Romantic Conception of Cyclic Form*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

Van Alphen, Henri Peter. "The Structure of Franck's D minor Symphony and its Historical Antecedents." Master's thesis, University of Cape Town, 2007.

Young, James. "Kant's (Moderate) Musical Antiformalism: A Reply to Sousa." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 81 (2023): 383-386.

© 2026 Stefano Scarpa. This is an Open Access article published in the journal Musica Academica by the University of Oradea Publishing House and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). The full terms of this license are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0

*Musica Academica*
Volume 3. Issue 1 (2026): 83-99
DOI: 10.61215/MA.2026.vol.3.iss.1.04

# ENACTING KNOWING: BUDDHIST VIJÑĀNA IN THE MUSIC AND DRAMA OF WAGNER'S PARSIFAL

**YALAN MA**

PhD candidate,
University of Music and Performing Arts Graz, Graz (Austria)[1]
yalan.ma1104@gmail.com

**Abstract**
*This study argues that the fermatas on rests in the Prelude of Wagner's Parsifal enact, in the medium of music, a cognitive operation structurally homologous with the Buddhist concept of vijñāna—"distinct knowledge"—knowledge that arises not from continuity but from separation. Five fermatas on rests punctuate the Prelude, breaking the sonic continuum into clearly delineated blocks and transforming pre-reflective absorption into reflective distance. Drawing on Eugène Burnouf's Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien (1844), a source Wagner studied from 1855, the analysis demonstrates that the prefix vi- (apart, multiple, diverse) encodes in the term's very etymology the logic that the fermatas perform musically: the breaking of unity as knowing itself. This structural operation is then traced across two further registers of the work—the grammatical shift from first to third person in Parsifal's monologue after Kundry's kiss, and the suspended silence at the beginning of Act III—showing that the same cognitive logic governs the musical, linguistic, and dramatic fabric of the work. The study concludes by reinterpreting the governing formula, "durch Mitleid wissend" ("knowing through compassion"): Wagner reconfigures compassion not as a moral virtue but as the sensory mechanism through which distinct knowledge is produced. What Parsifal makes audible and legible is not Buddhist doctrine transplanted into a Christian legend, but a form of knowing enacted through the structural procedures of the music drama itself.*

**Keywords**
*Richard Wagner, Parsifal, Buddhism, vijñāna, temporality, suspension*

[1] Leonhardstraße 15, 8010 Graz, Austria

## Introduction

The question of Wagner's engagement with Buddhism has been a subject of scholarly inquiry since the 1960s. Early studies, such as those by Dorothea Watanabe-Dauer (1964, 1976), established a methodological caution—not every Buddhist-seeming motif in Wagner need derive from direct source study—while also tracing the biographical entanglement of Wagner's Buddhist interests with his relationship to Mathilde Wesendonck.[2] Carl Suneson's monograph *Richard Wagner und die indische Geisteswelt* (1989) brought an Indologist's perspective to the question, reconstructing Wagner's Indian reading and suggesting affinities between his melodic aesthetic and Indian metaphysics.[3] The 1990s and 2000s saw further biographical treatments—Urs App's *Richard Wagner und der Buddhismus: Liebe – Tragik* (1997) and Danielle Buschinger's *Durch Mitleid Wissend: Wagner und der Buddhismus* (2017), which placed the Buddhist concept of compassion at the center of the discussion.[4] The *Wagnerspectrum* thematic issue *Wagner und der Buddhismus* (2007), edited by Ulrike Kienzle, opened new perspectives on Wagner's Buddhist-inflected Christianity, the narrative structure of *Tristan*, and unexpected connections to tantric tradition.[5] The most recent contribution, Douglas T. McGetchin's "The German Study of India and Buddhism" (2024), attends not only to Wagner's reading pathways but to the methodological constitution of the Indology of his time—a consideration that bears on the question of what kind of Buddhist knowledge was available to Wagner in the first place.[6]

Wagner's own encounter with Buddhism, as Douglas T. McGetchin has reconstructed it, occurred in 1854, when he read Schopenhauer.

---

[2] Dorothea Watanabe-Dauer, "Richard Wagner's Art in its Relation to Buddhist Thought," *Kentucky Foreign Romance Quarterly* 11, Supplement (1964): 11; "Richard Wagner and Buddhism: 'Tristan and Isolde' and 'The Victors,'" *The Eastern Buddhist* 9, no. 2 (1976): 123.

[3] Carl Suneson, *Richard Wagner und die indische Geisteswelt* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989).

[4] Urs App, *Richard Wagner und der Buddhismus: Liebe – Tragik* (Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1997); Danielle Buschinger, *Durch Mitleid Wissend: Wagner und der Buddhismus* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017).

[5] Dieter Borchmeyer, "'Sehnsüchtig blicke ich oft nach dem Land Nirwana …' Richard Wagners buddhistisches Christentum," *Wagnerspectrum*, no. 2 (2007): 15–34; Wolf-Daniel Hartwich, "Auslöschung – Richard Wagner und die buddhistische Mythologie des Jenseits," *Wagnerspectrum*, no. 2 (2007): 85–96; Ulrike Kienzle, "Tönendes Nirvana: Von der musikalischen Aufhebung der Zeit in Wagners Tristan und Parsifal," *Wagnerspectrum*, no. 2 (2007): 35–53.

[6] Douglas T. McGetchin, "The German Study of India and Buddhism," in *Wagner in Context*, ed. David Trippett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 267–274.

Schopenhauer's metaphysics—deeply shaped by his reading of the *Upanishads* (Vedic Hindu philosophical texts)—placed music at the summit of the arts as the direct objectification of the will. This framework became the lens through which he first approached Buddhist thought. In the winter of 1855, he began reading Buddhist sources in translation and European interpretation—above all Eugène Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien* (1844), which, as McGetchin notes, first offered him an idealized Buddha as the originator of a "pure and unmixed Christianity," and shortly thereafter Karl Friedrich Koeppen's *Die Religion des Buddha* (1857–1859), which dismantled that "heroic image of the Buddha" in favor of an anti-clerical reformer—a projection shaped by the Protestant assumptions of German Indology.[7] These studies coincided with Wagner's most productive phase: alongside work on *Tristan and Isolde*, *The Valkyrie*, *Siegfried*, and *Parsifal*, he drafted in 1856 the prose sketch for *The Victors*, an unfinished Buddhist opera whose concepts he would later transfer into other works.

What remains less clearly understood is whether the Buddhist concepts Wagner encountered merely furnished his works with isolated motifs and lexical borrowings, or whether they found their way into the structural procedures of the music drama itself—not as represented content, but as operative logic.

The argument proceeds in three parts, followed by a conclusion. The first analyzes the fermatas on rests as a compositional strategy and traces their structural homology with the Buddhist concept of *vijñāna*. The second extends this analysis to two further registers of work—language and dramaturgy. The third follows the conceptual arc from Burnouf's *vijñāna* to Wagner's formula "knowing through compassion."

The method of this study is neither source criticism nor biography. It does not ask whether Wagner "correctly understood" Buddhism, nor does it catalogue the Buddhist motifs that appear in his theoretical writings. Its primary focus lies on the inner functioning of the works themselves: how the musical, linguistic and dramatic operations configure the knowing. Buddhist concepts are introduced not as keys to Wagner's intentions but as analytical instruments: they provide a vocabulary for describing cognitive operations that the musical and dramatic structures already perform. This approach treats Wagner's encounter with Buddhism not as a question of doctrinal fidelity but as a catalyst for formal innovation.

[7] See McGetchin, "The German Study of India and Buddhism," 270–274.

## 1. Prelude: Fermata on Rests as Structural Principle

The Prelude to Act I of *Parsifal* is structured by a recurring musical event: fermatas on rests. They are placed at measures 19, 38, 44, 47 and 50 (Example no. 1 shows the first of these).[8]




*Example no. 1 – Richard Wagner, Parsifal, Prelude, mm. 17–23 (m. 19 highlighted)*

These fermatas on rests raise a threefold question. First, what structural function do they perform in the score? Do they merely articulate

[8] Richard Wagner, *Parsifal*, WWV 111, ed. Egon Voss and Martin Geck, Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Werke, vol. 14, I (Mainz: Schott Music, 1972), mm. 17–23.

sectional boundaries, or do they operate as a compositional principle that governs the Prelude's larger formal logic? Second, what transformation of musical temporality does this formal arrangement produce? Third, and most decisively for the present study, how does this compositional strategy relate to Wagner's Buddhist interest?

### 1. 1. Exhibition Rather Than Development

The *Parsifal* Prelude presents a peculiar disposition: it is not a single, through-composed stream of sound, but is articulated by structural fermatas on rests (mm. 19, 38, 44, 47, 50) into clearly delineated sections. The musical flow is repeatedly interrupted. These interruptions do not function as mere caesuras; through them, the sections are set apart as conspicuously discrete units. What arises here resembles an exhibition: the themes are not motivically processed or contrapuntally interwoven. Instead, they are placed side by side, one after another, at a distance that seems less temporal than ontological: as if between them lay that infinite space (the fermatas on rests) that separates things before they enter into relation. The fermata on a rest is the audible enactment of this separation. It carves out a hollow space within the musical flow, and it is within this very emptiness that the principle of separation becomes the movement's structural law.

In Wagner's conversations with his wife Cosima, a remark recorded on 31 October 1878 gives this principle a name: "Meine Vorspiele müssen alle elementarisch sein, nicht dramatisch, wie die Leonoren-Ouvertüre, denn dann ist das Drama überflüssig"[9] ("My preludes must all be elementary, not dramatic, like the Leonore Overture, for then the drama is superfluous.") What Wagner here calls "elementary" is expressly distinguished from dramatic. The dramatic—as he saw it embodied in Beethoven's overture—lives from causality, conflict, and development. The elementary, by contrast, designates a music that does not enter into this logic but lies before it, in a state of simple givenness. The plural "Meine Vorspiele" ("My preludes") is telling: it suggests that Wagner conceived of his preludes not as organic wholes but as constellations of discrete elements, a plurality that resists subsumption under a single developmental arc.

He becomes more concrete in a further diary entry of September 23, 1879. There he describes the Prelude as a "Vorrede"—a preface—and specifies: "weil die Themen einfach nebeneinandergelegt sind"[10]

[9] Cosima Wagner, *Die Tagebücher*, ed. Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack, 2 vols. (Munich: Piper, 1976–1977), vol. 2, 216. Hereafter cited as CT.

[10] CT, vol. 2, 415.

("because the themes are simply placed next to one another.") The preface to a sermon gathers themes, presents them, without yet unfolding them. This principle of "placing side by side"—of exhibiting rather than developing—can be observed throughout the score: the themes appear in calm succession, yet are separated by fermatas on rests, without motivic processing, without contrapuntal interweaving—a compositional principle that Adorno would later capture with his characterization of the *Parsifal* score as "statische Partitur" ("static score").[11]

The fermata on a rest thus constitutes not merely a punctuating device; rather, it is a logic of exhibition as opposed to development.

### 1. 2. The Temporality of the "Dramatic": Pre-Reflective Continuity[12]

To clarify what the fermatas on rests interrupt, a closer look at the temporality in question is necessary; music is a temporal art, and what the fermatas suspend is not only sound, but a particular way of inhabiting time. In studies of the closing passages of *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*—particularly those following Ulrike Kienzle's "'Tönendes Nirvāna': Von der musikalischen Aufhebung der Zeit in Wagners Tristan and Parsifal"—one

[11] See Theodor W. Adorno, "Zur Partitur des 'Parsifal'," in *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 17: *Musikalische Schriften IV*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982), 47–48. Adorno interpreted this disposition as an expression of a "statische Partitur" ("static score"), in which the motifs are "viel weniger ineinander verwoben" ("far less interwoven"), but rather "absichtsvoll-unbekümmert, bloss wie Bildchen aneinander gereiht" ("deliberately nonchalant, merely strung together like little pictures"). Adorno's diagnosis remains definitional; he does not specify which compositional technique produces this effect. The function of the pauses analyzed here confirms his observation on the level of temporal structure and identifies the fermata on a rest as the precise mechanism through which this "static score" is realized. William Kinderman, in "Gral und Gegengral: Die Klangräume des Parsifal-Dramas," *Wagnerspectrum* 8, no. 1 (2008): 30–47, here 30, argued that the dualistic tension between diatonic Grail and chromatic Anti-Grail spheres undercuts Adorno's characterization. Yet this tension does not refute Adorno's category: what "static" designates is not an absence of polarity but a withdrawal from developmental momentum—a withdrawal that the motivic and tonal polarities Kinderman analyzes articulate rather than undermine. Adorno diagnoses an aesthetic stance—the "withdrawal from appearance" ("Zurücktreten von der Erscheinung"), not a technical flaw. Read in this light, Kinderman's critique addresses Adorno's claim on a level other than the one on which it was made. Adorno's category of "late style" ("Altersstil") is not meant technically, but historically and aesthetically.

[12] These reflections on temporality operate on the level of a phenomenological description of the structures of musical experience. They do not aim to assert an actual effect on reception, but rather to uncover the temporal conditions that the work structurally claims for itself.

repeatedly finds the phrase "Aufhebung der Zeit" ("sublation of time").[13] Kienzle's use of the term presupposes a particular conception of time: a linear, continuous flow that is sublated in certain musical moments.

This conception, while illuminating, rests on a presupposition that has become so self-evident in motivic-thematic instrumental music of the nineteenth century that it tends to escape scrutiny: the assumption that musical time is inherently linear and continuous. Time, however, is not intrinsically linear; that particular modality is one possibility among others. It can also be organized as cycle, as constellation, as eternal present—forms in which succession yields to other principles of temporal organization.

That linear continuity became the self-evident norm, however, is due not to the nature of time but to a particular constitution of the music itself: the harmonic and motivic logic of nineteenth-century music, in which each event arises as the consequence of what precedes it and the condition of what follows—a chain of directional, goal-oriented causality. This is the logic Wagner subsumed under the concept of the "dramatic." Such music not only unfolds along a temporal axis; it generates its own temporal momentum—a directional thrust in which each moment is felt as both effect and cause. In doing so with self-sustaining coherence, it produces a temporal structure whose dynamic unity of retention, attention, and protention is already inscribed into the motivic and harmonic fabric itself.[14] The work does not merely invite this mode of temporal experience; it structurally enforces it. Within this temporal regime, the position that the work addresses is absorbed into its forward momentum:

---

[13] Ulrike Kienzle, "Tönendes Nirvāna," 35. Kienzle's analysis focuses primarily on the closing passages of the works and on the harmonic suspension in the *Tristan* prelude; the general pauses with fermata in the *Parsifal* prelude are not examined there.

[14] The terms "retention", "attention," and "protention" are drawn from Edmund Husserl's phenomenology of inner time-consciousness. See Edmund Husserl, *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*, ed. Martin Heidegger (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000; originally published 1928). "Attention" renders what Husserl terms "primal impression" ("Urimpression"), the immediate now-point around which retention (the just-past) and protention (the imminent future) are organized. The justification for borrowing these terms is twofold. First, Husserl's model describes the formal structure of any temporal experience and is thus applicable, in principle, to musical temporality as one species of temporal experience. Second, the music under analysis here is itself constituted by a specific mode of temporal organization (the motivic-harmonic chain of nineteenth-century developmental music); the Husserlian vocabulary makes it possible to describe the structural conditions built into that organization without recourse to empirical claims about actual listeners. The present study uses these terms descriptively, without thereby claiming a strictly phenomenological mode of argumentation; they are applied here to the structural organization of the musical fabric, not to the consciousness of an empirical listener.

the stream of sound carries itself, so that the structural opening for reflective distance is precisely what the work forecloses.

This condition—in which the forward momentum of the musical fabric absorbs the position addressed by the work into its own movement, leaving no structural opening for reflective distance—rests on a single presupposition, which the work itself secures at every moment: continuity. As long as the motivic chain holds, as long as one harmonic event is causally linked to the next, the structure maintains its grip on the temporal field it has established. Such a condition, in which consciousness is carried without needing to apprehend what carries it, is a pre-reflective condition.

### 1. 3. The Pause as Temporal Reconfiguration

The fermatas on rests withdraw this pre-reflective condition. The consequences of that withdrawal can be specified across three dimensions.

First: the suspension of the continuous flow of sound. The fermatas on rests break the sound continuum. The steady influx of sensory material is suspended. The structural ground of pre-reflective absorption is thereby withdrawn. This suspension creates a void in the musical fabric itself—not as a negation of time, but as an interruption of one temporality in order to open space for another.

Second: the opening of a space of reflection. When the sound object is withdrawn, a distanced relation to what has been heard becomes possible. The motifs that previously appeared in succession can now be held in memory and related to one another. The pauses thus articulate a temporal clearing within the musical structure itself. Motifs that were previously presented in linear succession are, through the intervention of the fermatas, reconfigured in a quasi-spatial present: they stand side by side, their separation enabling a mode of relation that is no longer that of continuous flow. In continuous flow, each event is immediately overtaken by the next, and consciousness, carried forward by the momentum of the motivic chain, has no occasion to arrest its attention on any single element. In the constellation that the fermatas produce, by contrast, each thematic block is released from the obligation to generate its successor. Consciousness is no longer propelled forward; it can dwell, compare, and relate. It is this shift—from being carried to being able to pause—that constitutes the opening of a space of reflection. The structure thus shifts from presenting its material as stream to presenting it as constellation.

Third: the reassignment of synthesis—from the compositional fabric to the addressee, the position of reflective subjectivity that the work

structurally summons. In the tradition of motivic-thematic development, the work of linking is performed by the compositional fabric itself. In this Prelude, the fermatas on rests suspend this logic. They intervene at moments where the music, by its own momentum, would otherwise continue—and they stop it. The work of linking is thereby no longer inscribed in the notated text. The work thus redefines the addressee-position inscribed in its own structure: at this site, the music no longer provides the connection in the form of motivic causality. It falls to the addressee—the position that the work structurally summons—to supply it. What is opened here is, in effect, a space for the addressee's reflective subjectivity: a structural opening in which the one who hears might become the one who knows.

In summary, the fermatas on rests and the continuous flow they interrupt constitute a temporal logic specific to this Prelude, each term inert without the other: the continuous flow supplies the sensory material; the pauses create the space in which this material can be contemplated—and, in that contemplation, reconnected by the one who hears.

### 1. 4. Enacting Knowing: The Fermata as *Vijñāna*

Unlike the harmonic suspension that, as Kienzle has shown, evokes a sonorous timelessness in the closing passages of *Tristan and Isolde* and *Parsifal*, the fermatas on rests operate through structural interruption. Both procedures aim at a comparable transformation of temporality—yet the fermatas on rests accomplish this not by negating time, but by opening it to its own multiplicity. This opening, moreover, does more than reconfigure temporal experience: it enacts, in the medium of music, a cognitive operation whose structure corresponds point for point to a specific concept in Buddhist thought—*vijñāna*.

Burnouf, whose *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien* (1844) Wagner studied from the winter of 1855 onward, defines it as a "distinct knowledge"—a knowledge distinguished from pure cognition by its entanglement with feeling and with the nascent sense of individual consciousness.[15] The Indologist Theodor Goldstücker, in a critical note appended to Burnouf's text, sharpened this point in a way that bears directly on the musical operation at issue here: *vijñāna*, he argued, is "the learning of what is *vi*, multiple, diverse, without unity"—a knowledge of the separated, the varied, the apparition-filled world—as opposed to *jñāna*, the knowledge of what is one, of Brahman, which is true

[15] Eugène Burnouf, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, trans. Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 463–464.

knowledge.[16] The prefix *vi-* thus does not merely intensify (as the Tibetan translators rendered it: "totally, completely"); it introduces differentiation into the very structure of knowing. Knowledge becomes possible only through separation, through the breaking of an original continuity.

What is noteworthy in these definitions is less their accuracy than their shared horizon: both situate *vijñāna* within a framework in which knowledge arises from separation, from the breaking of unity. Wagner, it seems, grasped precisely this point—and saw in it a structural principle. This is the principle that the fermatas on rests set into operation. By interrupting the continuous sonic stream, they break the pre-reflective unity of unreflective absorption; by producing distance between the separated sections, they create the condition under which what has been heard can become an object of contemplation; and by transforming immediacy into reflective distance, they constitute the musical analogue of that "distinct knowledge."

## 2. Language and Dramatic Form of "Knowing"

The preceding chapter traced a cognitive operation unfolding in the *Parsifal* Prelude. This operation was shown to display a structural homology with the Buddhist concept of *vijñāna*—a "distinct knowledge" that arises from separation. But the Prelude is only one register in which this cognitive operation takes shape. Does it resonate elsewhere in the work? Specifically, does the drama's textual fabric—its handling of language, its construction of narrative events—enact a parallel operation?

### 2. 1. Grammatical Self-Objectivization in Act II

The cognitive operation traced in the Prelude also operates in the linguistic register of the work. Parsifal's monologue after Kundry's kiss enacts a grammatical self-objectivization that splits the subject in two: the knowing "I" transforms the desiring "I"—the self-entangled in the mother-illusion—into an objectivized, observed "him." The shift is sustained throughout the monologue: the first-person immediacy of desire gives way entirely to the third person, as Parsifal disassembles the illusion into a series of sensory details—voice, gaze, the twitching of lips, the arching of the neck, the caress of the cheek (II. 811–823):

| | |
|---|---|
| Ja! Diese Stimme! So rief sie<br>ihm; – und diesen Blick,<br>deutlich erkenn' ich ihn, –<br>Auch diesen, der ihm so | Yes! This voice! So she<br>called to him; –and this<br>look, I recognize it clearly, –<br>this too, that laughed at him |

[16] Theodor Goldstücker, quoted in Burnouf, *Introduction*, 464n1.

| | |
|---|---|
| friedlos lachte.<br>Die Lippe, – ja – so zuckte<br>sie ihm; – so neigte sich der<br>Nacken, –so hob sich kühn<br>das Haupt; – so flatterten<br>lachend die Locken, – so<br>schlang um den Hals sich<br>der Arm –<br>so schmeichelte weich die<br>Wange–!<br>Mit aller Schmerzen Qual im<br>Bund,das Heil der Seele<br>entküßte ihm ihr Mund! –<br>Ha! – dieser Kuß! – | so restlessly.<br>The lip, – yes – so it<br>twitched for him; –so the<br>neck inclined, –so boldly the<br>head raised itself; – so the<br>locks fluttered, laughing; –<br>so the arm curled around<br>the neck –<br>so the cheek softly caressed<br>–!<br>With all the agony of pain<br>united, the salvation of the<br>soul was kissed from him by<br>her mouth! –<br>Ha! — this kiss! –) |

Through this self-objectivization, desire becomes, for the first time, an analyzable object. What Parsifal recognizes, in the disassembly of the sensory details that follows, is that the desire Kundry's kiss stirred was never for her as a woman but for what she represented in the mother-illusion: the absolute consolation and peace of soul ("the salvation of the soul") that the illusion had once promised—a state in which separation is abolished and mother and child are one.

This grammatical operation accomplishes in the medium of language a structurally homologous operation to that of the fermatas on rests in the Prelude. The fermata suspends sonic continuity and opens a reflective distance to the musical flow; the pronoun shift suspends subjective immediacy and opens a reflective distance to one's own desire. In both cases, what was previously enacted in unmediated absorption is transformed into an object of contemplation. Both operations are materially different—here language, there sound—but structurally homologous. They converge in the logic of "knowing": the transformation of entanglement into an object of consciousness.

### 2. 2. Dramatic Suspension: Silence as Cognitive Aftermath

Parsifal's appearance at the beginning of Act III is defined by silence and deceleration to the threshold of stillness. The stage direction that follows the line 974 reads:

> Parsifal tritt aus dem Walde auf. Er ist ganz in schwarzer Waffenrüstung: mit geschlossenem Helme und gesenktem Speer, schreitet er, gebeugten Hauptes, träumerisch zögernd, langsam daher, und setzt sich auf dem kleinen Rasenhügel am Quelle nieder.

> (Parsifal steps out of the forest. He is in full black armor: with closed helmet and lowered spear, he strides, head bowed, dreamily hesitating, slowly forward, and seats himself on the small grassy mound by the spring.)

Later, after a further silence, the direction following line 995 continues:

> Parsifal erhebt sich, nach einem abermaligen Schweigen, stößt den Speer vor sich in den Boden, legt Schild und Schwert davor nieder, öffnet den Helm, nimmt ihn vom Haupt und legt ihn zu den anderen Waffen, worauf er dann zu stummem Gebete vor dem Speer niederkniet. (Parsifal rises, after another silence, thrusts the spear into the ground before him, lays down shield and sword, opens his helmet, takes it from his head and lays it with the other weapons, then kneels in mute prayer before the spear.)

Every gesture is decelerated to the threshold of stillness. The closed visor, the bowed head, the laying down of weapons, the mute prayer—these are the outward form of a consciousness that has reached its cognitive limit. What the stage direction presents is a consciousness saturated after a long trajectory of experience; the knowledge that Kundry's kiss unlocked—the causal logic of desire and suffering, his own entanglement in the mother-illusion, the weight of a mission whose path he cannot yet find—has saturated his consciousness. The silence and stillness are not a retreat, not a refusal, but a holding-still: a cognitive aftermath in which all inherited frameworks for action have become transparent and no new path has yet emerged.

This silence is the structural condition out of which Parsifal's monologue arises—a monologue that does not proclaim the abandonment of meaning but sinks into an existential interrogation in which the old frameworks of guilt, atonement, and redemption no longer hold (II. 1076–1086):

| | |
|---|---|
| Und ich—ich bin's,<br>der all dies Elend schuf!<br>Ha! Welcher Sünden,<br>welcher Frevel Schuld<br>muß dieses Toren-Haupt<br>seit Ewigkeit belasten,<br>da keine Buße, keine Sühne<br>der Blindheit mich<br>entwindet,<br>mir, selbst zur Rettung | And I—I am the one<br>who created all this misery!<br>Ha! What sins, what<br>sacrilegious guilt must<br>burden this fool's head<br>since eternity, since no<br>penance, no atonement<br>can wrest me from<br>blindness,<br>for me, myself chosen for |

| | |
|---|---|
| auserkoren,<br>in Irrnis wild verloren<br>der Rettung letzter Pfad<br>verschwindet! | salvation,<br>wildly lost in errancy,<br>the last path of salvation<br>vanishes! |

These terms—the eternal "blindness," the "errancy"—situate Parsifal's crisis within a conceptual field that Wagner understood in terms of illusion—what the Indic traditions, and Schopenhauer after them, call the "veil of Maya": the idea that the world as ordinarily perceived is a fabric of appearances, and that human suffering arises from entanglement in it. "Blindness" is the condition of one who does not see the fabric as fabric; "errancy" is the condition of one who, beginning to suspect its nature, still moves within it without finding an exit. The knowledge that Parsifal attains is thus a seeing-through—a penetration of this fabric. Yet what his knowledge reveals has a reach that extends beyond the illusion it exposes. To recognize the world as appearance is also to recognize that one's own desires, one's own guilt ("What sins, / what sacrilegious guilt / must burden this fool's head / since eternity"), one's own quest for redemption ("myself chosen for salvation"), are themselves woven into its texture. The framework within which he might act upon his insight is part of the very order he has seen through.

What the monologue lays bare, then, is not merely a personal crisis but the structure of a problem inherent in the act of knowing itself: the inherited frameworks of meaning—guilt, atonement, redemption—belong to the very order that Parsifal's knowledge has penetrated. His insight does not refute them; it renders them inoperative ("since no penance, no atonement / can wrest me from blindness"). They become transparent, and he is left standing in the cleft between clear insight and effective action, with no bridge in sight ("the last path of salvation vanishes!"). Parsifal's silence is thus more than a dramatic pause: it is the structural consequence of a knowledge that has outstripped every available framework for acting upon it.

This state could be interpreted as the expression of a Buddhist-inflected 'nihilism' or Schopenhauerian 'negation of the will', pointing toward a dissolution of meaning and an end of action. It would, however, be premature to qualify the work on this account as nihilistic or pessimistic, for this state by no means represents the telos of the entire music drama but merely the starting point of Act III. What is at issue here is not an empty finality, but a temporary, critical suspension after cognitive saturation—a deep silence, ready for action.

Structurally, this holding-still is the dramatic counterpart to the fermata on a rest, just as the grammatical self-objectivization analyzed

above is its linguistic counterpart. In each register—music, language, dramatic form—the operation is the same: continuity is broken, distance is produced, and what was previously enacted in unmediated absorption is transformed into an object of contemplation.

The interruption does not determine what follows from it, but it does demand that something follow. What it creates is the distance through which "distinct knowledge" (*vijñāna*) becomes possible, and with it, the structural condition for an action that is not merely the continuation of the old order.

## 3. From Burnouf's *Vijñāna* to Wagner's "Knowing through Compassion"

The homology traced in the preceding chapters—between the fermata on a rest, the grammatical shift from "I" to "him," the suspended silence of Act III, and the Buddhist concept of *vijñāna*—raises a question that the analysis has so far deferred. What is the nature of the relationship between Wagner's music drama and the Buddhist sources he read? Did Burnouf's *Introduction à l'histoire du Bouddhisme indien* simply supply Wagner with a term, or did something more fundamental take place—a transformation of the concept itself in its passage from philological text to musical structure?

Burnouf's treatment of *vijñāna* remained, in decisive respects, within a cosmological and metaphysical framework. His *vijñāna* is the third link in the chain of dependent origination—a stage in the genesis of consciousness from ignorance and formative impulse. It describes how consciousness arises; it does not offer a theory of how knowledge is produced—a theory that would not appear in Western scholarship until the twentieth century, most systematically in Theodor Stcherbatsky's *Buddhist Logic* (1930–1932).[17] Burnouf's section on the *Abhidharma*, the corpus devoted to the twelve links and their third term, appears under the heading "Abhidharma, or Metaphysics", a rubric that announces his orientation toward general Buddhist philosophy rather than the specific questions of cognition and epistemology that Buddhism also contain. As Donald S. Lopez Jr. has noted, Burnouf's treatment is "concerned not so much with the topics specifically associated with these scriptures, such as epistemology and the function of cognition, but more broadly with

[17] Theodor Stcherbatsky, *Buddhist Logic*, 2 vols., Bibliotheca Buddhica 26 (Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1930–1932).

Buddhist philosophy."[18] What Burnouf's text could name and define—vijñāna as "distinct knowledge"—it could not theorize as an epistemological operation. The mechanism by which separation produces knowledge remained, in his framework, embedded within a cosmology it did not need to explain.

This is where Wagner's music drama moves beyond the text that supplied its terms. The formula "knowing through compassion"—marks the site of this transformation. Burnouf had defined *vijñāna*; Wagner embeds it in a structure that answers the question "how is knowing possible?" The word "through" is the pivot. It designates compassion as the means by which knowing is produced—not a moral virtue to be cultivated, as in the tradition from Schopenhauer onward, but a sensory mechanism to be undergone. The kiss is the concrete form this mechanism takes in the drama: a somatic reenactment of Amfortas' act, an entry into the causal logic of desire and suffering, a break in the continuity of illusion. Compassion, in this configuration, is the name for the sensory practice, a bodily mimesis of the suffering of another, through which distinct knowledge—*vijñāna*— is generated. Wagner thus extracts the epistemological core from Burnouf's metaphysical framework and gives it structural realization: the "how" of knowing, enacted in music, language, and dramatic form.

This is not to claim that Wagner "correctly understood" Buddhism while Burnouf did not. It is to identify a shift in the modality of the concept itself. In Burnouf's text, *vijñāna* is an object of philological and philosophical description—a term to be defined, classified, and situated within a doctrinal system. In Wagner's music drama, *vijñāna* becomes a structural operation—something the work does rather than something it says. The fermata on a rest is *vijñāna* made audible. The pronoun shift is self-objectivization enacted in grammar. The silence of Act III is cognitive saturation given dramatic form. This is the specific mode of Wagner's achievement. That capacity — to transform a definition into an event, a term into a structural procedure—is the kind of knowing that *Parsifal* enacts.

## Conclusion

*Parsifal* stands as a singular case in the history of nineteenth-century cultural transfer: a work in which a Buddhist concept is not represented, not thematized, not dramatized as exotic content—but performed, in the

[18] Donald S. Lopez Jr., "Introduction to the Translation," in Burnouf, *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, trans. Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez Jr. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), 17–18.

very procedures of the music drama itself. Burnouf's text could name the concept within a metaphysical framework—*vijñāna* as a link in the chain of dependent origination, a stage in the genesis of consciousness. Wagner's *Parsifal* performs it as an epistemological operation: a distinct knowledge generated through the sensory path of compassion. The kiss, the grammatical split, the suspended silence—these are not illustrations of a doctrine. They are compassion's form, through which knowing is produced. In this performance, the Buddhist term ceases to be a philological object and becomes an epistemological event—a kind of knowing that sounds like silence.

## Bibliography

Adorno, Theodor W. "Zur Partitur des 'Parsifal'." In *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 17: *Musikalische Schriften IV*, edited by Rolf Tiedemann, 37–50. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1982.

App, Urs. *Richard Wagner und der Buddhismus: Liebe – Tragik*. Zürich: Museum Rietberg, 1997.

Borchmeyer, Dieter. "'sehnsüchtig blicke ich oft nach dem Land Nirwana …' Richard Wagners buddhistisches Christentum," *Wagnerspectrum*, no. 2 (2007): 15–34.

Burnouf, Eugène. *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*. Translated by Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez Jr. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

Buschinger, Danielle. *Durch Mitleid Wissend: Wagner und der Buddhismus*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2017.

Hartwich, Wolf-Daniel. "Auslöschung – Richard Wagner und die buddhistische Mythologie des Jenseits." *Wagnerspectrum*, no. 2 (2007): 85–96.

Husserl, Edmund. *Vorlesungen zur Phänomenologie des inneren Zeitbewußtseins*. Edited by Martin Heidegger. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 2000. Originally published 1928.

Kienzle, Ulrike. "Tönendes Nirvana: Von der musikalischen Aufhebung der Zeit in Wagners Tristan und Parsifal." *Wagnerspectrum* 3, no. 2 (2007): 35–53.

Kinderman, William. "Gral und Gegengral: Die Klangräume des Parsifal-Dramas." *Wagnerspectrum* 8, no. 1 (2008): 30–47.

Lopez, Donald S., Jr. "Introduction to the Translation." In *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism*, by Eugène Burnouf, translated by Katia Buffetrille and Donald S. Lopez Jr., 1–27. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

McGetchin, Douglas T. "The German Study of India and Buddhism." In *Wagner in Context*, edited by David Trippett, 267–274. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024.

Stcherbatsky, Theodor. *Buddhist Logic*. 2 vols. Bibliotheca Buddhica 26.

Leningrad: Academy of Sciences of the USSR, 1930–1932.
Suneson, Carl. *Richard Wagner und die indische Geisteswelt*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1989.
Wagner, Cosima. *Die Tagebücher*. Edited by Martin Gregor-Dellin and Dietrich Mack. 2 vols. Munich: Piper, 1976–1977.
Wagner, Richard. *Parsifal*, WWV 111. Edited by Martin Geck and Egon Voss. Richard Wagner: Sämtliche Werke, vol. 14, I. Mainz: Schott Music, 1972.
Watanabe-Dauer, Dorothea. "Richard Wagner and Buddhism: 'Tristan and Isolde' and 'The Victors.'" The Eastern Buddhist 9, no. 2 (1976): 115–128.
Watanabe-Dauer, Dorothea. "Richard Wagner's Art in its Relation to Buddhist Thought." Kentucky Foreign Romance Quarterly 11, Supplement (1964): 1–35.

© 2026 Yalan Ma. This is an Open Access article published in the journal Musica Academica by the University of Oradea Publishing House and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). The full terms of this license are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0.

*Musica Academica*
Volume 3. Issue 1 (2026): 100-121
DOI: 10.61215/MA.2026.vol.3.iss.1.05

# TONAL-CENTRIC SECTIONAL TERNARY DESIGN AND MESSIAEN-DERIVED POST-TONAL PROCEDURES IN TORU TAKEMITSU'S *RAIN TREE SKETCH II*

**DR. ROLYND LYON DELLA SYLVAN**

Ph.D. New York University[1]
Ph.D. Candidate, University of Oradea[2]
Adjunct Faculty, New School of Music, NYC[3]
Director of Faculty, Guitar Center[4]
DrRolyndLyonDellaSylvan@gmail.com

**Abstract**
*This paper interrogates the nexus of large-scale form, local motivic design, and harmonic organization in Tōru Takemitsu's "Rain Tree Sketch II" (1992), a memorial work for Olivier Messiaen that absorbs and transforms salient aspects of the dedicatee's compositional practice. Proceeding from the ostensibly diffuse surface, the study demonstrates that the piece articulates a rigorously coordinated simple, sectional ternary design whose global framework is underpinned by clearly profiled phrases, contrasting and parallel periods, and cadential phrase groups, frequently mediated by elision. At the foreground, the analysis traces how registral deployment and recurring cadential gestures, especially a single tone-centric orientation even as the work deploys post-tonal materials and their chromatic complement. The "A" sections are shown to synthesize triadic, tertian sonorities with flexible pitch-set usage, privileging singable melodic contours and functionally intelligible bass progressions over strict transformational operations. By contrast, the "B" section functions as a textural and harmonic disjunction, recasting the material into polyphonic terms, new sonorities, and systematically exploiting Messiaen's Mode 2 while strategically suppressing the tonic pitch. The study further situates Takemitsu's deployment of Messiaen's "modes of limited transposition" and use of rhythms with added or subtracted values within a broader discourse on temporality that generates a perception of suspended, "atemporal" flow. "Rain Tree Sketch II" thereby emerges as a paradigmatic late-style work in which Takemitsu mobilizes inherited tonal, formal, and motivic archetypes in dialectical interaction with post-tonal collections and Messiaen-derived techniques, producing a memorial idiom that is at once referential and idiosyncratically personal.*

**Keywords**
*Music theory, Modern music, Piano music, Toru Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch II*

---

[1] 70 Washington Sq South, New York, NY.
[2] Strada Universitatii nr. 1, Oradea 410087, Romania.
[3] 6 West 12th Street New York, NY 10011.
[4] 11977 St. Charles Rock Rd. Suite 100, Bridgeton, MO 63044.

## Introduction

**1.1** Toru Takemitsu (1930–1996) composed his final work for solo piano, *Rain Tree Sketch II* (1992), as an explicit memorial to Olivier Messiaen, the French composer, musicologist, ornithologist, and Holocaust survivor whose music and thought exerted a formative influence on Takemitsu from his youth onward.[5] Within this programmatic miniature, Takemitsu's idiosyncratic attachment to nature, his complex negotiations with questions of cultural identity and nationalism, and his longstanding fascination with timbre and resonance coalesce in a musical language that remains unmistakably his own even as it bears the trace of Messiaen's techniques and aesthetics. The present study takes as its point of departure the hypothesis that *Rain Tree Sketch II* functions not merely as an occasional homage but as a condensed site in which Takemitsu's late style and his dialogue with Messiaen are mutually illuminated, thereby offering a privileged lens through which to consider issues of form, harmonic organization, and temporality in late-twentieth-century piano repertoire.

**1.2** Central to this inquiry is the observation that *Rain Tree Sketch II achieves* a striking degree of formal lucidity while operating decisively within a post-tonal harmonic environment. Analysts have repeatedly construed the piece as articulating a ternary (A–B–A or A–B–A′) design whose outer sections frame a contrasting "Joyful" middle, and within which phrase groupings and cadential articulations can be inferred with considerable clarity despite the absence of conventional meter signatures and double-bar demarcations.[2] Within this framework, motivic recurrence, registral design, and dynamic contour assume the role traditionally occupied by tonal-functional syntax: they delineate points of initiation, climax, and closure; they signal returns and transformations; and they enable listeners to apprehend continuity and large-scale return as functions of patterned gesture rather than predictable progressions of harmonic function. In this respect, the work calls into question any residual assumption that post-tonal music must necessarily sacrifice formal intelligibility in pursuit of harmonic novelty, instead demonstrating how structural articulation can be secured through carefully choreographed distributions of material in time.

**1.3** At the same time, *Rain Tree Sketch II* offers a compelling model of how heterogeneous harmonic resources can be integrated into a single, coherent idiom that is neither strictly systematic nor loosely eclectic. The

[5] Takemitsu, Tōru.

piece draws upon set-theoretical collections, octatonic and other symmetrical scales—including Messiaen's Mode 2—alongside vestigial triadic sonorities and singable melodic contours, yet Takemitsu resists subjecting these materials to exhaustive combinatorial or serial procedures, thereby preserving a sense of spontaneity and contingency in the unfolding of sonorities. The recurrence of particular pitch-class collections and their associated coloristic "fingerprints" ensures that the harmonic language remains recognizably unified, while the friction between familiar triadic references and more saturated post-tonal aggregates sustains a productive tension between "old" and "new." Situated at the intersection of memorial intent, formal clarity, and a refined post-tonal palette, Rain Tree Sketch II thus frames the act of listening—to harmony, to resonance, to silence—as a form of remembrance, and it is this convergence of structural and commemorative concerns that the ensuing analysis seeks to elucidate in detail.

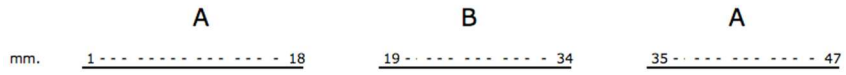
**Body**

**2.1** Though Takemitsu incorporates no double bars in the score, clear demarcations can be identified via the score itself. Even before an apposite analysis of the music is instigated, hints of the formal design can be discerned. There are three occasions on the printed score where the composer uses descriptive, even emotive, terms and these occasions hint at the formal demarcations by indicating contrasting moods: "Celestially Light" (m.1), "Joyful" (m.19), and "Celestially Light" indicated on the score a second time (m.35). (As the available score is without measure numbers, I have added them to the score attached [see appendix] and in the examples used throughout this paper. Where Takemitsu used dashed vertical lines to divide measures, I have enumerated these using lower-case letters. E.g. mm.30a, 30b, and 30c). Although Takemitsu indicates descriptive terms within the score, these descriptive terms accompany tempo change markings, these tempo change indications by themselves would not be evidence enough to satisfy sectional boundaries: changes in tempo, clearly indicated in the score, occur *virtually every other measure* throughout the piece. Identifying cohesive devices as well as detecting similar and contrasting musical elements will not only elucidate the formal design but will justify any initial suspicions of a tripartite formal design based on Takemitsu's use of emotive, descriptive terms.

**2.2** "Key" and specific musical material will be discussed below, but it is worth noting at this point that the piece is constructed using tertian structures, traditional triads, set theory, and is grounded not only

on the pitch “D” but also on a subset of a pitch collection belonging to an exotic scale which itself is based on the pitch “D.”

**2.3** Further investigation of the music itself indeed justifies a tripartite formal design: the piece is Ternary.

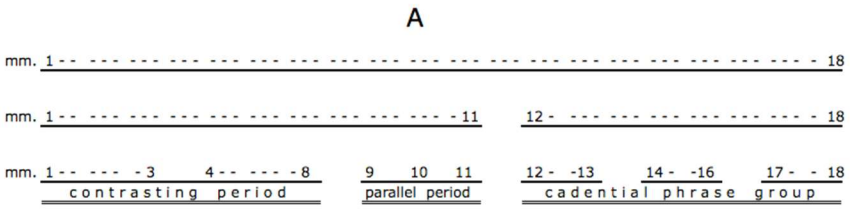


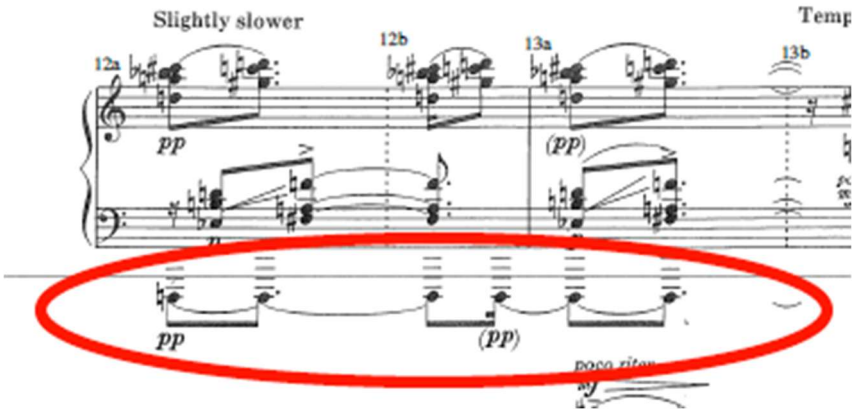

*(Example no. 1 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 1-47)*

In this large-scale view, the evidence for Ternary design lies in the contrasting second section as much as the “A” sections. This middle section centered in a new “key” (the “A” sections are centered on “D” and the “B” section is not) and it instigates new melodic material (discussed below) as well as presenting a new texture. Thus, the “B” section creates contrast with its surrounding “A” sections. The return of the “A” section is a true recapitulation and states the opening section in its entirety and the only modification is truncation of the length of the cadential phrase group. More specifically, the overarching formal plan is that of sectional Ternary as opposed to continuous Ternary. Where continuous Ternary closes the first section with a cadence in a key other than the tonic and continues the new key in the “B” section, the sectional form generally cadences on the tonic at the end of the first section and begins the second section in a new key. Although the “B” section of the continuous Ternary usually ends with a cadence on the tonic, and the sectional Ternary tends to end the second section on the overall key of the B (not the tonic), the presence of a strong closing cadential phrase group in the “B” section adds evidence for a sectional design. Further designation can be made by assigning this piece the formal description of Simple Ternary as opposed to Compound Ternary: in Compound Ternary, each of the three major sections is itself Ternary (A = aba; B = cdc; A = aba).

**2.4** Within each major section of *Rain Tree Sketch II* there is a smaller yet clear formal design. The first section, the “A” section, encompasses the first eighteen measures. The “A” section is itself, in an overall sense, is comprised of two sections: a busy but lyrical section presented in upper registers (the left hand is notated in the treble clef and does not reach below the D below middle C until the tenth measure) which is succeeded by a cadential phrase group featuring many ritenutos as well as virtual stops and starts. On a more detailed level and with further investigation, there is evidence that the “A” section consists of three sections: two

periods, one contrasting and the other parallel, followed by a cadential phrase group.


A
mm. 1 - - -




*(Example no. 4- Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 12a-13b)*

The contrasting period, mm. 1-8, begins with the presentation of material (mm. 1-3) followed by a complimentary repetition (mm. 4-8) with the material in the first two measures being similar but presented approximately a third lower in measures 4-5. Though the contours of the melody and the accompanying figures remain virtually the same in mm. 4-5, this is not a literal sequence, though it acts as one, for the reason that some of the pitches are transposed a down a minor 3rd while others pitches are transposed a major 3rd lower, a tritone lower, a half-step etc. This initial period closes with a strong cadence (see above example mm. 10) and measure 11 acts as a cadential extension—the addition of material beyond the point at which a cadence is expected—thus the strong cadence, filling out of the missing bass register, decrescendo, delineate this (mm. 1-11) from the next period.

**2.5** Measures 12-18 make up the next section within the overall "A" section with mm. 12-18 comprising a cadential phrase group. At this point, measures 12-13, an elision takes place thereby blurring the line between the cadence, which closes the two periods, and the third section.

**2.6** While the "A" section is presented in virtual homophonic texture, where homorhythm dominates the section with occasional stretto utterances between the voices (hands) and only the uppermost pitches of the right hand act as a melody, the "B" section maintains its textbook function: contrast. This contrasting second section (mm. 19-34) departs from the D-centered opening section by the mere omission of the note D in its first three measures (mm. 19-21) and by any appearances of the note D being buried in the vertical sonorities or by its presentation on a quick, unaccented beat until the last 8th note of measure 23. The "B" section also brings a new texture: polyphony. It is only here, beginning in measure 19

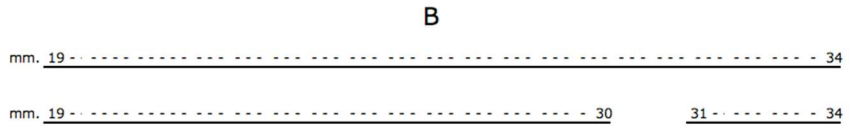
and enduring throughout the section, that a true, independent 2nd voice is established.




*(Example no. 5 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 19-20)*

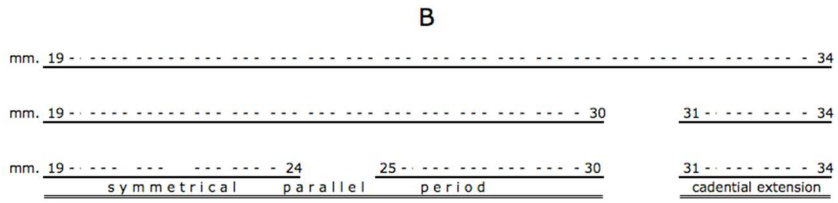
This 2nd voice is a stretto entrance and is virtually and answer, presented one octave lower, to the material stated in the upper-most voice stated an 8th note earlier. The "B" section does not entirely depart from the previous section as it maintains some of its homophonic characteristic only at this time by long, sustained chords in the lower-most voice which act as accompaniment to the movement of the essentially two-voice polyphony above it. With the middle section of sectional forms, such as the scherzo, the minuet, and others, being deemed a "trio" and with "trio" also meaning written for or sounding in three voices, justification for identifying this contrasting "B" section as a trio exists.

**2.7** The "B" section, just as with the "A" section, can be further divided into two smaller sections, mm. 19-10 and mm. 31-34, with the 2nd section acting as a cadential extension bringing the first section to a strong close.




*(Example no. 6 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 19-34)*

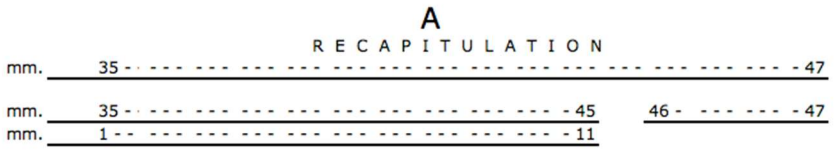
Just as with the "A" section, these middle-ground, two sections can be further broken down into yet smaller units.




*(Example no. 7 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 19-34)*

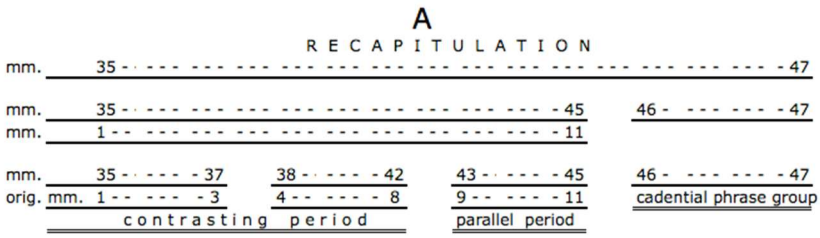
The "B" section opens with a symmetrical, parallel period where the phrases are the same length and containing virtually the same material as well as each containing the now familiar cadential device of the presentation of the low D (5 ledger lines below the bass staff). Measures 25-30 differ from the first phrase by the interpolation of material during sustained moments. Measures 31-34, with mm. 31-32 being literally repeated in mm. 33-34, act a cadential extension by a literal slowing down of the tempo, via the indication of "tempo II," and by virtual slowing down the music by means of the omission of the interpolating device used to fill any sustained moments in the measures the preceding measures (25-30).

**2.8** The third section of the Ternary design, mm. 35-47, is indeed a literal recapitulation of the initial "A" section (I have indicated the measure numbers of the initial "A" section just below the numbers describing this final section).




*(Example no. 8 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 35-47)*

Again, just as with the "A" and "B" sections, this middle-ground view can be further broken down into smaller units.




*(Example no. 9 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 35-47)*

Here, in the final section of the Ternary formal plan, rather than keeping the 7-measure cadential phrase group that closes the original "A" section, Takemitsu opts for a shorter 2-measure cadential phrase group. Though shorter here in the final "A" section, the ending remains satisfying. The familiar cadential devices abound in the final measures: low D is heard, here three times (m.44, m46, 47) as well as the now familiar slowing down of the music. Three sustained, low D's convincingly create conclusiveness with the last being voiced without interruption from any upper voices.

**2.9** *Rain Tree Sketch II* is clearly centered on the pitch D. Evidence for this can be seen by its being situated in two of the most prominent positions in orchestration: the highest and lowest notes sounded. In the first two measures, until the lone utterance of the major third above D (the symbol ^ followed by a number [e.g. ^1] will be used in this paper to denote scale tones as they relate to the D major scale: e.g. ^5 = the note "A" and ^b7 = "C natural") on the last 8th note, D is presented as both the highest and lowest note. More evidence reinforces the note D as tonic by examining the melody. The note D is approached by an ascending perfect 4th from ^5 in the upper-most voice and left by descending step to the leading tone which in turn, via registration, leads back to ^1 after the ^5 is voiced. To further reinforce D as the principal tone, a familiar Western common practice device of ^5 preceding ^1 in the melody is utilized as well as the use of ^7 as a leading tone. This is evidenced from the outset: this melodic, pitch-centering device is immediately repeated after first being stated.




*(Example no. 10 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars1-2)*

The lowest voice in the opening material provides further evidence of tonality and a D-centric piece by its beginning on D (^1) before leaving and returning by step then immediately leaving and returning to ^1 by step again (mm. 1-2). Then, after two scalar ascents (mm. 4-5) which ultimately lead to ^1, the important tonal bass function is continued with the appearance of ^5 being sounded as the lowest pitch thusfar before the return of ^1 in the familiar middle range (heard twice) before its ultimate appearance as ^1 five ledger lines below the bass staff in measure 10. Thus, a functionally tonal bass voice is created: ^1 ^2 ^1 ^2 ^1 ^b7 ^1 ^6 ^7 ^6 ^7 ^5 ^1 ^1 ^1. Consequently, a clear I V I is created (mm. 1-11).

**2.10** The cadential phrase group of the "A" section (mm. 12-18) features clear characteristics of tonal design with D assuming the principal positions. Here ^1 is virtually the lowest sounding note throughout this section with the upper-most notes moving to ^1 by step (Right hand: mm. 12-13a and 17-18a. Left hand: m.16a) and by "step" via octave displacement (thereby adhering to ^7 to ^1) in the left hand in measure 14a. ^1 is approached by ascending perfect 4th in the right hand in measures 14 and 16.

**2.11** It is precisely that ^1 does *not* appear in the prominent registral positions of highest and lowest as well as not being prepared via perfect 4th or ascending leading tone that give the "B" section its important contrast. It is also the obvious absence of the pitch D in the opening of this contrasting section, a section that is characteristically defined by its departure from tonic, which lends further evidence for a tonality based on D. In this middle section of the Ternary form, it is not until the cadence in m.30 and the succeeding cadential extension (mm. 31-34) that ^1 once again is made important via registration: ^1 is the highest note in m. 30a, the lowest in 30b, the highest then the lowest in the beginning of 31a, and the highest then the lowest in the beginning of 33.

**2.12** ^1 once again assumes prominence via registration, scalar preparation, and ascending leaps of a perfect 4th from ^5 to ^1 in the recapitulation (mm. 35-47).

**2.13** The principal motives of the work offer further evidence for tonality and Ternary design. Already mentioned are the scalar preparations of ^1 as well as the ascending leap of a perfect 4th from ^5 to ^1 but the motives of the piece do not end with these melodic devices. In fact, it can be argued that Takemitsu used the melodic, horizontal relationship (^5 - ^1 - ^7 [A – D – C#])




*(Example no. 11 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bar1)*

to generate vertical sonorities and relationships which act as important motives themselves.

(the opening measure)

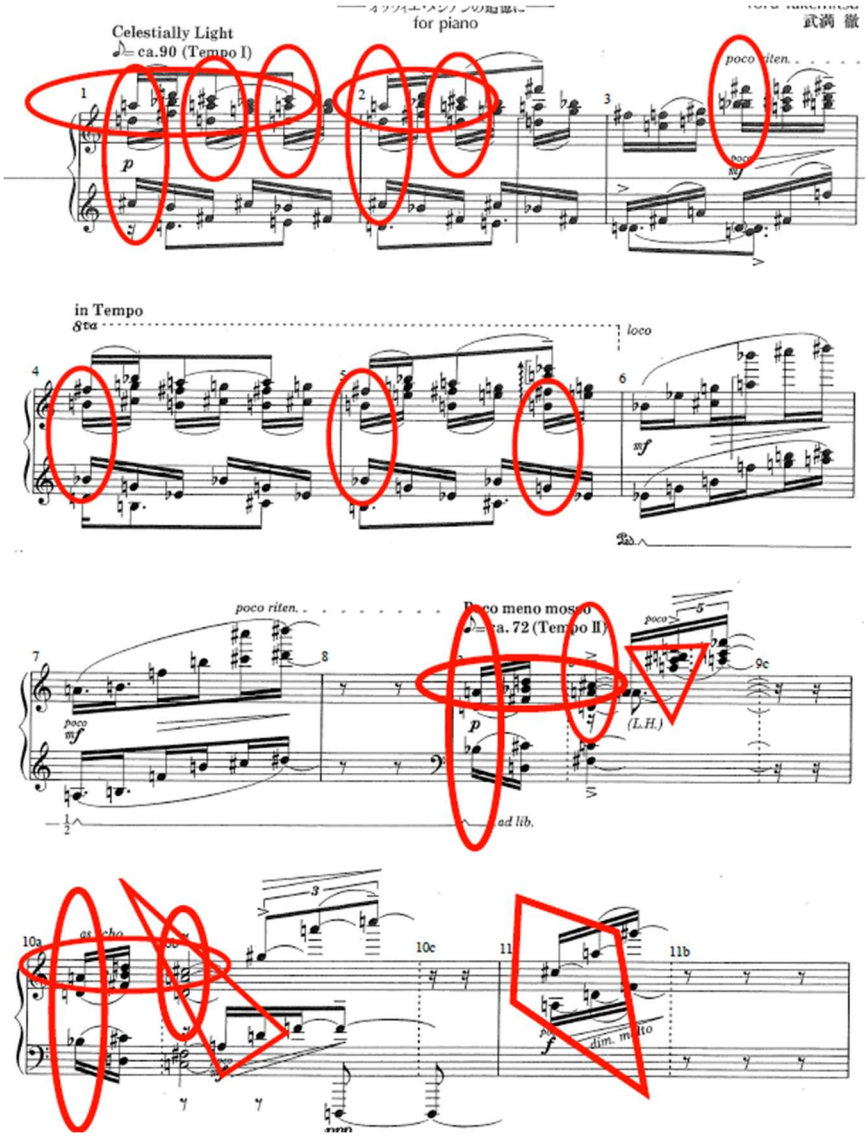



*(Example no. 12 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bar 1)*

**2.14** This (^5 - ^1 - ^7 [A – D – C#]) comprises the pitch set (0 1 5) and is used both horizontally and vertically (see above) and occurs throughout the "A" sections of the piece.

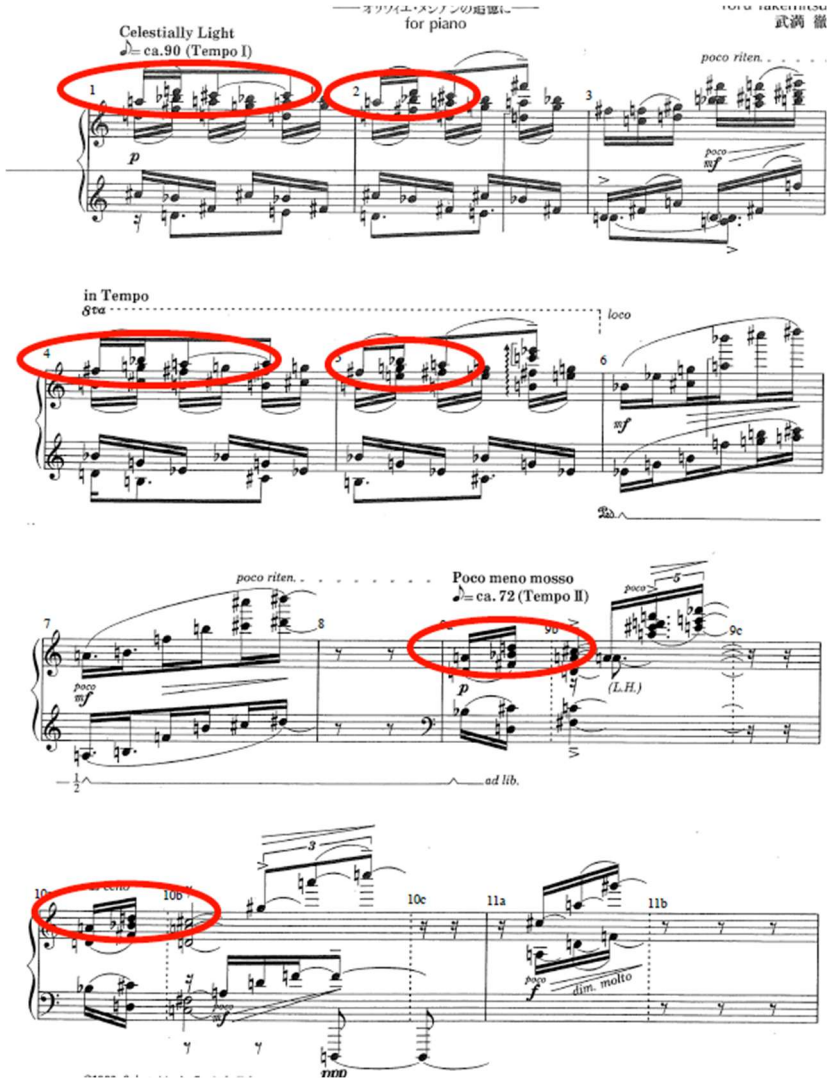

= (0 1 5)

*(Example no. 13 – description of nomenclature used and pitch set)*




*(Example no. 14 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 1-11b)*

Thus, the principal melodic motive of the "A" section is the horizontal presentation of A – D – C#. Although this constitutes the pitch set (0 1 5), it is the easily recognizable contour of this melody, reinforced by its orchestration—in the upper-most sounding voice of the moment—that further gives cohesion to the "A" sections. That is, a note followed by a small ascending leap and then followed by a descending step is a variation of the principal motive and even though it may not be a strict transposition of the adjacency interval series (AIS) of the original presentation, it nonetheless acts as a principal motive.




*(Example no. 15 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 1-11b)*

**2.15** The principal motive in the "B" section is the scalar figure which is first presented as G# - A# - B (mm. 19-20) and then transposed down a major 2nd in the succeeding two measures.




*(Example no. 16 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 19-21)*

As with the preceding section, the same applies here to the principal motive: although not a strict transposition of the adjacent interval series AIS, the clearly discernible contour plays an important melodic role and acts as a cohesive device in the middle section as it is easily heard via its registral placement and stretto entrances.




*(Example no. 17 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 22-24)*

**2.16** The recapitulation brings back the important ^5 - ^1 - ^7 motive as shown earlier.

**2.17** It is worth noting that these motives, pitch sets, and pitch collections (to be discussed below) are not manipulated by the habitual methods usually associated with pieces utilizing pitch set theory. That is, there is no abundance of important presentations of (0 1 5) transposed to different pitch classes: (0 1 5) virtually always appears as the notes D, C#, A. This adds gravity and more evidence for tonality to the piece.

**2.18** Even though the pitch set (0 1 5) occurs in the piece, it is not prominent enough state that it is the critical organizing device (see examples above) for the piece in its entirety. Adherence to a strict pitch set or sets do not appear to be the only cohesive, compositional device. Takemitsu is also basing tonality and centricity on pitch collections. Specifically, in the first measure, the aggregate pitch collection comprises an exotic 7-note scale: the D harmonic major scale (D E F# G A Bb C#). The prime form of this collection is (0 1 3 4 6 8 9) and although the collection plays a pivotal role, it is not via strict adherence to set theory as regularly manipulated. In fact, a survey of the disparate pitch collections of the opening of the "A" section reveal the lack of devotion to a single, or even a few, pitch sets:

**2.19** Disparate aggregates per measure within the contrasting period of the "A" section:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| m. 3 | D Eb F F# G# A Bb B C C# | (0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9 10) |
| m.4 | D Eb F# G A Bb B C# | (0 1 2 4 5 6 8 9) |
| m.5 | Eb F G A Bb B C# | (0 1 2 4 6 8 10) |
| m.7 | Eb F A B C# | (0 2 4 6 8) |

m.9a A D F# Bb C# (0 1 4 5 8)

m.9b D E F F# G# A Bb C C#(0 1 2 4 5 6 8 10)

m.10 D F F# G G# A Bb C C# (0 1 2 3 4 5 7 8 9)

m.11 D F G# A C# (0 1 4 7 8)

It may be more beneficial to view the pitches exploited through the lens of the opening measures. In measures 1-5 there is an abundance of tertian structure, specifically triads. Keeping in mind that the composer is firmly establishing the pitch D as central, the pitches that accompany the D prove to be important and how they are presented help give the piece its programmatically appropriate nature. The strident and disconcerting characteristics of "modern" pieces are, for the most part, missing: angular, disjointed melodies are abandoned in favor of sing-able melodies; easily identifiable triads, rather than being shunned, are embraced and copious; discordant vertical sonorities are eschewed and many traditional chords and extended chords are utilized. In the opening two measures there is an F# major triad presented as an ostinato in a middle voice which becomes a D major triad in the same voice in measure 3 which in turn becomes an Eb major triad in measures 4 and 5.

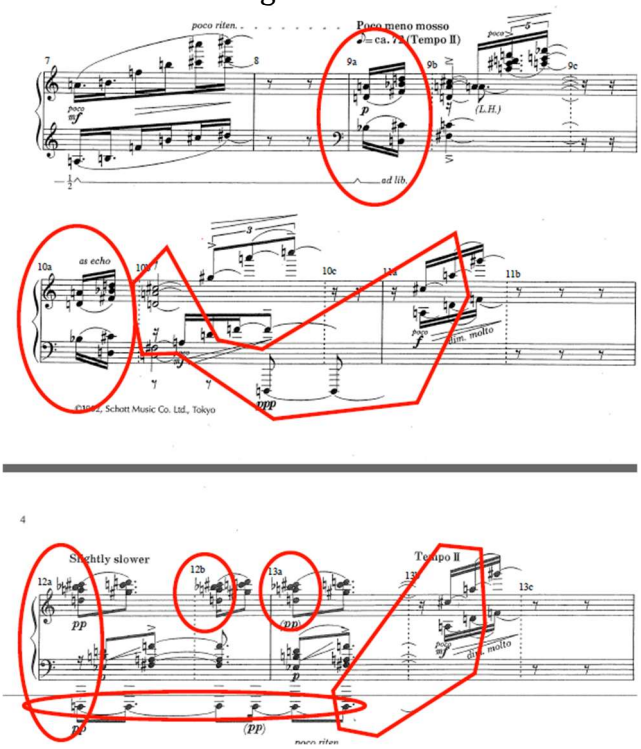
**2.20** One of the criticisms of set theory and dodecaphonic music is worth noting: major and minor triads are virtually never heard, even in their inversions, as being equivalent, yet set theory abstracts both of these to the pitch set (0 3 7). Takemitsu seems to be outwardly espousing the use of tonality, triads, tertian, quartal, and other "backward looking" harmonic language devices (I am speaking of this piece alone) and they saturate the piece—not as abstractions and presentations of (1 3 7) but of genuine-sounding triads.

**2.21** A case can be made that the fundamental harmonic language is the establishment of the seven notes comprising D harmonic major and then the intrusion of the compliment set (Eb F G# Bb C)—which is (0 2 4 7 9) in its prime form—which, now taken as a whole, constitute the complete chromatic scale. Below illustrates one example of the intrusion of these pitches on the established D harmonic major.




*(Example no. 18 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 1-3)*

That D harmonic major plays a fundamental role in establishing tonality can be seen by its placement in the cadential positions—and always in "root position." Below is the cadence of the contrasting period and the elision into the first measures of the cadential extension. Note the "root position" and the prominence of D F# Bb C# which is a distillation of the two pitches that give D its "major" sound as well as the two pitches that give the "harmonic major" its characteristic sound. The composer has abstracted the aggregate of D harmonic major to its most basic pitches and then used these to establish strong cadences.




*(Example no. 19 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars –13c)*

**2.22** Although 4ths and 5ths can be found in the "A" sections, it is in the "B" section that 4ths come to the fore. From the outset of the middle section, there is a new texture as well as a new harmonic region. The chord in the left hand on the downbeat of measure 19 is most often identified as a quartal structure with one note being displaced by an octave ensuring that the pianist can play all four pitches with the left hand alone. Significantly, this contrasting section begins on the tritone of the previous section, where the previous section is primarily centered on ^1 and this new "B" section notably begins with the absence of ^1. (^1 = the note "D"). The material that is interpolated into the second phrase of the symmetrical period at measure 26 lends further evidence that the composer is using pitch collections without adhering to strict pitch set manipulations. The aggregate of this material is symmetrical alternating half-whole octatonic scale built on the leading tone of the piece, C#, and is voiced in pairs of tritones with the first pair a major 3rd apart, the 2nd pair a perfect 4th apart, and the 3rd pair a major 7th apart. This aggregate is related to measure 23 where the entire pitch collection is an octatonic (half-whole) scale built on ^1. Here, in measure 23, the tritone plays an important role as the first three lowest sounding notes are paired with a tritone above it. The first three 16th notes of measure 24 also constitute the octatonic scale built on ^1. The prime form of the symmetrical alternating octatonic scale is (0 1 3 4 6 7 9 10). Measure 29a retains this pitch set (built on D) as well as the tritones in the lowest voice and measure 30a is also half-whole octatonic built on ^1 as well as 30b until the last 16th note which consists of a tritone (Bb and E) from the octatonic collection in measure 26 which built on the leading tone, C#. The material comprising the cadential extension of the "B" section, measures 31-34, is drawn from the octatonic collection built on the tonic pitch (only the single utterance of C# in 31b and again in 34b does not belong to this aggregate).

**2.23** The inclusion of the symmetrical alternating half-whole octatonic scale hints at Takemitsu's reverence for Olivier Messiaen. The octatonic scale is one of Messiaen's "modes of limited transposition": Mode 2. With so much of the "B" section deriving from Mode 2, it is fair to ask: does this mode or any of the other modes of limited transposition occur in the "A" sections? The answer is, no. As noted above,

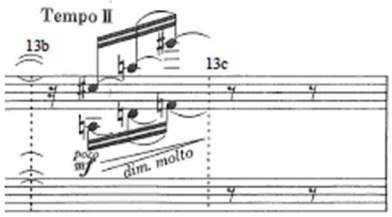
**2.24** Disparate aggregates per measure within the contrasting period of the "A" section:

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| m. 3 | D Eb F F# G# A Bb B C C# | (0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 9 10) |
| m.4 | D Eb F# G A Bb B C# | (0 1 2 4 5 6 8 9) |
| m.5 | Eb F G A Bb B C# | (0 1 2 4 6 8 10) |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| m.7 | Eb F A B C# | (0 2 4 6 8) |
| m.9a | A D F# Bb C# | (0 1 4 5 8) |
| m.9b | D E F F# G# A Bb C C# | (0 1 2 4 5 6 8 10) |
| m.10 | D F F# G G# A Bb C C# | (0 1 2 3 4 5 7 8 9) |
| m.11 | D F G# A C# | (0 1 4 7 8) |

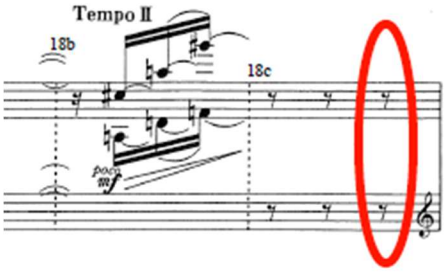
scrutiny of these collections reveal that none fit any of Messiaen's modes. There are many instances of fractions of modes but no complete presentations of any of the modes. Examining the first seven measures may suffice as an example. The first collection encountered after the opening D harmonic major region, is D Eb F F# G# A Bb B C C# and this can be reorganized to match only the first half of 10-note, Mode 7 (constructed Half Half Half Whole Half): C C# D Eb F F#. The pitches G# and Bb that are heard in measure 3 are not part of Mode 7. Starting the mode with G# will not result in any match, in any transposition, of Mode 7. A similar situation occurs in the next measure (m.4) where C# D Eb F# G indeed do constitute the first half of Mode 4 but the remaining pitches do not integrate into the mode. Measure 5 comes closer as the aggregate comprises Mode 2 (half-whole octatonic built on Eb) but the pitch "B," which plays an important role as it is the lowest note, occurs on a strong beat, and is a pedal point in the right hand, does not belong to Mode 2. Measure 6 can be interpreted as Mode 1 (whole tone scale) if only the left hand is taken into consideration. Here Mode 2 would be built on the important ^5 scale degree of the piece but the aggregate, but keeping in mind that the hands are homorhythmic thus presenting simultaneous pitches, the pitch collection does not conform to Mode 1. Measure 7 is perhaps the closest in the "A" sections to adhering to one mode: Mode 1 built on ^5. However, this 6-note scale is missing its 6$^{th}$ pitch (G). This is the only time that the aggregate adheres to a mode in the "A" sections and the omission of one of the pitches is indeed one of the manipulations allowed by Messiaen.

**2.25** Modes of limited transposition are not the only aspect of the piece that relate to its subtitle, "In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen." There is the absence of "time": there is no steady pulse in this piece. Another aspect in *Rain Tree Sketch II* that relates to Messiaen's work is Takemitsu's use of rhythms with added (or subtracted) values in which a short value is added by means of a note, rest, or dot. One example of Takemitsu's use an additive rhythm is measure 13c where the figure




*(Example no. 20 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 13b)*

is extended by an 8th note rest.




*(Example no. 21 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars18b-18c)*

An example of the compser's use of a diminished rhythm occurs in the sequencing of measures 19-21 with 21-22 where the notes are reduced by a 16th note.




*(Example no. 22 - Takemitsu, Rain Tree Sketch, Bars 19-25)*

The same diminishing of the rhythm occurs in measure 28. The rhythm in measure 28 is shortened by a 16th note when compared to m. 26 where the rhythm originated.

**2.26** Other occurrences of added rhythms occur in measure 24 where an 8th note is added at the end of the measure to the rhythm that is repeated: its original is in m. 23. The left hand chords in measure 13a are extended by a 16th note in m. 31. The upper-most notes in measure 13b are delayed by two 16th note triplets in 31b. In measure 46, the upper-most notes in measure 13b are delayed even further: three 16th notes.

**2.27** The delaying of notes via a short note value is another device the composer uses and measure illustrate this device: the low D which precedes measure by a 16th note is delayed by an 8th note, thus entering on the second 16th note in measure 31 and similarly in measure 46.

## Conclusions

**3.1** Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch II* may thus be understood as a paradigmatic instance of late-twentieth-century piano writing in which formal lucidity and post-tonal harmonic practice are not opposing values but mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single compositional project. The work's articulated ternary design, undergirded by clearly inferable phrase structures and cadential articulations, demonstrates that large- and small-scale coherence can be achieved without recourse to conventional barline demarcations or tonal-functional syntax, and thereby challenges any lingering assumption that post-tonal music must eschew traditional notions of form.[6] Within this framework, motivic recurrence, registral design, and dynamic contour function as primary carriers of structural information, such that the listener's perception of continuity and return is secured through the patterned disposition of gestures in time rather than through the predictable succession of harmonic functions.

**3.2** At the same time, the piece offers a compelling model of how diverse harmonic resources—set-theoretical collections, octatonic materials, triadic residues, and chromatic aggregates—can be woven into a single, highly personal idiom that is neither doctrinaire nor eclectic in any superficial sense. By refusing to subject his materials to systematic combinatorial exploitation, Takemitsu preserves a sense of spontaneity and contingency in the unfolding of sonorities, yet the recurrence of specific collections and their associated coloristic fingerprints ensures that the harmonic language remains recognizably "of a piece." The resultant tension between "old" and "new," between triadic singability

[6] Takemitsu, Tōru.

and post-tonal saturation, is not resolved but productively sustained, so that the listener is continually invited to hear familiar tonal references refracted through an environment shaped by Messiaen's modes, Debussyian color, and Takemitsu's own sensitivity to timbre and resonance.

**3.3** Finally, *Rain Tree Sketch II* emerges as both a deeply personal memorial to Olivier Messiaen and a concentrated summation of Takemitsu's mature aesthetic preoccupations, particularly his cultivation of silence, decay, and what he elsewhere describes as the "sea of sound." The integration of Messiaen's modes of limited transposition and rhythms with added values into a texture punctuated by carefully staged silences produces a temporal experience in which linear progression yields to suspended, contemplative time—an experience that aligns with Takemitsu's longstanding engagement with Japanese concepts of *ma* and with his fascination for the lingering resonance of sound after attack. In this convergence of memorial intent, formal clarity, and post-tonal refinement, *Rain Tree Sketch II* not only honors a revered mentor but also inscribes itself as a quietly radical contribution to the piano repertoire, one in which the act of listening—to harmony, to resonance, to silence—becomes tantamount to an act of remembrance.

## Bibliography

Burt, Peter. *The Music of Toru Takemitsu*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Caplin, William E. *Analyzing Classical Form: An Approach for the Classroom*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

Davy, Jennifer L. "A Gestural-Kinaesthetic Approach to Tōru Takemitsu's Rain Tree Sketch II." *In Music Theory* Online 28, no. 1 (2022).

Deguchi, Tadahiko. "Procedures of Becoming in Tōru Takemitsu's Piano Distance." In *Perspectives of New Music* 50, no. 2 (2012): 202–231.

Koozin, Timothy. "Octatonicism in Recent Solo Piano Works of Tōru Takemitsu." In *Perspectives of New Music* 29, no. 1 (1991): 124–140.

Lee, Ji Hye. "A Combination of Japanese Traditional Aesthetics and Western Music: Tōru Takemitsu's *Rain Tree Sketch* and *Rain Tree Sketch II*." D.M.A. dissertation, University of Kansas, 2018.

Morris, Robert D. *Composition with Pitch-Classes: A Theory of Compositional Design.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987.

Persichetti, Vincent. *Twentieth Century Harmony: Creative Aspects and Practice*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961.

Rands, Bernard. "Two Views of Takemitsu: 'I Sing Only for Myself…'" In *The Musical Times* 128, no. 1733 (1987): 397–400.

Schoenberg, Arnold. *Fundamentals of Musical Composition*. Edited by Gerald Strang, with Leonard Stein. London: Faber and Faber, 1967.

Smaldone, Edward. "Japanese and Western Confluences in Large-Scale Pitch Organization of Tōru Takemitsu." In *Perspectives of New Music* 27, no. 2 (1989): 216–231.

Straus, Joseph N. *Introduction to Post-Tonal Theory*. 4th ed. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2016.

Takemitsu, Tōru. "Mirrors." Translated by Sumi Adachi and Roger Reynolds. In *Perspectives of New Music* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1992): 36–80.

Takemitsu, Tōru. Rain Tree Sketch II: "In Memoriam Olivier Messiaen" – for Piano. Hal Leonard. Accessed June 29, 2026. https://www.halleonard.com/product/49042645/rain-tree-sketch-ii.

University of Oradea. Strada Universitatii nr. 1, Oradea 410087, Romania

© 2026 Dr. Rolynd Lyon Della Sylvan. This is an Open Access article published in the journal Musica Academica by the University of Oradea Publishing House and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). The full terms of this license are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0.

*Musica Academica*
Volume 3. Issue 1 (2026): 122-130
DOI: 10.61215/MA.2026.vol.3.iss.1.06

# BEYOND THE LINGUISTIC MODEL: MUSIC, METAPHOR, AND INTERSEMIOTICITY

**FRANCESCO BRAZIOLI**

PhD Student in Musical Semiotics,
Conservatorio G.B. Martini, Bologna[1]
francesco.brazioli@stud.consbo.it

**Abstract**
*If music is not a language, how can it nevertheless participate in processes of signification, interpretation, and communication with other semiotic systems? This article addresses this question by reconsidering the linguistic model that has shaped much of musical semiotics. Rather than asking whether music can be understood as a language, it examines how music interacts with other sign systems without being reduced to them. This shift leads to a consideration of metaphor as a mechanism through which heterogeneous systems can become commensurable. Drawing on Rousseau, Saussure, Hjelmslev, Eco, Mithen, and Paolucci, the article approaches metaphor not merely as a rhetorical device, but as a cognitive and semiotic operation that precedes and enables linguistic articulation. The relationship between music and language is then reconsidered through Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, and Ruwet, highlighting the limits of approaches that interpret music primarily through linguistic categories. The argument ultimately reverses the traditional direction of analysis: rather than translating the musical into the linguistic, it proposes that linguistic articulation can itself be understood as emerging from a more fundamental semiotic condition in which the metaphorical and the musical play a constitutive role. Musical semiotics can therefore take the musical as a starting point for investigating processes of signification across different semiotic systems.*

**Keywords**
*Musical semiotics, Intersemioticity, Metaphor, Transemiotics, Music and language, Signification, Semiotic systems*

[1] P.za Rossini, 2, 40126 Bologna BO

## 0. Introduction

The semiotics of music is not strictly a multidisciplinary field, since it can constitute an extremely specific discipline even when considered in its own right. However, the recent perspectives that have emerged over the past few decades make it possible to adopt an approach that moves beyond semiotic theories and the musical domain, drawing on different paradigms with which to engage in the hope of identifying points of departure for rearticulating systems that have by now grown rusty. It is for these reasons that I have chosen to orient my research not so much towards the semiotics of music as towards transemiotic musical manifestations. The first section of this article aims to introduce and contextualize this subject for the reader through a number of suggestions that may stimulate curiosity about a field rich in potential yet still far too underrepresented. The content of this section corresponds, almost in its entirety, to what I had the opportunity to discuss at the conference "Multidisciplinary Perspectives in Music Research," held by the Doctoral School of Interdisciplinary Studies of the University of Oradea on 25 April 2026. On that occasion, and likewise in this section, the primary concern was to provide as general an overview as possible of my area of research, so as to stimulate discussion and receive suggestions also from those working on subjects only tangentially related to it. I hope that this contribution may likewise serve the same purpose. The second section develops the contents of that presentation in greater depth, offering a more specialized analysis of metaphor as a crucial tool for intersemiotic correlations.

## 1. Musical semiotics

Semiotics originated as a discipline concerned with the study of signs. Signs are all those phenomena that necessarily derive from some other phenomenon, much like symptoms are signs of an illness (Eco 1997). This example is not accidental: one of the earliest fields of application of semiotics was Hippocratic medicine, and even today "medical semiotics" is a fundamental discipline for physicians' education. Carlo Ginzburg, in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*, associated Hippocratic medical reasoning with a series of cognitive practices that run parallel to, and sometimes diverge from, those underlying scientific deductive reasoning. The aim of semiotics is in fact not to produce universally valid conclusions, but rather to formulate plausible hypotheses. The root of semiotics as a heuristic device therefore lies in its ability to navigate the world effectively, approximating the truth value of what surrounds us. It is hardly surprising

that music, which has never been expected to formulate truths, was for a long time excluded from the scope of semiotic inquiry. Nor have the more recent developments of the discipline tended towards incorporating the musical, since they have become increasingly specialized in addressing linguistic issues (Fabbri 1998), whose relationship to musical ones is far from immediately evident.

The linguistic tendency is partly due to the fact that many of the major semioticians, such as Saussure and Hjelmslev, were themselves linguists. More broadly, as Paolo Fabbri has observed, the humanities have recently tended to reduce their objects of study to the linguistic or the literary dimension, and Semiotics had an important precursor in St. Augustin, who first systematically connected the theory of signs to the theory of language in his *The Magistro*.

What happened, therefore, is that musical semiotics, from its very beginnings, has been strongly influenced by linguistic models: just think about Bernstein's famous *The Unanswered Question*, where music was analysed and divided in morphological, syntactical and semantic aspects, or the seminal work for musical semiotics that is Ruwet's *Langage, musique, poesie* (1983). When, twenty years later, *The sense in music* (1987), a volume collecting seventeen essays by different authors on the early stages of musical semiotics, was published, almost none of these contributions were still entirely free from a linguistic bias, although an awareness of the need for greater autonomy from verbal language indeed occasionally emerged, as in the essays by Jiránek and, somewhat paradoxically, by Lerdahl and Jackendoff. Most of these studies still turned to language in order to establish parallels with music. One example is Otto Laske's article "From Psycholinguistics to Psychomusicology," which proposed drawing on psycholinguistic methods to investigate modes of musical listening. And even if we went twenty additional years forward in time, consulting the collection *Parole nell'aria*, the acts of the 2008 AISS conference, we can see how strong the influence of verbal systems in the analysis of music, as the scope of the collection was to investigate parallels between music and other sign systems and a large number of the contributions delved into music and verbal texts.

Now, these perspectives should not be dismissed simply because they involve the notion of language—on the contrary. Comparing different sign systems of any kind can be extremely productive, as we'll see in the next paragraphs. However, if we expected music to "speak" in the same way language does, i.e. idealizing an equation in which expression stands to musical sounds as content does to emotions or even concepts, we are

simply on the wrong path. If we used music to speak, then music would be language, and there would be no fundamental difference between the two.

And yet, today, no one really expects music to actually function as a language. This attitude is, on the one hand, limiting, because it turns many interesting questions about musical meaning into taboos, dismissing them as naïve. On the other hand, it is precisely this impasse that pushes us toward a change of perspective, one that is also very much needed within semiotics itself.

As mentioned earlier, in fact, semiotics became overly focused on language during the twentieth century. In *The Semiotic Turn*, Paolo Fabbri suggested that we move beyond treating signs as if they were only words, and begin instead to consider other sign systems, and, crucially, the ways in which they interact. Applied to music, this shift allows for two important developments. First, it enables us to consider music as an autonomous system of signs, rich in interpretative dynamics. A musical performance, for instance, can be understood as an interpretation of graphic signs by the performer, and in turn as an interpretation of sonic signs by the listener. Second, it allows us to think of music as a system, or even a multisystem, while recognizing that different systems can interpenetrate without losing their autonomy.

From such perspectives, a new and less illusory way of understanding how music may relate to reality begins to emerge. And from a semiotic point of view, this also opens a path toward what Paolo Fabbri called *intersemiotic transduction*, and helps us avoid falling back into a reduction to the linguistic—by taking as our starting point a different kind of sign system, namely music.

## 2. From Music to Language through Metaphor

There are two reasons for beginning this second section with some reflections on metaphor. First, it is a rhetorical figure generally associated with language; as we shall see, however, it can be understood in a broader sense as a suprasystemic or asystemic cognitive device responsible for bringing different sign systems into communication with one another, thereby playing a fundamental role in explaining the transemiotic dynamics whose importance we emphasized in the previous section. Second, this initial exploration of metaphor will allow us, in a subsequent step, to move towards a reconsideration of the relationship between poetry and music, which has marked the history of music semiotics, establishing itself as a point of reference for a depolarization of the role played by language in mediating approaches to the semiotics of music.

### 2.1. The foundational role of metaphor

The metaphorical and the musical are both starting points and endpoints of the cognitive and communicative movement of human beings. Both of these moments arise from, and at the same time entail, a dimension of encounter between incommensurables, which is precisely the dimension of the metaphorical and the musical. Rousseau describes the generative moment of language as follows:

> A savage man, upon encountering others, would at first be frightened. His fear would make these men appear to him larger and stronger than himself; and he would therefore give them the name of giants. After many experiences, he would realize that these supposed "giants" are neither larger nor stronger than he is, and that their stature therefore in no way corresponds to the idea he had initially associated with the word giant. He would then invent another name that could be applied equally to them and to himself, such as, for instance, the name man, and would retain giant to designate the false object that had struck him in his delusion. This is how figurative language comes to precede literal language, when passion blinds us and the first idea it presents to us does not correspond to the truth. What I have said of words and names applies without difficulty to syntactic expressions as well. Since the illusory image suggested by passion manifested itself first, the corresponding language was likewise the first to emerge; only later did it become metaphorical, when the enlightened mind, recognizing the original error, used those expressions only for the very passions that had given rise to them.[2]

The primordial encounter with the Other cannot be reduced to the discrete domain of compositional language, but rather belongs to the continuous and emotional experience of relationality, which only subsequently comes to be carved up into the discrete units that constitute the terms of language. This same line of thought is taken up, if not necessarily from a chronological perspective, then certainly from a conceptual one, by later authors such as Saussure (the differential logic of value), Hjelmslev (form applied to the substance of expression and content), Eco (semantics as the carving up of the Encyclopedia), and Mithen (the emergence of compositional language through the segmentation of holistic communication).

[2] Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Essai sur l'origine des langues, où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale*. Genève: DuPeyrou, 1781, my translation.

What interests us is to see how all of this relates to music. The point is that, at a prelinguistic stage, there could logically be no form of communication other than the figurative or metaphorical kind that, for Rousseau, governs the generative moment of meaning: there would be no "man" definable as "non-giant," or in relation to any other entity; there would only be the fright experienced by a man that makes the other appear threatening, and nothing with which to express it other than the sonic "sign" (in the logical-Stoic sense) of our emotion. We would therefore find ourselves at a level closer to the musical, precisely because communication, already sonic at this stage, would be impossible to divide into a grid of signifiers corresponding to a grid of contents. And it will come as no surprise to discover that Rousseau and Mithen in fact associate their similar views of protolanguage with music.

Apparently, then, the introduction of compositional language would have represented an articulation of the cognitive and the sonic domains: articulation rather than segmentation, since it would have left the interstices, the joints, immersed in a void that cannot be grasped in terms of signification. This observation finds support in Eco's (1984) identification of the limitations of Aristotelian, dictionary-based semantics, which would claim to be able to establish equivalences between terms and definitions without taking into account the overlaps and displacements that the articulation of a continuum inevitably entails. The assignment of meanings to terms, as well as the selection of their different senses, cannot dispense with continual "jumps backward," returns to the dimension of comparison and encounter with the Other, which enable us to confer meaning upon every expression we handle. Each of us, in fact, speaks (and listens) by selecting a specific portion of the Encyclopedia (which we understand here as the general body of cultural knowledge); that is, the standpoint that allows us to formulate hypotheses, predictions, and abductions about how what we say will be interpreted and about where what is being said to us is leading.

Claudio Paolucci (2012) describes this localization of meaning in terms of condensations of minimal units of meaning around isotopies (dense points within the rhizomatic network of the Encyclopedia). The entire structure of signification would therefore operate according to the same mechanism as analogy, which, following Enzo Melandri, we can understand as a hyponym of metaphor. To interpret would then be to perform the work of the *interpres*: one who knows how to establish a correspondence of value between two elements belonging to different registers, thereby creating commensurability between different systems. That is, one who operates metaphorically.

And at this point we can therefore close the circle: with the realization that our capacity to communicate arises from an encounter with an Other that enables us to discretize meanings and handle a compositional language; to descend from the Musical into a specific lexicon through the metaphor. And then, by handling this discrete, specific, and compositional lexicon, we realize that it is never sufficient in itself, and that, in order to understand anything, as well as to create new meanings and new ways of reading the world, we are compelled to start again from the specific lexicon and climb once more back up there through metaphoric jumps, into the boundless field of encounters, which is that of the Musical[3].

**3. Conclusion: Moving Away from the Linguistic System**

Over the course of these few pages, we have seen that semiotics does not necessarily have to do with language, and that what music lacks in terms of articulation can instead be understood as a gain in its flexibility with respect to the metaphorical. This does not mean, however, that this contribution should conclude, on the basis of this flexibility, by idealizing music and portraying it as a universal and original mechanism of communication. The Musical we have described should rather be understood as the dimension that precedes and exceeds the fragile rigidity of an expressive articulation carrying with it the expectation of a correspondence at the level of content. It functions, as a stipulated term, precisely in relation to language and from a Rousseauian perspective: the continuum as that which is not linguistic, and therefore as the musical. Traditional music, understood as the sonic, must instead be acknowledged as already being, to some extent, subject to a process of segmentation of the original continuum, which has led to the emergence of forms of musical expression and, to a greater or lesser extent, of actual semantic contents.

Nevertheless, for the study of musical semiotics, it is a useful starting point to idealize an entirely flexible Musical, capable of entering into communication with, and filling the interstices of, all other systems of meaning. From this perspective, it becomes interesting to consider what constitutes musical interpretation, focusing not so much on the listener as on the interpreter, that is, the person who interprets musical signs. At this point, the argument shifts from the idealistic to the thoroughly pragmatic, allowing us to examine engagement with musical signs from a stable and disenchanted standpoint, without presupposing a dependence on

[3] We use this understanding of the Musical in reference to what Rousseau and Mithen have already been shown to express, as well as to the relationship with the verbal.

language. Notation, timbres, and tempi become bearers of relative, encyclopedically contextualized meanings, in diagrammatic relation to elements that may simultaneously belong to what expresses (the indication addressed to the interpreter) and to what is expressed (what the interpreter intends to communicate). Interpretive choices thus become amenable to the tools of cognitive semiotics, through the study of the relationship between musical performance, narrativity, and the bodies of performer and instrument. From here, space opens up for the minor senses, endosemiotics, and theories concerning the "micro" level, such as vibroacoustic medicine. The interpreter is no longer merely a performer but becomes an explorer, a detective who, following the evidential paradigm, can draw on visual sources and metaphorical connections to establish diagrammatic relationships between sounds.

To establish that the semiotics of music need not necessarily be analogous to the semiotics of language does not at all mean denying the semantic or communicative possibilities of the musical. Indeed, as we have seen, it is from the musical that the linguistic emerges, and not the other way around.

## Bibliography

Bernstein, Leonard. *The Unanswered Question: Six Talks at Harvard.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976.

Eco, Umberto. *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*. Torino: Einaudi, 1984.

Fabbri, Paolo. *La svolta semiotica*. Roma-Bari: Laterza, 1998.

Ginzburg, Carlo*. Clues, Myths, and the Historical Method*. Translated by John and Anne C. Tedeschi. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989.

Hjelmslev, Louis. *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language*. Translated by Francis J. Whitfield. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1961.

Jakobson, Roman. *Six leçons sur le son et le sens*. Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1976.

Laske, Otto E. "Musicology and Psychomusicology: Two Sciences of Music." Psychology of Music 5, no. 2 (1977): 10–22.

Jakobson, Roman, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. *La linguistica e le scienze dell'uomo: Sei lezioni sul suono e sul senso; Mito e significato: Cinque conversazioni radiofoniche*. Milano: Il Saggiatore, 2011.

Melandri, Enzo. *La linea e il circolo: Studio logico-filosofico sull'analogia*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 1968.

Mithen, Steven. *The Singing Neanderthals: The Origins of Music, Language, Mind and Body*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005.

Monelle, Raymond. *The Sense of Music: Semiotic Essays*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Paolucci, Claudio. *Strutturalismo e interpretazione: La semiotica di Umberto Eco*. Milano: Bompiani, 2012.
Pozzato, Maria Pia, and Lucio Spaziante, eds. *Parole nell'aria: Sincretismi fra musica e altri linguaggi*. Atti del Congresso AISS, San Marino, 2008.
Reybrouck, Mark. *Musical Sense-Making: Enaction, Experience, and Computation*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2021.
Ruwet, Nicolas. *Linguaggio, musica, poesia*. Translated by Mario Bortolotto, Luisa Geroldi, and Elena De Angeli. Torino: Einaudi, 1983.
Rousseau, Jean-Jacques. *Essai sur l'origine des langues, où il est parlé de la mélodie et de l'imitation musicale*. Genève: DuPeyrou, 1781.
Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Translated by Wade Baskin. New York: Columbia University Press, 2011.

© 2026 Francesco Brazioli. This is an Open Access article published in the journal Musica Academica by the University of Oradea Publishing House and distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC BY 4.0). The full terms of this license are available at https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0.

## *Contributors' Biographical Notes*



**Dr. Chesney Palmer** is a South African composer, researcher, and educator whose work explores the intersection of sound, visual abstraction, philosophy, and contemporary artistic practice. His research investigates the translation of visual and gestural forms into musical structures, drawing particularly on synesthetic perception, music cognition, and abstract art. His compositions are recognised for their atmospheric depth, structural clarity, and engagement with extra-musical concepts such as memory, trauma, spirituality, and visual rhythm.

Palmer's music has been performed internationally at festivals and institutions including the ISCM World New Music Days in South Africa and the Faroe Islands, the Rossi Festival, and projects with the Cape Town Philharmonic Orchestra. His works include orchestral, chamber, multimedia, and interdisciplinary collaborations, and his composition *The Line that Shattered the Stillness* is scheduled for performance by Ensemble Modern as part of the International Young Composers Academy in Switzerland. He is also developing the opera *Trilogy of Dreams: Faith, Love and Revolution* in collaboration with German librettist and director Robert Lehmeier.

Alongside his creative practice, Palmer lectures in composition, orchestration, music theory, aural training and scoring for media at The Academic Institute of Excellence. He serves as Director of the Board of NewMusicSA and continues to advocate for experimental composition, interdisciplinary collaboration, and innovation in music education.



**Susan M. Holman** is a musicologist specializing in eighteenth-century European women musicians, social network analysis, and digital humanities. She holds a PhD in Musicology from Universität Paderborn (2025) and an MA in Musicology from the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. Her doctoral dissertation, *Harmonizing Histories: Networking 18th-Century European Female Musicians*, examined transnational networks of female musicians across Western Europe using an integrated methodology that combines prosopographical biography with Gephi network visualization. The dissertation is accompanied by an open-access digital companion and a suite of datasets available on Zenodo.

Her original archival research has recovered the tripartite identity of Marie Antoinette Crux Gillberg Petersén—previously recorded in three separate national archives under three different names—as a single transnational career spanning the Germanic courts, the Haydn-Salomon concerts in London, and the musical salons of Gustavian Sweden. A book manuscript, *Five Minutes on Foot: Women's Musical Worlds in Eighteenth-Century Europe*, is under development for Eastman Studies in Music, University of Rochester Press.

Holman has served as an English Language Fellow with the U.S. Department of State in East Jerusalem and Montenegro, and as Senior Lecturer and Academic Writing Coordinator at Princess Noura bint AbdulRahman University in Riyadh. An accomplished pianist and vocalist, she has directed choirs in the United States, Saudi Arabia, and Montenegro. In her teaching and research, she integrates historical scholarship and performance.



**Stefano Scarpa** (b. 1995, Padova, Italy) trained as a pianist before devoting himself to the organ from the age of fifteen. He holds a Diploma in Organ and Organ Composition (2017) and a Second-Level Academic Diploma in Organ (2020) from the Conservatory of Vicenza, where he studied under Roberto Antonello, graduating with the highest marks in both. During his studies he participated in the Erasmus+ programme at the Conservatoire de Lyon (France), working with François Espinasse and Liesbeth Schlumberger. He performs as a soloist and in small chamber ensembles across Italy and Europe. Alongside his musical training, Stefano pursued parallel studies in philosophy at the University of Padova, obtaining a bachelor's degree in philosophy (2022) and a master's degree in Philosophical Sciences with specialization in musical aesthetics (2025). His master's thesis, *Form without Schema: A Kantian Reading of César Franck's 'principe cyclique'*, was defended under the supervision of Prof. Gabriele Tomasi. In 2022 he was admitted to the Second-Level Master's in Artistic Research in Music at the Conservatory of "Santa Cecilia" in Rome. Since 2024 he has been a PhD candidate in a joint programme between Roma Tre University and the Conservatory of "Santa Cecilia", under the supervision of Prof. Teresa Chirico, with Prof. Benedict Taylor (University of Cambridge) as co-supervisor. He has recently been accepted as a Visiting PhD Student at the Faculty of Music of the University of Cambridge (UK). His doctoral research focuses on the definition of cyclic form and its application on the organ repertoire. He is also a permanent music teacher in Italian secondary schools.

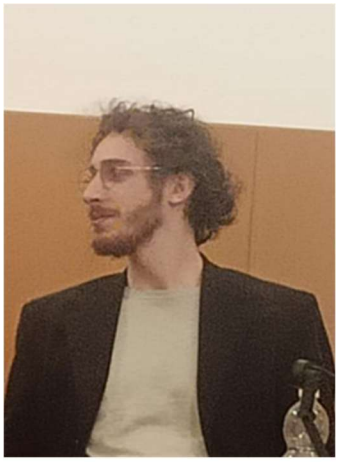


**Yalan Ma,** born in 1992, is a doctoral candidate since 2022 and university assistant at the Institute 14 Aesthetics of Music at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz in Austria, where her research project is titled "Richard Wagner's Interest in Buddhism: Ideas, Texts, Music." Her research focuses on the intersection of Richard Wagner's music drama and Buddhist thought, with a particular interest in how cognitive and epistemological concepts are enacted through music and dramatic structures. In 2015 she completed her Bachelor of Arts in musicology at Wuhan Conservatory of Music in China with a thesis on Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos*. In 2020 she completed her Master of Arts in historical musicology at Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, Germany, with a thesis on Wagner's *Wesendonck-Lieder*, including an Erasmus exchange at the University of Zurich, Switzerland, and an internship at the Richard Strauss Critical Edition in Munich. Her teaching experience includes "The Musical Imagination of Asia in European Music" and "Introduction to Aesthetics" (co-teaching). Her research interests include Richard Wagner, music analysis, aesthetics, the history of ideas, and Buddhism.



**Dr. Rolynd Lyon Della Sylvan** earned multiple Gold Medals for conducting; a Ph.D. at New York University; post-Doctoral studies and teaching at Juilliard, New England Conservatory, London College of Music and is an International award-winning musician and scholar who has composed for, performed with, and conducted Grammy-winners and world-renowned artists in over 3,500 concerts around the world. His compositions have been performed in Carnegie Hall including several world-premieres and his ASCAP award-winning works and more. Dr. Della Sylvan has been featured at International Conferences as a conductor, a composer, and as a researcher in music theory, pedagogical methods. Along with his gold medal wins and awards for orchestral conducting and prizes for his classical compositions, Dr. Della Sylvan was featured in concert in Carnegie Hall as the winner of several International Competitions for jazz soloists bringing his awards for orchestral conducting, classical composition, jazz composition, and music theory research to over 30 International awards. Inducted into America's oldest and most prestigious Honor Society, Phi Beta Kappa, he has been inducted into many Honor Societies as a musician and as a scholar. Dr Della Sylvan is a two-time Valedictorian, All-American Scholar, Presser Scholar, and FM-AM

Scholar with degrees in Philosophy, Conducting, Theory, Performance, Classical Composition, and Jazz Composition. Dr. Della Sylvan is based in New York City as the Principal Conductor of the Novus et Antiquus Orchestra; The Composers' Orchestra; Faculty at the New School of Music; Conducting Teaching Assistant at the New England Conservatory of Music; Jury and conductor for the New York Global Music Competition; and was an assistant conductor of the Cecilia Chorus and Orchestra of New York. He recently won the Helsinki Metropolitan Orchestra's Favourite Conductor award, the Sofia Sinfonietta Favourite Conductor Award, and a Conducting Award from the President's Orchestra of Ukraine.



**Francesco Brazioli** (b. 2001) is a PhD candidate in Musical Semiotics at the G. B. Martini Conservatory of Bologna, under the supervision of Prof. Patrizia Prati and Prof. Pierluigi Basso Fossali. He graduated with honours in Philosophy, with a thesis on the origins of language; in Philosophical Sciences, with a thesis on Günther Anders; and in Piano Performance, with a thesis on the case of intersemiotic translation represented by Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition. For the latter, he received an Honourable Mention. He has been awarded several merit-based prizes by the University of Bologna and is an alumnus of the Collegio Superiore of Bologna. Alongside his doctoral studies, he is currently pursuing a third Master's degree in Semiotics. For Treccani, he served as editor-in-chief of the cultural journal *Il Chiasmo*. He has already presented his research on musical semiotics at conferences in Italy, France, and Romania. His research interests focus particularly on the semiotics of interpretation and on cases in which music comes into contact with other sign systems.

University of Oradea Publishing House
Cod 410087, Str. Universității, Nr. 1, Oradea
Jud. Bihor, România
Phone/Fax. +40 259 408 627
E-mail: editura@uoradea.ro
Web:
https://www.uoradea.ro/Editura+Universitatii+din+Oradea

ISSN: 3061-5364
ISSN ONLINE: 3090-9902
ISSN-l: 3061-5364