

International Symposium I  
Nice, Fondation UniCA, 13-15 April 2026

## **Music as Relation**



**CALL FOR PAPERS:  
15 OCTOBER 2025**

## Music as Relation

Seeking to musicalize history, **MusiCol**'s first international symposium welcomes study of music, musicians, and musical practices in the urban capitals of 20th c. empires, particularly from the perspective of musicians' agency. Here, we take seriously Glissant 1997's observation that every identity is "extended through a relationship with the Other." This "Other" can be settlers (French, Europeans, or others), including those pursuing trade and other interests not part of the colonial apparatus, or local communities of various origins and ethnicities, as well as migrants and foreigners established there. During the colonial period, the latter could include Brazilians in Porto-Novo, Egyptians in Tunis, Lebanese in Dakar, Indians in Tananarive, and Filipinos in Phnom Penh. Each brought their own musical traditions, sometimes collaborating. Understanding this requires a geologic-like survey, mapping an inventory of residents, considering their interactions, and analyzing their possible reciprocal impact on one another and society through the prism of music.

Across the modern empires, traces of musical works, activities, and practices—Pierre Nora 1984's "everyday life of the past"—can be found in periodicals, concert programs, photographs, recordings, and memoirs in archives, public and private. We recommend approaching this research as fieldwork, immersive, attentive to silences, and contrapuntal with messy complexity.

Inspired by **MusiCol**'s questions and analytical methods, this symposium focuses on its first four themes: training the ear, musical collaborations, music in religious and theatrical contexts. It invites study and comparative analysis of musicians and musical life in various empires alongside the French: Indonesians in the Dutch East Indies, Indians and Kenyans under the British empire, Angolans under the Portuguese, Libyans the Italians, Cameroonians the Germans. Also important are touring musicians, emigrants, and musical traditions, such as opera and jazz, that crossed the globe. Whether imperial governments interacted with, controlled, or ignored them, to what extent do musicians, their repertoire and careers, performance spaces, audiences and their tastes shed light on evolving forms of self-determination in modern colonial empires?

Through papers and dialogue, we seek to replace the "subservient victim" narrative of the colonized musician with new approaches that valorize their agency, inherent in musical practices, and the capacity of music to enact Glissant's Relation.







## Theme 1. Learning Music



What experiences formed people's ears for music in the modern empires and what forces shaped their musical sensibilities and tastes?

Certainly, there were maternal lullabies, scouts' songs, music at civic and religious ceremonies, but how did specific colonial contexts impact this learning?

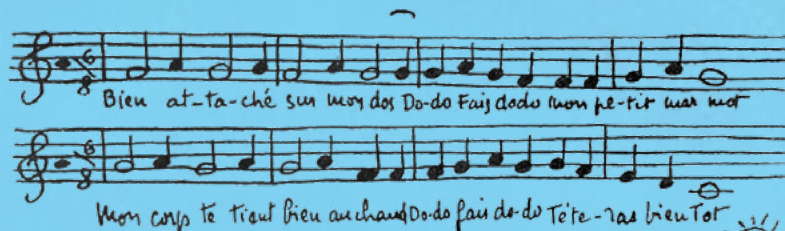
Where and how, for example, did children and adults learn to sing, play music, and with whom? Who taught them, promoting which priorities, in private milieux, elementary schools, and local conservatories?

Which instruments and repertoire were used at each level? What performances involved collaboration, such as in Hanoi (1938) when Vietnamese and French female piano students together performed Ravel's *Boléro* for eight-hands?

Recordings and radio too contributed to music education: how was this integrated and organized under colonialism?

In sum, how were the methods and uses of music education conceived and deployed, at home, school, and elsewhere, in urban and rural areas, from one region to another in the empires and compared with those of other imperial capitals (e.g. Calcutta, Cairo, or Manila)?

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J. Rajajonah, 1905 - 1979

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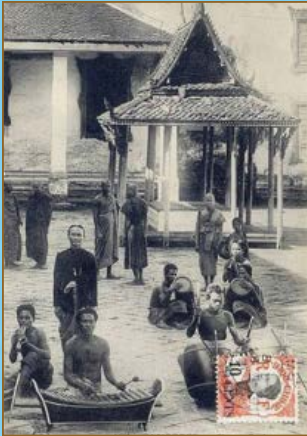
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Shared musical practices among different religious groups also call for comparative analysis, e.g. between Jewish traditions and Arabo-Andalusian nubas in North Africa, Moroccan and Senegalese Sufi music. One can also examine parallels with the music associated with local royalty, e.g. those of Buddhist Cambodia or Dahomey, with its tams-tams.





### Theme 3. Musical ensembles: tradition and hybridity



Whether urban or rural settlers, indigenous musicians, or outsiders, their choruses, bands, amateur and professional orchestras provided musicians in colonial empires with significant agency. Each involved leadership, repertoire choices, performances, and collaborations.

Who founded these groups, who joined, where and when did they play? How did community-based amateur ensembles construct their programs and build audiences, compared with professional ones?

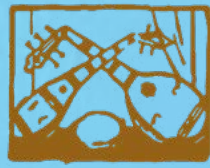
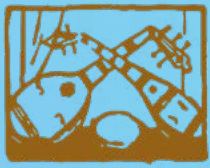
How and why did some incorporate instruments and music from diverse traditions, present hybrid experiences, or mix performers of various ethnic or national origins?

What was the impact on local culture of both large orchestras and ensembles with a single instrument, e.g. accordion, or bands associated with civic ceremonies, sports, or dancing?

What attracted touring musicians and with whom did they build alliances and musical exchanges locally and across the empire?

What, then, does an ensemble's organization, repertoire, and collaborations tell us about colonial relations, about European and indigenous sensibilities? And about the circulation of music and tastes, within an empire and beyond?





## Theme 4. Music in theatrical spectacles



How were theatrical spectacles financed, governed, and organized and what functions did they play in colonial as well as traditional societies?

How were performers chosen, received, and understood by their public?

Who constituted this public, and what productions attracted mixed audiences?

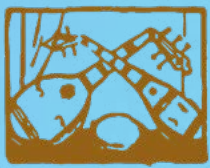
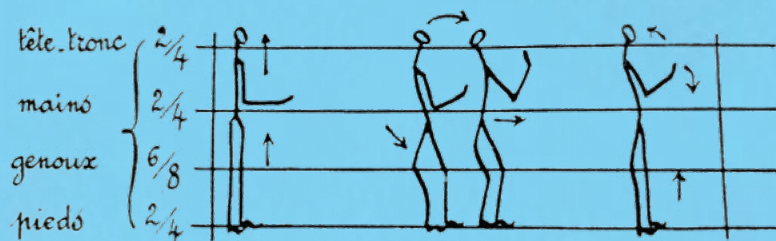
Which theatrical genres thrived in colonial contexts, chosen according to which criteria, why and what impact did they have on local traditions?

Alongside settler and touring artists, when did indigenous musicians begin to take part as composers, librettists, and performers in various colonial contexts, and what did their collaborations consist of, including with governments?

The incorporation of local languages in theatrical works (e.g. Arabic in North Africa) deserves investigation as contributions to emerging national identities.

So too, the languages of dance, from the ancient Chams of central Vietnam to rural Moroccan Chleuhs for whom musical rhythms systematically controlled each part of their bodies.

To what extent, we ask, did intersections, affinities, and repertoire choices influence these diverse multi-disciplinary genres and did they lead to new identities across the city, region, and empire?





# PROPOSAL SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

## Where to submit?

See “[Proposal Form](#)” on the project’s home webpage.

## Proposals:

On this form you will be asked to provide the following:

- Choice of Symposium I or II
- Author’s name
- Email address
- Institutional affiliation, city and country
- Proposal title
- Symposium research theme (I to 6) or other subject
- Proposal abstract, anonymous, as a PDF (350 words maximum)

**NOTE:** *Only proposals submitted on the form provided through the project’s home webpage will be accepted.*

**Paper length:** 30 minutes + 10 minutes for questions and discussion.

**Description:** Abstracts should indicate the colonial empire and relevance of the symposium research theme, research sources, questions, and analytical methods, as well as conclusions pertinent for comparative analysis and discussion at the symposium.

**Languages:** Proposals must be submitted and papers delivered in English or French.

**Attendance:** In person is strongly encouraged. Remote presentations will not be permitted.

**Partial financial assistance** may be available for junior scholars

## Scientific Committee:

Saif Ben Abderrazak

Suppya Nut

Vanessa Paloma Elbaz

Jann Pasler

## Information later added on this website:

FINAL PROGRAMS of Symposiums I and II

ABSTRACTS

CONFERENCE SITE: Map of the symposium venues and directions

## SUBMISSION GUIDELINES FOR FUTURE PUBLICATION

- For those authors invited to submit their essays for consideration in the symposium collective volume, these will undergo a thorough peer-review process after which a decision will be made regarding acceptance. Authors will then be asked to consider changes and complete their final revisions by the assigned date.
- Further guidelines for publication will be indicated on this MusiCol’s webpage.

Looking forward to hearing from you!



Contact: [musicol@musicol.org](mailto:musicol@musicol.org)