

International Symposium II
Paris, 16-17 April 2026

Music and Media in 20th c. Empires



CALL FOR PAPERS:
15 OCTOBER 2025

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Aiming to historicize aural media in 20th c. empires, **MusiCol**'s second international symposium invites researchers from diverse disciplines to consider a panoply of questions, perspectives, and methodologies in the study of recordings and music on colonial radio. Global by nature, both media depended on local participation; both transgressed social, ethnic, and geographic boundaries; both bring a new dimension to colonial history.

In recent years, much effort has focused on digitizing recordings, from forgotten masterpieces by European artists to little-known works made by and for autochtone populations. These raise important questions. To balance local needs with global ambitions, who decided who and what to record, how to market it, and to whom? The record industry is an ideal realm for studying differences in governance and musical commerce across empires. It also sheds light on the musical productivity of vast numbers of musicians, largely unknown today. But how were recordings received? We know that collective listening encouraged family exchanges and community-building (see Kinnear in India, Bengh in Malaysia, and Yampolsky in Indonesia). Recordings' role in the evolution of musical tastes is less understood. Going further, we ask, did recordings contribute to flux in tastes, emergence of new identities, and even personal and communal Relations?

This symposium offers a rare opportunity to explore relationships between European radio and that of its colonies and what listeners in both contexts tuned in to. Substantial research has been done on the major European broadcasters and the history of African radio. Yet, few have studied music programming, and none across an empire.

With its staggering variety of musical genres, colonial radio—"live and local"—offered a rich microcosm of musical life. This merits comparison both within each country and region and across the seas. Not only did local radio shape how, when, and why people listened, it manifests the particularity of local tastes as well as similarities within and across borders (Pasler 2024b). Colonial radio was also a trans-ethnic arena and window on colonial coexistence. In broadcasting news and lectures in many languages, it often accompanied these with music: on Radio-Hanoi (in Chinese and Vietnamese), and on Radio-Dakar (in eight to twelve languages, accompanied by their "folk" music). Music on colonial radio thus presents opportunities to explore tastes shared across countries, regions, and continents and what remained culturally distinct and emblematic for each population.



Theme 5. Sonic Geography: Recordings of music



The recording industry in 20th c. empires ranged from private enthusiasts to Pathé with its profound ties to the French government, and from commercially-oriented international giants (e.g. Gramophone and Odeon) to regionally active producers with international capital (e.g. Baidaphone and Beka), along with innumerable local companies working in rural as well as urban centers. How did these function, what did they share, and how did they differ?

In particular, how did they survive competition? By recording great musicians, but whom? Thanks to Government subsidies, for what exactly? With wide distribution and excellent advertisements, directed to whom? Their use in schools and churches, cafes and dance halls, and especially radio, where listener choices were aired regularly? How can we study the listeners of these recordings and what shaped their reactions?

Which genres thrived (e.g. Egyptian recordings in North Africa) and which pitfalls to avoid? Were sales abroad important, such as Pathé's records sold in China? What role did record reviews in the press play in shaping taste and sales? Whose opinions and which publications carried the most weight? Some, such as Bedouin recordings in Algeria, depended on these companies to be heard beyond their villages. Who listened and what was their impact? Which recording decisions helped producers achieve distinction?

Finally, what forces and individuals determined the choice of musicians, markets, and sales strategies and how might these be different from one colonial context to another? With records easily transported and escaping surveillance, was censorship attempted? If so, in which circumstances, by whom, and to what end? What remains from their catalogues today and where can these recordings be found?



Theme 6. Music on Colonial Radio



“Empires of the air” were historical forces, as Hilmes 2012 notes. Radio in the French empire was almost entirely produced in the colonies, except for occasional retransmissions, vesting it with not only considerable autonomy, but also the ability to shape local identities. In contrast, with its centralizing role in the British world, the BBC could contribute to the global canonization of western tastes and values. To the extent that certain music supported the British agenda of “cultural improvement,” the BBC’s “highbrow-programming” would have reinforced the status of elites.

Did this extend to its colonies, like India or South Africa or did some maintain a certain independence? How did the BBC and its affiliates, or radio in other empires, differ from French national radio and its attempts to reach its colonies? What shortcomings were inevitable?

How might the radio strategies of European programmers and the tastes of their listeners differ in the French, Dutch, Italian, and German colonies? What about Belgian and French radiophonic competition on two sides of the Congolese river? Or Radio-Toulouse’s *concerts arabes* and Radio-Tétouan’s *musique andalouse*, alternatives to western notions of classical music?

Or might radio’s “historical forces” take other forms? If radio could traverse urban spaces, from the newly-constructed *villes nouvelles* to the medinas, and deliver sonic equity to all listeners, how did it balance classical and popular music? The taste for indigenous “folk” music, while questioning age-old stereotypes? Could radio form new communities of belonging, with emerging national implications?

Lastly, how did radio create new careers for local musicians, including women, and what were the challenges?



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