



DE-COMPOSING CLASSICAL MUSIC DECOLONIALITY AND RESISTANCE

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY
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ERIN JOHNSON-WILLIAMS,
JORGE LOZANO,
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& LIANG-KAI YU





In this zine you can find the traces of a day in October 2025, when classical music practitioners, students, and scholars came together at Maastricht University to think about what ‘decoloniality’ means in the context of classical music, and how decolonial work in the practice could look like.



Some presenters at the event. Maastricht University, 13 October 2025. Photos taken by Karoly Molina.



Working group at the event. Maastricht University, 13 October 2025. Photo taken by Karoly Molina.

It collects the main insights and questions from the event, structured alongside its contributors and aims at decentring the idea of 'Western Art Music'. This is why you will also find other musical and sound-related practices and traditions in here.

It is for everyone who seeks inspiration on how to address the topic of decoloniality and coloniality in classical music practice.





Music Theory and the White Racial Frame*

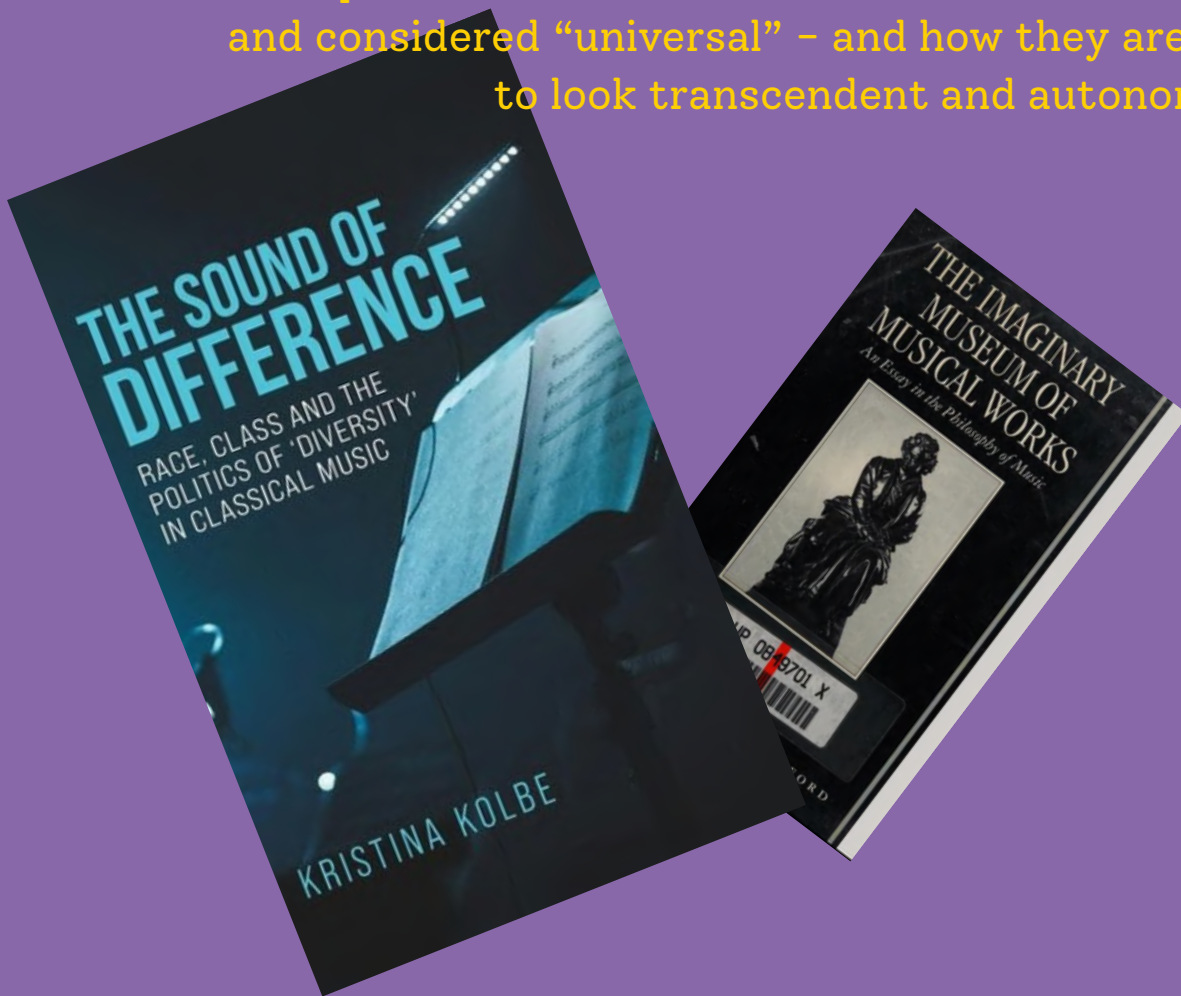
Philip A. Ewell

"Decoloniality Seeks to make visible, open up, and advance radically distinct perspectives and positionalities that displace Western rationality as the only framework and possibility of existence, analysis, and thought."

(Walter Dignolo & Catherine Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*, 2014)



In the context of classical music, decoloniality asks us to question whose music and traditions are valued and considered “universal” – and how they are made to look transcendent and autonomous.



“When thinking about a traditional ‘western’ classical music setting, such as a concert hall, an opera house or a music conservatoire, certain ideas come to mind. Big atriums in impressive buildings, an orchestra all dressed in black, often grey-haired audiences in smart clothing, repertoire predominantly composed and conducted by (dead) white men from Europe, heavily racialized opera characters that are too often uncritically adapted by contemporary directors, or diligent music students from ‘good homes’ working hard towards an unreachable standard of technical perfection. Indeed, as a traditional site of highbrow culture, classical music is undoubtedly more associated with elitism, gendered hierarchies, Eurocentrism, and systems of Whiteness than with any kind of institutional or even social change.”

(Kristina Kolbe, *The Sound of Difference*, 2024)

Decoloniality implies a way of living that creates space for musical traditions, practitioners, and ways of listening that have been systematically excluded by help of colonial structures.

So, decolonial work also requires us to understand **coloniality**: What do these legacies look like in practice? How do they feel and sound? What do they do to us – and what can or shall we do with them?



Coloniality is colonialism's mindset and systems living on after colonial rule ends. The ideas and power structures of colonialism continue to exist.

Decoloniality is about unlearning this colonial thinking and doing, and building more just ways of knowing and living.

I'VE BEEN SURPRISED BY THE
LITTLE AMOUNT OF ~~OF~~ MUSIC
PERFORMERS PRESENT; THIS
DISCUSSIONS SHOULD BE MORE
OFTEN AND INVOLVE BOTH MUSIC
PERFORMERS AND SCHOLARS LIKEWISE

Notes from unknown participants of the event, 13 October 2025.

How to resist
(colonial) structures
when you are
reliant or dependent
on them?

Decolonization is not a metaphor

Eve Tuck

State University of New York at New Paltz

K. Wayne Yang

University of California, San Diego

Erin Johnson-Williams
De-Composing and Decolonising Music: Towards a Sustainable Future

Decolonization is Not a Metaphor

In 2012, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's published their influential essay "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor". Over a decade has passed since the publication of this landmark text, but their work has not (yet) been taken up by music scholars in a sustained way. While rooting in settler colonialism, the authors' argument has been helpful in challenging scholars to view decolonization as more than a 'box-ticking exercise', disentangling it from other inclusion 'buzzwords' such as Diversity, Equality and Inclusion.

Tuck and Yang's Moves to Innocence

Tuck and Yang's encourage scholars to recognize and admit to their own "moves to innocence," which are tropes that "problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity" (2012, p. 3). Moves to innocence are strategic evasions: conceptual and rhetorical maneuvers that colonizers use to present themselves as 'good', 'non-complicit', or 'already decolonized'. They serve to make them appear accountable without actually giving up privilege; they attempt to create distance from ongoing violence and colonization; and they claim a kind of moral purity, neutrality, or even absolution.

Moves to Innocence... in Music Studies?

Calling out a discipline's moves to innocence can be a decolonial act. Doing this in music studies, however, is often an especially difficult task, because of neo-Romantic, quasi-spiritual attachments to the canon that are built into the social infrastructures that uphold Western classical music. So, what might moves to innocence look like in music (studies)?



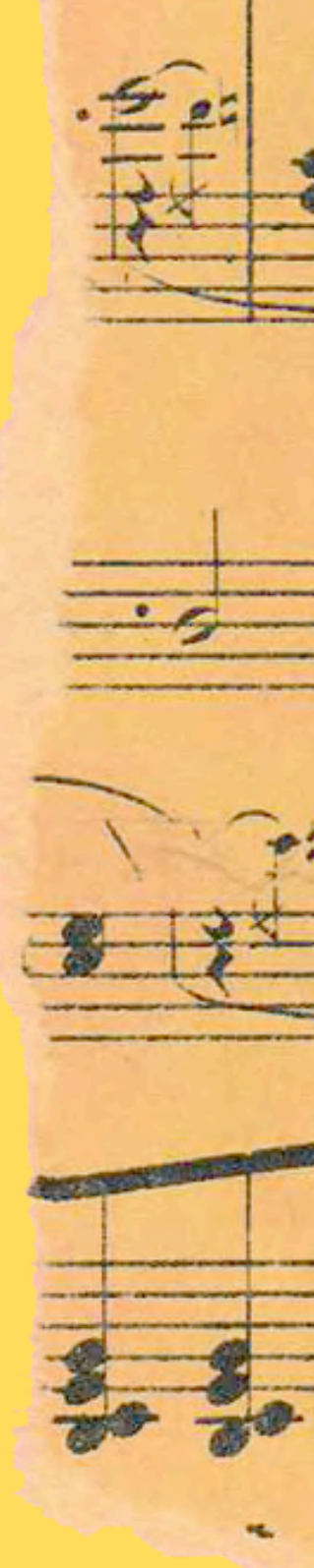
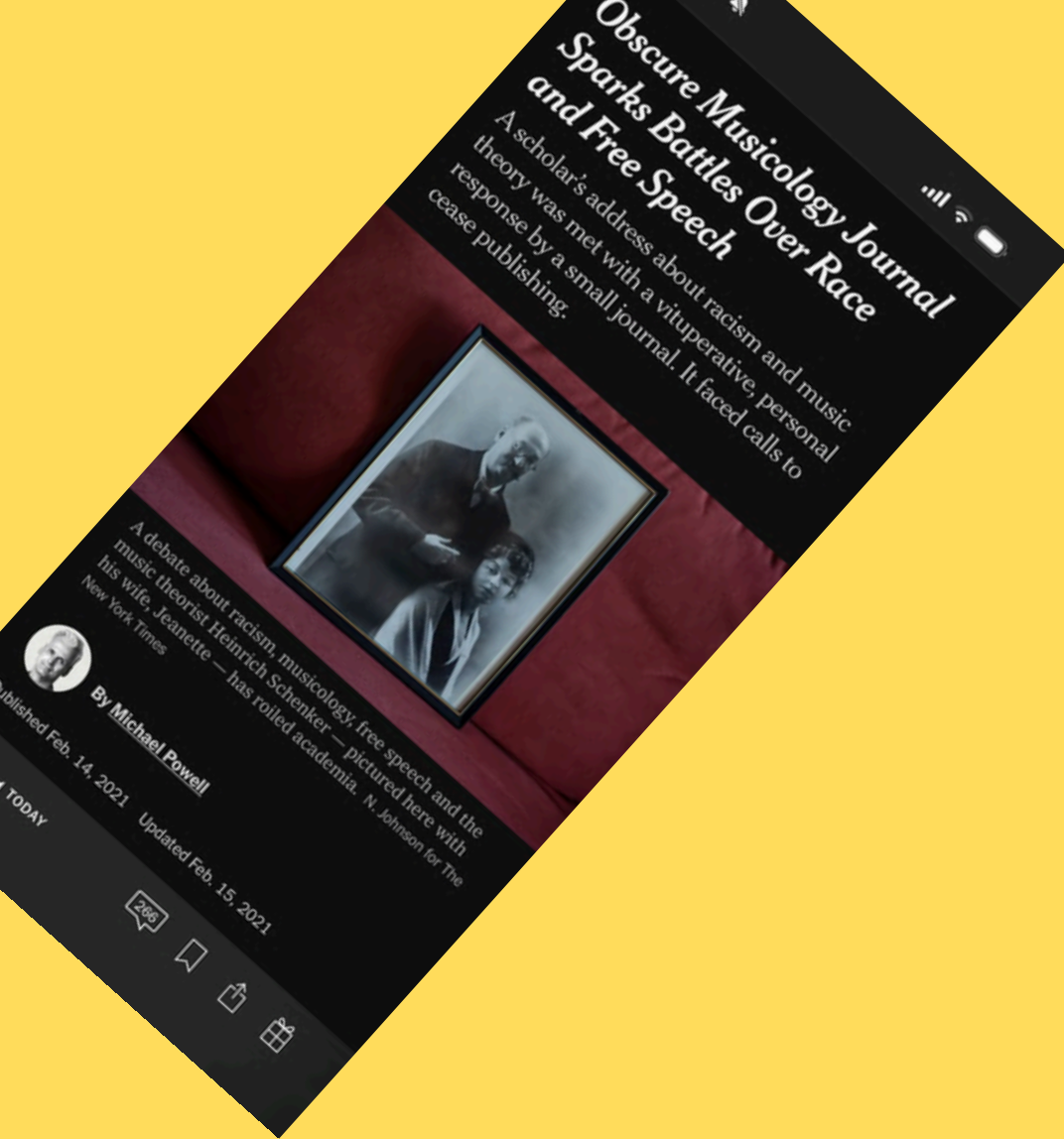
Move to innocence I: Musical truth equals aesthetic good.

This move frames Western classical music – especially the canon of 19th-century “absolute music” – as inherently truthful, valuable, and morally elevating, allowing its practitioners to avoid confronting the racial, colonial, and exclusionary histories that produced those values in the first place.

Example:

A major orchestra launches an education programme built entirely around teaching children to appreciate Bach and Brahms on the grounds that these works represent “timeless human beauty”. The implication is that these repertoires are, inherently, a Good Thing for the students. These cultural associations avoid a more nuanced discussion about how this music was historically elevated through European imperial cultural power, which results in local, Indigenous, or diasporic musics being treated as optional add-ons.





Move to innocence II: Musical truth is above decolonisation.

This move describes that Western classical music's aesthetic value exists independently of social, racial, or colonial contexts, allowing musicians and scholars to evade engaging with decolonization or structural inequities. It follows logically from the first move.

Example:

The 2020 *Schenkerian Studies* controversy illustrates this: the journal initially defended the Western canon as purely aesthetic and "above" social critique, ignoring decolonial and antiracist concerns, until public backlash from the Black Lives Matter movement prompted a redaction and broader discussions on music theory curriculum reform.



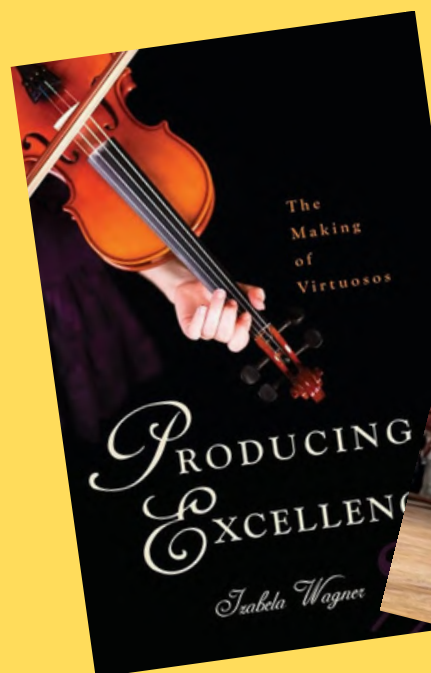
Move to innocence III: Musical “Authority” is justifiable in the context of settler colonialism because white settlers were victims of imperialism, too.

This move frames Western musical standards and institutions as neutral or benevolent, claiming that white settler musicians and educators were themselves victims of imperial systems.

This masks the ongoing erasure of Indigenous musical traditions and the reinforcement of colonial hierarchies.

Example:

A youth orchestra competition in a former settler-colonial country – for example Canada, New Zealand or Australia – frames its rules and repertoire around the Western European canon in order to maintain “international competitiveness,” claiming that organisers and participants are burdened by global standards. The consequence is a systematic neglect of Indigenous, local, or culturally diverse musical expressions, as the competition upholds Western musical authority. The former colony also portrays its own adherence to these standards as a necessary constraint rather than a choice that sustains and perpetuates colonial power hierarchies.



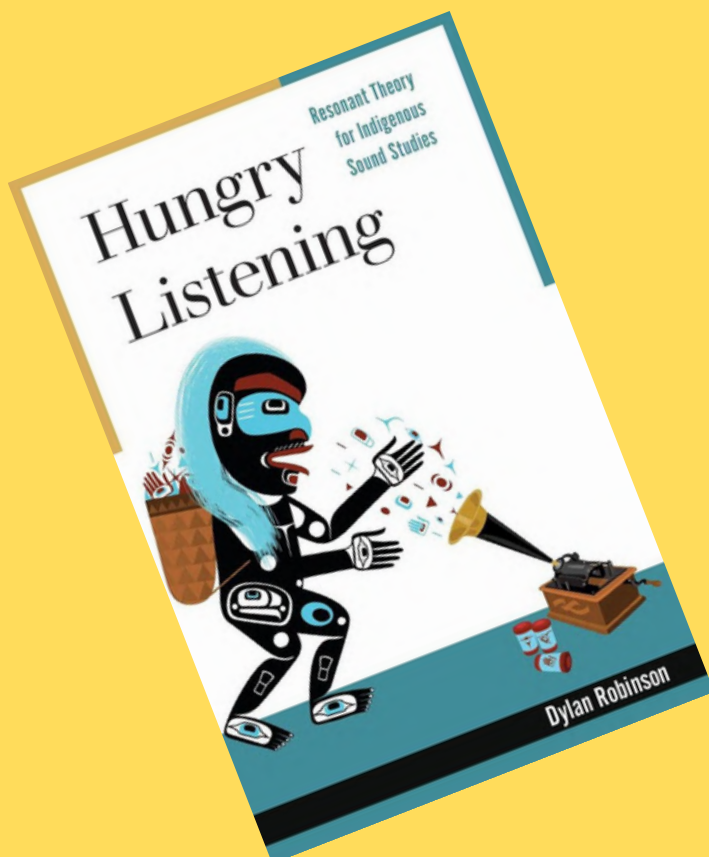


Moving Away from Innocence: Towards/alongside disruption

Instead of treating music as inherently “good” or neutral, this move recognizes its disruptive potential to challenge colonial power structures. Music studies can engage in truth-telling, reflexivity, and inclusion of Indigenous and marginalised traditions, using performance and scholarship as tools for decolonial practice.

Example:

Example: Dylan Robinson's book Hungry Listening, focusing on the Canadian context, is the first book to consider musical listening from both Indigenous and settler colonial perspectives. Challenging the white hegemony of music and sound studies, Robinson explores decolonial practices of listening that enable scholars to 'hear' differently, whether listening to Indigenous or Western sounds.





Jorge Lozano

*Beethoven in the Andes: A Story of Love, Empire,
and Resistance*

Vignette I - Prologue

These short pages are scattered through this zine like interruptions, small scenes that keep returning. They don't summarise arguments, they test them. Each is a snapshot from a longer story about classical music in the Global South, told in three acts: *Love, Empire, Resistance*.

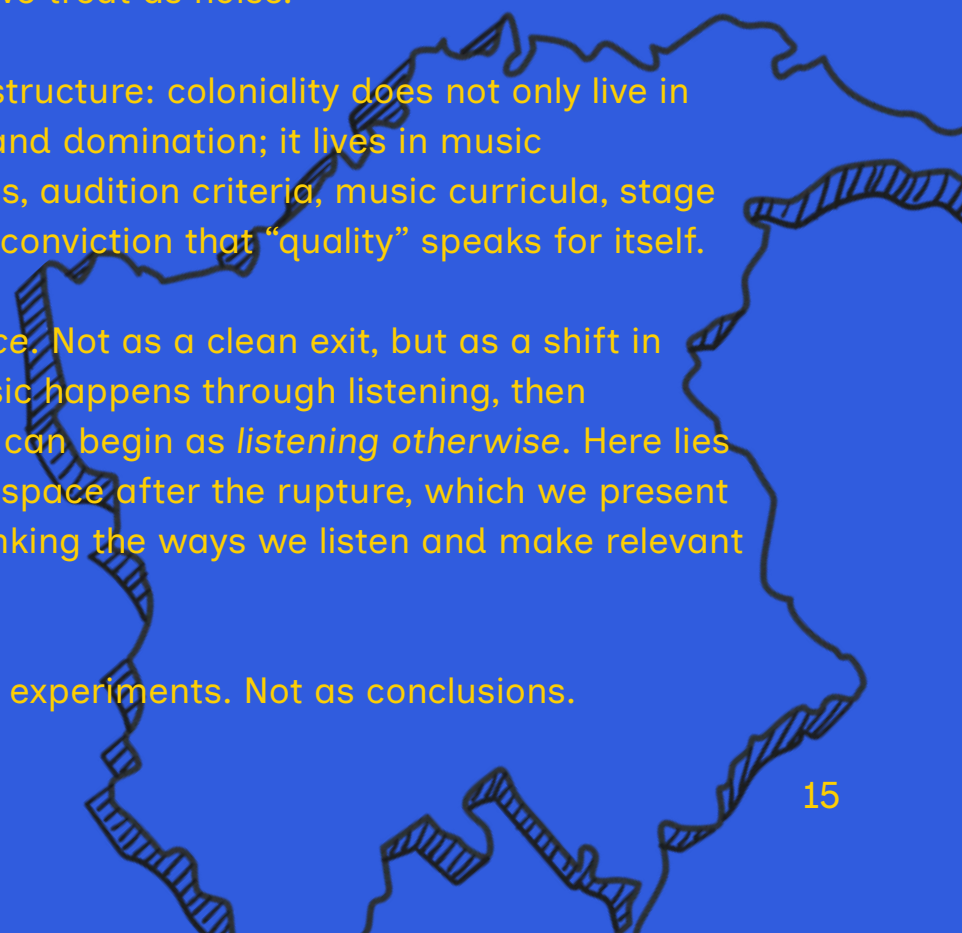
The reflections behind them come from studying and performing classical music in Colombia, where European practices arrived through colonial legacies, and kept growing through institutions that look, sound, and behave like their European models. But the beginning of the story is not empire. The beginning is love: a closeness to the artform so intimate it can feel like home.

Enters the first twist: this love is not innocent. It produces attachments, habits, hierarchies of value. It shapes what we hear as universal, and what we treat as noise.

Then comes *empire* as structure: coloniality does not only live in archives of oppression and domination; it lives in music classrooms, concert halls, audition criteria, music curricula, stage etiquette, and the quiet conviction that "quality" speaks for itself.

The last turn is *resistance*. Not as a clean exit, but as a shift in method: if knowing music happens through listening, then epistemic disobedience can begin as *listening otherwise*. Here lies no doctrine, only empty space after the rupture, which we present as opportunity for rethinking the ways we listen and make relevant classical music.

Read these vignettes as experiments. Not as conclusions.



Layan Nijem

*Beyond the European Lens: Lessons from Decolonizing
Southeast Asian Sound Archives Project (DeCoSEAS)*



Setting the tone

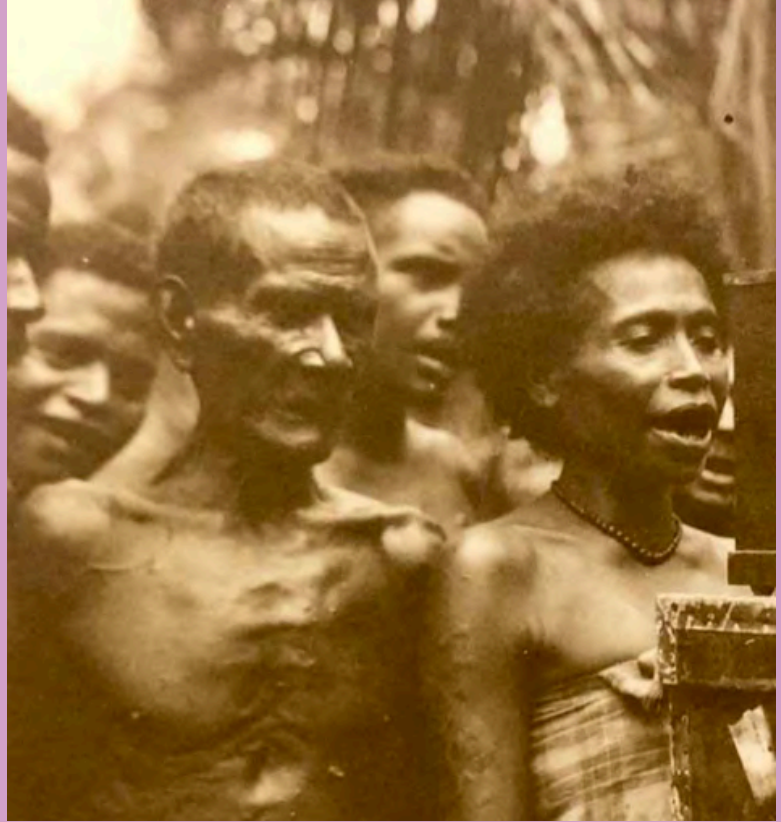
How do we listen to colonial sound archives?

What legacies of power inform how things are kept, ordered, and circulated?

What is preserved and for whom?

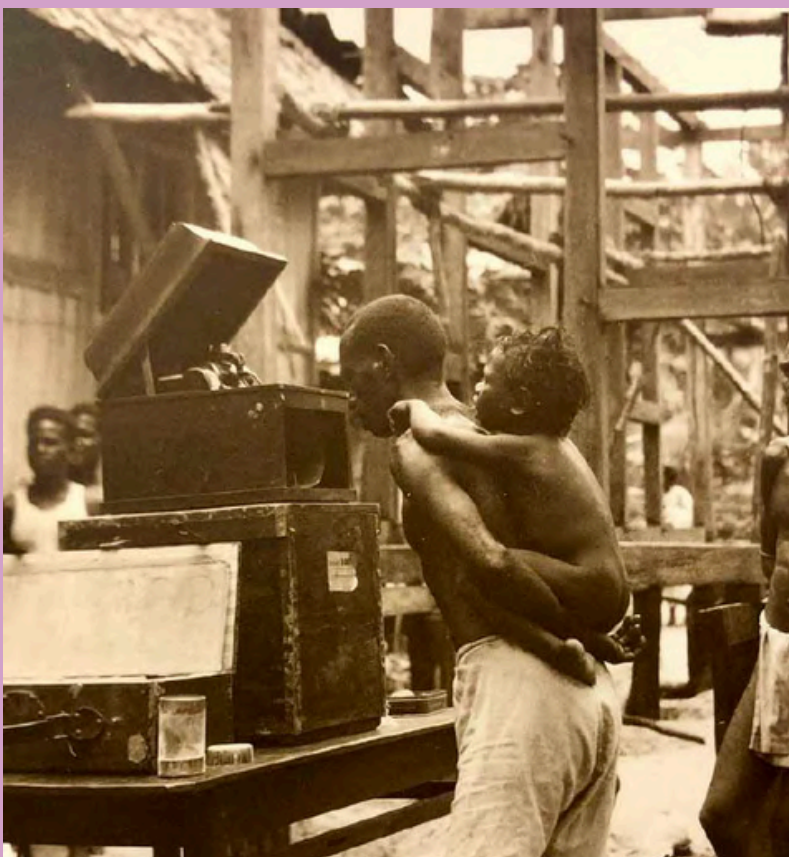
How can these legacies be challenged?





Papua, Indonesia – Jaap Kunst Sound Collection,
University of Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://jaapkunst.org>

How do archives render people invisible?
How do they make some
voices inaudible?



Papua, Indonesia – Jaap Kunst Sound Collection,
University of Amsterdam. Retrieved from
<https://jaapkunst.org>



In the process of recording, sound can be

- removed from its context,
- alienated from its creator,
- lodged in containers, such as files, discs, wax cylinders, diaries, shelves and cases -

and despite all these interventions by a range of people, these sounds-that-turned-into-“things” are supposed to be free of the collector’s influence, keeping the qualities they had before the collector’s intervention. What is “the recording of the song” becomes “the song” (García, 2017: 14).



So, how to decolonize?



Recording Session at Urbinasopèn, Waigéo (1932) – Jaaap Kunst Sound Collection, University of Amsterdam. Retrieved from <https://jaapkunst.org>

When it comes to decolonising classical music, we cannot begin to think about it without considering the colonial power structures that are embedded within it and how these structures have shaped what we hear and teach – how it shapes our worldview.

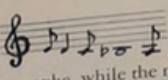
The Jaap Kunst Collection, which is partially housed at the University of Amsterdam, is a sound archive comprising material such as sound recordings, photographs, silent films, and correspondence from the Indonesian archipelago. This material was collected by the Dutch ethnomusicologist Jaap Kunst between 1922 and 1934. Over the years, the collection has expanded to include further field recordings and research material from various sites contributed by Kunst's assistants, Ernst Heins and Felix van Lamsweerde, as well as other researchers and students (Heins, 1994). For more information, visit jaapkunst.org.

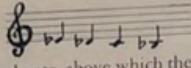
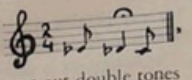



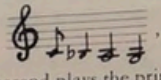
While working with the collection, I became familiar with the crackling and hissing sounds that remained, even in digital format, of the original wax cylinder recordings. I became acquainted with certain voices and images of the Indonesian archipelago from a hundred years ago. In his studies, Kunst provided extensive details about the instruments or songs he recorded. He also regularly included calculations of intonation, tables or sketches of instruments in his written publications. However, inscriptions such as 'Male Vocal' or 'Women's Choir' made it more challenging to find the performers' names.

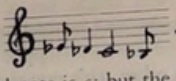
Lamsweerde, Felix van. 1994. "Appendix 2: Inventory of the Wax Cylinder Collection of the Tropenmuseum." In *Indonesian Music and Dance* (p. 260). Tropenmuseum / University of Amsterdam.

Nr.	Region/Place Population	Performers instruments	Title genre	Remarks/ References
165-a	West Manggarai, Ruteng Todo	Bangkus, vocal	O kakor	<i>O, cock crowing</i> MIF 101, nr.129
165-b	Idem	Bong, vocal	Welki sconslet	<i>If the body is small...</i> MIF 102, nr.130
165-c	Idem	Taram		
166-a	Idem	daluh of Todo, male vocal	Kode	<i>Monkey, a song mocking the headman of another village</i> MIF 91
166-b	Idem	Idem	Manin	Idem
167-a	Idem	Saga, male vocal	Tepopong	MIF 101, nr.128
167-b	Idem	Idem	Keeyong Todo	MIF 94, nr.122
168-a	Idem	daluh of Todo, male vocal	Ronda Todo	Melody different from 168-a
168-b	Idem	Idem	Idem	
168-c	Idem	Idem	Ronda caci Todo	
168-d	Idem	Idem	Daludo	MIF 102, 103, nr.131
168-e	Idem	Idem	Raang	
:: 169-a	Idem	Idem	Lelang lau	
:: 169-b	Idem	Idem	Paci	Mocking and challenging song
:: 169-c	Idem	Saga, male vocal		
170-a	Idem	daluh of Todo, male vocal	Dindi	
170-b	Idem	Idem	Lembo + Paci	
170-c	Idem	Idem	Ndari sili lain ndari sams	Nostalgic song
171	Idem	Idem	Mbata	Dance melody
172-a	West Manggarai, Ruteng Pongkor	Narun e.a.	Sending	
172-b	Idem	Ceha	Rembong rejo-rejo	<i>Jagung flower</i> MIF 91
173	Idem	Nenggang e.a., male vocal	Go'ul	MIF 91, 92, 104, nr.132
174-a	Idem	Lutu, vocal	Dindi	MIF 91, 92
174-b	Idem	Idem	Dunging	MIF 92
175-a	Idem	Ceha, vocal	Rambung (3 x)	MIF 92
175-b	Idem	Idem	Wangka danggang	<i>Trading proa</i>


THE VOCAL MUSIC OF EAST-FLORES

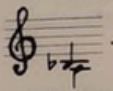
The scale used might be rendered as follows:  in which the *c* occurred a single time only, at the beginning of a fresh strophe, while the notes *c* and *a*, too, occur only rarely.

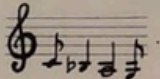
The lagu *Naja nungēt* (phon. K. 184¹) was found to have an ambit of a perfect fourth:  in which now the *b♭*, now the *c* might be held to represent the central note, above which the recitativo undulates up and down, using the three remaining notes. One often hears this: 10  and every now and then the long drawn-out double tones  and . In the 2nd and 3rd melodies of this record K 184 the basal note is , and the recitativo moves through the notes , the note *a* preponderating, so that here, too, a double tone of a major second plays the principal rôle.

In phon. K. 185 the scale used in all three of the songs recorded on it (*Naja nētung*, *Bē' odong*, and *Barassi hama*) is the following: .

The principal recitativo-tone is *d♭*; the basal note is *c*; but the latter sometimes slides down to *b♭* at the end of a phrase, whereas the minor second interval is resolved towards the minor third in a manner satisfying to Western ears.

In phon. K. 183 (*Lian goko*, *Lian lēlu'ung*, and *Barassi tiné*) the ambit is in no case greater than a perfect fourth. The basal note is .

The lagu *Lian lēlu'ung* consists of an almost absolutely monotone melody (on a *b♭*), which is replaced only at the outset by a *c*, dropping down to *a* towards the end, as a result of which the melody then coincides with the basal note. Most of the time, however, the minor second double tone is heard: .

The scale may—since the recitativo-note very occasionally drops down to *g*—be rendered as follows: .

Kunst Jaap. *Music in Flores. A Study of the Vocal and Instrumental Music among the Tribes living in Flores.* English Translation by EMILE VAN LOO. (Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie. Supplement zu Band XLII.) With 200 Musical Examples, 6 Sketch Maps, 4 Tables and 67 Illustrations from Photographs. XII + 164 pp. Leiden 1942. E. J. BRILL. Price : Gld. 22.50.

Regardless of Kunst's intentions to preserve Indonesian culture, the existing material is based on his choices (Heins, 1994, p. 20). These preferences were related not only to the technical capabilities of the recording equipment, but also to culturally specific aesthetic preferences that were presented as universal values. Given the nature of documentation, musical annotations were made according to Kunst's understanding of the European ear (Koenis, 2018). Therefore, Kunst was not necessarily documenting Indonesian music and dance, but rather producing his own interpretation of what they were supposed to sound like, and what he deemed 'worthy' of preservation.



Images from ARTJOG2024



Instead of reading the transcription, what can we hear?

Recorded music from East Flores, 1930

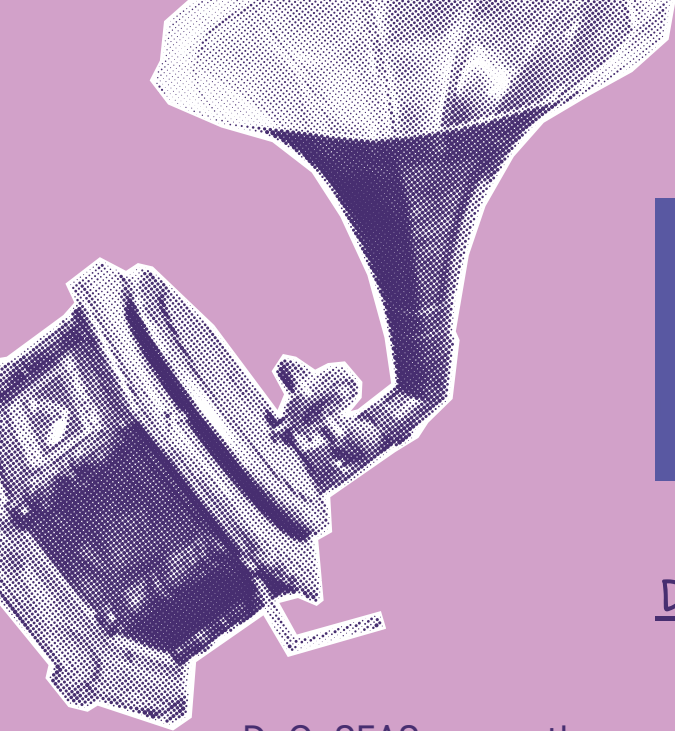
<https://omekas.seasia-hearing.org/s/jaapkunst/item/350>



Visual from *Hungry Listening* (2020), Dylan Robinson

Dylan Robinson describes the process of transcribing melodies as “pinning down” musical expressions onto the five-line European musical staff (Robinson 2020, p. 149). The transcription process is then a sequence of decisions about rhythm and pitch within the limitations of the notation system and influenced by individual subjectivities. Robinson further compares the act of pinning down sound to the “Western system of zoology aimed at capturing, ‘preserving,’ and categorizing specimens. The history of gathering indigenous songs by ethnographers is a history of ‘pinning down’ that which is alive like the wings of butterflies” (2020, p. 149).

This metaphor illustrates the authoritative role of writing in Eurocentric modes of transmission. Accordingly, music transcriptions affirm epistemic domination, in which Kunst’s agency prevailed over the voices within the sonic material. Consequently, transcriptions may prioritise certain aspects of perceived sounds, disregarding unfamiliar elements or deeming them irrelevant. Therefore, transcription and analysis play a part in articulating and documenting an aesthetic for music and sound.

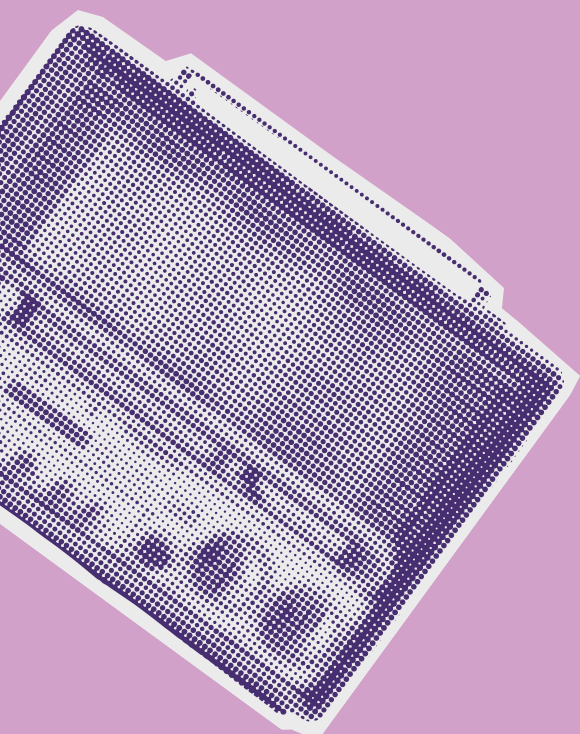


DeCoSEAS.org

DeCoSEAS was a three-year transnational research and community engagement project (2021–2024), which aimed to decolonise heritage curation through

- improving access;
- diversifying the dialogue and discourse;
- transferring agency to stakeholders.

The emphasis is on the capacity of sound (and music) to be disruptive and carry meaning and political significance. Sound and music have incredible potential for reframing, reconciling and repatriating.



In a similar vein to DeCoSEAS, classical music can contribute to a more inclusive and representative musical landscape by honouring diverse traditions while challenging the status quo. This can be achieved by moving away from the epistemological paradigm of Eurocentric universalism, which continues to reinforce colonial hierarchies of musical experience, value, and knowledge in both explicit and latent ways.

Vignette II – Love

Device: Letter to Beethoven

This is a love story, but not necessarily the happy, innocent kind. It begins in Colombia, before words like canon or coloniality had entered my vocabulary, when music was not more than a wondrous encounter.

Dear Ludwig,

I met you before I had words for you. You arrived through my aunt's radio, my gran's turntable. Four or five years old: your Fifth was fear; the Ninth, élan. Later, you returned as a boxset of classical greatest hits, and I replayed you until the walls knew your music by heart.

Then I felt the need to play what I had only heard. A borrowed violin, clumsy fingers on a stubborn bow, undeterred by the squealing-cat sounds. The Suzuki Violin Mehtod: easy versions of Bach, Handel, Brahms, Dvořák, and well... you!

I think this has career potential. Then the orchestra at the uni: my first-ever programme, can barely play the notes: your name on the page on my stand. And the Fifth, no less. The universe on my side, clearly. The third movement and a revelation: the notion of climax in classical music. Forty bars of crescendo bursting into a radiant finale. My fate was sealed. I had fallen in love.^{1, 2, 3}

Tell me, when I fell in love with you, what else did I learn to love without noticing?

Most likely forever yours,
Jorge

¹ Love is not just feeling: it is alignment, a way to bind yourself to an ideal. See Ahmed, S. (2014). *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (NED-New edition, 2). Edinburgh University Press. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.3366/j.ctt1g09x4g>

² It works as identification: a pull to become like what you admire, a reaching towards *where you are not yet*.

³ It also works as idealisation: you invest in what surrounds the beloved, with its repertoire, concert halls and etiquettes, until those objects feel sacred, and start measuring you back.

Liang-Kai Yu
Listening Otherwise

What does the music ask of you?
To feel
To remember
To move
To unlisten?



At the symposium *De-Composing Classical Music: Decoloniality and Resistance*, we gathered for a listening exercise.



We began with a scene from *Madama Butterfly*, the 1904 opera by Giacomo Puccini. We chose the final act, in which Butterfly says goodbye to her child and takes her own life. We listened to a version sung by Maria Callas, without the visual staging. Stripped of spectacle, the music still carried the emotional force of a colonial fantasy, one that romanticises loss, abandonment, and the death of an exoticised woman.

BUTTERFLY

Go along, I order you to.

(Suzuki goes out, crying. Butterfly lights a taper in front of the sanctuary, and bows. Then she takes her father's knife from the wall, kisses it, and slowly reads the inscription on the blade.)
"He dies with honour
who cannot live with honour."

(As she places the blade against her throat, the door opens and Suzuki's arm pushes the child towards his mother. Butterfly drops the knife and rushes to the child, which she seizes up and kisses passionately.)

You? You? You?
Little idol of my heart.
My Love, my love,
flower of the lily and rose.
Never know that, for you,
for your innocent eyes,
Butterfly is about to die...
so that you may go
away beyond the sea
without being subject to remorse
in later years

for your mother's desertion.
Oh, you who have come down to me
from high heaven,
look well, well
on your mother's face,
that you may keep a faint memory of it,
look well!
Little love, farewell!
Farewell, my little love!
Go and play.

(She picks up the child and sets him down on a mat; she gives him an American flag and a doll to play with and gently blindfolds his eyes. Picking up the

BUTTERFLY

Va, va. Te lo comando.

(Suzuki esce piangendo. Butterfly accende un lume davanti al reliquario, s'inchina. Poi prende il pugnale e lo bacia. Legge le parole incise sulla lama.)
"Con onor muore
chi non può serbar vita con onore."
(Si punta il coltello lateralmente alla gola. La porta s'apre e vedesi il braccio di Suzuki che spinge il bambino verso la madre. Butterfly lascia cadere il coltello, si precipita verso il bambino, lo abbraccia e lo bacia quasi a soffocarlo.)

Tu? tu? tu? tu?
Piccolo iddio!
Amore, amore mio.
Fior di giglio e di rosa.
Non saperlo mai...per te,
pei tuoi puri occhi
muore Butterfly...
Perché tu possa andar
di là dal mare
senza che ti rimorda
ai di maturi

il materno abbandono.
O a me, sceso dal trono
dell'alto Paradiso,
guarda ben fiso, fiso,
di tua madre la faccia!
Che ten' resti una traccia,
guarda ben!
Amore, addio, addio!
Piccolo amor!
Va, gioca, gioca.

(Prende il bambino, lo posa su di una stuoia, gli dà nelle mani la banderuola americana e una pupattola e lo invita a trastullarsene, mentre

triggers of emotion

A mother saying goodbye to her son

bittersweetness

a lamentation, stringy adagio

knife she goes behind the screen. Then appearing from behind the screen with the white veil clasped round her throat, Butterfly staggers across the room towards the baby, and collapses beside him.)

VOICE OF PINKERTON

Butterfly! Butterfly! Butterfly!
(Pinkerton and Sharpless burst into the room, and run to her side. With a weak gesture Butterfly points to her child and dies. Pinkerton kneels down beside her, while Sharpless goes to pick up the child.)

END

Source

https://www.murashev.com/opera/Madama_Butterfly_libretto_English_Italian

delicatamente gli benda gli occhi. Poi afferra il coltello e va dietro il paravento. Si vede Butterfly sporgersi fuori dal paravento e brancolando muovere verso il bambino. Il gran velo bianco le circonda il collo; si trascina verso il bambino, poi gli cade vicino.)

VOCE DI PINKERTON

Butterfly! Butterfly! Butterfly!
(Pinkerton e Sharpless si precipitano nella stanza, accorrendo presso Butterfly che con debole gesto indica il bambino e muore. Pinkerton s'inginocchia mentre Sharpless prende il bambino.)

FINE

ending in a bVII, sounds unresolved, as something left unsaid

Then we listened to *Bye Bye Butterfly*, composed by Pauline Oliveros in 1965. The piece was created using early electronic technology, looping and distorting fragments of opera into feedback and resonance. It is at once a farewell and a refusal. Rather than a critique, *Bye Bye Butterfly* seems to offer a sonic gesture of release, a drifting away from the operatic spectacle and toward something freer, stranger, and more expansive.



Photo courtesy Center for Contemporary Music Archives, Mills College. Retrieved from <https://paulineoliveros.bandcamp.com/track/bye-bye-butterfly>



“Listening is directing attention to what is heard, gathering meaning, interpreting and deciding on action. Quantum listening is listening to more than one reality.”
(Pauline Oliveros, *Quantum Listening*, 2010)





Together, the two pieces ask us to listen otherwise.

We invite you to listen yourself and think with the prompts that you will find on the following pages.



Madama Butterfly: Con onor muore... Tu? tu? tu? tu? tu? tu? tu? Piccolo Iddio (YouTube, Maria Callas, uploaded 12 November 2014). <https://tinyurl.com/3bha6n6h>

Pauline Oliveros: Bye bye butterfly (1967) (YouTube, TheWelleszCompany, uploaded 24 March 2011). <https://tinyurl.com/39d2npg9>





Listening otherwise. Maastricht University, 13 October 2025. Photo taken by Karoly Molina.

Vignette III – Empire

Device: archival fragment and reflection



ARCHIVAL FRAGMENT – Bogotá, 1882

Regulations for the National Academy of Music

By virtue of the Decree of the President of the United States of Colombia, dated 31 January of the present year, whereby a Music Academy is established, the Council of the “National Academy of Music” hereby issues these Regulations for the governance of the Institute.

Article I. The purpose of the National Academy of Music is to promote the cultivation of music in Colombia and to raise it to the level at which it is found in civilized countries.

...



Vignette III – Empire

Device: archival fragment and reflection

Raise. Level. Civilised.

Not a metaphor. Not a euphemism. A programme.

A mission statement that tells you, in one sentence, what music education is for: *to catch up.*

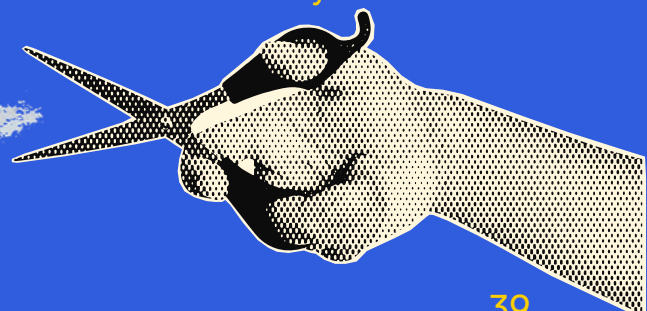
Fast forward: the same concert halls, the same rituals. The same repertoire lists repeating like liturgical prayer. The same bodies trained to be restrained, to bow correctly, sit correctly, sound correctly. The same concert etiquette: silence as virtue, coughs as failure, emotion permitted only discreetly in the shape of a smile or a subtle tear, or publicly as applause. And if there is too much emotion, you may stand when you clap, thank you very much.

The fury? It never presents itself as domination. It presents itself as *normality. As quality. As excellence. As transcendence.*

We learn to see it as neutrality. We learn to see it as autonomy. We learn or motto: *focus on the music.*

But the music, the whole apparatus, was never outside history. Here, Europe is not only admired: it is installed as the measure. The horizon of becoming. The reference point that does not need to introduce itself.

Love has a shadow. And it looks like structure. It looks like system.



Pieter du Plessis

*Thinking through the Hollands-Afrikaanse
Liederbundel: Whiteness, Affect, and Music*

This songbook does not just preserve music; it is a technology of whiteness and white ideology, a colonial fantasy circulated transnationally and disguised as innocent musical heritage.

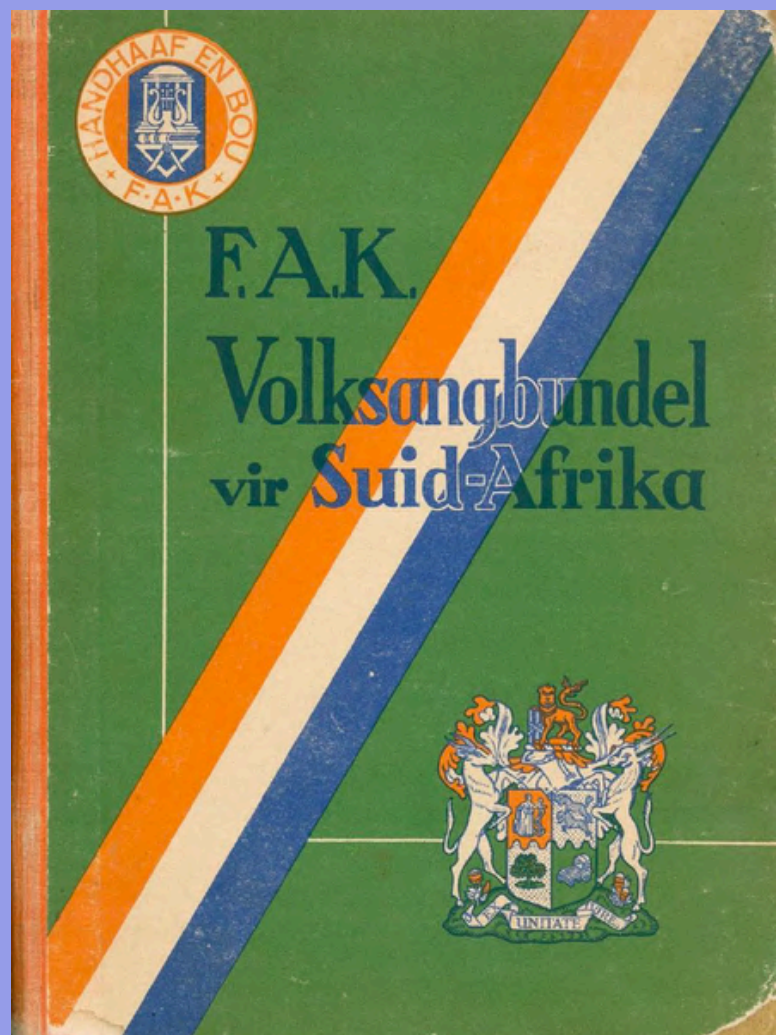


Cover of the *Hollands-Afrikaanse Songbook* (1907) by Dr. N. Mansvelt.
Collage by Pieter du Plessis.

The *Hollands-Afrikaanse Songbook* published in 1907 formed a part of the basis for consolidating Afrikaans folk and nationalist songs. The songbook itself should be considered in the historical context of rising Afrikaner nationalism and the standardisation of the Afrikaans language. It was a gift by the Dutch 'friends of the Afrikaners', served as a tool to resist anglicization and to keep Afrikaners aligned with the Dutch language and cultural repertoire.

Cover of the *F.A.K Volksangbundel vir Suid-Afrika* (1937) by the Federation of Afrikaans Cultural Associations (F.A.K).

The F.A.K Folk Songbook published in 1937 in the context of rising Afrikaner nationalism (which consolidated in Afrikaner nationalists gaining power and formalising the apartheid system in 1948), was the follow-up of the *Hollands-Afrikaanse* songbook. The F.A.K worked closely with nationalists at the time to create and maintain an Afrikaner cultural repertoire through the songbook for example. This songbook thus forms part of a genealogy of 'white sound' that sustained an imagined community whilst excluding Black Africans and Black Afrikaans speakers.





Bijeenkomst in de Domkerk in Utrecht ter ere van de verjaardag van Paul Kruger en de generaals De Wet, Botha en De la Rey' [Meeting in Utrecht's Dom Church in honour of the birthday of Paul Kruger and Generals De Wet, Botha, and De la Rey]. Beeldbank of Het Zuid-Afrikahuis. Identification number: Map193-1/.

This image, found in the archive of the Zuid-Afrikahuis, is to illustrate the type of events where people would sing together.

In this instance, it was a large gathering to celebrate the birthday of the late Boer-Afrikaner leader, Paul Kruger in 1902. Here too, songbooks would be used. The image illustrates to us the connection between the songbook and the act of singing together, moving from an imagined community to an embodied community. Other events would include the opening of monuments, society meetings, political assemblies, among many others.



The Zuid-Afrikanhuis in Amsterdam. Photos taken by Pieter du Plessis.

Front cover of *White Innocence: Paradoxes of Colonialism and Race* by Prof. Gloria Wekker.

Gloria Wekker's work on 'white innocence' unsettles the songbook as an innocent object. Rather, it points to the ways in which the songbook forms part of the Dutch cultural archive - a structure of thinking and feeling that has come to inform a dominant white Dutch sense of self as innocent and absolved from the Netherlands' colonial history and its afterlife. Read through this lens, the songbook points to racial hierarchies and a sense of self instilled through feelings and moral sensibilities.



Transvaals Volkslied.

Woorden van CATH. I. VAN REES.

Allegro Moderato.

Musiek van RICHARD HOL. (?)

I. Kent gij dat volk vol hel - den - moed En toch zo lang ge -
 knecht? Het heeft ge - of - ferd goed en bloed Voor vrij - heid en voor
 recht. Komt, bur - gers! laat de vlag - gen wap' - ren; Ons
 lij - den is voor - bij; Roemt in de ze - ge on - zer dap' - ren: Dat

Music score and lyrics of the song *Transvaals Volkslied* (*Transvaal Folk Anthem*) on page 18 of the *Hollands-Afrikaanse Songbook* (1908) by Dr. N Mansvelt. Scan by Pieter du Plessis.

The sheet music of the song *Transvaals Volkslied* is but one example of the nationalist repertoire included in the songbook, among other songs that would directly celebrate the imagined ethnic-racial kinship between the Dutch, Flemish and Afrikaners.

Notes from an unknown participant of the event, 13 October 2025.

To read:
Black skin,
White masks
by Frantz Fanon

B-179 

Black Skin, White Masks by Frantz Fanon

author of
The Wretched of the Earth



Eliz Gökdere

Echoes of Anatolia: Turkish Music in a Western Frame



What are the intersections of Western classical performance and Turkish musical identity?



Turkish stringed instruments. Salamuzik.com

Turkish percussion instruments.
Salamuzik.com



Kanun. Salamuzik.com



Origins

Turkish music began in Central Asia around the 6th century and was part of daily life and ritual. As Turkic communities migrated west, their music blended with Persian, Arabic, Byzantine, and Anatolian cultures.

In the Ottoman period, Classical Turkish Music developed in court and religious spaces, while Folk Music lived among ordinary people through traveling poet-musicians (*ashiks*). Both traditions were mainly monophonic, focusing on a single melodic line.



Turkish bowed instruments. - Salamuzik.com



Eliz Gökdere presenting, Conservatorium Maastricht, 13 October 2025. Photo taken by Denise Petzold.



Below: Ottoman military band (1914), newspaper photograph by Paul Thompson.

Above: Ottoman military band (Mehter). Wikimedia/Wikipedia Commons, accessed 2026.



Turkish in Spirit, Western in Form

In the 19th century, Western music became the new model for the Ottoman Empire. The palace replaced its traditional military band with a Western orchestra. Classical Turkish Music lost its official place and moved outside institutions. Musicians had to learn both musical practices to survive. Western notation and education entered musical life.

In 1923, the new Republic used music to shape a modern national identity. The goal was to create a new type of music: Turkish in spirit, Western in form. Traditional music was removed from schools, conservatories, and radio. New institutions were created, and young musicians were sent to Europe. A new generation began composing polyphonic Turkish music.

The Turkish Five



Cemal Reşit Rey (1904–1985)

Hasan Ferit Alnar (1906–1978)

Ulvi Cemal Erkin (1906–1972)

Ahmet Adnan Saygun (1907–1991)

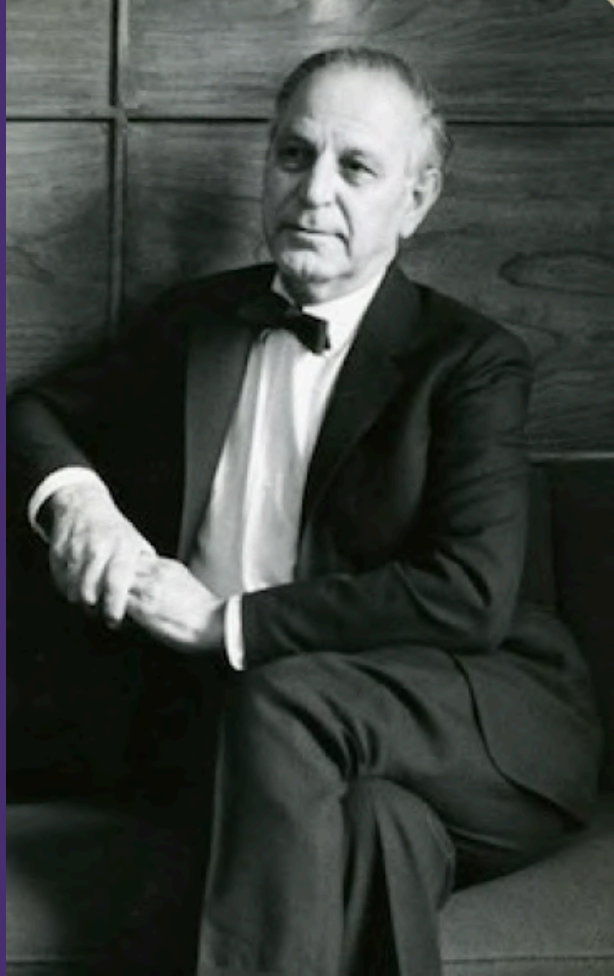
Necil Kazım Akses (1908–1999)

Aimed for a Neo-nationalist style, blending Turkish traditions with Western techniques.

Trained to build a modern, polyphonic Turkish music culture

The “Turkish Five” were the first generation of composers of the Turkish Republic. They were sent to Europe to study composition and Western music. They wrote the first symphonies, concertos, and chamber music of the Republic. This new music combined Turkish tradition with Western composition. Folk music was the main source of rhythm and character. Irregular rhythms, modal sounds (*makams*), and pentatonic structures were common.

Ulvi Cemal Erkin



Ulvi Cemal Erkin, a member of the Turkish Five, studied in Paris and returned to help shape the new musical life of the Republic. As a composer and teacher, he brought Western training into dialogue with Turkish musical language. His piano suite *Duyuşlar* (1937) gathers eleven short pieces with intimate, rhythmic, and expressive character.

The suite was presented in three parts. Between each section, contextual information was shared and selected moments were discussed. The format invited the audience into an active listening experience and open exchange afterwards.



Eliz Gökdere performing a selection of pieces from *Duyşular* (Impressions) by Ulvi Cemal Erkin. Conservatorium Maastricht, 13 October 2025. Photos taken by Denise Petzold.





Vignette IV – Resistance

Device: experiment protocol

BETA TESTS FOR AN OTHERWISE EAR

A draft protocol.

Not instructions.

Try one, skip one, pick one at random.

Repeat.

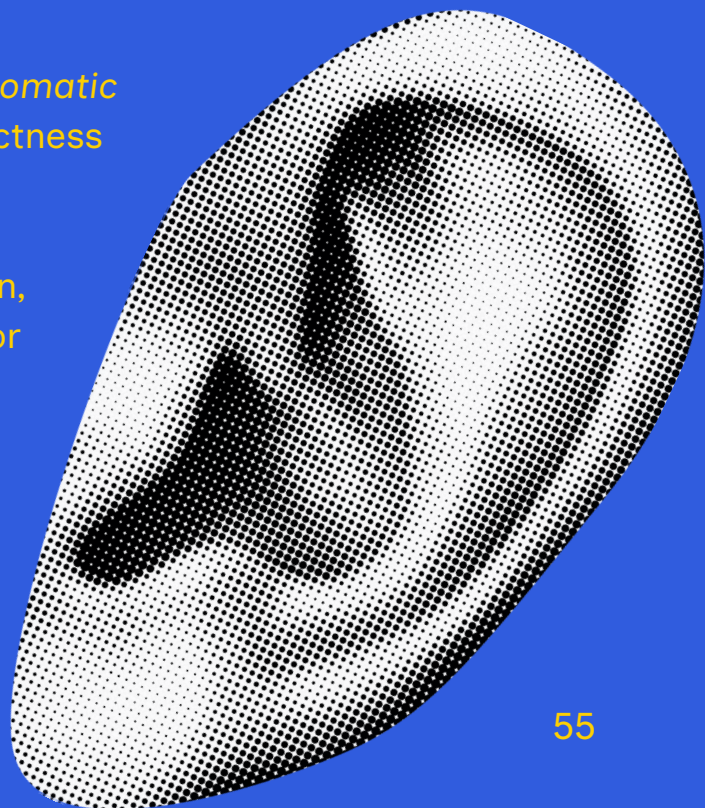
Results may vary by ear and by room.

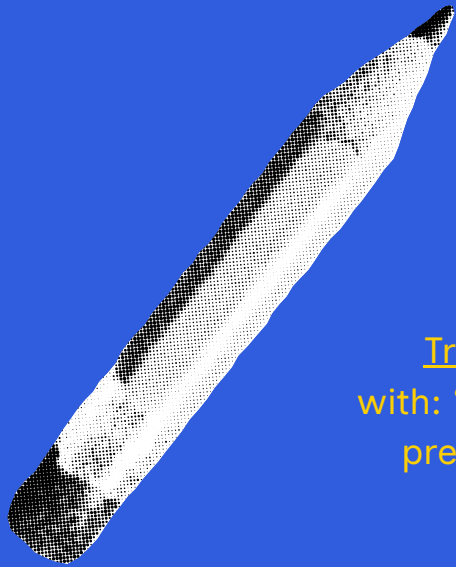
I. Sensory Test: The Reflex

Trial: Put on a canonical piece—a *classical greatest hit*. Don't analyse it: just track your body. Notice: where does tension appear? Jaw, neck, shoulders, breath? When do you brace for *mistakes*?

Hypothesis: Coloniality can live as a somatic reflex: the body trained toward correctness and away from wonder.

Decolonising move: On a second listen, deliberately soften the reflex: listen for *texture over correctness*.





II. Cognitive Test: The Neutral

Trial: After listening, write three sentences beginning with: “This is good because...” Then circle the words that pretend to be neutral: *quality, excellence, seriousness, transcendence, professionalism, tradition.*

Hypothesis: Coloniality hides behind cognitive shortcuts: universals with vague addresses.

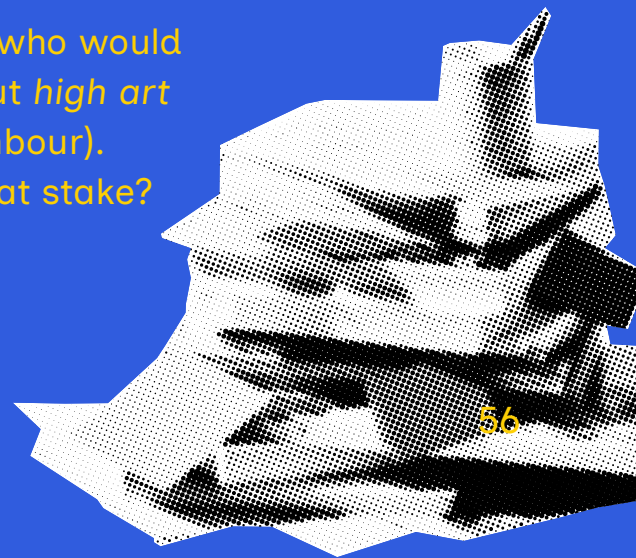
Decolonising move: Rewrite each sentence as situated: “Good for *whom, where, under what history*”.

III. Affective Test: The Attachment

Trial: After listening, name what you love in (classical) music, one detail only. Then ask: what does that love make you loyal to: sound, technique, composer, institution, a notion of prestige?

Hypothesis: Love can reproduce hierarchy when attachment becomes allegiance.

Decolonising move: Imagine one listener who would not grant prestige or would not care about *high art* (a child, a non-classical musician, a neighbour). Ask: what do I hear when prestige is not at stake?



IV. Social Test: The Interaction

Trial: In a rehearsal, lesson, or concert, listen for the micropolitics of the situation: who speaks first, who corrects, who apologises, who remains silent, who voices dissent, who complies.

Hypothesis: Listening is social: coloniality reproduces itself as authority, that is, who is heard as legitimate.

Decolonising move: Imagine the same exchange with *no ranks*: no teacher/student, no jury, no 'expert'. Ask: what changes in tone, timing, and who gets the last word?

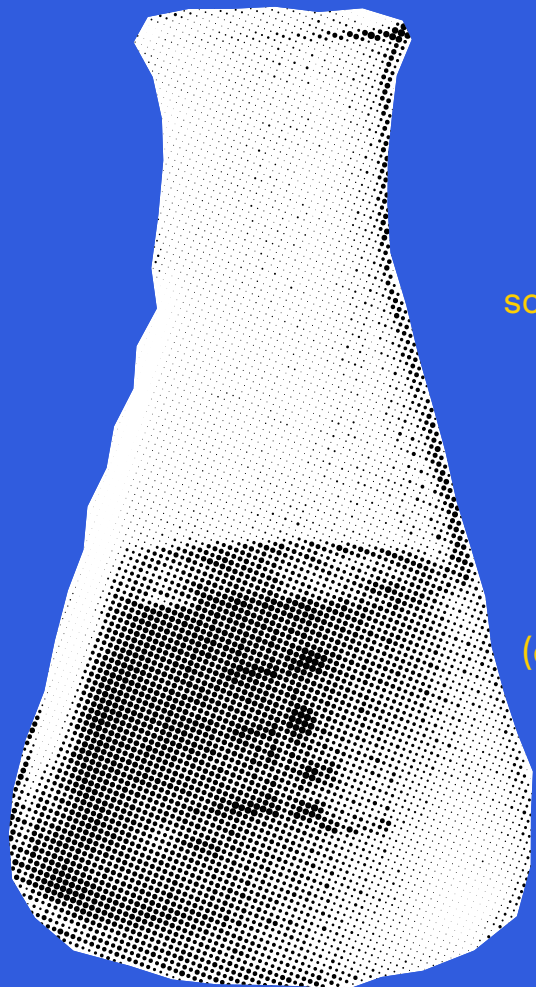


V. Institutional Test: The Rubric

Trial: Read an audition brief, syllabus, competition criteria, or programme note. Ask: what kinds of sound and personhood does this reward? What does it render irrelevant?

Hypothesis: Institutions don't just evaluate, they manufacture the ear that evaluates.

Decolonising move: Draft one alternative criterion (one line) that values relation over mastery: context, care, encounter, accountability.



The Maastricht Centre for the Innovation of Classical Music (MCICM) is a collaboration between Maastricht University, Zuyd University of Applied Sciences and philzuid. For more information on the MCICM's projects and researchers, please visit our website (www.mcicm.nl), which also contains news and events. For inquiries, please contact us at mcicm-fasos@maastrichtuniversity.nl.

This zine is based on a one-day event with the same title that took place on 13 October 2025. It was edited by Denise Petzold via Canva, with contributions by Pieter du Plessis, Eliz Gökdere, Erin Johnson-Williams, Jorge Lozano, Layan Nijem, and Liang-Kai Yu.

The team of the MCICM would like to thank everyone who contributed to this event and this zine with their time, energy and critical eye.

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Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences, Maastricht University.



