

Yarn/Wire Institute, 2022

Panel: Music in/of the Present

June 20, 2022, 1-3 pm, Staller Center, Music Wing, Room 0113

Livestream at: <https://twitch.tv/yarnwire>

Yarn/Wire is premised on the idea of music in and of the present: music that is created, performed, and heard in the contexts of the present. Panelists consider how the creative aspects of composition, performance, spontaneous composition, and critical thought participate in the scenes of musical practice in the Twenty-First Century. Our focus will be on the scenes of music in the field of what might be construed as “contemporary classical music,” but our goals will be to consider the broader contexts in which a “new” classical music tradition functions as an integral part of music making in the present.

Participants and Abstracts

Miki Kaneda, Do What you Love? Working in New Music After 2020

Musicians working in new music in the United States are among the rare, privileged, few who might find a source of love in their work. But such claims about love have unwittingly taken part in the accelerating exploitation of “love” as a rationale for devaluing both musical labor and labor for many others—including those who are far less likely to be able to claim love for their work. My analysis of contemporary musical labor largely concurs with recent critiques of the complicity of new music with capitalist structures by scholars including Andrea Moore, Marianna Ritchey, Will Robin, and John Phippen. Behind the veneer of “love,” schedules of musicians are ever more packed; self-entrepreneurship and the ability to perform the myriad tasks of flexible workers are basic job requirements of the performing musician. All the while, under the precarious labor arrangements of gig work, musicians struggle to provide basic care for their own mental health, their children, or elderly family members. However, in this presentation, I argue that the complex articulations of love in musical labor—especially those forms that emphasize collective care over individual gains—also harbor possibilities for opposing the exploitative confluences of love and labor that damagingly center individual happiness in the ecosystem of musical work in a capitalist labor environment. Based on fieldwork with musicians working in new music in New York City since 2015, my analysis homes in on the first year of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020. The global pandemic amplified the unevenness of the economic and physical toll unfolding along the lines of race, gender, and class. At the same time, the 2020 pause in the relentless cycle of never-ending work for musicians served as reminder of how an ethics of love in musical labor manifests through relational practices that are fundamental to creative processes and the social practices of music. The lesson I draw out from the moment

of the pause about musical labor is that an ethics of love in musical work offers more than a manifestation of exploitable labors of love.

Judith Lochhead, Music Now: Sonic Imaginings of New Futures

In *Philosophy of New Music*, philosopher/musician Theodor Adorno claimed that music can be a “catalyst for change in society,” while restricting that possibility to then-contemporary classical music of the mid-twentieth century. While disavowing Adorno’s racial and cultural biases against various types of non-classical music, I explore his fundamentally hopeful view of the transformative potentials of music in the present. While it may be true, as Luciano Berio points out, that “music can’t lower the cost of bread, is incapable of stopping...wars, [and] cannot eradicate the slums and injustice,” the affective powers of music as sensuous presence can spur imaginings of new futures. I consider three recent works that sonically image new ways of being: Thomas Meadowcroft’s *Another Children’s Television* (2021), George Lewis’s *In the Breach* (2015), and Katherine Young’s *When Stranger Things Happen* (2017).

Anna Reguero, Renewed Romanticisms in Travis Laplante’s Inner Garden

Inner Garden (New Amsterdam Records, 2021), a dreamy three-movement work written by saxophonist Travis Laplante and recorded with the new music ensemble Yarn/Wire, features seemingly contradictory styles and techniques. The work is composed yet improvisatory and includes stylistic minimalism and diatonicism but also noise and extended techniques. More than a sonic experiment, Laplante explained that he aimed to capture “the deepest sense of beauty at the center of the earth or the center of all of us” and members of Yarn/Wire use descriptors such as “organic,” “core of the earth,” “flowing,” and “mysterious.” Rather than hear such sounds and descriptions as conflicting, I propose that composers such as Laplante, and others who are considered “post-genre,” are blending sonic categories as an attempt toward a renewed Romanticism, reaching for beauty and transcendence through contemporary sonic means. In this talk, I will analyze how *Inner Garden* uses deconstructive techniques towards reconstructive means, which I claim is part of a new direction gaining traction in contemporary art music composition.

William Robin, Rethinking Musical Minimalism

The history of musical minimalism has fixated on the so-called “Big Four” composers: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, and Philip Glass, who have been canonized, in part, due to a persistent focus on a small group of primary sources. What would it mean to instead create a revisionist history of musical minimalism, through an alternative list of sources? This presentation discusses *On Minimalism: Documenting a Musical Movement* (forthcoming from University of California Press), an alternative history in collaboration with Kerry O’Brien, which foregrounds Black improvisers and encounters with non-Western musicians, rooting the genre in the innovations of non-white thinkers without overlooking its colonialist roots.

Biographies of the Panelists

Miki Kaneda (she/her) researches transcultural movements and the entanglements of race, gender, and empire in experimental, avant-garde and popular music. Her recent projects study the role of care in musical labor and contemporary musical practices. Miki teaches at Boston University in the Department of musicology and ethnomusicology.

Judith Lochhead is a music scholar whose work focuses on musical practices of the present in North America and Europe. Recent publications include: *Reconceiving Structure: New Tools in Music Theory and Analysis* (Routledge, 2015); *Sound and Affect: Sound, Music, World*, edited by Judith Lochhead, Eduardo Mendieta, and Stephen Decatur Smith (University of Chicago Press 2021); “Émilie du Châtelet, Kaija Saariaho and Heroes of the 21st Century,” *The Heroic in Music*, eds. Beate Kutschke and Katherine Butler; “Timbre Realities: A Phenomenological Study of Liza Lim’s *Extinction Events and Dawn Chorus*,” forthcoming in the *Oxford Handbook of the Phenomenology of Music*, eds. B. Steege, J. Wiskus, J. De Souza.; and “Multiplicities, Truth, Ethics: a queering analysis of Chaya Czernowin’s *Anea Crystal*,” in *Queering Music Theory*, ed. G. Lee. Lochhead teaches at Stony Brook University.

Anna Reguero is a musicologist and music analyst focused on investigating the aesthetics of post-genre music. She received a PhD in Music History and Theory from Stony Brook University in 2022. In addition to her scholarly work, Anna is a freelance music critic and arts reporter. She earned a master's in arts journalism from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University and was a National Endowment for Arts Journalism Institute fellow. Currently, Anna is the editor of the Eastman Case Studies, a publication that examines leadership challenges in music organizations.

William Robin is an assistant professor of musicology at the University of Maryland’s School of Music. *Industry: Bang on a Can and New Music in the Marketplace*, published in 2021 by Oxford University Press, examines the new-music festival Bang on a Can and their participation in major institutional shifts in contemporary music in the 1980s and 1990s. He is currently collaborating with musicologist Kerry O'Brien on the volume *On Minimalism: Documenting a Musical Movement*, forthcoming from University of California Press. As a public scholar, Robin contributes to *The New York Times*, hosts the podcast Sound Expertise, and tweets as @seatedovation.