

# NARRATING MUSICOLOGY REVIEWING THE HISTORY/ HISTORIES OF MUSICOLOGY



International Conference of the Institute of Musicology  
at the University of Bern, September 5th-8th, 2021

**Attention: This is an updated version of our call for papers published in October 2019. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, our conference, originally scheduled for October 2020, had to be postponed and will now take place in September 2021.**

In November 1996, a musicological colloquium was held at the University of Bern under the title *Musikwissenschaft - eine verspätete Disziplin?* ('Musicology - a Delayed Discipline?'). The discussions and outcomes that took place were then published four years later in an anthology of the same title, edited by Anselm Gerhard. The aim of both the conference and the publication was to focus less on specific key people or institutions, and instead foreground general tendencies within the history of musicology: from its beginning in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century until the time of publication, and with a scope also beyond the German-speaking world. Although this discussion itself was perhaps due sooner, the approach proved essential for considering the history of the musicological discipline as an object of study in itself. In light of the upcoming 100-year anniversary of the Institute of Musicology, Bern, which will take place in 2021, we now take the opportunity to once again reflect on these issues:

- What is the current state of the history of musicology as a discipline?
- How has the reflection on musicology changed current research as well as teaching contents?
- Can musicology still be understood as a "delayed discipline"?

Traditionally, musicology has been divided into three strands: historical musicology, systematic musicology and ethnomusicology. Additionally, related subjects such as music theory and music pedagogy have had an important impact on current research on the history of the discipline. The result of this, however, is that multiple – and at times even isolated – histories of musicology have developed. This conference focuses on these various narratives, and aims at encouraging an inter- as well as intra-disciplinary dialogue. The Bernese colloquium twenty years ago focused on the field of tension in musicology "between belief in progress and rejection of modernity". The discrepancy between international orientation and nationalist and chauvinistic tendencies, which were both present in the 1990s, were also addressed. The present conference asks, do such tensions still remain today?

Herein, a first focus concerns the question of whether the disclosure of the various historically conditioned ideological pitfalls, as well as the culturally specific contradictions within the discipline, have changed the self-perception of musicology as a whole. How important are national, social and ethnic categories in shaping the principal focus of the discipline's history nowadays? This conference focuses on the various narratives that have evolved within our field and questions the motivations which have led to these various regional histories. Therefore, the focus shall be extended beyond Western academic perspectives to a more global approach.

Another important aspect of this conference is the question of why we should study the history of our discipline at all.

- What kind of interaction is at play when, on the one hand we focus on disciplinary self-reflection, and on the other our objects of study?
- What are the objects of study of the history of this specific academic discipline?
- On the topic of musicology's protagonists: who is responsible for narrating the histories of musicology?
- How much power do various institutions have in shaping and constructing the narratives surrounding musicology?
- What roles do these narratives play in shaping the identities of scientists, institutions and various schools of thought?
- How can musicologists deal with the history of musicology with regard to current debates concerning the digital age and decolonialisation?

Since our first call for papers for this conference last October, which was well received by many researchers, a lot of changes have happened in discussions surrounding musicology as a discipline. Starting with the Black Lives Matter movements, strong protests against explicit (and hidden) structural racism have led to heated debates in various realms of our field. Discussions concerning the "whiteness" of musicology, anti-Semitism in music theory and decolonialisation in ethnomusicology, show how urgent intradisciplinary communication has become. As the organising committee we feel responsible to give additional room for these discussions, both independent of, and in relation to the wider conference themes.

Additionally, this new call for papers offers the possibility, to bring in further primary research on the discipline of musicology. The conference furthermore aims to provide a platform where discussions can happen across different generations and between the various sub-disciplines of musicology, music theory and music pedagogy.

The conference's core topics are:

- Reflections on the various histories within musicology (regional, national and international, as well as inter- and intra-disciplinary practice)
- The interaction between musicology's self-reflexion and our objects of study (protagonists, methods, institutions, the digital age)
- Diversity and inclusivity of musicology and its various sub-disciplines

We invite prospective participants to send their proposals (max. 300 words) for one of the following categories:

- Individual papers (20 minutes plus 10 minutes of discussion)
- Panels (3 related papers of 1.5 hours in total)
- Roundtables (4 shorter presentations of 15 minutes each plus a chaired discussion; 2 hours in total)
- Presentation of films, audio or other media

Please submit your abstracts to [narratingmusicology@musik.unibe.ch](mailto:narratingmusicology@musik.unibe.ch) by the **1st of February 2021**. Proposals will be evaluated anonymously and should therefore not contain the names of the authors. Successful applicants will be notified by the end of March 2021.

Further Information about the conference can be found at:

[www.narratingmusicology.home.blog](http://www.narratingmusicology.home.blog)