

EXPRESSION LANGUAGE MUSIC 3

OCTOBER 2-3, 2026

STORRS, CT

UConn

COLLEGE OF LIBERAL
ARTS AND SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY



EXPRESSION LANGUAGE MUSIC 3



Conference Website:
elm.clas.uconn.edu

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We would like to begin by acknowledging that the land on which we gather is the territory of the Eastern Pequot, Golden Hill Paugussett, Lenape, Mashantucket Pequot, Mohegan, Nipmuc and Schaghticoke Peoples who have stewarded this land throughout the generations. We thank them for their strength and resilience in protecting this land, and aspire to uphold our responsibilities according to their example.

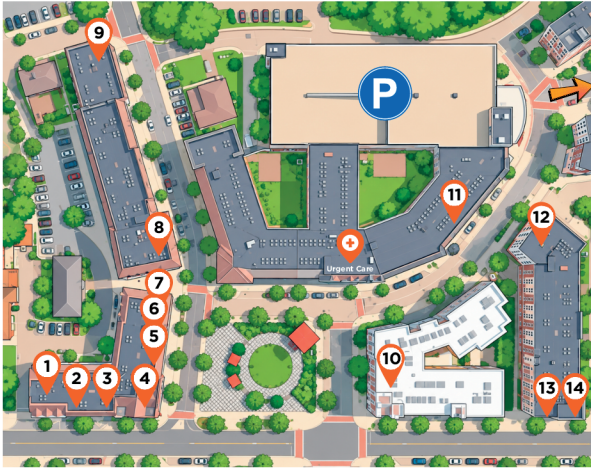
PARKING

Guest parking is available in the **North Parking Garage** (103 North Eagleville Road, Storrs, CT 06269). The current rate is \$2.00 per hour, with a maximum daily fee of \$30. Payment must be made upon entry for the expected duration of the visit via PayByPhone, Flowbird, or kiosk.

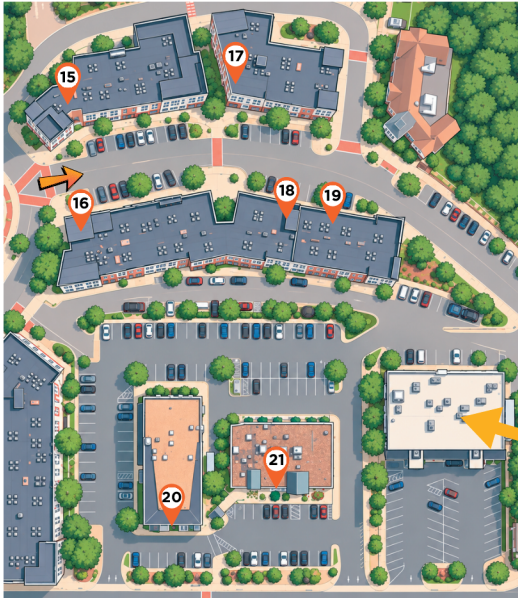


PayByPhone:
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DISCOVER STORRS CENTER



1. Moe's Southwest Grill
2. Playa Bowls
3. Daddy's Noodle Bar
4. Dog Lane Cafe
5. Subway
6. Insomnia Cookies
7. Mooyah Burgers & Fries
8. Square Peg Pizzeria
9. Jefferson Fry Company
10. CVS Pharmacy
11. Eatjoy
12. Blaze Pizza
13. Dunkin'
14. Gansett Wraps
15. Tea More Cafe
16. Huskies Restaurant & Bar
17. The Whale Tea
18. Kathmandu Kitchen & Bar
19. Dog House Subs
20. Nikki's Dog House
21. Starbucks



University Plaza

- Little Aladdin
- DP Dough
- Oriental Cafe
- Spice Venue
- Bagel Zone
- Tokyo Ramen

DINING

DOWNTOWNSTORRS.ORG/DINE



SHOPPING

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FRIDAY, OCTOBER 2 | ALUMNI CENTER; GREAT HALL

8:00 - 8:30	Registration & Coffee
8:30 - 8:40	Opening Remarks
8:40 - 9:50	Why do we love music? A view from cognitive neuroscience Robert Zatorre (McGill)
9:55 - 10:35	Expression, Communication, and Origins of Meaning: Four Milestones In the Evolution of Human Pragmatic Communication Dorit Bar-On (UConn)
10:35 - 10:45	Break
10:45 - 11:15	Acoustic Ecology and the Divergence of Music and Language: A Transmission Range Hypothesis Piotr Podlipniak (AMU, Poznań)
11:20 - 11:50	A Pluralistic Hypothesis of How Expressions Became Communicative Acts Jorge Bonet Gomez (Wollongong)
11:50 - 12:10	Transition to Storrs Hall/Nursing Building for Afternoon Session
12:10 - 13:55	Lunch
13:55 - 15:05	Diagram Semantics and Iconic Transparency Gabriel Greenberg (UCLA)
15:10 - 15:40	The Ups and Downs of Tone-Tune Bigram Analysis in Thai Song Text-Setting Micah Mooney (Michigan)
15:40 - 15:50	Break
15:50 - 17:00	Development, Enculturation, and Musical Meaning Erin Hannon (UNLV)
17:05 - 17:50	Understanding Authenticity of Live Performance: A Case Study of Foo Fighters' "Times Like These" Stefanie Acevedo (UConn)
17:50 - 18:05	Day 1 Wrap-up
18:30 - 20:30	Music Evening and Reception

Day 1 will begin in the Great Hall of the Alumni Center (2384 Alumni Drive), and will follow with lunch and the afternoon session in the Carolyn Ladd Widmer Wing, Storrs Hall / School of Nursing (231 Glenbrook Road). A reception will follow in Room 103 of the Zachs Family Fine Arts Administration Building (ZFA) (1295 Storrs Road).



North Garage to Alumni Center



Storrs Hall to ZFA



Alumni Center to Storrs Hall



ZFA to North Gara

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 3 | STORRS HALL; WIDMER WING

9:00 - 9:30

Coffee

9:30 - 10:40

The Brain's Crescendo: How Music Engagement Enriches Neurocognitive Development Across the Lifespan
Assal Habibi (USC)

10:45 - 11:15

I Made You a Mixtape: Relational Communication in Music Sharing and Playlist Curation
Ali Bebry (The New School)

11:15 - 11:25

Break

11:25 - 11:55

Effects of Rhythmic Priming on Grammaticality Judgement in English-Speaking Children
Justyna Skop-Wach (Dundee)

12:00 - 12:30

Why Does Music Make Us Move? An Embodied Dynamical Account of Music Perception and Action
Ji Chul Kim (UConn)

12:30 - 13:40

Lunch

13:40 - 14:50

Mapping Cross-Cultural Internal Representations in Music
Nori Jacoby (Cornell)

14:55 - 15:25

Combinatoriality Before Propositionality: Music, Language, and an Eventive Architecture of Representation
Carmen Wong (UIC)

15:25 - 15:35

Break

15:40 - 16:50

When and What Were the First Words? How They Caused Music and Language to Diverge
Steven Mithen (Reading)

16:50 - 18:00

Closing Discussion

Day 2 will be held in the Carolyn Ladd Widmer Wing, Storrs Hall / School of Nursing (231 Glenbrook Road).



North Garage to Storrs Hall

*“Musical sounds afforded one
of the bases for the
development of language.”*

- Charles Darwin, The Descent of Man (1871)

ROBERT ZATORRE

McGill University

WHY DO WE LOVE MUSIC? A VIEW FROM COGNITIVE NEUROSCIENCE

Music has existed in human societies since prehistory, perhaps in part because it allows expression and regulation of emotion, and evokes pleasure. In this lecture I will present findings from cognitive neuroscience that bear on the question of how we get from perception of sound patterns to pleasurable responses. Specifically I will discuss neuroimaging evidence from our lab focusing on the dopaminergic reward system, and its involvement in musical pleasure, and what happens when that system is disrupted. I propose that pleasure in music arises from interactions between cortical loops that enable predictions and expectancies to emerge from sound patterns, and subcortical systems responsible for reward and valuation. This model integrates knowledge derived from basic neuroscience of reward mechanisms with independently derived concepts, such as tension and anticipation, from music theory. It may also serve as a way of thinking more broadly about aesthetic rewards.

DORIT BAR-ON

UConn

EXPRESSION, COMMUNICATION, AND ORIGINS OF MEANING: FOUR MILESTONES IN THE EVOLUTION OF HUMAN PRAGMATIC COMMUNICATION

So-called Protolanguage is a theoretical construct designed to help explain the gradual phylogenetic emergence of human language from animal communication systems. In *Expression, Communication, and Origins of Meaning* (forthcoming, OUP), I argue that Protolanguage ought to be conceived as *pragmatically*—and therefore *psychologically*—intermediate. This places certain substantive constraints on the psychological capacities with which we can credit our nonlinguistic ancestors. In particular, we should not credit them with a Theory of Mind or a capacity for Gricean ‘mindreading’, or even the ability to entertain language-like (propositional-conceptual) thoughts. Instead, we should focus on the contribution of a basic, non-Gricean form of understanding others’ minds that nonhuman animals, preverbal infants, and even adult humans, regularly exercise in their intersubjective interactions – what I label “mind-minding”. Mind-minding, as I theorize it, becomes possible in social creatures who engage *expressive communication*, which enables them to share with each other psychological states. The emergence of expressive communication thus marks a crucial first milestone on the evolution of pragmatic communication.

After explaining the contribution of expressive communication, I propose three additional hypothetical milestones on our ancestors’ path toward a *pragmatically intermediate Protolanguage* (“PIP”), relying on a combination of empirical and theoretical considerations. These milestones can be used to describe a trajectory leading from an ancestral communication system that resembled existing forms of animal communication to PIP.

PIOTR PODLIPNIAK

Adam Mickiewicz University; Poznań

ACOUSTIC ECOLOGY AND THE DIVERGENCE OF MUSIC AND LANGUAGE: A TRANSMISSION RANGE HYPOTHESIS

Language and music share auditory foundations and prosodic features, prompting proposals of a common evolutionary origin. Yet, they diverge sharply: language conveys propositional meaning through dialogic, amplitude-modulated signals, whereas music is collective, repetitive, rhythmically regular, and pitch-stable. This proposal emphasizes that these differences reflect distinct transmission-range pressures within hominin acoustic ecology.



Long-distance intergroup calls favored loud, synchronized, pitch-matched, and redundancy-rich signals—traits characteristic of music. Short-distance intragroup communication favored less conspicuous, rapidly degrading amplitude-based signals, aligning with speech. Therefore, music likely evolved as a long-range signaling system, while language specialized for close-range interaction.

JORGE BONET GOMEZ

University of
Wollongong

A PLURALISTIC HYPOTHESIS OF HOW EXPRESSIONS BECAME COMMUNICATIVE ACTS

We constantly make our inner states, thoughts, and feelings available to others through expressions. In fact, many authors have highlighted the important role that expressions play in communication (Bar-On, 2004; Green, 2007; Wharton, 2009). Within this “expressivist” movement, scholars have emphasized the importance that expressions may have had in the evolution of communication (Bar-On, 2013; Heintz & Scott-Phillips, 2023). However, it remains unclear which expressions can become communicative and how this process occurs. In this talk, I attempt to clarify this issue within an evolutionary framework by proposing a pluralistic hypothesis about how expressions can become elements of communication.

GABRIEL GREENBERG

University of
California, Los
Angeles

DIAGRAM SEMANTICS AND ICONIC TRANSPARENCY

Diagrams are an extremely diverse class of iconic representations, including Cartesian graphs, Venn diagrams, directed graphs, bar charts, and more. Unlike other forms of iconicity, such as pictures, maps, and 3D models, most diagram systems were only introduced and stabilized in the last 300 years. As a group, diagrams enlist spatial and chromatic properties to capture relational and quantitative data. But how and why do diagrams work, in detail? A first approach aims to explicate the semantic rules by which users interpret diagrams. Such investigation yields disarmingly simple interpretive rules for most familiar diagram systems. But this puzzling, for why then are viable diagram systems so rare and so recent? In general, a purely semantic approach has trouble distinguishing merely iconic diagrams from genuinely useful iconicity. In this talk, I outline a different approach, one that formalizes principles of iconic “transparency.” The result is a scoring function for diagram systems that is responsive to embodied aspects of the interpretive process, such as readings, looks, and comparisons. The project as a whole aims to understand the space of possible diagrams, as well as the creative evolution that explains the emergence of the diagrammatic systems we collectively use today.

MICAH MOONEY

University of
Michigan

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF TONE-TUNE BIGRAM ANALYSIS IN THAI SONG TEXT-SETTING

Corpus studies often measure tone-tune matching in tonal-language songs through bigram analysis, comparing tone-level contour with melodic contour between adjacent syllables. For Thai songs, previous corpus studies have used contrasting methodologies that produce conflicting results. I argue that these conflicts are due to inconsistent treatment of Thai’s contour tones. Rather than assigning contour tones a fixed height, this paper analyzes how each tonebigram is melodically set across a Thai song corpus. I then return to audio recordings to show how performers realize contour tones on the musical surface, arguing that bigram analysis alone cannot fully evaluate Thai text-setting.

ERIN HANNON

University of
Nevada, Las Vegas

DEVELOPMENT, ENCULTURATION, AND MUSICAL MEANING

Singing, dancing, and being emotionally moved by music are widespread, everyday aspects of human musicality which are often assumed to reflect human biological predispositions. However, an overemphasis on musical predispositions ignores the crucial role of developmental processes that shape musical behaviors and experiences over the course of a lifetime. In particular, the tremendous cultural diversity of music and musical behaviors may have implications for how and when during development listeners build the knowledge and skills that enable them to respond meaningfully to music within a given cultural context. I will illustrate this point using musical entrainment as an example, providing an overview of developmental evidence that contrasts the seemingly precocious perceptual abilities of young infants with the relatively slow developmental trajectory of entrainment-related production and perception abilities. I will highlight cross-cultural differences in rhythm perception and production in listeners of different ages, and discuss the implications of enculturation for social and emotional aspects of musical experience. In particular, I will discuss recent evidence from our lab and others examining the development of musical groove, as well as touch on broader work illustrating how developing musical abilities during childhood shape music preferences and real time experiences of musical emotion. To the extent that a listener's predictions or expectations drive emotionally meaningful musical experiences, it is critical to examine the interface between developing musical expertise and those experiences.

STEFANIE ACEVEDO

UConn

UNDERSTANDING AUTHENTICITY OF LIVE PERFORMANCE: A CASE STUDY OF FOO FIGHTERS' "TIMES LIKE THESE"

This paper examines the evolution of authenticity in rock music by analyzing the relationship between musical structure and extra-musical context. While traditionally, the recorded object is prioritized as the primary site of rock authenticity (Gracyk 1996), this study adopts Philip Auslander's (1998) framework which views authenticity not as an innate "essence" but as a culturally-determined convention—a "perceived quality of sincerity" verified through live performance (Frith 1981, 71).

Central to this argument is the premise that authenticity cannot reside solely within musical structures themselves; rather it requires a cognitive agent to imbue those structures with meaning based on extra-musical knowledge and historical circumstances (Meyer 1956, Kramer 2002, Clarke 2005).

Integrating Alan Moore's (2005, 2012) concept of personic environment, I utilize an ecological psychology lens to explore how listeners navigate the relationship between a performance persona and the sonic landscape. This framework is applied to a longitudinal analysis of the Foo Fighters' song "Times Like These." By comparing the 2002 studio recording to subsequent (mainly post-2020) live iterations, I demonstrate how specific musical affordances interact with shifting cultural contexts to alter the song's perceived meaning and the band's authenticity.

I argue that the song's authenticity is not static but progressively re-imbued through significant extra-musical disruptions, specifically the COVID-19 pandemic and the sudden death of the band's drummer, Taylor Hawkins. These events transformed the song from a standard rock hit into a site of collective mourning and resilience.

Ultimately, this paper concludes that rock authenticity is a fluid, historical process, where the "personic environment" serves as an interface between the artist's performance and the listener's socio-historical reality. This case study illustrates that as the band's culturo-historical moment shifts, the extra-musical dimensions become the primary drivers of sincerity and emotional resonance.

ASSAL HABIBI

University of
Southern
California

THE BRAIN'S CRESCENDO: HOW MUSIC ENGAGEMENT ENRICHES NEUROCOGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT ACROSS THE LIFESPAN

Learning to play a musical instrument is a uniquely complex, multisensory experience that engages cognitive, sensory, motor, and emotional systems. Musical expertise develops through sustained practice that requires focused attention, error monitoring, adaptive learning, and the ability to flexibly adjust behavior as task demands change. Growing evidence suggests that these experiences can promote neurocognitive development and brain plasticity. However, findings across the field remain mixed, reflecting the challenges of conducting randomized controlled trials, the scarcity of long-term longitudinal studies, variability in training approaches, and individual differences in the intensity, duration, and quality of musical engagement. In this talk, I will present findings from two complementary lines of research examining the impact of musical engagement across the lifespan. First, I will describe results from a longitudinal study of children participating in two after-school music programs in historically underserved communities in Los Angeles. Compared with untrained peers, children receiving music training demonstrated stronger performance on measures of executive function, particularly inhibitory control and working memory, during the early school years. These behavioral differences were accompanied by changes in brain structure and function within sensory and frontal networks. Interestingly, as participants approached adolescence, behavioral and neural differences became less pronounced, suggesting that music training may accelerate the maturation of cognitive processes during sensitive developmental periods, with advantages diminishing as these systems approach developmental maturity. Second, I will present findings from a series of intervention studies examining the effects of group singing in older adults. Following 15 to 20 weeks of participation, individuals in the choir groups, compared with active control groups, demonstrated improved speech-in-noise perception alongside changes in both early sensory and later auditory evoked potentials. These findings suggest enhanced bottom-up auditory processing as well as improved top-down attentional control, highlighting the capacity of musical engagement to support adaptive neuroplasticity later in life. Together, these studies demonstrate that musical engagement can strengthen sensory, cognitive, and attentional processes across the lifespan. While childhood may represent a particularly sensitive period for shaping brain development, meaningful neural and behavioral benefits continue to emerge through active music-making well into older adulthood, underscoring music's potential as a powerful tool for promoting lifelong brain health.

ALI BEBRY

The New School

I MADE YOU A MIXTAPE: RELATIONAL COMMUNICATION IN MUSIC SHARING AND PLAYLIST CURATION

This study examines mixtape playlist sharing as a form of relational communication. Using dyadic interviews and survey data, it explores how individuals curate playlists to convey social and emotional messages, how recipients interpret these messages, and how attention to song lyrics shapes these processes. Participants complete semi-structured interviews and the Music Use and Background Questionnaire (MUSEBAQ), with qualitative thematic analysis and complementary quantitative analyses. The project advances understanding of lyric focus in musical meaning-making. Data collection is ongoing, with findings expected to inform theories of interpersonal meaning-making and potential applications in therapeutic contexts.

JUSTYNA SKOP- WACH

University of
Dundee

EFFECTS OF RHYTHMIC PRIMING ON GRAMMATICALITY JUDGEMENT IN ENGLISH- SPEAKING CHILDREN

Regular rhythmic primes have been shown to enhance grammatical processing in children, yet underlying mechanisms remain unclear. This study investigates whether rhythmic priming improves grammaticality judgment performance in 77 English-speaking children aged 5-12 years, and whether effects are modulated by individual differences in linguistic, reading, and rhythmic skills. Children complete a computer-based task in which each trial begins with a regular or irregular prime, followed by a grammaticality judgment or non-linguistic control task. Individual profiles are assessed using standardised measures of language, reading, and rhythm. Findings inform theoretical accounts of rhythmic facilitation and guide future research on rhythm-based interventions.

JI CHUL KIM

UConn

WHY DOES MUSIC MAKE US MOVE? AN EMBODIED DYNAMICAL ACCOUNT OF MUSIC PERCEPTION AND ACTION

A new theory of music perception and action is introduced, called embodied dynamics of music (EDM). EDM brings embodiment and dynamical systems together to describe music perception and performance as dynamic patterns of coordinated movement distributed over, and maintained by, the brain, the body, and the environment. As an alternative to the standard cognitive, computational approaches, EDM, powered by the mathematical language of coordination dynamics, provides new ways to describe and study musical patterns, which can further our understanding of the deep connection between music, body and movement. This talk will focus on how EDM reconceptualizes rhythm perception.

NORI JACOBY

Cornell University

MAPPING CROSS-CULTURAL INTERNAL REPRESENTATIONS IN MUSIC

Music is shaped by both biological and cultural factors, but the extent of each influence is not fully understood. This is in part due to recruitment bias, since studies tend to rely on English-speaking or student participants. Additionally, existing behavioral techniques are frequently unsuited for cross-cultural research and lack the capability to capture rich and complex perceptual spaces. In this talk, I will discuss my work in addressing these limitations. I will cover two complementary lines of research: the first involves using computational methods in global fieldwork to explore how pitch, melody, and rhythm are represented by different populations, including small-scale societies and traditional music experts. The second line of research focuses on expanding online experimentation through innovative behavioral methods, such as online tapping and singing, and by recruiting beyond standard platforms like Prolific or Qualtrics. I will also describe how our platform, PsyNet (www.psynet.dev), leverages human-in-the-loop sampling to facilitate the study of richer, multidimensional perceptual spaces. Our findings suggest that we should re-evaluate our assumptions about which musical building blocks are shared across cultures and which ones are culturally specific.



CARMEN WONG

University of
Illinois; Chicago

COMBINATORIALITY BEFORE PROPOSITIONALITY: MUSIC, LANGUAGE, AND AN EVENTIVE ARCHITECTURE OF REPRESENTATION

Musical perception provides evidence that musical cognition involves structured mental representations. Drawing on neurocognitive research on music and language as combinatorial systems, I argue that their partially overlapping processing mechanisms do not imply a shared representational architecture. The Language of Thought hypothesis characterizes propositional mental representations as syntactically structured combinations of mental symbols. Musical cognition, however, points to an alternative. I propose an eventive architecture of representation in which the representational vehicle is structured to mirror the temporal structure of an unfolding event. Musical cognition may therefore be combinatorial without adopting the sentence-like architecture characteristic of propositional representation.

STEVEN MITHEN

Reading
University

WHEN AND WHAT WERE THE FIRST WORDS? HOW THEY CAUSED MUSIC AND LANGUAGE TO DIVERGE

Understanding the evolutionary histories of language and music informs us about how and why we use them today, their respective strengths, weaknesses and risks, and how we might enhance their use for our social and individual well-being. It is a reasonable hypothesis that language and music evolved from a single communicatory system used by our ancestors within which emotional expression was prominent. What was the nature of that ancestral system? When, why and how did it bifurcate into language and music? In my presentation I will draw on both long-known and recent discoveries in a range of academic disciplines including archaeology, linguistics and neuroscience to argue the divergence began with the 'invention' of the first words soon after two million years ago. What could those words have been like? What were they about? Their on-going divergence was a gradual process, as both musicality and linguality evolved in separate directions to provide complementary functions within hominin society, as they continue to do so today. To make this case, I will take us through the course of human evolution, proposing the stages of language evolution from the first words, through the emergence of grammar to complex metaphorical utterances, exploring how such developments in language were matched by the changing nature and role of musical expression.

Notes:

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