Sound In/As Theory:
Means and Meanings in Motion

An Interdisciplinary Conference on Sound, Media, and Cultural Studies
April 22–24, 2027
Eastman School of Music at the University of Rochester

Call for Proposals

What is the relationship between sound and theory? Theory is often a means to make meaning of sound. But how might we consider sound as a means to articulate meaningful theories?

Scholars across many fields have been testing this boundary. Practice-based researchers contribute to theory in interdisciplinary areas like sound studies, where critical-creative projects engage with social and political themes, as well as in design engineering and makerspaces, where new musical instruments enact their own epistemologies of sound through performance. In Black studies, scholars theorize sound as a mode of resistance and fugitive world-making that pushes against the primacy of language. And in a more philosophical vein, posthumanist and new materialist theories often draw on sound as a vibratory model for thinking across different registers of reality. Taken together, these and other interventions make clear the relationship between sound and theory is always in motion and the question of meaning is always open to debate.

This conference aims to foster critical dialogue on the interaction between *sound* and *theory* as these keywords are broadly construed across different fields of study. We invite proposals from scholars who theorize sound, practitioners who sonify theory, and also those who combine theory and sonic practice into a hybrid praxis. Available formats include 20-minute paper presentations, special-themed sessions, discussion panels, posters, workshops, and demonstrations. In your proposal, please indicate your preferred format and provide a brief description or abstract of your contribution (no more than 500 words). Further details, including a list of relevant themes, can be found online at https://www.esm.rochester.edu/esm-event/sound-in-as-theory-conference/.

DEADLINE: submit all proposals by midnight (EST) on Wednesday, January 6th, 2027 to soundtheoryconference@gmail.com.

The conference will feature three distinguished keynote speakers—George Lewis (Columbia), Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier (UC Berkeley), and Martin Scherzinger (NYU)—who together bring distinct disciplinary perspectives to the sound-theory question. Additionally, the conference will include concerts each night, including George Lewis's 2024 opera, *The Comet*, by the Eastman Opera Theatre (April 22), a live performance by King Britt (April 23), and a concert featuring the Electroacoustic Music Studios at Eastman (EMuSE) (April 24). Support comes from the Central New York Humanities Corridor Working Group on Sound and Media, as well as by the Eastman School of Music, the Glenn Watkins Lecture in Musicology, and the Hanson Visiting Professorship in Composition.

Below is a list of suggested themes, topics, and questions, though it is not meant to be exhaustive, and we encourage submission on other subjects relevant to the conference theme:

- Critical organological approaches to theorizing musical (and scientific) instruments and interfaces
- Capacity of sound to articulate, enact, or embody cultural perspective, or the politics of a community
- How musicians and artists understand the theoretical work of their creative activities
- On the importance of maintaining a critical orientation in sound studies and the prospect of mounting critical-creative resistance through artistic practice
- Performance studies, and the intersections of sound, theory, and analysis
- Theorizing the sound of crisis (or, the crisis of sound) in the Anthropocene
- Afrofuturist perspectives on the power of sound to theorize counter-narratives
- On the relevance of radical conjuncturalist approaches from literary theory and cultural studies (e.g., Stuart Hall) to theorizing popular music and media today
- Critical perspectives on the impact of AI / machine learning on creative music practices, listening habits, labor relations, communication systems, material ecologies, etc.
- On the status of non-textual artifacts in global historiographies of music theory
- Perspectives on social and technological mediation in musical performance (e.g., electronic and digital instrumentation, extended techniques, and historical period practices)
- How musical genre and aesthetic practices (e.g., new conceptualism, free jazz, punk rock, Americana) can work to theorize the social and political world
- Pedagogical approaches to working with sound or sonic technologies in the classroom
- On the politics of metadata and classification in digital audio
- Ethnographic perspectives on sound in/as theory
- Archival sound(s) and theories of the archive
- Theories of listening and listening practices
- On the place of sound and theory within academic or cultural institutions
- Disciplinary perspectives on sonic practices or theories about sound