

Colloquium March 20, 2026
Stephanie Venturino (Yale School of Music)

Title: “Alma Mahler-Werfel’s “Ich wandle unter Blumen” and the Dualist Musical Imagination”

Abstract: Like many of her fin-de-siècle works, Alma Mahler-Werfel’s “Ich wandle unter Blumen” from her *Fünf Lieder* (1910) presents a music-analytical challenge. On the local level, the song features non-functional, common-tone-centric harmonic progressions that resist conventional tonal interpretations; yet on a global level, the song seemingly achieves a coherent design that aptly reflects Heinrich Heine’s eponymous text. In this presentation, I argue that harmonic dualism—particularly extensions of Ernst Kurth’s (1931) “dynamic dualism” and Vincent d’Indy’s (1912) dualist-focused “order relationships”—helps explain the song’s highly chromatic harmonic language and broader tonal organization. Beyond offering insight into “Ich wandle unter Blumen,” this exploration of dualism’s musicanalytical potential addresses a significant gap in current scholarship: while nineteenth-century dualisms have received considerable scholarly attention, “the endurance of dualism as a theoretical conceit in the generation after Riemann has been less frequently acknowledged” (Tan 2020, 16). Even more rarely has twentieth-century dualist thought been applied in analytical practice (Pau 2016; Revuluri 2016; Venturino 2022). The presentation proceeds in four parts. First, I briefly introduce the concept of harmonic dualism and trace its modern reception. Second, I explain Kurth’s “dynamic dualism” and connect his dualist ideas to the melodic and harmonic tension processes that animate MahlerWerfel’s song. Third, I present d’Indy’s dualist-focused “order relationships” and apply his concept to explain the song’s common-tone sonorities and large-scale tonal design. In both cases, I consider how these dualist approaches illuminate the text and dramatic action, particularly shifts between the narrator’s reality and her love-drunken dream state. Fourth, I reflect on the strengths and shortcomings of these dualist analytical approaches. Where do they provide insight into “Ich wandle unter Blumen,” and where do they fall short? How might dualism help us, as Kurth puts it, “approach music as if one were faced with its wonders for the first time”? As he remarks, “it is good to force oneself quite often to adopt this attitude” ([1931] 2022, 62).

Bio: Stephanie Venturino is an assistant professor of music analysis and musicianship at the Yale School of Music. Her research interests include twentieth- and twenty-first-century French music, the history of music theory, and music theory and aural skills pedagogy. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Music Theory Online*, *Music Theory and Analysis*, and *Theoria: Historical Aspects of Music Theory*, as well as in edited collections from Cambridge University Press, Routledge, and University of Rochester Press. She is co-editor of and contributor to *Chromatic Harmony: Methodological Approaches in Dialogue* (Routledge, 2027), an ecumenical exploration—through the lens of Alma Mahler-Werfel’s “Ich wandle unter Blumen”—of how differing outlooks on chromatic harmony interact with, diverge from, and complement one another. She also serves as reviews editor for *Theory and Practice*, secretary of the Music Theory Society of New York State, and chair of the SMT Student Presentation Award Committee. A native of Rochester, N.Y., she holds degrees in music theory (Ph.D., M.A., B.M.) and classical saxophone performance (B.M. with Performer’s Certificate) from the Eastman School of Music.