

**Colloquium March 27, 2026**  
**Daniel Walden (Yale University)**

**Title:** “On the Seventh Partial: Tuning as *Stimmung*”

**Abstract:**

It is a truth universally acknowledged that the consonances of Western harmony and counterpoint derive from ratios present in the overtone series: the octave is given by the ratio between the second and first partials (2:1), the fifth by the ratio between the third and the second (3:2), and so forth. But the overtone series is theoretically infinite, while the number of consonances is finite. Zarlino called it quits at the sixth partial, arguing that the *senario* (1:2:3:4:5:6) furnished the full range of consonances—octave, fifth, fourth, and thirds—that harmony required. Legions of theorists followed suit, leading to Schenker's proclamation that "no overtone beyond the fifth in the series [= the sixth partial] has any application to our tonal system": "it is a wonderful, strange, and inexplicably mysterious *fact*, but a fact, nevertheless." The tonal regions beyond the *senario* has thus long been treated as the *terra nullius* of tonal theory and practice, rich with potential, but fallow.

Yet at the margins of the history of music theory, many are intent on penetrating that expanse: some treating it as terrain for the West's future capture, others as a domain already claimed by one of the West's Others. I will look at two such figures—Johanna Kinkel (Bonn 1810-1858) and Nicholas Ballanta (Freetown 1893-1962)—who sought to articulate what harmony grounded in a *septario* looked like. The former pointed towards the music of Frederic Chopin, as well as the "next generation" of composers fed by his example; the latter to the music of Africa and its diaspora. I argue that what links their perspectives, notwithstanding the gulf in time and space between them, are 1) their concerns for tonal function over quantifiable reality—i.e. for intervals that function "septimally" even when they are not actually tuned as such—and 2) their belief that the ability to hear such functions might disclose different ways (e.g. feminine, African) of being-in-the-world—*Stimmungen*, in the parlance of Martin Heidegger.

**Bio:**

*Coming soon*