



Institute for Social Justice



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

SATURDAY AUGUST 13 2016 | 10AM UNTIL 6PM

MUSIC & SOCIAL JUSTICE 2016

ISABEL MENTON THEATRE
11 MOUNT STREET, NORTH SYDNEY

RSVP on our website www.isj.acu.edu.au

MUSIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Music has accompanied, inspired, and given voice to struggles for justice for centuries.

FEATURING



Struggles for justice have also inspired composers and musicians. In this workshop, we will explore the links between music and social justice through thoughtful investigations of these links, and through live performance of some very powerful music.



MARLENE CUMMINS

Marlene Cummins is Australia's foremost Indigenous female blues writer and performer. Marlene knows the blues from an Aboriginal woman's perspective in this country and her story is one of vulnerability, strength and survival.



LISA MOORE

Described as "brilliant and searching... beautiful and impassioned...lustrous at the keyboard" by The New York Times, Lisa Moore's performances combine music and theatre with expressive and emotional power – whether in the delivery of the simplest song, a solo recital or a fiendish chamber score.

Image courtesy of Yumiko Izu

SPEAKERS



“The Lessons of Jornaleros: Migrant Musicians, Emancipatory Education, and the Aims of Critical Theory”

Paul Apostolidis, *Whitman College and Institute for Social Justice/ACU*

Responding to Jacques Rancière’s meditations on emancipatory education, Samuel Chambers proposes that critical theory should center its efforts on enabling and calling attention to demonstrations of intellectual equality. Such demonstrations, for Chambers (and Rancière) spring from moments when those who have been socially positioned as lacking both knowledge and faculties for knowing step forth to manifest themselves as the intellectual equals of all.

This paper elaborates this vision for critical theory through readings of Rancière and Chambers in conjunction with reflections on an extraordinary documentary film produced by a contemporary organization of Latin American migrant day laborers in the United States. Titled “Jornaleros,” (“day laborers”), this short film about day laborers’ musical and artistic projects enacts, in startling and ironic fashion, the protagonists’ self-assertion as subjects who refuse to be defined by their social role as “workers.” The film shows day laborers executing musical and other

aesthetic interventions that re-order the distribution of the sensible, that deploy the democratizing discursive resources that Rancière denotes as “literarity,” and that splice such efforts to collective political mobilizations. Re-reading Rancièrian theory in association with *Jornaleros* thus clarifies the complex multi-dimensionality of the challenges critical theory faces in seeking to facilitate and spotlight exhibitions of intellectual equality, in ways that neither Rancière nor Chambers fully captures.

This exercise also gives us important critical distance on the excessive formalism and temporal limitations of the Rancièrian egalitarian vision. When this conception of aesthetic politics is critically leavened with certain principles of popular education – the practical philosophy of emancipatory education that imbues the day labor movement and suffuses *Jornaleros* – it can acquire added substantive depth, temporal extension, and political heft.



“Toward a Radical Democratic Groove: Receptivity and the Arts of Political Musicality”

Romand Coles and Lia Haro, *Institute for Social Justice/ACU*

“Neoliberal economic rationality deploys linguistic practices (e.g., Wendy Brown’s analysis of “benchmarks”, “best practices”, “outcome-based metrics”, “assessments”, “messaging”, “branding”) that undermine a “political musicality” that is indispensable to radical democratic politics. Such rationality governs our voices, ears, bodies, and imaginations in ways that proscribe many kinds of questioning and radicalization (concerning power, justice, creative alternatives and normative horizons) and render political “groove” nearly impossible.

Based on a book-length research project, this presentation examines elements of political musicality necessary for re-learning and advancing arts of radical democratic groove that are an often neglected well-spring of power. While others (most notably, Cornel West) have explored the jazz-like improvisational characteristics of radical democratic voicing, we focus on the prominence of full-bodied receptivity and

listening in the not-coincidentally-simultaneous emergence of new expressions in jazz and the U.S. civil rights movement in the late 1950’s and early 1960’s, when both musical and political groove were in one of their most inventive and powerful phases.

We pay careful attention to the theory and practices of receptivity in both the movement called “free jazz” and the “freedom movement” in order to investigate not only our receptive powers, but the political powers of receptive relationality. What we theorise as “receptive expressivity” and “expressive receptivity” in bass players such as Charlie Haden and Victor Wooten is particularly illuminating here.

We develop this work in conversation with a host of contemporary theorists investigating receptivity, responsiveness and listening. These themes are developed further in the political action research, and ethnographic aspects of our collaborative work.”



SPEAKERS



“The Political Elephant in Duke Bluebeard’s Castle”

Martin Bresnick, *School of Music, Yale University*

Béla Bartók and Béla Balázs’ great operatic collaboration Duke Bluebeard’s Castle (Kékszakállú Herceg Vára) was completed in 1911 and later revised for its first performance in 1917. Although the premiere was not a success Duke Bluebeard’s Castle has since become a standard of the 20th operatic repertoire. There have been numerous attempts to characterize the opera’s

elusive meanings. Symbolist, Folkloric, Psychological, Misogynist, Feminist, among other perspectives, have all provided apposite explanations for this complex work. Created as it was by the communist Balázs and the radical Bartók, the elephant in Duke Bluebeard’s Castle is, I propose, the opera’s uncompromisingly leftist political import.



“Just Music?”

Nikolas Kompridis, *Institute for Social Justice/ACU*

Critical theorists of various stripes have claimed to hear in certain kinds of music or certain forms of music-making, an outline of an alternative ethics and politics, one which is more attuned, literally and metaphorically, to justice. My paper begins with these questions: Are the relevant kinds of music or forms music-making themselves just – just in some ethically and politically meaningful sense that is inseparable from the kind of music or form of music-making they are? Or are they merely instrumental to the purpose of creating a more just world? Put

in a more facile way, is the music just, or is it just music? This leads to further questions about just how “autonomous” music should be to be “just” in the meaningful sense: does music disconnect itself from justice the more “autonomous” it becomes? It also raises the question of how much music (or any art, for that matter) can be the bearer of ethical and political expectations and claims. To facilitate the exploration of these difficult to answer questions, I will consider some specific pieces of music, and also offer a brief reading of the film, *Twenty Feet from Stardom*.



“The Musicology of Urban Ethics: Flow and Call-Response from Ferguson, Missouri to Mexico City”

Cynthia Willett, *Department of Philosophy, Emory University*

From Mexican protests against drug cartels and corrupt governments to Ferguson, Missouri’s Black Lives Matter, art and cultural movements are developing in tandem with visions of ethics.

Since the 1990s critics have theorized these movements in terms of what Nicholas Bourriaud calls relational aesthetics. I unfold various features of ethico-aesthetic relationality. Among these features are the conversion of negative to positive energy, the reconfiguration of social bonds, and an appeal to moral beauty. These features occur as aspects of two dynamic structures of relationality that I interpret, via an Africana musicology, as

patterns of rhythmic flow and call-response.

Rhythmic flow and call-response patterns shape the corporeal and affectively charged dynamics of urban lives across the Americas. Creative practices ranging from multimedia art to popular rap music counter the negative charges and territorial markings of the geopolitical map as drawn by the American drug wars.

Without formal leadership or explicit theories to guide them, these creative practices carry the insistent rhythms and tones of radical political change. This talk is based on a book project titled *The Musicology of Ethics*.