

The Symphony and its Publics: 1918–1968

La symphonie et ses publics (1918–1968)



Klaus Mäkelä dirigeait l'Orchestre royal du Concertgebouw au Palau de la Música Catalana, Barcelone, 26.01.2025.
Crédit : Chuyu Zhang

Study Day / Journée d'étude
26.06.2026

Université de Genève

Bâtiment des Philosophes, salle 216

Boulevard des Philosophes 22

Programme

9:40 **Welcome / Mot d'accueil**

Panel 1 – Resonances in Eastern Europe / Perspectives d'Europe de l'Est
(Chair: Nicolas Donin)

10:00 **Miloš Bralović (Belgrade)**
Stanojlo Rajičić, Conservative Critics,
and Symphony No. 2 as a Lost Opportunity

10:35 **Gvantsa Ghvinjilia (Tbilisi)**
Parabolic Response to Soviet Cultural Policy:
The Case of Shalva Mshvelidze's *Zviadauri*

11:10 *Coffee break / Pause*

Panel 2 – Patrons, media, discourse / Mécènes, médias, discours
(Chair: Anna Stoll-Knecht)

11:30 **Chuyu Zhang (Bern/Geneva)**
The Realism Complex: On Robert Blum's Symphonies Nos. 4 and 6

12:05 **Claire Lapalu (Paris)**
Modalités et enjeux du discours radiophonique sur la symphonie
contemporaine en France entre 1945 et 1968

12:40 *Lunch / Déjeuner*

Keynote Presentation / Conférence invitée
(Chair: Chuyu Zhang)

14:00 **Ben Earle (Birmingham)**
The Nazi Symphony

15:10 *Coffee break / Pause*

**Panel 3 – Soviet Symphonies at home and abroad /
Les symphonies soviétiques, à domicile et à l'étranger**
(Chair: Chris Walton)

15:30 **Richard Louis Gillies (Nottingham)**
Composing Utopia: Nikolai Myaskovsky's Symphony No. 12

16:05 **Madeline Roycroft (Melbourne)**
French Conductors, Soviet Symphonies:
Shostakovich's Wartime Trilogy in Post-War Paris

16:40 *Coffee break / Pause*

Panel 4 – From National to Global / Du national au global

(Chair: Nicolas Donin)

17:00 **Chris Walton (Bern/Basel)**

Apartheid and the Twelve-Note Symphony

17:35 **Luis Velasco-Pufleau (Montréal/Bern)**

Faire écouter la nation : La *Sinfonía India* de Carlos Chávez et la construction du Mexique postrévolutionnaire

19:00 *Dinner / Dîner*

Café Restaurant du Grütli

Rue du Général-Dufour 16, 1204 Genève

This Study Day is part of the project “Helvetia through a Twelve-Note Lens” at the Bern Academy of the Arts (HKB) that has received funding from the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF).

Cette journée d'étude s'inscrit dans le cadre du projet « Helvetia through a Twelve-Note Lens » de l'Académie des arts de Berne (HKB), qui a bénéficié d'un financement du Fonds national suisse de la recherche scientifique (FNS).

Organisation

Chuyu Zhang

Scientific Committee/Comité scientifique

Nicolas Donin (UniGE), Anna Stoll-Knecht (UniFR),
Chris Walton (HKB/FHNW), Chuyu Zhang (HKB/UniGE)

A cooperation of Unité de musicologie (UniGe) with Institute Interpretation (HKB) /

Une coopération de l'Unité de musicologie (UniGe) avec l'Institut Interpretation (HKB)

Abstracts & Biographies / Résumés et biographies

Miloš Bralović (Belgrade)

Stanojlo Rajičić, Conservative Critics, and Symphony No. 2 as a Lost Opportunity

Stanojlo Rajičić (1910–2000) was one of the most prolific Serbian composers of the 20th century. He taught composition at the Academy of Music (now the Faculty of Music) in Belgrade and was a full member of the Department of Fine Arts and Music (now the Department of Arts) of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. His oeuvre spans nearly all musical genres; however, his six symphonies, composed between 1935 and 1967, have attracted little musicological attention. Of these, Nos. 2 and 3 were never performed, while No. 4 received only a single semi-public performance and was harshly criticised.

As a student of Rudolf Karel (1880–1845) and Josef Suk (1874–1935), Rajičić composed Symphony No. 1 in 1935 as his graduation piece at the Prague State Conservatory. Returning to Belgrade, he faced hostility from conservative critics. The Belgrade premiere of Symphony No. 1 in February 1939 sparked polemics, culminating in debates by Rajičić and fellow composer Svetomir Nastasijević (1902–1979) published in journals and music magazines during 1940–1941. This controversy likely inspired Symphony No. 2, finished in early 1941, but the World War II occupation of Yugoslavia in April ended hopes of its performance. Postwar policies altered the direction of Serbian and Yugoslav music, leading Rajičić to unofficially “renounce” his prewar works. A key question is whether the performance of Symphony No. 2, had it taken place, could have changed the critical reception of Rajičić’s compositions or influenced the subsequent development of Serbian music.

Miloš Bralović (Belgrade, 1991) completed his Bachelor’s, Master’s, and doctoral studies in musicology at the Faculty of Music, University of Arts in Belgrade. He is a Research Associate at the Institute of Musicology, Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. He is mainly interested in modernist and avant-garde tendencies in Serbian music from 1918 onwards, including the work of Serbian and Yugoslav composers such as Josip Slavenski, Ljubica Marić, Milan Ristić, Stanojlo Rajičić and others.

Gvantsa Ghvinjilia (Tbilisi)

Parabolic Response to Soviet Cultural Policy: The Case of Shalva Mshvelidze’s *Zviadauri*

The development of Georgian symphonic music differs significantly from the European trajectory. Georgian art music, established in the early twentieth century, initially focused on romance and opera, while symphonic music developed from the 1930s within the Soviet system. Although subject to ideological pressure, it remained a relatively freer space for composers’ self-expression, often conveyed through parabolic language. Following WWII, the symphonic genre—like opera—became an important vehicle for patriotic narratives and gained considerable public significance. In this context, Shalva Mshvelidze, a pioneer of Georgian symphonic music, subtly distanced himself from Soviet ideological constraints.

This paper examines his symphony *Zviadauri*, a landmark of Georgian symphonic music that, through parabolic language, exemplifies a strategy of double coding. While the composition’s main ideas—such as the friendship of peoples and internationalism—align with the official ideology of the USSR, its deeper conceptual foundation draws on *Host and Guest* by Vazha-Pshavela, a key figure in Georgian

liberal thought. The symphony foregrounds the triumph of humanistic and democratic values over traditions of revenge and religious fanaticism prevalent in Georgia's mountainous regions.

Within the constraints of Soviet isolationism and the ban on modern European compositional techniques, including dodecaphony, Mshvelidze succeeded in renewing the Georgian symphonic language. He achieved this through integrating distinctive melodic and rhythmic features of Georgian mountain music with the improvisatory-recitative character of neighboring traditions, including Kabardian, Adyghe, Kist, and Chechen music. The underlying messages of *Zviadauri*—peacefulness, tolerance, democratic progress, and humanism—remain highly relevant today, particularly in light of ongoing regional conflicts in the Middle East and the Caucasus.

Gvantsa Ghvinjilia is a musicologist, a member of the Georgian Composers' Union, an Associate Professor at the Tbilisi State Conservatoire, and the Chair of its Dissertation Board. She is also a guest lecturer at the Shota Rustaveli Theatre and Film Georgia State University. She is a scholarship recipient of composer Zakaria Paliashvili and the President of Georgia. She participated in Erasmus+ Mobility+ working visits to Belgium, France, Poland, and Sweden. She regularly takes part in national and international conferences. She served as a keynote speaker at conferences and congresses in Turkey and Ukraine. Her scientific interests include AI-generated music, multimedia music, eco-music, the metaverse, transcultural music, and interdisciplinary studies. She is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Journal of Music Theory and Transcultural Music Studies* (Isparta, Türkiye) and serves as Chair of the *Rast Music Congress* (Türkiye) and the *International Symposium on Interdisciplinary and Progressive Arts & Education* (Türkiye).

Chuyu Zhang (Bern/Geneva)

The Realism Complex: On Robert Blum's Symphonies Nos. 4 and 6

The première of Arthur Honegger's Symphony No. 3, '*liturgique*' (1945–6) in Zurich's Tonhalle on 17 August 1946 was a huge success – a moment when the genre of symphony 'triumphed'. Recipient of the City of Zurich's *Musikpreis*, Honegger received the commission from Pro Helvetia, the Swiss Arts Council, to compose this symphony earlier that year. From then on, the Swiss authorities and cultural institutions began commissioning works directly from local composers. Honegger's legacy being hard to emulate, the symphony remained the default large-scale orchestral genre until the mid-60s. In Zurich, in the decades of 50s and 60s, nearly half of the Swiss symphonies were written or premiered there.

These commissioned symphonies cut across various styles. While Honegger's symphonies can be categorised as 'realist' or 'middlebrow', whose coherent narrative and often transparent style render themselves immediately comprehensible to the average audience, many others are 'modernist', the music that acknowledges its inability to narrate and often presents itself in a 'broken' form. This stylistic distinction turns us to the Zurich composer Robert Blum's (1900–94) symphonies, Nos. 4 (1959) and 6 (1969). The narrative in his Fourth Symphony, a Christmas symphony commissioned by the Tonhalle and the City of Zurich, evokes idioms that could be easily recognised by the audience, whereas in the modernist Sixth, the idioms appear more autonomous, retaining its relationship with musical conventions in a disguised manner. By attending to the Sixth Symphony in analytical detail, this paper proposes a possible 'realist' reading of this modernist work.

Chuyu Zhang is working on a research project at the Bern Academy of the Arts, funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, and pursuing his PhD at Geneva University. His doctoral research focuses on the Swiss composer Robert Blum (1900–94). Zhang’s research interests lie in the analysis, history and aesthetics of twentieth-century musical modernism, musical realism, Swiss symphonies, dodecaphony and its aftermath. An essay on postwar Swiss symphonies will be published by Routledge in 2027.

Claire Lapalu (Paris)

Modalités et enjeux du discours radiophonique sur la symphonie contemporaine en France entre 1945 et 1968

Dès la fin de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, la radio publique française affirme sa position incontournable dans le paysage de la création musicale. En commandant et diffusant des œuvres nouvelles, elle apporte un important soutien aux compositeur·rices et relaye auprès d’un large public les langages musicaux les plus récents. Afin de comprendre la manière dont la radio intervient dans le renouvellement et la transmission de la symphonie, deux axes gagnent à être observés : celui de la commande d’œuvres et celui des discours.

Par la commande d’œuvres, la radio contribue fortement à actualiser la symphonie. Quelle place l’institution fait-elle à ce genre hérité alors qu’elle semble tout entière tournée vers l’avenir, notamment par la faveur qu’elle accorde à l’inventivité technologique et artistique ? L’examen des commandes de symphonies passées par la radio mettra en exergue les évolutions et les lignes de force à l’œuvre au cours de ces deux décennies.

Par ailleurs, les symphonies contemporaines deviennent, sur les ondes, des objets partagés avec un public hétéroclite (particulièrement par l’âge et la catégorie socio-professionnelle) et nombreux (la radio permettant de dépasser les frontières urbaines de la salle de concert). Afin de comprendre le rôle joué par la RTF dans la construction de références collectives sur la symphonie et la manière dont le public a été sensibilisé aux symphonies contemporaines, l’analyse de quelques émissions radiophoniques fera apparaître les différentes modalités discursives employées en fonction du public (l’amateur·rice de concert, la·le mélomane érudit·e ou le jeune public) que les programmes ambitionnent de toucher.

Claire Lapalu est musicologue, formée au CNSMDL et à l’Université de Saint-Étienne. Son activité de recherche s’est portée sur l’analyse des institutions musicales et plus particulièrement sur la radiodiffusion dans une thèse intitulée *Commander, diffuser, commenter : la musique contemporaine sur les ondes de la radio publique française entre 1946 et 1974*. Après avoir enseigné pendant plusieurs années, elle est désormais responsable du département Musicologie et analyse du CNSMDP et poursuit divers travaux de recherche relatifs à l’analyse des discours sur la musique.

Ben Earle (Birmingham)

The Nazi Symphony

In a well-known paper from 2005, the musicologist and cultural historian Pamela Potter works hard to put paid to the idea of ‘Nazi music’. Popular notions of a universally enforced, monumentalising Wagner-imitation are simply false. The Nazis were certainly antisemitic and anti-leftist, but despite decades of post-war critical insistence that they were also anti-modernist, it seems this was not genuinely the case. In fact, there was very little in the way of centralised aesthetic directives from the regime, and

in this absence, German composers of the Nazi period continued to work in a wide range of idioms. Some were indeed Wagner-imitators, others preferred to model themselves stylistically on Stravinsky. There were even twelve-note composers who managed to have their work performed in Hitler's Reich.

This revisionist thesis has been widely accepted, but there remain some loose ends. In particular, the notion of a musical pluralism under the Nazis sits uneasily with Potter's observation that the art music produced during the regime remains basically unstudied. For decades it was indeed close to impossible to hear this music. But without an active knowledge of the repertoire, it would seem difficult to pronounce on it. As it happens, even before the publication of Potter's article, commercial recordings of art music of the Nazi period had begun to appear. With Youtube, old bootlegs of radio recordings have also emerged. There is now the opportunity to test Potter's argument in more detail. Taking that most German of musical genres, the symphony, as a test case, this paper will ask three questions. First, is it possible that, despite the lack of a Nazi aesthetic, composers of the period nevertheless converged in certain stylistic principles? Second, if we can trace stylistic convergences, why should these in any way be connected to the German political regime of the period? Finally, is there any possibility of a methodology that will permit us to consider stylistic trends and political significance together, without simply collapsing the one into the other?

Ben Earle is Associate Professor and Head of the Department of Music at the University of Birmingham. He has published widely on Italian and British music of the mid-twentieth century. Publications specifically on symphonies include chapters on Humphrey Searle, in Matthew Riley (ed.), *British Music and Modernism, 1895–1960* (Ashgate, 2010), on Mario Zafred, in Robert Adlington (ed.), *Red Strains: Music and Communism outside the Soviet Bloc* (British Academy, 2013) and on various obscure British figures, in Nicholas Jones (ed.), *The Symphony in Britain and Ireland since 1900* (Cambridge, 2026).

Richard Louis Gillies (Nottingham)

Composing Utopia: Nikolai Myaskovsky's Symphony No. 12

After the formation of the USSR in 1922, the task of rebuilding not only concerned social, economic, industrial, and agricultural infrastructures, but also confronted the divisive question of how to mould a distinctly soviet culture and identity. The debates around what music was appropriate for proletarian consumption are well-documented in recent historiography. Genre and style were politicised, consensus was rare. But by the early 1930s, the conservatising trends of Stalinist culture were apparent and the symphony and the opera emerged as the dominant monumental genres appropriate for soviet composers. The utopian and collective aspirations of the symphony as a 'public genre' mirrored the utopian cultural myth-building of Stalinist society—a culture in which 'public/collective' took precedence and 'private/individual' was viewed with hostile suspicion.

Nikolai Myaskovsky emerged as the period's most prolific and successful symphonist. His rarely performed Symphony No. 12 in G minor, Op. 35 is perhaps best known for its nickname, 'Collective Farm' [*Kolkhoznaya*]. Commissioned during the Soviet Famine of 1930-33 which killed between 5 and 9 million people across the USSR (the majority Ukrainian and Kazakh), its proposed programme—which Myaskovsky evidently detested—celebrates collectivisation and renders it a bitter example of music in service of the state. This paper situates the symphony against the backdrop of mass starvation to explore the dissonance between the cultural myth-building surrounding collectivisation and the catastrophic realities of its failure. In doing so, it not only asks

which publics the symphony addressed, but also which publics it served to imagine and mythologise.

After receiving his PhD from the University of Manchester, Dr. **Richard Louis Gillies** has held positions as a lecturer in music at Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance and subsequently at the Universities of Glasgow and Nottingham. He is currently a lecturer in Modern History at the University of Nottingham where he teaches social- and cultural-historical approaches to European fascisms 1900-1945, revolutionary Russia 1905-1921, and daily life in authoritarian regimes during the Long Twentieth Century. His first book, *Singing Soviet Stagnation: Vocal Cycles from the USSR, 1964-1985* was published by Routledge in 2022. He is currently writing up his second book, *Sculpting in Sound: Valentin Silvestrov's Symphony No. 5*, for the Royal Musical Association's Short Monograph Series.

Madeline Roycroft (Melbourne)

**French Conductors, Soviet Symphonies:
Shostakovich's Wartime Trilogy in Post-War Paris**

Spanning 46 years of composition, Shostakovich's symphonies reflect many major socio-political events through which the composer lived and worked and are widely recognised as archetypal musical works of the USSR. The story of the composer's turbulent reception in the USSR is well known, but studying the international reception continues to provide new insights into the relationship between music and politics in the twentieth century. In Paris, for instance, where a fascination for Russian music had developed since the end of the nineteenth century, how were Soviet symphonies understood during the 1930s and '40s, when there was still a relatively limited understanding of life in the USSR?

This paper interrogates the programming and reception of Shostakovich's wartime symphonies in Paris in the years immediately following the Liberation. At no other time in twentieth-century France did such a high concentration of Shostakovich symphonies premiere than in 1945 and 1946: the Sixth, Seventh, Eighth and Ninth symphonies all received a first performance, and the Seventh was performed twice in one year. This surge is striking given that Shostakovich the symphonist had received a lukewarm reception in the 1930s, when he was only promoted enthusiastically within French Communist circles. I account for this shift by drawing parallels between the post-war performances and the musicians' Resistance networks formed during the Second World War. I focus in particular on the role of the conductors Roger Désormière, Manual Rosenthal, and Charles Munch, former resistants who became mediators of Shostakovich's symphonies in post-war Paris.

Madeline Roycroft obtained her PhD in musicology from the University of Melbourne in 2023. In 2024 and 2025, her postdoctoral research fellowship on the French conductor and Communist Party member Roger Désormière (1898–1963) was funded by the Équipe musique en France and the Chaire de recherche du Canada en musique et politique at the Université de Montréal. Madeline currently lectures in music history at the University of Melbourne, and her first monograph, *Shostakovich in France: Reception and Mediation in Paris and the Regions*, has just been published with Boydell & Brewer.

Chris Walton (Bern/Basel)

Apartheid and the Twelve-Note Symphony

After the National Party came to power in South Africa in 1948, it embarked on a large-scale project that required the complete segregation of the country along so-called racial lines. But it also entailed a process of nation-building in the realms of both language (focusing on Afrikaans, the recently codified mother tongue of the new government) and the arts. Concert halls, opera houses, theatres and university arts departments were set up across the country, and funds provided to commission works of art that might project a positive, modern, thoroughly 'Western' image of South Africa out into the wider world.

As the preeminent genre of Western absolute music, the symphony had an important role to play in this 'new', racially segregated South Africa. The most notable symphonies written by South Africans in the early apartheid era were by Stefans Grové (1922–2014) and Graham Newcater (1941–2025). Both date from the early 1960s, both used dodecaphonic techniques, and both received funding from the South African state. In fact, apartheid South Africa was quite possibly the only fascist state in the 20th century that actively promoted twelve-note music, despite no proof that South African audiences liked it or wanted it. This paper will take a closer look at the apartheid-era South African symphony, its links to the state, and will use Newcater in particular as a case study to investigate why a conservative, Calvinist, nationalist, white supremacist regime invested money and energy in the musical avant-garde.

Chris Walton studied at the universities of Cambridge, Oxford and Zurich, and was a Humboldt research fellow at Munich University. He ran the music department of the Zentralbibliothek Zürich from 1990 to 2001, when he was appointed to the chair of music at Pretoria University in South Africa. Today, he lectures at the Basel Music Academy and runs research projects there and at the Bern Academy of the Arts. He is also an honorary professor at Stellenbosch University. His latest book is *Music and Desire Among the Austro-German Romantics* (University of Rochester Press).

Luis Velasco-Puffleau (Montréal/Bern)

Faire écouter la nation : La *Sinfonía India* de Carlos Chávez et la construction du Mexique postrévolutionnaire

Quand une symphonie devient le modèle de la musique savante nationale du Mexique postrévolutionnaire, à quelle communauté d'écoute s'adresse-t-elle ? L'esthétique indigéniste du compositeur mexicain Carlos Chávez (1899-1978) trouve son aboutissement dans sa deuxième symphonie, la *Sinfonía India*, commandée par la CBS et créée à New York le 23 janvier 1936. Dans cette œuvre, Chávez embrasse les codes esthétiques européens, et y adhère dans la mesure où il intitule son œuvre *Sinfonía*, tout en revendiquant de façon paradoxale une identité non-« occidentale » propre par l'adjectif *India*. Chávez utilise le schéma formel de la *Cinquième Symphonie* de Beethoven pour construire sa *Sinfonía India*. Cependant, le thème principal, développé dans la forme sonate de cette symphonie en un mouvement, est un chant indigène cora collecté par l'ethnologue allemand Konrad T. Preuss en 1906 et transcrit par l'ethnomusicologue autrichien Erich M. von Hornbostel.

Cette communication analyse comment Chávez délimite une certaine communauté d'écoute en utilisant un modèle formel issu du canon classique européen et y insérant un matériau mythifié par le régime postrévolutionnaire. La *Sinfonía India* reçoit un accueil triomphal de la part des critiques et du public, tant au Mexique qu'aux États-Unis. Le point central de cette réception est l'évocation dans les notes du programme, dans les critiques spécialisées et dans les déclarations du compositeur, de l'utilisation

des mélodies préhispaniques “pures”. La *Sinfonía India* devient ainsi un modèle à suivre pour des compositeurs mexicains élèves ou disciples de Chávez, consolidant un certain rapport entre le passé préhispanique mythifié par le régime postrévolutionnaire et l’héritage européen exacerbé dans un présent considéré comme « métis ».

Musicien et musicologue spécialiste de la musique des XXe et XXIe siècles, **Luis Velasco-Pufleau** est Professeur associé à la Faculté de musique de l’Université de Montréal et chercheur associé à l’Institut de musicologie de l’Université de Berne. Ancien Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global Fellow à l’Université McGill, ses travaux récents portent les interactions entre création musicale et enjeux politiques contemporains tels que les droits humains, la justice sociale et l’écologie politique. Il est rédacteur en chef du carnet de recherche *Music, Sound and Conflict*, membre élu de la Jeune Académie suisse et membre du comité de rédaction de la revue *Transposition*.

Practical information / Informations pratiques

Event location / Lieu de l'évènement

Université de Genève
Les Philosophes, salle 216
Bd des Philosophes 22, 1205 Genève

Hotel / Hôtel

Starling Hotel Residence Genève
Rte des Acacias 4, 1227 Genève

Please note: Breakfast is included. Tickets for public transport in Geneva will be issued by the hotel three days before you travel. / Remarques : Les petits-déjeuners sont compris. Les titres de transport pour les transports publics de Genève vous seront remis par l'hôtel trois jours avant votre venue.

Connections / Comment venir

From / de Gare de Genève-Cornavin à Starling Hotel :

Tram 13 (direction Nations), descendre à Acacias.

From / de Genève Aéroport to / à Starling Hotel :

Option 1 : Bus 23 (direction Carouge GE), changer à Grand-Lancy, Tram 15 (direction Nations), descendre à Acacias.

Option 2 : Bus 10 (Rive, GE), changer à Molard, Tram 17 (direction Lancy-Pont-Rouge), descendre à Acacias.

Option 3 : Train IR95 (direction Brig), changer à Gare de Cornavin, Tram 13 (direction Nations), descendre à Acacias.

Please note, however, that for IR95, an additional train ticket is required. / Attention : pour la ligne IR95, il faut acheter un billet de train supplémentaire.

Option 4 : Bus 5 (direction Thônex, Vallard), changer à Bel-Air, Tram 17 (direction Lancy-Pont-Rouge), descendre à Acacias.

From Hotel to the conference / De l'hôtel à la conférence :

