The 13th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus20)

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Abstract
Held entirely online, the 13th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus20) saw early stage researchers sharing ideas at the intersection of musicology and empirical scientific research. At this student-led conference, presenters were able to showcase exciting research projects, disseminate findings from recent studies, and learn valuable skills from virtual workshops. Keynote addresses were held by Dr Freya Bailes (University of Leeds) and Prof. Ian Cross (University of Cambridge). A summary of the sessions and an overview the conference is here presented by this report.

Keywords
Conference report, music psychology, student conference, SysMus, systematic musicology

Submission date: 28 October 2020; Acceptance date: 28 October 2020

Introduction
The 13th International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus20) was for the first time held as a virtual conference due to the Covid-19 pandemic over the course of three days, 15–17 September 2020, with workshop sessions held on 14 September. The conference was hosted at the University of York in the United Kingdom.

About SysMus
The SysMus conference series was co-founded in 2008 by Manuela M. Marin and Prof. Richard Parncutt for the benefit of doctoral and Masters students to meet and share their research. Since its conception, SysMus has embraced a broad and diverse range of research topics and methodologies related to topics in systematic musicology and scientific musicology that is empirical and data-oriented (Parncutt, 2007). These include the fields of music psychology, music perception, music cognition, musical modelling, music therapy, music and culture, and music philosophy, among many others. The previous conference (SysMus19) was held at the SRH Hochschule der populären Künste (hdpk) in Berlin, Germany. As well as being a conference for students’ research, the conference series is also organised by students, granting administrative conference experience to early career researchers.

SysMus20
The conference was originally planned as an in-person event and converted to a virtual conference due to the Covid-19 pandemic. SysMus20 was organised by Diana Kayser (SysMus20 Director) and Dr Hauke Egermann (SysMus20 Supervisor) along with five graduate students from the University of York (York Music Psychology Group, YMPG). Seventeen members of the scientific committee reviewed 42 abstract submissions and issued no rejections. After four cancellations, 38 submissions were included in the conference – 20 talks, 14 poster presentations, and 4 workshops. In addition, there were two keynote notes from Dr Freya Bailes (University of Leeds) and Prof. Ian Cross (University of Cambridge) and a workshop/
showcase given by Dr Hauke Egermann. The conference was free to attend, and 272 registrations were ticketed through Eventbrite. All the conference sessions were accessible through Blackboard Collaborate, an online web conferencing application for presentations and discussions that acted as a virtual classroom. Throughout each of the sessions approximately 60 people were in attendance at any given time. Attendees of the conference were from 43 countries spanning the globe, located predominately in Europe and North America.

**Keynotes**

The conference began with the first keynote address *Why research musical imagery? Reasons to care about the ‘sounds of silence’* presented by Dr Freya Bailes. This talk examined the ways in which we imagine the sounds of music (auditory imagery) and how this plays a vital role in musical imagery, embodied cognition, visual and motor processing, and kinaesthetic imagery. Here it was argued that musical imagery can never be fully disembodied (Bailes, 2019) – musical imagery (MI) draws on our experiences to imagine gestures that make sounds (e.g., Lotze et al., 2003; McCullough & Margulis, 2015). In addition, this presentation outlined a project to investigate the role of individual differences in associative thinking on imagining music. As there is a lack of research in the intersection of MI and creativity (Bailes & Bishop, 2012), and as MI is a critical component of creativity (Chavez, 2016), a cross-sectional review of recent empirical evidence was explored. Bailes concluded by answering the title question of the talk with a quote from Carl Seashore showing the importance of MI to musicological research, ‘Take out the image from the musical mind and you take out its very essence’ (1938).

On the third day of the conference, Prof. Ian Cross delivered the second keynote address titled *The culture repair kit: Intersections between music and language*. This presentation explored the long-standing debate concerning the role of music in language and its function in communication through the lens of mutually affiliative social interactions. Comparisons between music and language have historically privileged the features of text (e.g., Olson, 1977; Lerdahl & Jackendoff, 1983) through the understanding of music as a contingent commodity (e.g., Hunter, 1986). This talk aimed to reshape understandings of the relationship between music and language to emphasise music as a communicative cognate with speech. Through examining behavioural alignment in social interactions (e.g., Hawkins et al., 2013), Prof. Cross argues that the roles of music and spoken language can seem indistinguishable from each other, and consequently, to understand human communication, one must understand music.

**Presentations, Posters, and the PhD Process**

Over the three days of the conferences, nine paper sessions were held. The topics of these sessions were as follows: communications and meaning, computational modelling and audio processing, pandem(ic)usicology – musical behaviour in times of Covid-19 – music across cultures, the effect of musical features on altered states of consciousness, music and memory, music and well-being, audience and performance, and togetherness/music and prosociality. There was a wide range of talks within these topics – Patricia Dreesbach (University of Cologne) discussed musical pragmatics as an approach to musical meaning; Edward Hall (Queen Mary University of London) modelled large-scale thematic structures in music corpora; Pathmanesan Sanmugeswaran (University of Kentucky) talked on the invention of a new instrument, the Jiva Jeya Nätam; and, among many other speakers, Katherine O’Neill spoke about applying social bonding theories to live musical concert audiences. In the talk *Effect of musical training in preserving the temporal and spatial hearing processing abilities in elderly adults*, Ranjini Durai (All India Institute of Speech and Hearing) investigated how musical training affects cognitive processing of elderly listeners. The study found that musical training is associative with heightened auditory process (binaural, temporal, and spatial) and seems to have a preserving effect on these processes as we age. Rory Kirk (University of Sheffield) in his talk *Assessing properties of music for sleep and relaxation* discussed the current state of ‘music for sleep’ research and the dearth of empirical evidence in this area. This PhD project proposes to examine the acoustic qualities found in music for insomnia interventions (Jespersen et al., 2015) and uses these features to explore their impact on physiology and sleep studies. Tara Henechowicz (University of Toronto) presented on *Music-evoked autobiographical memory retrieval in healthy populations: Future direction for a unified research method approach*. This talk explored individual differences in musical imagery between younger and older populations and musicians and non-musicians. By examining group differences, this talk argued for a unified research approach to music-evoked autobiographical memories (MEAMs) to understand the variability of MEAM processes and to systematically explain the variability found within them.

Poster presentations were held in two one-hour blocks in which conference attendees could enter a video call with the poster presenters. On the first day of the conference, eight posters were presented covering a large range of topics. In this session Giovann Carugno (Conservatory of Salerno) presented a case study on music education in the 19th century, Landon S. L. Peck (University of Oxford) presented on perceptions of musical size, and Zongyu Yin (University of York) investigated participants’ aesthetic and musical ratings of AI-generated music. The second poster session was held on the third day and hosted six
posters. Harin Lee (Goldsmiths, University of London) presented on the perception of social bonding and power through dance, Thomas Lennie (Durham University) presented on adopting a goal-oriented dimensional-appraisal account of musical emotions, and Sebastian Klafmass (University of Cologne) discussed digital habits for interdisciplinary music research.

On the second day, a panel discussion titled *The impact of Covid-19 on the PhD process* was held by four doctoral students and discussed the difficulties of research faced during a pandemic. The panellists shared their own experiences and struggles and offered helpful advice to early career researchers. The panellists also brought the discussion to the audience and fielded questions and concerns from people in similar circumstances. Some solutions offered were bringing experimentation online, applying as a visiting student to work with a local university, and emulating an office by virtually working alongside others on occasion.

**Workshops and Showcase**

Four workshops were held on the Sunday prior to the start of the conference. These too were held as virtual presentations where participants were able to attend any and all they chose. Dr Kelly Jakubowski (Durham University) in *An introduction to publishing in peer-reviewed journals* outlined how to successfully submit to journals in the field and act as a peer reviewer. Dr Jan Stupacher (Aarhus University) discussed *How to write a grant application / a research proposal* and provided a series of actions researchers can take to maximise their chances whilst applying for grants. Dr David John Baker (Goldsmiths, University of London) spoke about the world outside of academia and how to translate academic skills to the private sector in his presentation entitled *Value and values inside and outside the ivory tower*. In *Data-driven music history*, Dr Fabian C. Moss (École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne) spoke on how data-driven approaches to music analysis offer new and exciting ways of studying music history through digital examinations of corpora. The last workshop *Measuring the audience experience – How can we capture audience experience with innovative research methods?* was held by Dr Hauke Egermann during the second day of the conference. This presentation showcased data collection techniques (real-time appraisal ratings and psychophysiological measurements) used to examine audience reactions in an ecologically valid concert hall setting.

**Social Activities**

Previous SysMus conferences had scheduled a day for group social interaction in the host city; however, due to the online nature of SysMus20, this was the first year without such an event. In its place, there were structured social engagements in the form of sharing meals across time zones. Each day participants had the opportunity to join a video chat with other conference attendees to chat, discuss work, and network.

**Summary and Closing Remarks**

Though SysMus20 was a virtual conference, the spirit of the conference series was wholly retained through its high quality of talks and posters, informative workshops, and wonderful keynotes. Attendees may have lost out on the face-to-face interactions provided by an in-person conference, but with lower financial and geographic barriers afforded by an online format, a record number of people were able to attend. The execution and administration of the conference yielded a smooth and efficient experience for virtual attendees and provided an engaging experience for those involved. SysMus21 will be held by the Center for Music in the Brain at Aarhus University in November 2021.

**Action Editor**

Ian Cross, University of Cambridge, Faculty of Music.

**Contributorship**

LP wrote the all drafts of the conference report. The author has reviewed and edited the report and approved the final version of the manuscript.

**Declaration of conflicting interests**

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

**Funding**

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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