

Conference Programme

Seeking Birdscapes: Musik, Ökologie und die Klangwelten der Vögel

7th and 8th of October 2022

“Seeking Birdscapes: Musik, Ökologie und die Klangwelten der Vögel” concludes the project “Seeking Birdscapes,” funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts Interdisciplinary Program (ITC), which explores the ways people relate to, perceive, and experience their environment through sounds – specifically, bird sounds. Just as the project included ethnographic research with a broad range of people engaged with birds and their sounds, so, too, will the conference draw together interdisciplinary perspectives on bird sounds, with presentations from the fields of field ornithology, bioacoustics, sound art and composition, conservation, musicology, ethnomusicology, anthropology. By considering bird sound and our relation to it through these many lenses and in varying formats – presentations, dialogue, artistic presentations, excursions, and workshops – the conference will offer a more comprehensive view of how birds form part of the characteristic soundscapes that surround us and how that shapes our sonic experience in and of the world.

As well as the two-day conference at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, an exhibition at the Lucerne Natural History Museum (16th September to 3rd November 2022) is part of the project’s closing events.

The conference is free and open to the public, with no registration required. It will take place at the Lucerne School of Music, Arsenalstrasse 28a, 6010 Luzern-Kriens, in room 250 on the 2nd floor. The building is wheelchair accessible.

Friday 7.10.22

10:45-11:00	Welcome	Room 250
11:00-12:30	<p><u>Panel 1</u> Marcello Source Keller <i>Von Vögeln, Menschen und Tieren: Warum wir die <Musik> nicht mehr als <Musik> bezeichnen sollten (in German)</i></p> <p>Matthias Lewy <i>Begriffliche Dilemmata und klangontologische Differenzen: Von nichtmenschlichen Tieren, Proto-Humanen und Sonic Beings (in German)</i></p> <p>Tiago de Oliveira Pinto <i>Vogelgesang als ästhetische Kategorie bei den Singvogelwettbewerben in der Harzregion (Deutschland) (in German)</i></p>	Room 250
12:30-14:00	Lunch break	
14:00-15:30	<p><u>Intervention 1</u> Marie-Cécile Reber <i>Pirol (2017) (in German)</i> Discussion with the composer, visit to the <i>Pirol</i> installation, guided Deep Listening activity (outside)</p>	Room 250 – outside – Klangturm
15:30-16:00	Coffee break	Foyer
16:00-17:30	<p><u>Panel 2</u> John García and Josep Ramoneda <i>A Naturalist Perspective on Bird Sounds: Listening Experiences of Passionate Birdwatchers</i></p> <p>Marie-Louise Nigg <i>Non/humane Imaginationsräume – Birdscapes in den Künsten (in German)</i></p>	Room 250

Saturday 8.10.22

9:00-10:30	<p><u>Panel 3</u> Andrew Whitehouse <i>Inquisitory Birds: Thinking through the Ethics and Assumptions of Playback Responses in Birds</i> Shannon Luepold <i>Cultural Evolution of Birdsong</i> Patricia Jäggi <i>Seeking Birdscapes in Iceland: A Multimodal Reflection on Auditory Fieldwork with Summering Birds</i></p>	Room 250
10:30-10:45	Coffee break	Foyer
10:45-12:15	<p><u>Panel 4</u> Emily Doolittle <i>"Scarce Inferior to the Nightingale": Hermit Thrush Song and Anglophone-American Cultural Identity</i> Gergely Loch <i>The Anatomy of a Benign Failure: The Musical Quality of Birdsong Discussed in a 1975 Hungarian Children's Film</i> Natalie Kirschstein und Helena Simonett <i>Tùn resùn: Walking in the Sounding Forest</i></p>	Room 250
12:15-13:15	Lunch break	
13:15-14:15	<p><u>Intervention 2</u> Emily Doolittle <i>Gardenscape</i> (2020) Performed by Mira Spengler (Violin) Hildur Jónsdóttir <i>Práhyggjufugl (Obsession Bird)</i> (2019) Performed by Maral Yerbol (Flute)</p>	Room 250
14:15-14:30	Closing	Room 250
15:00	<p>Post-Conference Options</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Workshop: Recording Techniques - Research Methods 	News Lounge

Abstracts and Biographies (in programme order)

Marcello Source Keller

Von Vögeln, Menschen und Tieren: Warum wir die <Musik> nicht mehr als <Musik> bezeichnen sollten (*in German*)

Birds sing. We all know that. In fact, from a human point of view, they often seem very musical. Other animals also use tones and/or sounds that they have “learned” to put together over time – the learning being a key point. Whether they intend to “be musical” is another question and one we are often asked. But it is, in my opinion, not a very good question. Therefore, my goal is to show that precisely because the word “music” (or rather, the concept of “music”) is not present in all human cultures there is also no plausible reason for us to use this word in the realm of animal cultures. If we think away the word “music”, a new way of looking at and listening to the world of sounds opens up; one that offers us the possibility of dealing equally with human and non-human animals.

Marcello Sorce Keller was originally a pop music pianist and arranger, and only later decided to get serious and obtain a PhD in musicology at the University of Illinois, where he studied with Bruno Nettl. Afterwards he published a few books, articles, and encyclopedia entries. He now lives in Lugano, alone, without even cats or dogs who would certainly have a hard time putting up with him.

Matthias Lewy

Begriffliche Dilemmata und klangontologische Differenzen: Von nichtmenschlichen Tieren, Proto-Humanen und Sonic Beings (*in German*)

A comparison of studies of human-bird-sound relations among the indigenous inhabitants of the Venezuelan-Brazilian border and the “modern” people interviewed in the Seeking Birdscapes project in Switzerland and Catalonia revealed differences in the interpretations of both sound production and sound perception between humans and birds, as well as between birds themselves. These differences are based on different modes of existence, the axioms of which lead to conceptual dilemmas. The first part of the presentation will explain these differences in conceptions and modes of existence. The concept of “non-human animals” will be used as *pars pro toto* for the way of thinking of the “moderns” in contrast to the indigenous conception of “proto-humans” which, again *pars pro toto*, ascribes a human continuity to the multitude of taxonomically relevant entities. While the “moderns” try to understand the sound utterances of birds through popular scientific knowledge, the biggest difference of indigenous anthropomorphism is that it includes the possibility that birds’ sound production – what “moderns” conceive of as “bird sound” – might also be a human song. This phenomenon will be explained using the example of the non-human bird shaman *kumarak pachi* during the presentation

and will be made experiential in the exhibition at the Lucerne Natural History Museum. The second part of the paper will offer suggestions for how the dilemmas can be rethought and possibly overcome with the help of Stoichita's and Brabec de Mori's work on the conceptualisation of sonic beings.

Matthias Lewy is an ethnomusicologist and cultural anthropologist. He works as a senior research associate at the Music Department of the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, where he has been involved in research for the past three years, including the "Seeking Birdscapes" project. Previously, he completed a five-year post-doctorate at the University of Brasília, where he is still active as a Professor Colaborador. He lived and worked with indigenous people in Venezuela for more than 15 years. Currently the only member of his nuclear family to remain there is his pet toy poodle, who preferred to stay with his in-laws in the Gran Sabana rather than move to Europe.

Tiago de Oliveira Pinto

Vogelgesang als ästhetische Kategorie bei den Singvogelwettbewerben in der Harzregion (Deutschland) (*in German*)

The custom of keeping songbirds in cages for daily enjoyment may be as long standing as humans actively relating to their environment and especially to animals. Birdkeeping in the Harz region of Germany has always been centred around families, a tradition that to the external perception has almost solely been maintained by male family members. Acting as a coach for a specific style of beauty songs, a *Finker*, the local finch master, assumes the duty of filling the gap opened by the learned nature innate in birdsong. Appreciated as art by the *Finker*, birdsongs lie between nature and a humanly shaped world. This is the reason given by finch masters for why they find the learned song much more touching than a song that resonates freely in nature.

Tiago de Oliveira Pinto is UNESCO Chair Holder on Transcultural Music Studies and Head of the Department of Musicology at the University of Music Franz Liszt, Weimar, and Friedrich Schiller University, Jena, Germany. He has also served as a Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of São Paulo, Brazil, and Director of the Brazilian Cultural Institute in Germany, as well as a visiting scholar at Harvard University, Kent State University Ohio, University of Fort Hare, South Africa, among several other European and Brazilian Universities. He is the author of books and numerous chapters and papers on music in Latin America and in Africa, on music as intangible cultural heritage, on international cultural policy, and has also published on different methodological issues. His most recent book is entitled *Music as Living Heritage. An Essay on Intangible Culture* (2018). In one of his current research projects, he analyses the aesthetical dimensions in public contests of singing birds in Germany, Brazil and Thailand.

Marie-Cécile Reber

Pirol (2017) (in German)

Within my hearing range the sounds of the city are replaced by beautiful birdsong. The sound of the chirping birds fascinates me and often makes me smile. It is astounding how loud their voices can be when I focus my attention on them. If I listen more accurately, I can track how the individual birds react and communicate with each other. One can hear them talking, fighting, laughing and debating; dialogues emerge and different emotions are perceptible. I am always amazed! It's a soundscape with different depths of space depending on what I focus on.

These observations and experiences prompted me to create my own audio-landscape using bird song. In this composition I set out to challenge our perceptions of what is natural and what is artificial. The work was originally situated outdoors so that my manipulated bird calls mixed with real ambient bird calls. By creating a slight irritation between the naturally occurring and the manipulated sounds I intend to sharpen and expand our perception and thus the song of the oriole becomes more clearly distinguishable.

I composed the oriole by cutting a recording of the bird's natural song into its smallest units and reassembling them into new melodies, which are not found in nature. I kept the characteristic sounds but in a slightly exaggerated form.

The oriole's song in the piece consists of four compositions with their own structure, dynamic and tonal quality. First, we hear the call and then two melodies develop. As a result, there is a lively dialogue between the compositions, which gently flattens out towards the end and dissolves again into the ambient birdcall background.

"Pirol" can be understood as a statement about a world that is increasingly fragile ecologically and politically. Nature and habitats are endangered, those with political power seem only to become more untrustworthy and corrupt, economic interests dominate everything and the gaps in the social system are getting bigger. Bearing this situation in mind I have found working with birdsong to be a safe haven, one that relaxes and rejuvenates me. Here I can recharge my batteries and breathe deeply. *Pirol* is intended to draw our attention to the subtle and striking beauty that still defines our existence and comes to life with a special magic in birdsong.

Marie-Cécile Reber (www.mc-reber.ch) is a Lucerne-based musician and composer who uses electronic musical instruments. Reber searches for sound in nature and, having dealt with microscopic noise structures such as ant and insect sounds for years, she has found ways to transform them into pictorial soundscapes and use them as elements for her compositions. The performance of her compositions is often placed within a natural environment (within a natural setting) with the result that the natural sound environment blends into her composition and vice versa.

John García and Josep Ramoneda

A Naturalist Perspective on Bird Sounds: Listening Experiences of Passionate Birdwatchers

John García and Josep Ramoneda have been interested in birdwatching for almost 20 years. In this conversation they discuss their experiences with bird sounds as naturalists and birdwatchers and compare the events and sociocultural contexts that triggered their fascination with birds. In their discussion they will also contrast their perspectives on bird sounds, feelings associated with them, and the meaning derived from listening to birds. The conversation will address the roles of hearing and sight as the predominant senses in their exploration of birdlife. There are multiple ways of engaging with the exploration of nature, and the conversation will address how ascribing different meanings to bird sounds might heavily impact the way people approach nature. Finally, two pressing topics will be discussed: the importance of birdwatching for wellbeing, and the impact of global change on birdlife and on the speakers' birdwatching experiences.

Josep Ramoneda obtained a degree in Biology at the Autonomous University of Barcelona before moving to Imperial College London, where he obtained a Master's in Research in Ecology and Evolution. He then started his doctoral studies at ETH Zurich, where he studied approaches to improving the nutrition of legume crops using native microbial communities. He is currently a postdoctoral fellow of the Swiss National Science Foundation at the University of Colorado, Boulder (USA). Josep has been interested in birds and wildlife in general since his parents – also birdwatchers – transmitted their passion to him. He has been a partner of the “Seeking Birdscapes” project since its inception.

Marie-Louise Nigg

Non/humane Imaginationsräume – Birdscapes in den Künsten (*in German*)

Sound events as well as listening (to) and recording sounds continually produce space while simultaneously being bodily experiences. Accordingly, soundscapes and birdscapes can be described as dynamic spaces that are actively perceived and created, both medially and culturally. This applies equally to everyday auditory experiences as well as to their “translation” or transformation – for example into sound installations or art performances. The latter can, on the one hand, sharpen attention for soundscapes and birdscapes and their emotional and atmospheric meanings in our predominantly urban everyday life; on the other hand, these artistic practices open up new spaces of interpretation and imagination in the dialogue between humans, birds, and the environment, which create alternative approaches to the “naturculturescape”. With reference to current concepts of spatial and cultural studies, this contribution discusses selected projects ranging from performance art to computer games and sound installations, which make bird sounds, but also bird movements, experienceable in a hybrid way. The focus will be on their spatialisation and embodiment, with special attention to human/non-human and audio-visual interfaces, which also raise questions about media and mediation as well as the possibilities of horizontal communication.

Marie-Louise Nigg is a researcher of and lecturer on cultural and art theory at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts department of Art and Design, Switzerland. Her work focuses on the interface of spatial and walking concepts as well as on the interdisciplinary, transcultural, and non/human interplay in theory and art practice. Her current projects are concerned with the interdisciplinary art mediation of “Seeking Birdscapes” and the transcontinental co-production of public square narratives (“Squares re\p\l\l\ay\c\ed”). Nigg studied German philology, art history and comparative literature at the University of Zurich and then earned her PhD with a study on walking and spatial practices in literature and art (“Gehen. Raumpraktiken in Literatur und Kunst”) in 2015 at the Humboldt University of Berlin, which was published as a book in 2017.

Andrew Whitehouse

Inquisitory Birds: Thinking Through the Ethics and Assumptions of Playback Responses in Birds

A technique often employed by both scientists and birders is the use of song playback to elicit a response from a bird. For birders, this is normally done to encourage a hidden bird to reveal itself to the observer. On hearing the recording, the bird reacts as though the sound is from another of its kind and moves towards its origin, either as an aggressive territorial response or inquisitory social approach. While the effects of playback on birds are not thoroughly understood, repeated exposure to playback appears to influence a bird’s subsequent behaviour. Sometimes where playback has been widely used, it seems birds no longer respond to the sounds of their own species as previously; they become “played out”, ignore the sound and thus deviate from their assumed natural behaviour. These effects have raised ethical questions about the use of playback in birding and in some places the practice is banned.

This paper examines the use of playback in birding and considers the wider questions the practice raises. Various encounters with birds are used to examine different playback techniques, skilled practices, and the different responses of birds. This discussion will be brought into dialogue with scientific literature on playback responses and anthropological and philosophical work on human-animal relations. Finally, ethical debates around playback use will be examined anthropologically, with the aim of thinking through what they reveal about human-bird relations rather than deciding what is ethical. Questions will be raised about whether playback is inherently bad for birds, how deviations in behaviour are explained, and how ideas of naturalness shape ethical arguments and assumptions about human-bird interactions.

Andrew Whitehouse is an environmental anthropologist and birder. He is a lecturer in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Aberdeen, where he researches nature conservation, landscape, and human-bird relations. He conducted the AHRC-funded *Listening to Birds* project with Tim Ingold, which considered the ways that people relate to birds through sound. He was co-editor of the book *Landscapes beyond Land: Routes, aesthetics, narratives* (2012: Berghahn) and has published articles on the anxieties of listening to birds in the Anthropocene and on more-than-human seasonalities.

Shannon Luepold

Cultural Evolution of Birdsong

The beauty of birdsong, and our fascination with it, is multi-layered. Hearing a Blackbird sing brings us aesthetic and emotional pleasure, which is complemented by the knowledge that the individual's repertoire reflects their unique social history. The motifs and phrases of the song constitute a sort of autobiography, in that they bear the imprint of where the bird has been and with whom it has interacted. Songbirds like Blackbirds acquire their songs through the process of vocal production learning, a form of social learning that involves memorising sounds and then learning to reproduce those sounds. This social learning process may lead to the development of vocal cultures, which may then evolve via mechanisms analogous to genetic evolution. Indeed, the learned songs of oscine songbirds are renowned as premier examples of animal culture and cultural evolution.

This review of cultural evolution in birdsong will cover three main topics: (1) vocal production learning and the process of cultural transmission; (2) potential consequences of cultural transmission and the different forms that cultural evolution can take; (3) cultural evolution in the soundscapes of the Anthropocene. In the first part, I will describe different song learning strategies and learning templates. I will then address how these different learning strategies and templates may play out in nature and shape the course of cultural evolution. Finally, I will highlight how the acoustic environment experienced by many individual birds has been greatly altered by human activities, and how these changes might influence patterns of cultural evolution in birdsong.

Shannon Luepold grew up in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada Mountains in northern California, USA. She was a keen observer of nature from an early age, developing a particular interest in birds. She completed a BA in Biology and Spanish at Willamette University (Salem, OR, USA) in 2009 and a MSc in Conservation Biology at the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry (Syracuse, NY, USA) in 2013. Most recently (2022), she completed a PhD in Ecology at University of Zürich and the Swiss Ornithological Institute. During her PhD, she studied various aspects of birdsong in Wood Warblers (*Phylloscopus sibilatrix*) and Western Bonelli's Warblers (*P. bonelli*). In her free time, she enjoys playing cello and singing.

Patricia Jäggi

Seeking Birdscapes in Iceland: A Multimodal Reflection on Auditory Fieldwork with Summering Birds

This presentation offers insight into aural-sonic fieldwork with wild living birds in Iceland. It takes as its starting point practices of field recording as a zone of aural-sonic contact with birds and considers the aural-sonic field experience by addressing different sensory modes. In the sense of creating "alternative ornithologies", Patricia Jäggi has created an experimental documentary through which she aims to reflect autoethnographically

on the entangled relations of humans and birds in the anthropocene. The film aims to evoke atmospheres of the rough subpolar land-, sea- and skiescapes that are shaped by forces such as fire, wind, and ice but are nevertheless and fascinatingly inhabited by birds, especially during summer. This multimodal presentation reflects on multispecies meaning-making processes and interrogates the role of bird sound today; the different ways ornithologists, artists, musicians, and anthropologists listen to birds; and the oft-cited power of listening for raising ecological awareness.

Patricia Jäggi is a cultural anthropologist whose research focuses on the auditory-sonic relations of humans and the environment. She is currently working in the SNSF-funded research project «Seeking Birdscapes - Contemporary Listening and Recording Practices in Ornithology and Environmental Sound Art» at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts – Music. The project deals with the aural-sonic relationship of humans and birds as sound producers and listeners. Jäggi uses field recording as a core explorative and artistic practice of auditory field research. In her work, she explores the ways listening – both with audio technologies and with naked ears – can enable an expanded understanding of the sound and life worlds of other living beings in the sense of an aural multispecies ethnography.

Emily Doolittle

“Scarce Inferior to the Nightingale”: Hermit Thrush Song and Anglophone-American Cultural Identity

The hermit thrush (*Catharus guttatus*) is a small songbird, widespread across North America. Hermit thrush song – heard in the bird’s breeding range, which roughly overlaps with the primarily Anglophone regions of central and southern Canada and the coastal United States – is widely considered beautiful. Indeed, it has been posited as the ‘equal, if not [the] superior’ of Europe’s ‘favorite bird, the nightingale of the poet’ (Schyuler Mathews, 1898). Over the past 200 years, English-speaking North American poets, nature writers, theologians, performers, composers, musicologists, and scientists have created a rich, multi-disciplinary body of works about hermit thrush song, which draws to varying degrees on objective description, subjective response, and creative re-interpretation of the song. The aims, ways of working, and individuals involved with these diverse fields are distinct, but all are affected (often unconsciously) by prevailing cultural values and conceptions about the human, the animal, the natural, and the beautiful. In turn, understandings gained through each of these methods of inquiry often filter into public consciousness, and from there into seemingly unrelated areas, including the development of North American spiritual and moral ideologies. In this paper I draw on my experience as a composer, (zöo-)musicologist, and interdisciplinary collaborator with biologists to show how these diverse ways of conceptualising hermit thrush song all fit together as part of a single narrative about how people, coming from a variety of perspectives, have heard, understood, and represented the hermit thrush throughout history, with these changing understandings revealing as much about the developing cultural identity of English-speaking North Americans over the past 200 years as they do about the hermit thrush itself.

Emily Doolittle is a Canadian-born, Glasgow-based composer and researcher with an ongoing interest in zoomusicology, the study of the music-like aspects of non-human animal song. Doolittle's outputs include compositions such as *Reedbird*, commissioned and performed by the Vancouver Symphony (2019) and *Gannetry*, commissioned by Modern Chants/Ruta Vitkauskaite for clarinetist Jo Nicholson (2021); musicological research, such as "*Hearken to the Hermit Thrush*": *A Case-Study in Interdisciplinary Listening* (Frontiers in Psychology 2020); and interdisciplinary collaborative research with scientists. Other interests include gender and creativity, musical story-telling, and arts-based environmental activism. In addition to her own research, she facilitates interdisciplinary research for others through SHARE ([Science, Humanities and Arts Research Exchange](#)). Doolittle received her PhD at Princeton University in 2007 and is now an Athenaeum Research Fellow and Lecturer at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Gergely Loch

The Anatomy of a Benign Failure: The musical quality of birdsong discussed in a 1975 Hungarian children's film

The 1975 Hungarian children's film *Barátom, Bonca* (*Bonca, my Friend*; directed by Ilona Katkics, screenplay by Katalin Varga) contains a remarkable scene in which Bence, the ten-year-old boy protagonist receives initiation from an elderly friend into the musical quality of birdsong. I show that the scene was inspired by ornithomusicology, a one-man discipline of Péter Szőke, a Hungarian researcher whose (pseudo-)scientific activity during the Kádár era aimed to prove that birdsong and human music were governed by the same physical and neurological laws. I dissect the scene, demonstrating that everything one hears in it is the result of four consecutive instances of failure: scientific forgery, misinterpretation, misrepresentation, and misidentification, where the first can be ascribed to Szőke and the rest to the filmmakers. I show how the filmmakers' factual errors were conditioned by age-old concepts of European culture, and I conclude that both these errors and Szőke's forgeries nevertheless contributed to the artistic authenticity of the final product, an authenticity which is inseparable from a strong sense of environmental ethics. This conclusion can be connected to the broader issue of the relationship between environmental ethics and (what we think to be) the results of natural science, and the question of whether the latter can be a reliable foundation for the former at all.

Gergely Loch studied musicology at the Liszt Academy of Music, Budapest, and at the University of Stockholm. He recently gained a PhD degree at the former institution with his dissertation entitled *Péter Szőke and His Ornithomusicology: Science, Productive Misunderstanding and Reminiscence*. Regardless of whether it is about birdsong, electroacoustic music or melodic snippets from popular culture, his research is always concerned with phenomena that seem to be located on the verge of "musicality".

Natalie Kirschstein und Helena Simonett

Tùn resùn: Walking in the sounding forest

This paper is based on interviews and conversations conducted while walking through the “Klangwald” or “sounding forest” in Lohn, Graubünden, Switzerland. Outfitted with various musical instruments and other sounding items for visitors to play and hear, the Klangwald’s name and the stations along the trail invite and encourage people to engage with their surroundings by making and listening to sounds. While our initial intent was to reflect this focus on hearing and listening in our research, our walking conversations revealed a much more holistic sensory experience, and we began to ask the broader question of what it means sensorially to be in and move through the forest.

Drawing on anthropology of the senses (LeBreton, 2017) and expanding on Tim Ingold’s work (2011), we propose an “anthropology of walking.” By walking alongside people as we interview them, the conversation – like the walking itself – becomes an experiential and sensorial process rather than a purely linguistic and semantic one. Being present with people in real time as they describe their experiences offers an immediacy that is not possible in a decontextualized interview. Thus, this presentation explores not only people’s perceptions of the forest environment but also a methodology for investigating that perception. Accompanying interviewees as they articulated what they are sensing – particularly in the liminal spaces and concepts between within and outside of the forest, sound and silence, and constancy and change – provided a deeper understanding of how people relate to, experience, and perceive their lived environment.

Natalie Kirschstein is an ethnomusicologist, researcher, and teacher with interests at the intersection of music, migration, identity, sustainability, and social justice. She has worked on Uruguayan and Irish musics and has taught college courses in world music, American music, music history, music appreciation, and music theory. She has also worked to foster appreciation for diversity and love of the arts as a piano teacher, early childhood music educator and a grade-school Spanish teacher. She holds a Bachelor of Science in music and psychology from Keele University, and an MA and PhD in ethnomusicology from Harvard University.

Helena Simonett studied musicology at the University of Zurich and received her PhD in ethnomusicology from the University of California, Los Angeles with a thesis on a genre of transnational Mexican popular music. She served for many years as a lecturer at the College of Art & Science and the Blair School of Music, Vanderbilt University, Nashville (Tennessee), where she was also Associate Director of the Center for Latin American Studies. Her longstanding research on indigenous sound practices in north-western Mexico has been instrumental in shaping the new field of Ecomusicology (a very unfortunate term, but fortunately not one she chose). Simonett is the author and editor of several books and has published her research findings in numerous articles and book chapters. In 2017, she returned to Switzerland, where she is active in research at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts Music Department. Since her daughters have fledged, former street dog Theodore Houdini (“Teddy”) has taken to her heels and continues to amaze her with his superior sensory abilities during their extended walks together.

Emily Doolittle

***Gardenscape* (2020)**

Performed by Mira Spengler (Violin)

This programme note is excerpted from the blog post “Why MacDowell Now? On lockdown, wood pigeons, and grounding ourselves in the natural rhythms of creativity” (Emily Doolittle, August 14, 2020).

(<https://www.macdowell.org/news/why-macdowell-now-on-lockdown-wood-pigeons-and-grounding-ourselves-in-the-natural-rhythms-of-creativity>)

When Scotland went into COVID-19 lockdown on March 23, 2020 – a date now permanently emblazoned in my mind – I found it very hard to do any of my work as a composer, researcher, or writer. After several of weeks of anxious nothingness, some inspiration crept in, albeit in a form I did not recognize at first. That form was a common wood pigeon, *Columba palumbus*, which took up residence in the cherry blossom tree outside my window. Those of you who have spent time in Europe in the spring will need no description of its call, but for those who haven’t heard it, some words that come to mind are “repetitive,” “persistent,” and “intrusive.” I had the idea to write a piece called, in reference to a baroque form based on repetition, Chaconne for Bassoon and Piano: or, Is This Wood Pigeon Ever Going to Go Away? (I may yet write this piece.) And suddenly, as soon as I thought of turning my annoyance into music, I was back. I could think again, could feel, could engage with my surroundings: perhaps I could even appreciate and create art again. Because in wrenching my attention away from my unsettled brain and the newsfeed, this wood pigeon reminded me to attend to the world around me. Pandemic or no, the shared garden outside my window is home to a kaleidoscopically varied wealth of life: not just the insistent wood pigeon, but also the joyfully melodic blackbird, the tiny but mighty wren, the carefree blue tit, the marauding flocks of lesser black-backed gulls. I may be complaining about the persistence of the wood pigeon’s call, but it was this very persistence that brought me out of my own head and back to the world.

In a bit of well-timed good luck, I was asked to write a short lockdown-related commission for violinist Ruta Vitkauskaitė by the organization Contemporary Music for All. I decided to transcribe the songs of the birds which came to our garden – not just the species, but the individual birds – and create a piece in which Ruta could record or loop multiple layers of birdsong and environmental sounds to create her own garden soundscape. As I listened, made recordings, and transcribed the songs, I began to relax into our bizarre time. I relearned how to appreciate what was still around me, rather than just mourn what wasn’t. I thought about past times when increased attentiveness to the natural world helped form who I am as a composer and a person: when I moved to Amsterdam in 1997 and heard a European blackbird for the first time; when I participated in workshops and collaborative projects with Canadian composer Murray Schafer and learned to make music outdoors working with rather than against the environment; when I followed my interest in Scottish folklore to the Outer Hebrides and heard grey seals howling in response to human singing; and my two wonderful residencies at MacDowell (2004 and 2012) when I was able to immerse myself in the natural rhythms of days and seasons, and let these permeate the rhythms of my own creativity. I began to feel like myself again.

Emily Doolittle (<https://emilydoolittle.com/>) is a Canadian-born, Glasgow-based composer and researcher with an ongoing interest in zoomusicology, the study of the music-like aspects of non-human animal song. Doolittle's outputs include compositions such as *Reedbird*, commissioned and performed by the Vancouver Symphony (2019) and *Gannetry*, commissioned by Modern Chants/Ruta Vitkauskaitė for clarinetist Jo Nicholson (2021); musicological research, such as "*Hearken to the Hermit Thrush*": *A Case-Study in Interdisciplinary Listening* (Frontiers in Psychology 2020); and interdisciplinary collaborative research with scientists. Other interests include gender and creativity, musical story-telling, and arts-based environmental activism. In addition to her own research, she facilitates interdisciplinary research for others through SHARE ([Science, Humanities and Arts Research Exchange](#)). Doolittle received her PhD at Princeton University in 2007 and is now an Athenaicum Research Fellow and Lecturer at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland.

Mira Spengler performs as a soloist, in chamber music ensembles, and as an orchestral musician. Her repertoire ranges from baroque, classical, romantic, and late 20th century to modern and freely improvised music. She has performed at music festivals such as the Lucerne Festival, as an academist of the Davos Festival, and as a "classic scout" at the Heidelberger Frühling and other festivals.

Mira Spengler graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in Music and a Master of Arts in Music Performance from the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts. Through an Erasmus scholarship she was able to spend a year at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo during her master studies. Another scholarship from New York University allowed her to study at New York University for one month. In the summer of 2021, she completed another artistic master's degree in violin with honors at the Conservatoire Royal de Mons with Anton Martynov, and since the fall of 2021 has been studying in the master's program in pedagogy at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts, which she expects to complete in the summer of 2023.

She received further inspiration for her musical and artistic education from professors and renowned violinists such as Ivry Gitlis, David Takeno, Alexander Markov, Gilles Apap, Hans Heinz Schneeberger, Rainer Schmidt, Hagai Shaham, Detlef Hahn, Gunnars Larsens, Roman Nodel and Petru Munteanu.

In 2022 Mira Spengler was awarded several first prizes. She received a first prize at the Golden Classical Music Awards International Competition in New York and two additional first prizes at the Grand Prize Virtuoso Competition in London and Vienna, with invitations to make debuts at Carnegie Hall, the Royal Albert Hall, and the Glass Hall.

In 2020, she was a guest artist in residence in Poschiavo (CH), where she presented her solo program *Dialogue with Violin*. Mira has been supported by grants from New York University, the Norwegian Academy of Music, the Irene Denereaz Foundation, as well as the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts and the Baden-Württemberg Foundation (Klangspektrum).

In addition to her life as a freelance musician, the violinist is also a trained Feldenkrais teacher.

Hildur Elísa Jónsdóttir

Þráhyggjufugl Obsession Bird (2019)

Performed by Maral Yerbol (Flute)

Þráhyggjufugl (Obsession Bird) (2019) for solo flute, is inspired by Queen Gunnhildr's role in Egill's Saga and her obsessive desire to kill Egill. In the Sagas of Icelanders Queen Gunnhildr is the wife of Eirík Bloodaxe, king of Norway and later York, and is depicted as a powerful and cruel figure, admired for her beauty and generosity, but feared for her magic, cunning and sexuality. Gunnhildr was the nemesis of Egill Skallagrímsson, and his saga and poetry present her in a particularly negative light. After a feud between the two, which ended with Egill killing Gunnhildr's 11-year-old son, Gunnhildr became obsessed with killing Egill and cursed him. The curse drove Egill to sail to York, where Eirík Bloodaxe and Gunnhildr were living in exile. When Egill's ship was shipwrecked on a nearby shore, he was brought before Eirík, who sentenced him to death. To escape the death sentence Egill was allowed a single night to compose a tributary poem to Eirík. During the night, in order to stop Egill from saving his life, Gunnhildr shapeshifted into a swallow and successfully distracted Egill from his writing by twittering constantly at the window to his prison toward morning, when an accomplice of his began guarding the window.

Þráhyggjufugl is systematically based on the poem Höfuðlausn (Head's Ransom) by Egill Skallagrímsson. Each letter in the Icelandic alphabet represents a note in F Major and F Lydian, common in Icelandic folk music, as well as a few accidentals, accents, and extended techniques at random. The notational system was then bound to all 20 verses of Höfuðlausn, while the rhythm of the piece is the same as in the song of a barn swallow. This results in an aggressive and irregular melody, embodying Gunnhildr's rage.

Hildur Elísa Jónsdóttir (hildurelisa.com) (b.1993) is an artist, musician and composer based in Reykjavík and Amsterdam. She is interested in storytelling and creating engulfing experiences, often inspired by the mundanity of everyday life. Through a variety of media, she employs normalised human behaviours and experiences in a critical way, displacing them into an artistic context. By placing these mundane, everyday happenings in unconventional and absurd scenes, she aims to challenge our understanding of our heavily constructed social reality, reflecting on our own ability to create new meaning and forge our own reality – always asking “why?” and “what if?”. Hildur Elísa holds a BA degree in Fine Arts from The Iceland University of the Arts and a diploma from the Reykjavík College of Music. During her studies at the IUA she went on exchange at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts in Switzerland, and after graduation she did an internship with artist, musician, and composer Lina Lapelytė in Vilnius.

Kazakh flautist **Maral Yerbol** received her first flute lessons at the age of seven. She continued her creative path in Almaty, studying at the Special Music School of K. Bayseitova. During her studies she participated in numerous competitions and performed several times as a soloist with the Almaty State Philharmonic Theater and Camerata Almaty. Supported by scholarships from the Ad Infinitum Foundation and the Yehudi Menuhin -

Life Music Now Association, she completed her bachelor's studies at the Rostock University of Music and Drama in the class of Prof. Dr. Anja Setzkorn-Krause. Master classes with Robert Winn, Renate Greiss Armin and Pirmin Grehl completed her musical career. She has performed in concerts as a soloist, chamber musician and orchestral musician, among others with the Norddeutsche Philharmonie and the Wietzow Opera. Baroque and contemporary music plays a particularly important role in Maral's repertoire.

In September 2022, Maral began master's studies at the Lucerne Conservatory in the class of Isabelle Schnöller Hildebrandt.