

The Bulletin

of the Society for American Music

FOUNDED IN HONOR
OF OSCAR G. T. SONNECK

From the President

Denise von Glahn



This President's Message will be different from many others in that it must start with a thank you and a goodbye. Days after the close of this year's conference, Dr. Megan MacDonald informed the Board that she had accepted another Executive Director position close to her home and family and would officially hand over her duties to an interim Executive Director starting April 6. Within months of beginning her seven years with SAM in 2019, Megan was confronted with the COVID pandemic, and she gave birth to twins. Business as usual was not an option, so she started the job having to invent ways of doing the Society's business. With the support of President Tammy Kernodle, and working closely with SAM's Technology Coordinator, Paula Bishop, and then-Associate Conference Manager, Joice Gibson,

Megan and the team quickly pivoted from a thoroughly planned in-person conference to be held in Minneapolis to a fully virtual event. The online conference ran so smoothly it became the model for sister societies who needed to make similar arrangements for their own conferences. It is hard to imagine a more intense or protracted baptism-by-fire for any incoming Executive Director. SAM would continue to hold virtual conferences in 2021 and 2022. It wouldn't be until 2023 that SAM held an in-person conference, in Minneapolis. Finally, Megan and her conference team, which now included Megan Murph as Associate Conference Manager, had an opportunity to mount and host the kind of event a majority of members craved.

In the intervening years, the Executive Director position has grown in its complexity and reach. And Megan repeatedly rose to the occasion by, for example, recently completing a course on financial management of non-profits. It's no wonder that someone else wanted her skills. We will miss Megan's remarkable graciousness and equanimity. She has been a trusted and respected advocate for SAM with encyclopedic knowledge of our Society and its operations. She has promised to be available through June to assist our Interim Executive Director, Dr. Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, currently SAM Secretary, through this transitional period. They have already arranged weekly meetings to ensure that this moment is a smooth one. And so, we say thank you, farewell, and all good wishes as you embark on this next chapter of your professional life. We'll look for you in a different role in Buffalo, 2027: perhaps a regular attendee?

Volume LII, No. 2

Spring 2026

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We look forward to many opportunities for SAM members to engage with each other in the coming months. This summer we anticipate a roundtable event facilitated by Megan Murph that is part of SAM's Sounding the Nation at 250 initiative and features directors from American Music Centers and Institutes in discussion. Stay tuned for more details on that as well as a future President's Forum focused on the question of internationalism. How does, and how can SAM support its international members? Is there room for international engagement in the SAM community? In what ways is the international exchange of ideas necessary, essential, desirable, beneficial? For whom? I envision a virtual roundtable of scholars who are actively caught in this moment.

The business of SAM continues day and night and seven days a week with dozens of small conversations taking place through email, text, and phone calls among board and staff members. As I write, volunteers are working on the *Bulletin* and *JSAM*, organizing committee meetings, and planning next year's conference. SAM exists because of its volunteers. With so much activity, however, the need for an Executive Director has become apparent, as a single central figure directing traffic prevents the odd, confused, or missing communication. But patience and good will go a long way and we'll get there. The Development Committee is looking forward to engaging with our new permanent Executive Director starting in September; a task force is currently rethinking our committee structure; an ad-hoc group is investigating opportunities that might exist for publishing editions of American music post-MUSA; and we're all imagining ways to strengthen SAM so that its promise of community is a reality for everyone.

2026 SAM Business Meeting Summary

Dana Gorzelany-Mostak, Secretary and Interim Executive Director

SAM convened its annual business meeting on March 14, 2026, at the Downtown Marriott in Richmond, VA. **President Denise Von Glahn** opened the meeting by expressing her gratitude to the many individuals whose efforts contributed to a successful and vibrant conference. She offered special thanks to the conference team of Megan MacDonald, Megan Murph, and Paula Bishop, the Local Arrangements Committee, and the Program Committee for assembling an exciting program of scholarship, performances, and excursions.

Von Glahn discussed the newly approved [strategic plan](#), developed under the leadership of former Vice President Beth Levy. This plan will guide SAM's priorities in the coming years, with an emphasis on community engagement, infrastructure, and expanded impact. In response to member feedback on the 2024 survey, SAM has already started implementing new initiatives to improve communication and sustain connection between annual meetings. The President's Forum is a quarterly virtual gathering designed to facilitate discussion on pressing issues in the field. Recent forums have addressed challenges in teaching and the evolving role of artificial intelligence in music scholarship and pedagogy. A forthcoming town hall will allow members to offer feedback on the conference. Additional initiatives include plans to redesign the SAM website for improved usability and accessibility, as well as the launch of [Sounding the Nation at 250](#), a series of concerts, exhibits, and lectures which will promote engagement with American music research in anticipation of the U.S. Semiquincentennial. The Board is also examining the possibility of expanding publication practices to include scholarship in languages other than English. Von Glahn noted the Board's recent vote to expand the hours and compensation of the Executive Director, a move intended to strengthen organizational infrastructure and support future initiatives, including the upcoming capital campaign. The Board has also transitioned to a quarterly meeting schedule to enhance responsiveness and continuity.

Executive Director Megan MacDonald emphasized the importance of member engagement and encouraged attendees to contribute their time, creativity, and ideas to SAM. She announced efforts to revive SAM's listservs, which will begin with job postings and announcements, with the possibility for expansion. MacDonald also discussed the importance of financial support, noting that member contributions enable the Society to pursue innovative programming and initiatives.

Treasurer Doug Shadle reported that the Society is in a strong financial position, with a positive net income over the past year. At the same time, he acknowledged the broader context of precarity in academic employment and stressed the importance of aligning financial decisions with the Society's core values. Shadle outlined several strategic investments, including a new progressive dues structure, expanded non-conference programming, and increased staffing capacity. He emphasized that these changes, while involving some risk, are essential for long-term sustainability and growth.

Vice President **Jeff Magee** discussed the implementation of the new strategic plan, which centers on three priorities: connection, foundation, and impact. He announced plans for a major capital campaign—tentatively titled the “SAM Century Campaign”—with a goal of raising one million dollars. Building on the success of the previous SAM 2.0 campaign, this initiative will secure the Society’s future and support the next generation of scholars. Magee highlighted volunteerism as a defining attribute of the organization.

Jim Cassaro and **Paul Sommerfeld** introduced Buffalo, NY, as the site of the 2027 annual conference and issued a [call for papers](#). The meeting concluded with recognition of outgoing and incoming Board members, a moment of remembrance for members who passed during the previous year, and the announcement of numerous fellowships, awards, and honors. Among the notable awardees were Neil Lerner, who won the Distinguished Service Award, and Katherine (Kitty) Preston, who won the Lifetime Achievement Award.

Von Glahn closed by reaffirming SAM’s commitment to collegiality, transparency, and service.

SAM Awards and Fellowships 2025–26

Adrienne Fried Block Fellowship

[Scott Spencer](#)



The winner of the 2026 Adrienne Fried Block Fellowship is **Scott Spencer** for his book-in-progress, *Never Forget – Piping for the Fallen*, under contract with the Oxford University Press American Musicspheres series. The project explores the New York Police Department Emerald Society Bagpipe Band, their creation of a line-of-duty funeral in 1971, and how that exclusively Irish American rite of passage has shifted in New York City over time to represent anyone, from any ethnicity or religion, who has died in public service. Using historical and archival research along with personal interviews, Spencer argues that the practice of bagpiping at line-of-duty NYPD funerals developed from a specific local urban tradition rooted in an expression of Irish American identity, to a broader national practice in the post-9/11 United States that touches many areas of public service and commemorative musicmaking while reflecting changing expressions of Irish identity in America.

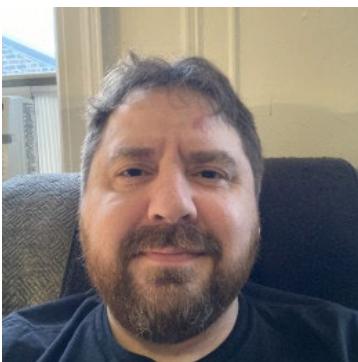
John and Roberta Graziano Fellowship

[James Revell Carr](#)

The winner of the 2026 John and Roberta Graziano Fellowship is **James Revell Carr** to support research toward his book-in-progress, *Beyond Blackface: Cultural Appropriation in Nineteenth Century American Performing Arts*. Carr’s book will explore the multifaceted nature of musical mimicry based on racial, national, and ethnic signifiers present in the popular performances of the nineteenth-century United States. Carr argues that this ethnic musical mimicry reflects a social need to understand an emergent American identity as a nation of immigrants, and that the appropriative practices of that era are a cornerstone of today’s postmodern popular culture.



Edward T. Cone Fellowship



[Scott Gleason](#)

The winner of the 2026 Edward T. Cone Fellowship is **Scott Gleason** for his book-in-progress, *Composing Modernism: Musical Formalism and the Experimental Turn in the Princeton School*, to be published by the University of California Press. The book explores the people, subjects, and aesthetic and formal aspects of The Princeton School of composer-theorists, a major force in North American musical modernism. In exploring the later shift from serialism to experimental and improvisational techniques by J. K. Randall, Benjamin Boretz, and Elaine Barkin, Gleason’s book asserts the extended impact of Princeton School composers, beyond the immediate post-war era of Milton Babbitt.

Paul Charosh Independent Scholar Fellowship

Deanna Witkowski

This year there were four applications for the Charosh Award, and the winner is **Deanna Witkowski**, an independent scholar living in Chicago, IL. Witkowski will research “Jazz in the Pews: ‘Experiments in Sunday Worship’ in the 1960s,” which explores the relationships between two Black Catholic composers, Mary Lou Williams and Eddie Bonnemère, and two parishes for which they composed liturgical jazz: St. Thomas the Apostle Church, a Black Catholic parish in Harlem, and Saint Peter’s Church (Lutheran), a predominantly white Protestant congregation, in midtown Manhattan.



Photo Credit: Erika Kapin

Wayne Shirley Research Fellowship



Eric Zolov

Of the four applicants this year, the winner is **Eric Zolov**, a Professor at Stony Brook University. The award will facilitate research into the personal papers of the Brazilian American musician Laurindo Almeida, original photographs by David Drew Zingg taken during the visit by bossa nova performers in New York City in the fall of 1962, and additional bossa nova related items held by the Library of Congress. These materials will be used in developing a larger research project, “The Bossa Nova Moment: Harmonizing Pan-Americanism in the Era of the Cuba Revolution.”

Hampsong Education Fellowship in American Song

Narantsetseg Ren

The winner of the 2026 Hampsong Fellowship is **Narantsetseg Ren** for her presentation “Songs Across the Bridge: The Origins and Social Functions of Native American Song.” This research explores the cross-cultural contexts of Native American Song, culminating in a pilot concert in late 2026, *Songs Across the Bridge: A Musical Dialogue Between Continents*, which will “preserve and revitalize song traditions that illuminate both cultural identity and collective memory.”



Virgil Thomson Fellowship

Elizabeth Craft and Seokyoung Kim



The Co-Winner of the 2026 Virgil Thomson Fellowship is **Elizabeth Craft** (left) for her book *Hundreds of Stories: A Cultural History of In the Heights*. Craft seeks to explore the musical depiction of Latino culture through the eyes of a Latino creator.

The Co-Winner of the 2026 Virgil Thomson Fellowship is **Seokyoung Kim** (right) for her dissertation “Opera, Interculturality, and Asian American Voices in Huang Ruo’s *M. Butterfly*.” The dissertation focuses, in her words, “on the century long dialogue with Puccini’s *Madama Butterfly*,” moving from “exotic spectacle into an exploration of race, gender, and listening itself.”



Judith McCulloh Fellowship

Maako Shiratori

The winner of the 2026 Judith McCulloh Fellowship is **Maako Shiratori** for fieldwork in support of her dissertation “Performing ‘Jappalachian’ Music: An Embodied Asian American Community from the Mountains.” Shiratori’s interviews and participant observations will extend across musical networks in the U.S. Appalachian region and Japan.



Anne Dhu McLucas Fellowship

Sweet Corn Young Woman (Christina M. Thomas)

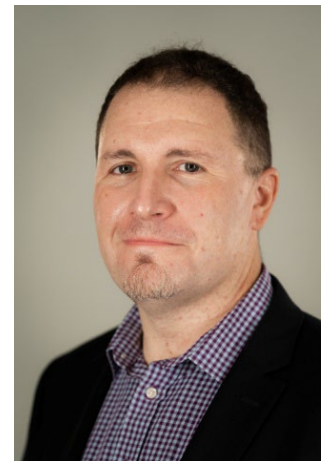


The winner of the 2026 Anne Dhu McLucas Fellowship is **Sweet Corn Young Woman**, English name **Christina M. Thomas**. The awarded funds will support work with Community Elders on her critical edition project titled “Numu Nugadu.” This community-led edited collection of songs, featuring Numu-centered transcriptions and translations, is designed to amplify Numu histories and practices long assumed lost or silenced and to advance community health and wellbeing via narratives of resurgence.

Eileen Southern Fellowship

Gibb Schreffler

The winner of the 2026 Eileen Southern Fellowship is **Gibb Schreffler**, in support of his book project *Recovering the African American Heritage of Sea Shanties*. Schreffler argues that sea shanties, by the early twentieth century, underwent a “discursive appropriation to represent romantic images of white/European sailors.” To construct a more complete picture of shanties as a product of the Atlantic cultural exchange, Schreffler’s book “draws on previously neglected accounts of African diasporic music making, cross analyzing disparate data points from primary source texts and recorded/transcribed musical material.”



Koegel Latin American and Latinx Fellowship

Christopher Campo-Bowen and Wesley Somers



The winners of the 2026 John Koegel Latin American and Latinx Fellowship are **Christopher Campo-Bowen** (left) and **Wesley Somers**.

Campo-Bowen’s project, “Music, Politics, and Performance in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century El Salvador,” surveys the history of opera and theater in the region, as well as popular music during the Salvadoran Civil War. In doing so, he illuminates the cultural, social, and political history of a country that has received comparatively little attention in Latin American music scholarship.

Somers’s project, “Laudería jarocho tradicional: Maintaining Jarocho Cultural Knowledge in the Age of Neo-extractivism,” focuses on the instrument-making tradition associated with Son Jarocho from the Sotavento region in southern Veracruz. In particular, he addresses the correlations between instrument-making, cultural production, and ecology.

Charles Hiroshi Garrett Fellowship

Kyle DeCoste and Alex Blue V

The winner of the 2026 Charles Hiroshi Garrett Fellowship for Research on Music and Racial/Social Justice is the scholarly team of **Kyle DeCoste** (Ethnomusicologist, Tulane University) and **Alex Blue V** (Art Historian and Communication Studies Scholar, McGill University) for their research project and anticipated future book titled “Country Rap: An Ethnographic Study of Race, Place, and Sound.” Their project explores the underground genre of “Hick-Hop,” using a collaborative, interracial, and multidisciplinary ethnographic method. DeCoste and Blue argue that the inherent contradictions of this primarily white, rural music given voice in the sonic and symbolic traditions of a Black urban genre offer provocative insights into the conflicts, contestations, and contradictions of the current political moment shaping social justice in the United States. The fellowship award will support a pair of ethnographic trips to attend Country Rap festivals and interview artists, practitioners, and audience members to explore issues of appropriation, authenticity, and the music’s complex stories and “muddy” representations through an interracial lens.



Margery Lowens Dissertation Research Fellowship

Morgan Bates and John C. Wood

The co-winner of the 2026 Margery Lowens Dissertation Research Fellowship is **Morgan Bates** for their dissertation “‘The Space in My Mouth’: Drag Vocal Performance as Material(ized) Resistance in the United States,” which explores “drag vocality,” or the “social lives of voices in drag.” Considering the material and sensorial aspects of the voice in drag performance from Black feminist and queer of color critical discourses, Bates proposes “drag vocality” as a site of social resistance and interhuman connection, a crucial and timely topic today.



The co-winner of the 2026 Margery Lowens Dissertation Research Fellowship is **John C. Wood** for his dissertation “A Highway Acoustemology: American Popular Music in the Age of Internal Combustion,” which introduces the “musical car” as a locus of human, technological, political, and environmental interaction. Creatively synthesizing scholarship from car studies, sound studies, organology, and political ecology, Wood argues that the musical car can illuminate the “contradictory inheritances of American optimism and waste,” and in so doing provides a novel method for theorizing cultural-ecological relationships in the Anthropocene.

The committee was deeply impressed by both projects’ well-grounded theoretical frames, creative and interdisciplinary methodologies, compelling arguments, and passionate commitment to the communities and topics they intend to research. Exploring music and cultural practices in relation to sociality, politics, technological advances, and the environment, the authors promise to have broad impact. We are confident that Morgan Bates’s and John C. Wood’s work will resonate with scholars within and beyond the musicological community.

Judith Tick Fellowship

Heidi Carolyn Feldman

There were seven applicants this year for the Judith Tick Fellowship. The winner is **Heidi Carolyn Feldman**, a visiting scholar at the University of California, San Diego. The award will allow Feldman to complete a book-length biography of the Black Peruvian composer, choreographer, and director Victoria Santa Cruz (1922–2014).



Irving Lowens Article Award

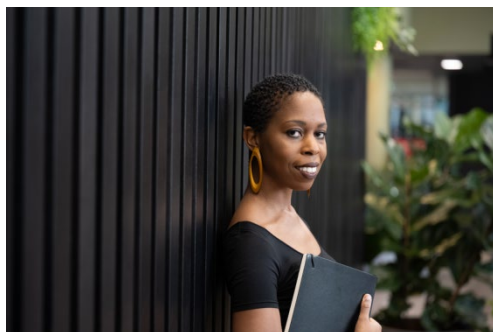
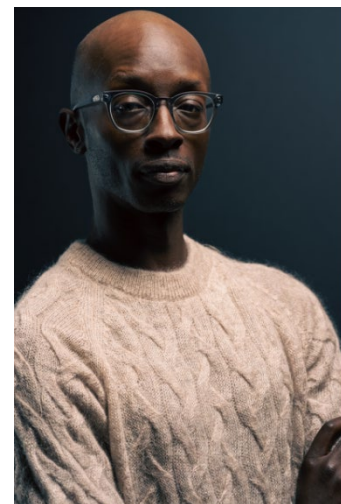
Matthew Mendez

The winner of the 2026 Irving Lowens Article Award is **Matthew Mendez** for his article “History Beyond Recovery: Julius Eastman and the Challenge of the Heterological,” published in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. Mendez’s article moves beyond simply a great case study to investigate how musicological canons are formed (or unformed) and the power of hermeneutics to reconstitute the lives and contributions of marginalized individuals who appear to have vanished “without a trace.”

Irving Lowens Book Award

Matthew D. Morrison and Samantha Ege

The winner of the 2026 Irving Lowens Book Award is **Matthew D. Morrison** for his book *Blacksound: Making Race and Popular Music in the United States*, published by the University of California Press. The committee lauded *Blacksound* for its new and convincing way of understanding the insidious and complicated legacy of blackface minstrelsy and its performances of blackness as the foundation of the American popular music industry and for demonstrating how Black music and musical performance has been, and continues to be, adopted, adapted and appropriated. Opening multiple lines of inquiry on the intersections of race, musical performance, and intellectual property, Morrison’s book is rigorous in its scholarship and compelling and engaging in its literary voice.



The committee also wants to acknowledge as an honorable mention **Samantha Ege** for her *South Side Impresarios: How Race Women Transformed Chicago’s Classical Music Scene*, published by the University of Illinois Press.

Wiley Housewright Dissertation Award

Jade Conlee and Chase Castle



The winner of the 2026 Housewright Dissertation Prize is **Jade Conlee** for her dissertation “Empire’s Sonic Atmospheres: Background Music and Racial Worldmaking,” which explores background music, particularly “exotica,” a genre that emerged in the 1950s, in relation to American empire. Adeptly connecting exotica to postwar American musical, cultural, and political phenomena ranging from white flight and the rise of the American suburb to the evolution of hi-fi recording, Conlee convincingly argues that background music constitutes immersive “atmospheric cartographies” that shape and document social ideologies, racialized productions of space, and global power structures.

The committee is also pleased to recognize **Chase Castle** with an Honorable Mention for his dissertation “The Gospel in Black and White: Race and Power in American Evangelical Hymnody, 1840–1900.” Drawing on a rich trove of religious and musical material, Castle compellingly demonstrates that nineteenth-century gospel hymns drew on minstrelsy and spirituals as well as Sunday school song to uphold racial order, discipline subjects, and create affective experiences in evangelical settings that crossed continents and color lines.



Mark Tucker Award

Joseph Z. Johnson

This year's Mark Tucker Award goes to **Joseph Z. Johnson** for his paper "My Banjo Still Thinks It's a Tree: Black Lutherie, Land, and the Politics of Sonic Materiality." In this creative and compelling paper, Johnson crafts a moving and fresh narrative about the contemporary Black banjo renaissance as he turns a critical eye and ear to the intersection of environment, instrument-making, and racial justice. Johnson positions banjo-making as not only a craft, but also a land-based political practice that reconnects systems of knowledge, memory, land, and bodies to challenge existing narratives surrounding the instrument and its practitioners. Johnson's work asks us to think about labor and modes of production from beginning to end. Interweaving a deeply personal mode of storytelling while also threading interviews, theoretical analysis, and attention to ethnographic detail, this paper stood out to the committee as a powerful model for the next generation of musicological storytelling. This careful combination invited the committee to think more deeply about the labor of musical creation and the material history behind every musical moment. A true tour de force in American music research.



Cambridge University Press Award

Alyssa Cottle

The winner of the 2026 Cambridge University Press Award for international scholars is **Alyssa Cottle**, for her paper, "Commemoration, Memory, and the Chilean Post-Dictatorial Digital Sound Archive," presented at the 2026 national meeting. The paper examines Chile's Popular Unity period (1970–1973) through the digital sound archive El Discos Cultura, which preserves and commemorates the catalogue of the state-owned IRT Records, dispersed and fragmented after the 1973 CIA-backed coup that ended Salvador Allende's socialist government and installed the dictator Augusto Pinochet. Cottle shows in her thought-provoking and eloquent paper how the project, which presents surviving recordings on online radio, excavates a cultural memory of past hopes and lost futures nearly erased amid ongoing political challenges in Chile during and after Pinochet's dictatorship.



H. Earle Johnson Publication Subvention

S. Andrew Granade and Amy Skjerseth

The first winner of the 2026 H. Earle Johnson Publication Subvention is **S. Andrew Granade**, for his edited volume *The Musical Identities of Harry Partch: History, Theories, Performance*, published by Boydell & Brewer Press. Granade's collection offers a cutting-edge rethinking of a composer who himself was the epitome of cutting-edge thought, bringing together a dozen distinguished scholars to situate Partch's eventful life and complex legacy.



The second winner of the 2026 H. Earle Johnson Publication Subvention is **Amy Skjerseth**, for her monograph *Instrumental Presets: The Visible Past of Popular Music*, published by University of California Press. Skjerseth's work explodes the concept of the "preset" as it arose in popular and commercial music throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, using it as a lens to probe fascinating issues of economics, aesthetics, and identity.

Distinguished Service Award

Neil Lerner

Neil Lerner has provided sterling service to the Society for American Music, most visibly in his eight years as Secretary (four terms, 2010–18) and as Chair of the Local Arrangements Committee for the Charlotte meeting in 2012. Both tasks were extremely time-consuming, requiring a tremendous amount of finesse and attention to detail. Especially collegial and supportive, he carried out these key responsibilities with calm assurance, warm humor, and a steady hand. He has also served as a member of the Nominating Committee (2005–08; 2024–26), the Lowens Book Award Committee (2006–07, Chair in 2007), the Long-Range Planning Committee (2012), the Development Committee (2015–17), and the Program Committee (2024). Beyond SAM, Neil has served as the Editor of *American Music* and been on the editorial boards of the *Journal of the Society for American Music*; *Music, Sound, and the Moving Image*; the *Journal of Sound and Music in Games*; and the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. As a prolific author, as editor of several essay collections, and as Series Editor for Routledge’s Music and Screen Media series, Neil Lerner has made sustained contributions to the field of music and screen media and to music and disability studies.



Lifetime Achievement Award

Katherine K. Preston



Katherine K. (Kitty) Preston is a scholar, teacher, mentor, and leader. She is aptly described in *Grove* as “among the most prominent scholars of performance and the careers of performers in early America, seeking a broader understanding of music in American culture and advocating for 19th-century studies.”

Preston taught at the College of William and Mary from 1989 to 2018, serving for many years as the David N. and Margaret C. Bottoms Professor of Music. She has also held academic positions at Christ’s College, Cambridge, Leiden University, Keele University, the University of Maryland, and Catholic University. She is the recipient of many prestigious fellowships, including from the Fulbright Scholar Program and the National Humanities Center.

Preston’s long and continuing scholarly career has produced invaluable research over the span of many decades. Her books and editions include *George Frederick Bristow* (Illinois, 2020); *Opera for the People: English-Language Opera and Women Managers in Late 19th-Century America* (Oxford, 2017); *Bristow’s Symphony No. 2 (“Jullien”): A Critical Edition* (MUSA, 2011); *Emily’s Songbook: Popular Music in 1850s Albany*, co-edited with Mark Slobin, James Kimball, and Deane Root (A-R, 2011); and *Opera on the Road: Traveling Opera Companies in the United States, 1825–1860* (Illinois, 1993).

Preston’s service to the Society for American Music has been exemplary. She was a member of the Board of Trustees from 1991 to 1993; chaired the program committee for the international multi-society conference, Toronto 2000: Musical Intersections; led the society as President from 2011 to 2013, during which time she was a leader in the successful development campaign, SAM 2.0. For this and much more she received SAM’s Distinguished Service Award in 2020.

Constantly at work on a new book, article, lecture, leadership initiative, or conference paper, Kitty Preston exemplifies the model of a productive scholar, even while she reserves time for mentorship and service to her field.

Sounding the Nation at 250

July 4, 2026, marks the 250th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence. In recognition of this historic milestone, the Society for American Music is proud to sponsor Sounding the Nation at 250, a nationwide series of lectures, recitals, and exhibits celebrating the rich and diverse musical heritage of the Americas. This initiative highlights the essential role that music and the arts have played in expressing the hopes, struggles, identities, and aspirations of communities across time, while also looking forward to a future in which the arts continue to foster creativity, connection, and shared civic life.

SAM250 fosters collaboration among universities, ensembles, museums, libraries, and arts organizations, and showcases a diverse range of genres, including musical theater, blues, gospel, rap, film music, classical, and folk. From libraries to concert halls to community spaces, ten events have already taken place with twenty more to come! Check out our website for events near you. Or consider joining us for one of our events that will be livestreamed. Visit us at SAM250.org.

And we are still accepting proposals! Submit your Sounding the Nation at 250 ideas [here](#).

Journal of the Society for American Music

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Sangheon Lee

Jake Heggie, *Intelligence*, Houston Grand Opera

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“CFP”

Bulletin Editor's Note: Incoming editor of the Journal of the Society for American Music, Marian Wilson Kimber, wished to share this poem to encourage all members to submit their research for publication. This poem was first presented during the Business Meeting of the 2025 SAM Conference in Tacoma, WA.

Perhaps you have wondered if your work is enough,
If it's worthy of *JSAM*, if you've got the right stuff.

So let me be clear with you now, my friend,

Here is a list of topics to send:

Mariachi, ontology, and racialization,

Chinese exclusion and improvisation,

Opera, Chautauqua, and community uplift,

Female empowerment; our girl, Taylor Swift,

Synchronization, computer surrender,

Folk dance competitions and race, class, and gender,

Orchestras touring south of the borders,

Censorship, protest, and dictators' orders,

Settler colonialists and entering Black space,

Coolness, emotion, and *RuPaul's Drag Race*,

Minimalist aesthetics and generative AI,

Four Hands, Two Hearts, Two Guitars, and *Queer Eye*,

Mapping and disco, Maude Powell, gay punk,

Cage, Dawson, Price; nightlife scenes and new funk,

Forgotten accordions, bagpipes, Willie Jones,

Modernist dance, Gothic hymns, Rolling Stones,

Ephemera, archives, and white masculinity,

Mexican lo-fi and cultural hybridity,

Old timey string bands, Jewish immigration,

Assimilationist musical representation,

Beyoncé goes country, Copland's curation,

Lou Harrison encounters Asian intonation,

Violence, ethnography, hemispheric hip-hop,

Disney and Marvel, Satanic doo wop,

Soundscapes and sea chanteys, feminist views,

Marching bands, wind bands, and HBCUs,

Rock, pop, and soul, and this topic, surely:

The lost orchestrations of Harry T. Burleigh.

Whatever your topic, just say, "Yes, I am,

Going to send it along to *JSAM*."

—Marian Wilson Kimber

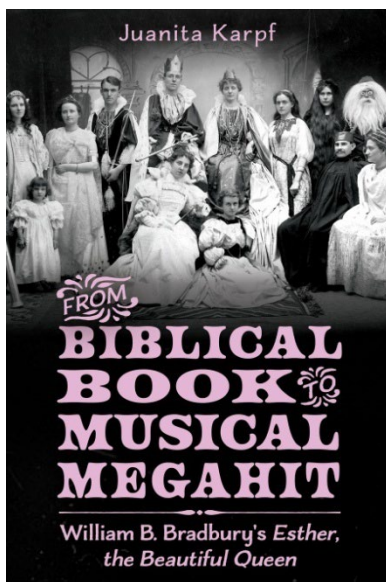
Book Reviews

[*From Biblical Book to Musical Megahit: William B. Bradbury's Esther, the Beautiful Queen.*](#)

Juanita Karpf. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2023. 296 pp. ISBN: 9781496845757. Paperback.

Hannah Porter Denecke, Alfred University

His name is less familiar today, but most practitioners of sacred music are aware of hymns by William B. Bradbury such as "Jesus Loves Me," "Just As I Am," "He Leadeth Me," or "Sweet Hour of Prayer." Yet, as Juanita Karpf reveals in *From Biblical Book to Musical Megahit*, Bradbury's music was once known far beyond the purview of hymnals on Sunday mornings. In her copious research of Bradbury's cantata, *Esther*, Karpf demonstrates the enormous impact this work had in the nineteenth-century United States and beyond. Bradbury originally conceived of *Esther, the Beautiful Queen* as a pedagogical work for teaching singing to amateurs. Karpf's study of the work traces its origins as a teaching piece to its ultimate role in nineteenth-century society as religious musical theater. In her use of archival materials from contemporary media in addition to relevant scholarly resources, the author uncovers a history of a piece that has only recently been abandoned by the popular imagination.



Esther, the Beautiful Queen begins with important context on William B. Bradbury's compositions and work as a musician. Trained at the Boston Academy of Music and a contemporary of Lowell Mason, Bradbury's first career roles were in teaching and church music throughout New England. In 1841, he relocated to New York City to teach at the Broadway Tabernacle (9). Bradbury became a frequent clinician for choral and vocal festivals and conferences throughout the United States. He developed *Esther* as a piece that could be prepared within a relatively short timeframe while he worked with young and amateur singers on their vocal skills (47). Often, *Esther* became quite beloved to the vocalists Bradbury worked with, and the local community embraced the piece as more than a pedagogical exercise. As the cantata's reputation became more widespread, community and church choirs became interested in performing the work outside of the pedagogical conventions and conferences where Bradbury served as a clinician.

In Chapter 3, Karpf describes the transition from *Esther* as a pedagogical piece mainly used by Bradbury to a religious musical theater work performed all over the United States. Various editors took the score into their own hands and revised it to suit the needs of amateur musical theater productions all over the country. These revisions included Richard Watson Seager's, which called for the work to be staged and gave extensive costuming suggestions (56), and Leon Keach's, which included numerous musical changes and the addition of piano accompaniments (68). Throughout her discussion of these revised editions, Karpf cites archival materials, such as newspaper articles and correspondence, to argue that Bradbury did not approve of *Esther* being staged. Bradbury intended the piece to function more like an oratorio, without staging or costumes being integrated (55). Bradbury's original aims for the piece did not stop enthusiastic amateurs from bringing *Esther* to the stage and transforming the simple cantata into a large-scale theatrical work. This chapter not only outlines the changes that brought the piece to the stage, but also the costuming and staging that evolved as *Esther* became a more frequently performed work in theaters.

Karpf examines genre specifically in Chapter 4, noting that confusion about the best way of describing *Esther* followed its path to the stage throughout the nineteenth century. Though Bradbury framed the work as a cantata, many listeners and practitioners of the piece questioned whether that was the most accurate description of the work. Karpf argues that *Esther* was an important early example of what is now the proliferate genre of musical theater, being a subgenre specifically of a religious nature (96). Unlike typical cantatas, oratorios, or operas, *Esther* includes tunes from popular music of the time, and updated editions of the work also included dialogue.

Chapter 5 parses the variety of reactions that religious people of the nineteenth century had to *Esther* as they experienced it as a musical theater performance. The piece was not received in a uniform manner from a religious perspective, though it tended to receive enormous affirmation from the public as a general whole. Karpf details the differing responses to *Esther* from those who participated in the production, those who viewed it as audience members, and those who entered into the public discourse about the piece's religious significance. Reactions ranged from audience members who found it entertaining and respectful to those who found it irreverent and inappropriate, but the criticism *Esther* received in public media did not affect its popularity throughout the country. At the end of this chapter, Karpf discusses the concept of Orientalism within the context of *Esther* and the aesthetics which were used to evoke the Ancient Middle East. The visual expressions of Orientalism included stages dressed with Turkish and Persian rugs and curtains, choreography which utilized scarves and cymbals, and costuming with silky and semi-transparent garments (120–122).

Chapter 6 includes several archival photographs of participants in *Esther* across the United States. The photographs range from local theater production photos from historical societies to those published in local newspapers promoting upcoming performances of the work. This chapter includes short commentary on the visual images, providing context to the reader about each local production featured in the photographs. More than any prior chapters of the book, the emphasis on a vague “oriental” aesthetic in *Esther* comes into focus through the photographs Karpf curates in Chapter 6. The reader also has the opportunity to see different interpretations of the “oriental” through the costuming and production of *Esther* in examining these photographs.

Interestingly, Chapter 7 focuses especially on the casts of *Esther*, which were comprised mostly of minorities. Productions of the cantata were not limited to white church communities or white audiences. This chapter highlights productions which took place across the United States in several African American communities, as well as San Francisco's Chinatown, and a multiracial Seventh-day Adventist cast promoted as including singers of “Filipino, Negro, Chinese, Japanese, Mexican, Guamanian and Palauan” descent (197). Karpf argues that these productions allowed the actors and musicians to identify “with the oppressed Jews in the Book of Esther, who, like themselves, were continually threatened with discriminatory, violent, and racist white behavior” (198). Chapter 8 further reinforces the transition of the cantata from a niche pedagogical work to a cultural phenomenon or “International Megahit.” By the end of the nineteenth century, *Esther* had been performed in several countries beyond the United States and was no longer known for any purpose other than religious musical theater.

Karpf's study of *Esther, the Beautiful Queen* raises questions for the reader about musical genre, ethnic identity, and ownership of a work once the composer has released it to the public. At the start of the book, Karpf states that the study is intended for a broader audience than just music specialists. This seems especially fitting for an examination of a work which surpassed its original intentions as a pedagogical piece and became a fascination to the general public. Today, *Esther* is no longer a part of the most popular musical performances to be heard and seen throughout the United States. Yet Karpf's work reveals that much of today's musical theater may have its roots in cultural phenomena like this now little-known cantata.

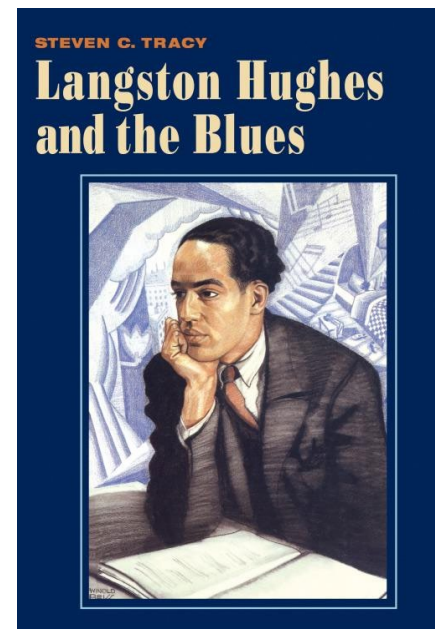
[*Langston Hughes and the Blues*](#). Steven C. Tracy. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2024. 328 pp. ISBN 9780252088049. Paperback.

Inioluwa Okunlola, West Virginia University

Can a poem have a rhythm if it is not heard, or a soul if it is not rooted in the soil of the everyday? For Langston Hughes, the answer was always found in the “low-down” bars and the weary blues of the Black working class. *Langston Hughes and the Blues* by Steven C. Tracy—now published in a new paperback edition—is an important recent release for people who study African American cultural expression in literature, music, or history. The book was initially published in 1988, but the 2024 edition maintains relevance today, connecting Hughes's art to the present. It adds a new introduction in which Tracy sheds light on recent scholarship and wider accessibility of blues recordings (ix). The updated discography and contextual additions make this edition more valuable for students or scholars encountering Langston Hughes's blues poetics for the first time. Tracy explores the blues not only as a musical form but as a kind of spiritual and social voice. This fits perfectly with contemporary discussions about art, identity, and resistance. By updating Hughes's discography and

pointing to new recordings now widely available online, the book also invites readers to hear the sounds that shaped Hughes's imagination. This transforms the book from a silent analysis to a source of an interactive soundscape for classrooms and cultural study, not just a historical document. At a time when interdisciplinary exchange seems imperative, Tracy's mix of literature, folklore, and musicology feels more important than ever. His reissued book shows how the blues continue to teach empathy, endurance, and creative freedom in the modern world.

For those unfamiliar with Tracy's writing on Hughes, the 2024 edition stays true to the structure and argument of the previous editions. In Chapter One, Tracy discusses how ideas about folklore within the Harlem Renaissance shifted over time. Alain Locke, James Weldon Johnson, and W. E. B. Du Bois, often seen as the "Old Guard," recognized the cultural importance of folk traditions, but they tended to view them through a middle-class, idealizing lens (17). Locke, for example, was perhaps the most sympathetic to the younger writers' embrace of plain, everyday language. By contrast, Hughes and his peers, including Zora Neale Hurston and Sterling Brown, approached folklore as a living source of inspiration for serious art rather than as curiosities to be polished for polite society. By looking at the differences between generations, Tracy argues that Hughes's blues poems continue the Harlem Renaissance tradition because they amplify the voices of "low-down folks." Hughes's style was a lot like Mark Twain's everyday humor or Carl Sandburg's democratic poetry because it went against what was usually seen as "polite" in literature. Instead of cleaning up or romanticizing folk culture, he leaned into its raw energy, pulling its rhythms, images, and ideas straight into his poems. Tracy shows Hughes as a writer who pushed aside elitist ideas of cultural uplift and chose instead to honor the everyday creativity of working-class Black communities.



In Chapter Two, Tracy explains the origins of the blues and what they have come to symbolize across different cultures. He places the genre in the context of African traditions, the legacy of slavery, the work songs and hollers of the Reconstruction era, and the blended styles that took shape in the early 1900s, drawing on folklore, history, and ethnomusicology. The chapter explores W.C. Handy, Howard Odum, and Guy B. Johnson, who were some of the first blues folklorists and arrangers. It also reveals how narrow their ideas were. Tracy emphasizes that the blues cannot be reduced to a single defining feature. Instead, it blends different musical styles, performance practices, and social contexts. He takes a close look at the common stanza patterns AAB, ABB, AAA, and AB-refrain to show how these forms can express everything from personal sadness to the anger of a whole community.

Tracy also points out how genuine the blues remains at the grassroots level, which he refers to as the "way of life," and how its deepest truths still come from ordinary Black communities rather than the commercial or academic versions of the genre (59). Simultaneously illustrating the genre's adaptation to broad audiences, delineating a distinct boundary between folk blues and commercial blues, Tracy shows that Hughes clearly got how these dynamics played out. In his nonfiction, Hughes often wrote about the blues as a method of survival and forward mobility, and, as an editor of phonograph records and anthologies, he connected the music to the larger picture of African American expressive culture.

Chapter Three, "Creating the Blues," is where Tracy spends the most time exploring Hughes's style of writing. It shows how Hughes made the blues into a unique kind of literary language, and in the process, he comes across as both practical and creative. Tracy points out how carefully Hughes worked with stanza forms. As he explains, "One of the most important and obvious ways that Langston Hughes used the blues tradition . . . was in his use of musical and stanzaic structures" (144). Hughes experimented with AAB, ABB, AAA, and refrain-based stanzas, often built around eight-bar and twelve-bar patterns. But he rarely applied them in a rigid, mechanical way. Instead, he shifted lines around, adjusted spacing, and played with typography so that the page itself felt like it was being performed aloud. By the close of the chapter, Hughes is shown as both someone who carried on tradition and someone who broke new ground. He made the blues easy to recognize in form but also shaped it into something new. As Tracy notes, Hughes "extended the blues in his own literary way," which suggests his modernist approach as someone engaged in experimental applications of cultural traditions (170).

The 2024 edition revitalizes this study by relating it to how we experience culture now. It clearly connects Hughes's work to relevant topics and the ways Black artistic traditions have shaped American culture. Tracy shows that blues music was not just a music performance but a way in which Black communities expressed hardship, survival, and joy. That idea carries weight in a moment when many are reconsidering the role of Black vernacular traditions in literature, music, and popular culture. Though much of the content remains the same, the updated 2024 edition reminds us that Hughes's blending of folk forms and written poetry still offers a model for how artists can honor community while experimenting with new forms.

A major strength of Tracy's book is the way it brings literary study and music study into the same conversation. His close readings never float away from real blues performance; instead, he constantly pushes the reader back to recordings, performers, and contexts. That combination of textual detail and cultural grounding is still rare in scholarship, and it makes the book useful not just for studying Hughes, but for understanding how African American expressive traditions work across genres.

Another hallmark of Tracy's writing is its authorial honesty and plainspokenness. He does not write as if to posit the final answer; instead, he invites readers to rethink, challenge, and extend his ideas. The writing itself is accessible, dense with examples, but never so technical that it pushes readers away. It is clear that Tracy respects both the music and the people who made it, and that respect comes through on every page. As a result, the book has a wide range of audiences. Students can use it to understand how Hughes built his poems, teachers can draw on its discography and examples to bring music into the classroom, and researchers can rely on it as a starting point for deeper work on blues literature. Because Tracy writes with so much attention to performance and sound, the book also speaks to readers interested in folklore, music history, and African American cultural studies, not just poetry.

Most of all, Tracy highlights Hughes's greatest innovation: putting the voices of "low-down folks" at the center of American modernism (41). By treating the blues as both folk art and modernist experiment, Hughes built a bridge between oral and written traditions, between the community and the individual, between the local and the universal. Tracy's book makes sure that this achievement is still heard, studied, and felt. In the end, it reminds us that to fully appreciate Hughes, we also need to "dig in the dirt" and uncover the traditions that lie beneath American literature (xvii).

***Bulletin* Board & Member News**

From **Jeffrey Magee** and **Marian Wilson Kimber**: The Richard Crawford Internship honors the legacy of the pioneering scholar of American music and long-time SAM member Richard Crawford (1935–2024). The editor-in-chief of the *Journal of the Society for American Music*, in consultation with the SAM Board, shall be empowered to appoint a student assistant to the editor, supported by an honorarium, and the assistant shall hold the Internship in recognition of its namesake's commitment to the broad spectrum of American music; clear, precise writing; mentoring students; painstaking editing; elevating the voices of underserved scholars and musicians; and ensuring the integrity of the peer-review process for scholarly publication.

The first recipient of the Crawford Internship is **Wendi Griffiths** (right), a Doctor of Musical Arts candidate in voice at the University of Iowa, where she is serving as *JSAM's* assistant editor. Her scholarly work focuses on assessment in the arts—including in a forthcoming Pressbook from Iowa's Center for Teaching—and the expansion of music curricula to incorporate women and other underrepresented composers. Wendi's ongoing dissertation project is entitled *The American Singing Voice on Stage: An Anthology of Songs by Female Composers of Early Broadway, 1900–1925*. An experienced pedagogue, Wendi has taught voice, piano, and music courses at several universities. She has also worked in arts administration and marketing in nonprofit and higher education settings.



From **SAM Student Forum**: The Student Forum is thrilled to announce **Virginia Jansen**, from UC Davis, as our new junior co-chair. Virginia was elected during this past Annual Conference in Richmond, VA, and is excited to bring new ideas into the Student Forum and continue developing our ongoing projects!

The *Bulletin* is an excellent space for the work of scholars, particularly those interested in forms of writing that deviate from traditional long-form academic articles. As an accessible online periodical, the *Bulletin* is a great way to share your work with the SAM community regardless of where you are in your academic journey. Media and concert reviews, ethnographies, and short essays representing styles of music from across the Americas are welcome.

This coming year, we especially encourage **concert and media reviews** (~500–750 words) marking the 250th anniversary of the United States. If you have an idea for a review, please contact the Media Reviews editor, Katie Callam.

From **Katherine Preston**: The *Forging an American Musical Identity* (FAMI) committee has continued to work hard to spread news and information about musical culture and excellent compositions written in the U.S. during the long nineteenth century (ca 1800–ca 1917). Our late January conference in Manhattan was a spectacular success—not even the blizzard kept folks away from the first-ever multiday conference devoted to 19th-century musical culture in our country. There were almost sixty participants (not including performers), and more than half were SAM members. There were 33 papers, 3 lecture recitals, and 2 concerts: the first included Anthony Philip Heinrich’s song cycle *Sunset Chimes* and excellent string quartets by William Henry Fry and George Frederick Bristow; the second (and culminating event) featured the American Symphony Orchestra under the direction of Leon Botstein performing works by three American composers: Dudley Buck’s *Festival Overture*, three spiritual adaptations by Harry Burleigh, and the modern premiere of Bristow’s *Symphony No. 5, the Niagara*, at Carnegie Hall. One of our many sponsors was SAM, through a Sounding the Nation at 250 award. See the FAMI webpage (<https://forginganamericanmusicalidentity.org/>) for information on 19th-century American composers and works, with links to recordings and (in many cases) scores. Help us celebrate our nation’s history during the Semiquincentennial with music from our rich musical past!

W. Anthony Sheppard (Williams College) has received a 2026 Guggenheim Fellowship in the area of Music Research.

Upcoming SAM Events and Deadlines

June 1: Proposals are due for the [2027 annual conference in Buffalo, NY](#). Applications are also due for the [Housewright Dissertation Award](#), the [Lowens Article Award](#), and the [Lowens Book Award](#).

July 15: Applications are due for the [Margery Lowens Dissertation Research Fellowship](#).

This summer, several SAM250 events will be live-streamed and accessible to the public. These include:

July 18, 11:00am CDT: John Spilker-Beed, [Opportunities for Care, Repair, and Equity: Discovering Music in Research on Racial Injustice](#). We will be holding a SAM Members Watch Party in connection with the lecture. Join your fellow SAM members via Zoom to watch the talk together and chat. Once the talk has concluded, Dr. Trudi Wright, SAM President-elect, will facilitate a conversation on the topics addressed in the lecture. This is a great opportunity to engage in dialogue with your colleagues and explore how we might bring conversations about care and repair into our work. You can register for the Watch Party [here](#).

July 29, 1:00pm EDT: Revell Carr, Mark Clague, Kathryn Haines, Paddy League, Megan Murph, Scott Schwartz, Christopher Smith, Michael Uy, and Heidi Marshal, [American Music Centers and Institutes Unite for America250](#)

Call for *Bulletin* Contributions

The *Bulletin* editorial board invites members to contribute feature articles, reviews, and news, as well as ideas for future *Bulletin* segments or series. We welcome essays and opinion pieces on current issues in American music (broadly conceived) and music scholarship; reports on concerts and conferences of interest to our membership; transcriptions of interviews with prominent persons in American musical life; reviews of recent books, online resources, media (including albums and documentaries) pertaining to American music; and updates on our members’ scholarly, creative, and professional activities. You can contact members of the editorial board via the [SAM website](#) or via the email addresses listed at the bottom of the *Bulletin* issue.

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Book Reviews Editor: [Chase Castle](#)

Design, Layout, and Media Editor: [Katie Callam](#)

Items for submission should be submitted via the [Bulletin's information page](#). Photographs or other graphic materials should be accompanied by captions and desired location in the text. Deadlines for submission of materials are 15 December, 15 April, and 15 August.