



Decolonising Sonic Heritage Spaces

Knowledge Exchange Workshop

**Monday June 19th, 2023
9.15am-5.15pm**

**Department of Performing Arts, Room AG09
College Building, St John Street, London EC1V 4BP**

Image by Shaouraav Shreshtha. Baglamuthi Temple, Nepal

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SCHEDULE AND SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

<https://www.city.ac.uk/news-and-events/events/2023/june/decolonizing-sonic-heritage-spaces-a-heif-funded-knowledge-exchange-workshop>

This HEIF-supported knowledge exchange event brings together curators, heritage professionals, sound artists and scholars to explore sound as a form of public engagement, learning, and critique in heritage spaces, with a focus on centring previously marginalised stories and voices. This event is convened by Dr Maria Mendonça (Kenyon College, US/City) and Professor Laudan Nooshin (City). Further information on the HEIF project can be found on the [Re-sounding the Past website](#).

SCHEDULE

9.15am Welcome

9.30-11am: Session 1

Chair: Eleanor M.K. Ryan (University of Cambridge)

James Bulgin (IWM London): 'Revising Sound's Scope in IWM's New Holocaust Galleries'

John Kannenberg (Museum of Portable Sound): 'Sound Studies as a Museum Decolonisation Methodology: The Museum of Portable Sound'

Susanna Austin (Curator and Visitor Experience Consultant): 'Integrity and the Visitor Experience of Voices and Sound in Historic Spaces'

Marion Leonard (University of Liverpool): 'Taking up Space: Using Sound in a Strategy to Decolonise the Museum'

11am-11.30am: Break (refreshments in the Performance Space foyer on the lower ground floor of the College Building)

11.30-1pm: Session 2

Chair: Flora Dennis (University of Sussex)

Jeanice Brooks (University of Southampton) and Wiebke Thormählen (Royal Northern College of Music): 'Hearing New Voices in Historic House Museums'

Aki Pasoulas (University of Kent) and Brona Martin (University of Birmingham): 'Sonic Palimpsest – Revisiting Chatham Historic Dockyards'

Mariana López (University of York): 'Diversifying Acoustical Heritage and Historical Soundscapes Research'

1-2pm: Lunch (Room ALG08, Common Room, lower ground floor of the College Building. N.B. feel free to take sandwiches onto the grass in Northampton Square if the weather is nice)

2-3pm: Session 3

Chair: Laura Joy Pieters (Science Museum)

Rachel Cowgill (University of York): 'Sonic Recoveries: Rearticulating the Lost Spaces of a Historic High Street through Sound'

Louise K. Wilson (University of Leeds): 'Encountering Survival: Audio Guides for Holocaust Centre North'

3-4pm: Break Out Sessions (rooms AG09, A107, A108, A111, Performance Space)

Led by Jeanice Brooks (University of Southampton) Marion Leonard (University of Liverpool) and Susanna Austin (Curator and Visitor Experience Consultant); Rachel Cowgill (University of York); John Kannenberg (Museum of Portable Sound); Brona Martin (University of Birmingham) and Aki Pasoulas (University of Kent); and Rina Sagoo (Museum of London)

4pm: Break (refreshments in Performance Space foyer)

4.30-5.15pm: Plenary session

ABSTRACTS AND BIOGRAPHIES

Session 1

Revising Sound's Scope in IWM's New Holocaust Galleries

In October 2021 IWM opened its new Holocaust Galleries. These Galleries sought to integrate evolutions in both historiographical and museological thinking in order to encourage visitors to think about the subject in fundamentally different ways. The use of sound was an integral part of this new approach. James will talk through the decision making process that informed the development of the sound design and how this evolved in dialogue with the practical and interpretive challenges that the team faced.

James Bulgin is Head of Public History at Imperial War Museums and was previously Head of Content for the award-winning new Holocaust Galleries. Before joining IWM James worked as a commercial theatre producer and director, with work in the West End and on national tour. He is currently completing his PhD at Royal Holloway College, University of London on ideas of apocalypse in Holocaust and Cold War history and he has an MA (with distinction) in Holocaust Studies. His academic research focuses on issues of representation in Holocaust literature and film, and he has presented papers at conferences in the UK, Germany and Israel. He is the author of the book *The Holocaust* and is the presenter of *How the Holocaust Began* for the BBC.

Sound Studies as a Museum Decolonisation Methodology: The Museum of Portable Sound

In the early 2000s, a group of academics sought to establish sound studies as an academic discipline analogous to visual culture, a body of work that could interrogate the so-called 'history of sound' as a wider cultural study of 'sound beyond music' (Mansell, 2021). As sound studies has increasingly been absorbed into the fields of musicology and 'sound art', this initial desire to

explore sound's wider cultural connections via historical analysis has struggled to remain at the fore of the discipline as more scholars embrace an attitude of 'musical exceptionalism' (Devine, 2019) that confers a greater importance to musicological histories. In following a more 'traditional' sound studies approach – beyond just music – the Museum of Portable Sound (MOPS), a small independent museum in Portsmouth, UK, has attempted to deconstruct accepted histories of sound rooted in 19th century white European and American perspectives. By presenting sounds as museum objects, MOPS uses traditional museological taxonomies to offer visitors ways of thinking about sounds, their histories and auditors, that spotlight unexpected stories of how attitudes supposedly relegated to the past including colonialism, white supremacy, gender inequality, institutionalized racism, and homophobia continue to echo throughout contemporary life to the present day.

References

- Devine, Kyle. *Decomposed: The Political Ecology of Music*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2019.
- Mansell, James. 'Historical Acoustemology: Past, Present, and Future'. *Music Research Annual*, no. 2 (2021): 1–19.

John Kannenberg (BFA, MFA, PhD) is an artistic researcher whose current work investigates sounds as museological objects. Via an acoustemological approach, he considers the histories and cultures surrounding sounds, the technologies that generate or record them, and the auditors who hear or listen to them. His primary research platform is the Museum of Portable Sound (MOPS), an experimental institution that explores questions related to sonic cultures, museology, digital heritage, media archaeology, and the visual culture of sound. Learn more about his work at <https://johnkannenberg.com>

Integrity and the Visitor Experience of Voices and Sound in Historic Spaces

I work in historic spaces functioning less as museums than chances to experience authentic stories and objects in their original settings. Sound can be a wonderful intervention, neither visually intrusive nor making someone read when they could be exploring the spaces and their own reactions. Using it with integrity is very important to me, seeking confidence in the evidence used as a basis for every sound, word or accent. This is harder where sources are fewer, leading to those who did not write, or whose words were not recorded by others, not having a voice in recreated sound interpretations.

Therefore, I'm interested in sharing and considering the ways I and workshop participants have experienced or created voices successfully brought back to life, considering:

- finding sources and evidence
- using modern parallels
- using non-vocal sounds
- using period music

and exploring creative, artistic interventions.

Susanna Austin

Susanna's 13 years with the National Trust spanned historical research, including oral history, conservation planning, property management and curatorship. She became a freelance Curator and Visitor Experience consultant in 2011. Key projects with audio interventions, such as immersive sound and audio guides, even a C17th racing commentary, include The Workhouse (2002 and 2019 versions), Coleridge Cottage, The Vyne's award-winning Lifting the Lid project and Powis Castle's House of Portraits. As one-time member of the National Trust's Out of Silence choir and with a family background in recorded music, she has considered evoking

sounds of the past through artistic means as well as accurate reconstructions of background noise, speech and music. Susanna studied art and architectural history as well as archives management.

Taking up Space: Using Sound in a Strategy to Decolonise the Museum

The historical development, practices and cultural power of museums positioned them as ‘messengers, benefactors, and monuments to colonialism’ (Macdonald, 2022: 10). In responding to this legacy, museums have been at the heart of intense debates about decolonisation. Decolonisation work within museums includes critiquing the processes through which these institutions and their collections were established, acknowledging and revealing links to colonial histories and legacies, working collaboratively to develop more inclusive and socially just practices and workplaces, with the project of sustainable structural change. This paper will reflect on the ways in which music and sound have been used in the physical and digital spaces of museums to assist with this important work. Drawing on examples from two UK museums I will examine the particular affordances that sound can offer in helping to reimagine the museum for its publics.

Marion Leonard is a Reader and Director of Research in the Department of Music. Her first monograph explored how gender shapes the experience of musicians navigating the music industries. Her recent research has primarily focussed on popular music and heritage. She has co-edited *The Beat Goes On: Liverpool, Popular Music and the Changing City* (2010) and *Sites of Music Heritage* (2014). Her forthcoming monograph examines the collection and curation of popular music in museums.

Session 2

Hearing New Voices in Historic House Museums

Historic houses present distinct challenges in comparison to other museum types, with interpretive issues arising from the nature of their collections, their totalizing environment, and visitors’ expectations of and connections to ideas of “home.” Yet these characteristics also mean that house museums can afford unique opportunities for sound interpretation. In this presentation, we explore some of these possibilities and provide examples from our own work with country houses in the UK, showing how an approach through sound and music can uncover new narratives and engage visitors in new ways.

Jeanice Brooks is Professor of Music at the University of Southampton (UK). A cultural historian of music, she is the author of books on early modern and twentieth-century French music. Her current monograph, *At Home with Music: Sounding the Domestic in Georgian Britain*, explores the role of music in changing ideals and practices of domesticity c. 1800. She directs both the Austen Family Music Books digital project (in collaboration with Jane Austen’s House Museum and Chawton House) and the international Sound Heritage network devoted to research and interpretation of music in historic house museums. Some of her work with heritage organisations has been published in *Sound Heritage: Making Music Matter in Historic Houses* (Routledge, 2021), co-edited with Wiebke Thormählen.

Music historian and violinist **Wiebke Thormählen** explores music as social and educational activity at the intersection of domestic and public music-making, with a particular focus on arrangements of large-scale works, domestic devotional music, and the engagement with opera in the home. She was co-investigator on the AHRC-funded project “Music, Home and Heritage: Sounding the Domestic in Georgian Britain”. Notable publications

include the *Routledge Companion to Music, Mind and Well-being: Historical and Scientific Perspectives* (2018, co-editor), and *Sound Heritage: Making Music Matter in Historic Houses* (2021, co-editor), a collection bringing together musicologist, historians and museum and heritage professionals. She is Director of Research at the Royal Northern College of Music.

Sonic Palimpsest – Revisiting Chatham Historic Dockyards

‘A Sonic Palimpsest: Revisiting Chatham Historic Dockyards’ is a research project funded by the AHRC. Its primary objective is to delve into the intricate relationship between sound and heritage, exploring how sound shapes our continuous encounters with objects and locations of historical significance. Through this project, we aimed to unlock the potential of sound as a powerful tool to immerse and engage members of the public, offering fresh perspectives on space and place through the medium of sound. By doing so, we aimed to unveil previously unexplored dimensions of engagement with noteworthy sites, ultimately enriching our collective understanding of heritage.

We explored this approach by creating site-sensitive works that encompass various elements, such as digitising historically significant tape recordings and conducting original interviews with former workers of Chatham dockyard. These valuable resources have been incorporated into our creative outputs. During our discussion, we will focus on the importance of public engagement and shed light on marginalised stories and voices that have emerged as a result of our research.

Brona Martin is an electroacoustic composer and sound artist from Banagher, Co. Offaly, Ireland. Her compositions explore narrative in Electroacoustic music, acoustic ecology and spatialisation techniques. She is currently exploring ways in which different media are being used to bring soundscape studies into the wider community through VR projects, smart phone applications and streaming technologies. Brona is currently a Teaching Fellow in Music at the University of Birmingham and a Visiting Lecture at The Royal Birmingham Conservatoire. She is also a Research Fellow at the SOUND/IMAGE Research group at the University of Greenwich exploring spatial audio applications in VR and gaming technologies.

Aki Pasoulas is an electroacoustic composer and Reader and the Director of Music & Audio Arts Sound Theatre (MAAST) at the University of Kent. He is the Principal Investigator of the research project ‘Sonic Palimpsest’ exploring our experience of heritage sites through sound, and Co-Investigator of ‘Liminal Spaces’ revealing hidden voices in desolate places. His research interests include acousmatic music, timescale perception, spatial sound, psychoacoustics, sound perception and soundscape ecology. His scholarly and music works are published by KPM/EMI, ICMA, Sonos Localia, Stolen Mirror, Gruenrekorder, HELMCA, Pinpoint Scotland, Cambridge and Oxford University Press, and his compositions are performed worldwide.

Diversifying Acoustical Heritage and Historical Soundscapes Research

This presentation will introduce work in the fields of acoustical heritage and historical soundscapes, by exploring the need for interdisciplinary work and a deeper insight on the connections to intangible heritage. Different ways in which the sounds of the past can be shared through sound installations and online experiences will be explored, in particular in relation to what version of the sonic past said experiences are articulating for audiences. The presentation will provide a reflection on the type of acoustical and sonic heritage that is often explored by researchers, with most research focused on European heritage. Mariana will discuss the need for greater diversity and how it connects back to UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Convention, including the importance of working with local communities.

Mariana López is a Professor in Sound Production and Post Production at the University of York. Her research has received funding from bodies such as the AHRC, the British Academy, the European Commission and The Royal Society. She is currently the Principal Investigator for the project *Enhancing Audio Description II: implementing accessible, personalised and inclusive film and television experiences for visually impaired audiences* (AHRC). She is also currently writing a book on acoustical heritage and historical soundscapes for Routledge. She has led national and international campaigns for gender equality in the field of audio and acoustics and is an active sound designer.

Session 3

Sonic Recoveries: Rearticulating the Lost Spaces of a Historic High Street through Sound

In November 2021, the City of York Council and University of York were awarded a UK Community Renewal Fund grant for a project entitled *StreetLife: Using York's Historic High Streets as Heritage Assets for Community Renewal*. Ambitious in scope and intensive by design, the project brought together multiple stakeholders in the immediate aftermath of the Covid lockdowns to build an interdisciplinary programme of activities for completion over a period of eight months. StreetLife's aim was to create innovative, immersive experiences combining digital innovation and physical engagement in a pop-up creative venue on Coney Street, York's most prestigious, but economically challenged city-centre high street. Collaborative research and free-to-join workshops would connect civic spaces to the community, transform the streetscape and its sounds, repurpose empty units, and forge links between retail premises and creative, heritage-led renewal. Directed by academics specialising in buildings archaeology, cultural-historical musicology, and print heritage, the project wove together three strands of activities - exploring and articulating past, present, and future versions of the street, and working with the public to connect with the communities who have lived, worked, and played there down through the centuries. York's relationship with colonialism is a complicated one, including multiple foreign invasions, the final days of the African Roman Emperor Septimus Severus, the activities of the Merchant Adventurers company, and the industrial production of chocolate, yet York has also been strongly influenced by its quaker heritage and more recently its status as City of Sanctuary (2016) and the UK's first City of Human Rights (2017). This presentation will focus on selected elements StreetLife to illustrate how music has provided a means of negotiating the complexities of representation and ownership the project has entailed.

Rachel Cowgill is Professor of Music and University Research Theme Champion for Creativity at the University of York. She has published extensively on community archiving and digital means in a range of studies of music in history and culture. She leads the interdisciplinary StreetLife project (www.streetlifeyork.uk) and AHRC-funded InterMusE project (The Internet of Musical Events: Digital Scholarship, Community and the Archiving of Performance), the latter of which is a collaboration between community music societies, Swansea University's Computational Foundry, the British Library, the Borthwick Institute for Archives, the University of Illinois (including the Krannert Center for Performing Arts), and Greenstone at the University of Waikato.

Encountering Survival: Audio Guides for Holocaust Centre North

This paper explores the process and thinking underpinning the making of a series of audio guides collectively entitled *Encountering Survival* (2022-3) produced by two artists (Linda O'Keeffe and myself) for Holocaust Centre North in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire. These audio works were created to prompt the visitor to reflect on both the Centre's collections and display, but also on what is not there – those materials, stories, affects, memories, and events that are absent,

lost, stolen or destroyed. The presentation will examine the methodology by which recorded voices (of survivor and survivor's family members testimony) were embedded within soundscapes where the affective agency of the objects had been 'auralised'. In effect these works tacitly explore the intersection of material culture and memory, and the differing ways in which meaning can be retroactively ascribe to objects from the past. The presentation will additionally investigate the impact of listening in different contexts, since the works are available both within the Museum via QR code and through an App.

Artist **Louise K Wilson** uses sound and visual media to ask philosophical and material questions about the spatio-temporal physicality of certain sites, our perceptions of them and the agency of those who inhabit them. To this end, she has travelled to nuclear submarines, listening stations, disused mines, marine research environments, RAF bases and other diverse sites. Her published writing includes book chapters for *The Oxford Handbook of Sound Art* (OUP 2021); *In the Ruins of the Cold War Bunker: Affect, Materiality and Meaning Making* (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2017) and *Contemporary Archaeologies: Excavating Now* (Peter Lang, 2009). She is a lecturer in Art and Design at the University of Leeds. Website: www.lkwilson.org

Session 4: Breakout groups

- **Rm A111 (1st floor):** Group discussion facilitated by **Rina Sagoo**, Museum of London, considering and responding to the day's conference presentations through the lens, learnings and provocations of *Curating London*, a contemporary collecting programme that aims for the museum's collections to become more reflective of the city.

Rina Sagoo (she/her) is an Assistant Curator at the Museum of London. She was the lead researcher and a curator of *Grime Stories: From the Corner to the Mainstream*, developed and led the *Docklands Soundscape*, a community researched sound work, Assistant Curator on *Listening to London*, using lived experiences to expand understanding of the museum's Oral History collection and curator of London's Music History display. Further projects include those falling under *Curating London*, a contemporary collecting programme. She has a MA in Digital Media Arts from the University of Brighton (2013) where her practice and thesis focussed on Sound Art.

- **Performance Space (lower ground floor):** Hands-on/ears-on session led by **John Kannenberg**, exploring the Museum of Portable Sound and critiquing it in terms of its decolonisation success or failure – generating action points for how other museums could use sound as listening based on the museum's model in order to promote decolonisation, dialogue and understanding within their own institutions.

- **Rm AG09 (ground floor):** Group discussion facilitated by **Jeanice Brooks, Marion Leonard** and **Susanna Austin**, exploring the day's themes from the perspectives of historic houses, museums and galleries.

- **Rm A108 (1st floor):** Group discussion facilitated by **Brona Martin** and **Aki Pasoulas**, focusing on the topic of exploring historical soundscapes, including collaboration and community engagement in soundscape studies, and measuring 'impact'.

- **Rm 107 (1st floor):** Group discussion facilitated by **Rachel Cowgill** approached through the question: what does decolonisation sound like?