

Interpretation and reinterpretation in jazz, rock and pop music

International scientific conference

8 October 2026

Venue: Faculty of Arts, Comenius University, 811 02 Bratislava, Gondova 2, room no. 239

9:25 – opening speech, Assoc. Prof. Vladimír Zvara, PhD., Vice Dean, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University

9:30-12:15, chairman: Aleš Opekar

1. Maciej Smółka (Poland, Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Institute of American Studies and Polish Diaspora): Staging the Minneapolis Sound: Reinterpreting Musical Heritage across Theater, Ballpark, and Block Party

2. Stefano Marino (Italy, University of Bologna, Dpt. Of Arts): “Push Me and I Will Resist”: Aesthetic and Social Dimensions of the Grunge Musical Subculture

3. Marcus Zagorski (Comenius University Bratislava, Faculty of Arts, Dpt. of Musicology): Phonognosis: sound and silence beyond anthropocentrism

10:00-10:15 coffee break

4. Jouni Järvinen (Finland, University of Helsinki, Faculty of Humanities, Aleksanteri Institute): Awaken Your Ears: Sound, Empathy, and Political Possibility

5. Julijana Zhabeva Papazova (Skopje-Faculty of Music, independent scholar, Macedonia): The Mystery of the Bulgarian Voices and Lisa Gerrard – reinterpretation of the relationship between West and East experiences



12:15-13:15 lunch

13:15-15:15, chairman: Marcus Zagorski

6. Aleš Opekar (Czech Republic, Czech Academy of Sciences, Institute of Art History, Dpt. Of Musicology, Prague): Old Reviews, New Sources: A Reinterpretation of the Second Czechoslovak Beat Festival Through the Lens of Contemporary Press and Newly Discovered Archival Documents

7. Jan Blüml (Czech Republic, Palacky University, Faculty of Arts, Olomouc): Music Criticism under State Socialism: The Case of the Czech Popular Music Magazine Melodie

8. Peter Michalovič (Comenius University Bratislava, Faculty of Arts, Dpt. of Aesthetics): „Zvonky, zvonče“ [Bells, Ring] – A Musical Event

9. Yvetta Kajanová (Comenius University Bratislava, Faculty of Arts, Dpt. of Musicology): Holistic approach to pop music: A Comparative and Multi-Dimensional Analysis of Pop Music Legends

4 November 2026, 13:00-14:30

Gary Carner: Pepper Adams's The Baritone Saxophonist's Journey of Joy

4 November 2026, 15:00-16:30 room no. 309

Workshop: David Kollar – electronic composition and AI possibilities

Conception: prof. Yvetta Kajanová, PhD.

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Organiser: Department of musicology, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University Komenského, International Association for the Study of Popular Music – Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe (IASPM CESE)

Organizational staff: prof. Yvetta Kajanová, PhD., Magdaléna Elzerová

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Key words: interpretation, jazz, rock, pop music, European music, music criticism, soundscape

The contemporary character of composition is influenced by performance techniques, since the composers of the new millennium are often the performers of their compositions, too. On the other hand, jazz musicians, traditionally focusing more on performance, enhance the compositional aspects in their performance. Although performance and textual critical interpretation (criticism) investigate the same object of composition, the result is different, depending on competence and non-traditional sound environments. Listeners and the environment directly participate in the performance. This project examines the contemporary and the past critical performance of jazz and art music, the extent of listeners' participation (participatory sense-making, the ear worm phenomenon), the intensity of experience (peak experience), and soundscape studies in contemporary composition in terms of climatic changes and the philosophy of deep ecology. It will confront the discovered facts with its own analytical findings.

Goals:

1. To discover the common and the different features of performance – musical-critical interpretation (with competence as the key term).
2. To update the composer-performer-listener-musicologist relationship and their outcomes: work of music-concert-experience-written text.
3. To investigate the influence of non-traditional, folk instruments and non-traditional sound environments on contemporary developments.
4. To re-assess the historical interpretation of jazz in old and recent critiques.
5. To examine professional composers and performers in terms of the “earworm” phenomenon, an infinitely repeating motif in a person's mind.
6. To analyze selected contemporary compositions of Slovak and global composers, inclined to philosophical concepts of music rather than natural musicianship.
7. To investigate the borderline of concepts of nature and soundscape against the background of the development of 20th-century composers' music-critical thinking.
8. To re-evaluate contemporary compositional concepts and performance theories – formalism, structuralism, semiotics, neopragmatism, phenomenology, Gestalt, hermeneutics, concepts of nature and soundscape.
9. To clarify the contemporary forms of presenting European compositions – festivals, concerts, interactive composition.
10. What is concert attendance in Slovakia/other countries like compared to the attendance of streaming services? The media, virtuality, listener participation online and offline, analysis of their comments during live streamings and internet streaming services (YouTube).
11. To research into non-art music subculture in Slovakia from the socio-aesthetic aspect and to analyze the compositions and their performance (power chord, distortion guitar sound, rhythmic pattern).



Current state of the issue:

In musicology, interpretation means the performative interpretation of the musicians (Levinson, 1993), indispensable in the musical communication process (Adorno, 1968, Dahlhaus, 1970), and interpretation of texts. Both interpret the same object of art (Paul Thom, 2006). While the performative interpretation of the object is inherently pluralistic, the critical interpretation of the text is often oriented towards a single synthesizing interpretation by the musicologist-theoretician. Both trace the concept of the composer, expressed in symbols (Silverman 2007), enter into a reader-text-interpretation relationship (Elliott 1995, Rosenblatt 1994), and look for the original meanings according to the “flow” theory” - while performing, the person is completely absorbed in his emotions with a highly energetic focus on the activity that swallows him in time (Csíkszentmihályi 1975).

A diverse interpretation of music history arises in music-critical interpretation. Music criticism distinguishes between criticism of the work of music and performance criticism but emphasizes the large extent of subjectivism and abstraction in music (Dean 1980). Both audience development and historical development can be traced by music criticism (Danuser, 1996, Taruskin 2010). We have available the developments in European jazz (Martinelli, 2018), the influence of art music and non-art music on the formation of European jazz (Cerchiari & Cugny & Kerschbaumer, 2012), the influence of ideology and socialist realism on European jazz (Pickhan & Ritter & Kajanová & Pietraszewski & Bluml, Peter Lang Verlag 2010-2019, vols. 1-6), and development according to the popularizing phenomena of jazz (Matzner & Motyčka & Wasserberger, 2018).

Research on music criticism appeared only in partial outputs (Albrecht, 1986) focusing on the historical development of critical thinking rather than the contemporary analysis of the critics (Braun 1972, Hřčková, 1986, Conway 2012). Only some publications monitor contemporary music criticism and its diversity in form and content (Pečman 1981, Letzle, 1992, Kajanová, 2010, Music Criticism Conference, IULM Milano 2021, Kajanová & Lombardi-Vallauri 2026). What artistic values are presented by contemporary music regardless of genre and style (Rahn 1989), how they can be presented through music- critical interpretation (J. Mukařovský, I. Hrušovský, intersonicism theory). The intensity of the listener’s artistic experience depends on the ways contemporary music is presented.

In musical practice, activating sense-making has a powerful meaning (Cuffari & Di Paolo & Jaegher, 2015; Schiavio & Jaegher 2017) since the object and the ongoing dynamic processes (autonomy, adaptivity, agency, meaning, experience, interaction) shape it through the systematic and mutual influences of each individual. Social dynamics, such as coordination and interaction, have a strong effect on the individual, be it concerts or reproduced music. Being the master of one’s craft, a criterion of professionalism in classical, “well composed music, which is stylish and closed in compositional technique” (Dahlhaus 1970), is not a prerequisite e.g. in rock music if the musicians can offer perfect communicative action leading to ecstasy (Kajanová 2022). Habermas (1987) says art, including music, is communicative action whose scene is construed broadly and requires individual spontaneity.

The relationship between rationality and emotionality, modernity and postmodernity, the avant-garde and the mainstream, communicativeness and modernism in composition, has been explored by several theoreticians (Gianmario Borio, 1993, 2014, Clayton & Herbert & Middleton, 2003, Georgina Born, 2000, Derek B. Scott, Susan McClary).

‘Earworm’ points out the harmful effects of music (Beaman & Williams, 2010), but also its connection to a preference of genres and styles (Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts journal, Goldstein & Vartanian eds.). However, the interpretation of music as peak experience (Maslow, 1964) in fulfilling the human need in the contemporary offer in culture needs to be re-evaluated.

“Ecological turn” can be viewed as part of broader “ecocriticism” that originated in literary studies. In music, this is sometimes called “ecomusicology” and considers relationships between nature, music, and sound (Allen, 2016), which have become especially significant as a response to the global climate crisis. Of particular interest to us is the field of “soundscape studies” initiated by the Canadian composer R. Murray Schafer (Schafer, 1993), and the ideas of the philosopher Arne Naess (Naess, 2005).