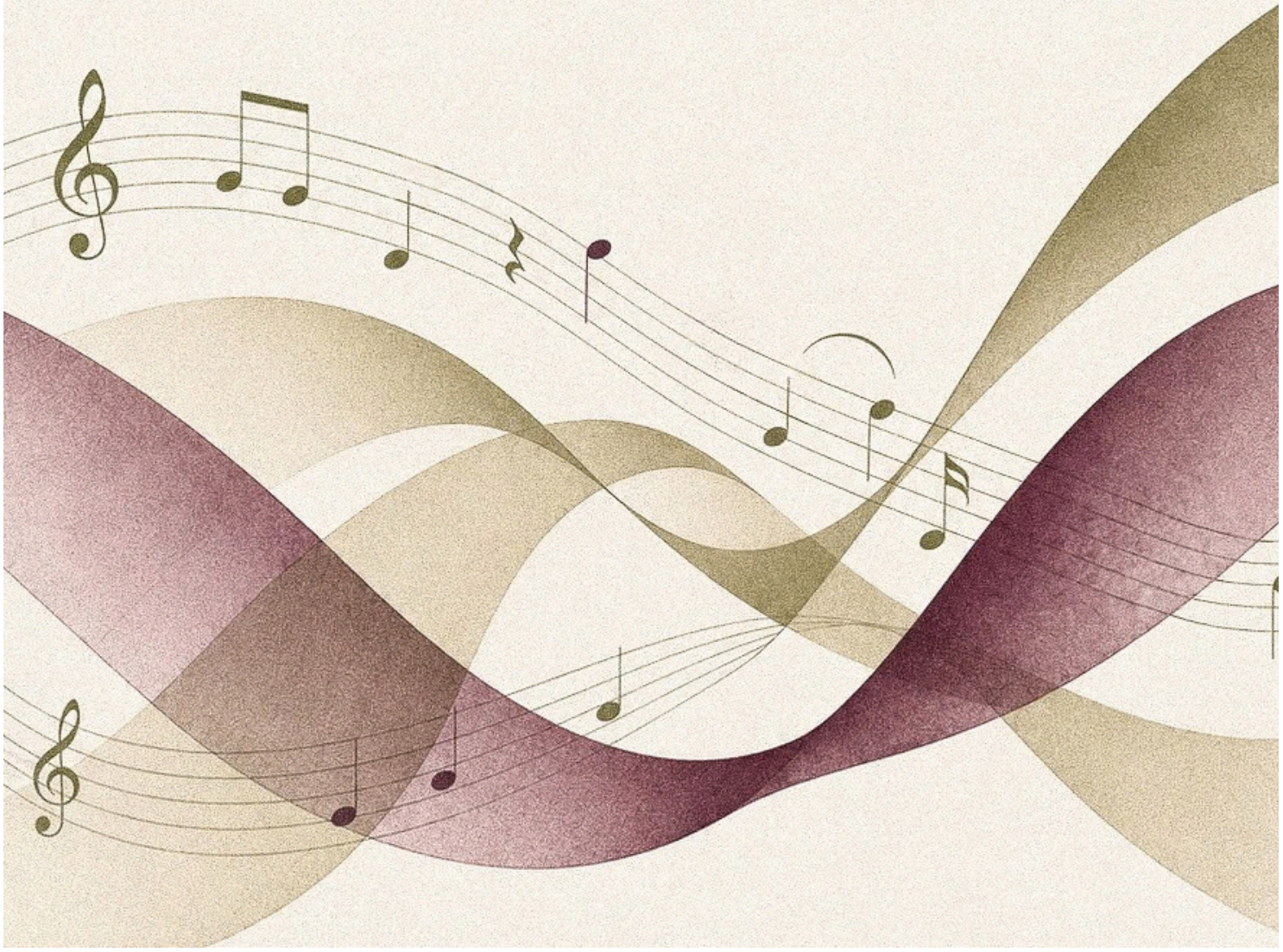Music *and* Translation

26 OCTOBER 2026 | NOVA FCSH | ROOM B413 | ONE-DAY SYMPOSIUM



CETAPS – Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies is funded by national funds through FCT, I.P., under the project UID/04097/2025, DOI: 10.54499/UID/04097/2025.
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Music and Translation

About the symposium

When translation scholars first developed an interest in music, in the 1980s and 90s, they were concerned almost exclusively with the interlingual aspect. They studied the translation of opera and songs for performance, the surtitling of libretti, the subtitling and dubbing of musical films and TV, and by the early 2000s, the translation of music for the sensorily impaired in the form of audiodescription and song-signing. In addition to these practitioner-oriented accounts, there were also descriptive studies which analysed translators' options in opera, musical comedy or popular song translation, or looked at the cultural or ideological issues arising when a song, opera or musical crossed linguistic and cultural boundaries. However, studies of intersemiotic translations, that is, of musical works based on prior literary or artistic works, or vice versa, were still rare in Translation Studies, and instead tended to be housed in disciplines such as adaptation studies, interart studies or intermediality, with theoretical considerations restricted to musical semiotics (e.g. Gorlée 2008; Tarasti 1994, 2002).

It was not until musicologists began to get interested in translation as offering a heuristic framework with applications to their own object of study that the 'verbal fixation' (Kaindl 2020, Bennett 2023) was finally overcome. The first book on translation and music by a musicologist, Helen Julia Minors' *Music, Text and Translation* (2013), problematized the question of whether music itself could mean. 'If music can translate in its own terms', she asks, 'what are these terms and how does its sense (and means) transfer and cross from one sensory domain to another?' (2013: 1). This book was followed by others a few years later: Lucile Desblache's very wide-ranging monograph, *Music and Translation: New Mediations in the Digital Age* (2019), which moves from a sociologically-inspired discussion of how music travels in a globalized world to considering how music itself translates and is translated; a second book by Minors on *Music, Dance and Translation* (2023); and then Małgorzata Grajter's *Applying Translation Theory to Musicological Research* (2024), which explores various kinds of musical translation including arrangements, cover versions and performance. By the time the Call for Papers was put out for the Łódź conference on *Translating Music: The Musical Work and Its Transformations*, held in March 2026, the concept of 'musical translation' had already acquired its own internal coherence in the musicological context, encompassing processes such as the interpretation of a musical score, the arrangement of an existing composition for a new purpose or lineup, the production of a cover version in popular music, and improvisation around a chord sequence in jazz.

Music and Translation

About the symposium

This symposium, organized jointly by the Centre for English, Translation and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS) and the Centre for Music Studies (CESEM) of NOVA University Lisbon, aims to extend the discussions initiated in Łódź by exploring all aspects of the relationship between translation and music. It will take place on Monday, 26 October 2026, from 9.30 a.m. to 6.00 p.m. at NOVA FCSH, Berna campus, bringing together translation scholars, musicologists and comparativists from Portugal and beyond. Attendance is free and open to all members of the academic community.

Organising Committee

Karen Bennett (CETAPS)
Ana Filipa Magalhães (CESEM)
Daniel Galvão (CETAPS)
Rui Pedro Almeida (CETAPS)
Filipa Cruz (CESEM)
Maria Francisca Pavia (NOVA FCSH)

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Music and Translation

Programme

Music and Translation

Programme

9.30 ***Opening remarks***

10.00-11.30 **Panel 1. Interlingual and Intersemiotic Translation**

Chair: Rui Pedro Almeida

Daniel Galvão (CETAPS / FCSH):
Making Broadway sing in Portugal: An external translation history

Sara de Sousa (ULICES):
Poundian memory and archivistic disposition in Leslee Smucker's *Personae* (2017)

Alyse Kaweng Fan (CEEC / UCP):
Translating William Blake's Poetic Vision of Madness: Geoffrey Gordon's *Mad Song* (2024)

Camila Oliveira Querino (CEAUL):
The musical prosody of Blake's prophecies and the politics of translation

11.30-12.00 ***Coffee Break***

12.00-13.00 **Keynote Lecture 1**

Rui Carvalho Homem (CETAPS / FLUP):
Dialogues in words and music: Intersemiotic challenges in three contemporary operas

Chair: Karen Bennett

13.00-14.00 ***Lunch***

14.00-15.00 **Keynote Lecture 2**

Małgorzata Grajter (Grazyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz University of Music in Lodz):
Translating Music: Transfer, Mediation, Meaning

Chair: João Pedro Cachopo

15.00-16.10 **Panel 2. Musical Translation**

Chair: Maria Francisca Pavia

Filipa Cruz (CESEM):
The significance of translating music: correspondence, coincidence, and the disappearance of sound

Sara Eckerson (UCP):
A Late-Beethoven arrangement: Considerations of musical translation and the *Große Fuge*

Filipa Magalhães (CESEM):
Translation as a constitutive element in Manos Tsangaris' *Love & Diversity*

16.10-16.30 ***Coffee Break***

16.30-17.30 **Roundtable: *Translationality in Music*** (Bennett 2026)

With Paulo Ferreira de Castro (CESEM)
Paula Gomes Ribeiro (CESEM)
Rui Carvalho Homem (CETAPS)
Daniel Galvão (CETAPS)
Małgorzata Grajter (Grazyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz University of Music)

Music and Translation

Keynotes

Keynote Lecture 1

Dialogues in Words and Music: intersemiotic challenges in three contemporary operas

Rui Carvalho Homem
CETAPS / FLUP

The work of Irish poet Paul Muldoon has been noted for the challenges it regularly poses to his readers. This lecture will address an intriguing strand in his output: his opera *libretti*. In the 1990s, Muldoon wrote a set of texts for operas by American composer Daron Aric Hagen: *Shining Brow* (1993), *Bandanna* (1999), and *Vera of Las Vegas* (1996 / 2001). These operas render into vocal music three narratives with a striking resonance in distinct domains of American culture: *Shining Brow* dramatises a moment in the personal and professional life of a great icon of 'white' America, architect Frank Lloyd Wright; *Bandanna* focuses on the plight of a Hispanic community; and *Vera of Las Vegas* relocates a couple of IRA volunteers (at the height of the Northern Irish 'Troubles') to the peculiar American setting named in the title.

The lecture will address the three operas, but will give a more sustained attention to *Bandanna* – for the breadth of issues it raises. This opera is an adaptation and intersemiotic translation of Shakespeare's *Othello*, displacing it to a recent historical context on the border between Mexico and the US. Muldoon's refashioning, for the conditions proper to opera, of plot and text elements of that early modern tragedy will be discussed together with his and Hagen's inevitable awareness of the 19th-century precedents set by both Rossini and Berio (1816), and Verdi and Boito (1887), through their respective operatic versions of *Othello*.

My discussion of the translational complexities posed by opera *libretti* will hinge on a consideration of the collaborative creative effort of writers and composers towards the production of *libretti* and opera scores – in their defining formal and aesthetic traits. It will include an integrated critical engagement with (on the one hand) Muldoon's provocative *aggiornamento* of characters and plots in their socio-historical frameworks, and (on the other) Hagen's musical rendering of human conflicts and profiles into the distinct dynamics of his choruses, arias and duets.

Rui Carvalho Homem is Professor of English at the University of Porto, Portugal. He has published widely on Irish literature, Early Modern drama, translation, and intermediality. As a translator, his publications include versions of Shakespeare, Marlowe, Seamus Heaney and Philip Larkin. His latest monograph (forthcoming) is Irish Poetry and the Visual Arts: transactions in contemporary poetics (Liverpool: Liverpool U.P., September 2026).

Keynote Lecture 2

Translating Music: Transfer, Mediation, Meaning

Małgorzata Grajter
Grazyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz
University of Music in Lodz

This lecture examines the concept of *musical translation* and outlines its theoretical and practical implications for musicological research, musical analysis, and performance. Translation, understood historically as a practice that creates connection between different worlds, cultures, and expressive systems, proves to be a productive term for understanding how music circulates, transforms, and acquires new meanings. Although music is commonly perceived as not requiring translation—because it is grasped intuitively through emotional response—it is nonetheless continually recontextualized in ways that resemble mechanisms known from linguistic translation.

Thus far, the author proposed two complementary working definitions of musical translation: a new rendition of an existing musical text shaped by time, place, and purpose, and a semiotic formulation describing a sign that replaces another musical work or performance in a new context. It also argues that musical translation can be understood as the process of making music comprehensible to listeners, especially those without access to notation.

Building on the theoretical framework developed by the author in *Applying Translation Theory to Musicological Research* (Springer 2024) and subsequent articles and conference presentations, the presentation investigates music as both an object and a target of translation processes. It identifies the necessary conditions for translation, such as the presence of a base in the form pre-existing musical text (or texts) and a constitutive difference that the translational act negotiates. Furthermore, it explores the domains in which musical translation operates: between score and performance, instruments and genres, musical styles and cultures, and across semiotic systems. Finally, selected examples from Western Classical and popular music will demonstrate how this theoretical model can be applied in practice, in connection with such phenomena as transcription, arrangement, performance, and cover versions. It will also illuminate how selected concepts and tools derived from Translation Studies (for instance, identity, difference, foreignization, domestication) can be adapted for musicological inquiry.

Małgorzata Grajter is a Polish music theorist and pianist affiliated with the Grażyna and Kiejstut Bacewicz Academy of Music in Łódź, where she serves as Head of the Department of Music Theory (from 2025). She completed two master's degrees at the same institution: in music theory (2007) and piano performance (2008). In 2014 she earned her PhD in music theory with a dissertation on word and music relations in Ludwig van Beethoven's vocal works (published in German by Peter Lang, 2019), and in 2025 she obtained her habilitation degree based on her monograph *Applying Translation Theory to Musicological Research* (Springer, 2024) and a collection of studies on music and translation.

Music and Translation

Panels

Panel 1. Interlingual and Intersemiotic Translation

Making Broadway Sing in Portugal: An External Translation History

Daniel Galvão
CETAPS / NOVA FCSH

Drawing on research undertaken for the PhD thesis *Singable Translations: A Study of Song Translations in Portuguese Productions of Broadway and West End Musicals*, this paper provides an overview of the external translation history of such productions from 1967 to 2025. Following Koster and Frank's conception of external translation history as a contextually developed account situated within its sociocultural circumstances (1990; 2002), this paper examines how sociopolitical, cultural and institutional conditions shaped the importation and, consequently, the translation of these works.
The overview is structured around the Catalogue of Portuguese Productions of Broadway and West End Musicals, a research instrument compiled for this study through the cross referencing of Paulo Carrilho's historical account (2018) with holdings of the Museu Nacional do Teatro e da Dança, contemporary periodical literature, venue archives and production portfolios. Rather than charting a linear process of institutionalisation, it reveals a discontinuous history of isolated ventures, concentrated activity, contraction and diversification.
It also traces how translation, adaptation, version and related designations were applied across integrated musicals and sung-through musicals, revealing no stable correspondence between crediting terminology, verbal character and translational practice. Through a case study of the renowned director and impresario Filipe La Féria, the final section examines how the hegemonic production model that consolidated translated musical theatre during the 2000s coexisted with shifting translation credits and continuing conceptual instability surrounding translation.

Daniel Galvão is an FCT-funded PhD candidate in the Inter-university PhD Programme in Translation Studies, jointly offered by Universidade Católica Portuguesa and NOVA University Lisbon. He is currently affiliated with the Centre for English, Translation, and Anglo-Portuguese Studies (CETAPS), where his research examines the intersection of translation, music, and vocal performance. This focus is informed by over a decade of professional experience as a singer, actor, vocal and music director, and song translator. His recent work has been published in the journal Translation Matters, where he currently serves as Associate Editor, and has been presented at academic events including Relational Forms IX (FLUP) and the Lisbon Spring School in Translation Studies (UCP), as well as the NOVA Translation Talks and the New Voices in Portuguese Translation Studies Symposium (NOVA FCSH).

Poundian Memory and Archivistic Disposition in Leslee Smucker's *Personae* (2017)

Sara de Sousa
ULICES

Influenced by American poet Ezra Pound's readings of the medieval *motz el son*, Leslee Smucker's album *Personae* (2017) offers an exercise in transmediality worth discussing. Smucker's tripartite line-up contemplating the plangency of the violin, interwoven with the intimate *tableaux* of the spoken-word poem entrusted to Jesse Nathan, supports a creative act informed by ontological and medial transmission — even more so if one considers the inclusion of silent film during the live performance. Indeed, when Nathan suggests that "[a] person is nothing if not a variation on an ancient form", we find a resonance of the modernist poet/composer, for whom remembering the troubadours is truly to unveil "*our* life, your life, my life, extended" (*Ur-Canto I*). In light of these considerations, this paper will assess Smucker's project in its transhistorical consciousness, revisiting previous biographical research on the poet's convoluted (and vastly autodidactic) process of musical learning. It will also meditate on Pound's sensibilities towards the philosophy of historical thought, prefiguring Philippe Ariès's conception of a narrative that cannot be "serene and indifferent" (*Le Temps de L'Histoire*, 1954). Ultimately, I aim to illustrate how the album's interpretative environment embraces a conflictual ground of translationality where the archival and the affective contend, thereby seeing, as in Nathan's poem, how "[t]he mind breeds many kinds of family" ("Stanza Two").

Sara de Sousa is a researcher at the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies and a cellist. In 2022/2023, she was Fellow for the New Talents Programme of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. She has published on the semiotics of musicality in T.S. Eliot's poetry, and she has also presented on concert reviews in the modernist periodical *The New Age* at the IX and X *Relational Forms* conferences (University of Porto). Her current research explores musical patronage and dissemination in fascist Italy, namely the network of musicians, composers, and patrons surrounding the poet Ezra Pound during his years in London, Rapallo, and Venice.

Music and Translation

Translating William Blake's Poetic Vision of Madness: Geoffrey Gordon's *Mad Song* (2024)

Alyse Kaweng Fan
CEEC / UCP

Wild winds weep a song of emotion in the poem "Mad Song" (1783), by the prophetic English poet William Blake (1757-1827). Following the tradition of Elizabethan mad song (see, for example, resonances with John Eccles and Thomas D'Urfey, "I Burn" [1694]), Blake reinterprets madness as a state of visionary perception in which the lyrical "I" transforms grief from inner emotions into the natural landscape. The enigmatic concept of madness in the poem becomes a creative force that rewrites ineffable human emotions through the poetic language.

The musicality of Blake's "Mad Song" inspired contemporary composer Geoffrey Gordon (b. 1968) to compose an eponymous orchestral composition, Mad Song (2024). This presentation will thus examine how Gordon's reworking of Blake's poem can be understood as an act of intersemiotic translation. I will argue that Gordon's composition translates not just Blake's poetic language into musical language; it will be shown that he in fact recreates the theme of madness through orchestral colour, texture, and particularly through the expressive voice of the cor anglais. Madness in Blake's poem, however, is not a destructive disorder but rather a reordering of imagination and reality; this interpretation follows Michel Foucault's consideration of madness as a condition that disrupts conventional understanding of meanings and signs towards the opening of alternative ways of perception (Foucault [1965] 1988, 33). Founded on this argument, I will show that Gordon's composition extends madness to a reordering of symbolic and musical meanings through the translation of Blake's poetic vision into a musical experience. The presentation will conclude by exploring Gordon's translation between poetry and music and how this creates new aesthetic meanings, by focusing on the evolution of Blake's representation of madness in Gordon's composition.

Alyse Kaweng Fan is a PhD candidate in Culture Studies at Universidade Católica Portuguesa in Portugal, continuing her academic pursuit of literature and music. She obtained an Associate of the Royal Schools of Music in Piano Performance (2024) and an MA in Romantic Literature, University of Leeds (2017) with a dissertation titled 'The Song from the Light-winged Dryad of the Trees: Keats, Organicism, and Music' that was awarded the Charles Barber Prize. Her research focuses on Romanticism and its influence on modern culture and poetry in twentieth-century Macau and Hong Kong.

The Musical Prosody of Blake's Prophecies and the Politics of Translation

Camila Oliveira Querino
CEAUL

For decades, early and mid-twentieth-century scholarship often categorised William Blake as a visionary mystic whose vertiginous poetic form from his prophetic books was largely subordinated to raw inspiration. However, a closer reading of the introductory plates of his prophetic epics—Milton and Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion—reveals an explicit, self-conscious philosophy of composition. Blake's deliberate manipulation of verse and cadence is particularly evident in his later work, and disrupts conventional prosodic taxonomies, demanding translation strategies that overcome semantic transfers and avoids artificially stabilised syllable counts.

This paper examines the tension between Blakean formal intentionality and the politics of literary translation, contrasting prose-based "domestications" (such as in the translations from Spanish and Italian by Xavier Campos and Giuseppe Ungaretti, respectively) with the Portuguese translation proposed on my PhD dissertation (2021). Supported by Walter Benjamin's concept of translational form and Paulo Henriques Britto's prosodic theory, the paper argues that compromising Blake's structural irregularities diminishes the text's inherent literariness.

To demonstrate how Blake's formal mechanics extend into performance, this presentation concludes with an analysis of a musical rendering by Susheela Raman and Sam Mills based on the author's Portuguese translation of excerpts from Jerusalem. Focusing on Raman and Mills' interpretation of the dynamics of the Portuguese text, this paper will attempt to illustrate how translating Blake's rhythmic "variations in every line" allows his "giant forms", as he called it, to be transposed to contemporary music.

Camila Oliveira Querino is a Junior Researcher Fellow at University of Lisbon Center for English Studies (ULICES), former Postdoc Researcher of the University of Geneva (2022), Trustee of the Blake Society and Blake Cottage Trust. She holds a PhD in English Literature from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro/ Kings College London (2021) and a MA in Music (2017). She specialized in interdisciplinary and multimedia studies articulating Music and Literature and is currently preparing a book on the reception of William Blake in popular music and translated Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant of Albion into Portuguese (2021).

Panel 2. Musical Translation

The significance of translating music: correspondence, coincidence, and the disappearance of sound

Filipa Cruz
CESEM

Halfway through the nineteenth-century, the concept of translation gained particular currency among those attempting to theorise the relationship between music and verbal language. In his 1846 essay on Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, Richard Wagner called upon Goethe's words to "express the higher human moods at the bottom" of the work and *translate* its chief theme (1964, 167). A few years later, in 1861, Charles Baudelaire would describe Wagner "as an artist translating the tumults of the human soul through the thousand combinations of sound" and set himself the task of rendering in words that inevitable translation that his imagination had made of the composer's opera *Tannhäuser* (2013, 1860-1, my translation).

These two texts speak both of an aesthetic shift towards an expressionist understanding of music and of a broader philosophical debate on the principles and methods that define the act of translating. This paper proposes to trace these connections and examine how the concept of translation has shaped literary representations of music and the many critical discourses that surround them. Taking Leo Tolstoy's *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1889) as its main case study, it argues that the ubiquity of the term — often dismissed as diluted in meaning — is far from irrelevant, and is directly related to what Eric Prieto describes as a musico-literary relationship progressively grounded in thought and freed from sound (2002, 10).

Filipa Cruz is a PhD student in Musical Sciences at the Social and Human Sciences Faculty of the NOVA University of Lisbon (NOVA FCSH). Her doctoral research focuses on the relationship between music and literature and aims to understand the concept and characteristics of imaginary music in the literary context, as well as the processes through which it is materialized in the case of cinematographic adaptations. She coordinates the Research Cluster on Thought and Music at CESEM (Centre for the Study of Music) and has so far dedicated her studies to topics such as music in the poetic work of Fernando Pessoa and music and text in the art-songs of Portuguese composer Fernando Lopes-Graça.

Music and Translation

A Late-Beethoven Arrangement: Considerations of Musical Translation and the *Große Fuge*

Sara Eckerson
UCP

In 1826, one of Ludwig van Beethoven's publishers, Artaria, requested an arrangement of what was (at that time) the final movement of the String Quartet in B-Flat (Op. 130) for piano four hands. Beethoven originally asked the pianist Anton Halm to do this but was very dissatisfied with the result. The composer then took it upon himself to make an arrangement of this movement, completing it by early September 1826. (The string movement eventually became a separate work, *Große Fuge* [Op. 133].)

Beethoven's desire to make his own arrangement resulted partially from technical problems, which Halm had already noted – namely, to keep the fugal subjects how they originally appear in the string quartet, and importantly to avoid hand crossing between the primo and secondo parts (which was integral to the tradition of piano four-hand compositions [Burney 1777]). Therefore, this arrangement might be considered a "recomposition" (Winter 2008) – beyond a mere arrangement – because innumerous parts in the original *Große Fuge* had to be altered to avoid hand crossing.

This talk will consider Beethoven's *Große Fuge* (Op. 133) and his piano four-hand arrangement (Op. 134) as a case study to discuss questions of making great works available in translation as arrangements (Grajter 2024, 59-64); regarding the *playability* (and perhaps the *listen-ability*) of a work as complex as the *Große Fuge* in an arrangement form; the question of translation into music for instruments that for centuries had a specific sound depending on the country of the instrument (Barenboim 2002); and the success of arrangements as translation by considering another one of Beethoven's own arrangements (the Violin Concerto in D major Op. 61 and the Piano Concerto arrangement, Op. 61a).

Sara Eckerson is an assistant professor at the Faculdade de Ciências Humanas, Universidade Católica Portuguesa, where she teaches in the Culture Studies department. She studied music and literature at New York University (BA) and earned her MA and PhD in Literary Theory from the Universidade de Lisboa. Her main areas of research are in the hermeneutics of music and literature, aesthetics and aesthetic theory, literary theory, and the philosophy of music. She has published numerous articles on literature and on music, including on Handel and Milton (Yale Journal of Music & Religion), and on Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto (*Manchester Beethoven Studies*, published by the Manchester University Press). She is currently developing a research project on the concept of *late style* in Edward W. Said.

Music and Translation

Translation as a Constitutive Element in Manos Tsangaris' *Love & Diversity*

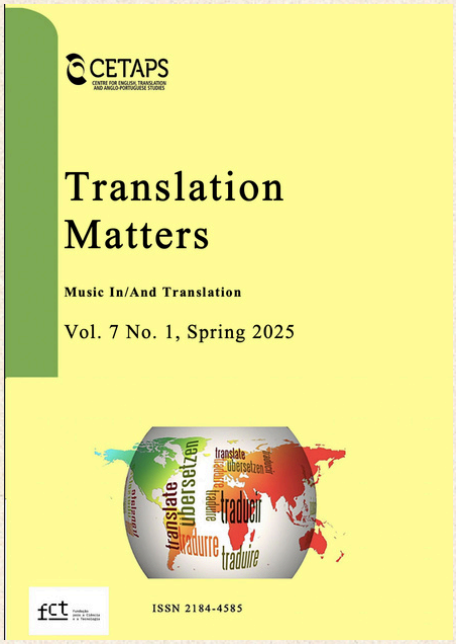
Filipa Magalhães
CESEM

Recent scholarship on translationality in music and performance has challenged the view of translation as a merely linguistic operation, arguing instead that it constitutes a creative and performative process. This paper examines these questions through the music theatre work *Love & Diversity* (2012) by the German composer Manos Tsangaris, whose text is translated into the local language every time the work is staged. Rather than treating translation as a secondary adaptation, the work integrates it into its artistic conception. Drawing on an interview with the composer, this paper argues that the identity of *Love & Diversity* does not reside in a fixed verbal text, but in the dynamic relationship between text, music and performance. According to Tsangaris, the work is built around the communicative situation of speed dating, where the central concern is not a specific language but the universal desire to establish human connection. Translation therefore becomes the means through which this communicative situation is recreated for each audience, allowing the work to remain recognisable while responding to different linguistic and cultural contexts. Using *Love & Diversity* as a case study, the paper discusses whether translation should be understood not simply as a strategy for accessibility, but as a compositional and performative parameter of contemporary music theatre. It thus contributes to current debates on translationality by proposing that, in certain works, translation is constitutive of the artwork itself rather than external to it.

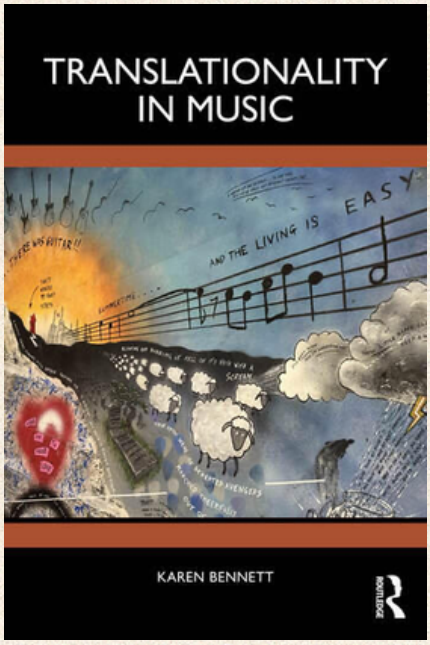
Filipa Magalhães is Assistant Researcher at CESEM – Centro de Estudos em Música at Faculdade de Ciências Sociais e Humanas (NOVA FCSH), Lisbon, Portugal. She holds a PhD in Musicology and a postgraduate degree in Historical Archivistics. Her research focuses on the preservation of music theatre works, combining musicology, archival science and digital humanities. She coordinates the Contemporary Music Research Group (GIMC) at CESEM and Thematic Line 4 (Archives) at IN2PAST—Associate Laboratory for Research and Innovation in Heritage, Arts, Sustainability, and Territory.

Music and Translation

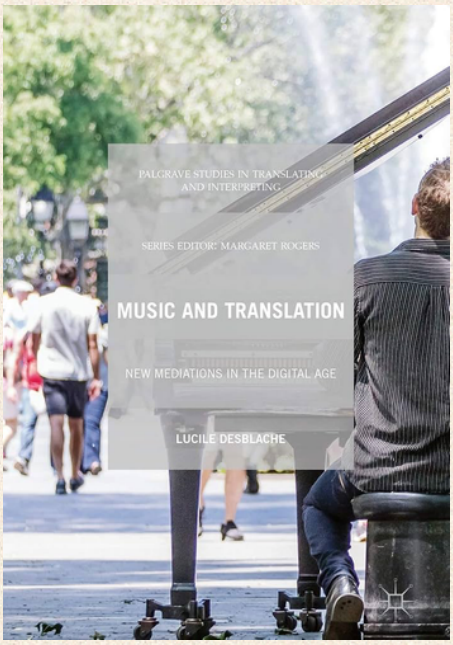
Recommended Reading



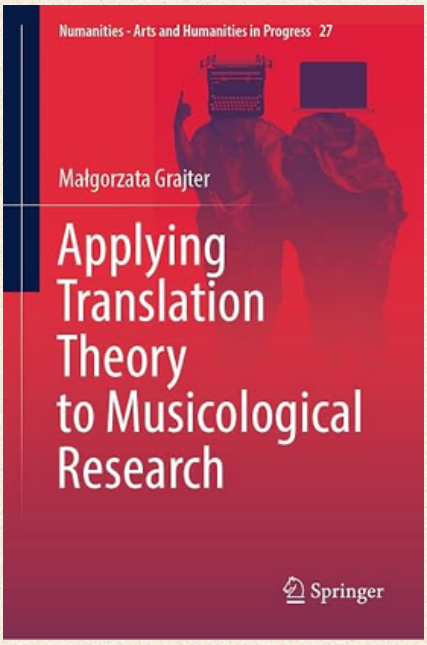
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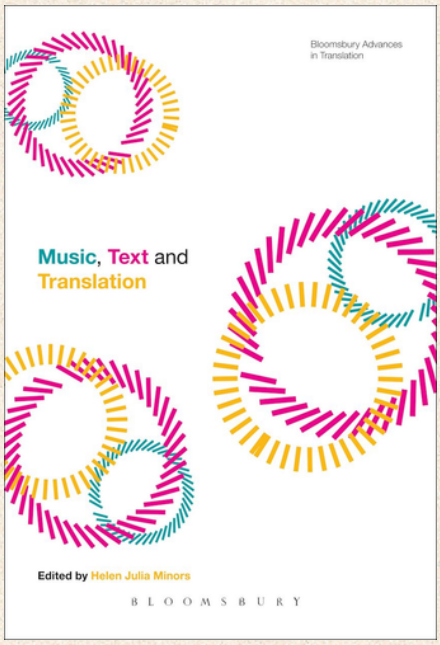
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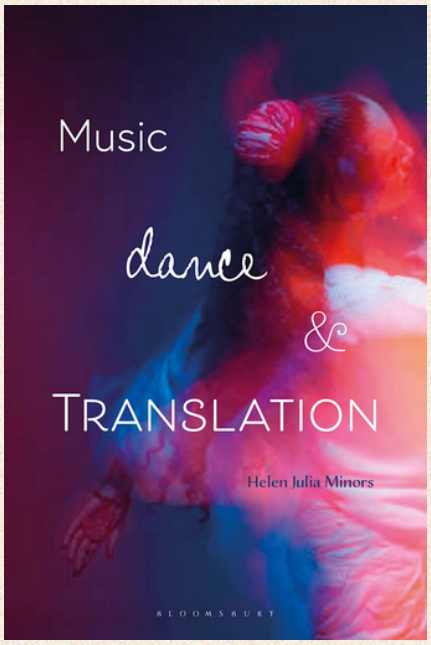
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Music and Translation

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Minors, H. J. (ed.) (2013) *Music, Text and Translation*. New York: Bloomsbury Academic.



Minors, H. J. (ed.) (2023) *Music, Dance and Translation*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.