

Conference Report

Second International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology (SysMus09)

The second International Conference of Students of Systematic Musicology was hosted by the Institute of Psychoacoustics and Electronic Music (IPEM) at Ghent University, Belgium, and directed by Luiz Naveda under the supervision of Profs. Marc Leman, Mark Reybrouck, Leon van Noorden and Dirk Moelants. On November 18, 2009, some 40 international Masters and PhD students gathered in the Bijloke Music Centre, a hospital dating from the 13th century which has recently been restored and turned into a modern music centre, to present and discuss their research in systematic musicology. The venue was formerly a solemn lecture hall devoted to dissecting human bodies in front of medical students, but neither the students (who represented 17 different countries) nor the local professors and keynote speakers were dissected this time. Instead, they enjoyed the opportunity of a stimulating meeting with other systematic musicologists in Ghent, one of the most enchanting Flemish cities.

Many of the SysMus09 participants had been unaware of the concept of systematic musicology before the conference. The term was coined by Austrian musicologist Guido Adler in 1885. In Adler's original concept, systematic musicology comprised aesthetics, music theory, music education and comparative musicology. Since then, the last three disciplines have become independent and are normally not regarded as part of systematic musicology. Today, systematic musicology is an umbrella term for a wide range of subdisciplines whose parent disciplines lie outside of musicology, including music acoustics and psychoacoustics, music psychology, the neurosciences of music, music computing and technology, the semiotics of music, music sociology, music philosophy, music aesthetics, and musical gender and cultural studies. Systematic musicology is concerned with music as a *phenomenon* and thus asks general questions about music, such as what is music, what is it for, and how and why do we engage with it. Parncutt (2007) proposed that systematic musicology be divided into two streams, one emphasizing the *scientific* and one the cultural or *humanities* side. Both streams were in evidence at SysMus09, leading to much lively discussion at the point where the objective/empirical and the subjective/philosophical intersect.

Together with the series of international summer schools on systematic musicology (a Socrates Intensive Programme involving five European universities and supported by the European Commission and the International Cooperative in Systematic and Comparative Musicology) this conference series is exposing students to a wide variety of research topics in systematic musicology. Both the summer schools and the conferences offer plenty of interaction with other students of systematic musicology as well as more advanced international researchers, which helps students to develop their skills and identities as researchers. Diversity in this field is not seen as a disadvantage, but as a natural, inevitable consequence of the quest for a better understanding of the complex phenomenon of music.

SysMus09 was based on a concept developed by Manuela Marin and Richard Parncutt in Graz for SysMus08, the first international students' conference ever held in the field of systematic musicology. SysMus conferences are directed by advanced students who are supervised by established researchers. They offer the student organisers valuable experience in organisational skills, including the coordination of local and international committees. Importantly, SysMus conferences promote transparency, objectivity and high academic standards by subjecting all submitted abstracts to a double-blind peer-review procedure. The review committee comprises international advanced PhD students or PostDocs whose names are suggested by leading professors in the field. Another aim of SysMus is the publication of proceedings to help students improve their presentation skills and give them an opportunity to publish their results for a wider audience in English. In this way, SysMus conferences provide an ideal platform for young researchers in the field to become familiar with the procedures of professional academic meetings.

SysMus keynote speakers are selected by the review committee. SysMus09 was honoured by the attendance of Prof. Ian Cross (University of Cambridge) and Prof. Marcelo Wanderley (McGill University). Cross's talk was entitled "Music as a communicative medium" and Wanderley's addressed "Multidisciplinary research on digital musical instruments". The keynotes reflected the central importance of interdisciplinarity for the SysMus series. Both talks impressively demonstrated the need for more collaboration among the subdisciplines of SysMus – and beyond. The keynotes also gave students a feel for the wide scope of topics and methodologies within systematic musicology. The diversity of systematic musicology was also well reflected by the topics of the 18 student papers, which were related to a number of systematic musicology subfields, including music cognition, music and emotion, music performance, musical development, music technology, music aesthetics, music philosophy, cultural studies, music and

computing, music and neuroscience as well as acoustics and psychoacoustics. The high level of academic quality generated many mind-challenging discussions. The humanities side of systematic musicology was unfortunately underrepresented by comparison to SysMus08, and future SysMus conferences should aim to attract more submissions from this area. A workshop on conference skills, which was found especially useful by non-English and first-time speakers, an introductory lecture on fMRI and music research by students of Prof. Marcel Brass from Ghent University, as well as demonstrations of current work at the IPEM enriched the appealing conference programme.

The panel discussion by Leman, Reybrouck, van Noorden, Moelants, Cross and Wanderley addressed a broad range of topics. These included the beginnings, development and future of the field, the challenges of interdisciplinary research within systematic musicology, different definitions of and perspectives on music, and the potential of systematic musicology to provide a framework that unites a wide range of disciplines in a meaningful way thereby fostering research infrastructure and quality in the long term. Prof. Leman remarked that systematic musicology is perceived and defined as a research field that is interested in music per se, which stands in contrast to non-musicological research that uses findings about music in order to pursue its own non-musical agenda. In the follow-up open discussion, the contributions of the students revealed their widespread concern with the addressed issues and longing to be part of a research field that extends beyond the frontiers of narrow specialized disciplines. From the discussion it also became clear that there is a need for students to have the opportunity to meet international colleagues at an early stage of their professional careers.

SysMus09 was characterized by a friendly and warm atmosphere, thanks to a stimulating social programme including two concerts, dinners at special locations in Ghent, a guided tour through the Bijloke Music Centre and coffee breaks with impressive live music performances by senior academics as well as students. One aspect of the conference that was commented on by participants, was the high level of enthusiasm for and broad appreciation of music practice, dispelling any idea that this is a group of people that coolly dissect music. Moreover, there was a lively intellectual interaction between the professors and students – something that is often missing at larger conferences. This was in no small part due to Luiz Naveda's love for organizational detail, and his efforts made this conference a memorable event that calls for a sequel. The third SysMus conference was hosted by the Music & Science group at Cambridge University, UK, and co-directed by Michelle Phillips, Sarah Knight, Tal-Chen Rabinowitch and Guy Hayward under the supervision of Prof. Ian Cross. SysMus10 took place in mid-September 2010 and was enormously successful. SysMus11 will be hosted by the Department of Musicology at the University of Cologne, Germany, and directed by Julia Wewers under the supervision of Prof. Uwe Seifert. More information about this new conference series can be found on the SysMus website at <https://sites.google.com/site/sysmusconference/>.

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Parncutt, R. (2007). Systematic musicology and the history and future of western musical scholarship. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies*, 1(1), 1-32.