

**Music Listening and Music Seeing:
Historical Reciprocities between the 17th and the 21st Centuries**

For centuries, the idea of ‘acousmatic sound’, of purely sonic listening situations in which sound can be perceived in complete isolation from the other senses, has preoccupied people who make, compose, listen to, reflect on, and communicate music. In the historical evolution of music listening as a cultural technique, the separation of hearing from other sensory perceptions such as seeing played a decisive role. At the same time it proved to be an effective mechanism to change and manipulate the role and the perception of music in culture and society. However, it is our understanding that the history of music listening can only be studied in connection with the history of ‘music seeing’. Vision has helped to determine what music has meant and what status it has been granted. The concept of ‘acousmatics’ or of ‘pure’ listening has to be challenged altogether as a product of an already ideologically shaped conceptualization of listening.

The multifaceted interactions between hearing and seeing in specific historical constellations will be explored in detail by a new working group that is part of a collaborative project of three partner institutions (Marburg University, Potsdam University, Max Planck Institute for the History of Science), funded by the DFG. The project will focus on exemplary cases of music seeing in the early modern period and the 20th and 21st centuries, aiming to create a new, multisensory, and interdisciplinary understanding of the history of music listening.

The working group will focus on the question of how music listening emerged as a learnable technique of listening, as distinct from seeing, and what roles music seeing played in these reciprocal processes in various settings. We are especially interested in listening situations in which the separation of the senses and their interaction can be studied. Surprisingly, efforts to de-visualize music listening have often resulted in a renewed visualization. Yet while audiovisual genres, such as music theater and music videos, and the iconography of music have gained scholarly attention, not enough light has been shed on the role of visual perception in listening situations of vocal and instrumental music. We invite scholars to look at tools, inventions, and practices that shape and appropriate such settings of listening. There is a wealth of historical and contemporary sources to be explored, ranging from sound channels to decorations and paintings, from architectural features in concert halls to staging and performing methods, or from listening instruction methods to digital listening apps.

We hope to bring together a group of scholars to research themes in the history of listening and analyze the complex reciprocities of the aural and the visual between the early modern period and today in any geographical or cultural context.

In this working group, we intend to address the history of music seeing from the perspectives of aesthetics, power, and historicity. We welcome (but are not limited to) proposals addressing the following topics and questions:

- What types of music seeing evolved in the course of history? What ideals and ideas governed this changing relationship?

- How, where, and why were listening experiences shaped by concepts of the role of seeing? How were listening practices influenced by changing media of the visual? Who were its actors and target groups?
- What kind of hierarchies emerged in different historical constellations and what purpose did they have? How did music seeing influence notions of gender, culture, race, and political power?
- What kind of knowledge transformed the role of music seeing?
- What tools, architectural structures, or specific media have been used to strengthen or to separate the visual from music listening experiences?

The working group will convene two to three times in Marburg, Potsdam, and Berlin in order to prepare a collaborative volume to be published in English.

Tentative schedule:

June 26–27, 2025: First workshop in Berlin; authors/participants will give short presentations on their outlines

June 2026 (exact date tbc): Second workshop; presentation and discussion of first drafts

June 2027 (exact date tbc): Third workshop; presentation and discussion of complete/revised drafts

Travel and accommodation will be funded by the DFG.

Submission details:

Please submit your working title and an abstract of max. 400 words, and a short CV indicating your current affiliation as two separate pdf files by December 6, 2024 via

<https://recruitment.mpiwg-berlin.mpg.de/auth/Apply/0/Position/27557896/Step/0>

Authors of accepted papers will be notified by early 2025.

Organizers:

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