

Scholarly Reflection

AY 2025-2026

Explication of Completed Presentations, Publications, Scholarly Service

I presented a paper as part of a panel on music and myths of meritocracy for the fall 2025 meeting of the Royal Music Association in Southampton, England. My paper, entitled “Winning Fame and Fortune? Race and Operatic Competitions in Mid-Century America,” focused on the purported meritocracy of radio audition contests. Whether behind closed doors or airing to millions on the radio, competitions played a formative role in the careers of most twentieth-century opera singers. Despite such ubiquity and significance, the role of musical contests as gatekeepers has received little critical attention, particularly in terms of representation. As Black opera singers negotiated segregated industry practices, how did competitions offer crucial opportunities? Conversely, how did subjective judging and opaque policies facilitate discrimination? Incorporating broader questions about musical meritocracy and mediatized performance, this paper explores how mid-twentieth-century competitions offer a unique lens into opera and race. I focused on the Metropolitan Opera Auditions of the Air (1935-58), a weekly NBC radio show. Each season, hundreds competed to gain a Met contract. In the 1940s, this program seemed like a pathway to desegregation; indeed, activists queried the auditions committee about accepting Black contestants. Eventually, audition winners included singers such as Fred Thomas ('51) and Martina Arroyo ('58). Yet like many competitions judged on “artistic merit,” the auditions were fraught with problems. Drawing on archival documents and in dialogue with scholarship by Katherine Meizel, William Cheng, Lindsay Wright, and Lisa McCormick, I offered a new analysis of competition, meritocracy, and race in operatic singing contexts. I presented this paper virtually, as traveling for a midweek conference to England in week 2 of the semester was logistically too challenging.

In fall 2025, I submitted edits for a chapter “Tuning In: Race, Listening, and the Metropolitan Opera Radio Broadcasts” in the edited collection *Black Identities on the Operatic Stage*, ed. Naomi André, Elizabeth Keathley, and Kristen Turner. This has already undergone one round of edits and submission to Oxford University Press; I have resubmitted as part of the entire volume in October 2025, awaiting a final decision on contract from Oxford University Press.

In October 2025, I presented a paper at University of California, Los Angeles, as part of the conference “Theorizing Trauma and Disability in the Arts and Music.” The four-day conference combined humanities research and artistic perspectives to bring focus to questions about how the experiences of trauma and disabilities are both generative and reflective in the arts. Panels covered a wide range of topics, from the soundscape of America’s midcentury polio epidemic and alternative medicine on vinyl to immigration trauma in nineteenth-century popular music and the politics of orchestral community outreach. My paper, entitled “Listening Historically? Trauma, Disability, and Sound in America’s Midcentury Polio Epidemic,” read testimonies of polio survivors alongside midcentury medical, psychological, and music therapy publications, analyzing medical soundscapes and musicking within America’s midcentury polio wards and rehabilitation centers. These case studies highlight how sound and music played a critical role in healing, community, and solace as well as discipline, control, and trauma.

I attended this year's annual American Musicological Society meeting in Minneapolis, MN, where I chaired a panel on "Psychoanalysis, Psychoanalysis, and the Music of Troubled Minds." I also continued my work as founding co-chair of the AMS Music, Sound, and Trauma Study Group. My co-chairs and I organized a session entitled "Music, Sound, and Trauma in Global and Historical Contexts." Finally, I helped SUNY Potsdam student Alyssa Spina prepare her lightning talk presentation on Shostakovich's *String Quartet No. 8* for the AMS Explore group, a new competitive mentoring and presentation program for undergrads.

My co-editors and I continue work on editing and commissioning essays for the contracted *Oxford Handbook of Music, Sound, and Trauma* in 2 volumes, to be delivered to Oxford in January 2027. This is a huge amount of ongoing work—usually weekly meetings—and will ramp up in 2025 and 2026.

As musicological service work/solicited expertise, I was asked to serve as an anonymous peer reviewer for manuscripts for the *Journal of the American Musicological Society* and *Nineteenth-Century Music Review*. Finally, in hopes of creating a more supportive and sustaining scholarly community within the Crane School of Music, I partnered with colleagues from THC and Music Ed to form a new weekly writing group in Fall 2025. This was pretty successful in forging community for written scholarly work, and we intend to continue the practice in spring 2026.

Upcoming Presentations and Publications/Future Plans

I submitted a paper for the summer 2026 meeting of the Feminist Theory in Music conference, to be held in Dayton, Ohio. Entitled "'Radio was loathe to let ladies make a bold step forward': Geraldine Farrar, Gender, and Expertise in Metropolitan Opera Broadcasts, 1934-'35," the paper focuses on iconic soprano Geraldine Farrar's intermission features for the live performances of the fourth season of Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts (1934-'35). Sponsored by Listerine for fourteen matinees on nationwide radio, Farrar sang operatic snippets while accompanying herself on piano from an enclosed box at the Met. Described as "miniature music appreciation broadcasts," Farrar offered tantalizing backstage anecdotes as well, beckoning radio listeners into the world of opera. Geraldine Farrar's career always uniquely fused gender and celebrity, from her passionate "Gerryflapper" fan base to problematic media coverage of an aging diva. And as the first woman to serve as Met commentator, her 1930s intermission features reveal a complex set of gendered ideologies, ranging from opera's conflicts between the power of prima donnas and worship of "the work concept" to twentieth-century tensions about voice, knowledge, and media. Despite the perpetual presence of women in early radio, from ham operators to broadcasters such as Judith Waller, by the 1920s debates raged over which voices could signal "authority" (Hilmes 1997, Ehrick 2015). And though audiences thrilled to her famous voice in the 1934-'35 Met season, Geraldine Farrar was nonetheless framed as a "raconteuse," a witty entertainer rather than an expert. Drawing upon archival materials, press coverage, advertising, and gender theory, I illuminate the ways this period crucially shaped understandings of mediatized female voices, classical music, and authority, with ongoing implications for the exclusion of women's voices in "expert commentary." This paper is based upon archival research I performed in the Library of Congress Music Division, Recorded Sound Division, and the Metropolitan Opera Archives.

I am continuing to work on my monograph *Operatic Listening: The Metropolitan Opera Radio Broadcasts, Culture, and Identity*. As continuing research for this monograph, it is necessary to make a few additional research trips. First, I plan to return to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC. I've

already gleaned most of the useful material from the Recorded Sound Division's microfilmed NBC master files and NBC history files and from the Music Division's Metropolitan Opera scripts by Geraldine Farrar, but I need to return to Recorded Sound to listen to more of their NBC radio transcriptions from the 1930s (namely Metropolitan Opera radio broadcasts), most of which are unique to this collection. I hope to apply for Professional Development funding for that archival trip, and intend to make that visit during Spring Break 2026. I also plan to visit the Wisconsin Historical Society (which has extensive and singular holdings of NBC papers) in summer 2026. The University of Wisconsin Friends of the Library has some funding opportunities available for short-term research, and I hope to acquire this funding for my summer research trip (I applied for this funding in January 2026). During spring 2026, I intend to finish revising my two book chapters and book outline. These are the materials I need to formally submit to University Chicago press for my book proposal, and I am hoping to have these materials polished and complete by the end of spring 2026. I hope to be awarded a formal book contract for this book, and complete the manuscript in 2027.