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# Infrastructures of musical globalisation, 1850–2000

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Infrastructures rarely come to mind when making or listening to music. This holds equally true for discovering or playing with unfamiliar sounds from different world regions. As an ephemeral and affective experience, music of whatever origin is difficult to capture, locate and pin down. And yet, without the emergence, development, transformation and deterioration of infrastructures, many musical experiences would have taken quite a different path – particularly at the transnational and global levels. Studying such infrastructures, broadly framed as material conditions as well as the explicit and implicit prerequisites of making music across borders since the 19th century, was at the heart of our workshop.

Actors involved in musical life, both historical and present, have taken infrastructures such as places and institutions of musical performance for granted, be these public, private or anything in between. They only receive greater attention when they do not meet artistic, economic, political or public expectations. Hence, the presence, lack and transformations of infrastructures are inextricably intertwined with the production of musical culture. They present driving forces, counterforces and lateral forces of musical practices broadly speaking. It was the forms and means, the reach and functions and, ultimately, the dis:connectivities of infrastructures that prompted intense and controversial discussions among the workshop participants from Europe and North America.

The papers covered an impressive geographical range with contributions on North and Latin America and the Caribbean,



on a global Europe and a global Soviet Union, on Central Africa as well as on South and East Asia. Chronologically, we focused on the 19th and 20th centuries as a key period for both global history and the history of infrastructures. Likewise, the papers featured a great variety of musical genres, ranging from opera and classical music to jazz, Congolese rumba and Afrobeat as well as to Soviet pop music and so-called ‘traditional music’ of indigenous peoples. Finally, the spectrum of infrastructures was pushed to the extremes: transnational networks of theatre agents ([Charlotte Bentley](#) and [Matteo Paoletti](#)) served as infrastructures of musical dis:connectivity as well as international organisations like UNESCO ([Anaïs Fléchet](#)) and European and African collecting societies ([Véronique Pouillard](#)), music education institutions ([Alexandre Bischofberger](#)) and the music industry ([Friedemann Pestel](#)), pitch standardisation negotiations ([Fanny Gribenski](#)) and genre discourse ([Thomas Irvine](#) and [Christopher Smith](#)) and, last but not least, cultural ministries ([Michel Abeßer](#)) and national embassies ([Zbigniew Wojnowski](#)).

This broad conceptualisation of infrastructures of musical dis:connectivity turned out to be very fruitful for the discussions since it provoked even more inventive ideas from the invited commentators about what else, in the context of music, could

Fig. 01  
**The Historisches Kolleg thankfully and appropriately offers marvelous acoustics. (Photo by the author)**

be framed as infrastructure: music itself as an infrastructure for human memory and everyday human life ([Dirk van Laak](#)); musical instruments as infrastructures of sound making ([Jürgen Osterhammel](#)); and the crucial question of how infrastructures in a narrow sense, such as electricity and the production of shellac played in the making of music ([Oliver Janz](#)) were among the most fascinating ones. Also, considerable thought was devoted to the conceptual boundaries of infrastructures and how they differ from structure(s) and networks. [Roland Wenzlhuemer](#), in his keynote, drew our attention to the spatial dimension of infrastructures by highlighting the significance of – otherwise largely disconnected – peripheries for connectivity in communication.

Additionally, from an anthropological viewpoint, the important difference between infrastructures as an emic category and an etic category was stressed ([Christina Brauner](#)). There was, however, no consensus about how much teleology comes into play when doing research on infrastructures: while some argued that path dependency is key to understanding infrastructures' effectiveness ([Heidi Tworek](#)), others warned of normative assumptions about the latter. These and many more aspects of the relationship between infrastructures and making music across borders underline how useful the dialogue between music history and infrastructure research can be. Also highly inspiring were the discussions about the distinction between the established perspective of musical 'institutions' and the perspective of 'infrastructures' that might direct our attention to less articulated, less formalised settings of musical production.

Several workshop participants emphasised the necessity of pluralising and de-Europeanising the idea of a musical globalisation. As the papers made evident, many musical globalisations have recurred since the mid-19th century with their own underlying infrastructures, mechanisms, geographies and limitations. Even within a single genre, such as European opera, the logics of circulation, appropriation and refusal differed considerably between the mid-19th century American South, which was driven by commercial motivations, and the countries of southern Latin America under the grip of fascist Italian diplomacy during the 1920s.

Nonetheless, a retreat from European musical metropolises and a reorientation to emerging American centres, such as New York and Buenos Aires, was common to both Americas in the decades around 1900, as was also the case in the emergence of Cuban music conservatories, which took as much inspiration from there as from Europe. Wojnowski extended de-centring one step further by emphasising the strong Western bias in Eurocentric accounts. There is call to study Eastern European attempts to globalise 'their' musics as well, even though they largely failed, as his case study on Soviet musical diplomacy in the emerging Third World demonstrated.