

Distinguished Lecturers in Music Theory Series



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Digital Antiphony: Memes and the Musicality of Internet Culture

Tuesday, October 6, 2020
12:45pm EDT
Via Zoom

If you would like to attend, please
contact Michael Callahan
(mrc@msu.edu) to request the Zoom
link.

Lecture Abstract:

This talk attends to the ever-expanding virtual archive of memes, GIFS, and other digital media, exploring these two questions: 1) What modes of creativity do these digital artifacts reveal? 2) What ways of listening do these potentially-viral objects solicit? Drawing together resources from music studies, media studies, visual studies, and philosophy, I will suggest that the production, modification, and distribution of these contagious, and frequently-humorous, items be understood in antiphonal terms. As such, “digital antiphony” names the emphatically intertextual and intermusical product and process of internet culture, a rich, emergent conversation that simultaneously materializes and refigures social categories of race and gender, concepts of belief and authorship. If antiphony is the logic of digital culture, then the meme is its animating force. With its generative interpenetration of call and response, the meme evidences a distinctly digital preoccupation with form, offering one sense of what it means to be musical in the 21st century.

Bio:

Braxton D. Shelley a musicologist who specializes in African American popular music, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Music and the Stanley A. Marks and William H. Marks Assistant Professor in the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University. His research and critical interests, while currently focused on African American gospel performance, extend into media studies, sound studies, phenomenology, homiletics, and theology.

After earning a BA in Music and History from Duke University, Shelley received his PhD in the History and Theory of Music at the University of Chicago. While at the University of Chicago, he also earned a Master of Divinity from the university's Divinity School. His 2017 dissertation, "Sermons in Song: Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination," developed an analytical paradigm for gospel music that braids together resources from cognitive theory, ritual theory, and homiletics with studies of repetition, form, rhythm and meter.

Recipient of the 2016 Paul A. Pisk Prize from the American Musicological Society, the 2016 Graduate Student Prize from the Society for Christian Scholarship in Music, and 2018 Dean's Distinguished Dissertation Award from the University of Chicago Division of the Humanities, and the 2019 Adam Krims award for the Popular Music Interest Group of the Society for Music Theory, he has presented his research at Amherst College, Brandeis University, Columbia University, Duke University, Northeastern University, Northwestern University, SUNY-Stony Brook, Tufts University, the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, and Yale University, as well as at the annual meetings of the Society for Christian Scholarship in Music, Music Theory Midwest, the Society for Music Theory, and the American Musicological Society.

His publications include the following essays: "Sounding Belief: 'Tuning Up' and The Gospel Imagination," in *Exploring Christian Song*, "'This Must Be The Single': Valuing The Live Recording in Contemporary Gospel Performance," in *Living the Life I Sing*, "Gospel Goes To Church (Again): Richard Smallwood's Hybridity as Liturgical Compromise," in *Readings in African American Church Music and Worship*, vol 2, and "Analyzing Gospel," in the *Journal of the American Musicological Society*. His book-length study of African American gospel music, *Healing for the Soul: Richard Smallwood, the Vamp, and the Gospel Imagination*, is forthcoming from Oxford University Press.