

Second International Symposium on Musical Topics and Performance Practice

The University of Melbourne | Faculty of Fine Arts and Music | Melbourne Conservatorium of Music | 10-12 September 2026.

The theory of musical topics is now an established framework for the study of musical meaning and expression. Although musical topics are realised in performance, the relationship between topic theory and performance practice has often remained implicit in the literature. In recent years, a growing body of work has begun to bring musicologists, analysts, and performers into closer dialogue, situating topic theory at the intersection of historical musicology, music analysis, and performance practice.

The University of Melbourne will host its **Second International Symposium on Musical Topics and Performance Practice** on 10-12 September 2026. Following the inaugural 2023 event, this symposium seeks to provide an international forum for scholars, performers, and scholar-performers to engage with and further develop these discussions.

The keynote address will be delivered by **Robert Hatten**.

The symposium will be held at the University of Melbourne's Conservatorium of Music in the Ian Potter Southbank Centre, the Conservatorium's new home in the heart of Melbourne's Arts Precinct. Its state-of-the-art performance and teaching facilities provide an ideal environment for the exchange of ideas between scholars and performers.

Call for papers

We welcome papers that explore the relationship between musical topics and performance practice, including (but not limited to) the following themes:

Topic theory in the performer's toolbox

- topical analysis and its implications for phrasing, articulation, tempo, dynamics, and timbre
- the role of topical awareness in resolving analytical or interpretive ambiguities
- dance steps, gestures, choreography, and the embodiment of musical topics

Topics, repertoires, and interpretive contexts

- individual musical topics and their performance implications
- identifying and interpreting culturally specific topics
- topic theory and performance in specific composers, genres, or stylistic traditions

Recording analysis and the realisation of topics

- historical recordings as sources for comparing interpretations of topical content
- performers' tacit or explicit use of topical knowledge in recorded performances

Topically inflected pedagogies

- pedagogical applications of topic theory in performance teaching
- strategies for integrating topic theory into graduate performance curricula
- approaches to teaching topical listening

The themes listed above are indicative rather than exhaustive, and proposals addressing related questions are also welcome.

Submission guidelines and deadlines

Formats

We welcome proposals for the following presentation formats:

Individual papers (20 minutes, followed by 10 minutes for discussion)

Panels (three or four related papers organised around a shared theme, with a total duration of 90 or 120 minutes)

Performance-based presentations (up to 40 minutes, followed by discussion)

Proposal requirements and anonymised submission

To ensure anonymous review, proposals must be submitted as two separate documents:

1. Abstract (anonymous).

This document should contain no identifying information and must include:

- title of the paper or presentation
- abstract of no more than 250 words
- three keywords
- List of works (for performance presentations only)

2. Cover sheet.

This document should include:

- name of the author(s) and institutional affiliation (if applicable)
- email address of the presenting author
- short biographical note for each presenter or participant involved (up to 150 words)
- any technical or performance-related requirements

Performance-based presentations

Performance-based presentations are expected to include both performance and a clearly articulated interpretive or analytical dimension. Abstracts should explain how the presentation articulates the relationship between performance and topical signification. Proposals should also include a list of works or excerpts to be performed, with approximate durations, which does not count towards the 250-word abstract limit, and an indication of the intended balance between performance and spoken component.

Mode of participation

The symposium will be held primarily in person, in order to facilitate close scholarly interaction. A limited number of hybrid presentations will be available for colleagues who are unable to attend in person due to geopolitical constraints or accessibility needs. Please indicate your request to present remotely at the time of submission.

Selection criteria

All proposals will be reviewed anonymously by the programme committee.

Papers and panels

For individual papers and panel proposals, the committee will give primary consideration to:

- relevance to the symposium theme
- significance and originality of the proposed contribution

For performance-based presentations, the committee will also consider the clarity with which the proposal articulates the integration of performance and scholarly inquiry.

Submission process and key dates

Abstract submission deadline: 28 February

Notification of acceptance: 1 April

Symposium dates: 10-12 September 2026

Please submit both documents as a single email to 2mtppsymposium@gmail.com, with the subject line:

“Second International Symposium on Musical Topics and Performance Practice – Submission”

For enquiries, please contact secretarymtppsymposium@gmail.com

For further information visit the Symposium website: <https://www.topictheory.net/>

Symposium Committee

Melanie Plesch (UoM chair)

John Gabriel (UoM)

Tim Daly (Secretary)