



**Max Planck Research Group**

Felt Communities?

Emotions in European Music  
Performances

### Max Planck Research Group

The **Max Planck Research Group "Felt Communities? Emotions in European Music Performances"** (Head: Sven Oliver Müller) investigates the historical development of the emotions triggered by music in the 19th and 20th centuries. Focusing on emotions as a public form of communication, the Research Group aims to decipher the emotional structure of communities: What role did and does music play in the development and cohesion of communities? The focus is less on the physiological effects of music than on how they are appropriated by groups. Musical performances have the power to connect diverse individuals within a community—or to create social and political enemies. The Research Group aims to analyze the historical patterns and contexts of these effects. The group began its work in 2010.



#### Research Staff 2009–2010

**Sven Oliver Müller**, Sarah Zalfen

#### *Predoctoral Fellows*

Tim Biermann, Anabelle Spallek, Henning Wellmann

## Introductory Overview

Why should history be concerned with emotions and, moreover, with emotions in the musical life of Europe? The research group consisting of four predoctoral, one postdoctoral fellow, and one research assistant aims to shed light on the historical development of trained emotions and to decrypt the emotional structure of communities. The research group is working with the category "musically motivated emotions," that is, they examine emotions as a form of public communication. The focus is on the social appropriation of music, rather than its physiological stimuli. Music lovers recognize each other by experiencing emotions as a group.

The appropriation of music bonds different people into a community—politically, socially, and economically. This is possible because music has a high emotional recognition. The qualities of music allow for the decoding of messages related to emotional states difficult to be communicated through language. Emotions triggered by music can bring people closer, they enable communication on a deeper level. The knowledge of styles, singers, and music groups is related to authority, as it determines who is educated, who belongs to the "knowing group"—and who does not.

For the research group, a historical and sociological approach is important: How did emotions motivate certain actions and how did they control behavior? What united music fans and what divided them? The predoctoral fellows examine to what extent "perceived communities" were formed through music performances. Through the repetition of

emotionally charged symbols, groups learned emotional bonds. By emotions here, we do not mean passing momentary sensations, but rather long-term behavioral patterns linked to social change. This means that the same songs could, in different contexts, often trigger different emotions. A change of historical perspective is necessary in order to understand the modulation of emotions. The research group will thus analyze music performances instead of musical stimuli, the impact of performances instead of the music itself.

The focus on modern Europe is certainly not representative of the entire historical world of music and emotions. It makes sense, however, for several reasons. The European music life in the 19th and 20th centuries needs to be considered within a time of political, economic, and cultural upheaval. The expansion of the public arena, the educational reforms, and the mass media opened up new learning paths for numerous people. The research group is studying how these factors led, on the one hand, to a convergence of emotions generated by music, but, on the other, to the emergence of social, national, and stylistic boundaries.

This can be observed in many places: in churches and street fairs, in dance clubs and on the radio, in 19th-century opera houses, and at pop concerts in the 20th century. The projects examine music performances in public places. Precisely due to the wide potential, the selected projects had to be limited. The topics of the PhD projects are:

- the media cult of Franz Liszt in Europe (1830–1850),
- the music policy of the Allies in Germany after the Second World War (1945–1949),
- the rise of the beat generation in the United Kingdom and Germany (1950–1970), and



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Source. [istockphoto.de/DNY59](https://www.istockphoto.de/DNY59).

- enthusiasm for, and the boycott of, the punk movement in Britain and Germany (1975–1995).

### Projects

In order to decipher musically motivated emotions, the predoctoral research fellows are working on case studies that they themselves have selected. There are rarely extreme examples, instead frequent, even everyday practices are analyzed. Each dissertation is designed to examine a relevant emotional phenomenon. Can common or different emotional patterns be identified over the two centuries? Or was the music of the emotions subject to the current political context, social position, religion, or gender? The dissertations can be divided into three thematic groups: control attempts, loss of control, and the cult of genius.

**Control attempts:** Music performances are analyzed as deliberate efforts to control emotions. Attention is drawn to the mainstream views on the conduct of the public whose movements and expressions in church services and symphony concerts had to be disciplined. **Loss of control:** Various unrests in musical life as emotional strategies of minorities or youth cultures are case studies for doctoral dissertations. These were not just the products of spontaneous inspirations but also of emotions often expressed in the course of cultural interpretation disputes.

**Cult of genius:** The research fellows will investigate how geniuses earned their emotional importance not only through the reproduction of the music but also through their unique reception by the public. Maybe the new media created new forms of worship, perhaps the 20th-century pop stars embodied the cult of the 19th-century virtuoso. Did emotions render the boundaries between popular and distinctive taste in music more permeable?

The importance of music in European cultural history has made the assessment of emotions a key issue. Musically motivated emotions are hard to explain because they are easy to understand. But this is exactly why music lovers and historians alike have had so many choices.

## Publications 2009–2010

(last update: February 2011)

**Müller, S. O.** (2010a). Analysing musical culture in nineteenth-century Europe: Towards a musical turn? *European Review of History*, 17, 833–857. doi: 10.1080/13507486.2010.535121

**Müller, S. O.** (2010b). Ein fehlender Neuanfang: Das bürgerliche Musikleben in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland nach 1945. In G. Budde, E. Conze, & C. Rauh (Eds.), *Bürger-tum nach dem bürgerlichen Zeit-alter: Leitbilder und Praxis seit 1945* (pp. 255–269). Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

**Müller, S. O.** (2010c). Das Publikum im Vergleich europäischer Städte. In S. O. Müller, P. Ther, J. Toelle, & G. zur Nieden (Eds.), *Die Oper im Wandel der Gesellschaft: Kulturtransfers und Netzwerke des Musiktheaters im modernen Europa* (Die Gesellschaft der Oper No. 5) (pp. 27–30). München: Oldenbourg.

**Müller, S. O., Ther, P., Toelle, J., & Zur Nieden, G.** (Eds.). (2010). *Die Oper im Wandel der Gesellschaft: Kulturtransfers und Netzwerke des Musiktheaters im modernen Europa* (Die Gesellschaft der Oper No. 5). München: Oldenbourg.

**Müller, S. O., & Zalfen, S.** (2010). "An interesting eastern potentate"? Staatsaufführungen für den Schah von Persien in Berlin—1873 und 1967. In S. O. Müller, P. Ther, J. Toelle, & G. zur Nieden (Eds.), *Die Oper im Wandel der Gesellschaft: Kulturtransfers und Netzwerke des Musiktheaters im modernen Europa* (Die Gesellschaft der Oper No. 5) (pp. 277–300). München: Oldenbourg.

**Zalfen, S.** (in press). *Staats-Opern? Der Wandel von Staat-lichkeit und die Opernkrise in Berlin, London und Paris am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts*. Wien: Böhlau.

**Zalfen, S.** (2010). Die Hauptstadt in Szene setzen: Die Berliner Opernlandschaft als Repräsentationsraum nach 1989. In S. O. Müller, P. Ther, J. Toelle, & G. zur Nieden (Eds.), *Die Oper im Wandel der Gesellschaft: Kulturtransfers und Netzwerke des Musiktheaters im modernen Europa* (Die Gesellschaft der Oper No. 5) (pp. 115–136). München: Oldenbourg.