Between Research and Activism: Futures of Music and Minority Studies

International Symposium at the Music and Minorities Research Center (MMRC)

mdw – University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna

12–14. February 2026

Call for Papers

The Music and Minorities Research Center (MMRC) is the only research center worldwide specifically dedicated to the study of music and minorities. It positions itself as both a compass and a seismograph for emerging developments, expansions, and innovative applications within the field of ethnomusicology. Founded in 2019 by Ursula Hemetek after she was awarded the 2018 Wittgenstein Prize, the center has positioned Vienna as a uniquely significant international hub for music and minority studies. After seven years of activity, the year 2026 marks the beginning of a new phase. We are using this milestone as an opportunity to reflect on the developments in musical minority research, examine current challenges, and consider the future direction of the field.

Drawing on the work of the ICTMD Study Group on Music and Minorities, founded in 1999 (Hemetek 2022), the MMRC has adopted a definition of "minorities" as "communities, groups, and/or individuals that are at higher risk of discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, race, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, disability, political opinion, displacement, and social or economic deprivation" (MMRC-website). Central to the MMRC's approach to music and minority studies is a commitment to dialogic knowledge production, engaged and applied ethnomusicology (Pettan and Titon 2015), and a critical awareness of structural power imbalances.

Building on this foundation, the symposium "Between Research and Activism: Futures of Music and Minority Studies" seeks to evaluate and further develop the mission of the MMRC to support innovative research, and to serve as a hub for international discourse beyond 2026. It aims to reflect on the developments of recent years and to address current challenges as well as future directions of the research field—particularly within the intersections of scholarship, activism, politics, artistic practice, and social engagement. We invite contributions that engage with theoretical and methodological questions from ethnomusicological and interdisciplinary perspectives on music and minority studies (Hemetek and Kölbl 2023) and foster dialogue across fields such as migration studies, Indigenous studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, gender and queer studies, and disability studies. The following questions could be points of departure:

- What constitutes the theoretical foundation of music and minority studies, and how might it benefit through engagement with intersecting paradigms such as postcolonial theory, queer theory, intersectional feminism, Indigenous epistemologies, and disability studies in order to foster meaningful cross-disciplinary dialogue?
- What roles do power, privilege, and positionality play in the production of musical knowledge about and with minoritized individuals or communities?
- How can music and minority studies strengthen their societal relevance by further exploring the interconnection between music, politics, and activism?
- How do recent global political developments—such as the rise of authoritarianism, nationalism, and fascism—challenge or reshape the musical practices of minoritized communities, and how do these dynamics affect different research fields?

The submitted contributions will represent one part of the symposium "Between Research and Activism: Futures of Music and Minority Studies" which includes events in various scholarly and artistic formats.

Language and Participation

The symposium will be held in English.

We particularly encourage early-career researchers to apply.

There is no registration fee and the symposium is planned to take place on-site in Vienna. We aim to offer financial support to speakers who are in need; a brief, informal application should be submitted separately (to lell@mdw.ac.at).

Meals, including lunch and dinner, will be provided on the symposium days.

Format and Submission Guidelines

The contribution format will be individual paper presentations of 30 minutes (20 min. presentation, 10 min. discussion). Authors should submit an abstract of max. 300 words that clearly outlines the central focus of the contribution, develops a coherent argument, incorporates a theoretical framing, demonstrates familiarity with existing scholarship, and articulates the implications for music and minority studies and/or ethnomusicology. Please also indicate on the proposal the name and contact info of the presenter, title, 5 keywords, a short biography (max. 150 words), and technical requirements (if other than standard AV setup). Co-authored papers and pre-organized panels (three presentations totaling 90 minutes) are also invited for submission.

Please send your submission to: lell@mdw.ac.at
Deadline for submission: 15 July 2025
Notifications of acceptance will be issued by: mid-October 2025

For any questions, please contact:
Peter Lell (he/him) – lell@mdw.ac.at

Program Committee

Amos Darkwa Asare (MMRC), Isabel Frey (Department of Folk Music Research and Ethnomusicology), Ursula Hemetek (co-chair, MMRC), Peter Lell (MMRC), Christian Poske (MMRC), Malik Sharif (co-chair, MMRC).