

**Annual Conference of the Austrian Society for Musicology
University of Innsbruck, Haus der Musik, 19–21 November 2026
Call for papers**

Human:Music:Environment

The idea of understanding music as a binding agent between humans and the environment encompasses a wide range of possible discussions from all areas of musicology. Music has always been used by humans as a medium of communication between the community and its environment. Flutes or pipes that imitate bird calls are not only used for hunting purposes, but also for aesthetic enjoyment or amusement. Music theories in ancient Greece, for example, or in ancient China, the Islamic Middle Ages, and Mesoamerican societies always connect the cosmic with the human. Such analogical conceptions, ranging from spherical harmonies to certain liturgical concepts to contemporary Neoplatonic ideas, are always based on the mediating function of music: the natural, such as animal sounds, geographies or mathematical forms, is made accessible through music, as is the supernatural: the animistically animated environment, the spirits and gods in their sacred places, or the universe itself.

Higher powers also appear in the history of art music, with the wild and threatening being set to music just as much as the idyllic and pastoral. In many of Franz Schubert's songs, streams and forests rustle, Bedřich Smetana set the course of the Vltava to music, and Gustav Mahler begins his First Symphony with "wie ein Naturlaut [like a sound of nature]".

References to the environment, though, call for critical reflection. One often encounters geographically mapped stereotypes, such as the "Nordic" in Jean Sibelius, or "African music", which may be intended positively, but nevertheless operate with ethnic, speciesist or even racist generalisations (such as the "Alpine" in National Socialism).

In folk music, country, folk and other popular music genres, reference is often made to the landscape or other regional characteristics of the environment. Protest songs can express criticism of environmental pollution or opposition to climate policy. However, it is precisely the "audible infrastructures" (Kyle Devine) of the (popular) music industry that produce a huge ecological footprint.

During the 20th century, musicology has opened up to newly emerging fields of ideas such as musique concrète, soundscape art and sound studies, acoustic ecology and zoomusicology. "More-than-human musicking," "ecomusicology," and "sonic ecologies" are current key terms for new approaches to sound and music that seek to promote a more far-reaching ecology of networks. Jakob von Uexküll's concept of Umwelt is being revived in Donna Haraway's posthumanism, as well as in Tim Ingold's "dwelling" and David Rothenberg's human-animal jazz. Anthropocentric criticism has found its way into musicology, as have "cultural animal studies" (for example, in the book series of the same name published by Springer-Verlag).

Musical instruments can bring the qualities of plants, animals, or specific locations into musical performance. With electroacoustic technologies and electronic sound generation, concepts and theories from science and technology studies are also coming to the fore in music research. For about a decade now, certain algorithms have been capable of composing music themselves, which are thus conceived less as instruments than as creative entities – as entities of the technosphere, the fabricated, quasi-animated environment of present and future humanity.

At its 2026 annual conference, entitled **Human:Music:Environment**, the Austrian Society for Musicology invites participants to engage in wide-ranging reflections on all these topics. Contributions to the conference may address the following or similar questions:

- What connections between the cosmos and humans have been or are being assumed in music theories or set to music in musical traditions?
- How do the environment, its phenomena, and the humans embedded in it sound in various compositional practices?
- With which instances from the environment have Indigenous or traditional communities interacted musically?
- What environmental concepts have been or are being introduced into music through the raw materials, production, transport, and treatment of musical instruments?
- What ecological costs arise from current practices of music reception and distribution, for example with regard to the energy consumption of streaming servers and the live music industry?
- How is eco-criticism expressed in popular music?
- How are environmental qualities illustrated and implemented in film and gaming music?
- Zoomusicology, phytomusicology, astromusicology, cybermusicology: real or fictional research desiderata?

The conference languages are English and German.

Formats: Lecture (20 minutes plus 10 minutes of discussion), round tables, panel discussions (max. 90 minutes including speeches). Other discussion formats, workshops or lecture recitals are very welcome; please consult with the organising team when submitting your proposal.

Submissions: Please send an abstract (max. 250 words) specifying the desired format, as well as a short biography (max. 100 words) by **30 April 2026** to musikwissenschaft@uibk.ac.at. Submissions will be reviewed anonymously. The programme committee will decide on acceptance and notify by **30 May 2026**.

Junge Musikwissenschaft (young scholars symposium): The Student Symposium of Junge Musikwissenschaft will also take place during the annual meeting. The separate call for this symposium can be found here:

<https://oegmw.at/junge-musikwissenschaft/nachwuchssymposium>

Organising team: Bernd Brabec (chair), Federico Celestini, Milijana Pavlović, Thomas Nußbaumer, Bernhard Steinbrecher, Sabine Daum.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact us:

musikwissenschaft@uibk.ac.at or Bernd.Brabec@uibk.ac.at