NEURODIVERGENT MUSIC STUDIES CONFERENCE 2026

JUNE 26TH
SYNCHRONOUS PROGRAM

UKRI Arts and Humanities Research Council

CHASE
Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-East England

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About the Neurodivergent Music Network

Our Volunteers

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Welcome

We are excited to welcome you to the first ever, inaugural **Neurodivergent Music Studies Conference**! This international conference aims to challenge current perspectives of music studies in relation to neurodivergence through centering many neurodivergent perspectives.

The existing literature centers neurotypical perspectives that traditionally attempt to use music to change, alter or "cure" neurodivergent people. The Neurodivergent Music Studies Conference defies these neuronormative constructs by sharing and uplifting work by neurodivergent music researchers, showcasing neurodivergent voices and contributions, and reflecting neurodivergent lived experiences of music.

We are guided by Dr. Nick Walker's vision of a "neurocosmopolitan future", a world where no single mind is considered "normal" or desirable. We ask: **what does a neurocosmopolitan future look like in music research?** By imagining it, and by actively centering neurodivergent voices, we move away from pathologising neurodivergence and towards a model of collective knowledge creation.

Our approach is interdisciplinary, and we welcome researchers from a wide range of fields, including but not limited to: performance practice, auraldiversity, Mad studies, disability studies, ethno- and ludomusicology, music psychology, music education, music therapy, cognitive neuroscience, music theory and composition, architecture, acoustics, and more!

The Neurodivergent Music Network is committed to providing an accessible, equitable, and neurodivergent-led space that is safe, comfortable, and welcoming to all neurotypes. As part of this commitment, our conference will not tolerate ableist language and promotions of "cure culture", the behavioural modification of innate neurodivergent traits, or the use of ABA therapy.

We warmly welcome you to the first ever Neurodivergent Music Studies Conference!

Sincerely,
The Conference Organising Committee:

Tara Allen (she/her)

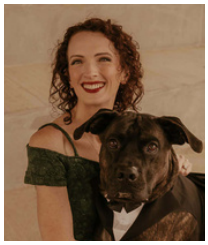
Nina Danon (she/they)

Niamh Gallagher (she/her)

Calanthe Milton (she/her)

Carmen Rosas-Pérez

Jess Walls (she/her)



Schedule: June 26th

All times are given in **Eastern Daylight Time** (EDT) and **British Summer Time** (BST).
To convert to your own time zone, you can use an online Time Zone Converter such as www.worldtimebuddy.com

9:00am-9:20am EDT / 2:00-2:20pm BST	**Opening Remarks**		
9:20am-11:25am EDT / 2:20-4:25pm BST **1st:** 10:20-10:30am EDT/3:20-3:30pm BST 5m short questions **2nd:** 10:35-10:55am EDT/3:35-3:55pm BST 5m short questions **3rd:** 11:00-11:20am EDT/4:00-4:20pm BST 5m short questions (All apply except room 3. Please view room 3)	**Parallel Sessions 1**	***Breakout Room 1:*** **Dyslexic Imagination - Dyslexic Listening** (10m) by John Levack Drever **Monotropism and Metal Music** (20m) by Stephen Connolly **Narratives of Neurodivergent Listening and the Music of Sonic the Hedgehog** (20m) by Molly Hennig	***Breakout Room 2:*** **Fidgeting on Stage: Neurodivergent Movement in the Context of Musical Gesture** (10m) by Charlie Clark **The Neurodivergent Musician: Report from a ThinkTank Event** (20m) by Anna Detari **Biodivergent Sites and Sounds: Stimming, Sonic Ecologies, and Neurodivergent Musical Worlds** (20m) by Elinor Rowlands
		Breakout Room 3: **A musical ethnography among autistic people within the Brazilian independent music scene** (20min) by Caio Prestes Góes Rocham (***Presentation Time: 10:20-10:40AM EDT/3:20-3:40PM BST)*** **Hear My Voice: An Investigation into a Collaboratively Designed Singing Framework for People who Stammer** (20min) by Abigail Mann-Daraz (P***resentation Time Is (10:50-11:10AM EDT/3:50-4:10PM BST)***	
11:25am-11:40am EDT / 4:25-4:40pm BST	**Break:** grab a tea or coffee and rest your eyes and your mind a bit!		

Schedule continues onto the next page

11:40am-12:25pm EDT / 4:40-5:25pm BST	**Panel Discussion:** *Exploring music and neurodivergence: methodologies and approaches* Panelists: Charlie Clark, Matt Rogerson, Neesa Sunar		
12:25pm-12:45pm EDT / 5:25-5:45pm BST	**Break:** grab a tea or coffee and rest your eyes and your mind a bit!		
12:45pm-1:50pm EDT / 5:45-6:50pm BST	**Parallel Sessions 2**		
	Breakout Room 1:	***Breakout Room 2:***	***Breakout Room 3:***
1st: 12:45-12:55pm EDT/5:45pm-5:55pm BST 5m for short questions **2nd:** 1:00-1:20pm EDT/6:00-6:20pm BST 5m for short questions **3rd:** 1:25-1:45pm EST/6:25-6:45pm BST 5m for short questions	**Auralplasticity: Unmasking the Neurodivergent Voice** (10m) by Ingrid Plum **Towards an Autistic Cultural History: Examining the Life and Music of Erik Satie** (20m) by Andrew Hugill and Pam Heaton **There's Two of Them: Creating Space for Neurodivergent Approaches to Music and Access** (20m) by Andrew Dell'Antonio and Steph Ban	**Lost in Plain Sight: Scoring Hallucination as Compositional Logic** (10m) by Takoto Fukuda **I Am Music - A Composition Focused Approach to Music Therapy for Individuals with DID** (20m) by Robin May **An Exploration into How the UK Training and Identity of Autistic Music Therapists Informs the Development of Their Approaches to Clinical Practice with Children: A Musically Enhanced Narrative Inqury** (20m) by Ella Machin-Bradbury	**Individual Differences in Narrative Perceptions of Music** (10m) by Bailey Runn, Rachael Farquharson, J. Devin McAuley **Navigating Aphantasia and Sonovisual Resonance through the Gesture of Listening** (20m) by Pere Amengual **Crip-time, Repetition, and Autistic Listening** (20m) by Ben Safran
1:50pm-2:00pm EDT / 6:50-7:00pm BST	**Closing Remarks**		

All talks will be recorded and made available after the conference. You will have until the end of August to watch them. Please prioritise your wellbeing and take breaks as needed! You can drop in and out at any point via the Zoom link sent to registered attendees. If you have not yet registered, you can do so here: https://www.neurodivergentmusicnetwork.com/2026-virtual-summer-conference.html

Conference Format & Etiquette

Synchronous & Asynchronous Format
The NMS Conference takes place over two days: June 26th, and July 1st.

Day 1: June 26th (Synchronous)
The first day takes place on Zoom.

- **Start time:** 10am EDT (Eastern Daylight Time) / 3pm BST (British Summer Time)
- **End Time:** 2pm EDT / 7pm BST

You will receive the link to join if you have registered for the conference (https://www.neurodivergentmusicnetwork.com/2026-virtual-summer-conference.html). The link will go live 10 minutes before the scheduled start time.

The social aspect of the day will take place on the conference Discord server. You will find dedicated rooms for introducing yourself, discuss conference topics, continue conversations started in the Q&As, and more!

Day 2: July 1st (Asynchronous)
Because live digital spaces can cause social and processing fatigue, the second half of our conference takes place entirely at your own pace. On July 1st, you will be able to view recorded presentations and posters on our website. You will also have the possibility to ask questions to the authors in a dedicated space on our conference Discord server.

Etiquette
We ask that all attendees follow these guidelines to ensure a safe and welcoming space for everyone:

- Please keep your microphone muted when not speaking.
- Use the chat or raise hand function to ask questions.
- Be respectful of all presenters and attendees.
- Do not record or screenshot any part of the conference without explicit permission.
- Avoid using ableist language or promoting cure culture.
- Be mindful of sensory needs: avoid sudden loud noises, flashing images, or busy backgrounds on camera.
- You are welcome to have your camera on or off — whatever feels most comfortable for you.
- Stimming, moving around, and taking breaks are all welcome and encouraged!

How to get support?

If you experience any issues during the conference, please reach out to a member of the organising committee via the Discord server or email us at neurodivergentmusicnetwork@gmail.com.

If you need any accessibility accommodations that have not been addressed, please let us know and we will do our best to support you.

We hope you enjoy the conference!

Abstracts & Speaker Bios

Parallel Session 1: Room 1

Dyslexic Imagination – Dyslexic Listening (10m)

John Levack Drever, University of Cambridge

How has working as a dyslexic composer, sonic artist, and music lecturer for over 30 years shaped my evolving practice? This paper adopts an autoethnographic methodology to examine a sustained creative and pedagogical practice developed within, against, and beyond neurotypical and auraltypical paradigms of music and sound-making. Grounded in lived experience, it interrogates how dyslexia has shaped both the constraints and generative possibilities of this practice.It traces how dyslexia has at times constrained my work, particularly through the lack of automaticity in reading and writing conventional music notation, and the recurrent necessity of relearning music theory and technical processes, often as if encountered anew. Core skills that are typically fluent and unconscious are instead slowed, with increasing cognitive load through reliance on conscious compensatory strategies (Nicolson & Fawcett, 1989). These draw on higher-level cognitive resources, including semantic knowledge, contextual inference and auditory memory. Such experiences are further intensified by stress and the ongoing labour of masking, which dominant disciplinary frameworks frequently construct as deficiency. However, this paper foregrounds the development of intuitive, playful, and direct sonorous approaches that eschew conventional notation, emerging from these conditions. It situates these within the concept of auraldiversity (Drever, 2015; 2019), where sound, memory, space, and structure are processed differently, and deviation from normative musical literacy and audition becomes generative. Drawing on work that foregrounds dyslexic imagination (Griggs, 2024), it examines how these experiences give rise to alternative compositional, pedagogical, aural, spatial, improvisational, and technological strategies. From this perspective, dyslexia is not positioned solely as a limitation but as a productive force that unsettles normative assumptions about literacy, memory, and musical knowledge. Ultimately, the presentation proposes that dyslexic listening is not merely adaptive but generative, offering critical insights into more inclusive and plural approaches to music and sound-making.

Bio: John Levack Drever is a sound artist, acoustician, and researcher. He is Creative Director of the soundscape and ambiance consultancy Otoloci and currently a Visiting Scholar with Cambridge Digital Humanities, where he co-directs LAURA (Leverhulme Trust Aural Diversity Doctoral Research Hub). He leads Working Group 1 of COST Action CA23145, Architectural and Urban Ambiances of European Cities, and is co-chair of the Inclusive Engineering Working Group for Noise Network Plus.

Parallel Session 1: Room 1 continued

Monotropism and Metal Music (20m)
Stephen Connolly, Sheffield Hallam University

Literature, blogs, and first-person accounts consistently highlight how profoundly the sensory world shapes autistic lives. Loud, chaotic, crowded environments with blinding lights and unpredictable tactile contact are often described as overwhelming or even intolerable. Yet many autistic people voluntarily and repeatedly enter precisely such spaces in pursuit of metal music.

This presentation draws on UK-based research exploring autistic experiences of metal music, its venues, and its embodied practices. Bringing together critical autism studies and metal music studies, the project examines how sensory hostility and monotropic engagement coexist. Using the framework of monotropism, the research considers how intense, focused interests can transform environments typically framed as inaccessible into spaces of regulation, connection, and meaning.

Based on interviews with 20 autistic metal fans, the study challenges deficit-based assumptions about autistic sensory experience. Rather than positioning metal environments solely as hostile, participants describe experiences of catharsis, immersion, community, and even calm within the apparent chaos. The findings suggest that sensory experience is relational and context-dependent, shaped by agency, predictability, shared culture, and deep interest.

By centering autistic voices, this presentation contributes to broader conversations within neurodiversity scholarship and music studies, asking what metal spaces reveal about sensory difference, Monotropism, belonging, and the politics of access.

Bio: Dr Stephen Connolly is a Senior Lecturer in Autism and Course Leader for the MA Autism programme at Sheffield Hallam. He developed his emanciparticipatory research approach to support challenges to deficit-based narratives and reposition autism within neuro-affirming, decolonial frameworks. Research areas include autistic experiences of nerd culture and autistic engagement in the metal music scene; His work bridges research, teaching, and public engagement to advance socially just understandings of autism.

Parallel Session 1: Room 1 continued

Narratives of Neurodivergent Listening and the Music of Sonic the Hedgehog (20m)
Molly Hennig, University of California (LA)

There have been recurring generalizations both online and offline that the Sonic the Hedgehog video game franchise attracts neurodivergent fans, and even further, that the music of the franchise attracts neurodivergent listeners. Relating Sonic to neurodiversity has found its way to official conventions such as Sonic EXPO 2025, wherein a panel of neurodivergent fans of Sonic cited the franchise's music as a prominent factor in their interest. While considering this frequent colloquial association between neurodivergence, the Sonic franchise, and its music, I combine online ethnographic observations from several neurodivergent fans of Sonic, specifically regarding their personal connections to the franchise's soundtracks. With these fans' narratives I argue that neurodivergent expressions of listening to Sonic music both curbs neurotypical hegemonies of musical interpretation and implies potentially neurodiverse characteristics to video game music. Specifically, neurodivergent listenership prioritizes the often described as embodied, pleasurable event of person-object relations and "direct perception" (Bernett 2022) while resisting neurotypically disembodied and emotionally restrictive listening expressions (Fessenden 2024). Video game music, which ludo musicologists have theorized as kinesonically syncretic (Collins 2013), multiply modal (Kamp 2024), and the stimulative bridge between material and virtual bodies (Plank 2021) therefore may lend well to some neurodivergent sensibilities. Furthermore, through expressions of listening, fans of game music might connect through each other's narratives of neurodivergence to build community and navigate neurotypical settings (Quinn & Barton 2024). With this ongoing ethnographic study, I aim to promote neurodivergent theorizations of video game music and demonstrate instances of video game music as a method of thriving in the neurodivergent experience.

Bio: Molly Hennig is a third-year doctoral student of the Department of Musicology at UCLA. Her current interests involve humor as music discourse, particularly concerning sound studies in online livestreaming, neurodivergence in gaming and play, and aesthetic judgements of childhood "edu-tainment." Her work has featured at the American Musicological Society and Society for Ethnomusicology, and she has received several UCLA humanities research fellowships for her projects "Gathering and Listening on Twitch," and "Narratives of Neurodivergent Listening in the Music of Video Game Soundtracks." Alongside her scholarship, Molly performs soprano voice and composes with a focus on contemporary art song.

Parallel Session 1: Room 2

Fidgeting on stage: Neurodivergent movement in the context of musical gesture (10m)

Charlie Clark, University of Birmingham

Musical performances are filled with movement. Musicians rarely restrict themselves to movements strictly needed to play their instrument, tapping, swaying or even jumping along to the music. Coining these movements 'ancillary gestures', research has explored the complex role they play in performance. It has been demonstrated that ancillary gestures are a key part of performance aesthetics, articulating emotional and structural features of the music. Characteristics of ancillary gestures in a given performance are also strongly influenced by genre, venue etc. Simultaneously, however, studies suggest ancillary gestures support regulation of musicians' affective states, highlighting a connection to engagement, flow state and performance anxiety. Performed ancillary gestures are therefore influenced by both aesthetic and affective components.

This presentation explores the tension between these two components with regards to neurodivergent performers, for whom the affective component of movement can be particularly salient. Many neurodivergent people have non-normative relationships to movement and affect. Those who need to tic, 'stim' (use self-stimulatory behaviours) or fidget often do so in response to a felt need to move, with this urge varying with, and influencing, their affective states. I draw on findings from a thematic analysis of ADHD musicians' performance experiences to discuss when and why ADHD musicians and choose to suppress or disinhibit the ADHD-driven urge to fidget, and how the resultant movement converges and diverges from musical ancillary gestures. Included is a critical discussion which uses the social model of disability to explore how the social-physical makeup of performance environments influences this distinction and the subsequent impact on ADHD musicians' affective experiences. In doing so, I incorporate a neurodiversity paradigm into theoretical contributions to the affective component of musical gesture. Finally, findings have implications for how neurodivergent performers' movement needs are understood in pedagogical, therapeutic and community settings.

Bio: Charlie Clark is a postgraduate researcher at the University of Birmingham, studying music cognition and neurodiversity. They studied a bachelor's degree in Music at the University of Birmingham (2016-2019), and a master's degree in the Psychology of Music at the University of Sheffield (2021-2022). They also have experience working as a teaching assistant in SEN with autistic children.

Parallel Session 1: Room 2 continued

The Neurodivergent Musician: Report from a ThinkTank event (20m)
Anna Detari, The Royal College of Music

The study of forms of neurodivergence, such as Autism Spectrum, ADHD, dyslexia, and dyspraxia, is a rapidly expanding field. In the past years, advocates and researchers have increasingly been challenging assumptions and stereotypes associated with the conditions and highlighting the importance of participatory and emancipatory research. As a result, exploration into the lived experience of previously under-studied populations, such as neurodivergent adults and women, is finally underway. Yet, there is still very little known about the strengths, challenges, and support needs of neurodivergent musicians. This study begins the exploration into the unique challenges neurodivergent musicians face in educational and professional settings, employing Participatory Action Research as a methodology.

Fifteen neurodivergent musicians, music educators, and academics were invited to fulfil the dual role of participant and researcher. During an in-person ThinkTank event and online conversations, we shared our experiences and discussed support needs, suggestions for research, and necessary policy changes in musical institutions and organisations. All conversations were audio recorded and transcribed, and an initial thematic analysis was performed. In the second stage, all participants were invited to engage with the data, collaborate in formulating hypotheses, and contribute to the resulting report as co-authors or advisors.

Two primary themes emerged from this participatory, partnership-oriented research process: Living with neurodivergent cognitive styles and physical characteristics in musical settings, and Institutional and organisational features through a neurodivergent lens. Additionally, in alignment with the PAR principles, we identified action steps in four different areas: improving education, taking responsibility, enhancing communication, and gathering evidence. We hope that this initial exploration will not only inspire more discussion about neurodivergent musicians but also set a good example of participatory and emancipatory research, which includes participants in decision-making at every stage of the process.

Bio: Anna Detari is a flautist and researcher with a primary interest in musicians' health and wellbeing, particularly performance-related injury, movement disorders, and mental health. She is a lecturer in Performance Science at the Royal College of Music. She identifies as neurodivergent, conducts participatory research studies exploring the lived experience of neurodivergent musicians, and also supervises PhD projects on the topic.

Parallel Session 1: Room 2 continued

Biodivergent Sites and Sounds: Stimming, Sonic Ecologies, and Neurodivergent Musical Worlds (20m)

Elinor Rowlands, PhD Student at Nottingham Trent University

This paper proposes biodivergence as a way of thinking through neurodivergent musical experience as ecological, relational, and irreducibly multiple. Biodivergence moves beyond existing musical structures and instead asks: what if neurodivergent perception already constitutes its own sonic ecosystems? What if stimming is not an adjunct to music, but music itself? Positioning stimming as an embodied, rhythmic, and affective engagement with sound, this paper understands neurodivergent musicality as emerging through repetition, relation, sensation, and environmental attunement. Stimming becomes a form of composition-in-motion: a continuous feedback loop between body, sound, and space. Here, music is not a fixed object but a shifting field of intensities that are felt, negotiated, and re-patterned in real time.

Through a short demo, I invite audiences to encounter "Biodivergent Sites and Sounds," reframing music as an ecological and relational process shaped by neurodivergent embodiment. These sites may include natural environments, digital interfaces, or everyday sonic landscapes, each operating as a dynamic ecology where sound is co-produced through movement, texture, and sensory responsiveness, activated by audiences who have full autonomy in how they encounter the music. Listening becomes participatory; audiences are collaborators in generating musical meaning, activating the depths at which sound is produced.

This paper also explores how interactive technologies can extend biodivergent practices by treating stimming as creative input. Drawing on neurodivergent studies, affect theory, experimental music, and frameworks of crip and queer temporalities, I argue that biodivergent musical worlds foreground fluidity, repetition, and sensory intensity as generative modes of engagement, where time, rhythm, and attention follow alternative temporalities. In these spaces, sound becomes a medium for enacting identities beyond fixed categories, where stimming, improvisation, and interaction challenge neuronormative ideas of coherence, linearity, and control.

Bio: Elinor Rowlands, Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts since 2018, is a multi-disciplinary artist, researcher, and practitioner. In the final year of a PhD on autistic stimming as an artistic methodology, they have created immersive and interactive sound art projects. Their work includes Retelling of the Wild Woods (Arts Council DYCP; 4th Annual Lethbridge International Film Festival, 2026) and Fragments of Perception: An Autistic Odyssey (2025), exploring ritualistic, heritage-based, and audio-visual practices. Their paper Beauty in the Gothic: Forms of Autistic Aesthetics (Ought journal) highlights biodivergent creative approaches.

Parallel Session 1: Room 3 continued

A musical ethnography among autistic people within the Brazilian independent music scene (20m)
Caio Prestes Góes Rocha, Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul

This study consists of a musical ethnography among autistic people involved with the Brazilian independent music scene. In Brazil, autism has been legally recognized as a form of disability since 2012, but social movements have continued to fight for the related rights to be fully respected, as well as for specific and intersectional ones, to oppose misinformation and harmful therapies, and for better understanding about autistic people by the rest of the population. Meanwhile, since the 1980s Brazil has developed a vibrant system of independent music: removed from corporations and big media, encompassing a large variety of musical genres, from marginalized local traditions to sonic experimentations, often community-based and influenced by the values of the counterculture, punk, and hip-hop. Since the mid-1990s, the Brazilian independent music scene has become larger and more widely connected, in great part thanks to the facilitation of the internet. Through both independent music online networks, and online branches of autistic social movements, I have come to locate a considerable number of autistic adults working with independent music across Brazil. This study considers disabilities as relational; autism in particular as a human neurological variety, still often misunderstood by the rest of society; and the pioneering experiences on the ethnomusicology of autism in the USA as starting points for a virtual and on-site ethnography among autistic people within the Brazilian independent music scene. Starting with long, open-ended video call interviews, I have been listening to such individuals narrate their own experiences both as autistic and in music, how the two relate for them, how their social, artistic and professional relationships take place, in their own words, and considering their intersectionalities. Additionally, I reflect on my own role as both another autistic individual involved with the Brazilian independent music scene, and the autistic musical ethnographer in this study.

Bio: Caio holds a Bachelor in Letters (Literature, Linguistics, and Translation: Portuguese and English, 2014-19), Master in Music (Musicology/Ethnomusicology, 2020-22) and now starting his second year out of four a Ph.D. student of Music (Musicology/Ethnomusicology, 2025-), all at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul, in Porto Alegre, Brazil. He discovered he was autistic during his Master's, and have since joined a collective for autistic people in his university, a mutual support group for his area, and one of the main self-advocate movements for rights in Brazil. He has also worked extensively on indie radio and music journalism in Brazil.

Parallel Session 1: Room 3 continued

Hear My Voice: An Investigation into a Collaboratively Designed Singing Framework for People who Stammer (20m)

Abigail Mann-Daraz, University of Wales Trinity St David

This qualitative, participatory action research project explores the impact of a stammering-sensitive singing framework on voice confidence for people who stammer. Situated within a broader understanding of voice as a relational and communicative process (Newham, 1999), the study responds to a gap in existing literature regarding the role of singing in shaping voice identity and self-perception for people who stammer (Falk, Schreier & Russo, 2020).

Over one month, four one-to-one online singing sessions were delivered to adult participants (18+) living with a stammer, across an international cohort with varied musical experience. The framework integrated person-centred practice, mindfulness, self-soothing strategies, and elements of therapeutic singing. Following each session, participants engaged in creative reflection, with practitioner observations also documented.

Data were analysed through a synthesis of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Thematic Analysis, with member checking and ongoing reflection on researcher positionality supporting a collaborative and ethically grounded process. Findings suggest that singing can significantly influence how individuals relate to their voice. Participants reported shifts in voice confidence, self-expression, and emotional connection to sound, aligning with emerging research on singing, wellbeing, and speech (Mongia et al., 2019).

This research proposes a stammering-sensitive framework for voice work and contributes towards developing a shared language across singing pedagogy, speech and language therapy, and neurodivergent-informed practice. It invites a reframing of voice work as a space not of correction, but of relationship, agency, and neuro-affirming, inclusive practice.

Bio: Abigail Mann-Daraz is a voice coach, singing teacher, and researcher specialising in inclusive, neurodiversity-affirming voice practice. She is the founder of The Musical Self and works across performance, education, and health settings, including SEND and PMLD contexts. With a background in psychology and voice pedagogy, her work explores voice as a relational and communicative process, with a focus on voice confidence, identity, and self-expression. Abi is currently developing a practitioner-focused handbook alongside ongoing research into stammering-sensitive voice work.

Panel Discussion
Exploring music and neurodivergence: methodologies and approaches

Panelists: Charlie Clark, Matt Rogerson, Neesa Sunar

Bios:

Charlie Clark is a postgraduate researcher at the University of Birmingham, studying music cognition and neurodiversity. They studied a bachelor's degree in Music at the University of Birmingham (2016-2019), and a master's degree in the Psychology of Music at the University of Sheffield (2021-2022). They also have experience working as a teaching assistant in SEN with autistic children.

Matt Rogerson is an interdisciplinary sound artist, musician and performer based in Leicester, UK. His research-practice investigates the convergence of audiovisual art, live art, cybernetics and neurodiversity studies to elucidate on his own lived experience as a neurodiverse identity—as both an embodied creative approach and a means of broader critical inquiry. He has presented his work at the IRCAM Forum (Paris, FR), NIME (Utrecht, NL), the SOUND/IMAGE Festival (UoG, UK) and the MA/AP Study Group (UCA, UK). Furthermore, he accommodates for his practice as a guitarist and improvisor by engaging in both contemporary and experimental music performance.

Neesa Suncheuri Sunar (she/her) is a PhD student and researcher at the University of Salford, supported by the Leverhulme Trust Aural Diversity Research Hub (LAURA). She is investigating the lived experiences of musicians with auditory aphantasia, a distinct cognitive profile causing inability to hear sound and music in the mind's ear. More broadly, aphantasia can impact cognition across sensory domains, such as the inability to voluntarily create realistic images in the imagination. Originally from NYC, Neesa has an interdisciplinary background in classical music performance on viola, violin/viola pedagogy, clinical social work and psychotherapy. She herself also has total aphantasia.

Bios of panelists continue onto the next page

Abstracts & Speaker Bios

Parallel Session 2: Room 1

Auralplasticity: Unmasking the Neurodivergent Voice (10m)
Ingrid Plum, University of Salford

This project investigates the intersection of disciplines between auraldiversity, participatory choral composition and emergent technologies. Within ensemble vocal singing, general inclusivity has limited benefits without specifically addressing the needs of neurodivergent singers. There is little research on the experience of neurodivergent singers in ensembles. Without agency, the neurodivergent singer may mask their experience: the communication, expression and authenticity of the neurodivergent performer becomes limited and they may even mask pain. In turn, this points to missed opportunities through lack of inclusivity, where unique contributions have not been facilitated to emerge. To create composition by/for neurodivergent performers, we must find new strategies for participatory composition, with more immediate collaboration. This paper explores approaches towards an inclusive methodology for collaborative composition with neurodivergent singers, specifically focusing on the incorporation of sensory soothing within performance environments to facilitate flow state. Technology offers a route for us to facilitate the contributions of neurodivergent singers and encourage a sense of agency through sensory soothing. By intersecting accessible design principles with research into the neurodivergent experience, I am developing a neurodivergent-inclusive design of sensory soothing accessible technology with the support of Drake Music, a leading charity in music, disability and technology. I am creating embodied sensory MIDI controllers which incorporate several aspects of sensory soothing: Rhythmic movement, auditory control and stimming (self-stimulatory behavior). An echo of the term neuroplasticity, (the ability of the brain to form and reorganize synaptic connections in response to experience), 'Auralplasticity' is used here to identify the new participatory compositional strategies that can be formed to incorporate and organize the knowledge or experiences of neurodivergent performers.

Bio: Ingrid's PhD for LAURA explores the intersection between aural diversity, participatory composition and emergent technologies. Ingrid completed a Visiting Research Fellowship with The Unit for Sound Practice Research at Goldsmiths, and shared research at: the Auraldiversities series, Goldsmiths; NHS Recovery College/Paul Hamlyn Foundation; Activating Inclusive Sound Spaces at the University of Huddersfield; Wild Energies with CRiSAP. Ingrid's publication 'Taut: Investigations into Contemporary Composition' has been taught at Mills College, Goldsmiths, the University of Brighton and Queen's University Belfast. Ingrid's work has been featured in BBC Radio 4's New Weird Britain, The Verb and Late Junction on BBC Radio 3.

Parallel Session 2: Room 1 continued

Towards an Autistic Cultural History: Examining the Life and Music of Erik Satie (20m)

Andrew Hugill, Leeds University
Pam Heaton, Goldsmiths and The Royal Northern College of Music

In our presentation we explore the extent that autism can provide a coherent framework for understanding the life and creative practice of Erik Satie. Drawing on documentary evidence, diagnostic criteria, and phenomenological theories of autism, we show that converging patterns in Satie's behaviour are consistent with autistic experience across social interaction, routine, sensory response, and attentional style. Analysis of the Gymnopédies and Embryons desséchés shows how contrasting compositional strategies of immersion and disruption may be understood as expressions of a single underlying attentional orientation. We argue that this approach contributes to the development of theoretically grounded methods for retrospective neurodivergent analysis and to the construction of an autistic cultural history.

Bio: Andrew Hugill is a retired British academic, composer and musicologist whose work explores systems of listening, post-minimalism, and neurodivergent experience.

Pam Heaton is an emeritus professor of psychology and neuroscience at Goldsmiths University. Pam's primary research interest is in developmental disorders, especially autism and its relation to musical cognition.

Parallel Session 2: Room 1 continued

There's Two of Them: Creating Space for Neurodivergent Approaches to Music and Access (20m)
Andrew Dell'Antonio, UTexas at Austin
Steph Ban, Independent Historical Scholar

Work on embodied musicology has established a tradition of dialogue with a historical composer through performance (for example LeGuin 2005) and has addressed listener responses from a variety of perspectives (for example Cox 2016, Dell'Antonio 2021, Fisher and Lockhhead 2002). Some work on music and disability has likewise addressed embodied disabled experience of musicking as providing crucial epistemic insights (for example Jones 2015). We believe that embodied musicology can open crucial pathways to interpretative access for non-normate bodyminds.

Focusing on the highly embodied discourse on music by Jean-Jacques Rousseau, which we read as grounded in disability both as social category and as impairment, we have been exploring the epistemic potential of neurodivergent "trialogue" between two twenty-first century scholars and a prominent past composer-theorist-philosopher. Through our trialogic engagement with each other and with Rousseau and his musicking communities, we ultimately propose to bring insight to the disabled-embodied nature of Rousseau's extensive musical perspectives and approaches, as well as the relevance of access to his musicking ideals and their resonance in present experience.

We want to share key facets of our neurodivergent-enbodiminded (Acevedo, 2020) trialogic approach, and invite others into our messy, sparkly exchange that takes seriously the importance of disabled embodied experience in supporting alternative epistemic frameworks of musicking. By doing so, we hope others will join us in questioning normate assumptions about embodied musical response in order to expand collective access in our analyses and pedagogies.

Bios continue onto the next page

Parallel Session 2: Room 1 continued

Bio: Andrew Dell'Antonio is both a decorated pedagogue and a zany neurodivergent chaos muppet. Thoroughly trained in normative Euro-canonic musical-theoretical approaches, he has recently realized that his training was difficult and ultimately incompletely absorbed because of its friction with his particular neurodivergent sensorium. His early career focused on musical traditions of early modern Europe; more recently he has collaborated with Steph Ban and others to open scholarly spaces for disabled and neurodivergent musicking inside and outside of academia. He seeks practical applications of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) to music historiography and higher-education pedagogy, from perspectives informed by critical disability studies.

Steph Ban is a mad, disabled independent scholar and essayist whose work centers on topics such as histories of activism, disability in historical memory, and histories of neurodivergence (broadly interpreted). She takes an interdisciplinary approach that draws on history, philosophy, musicology, and disability studies.

Parallel Session 2: Room 2

Lost in Plain Sight: Scoring Hallucination as Compositional Logic (10m)
Takuto Fukuda, The University of Pécs

In 2020, I experienced episodes of auditory and visual hallucination associated with schizophrenia. During those episodes, the perceptual boundary between what is present and what is represented was not available to me as a stable given: what I heard and saw carried the full force of the real, whether or not it originated in the physical world. Lost in Plain Sight, a chamber opera for soprano, two mezzo-sopranos, baritone, chamber ensemble, tape, and Mixed Reality (MR) projection, is the compositional response to that experience.

This paper offers an autoethnographic account of how neurodivergent perception has directly shaped the work's musical language, dramaturgy, and staging. Earlier disability-studies scholarship on music and mental illness has often proceeded hermeneutically — reading pathological metaphors into finished works, as in analogies drawn between autism and postwar serialism. I take a different route: rather than interpreting music through diagnostic lenses, I ask how a composer's lived perceptual world, once it has broken apart and been relearned, becomes generative material for form.

In Lost in Plain Sight, that material is the indistinguishability of real and virtual. The MR system — real-time depth-camera point-cloud silhouettes of the singers projected onto a semi-transparent holographic gauze between performers and audience — is not scenography but a compositional parameter. The Reality–Virtuality continuum operates as a temporal arc: virtual density rises toward a crisis; the protagonist's own body is rendered as a flickering light-point field; then the virtual layer dissolves and the soprano stands, unaugmented, as the Doctor sings of the brook and the cedar.

By scoring hallucination as structural trajectory rather than illustrating it, the piece positions schizophrenic experience not as pathology to be decoded but as a compositional logic in its own right — one contribution toward a more capacious account of neurodivergent authorship in contemporary music.

Bio: Takuto Fukuda is a composer, researcher, and educator. He is Assistant Professor in Electronic Music and Media Art at the University of Pécs, Hungary (2025–present). He holds a D.Mus. in Composition from McGill University (2023). Viewing art as a medium for insight-sharing, he uses technologies to highlight the contemporary human conditions, such as the blurred boundaries between human and non-human, presence and absence, and reality and imagery. His creative practice spans a wide range of media and styles: from mixed media compositions integrating audiovisual content and live performers, to gamified works enabling real-time, interactive, and chance-based music-making, as well as music for digital musical instruments like the T-Stick.

Parallel Session 2: Room 2 continued

I Am Music - A Composition Focused Approach to Music Therapy for Individuals with DID (20m)
Robin May, Independent Composer and Educator

For my Master's Thesis in 2024, I wrote a musical composition that represents my lived experience with Dissociative Identity Disorder (DID). The written part of my thesis outlined my research and a basic process for completing this composition, from finding existing music that represents my alters and experiences, to creating the final composition. My research explored the intersection of music interests and personalities, as well as different methods of music therapy and their effectiveness with individuals with DID. In addition, I discussed the use of music as representation of identity and character in existing media, expanding on the possibilities of connecting through music. Join me in discussing this research as well as parts of the composition and the creation process.

Bio: Robin May (they/she) is a composer and educator, having received both their Bachelor's and Master's in Composing for Visual Media from the Los Angeles College of Music. Robin has been scoring films and video games as well as composing music for the concert hall. Her research interests include music therapy, especially at its intersection with neurodivergence, as well as developments in music notation and performance.

Parallel Session 2: Room 2 continued

An exploration into how the UK training and identity of autistic music therapists informs the development of their approaches to clinical practice with children: a musically enhanced narrative inquiry (20m)
Ella Machin-Bradbury, Music Therapist

Aim: This study was designed to explore the approaches to clinical practice which are adopted and developed by autistic music therapists (MTs), informed by the intersectional experiences of trainees in the United Kingdom (UK) and their autistic identity. The research investigated autistic MT's trained and current approaches to clinical practice, and traced developments post-qualification. The research also sought to reveal how autistic MTs feel about their approaches to clinical practice. Method: One autistic (self-identified or diagnosed) MT completed a qualitative online survey. Using the methodology musically enhanced narrative inquiry, narratives and themes were identified, musically enhanced and re-told.

Findings: The data analysis identified three narratives, each containing themes: adoption and development of music therapy approaches (approaches are adopted to support the client; integrative approaches are developed post-qualification to support the client and the therapist's way of working; autistic identity is inseparable from therapeutic approach;disclosure of therapist's autistic identity is conditional on client need), strengths and misaligned music therapy approaches (strengths in structured approaches; misalignment with psychodynamic approaches) and impact of music therapy approaches on autistic therapists (emotional and physical toll of misaligned approaches; self-care for autistic needs; uncertainty about the sustainability of approaches).

Conclusion: This study revealed that an autistic MT adopts an integrative approach to clinical practice. Autistic identity and UK training influenced their current approaches, alongside client needs and post-qualification experiential learning in unfamiliar clinical settings. The participant identified misalignment with aspects of their current approach, leading to negative emotional and physical impacts. Uncertainty surrounds the sustainability of their current ways of working.

Recommendations: There is a need for opportunities for autistic mentorship in music therapy training courses and post-qualification. This would support autistic MTs to develop safe, effective and sustainable approaches to clinical practice.

Bio continues onto the next page

Parallel Session 2: Room 2 continued

An exploration into how the UK training and identity of autistic music therapists informs the development of their approaches to clinical practice with children: a musically enhanced narrative inquiry (20m)
Ella Machin-Bradbury, Music Therapist

Bio: Ella is a newly qualified music therapist who is also autistic. She is interested in exploring and unpicking what it means to be an autistic music therapist in a profession that can be quite polarised in terms of helper/helped roles. She now works with children in my music therapy practice, some of whom are neurodivergent, and want to further understand what being an autistic therapist can add. She chose to study the development of approaches to music therapy practice of autistic therapists for her masters project. The project is arts based research.

Parallel Session 2: Room 3

Individual Differences in Narrative Perceptions of Music (10m)
Bailey Runn, Michigan State University
Rachael Farquharson, Michigan State University
J. Devin McAuley, Michigan State University

Previous research shows that across cultures, listeners exhibit similar levels of narrativity—the extent to which instrumental music evokes stories—and narrative engagement, or how vivid and detailed those stories are. While there is substantial within-culture similarity in the content of imagined narratives, between-culture similarity is limited. Despite these broad patterns, narrative responses to music vary widely across individuals in ways that appear unrelated to cultural background. The present study investigates individual differences in narrative responses to instrumental music, focusing on the roles of auditory and visual imagery ability, empathy, and autistic traits. Participants listened to one of two ~five-minute Western instrumental excerpts and indicated whether they imagined a story. If they did imagine a story, those individuals provided written narratives. These narratives were evaluated by independent raters for richness and detail. Participants also completed measures of narrative engagement, empathy (Interpersonal Reactivity Index), autistic traits (Autism Symptom Dimension Questionnaire), visual imagery vividness (VVIQ), and auditory imagery ability (BAIS-V). Results revealed three main findings. First, greater auditory—but not visual—imagery ability was associated with higher narrative engagement, but not with narrativity. Second, higher empathy was associated with greater narrative engagement and narrativity. Third, autistic traits were not associated with narrative engagement but were positively correlated with narrativity. These findings highlight distinct cognitive and neurodivergent profiles underlying how individuals construct meaning from music, offering new insight into variability in music-evoked narrative experience.

Bio: Bailey Rann is a second-year doctoral student in the Cognition and Cognitive Neuroscience program at Michigan State University. Their research focuses on investigating neural differences in timing, attention, and perception in neurodevelopmental and neurodivergent populations. As a neurodivergent researcher, Bailey is committed to advancing understanding of the neural mechanisms underlying these differences and contributing to more inclusive and representative cognitive science.

Parallel Session 2: Room 3 continued

Navigating Aphantasia and Sonovisual Resonance through the Gesture of Listening (20m)
Pere Amengual, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid

As an electronic artist and "sound hacker" active since the mid-1980s, my practice has evolved from industrial recordings to the development of custom generative instruments inspired by Chaos Theory. This presentation explores a creative methodology rooted in a neurodivergent profile characterised by aphantasia and a high degree of somatic resonance.

In the absence of a previous "mental screen" or visual projection of my works, my compositional process diverges from traditional, linear planning. Instead, I employ a methodology defined as a real-time sonovisual feedback loop, where the validation of a sonic and visual texture is not intellectual or pre-conceived, but strictly physical while open to admittance of glitches and "happy accidents".

Drawing on the "gesture of listening" theory, informed by my work with hybrid chaotic instruments, such as those of Rob Hordijk, I navigate sound and images as a real-time dialogue between machine autonomy and an intuitive perception many times guided by "awe" and admiration for the emergent results.

Using my work "Estudios sobre lazo de realimentación no-lineal" (2024) as a case study, I demonstrate how I subvert neuronormative compositional workflows. By centering the artist's nervous system as the primary diagnostic tool, this research challenges standard notions of "imagination," proposing instead a visceral practice where aural diversity and tactile empathy drive the creative act.

This session aims to show how "making noise while people sleep" serves as both a sensory regulation strategy and a reclamation of neurodivergent musical space.

Bio: Pedro Trotz is a Majorcan electronic artist and sound hacker, recognized as a pioneer of experimental music in the Balearic Islands since the 1980s. Holding a Multimedia Degree and a Master's in Electroacoustic Composition from Katarina Gurska, his work spans industrial recordings, interactive installations, and generative software. Currently engaged in a PhD thesis on Rob Hordijk's legacy, his research explores the intersection of generative code and somatic interaction as a means of provoking visceral emotions. He has presented audiovisual works at festivals like ME_MMIX and Function

Parallel Session 2: Room 3 continued

Crip-time, Repetition, and Autistic Listening (20m)
Ben Safran, Institute Manager at the Cogut Institute for the Humanities at Brown University

"Crip time" has been used within disability studies to analyze works within a variety of media. As Sonia Loftis notes in a crip time analysis of Shakespeare, experiencing time differently can be central to the neurodivergent experience. I argue that thinking in crip time offers opportunities for analyzing repetition in music from the positionality of the autistic listener. As an example, I offer a crip time reading of the repetitions in the final movement of Shostakovich's Piano Trio No. 2 informed by my personal experience. Such a reading does not reject but may add an additional layer to traditional, historically-informed interpretations of non-normative passage of time and repetition within the piece.

Musicologists have used non-normative music as a metaphor for neurodivergent experience. For example, Joseph Straus observes that modernism in music includes a celebration of the unconventional aesthetic, which is especially open to a reading through a lens of disability. Drawing on hermeneutic analysis and on research ranging from Michael Bakan's ethnographic work to Katie Overy and Istvan Molnar-Szakacs's work on music perception, this paper uses crip time as a means to go beyond using musical style to represent disability, focusing instead on the experience of the crip listener.

Bio: Ben Safran is Institute Manager at the Cogut Institute for the Humanities at Brown University. They are responsible for operations including strategic planning, financial processes, facilities management, and human resources. They have a Ph.D. in music from Temple University and have presented research on protest music, campaign strategy, identity studies in music, music in childhood and youth culture, media studies, hermeneutics, ecomusicology, and 20th- and 21st-century concert music. Their scholarly work has been published in the Journal of the Society for American Music and Yale Journal of Music and Religion, while their compositions have been performed by musicians ranging from principal members of the Philadelphia Orchestra to grassroots activists performing a guerilla concert in a corporate headquarters lobby. They also serve as an instructor within Brown's Pre-College Division, where they currently teach courses on music in social movements.

Our Team

About the Neurodivergent Music Network

The Neurodivergent Music Network (NMN) is a cross-disciplinary hub for neurodivergent researchers to explore the intersection between music and neurodivergence, sharing ideas and methodologies. Our mission is to support our members' work while collectively establishing Neurodivergent Music Studies as a distinct and rigorous field of studies. NMN is part of the Consortium for the Humanities and the Arts South-east England (CHASE) research networks.

Our Volunteers

This conference wouldn't be possible without the generous support of our team of volunteers, and we wholeheartedly thank them for their hard work!

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Bruce Petherick

Our Committee

This conference is run by the organising committee of the CHASE Neurodivergent Music Network: Tara Allen, Nina Danon, Niamh Gallagher, Calanthe Milton, Carmen Rosas-Pérez, Jess Walls.

For more information about our individual research projects and our network's work, please visit: https://www.neurodivergentmusicnetwork.com/

You can use this link to join us, too!