

# Instruments of Global Music Theory: A Symposium

**Friday, May 19–Saturday, May 20, 2023**

**Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey**

**CFP deadline: December 31, 2022**

This symposium seeks to investigate musical instruments as a source for the historical study of music theory in a global context. While we think of musical instruments primarily in terms of music-making, in the context of theoretical inquiry instruments are tools of scientific experimentation critical to the process of knowledge acquisition. As Alexander Rehding has observed, instruments are epistemic conduits that both shape and reflect thoughts, ideas, and theories about fundamental aspects of music (“Instruments of Music Theory,” 2016). Instruments have taken center stage in music theories of different historical and geographical contexts: the monochord in the European West from antiquity into the early modern period, the *‘ūd* in Arabic-speaking lands since early ‘Abbāsīd times, the *lǜ* or the *qin* in China, or the piano in the modern theory classroom are all audible embodiments of theoretical ideas about music, as well as keys to interpreting the musical systems in which they operate.

Interest in global approaches to the history of music theory is widespread and thriving (Raz et al., “Going Global, in Theory,” 2019). In dialogue with recent interventions in this growing field, this symposium will investigate how a focus on the knowledge-bearing dimensions of musical instruments opens up new avenues for transcultural histories of music theory (Rehding, “Fine-Tuning,” 2022). It draws particular inspiration from John Tresch and Emily Dolan’s call for an exploratory and interpretative organology (“Toward a New Organology,” 2013) and Roger Moseley’s study of the keyboard as a “ludic interface” that enables modes of play that cut across time (*Keys to Play*, 2016).

We invite proposals exploring the theory-bearing dimensions of musical instruments in different historical periods and across musical cultures. We welcome and aim to bring together scholars at different career stages and from diverse backgrounds. Contributions focusing on non-Western contexts are

encouraged. Possible topics related to music-theoretical instruments may include, but are by no means limited to, the following:

- Musical instruments as a source for the historical study of music theory
- The relationship between music-theoretical instruments and the music theory they occasion
- Challenges of a global music theory: textual versus material approaches
- Instrument-making as theorization, instrument-builders as theorists
- Instruments of music theory as a colonial force
- The role of instruments in music theory pedagogy

We are delighted that Prof. Alexander Rehding (Harvard University) will deliver the symposium's keynote address.

Please send an abstract of your proposed paper (not exceeding 300 words), alongside a brief biographical note or CV to the program committee at [instrumentsmt@princeton.edu](mailto:instrumentsmt@princeton.edu) by December 31, 2022. Notifications of accepted proposals will be sent by January 31, 2023.

This symposium is organized by Marcel Camprubí (PhD candidate, Music) with the generous support of the Princeton University Department of Music.