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Institute News

Stephanie Jensen-Moulton

A quick intake of breath. That low and broad laugh festooning into the harmony of shared mirth. An electric presence that literally turned on the lights above her as she walked down the hallway towards her office at Brooklyn College, smiling, opening her arms gracefully, just at the waist, greeting one of her students warmly with an idiomatic “Sweetie...”

Tania León—pianist, dancer, creator, conductor, and composer—retired in 2019 from her position as Distinguished Professor of Music Composition at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center. Her legacy and mentorship loom too large to celebrate through just one outlet: Tania, one might say, has the same indelible effect on people as her music has on the ear. Therefore, we dedicate this issue of the *American Music Review* to her life and work, and in so doing, we assemble a group of short essays in the burgeoning new subfield of “Tania León Studies,” here written by colleagues, collaborators, and former students.

Maja Cerar’s cover essay locates her connection with León’s compositions in her idiomatic performance practice for the 2002 work for violin and electronics, *Axon*. Because of her unique positionality as performer and musicologist, Cerar is able to provide a compelling close reading of her tactile and intellectual relationship to the webs of electric impulses in León’s piece for solo violin and electronics. **Carol Oja’s** essay incorporates quotations from the Oral Histories of American Music collection featuring extended commentary by León about her extraordinary life. While contextualizing León’s 2021 Pulitzer Prize-winning piece *Stride* within the landscape of the composer’s own words and works, Oja complicates León’s historical rejection of identity markers such as “Black” and “Cuban” with regard to her creative life. **Isaac Jean-François**, who has been hard at work organizing León’s immense and priceless archive of notes, photos, and scores for its eventual deposit alongside Arthur Mitchell’s papers at Columbia University, writes passionately of his experience diving headfirst into this artist’s life via her artifacts. Deeply changed by migration from Russia to the US early in her career, composer **Polina Nazaykinskaya** considers the influence of Tania León on her music, her career, and her life. And finally, **Alejandro Madrid** discusses the process of writing the first substantive Tania León biography.

MUSIC IN POLY CULTURAL AMERICA SPEAKER SERIES

Looking back to the start of the Fall 2021 semester, our speaker series began auspiciously with a lecture on Hawaiian slide guitar music by **Kevin Fellezs** entitled “*Nahenahe*: The Restorative Politics of Hawaiian Music.” Fellezs explained how native Hawaiians (*Kanaka Maoli*) created a narrative through their mid-century popular music tradition, reaffirming cultural values shadowed by the biased narratives of American tourists. Brooklyn College MM alumna **Ana Alfonsina Mora Flores** returned (virtually) to share her research in the talk, “*Feminopraxis ruidistas*: Interlacing Affections, Sound, and Beyond in Latin America.” Mora Flores asserted that the creation of noise music or *ruido* has led to a movement of feminist collectives in South America that immerse women in a culture of safety and belonging. And finally, **Nancy Yunhwa Rao** joined us from a conference in Taiwan to discuss “A Transpacific History of American Music.” Empowering scholars to further explore the deep cultural links between Asian immigration patterns and American musics, Rao highlighted Chinese opera theater as a particularly rich topic for investigation along the lines of race, class, gender, and nationality.

Institute News (cont.)

STAFF NEWS

Along with a new academic year and its array of changes, Fall 2021 ushered in a new era for the staff of the Hitchcock Institute. With the official retirement of **Ray Allen**—who has now fully committed himself to HISAM Board activities while writing a second book on Brooklyn Carnival music—the Institute is now a four-person operation. But we're pleased to introduce our new Managing Editor, Graduate Center DMA cello performance candidate **Kirsten Jermé**. This fall, Jermé had the privilege of working with Tania León on "Oh Yemanjá" from León's 1994 opera *Scourge of Hyacinths*, along with Kaija Saariaho's "Mirage." Both works, scored for soprano, cello and piano, were performed by a trio of Graduate Center performers on the Music in Midtown series. Additionally, she continued to serve as a TA for several music courses at Brooklyn College while teaching one final semester remotely as Applied Music Lecturer in cello at North Carolina State University. Welcome to HISAM, Kirsten!



Album art by Whitney George

Composer and conductor **Whitney George** continued as the HISAM College Assistant while maintaining a packed schedule of creative work. This fall, she continued teaching with the music and film series **ThinkOlio** via Zoom, in addition to beginning a new collaboration with the Kauffman Music Center's Luna Lab, which provides mentorship and performance opportunities for young composers who are female, non-binary or gender nonconforming. Also with Kauffman, George began a position at the Special Music School (a New York City public high school for contemporary music) where she teaches composition, the Composer's Forum, and conducts the Improvisation Ensemble. In September, George's music was featured in Tania León's COMPOSERS NOW "Dialogues" event at National Opera America. And to cap off her fall term, George saw the release of two albums on Pinch Records: **For You** in September 2021 with The Curiosity Cabinet (featuring BC alumni Adam von Housen on violin, and Edward Forstman on piano); and **Solitude and Secrecy**, also with the Curiosity Cabinet. Congratulations, Dr. George!

Recently, contributing editor **Michelle Yom** presented her paper "Towards a Formal Genealogy of Black Art: Cecil Taylor, Arthur Jafa, and W.E.B. Du Bois" at the Black Portraiture[s] VII Conference. **Jeff Taylor** has taken over as Director of Jazz Studies at Brooklyn College--under the label of "Jazz@BC" (riffing on the name of a famous jazz organization in Manhattan) and housed at HISAM. He is working with ensemble leaders **Kat Rodriguez** and **Ronnie Burrage** to build a culture of jazz at BC, with strong ties to our lively surrounding community. He continues to head a committee charged with some important revisions to our Masters in Global Jazz degree program. Please check out Jazz@BC social media accounts: @jazzbccuny (Instagram), @jazzbccuny (Twitter) and @jazzcunybc (Facebook). For more information, please email jazzcunybc@gmail.com.

In addition to planning and enjoying each of our HISAM lectures, initiating the first phase of a fundraising campaign for the Institute, and anticipating events for Spring 2022, I've taken part in two panels: one at the annual meeting of the American Musicological Society, where we discussed feminist approaches to musicology careers in the creative industries; and a second in which the panel engaged with the idea of "Disruptive Pedagogy" particularly in the field of American Studies. I look forward to reuniting with many of you as we meet in a freer, brighter, and, hopefully, healthier new year.

In solidarity,
Stephanie Jensen-Moulton