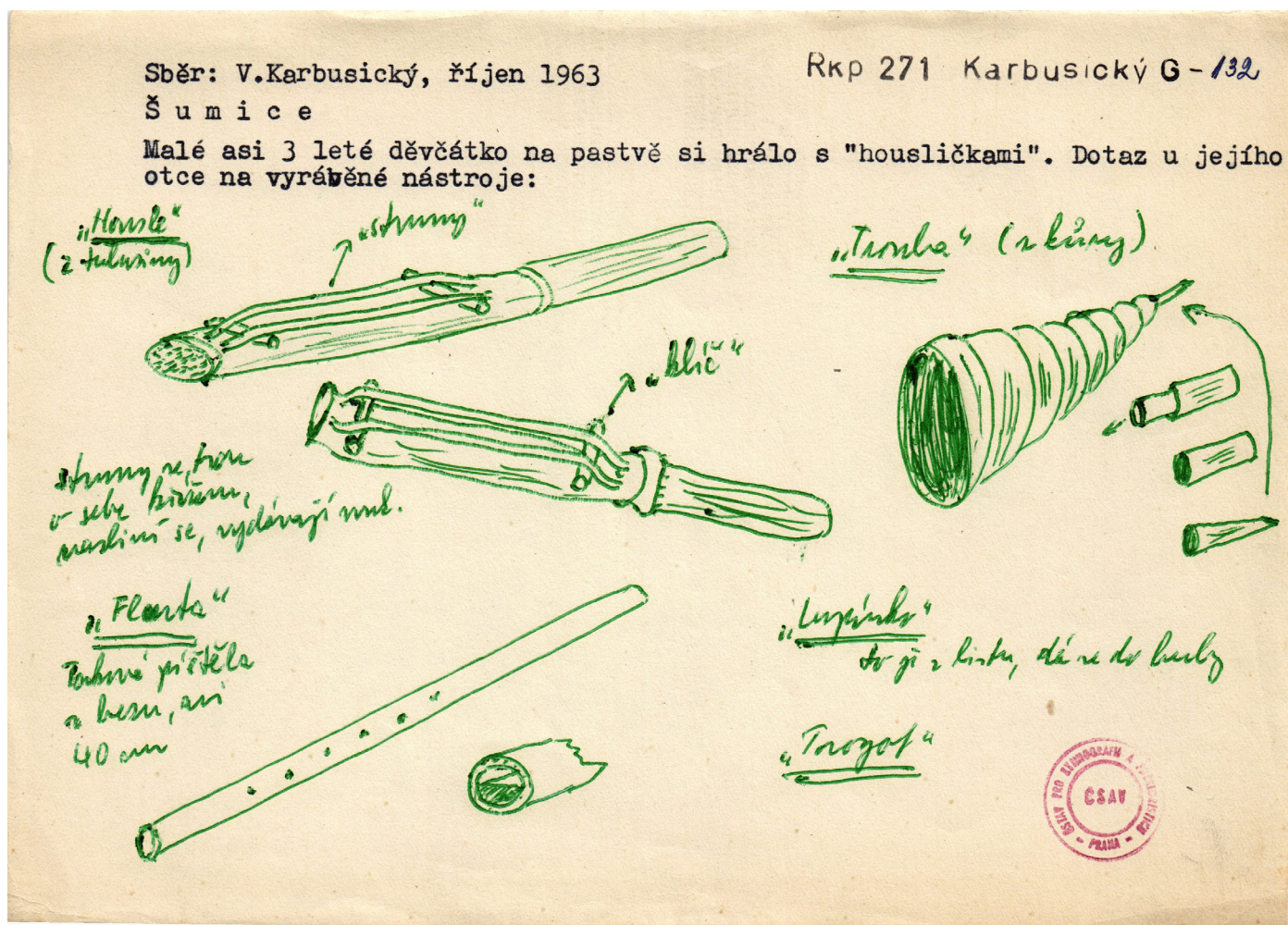


INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

VLADIMÍR KARBUSICKÝ (1925–2002): AN ACADEMIC AT THE CROSSROADS OF DISCIPLINES AND IDEOLOGIES



November 7–8, 2025

Musicological Library of the Institute of Art History,
Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 7

13.30–14.00 Registration

14.00–16.00

Opening

Chair: Golan Gur

Louise Duchesneau (Hamburg)

Vladimír Karbusický and György Ligeti – A Friendship in Uneasy Times

Ulrich Morgenstern (Vienna)

Vladimír Karbusický – a Scholar, a Teacher and a Humanist

Melanie Unseld (Vienna)

A Book from the Literary Estate: Vladimír Karbusický's Geschichte des böhmischen Musiktheaters

Coffee Break

16.30–18.00

Chair: Lucia Reiprich Maloveská

Anna Nikolozishvili (Utrecht)

Musical and Social Structures: Contextualising Jozef Kresánek's Slovenská ľudová pieseň zo stanoviska hudobného in the History of Central-European Musicology

Aleš Opekar (Prague) – **Jan Blüml** (Olomouc)

Vladimír Karbusický and His Contribution to Popular Music Research

Matěj Kratochvíl (Prague)

"Sonic Environment of Our Lives." Vladimír Karbusický and Transformations of Czech Ethnomusicology

Social Gathering

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 8

9.00–10.30

Chair: Ulrich Morgenstern

Golan Gur (Vienna)

Musical Signs and the Semantics of History: Vladimír Karbusický's Model of Music Semiotics in the Context of Cold War Ideologies

Štěpán Hurník (Prague)

The Concept of Music as a Source of Karbusický's and Jiránek's Dispute on the Nature of Music Semiotics

Dániel Nagy (Budapest)

Music, Meaning, Mimesis – Karbusický's Theory of Musical Semantics and Its Lessons for Contemporary Semiotic and Cognitive Theories

Coffee Break

11.00–12.00

Chair: Václav Kapsa

Lucia Reiprich Maloveská (Prague)

Systematic Musicology Now and Then: Karbusický's Concept from Music Theory's Perspective

Lauge Dideriksen (Vienna)

Musical Foundations at the Interpenetration of Nature and Culture

Coffee Break

12.15–(14.00)

Roundtable Discussion

Conference organizers and contacts:

Václav Kapsa, Institute of Art History of the CAS, kapsa@udu.cas.cz

Matěj Kratochvíl, Institute of Ethnology of the CAS, kratochvil@eu.cas.cz

Cover picture: Drawings of folk instruments from Șumice, Romania, by Vladimír Karbusický, Archive of the Institute of Ethnology

ABSTRACTS

Lauge Dideriksen

Musical Foundations at the Interpenetration of Nature and Culture

To think about musical foundations is to balance along a knife's edge. Technical details of human perception and cognition lurk on one side, mythoi about the nature of the universe on the other; on one side Nature, on the other side Culture. But unlike the ropewalker, who does well to keep their eyes level, reasoning about the foundations of music requires us to gaze deeply into each abyss and balance the measurable with the fugitive at every step. Few have taken on this task and fewer have made headway. Among those who have, Vladimír Karbusický stands out for his clarity, his unrelenting pragmatism, and his willingness to engage with folklore and myth on a level with the Western philosophical canon. Much has happened, however, since the publication of *Kosmos – Mensch – Musik*, especially in the field of empirical music research. Yet, the goal of this paper is not to "update" Karbusický's ideas with the latest advances in music perception, as much as it is to revisit parts of his account in light of recent scientific developments. What, for example, does Anne Danielsen's beat bin theory of rhythm mean for the Kantian notion of simultaneity as applied to music? And how does the ever more plausible embodied understanding of cognition inform a structural ontology of music? Above all, however, this paper attempts to perform that most Karbusickian of acts, namely to investigate musical fundamentals as the interpenetration of Nature and Culture.

Lauge Dideriksen is a Danish music scholar based in Vienna. His work examines time in music and music in time, particularly the notion of rhythmical weight, by bringing findings from perceptual and ethnomusicological studies of music into dialogue with ideas from philosophy, cognitive science, and music theory. Dideriksen holds degrees in composition and ethnomusicology, and is currently pursuing a PhD in philosophy and music at the University of Bremen and the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.

Louise Duchesneau

Vladimír Karbusický and György Ligeti – A Friendship in Uneasy Times

This paper chronicles the friendship between Vladimír Karbusický and György Ligeti, two refugees from Communist dictatorships who met in the 1970s in Cologne. In 1976 Vladimír Karbusický became the first professor in the newly established – and at the time, the only – independent department of Systematic Musicology at a German university. After a long search and despite his fame as a composer, György Ligeti was finally appointed a professor of composition at the Hamburg Hochschule für Musik in 1973. Alone their biographies would have provided sufficient common ground for friendship. The Second World War – the Holocaust – the Cold War – the Hungarian uprising in 1956 – the Prague Spring in 1968: at that time the 20th Century had been and was still in constant political and cultural upheaval. That they shared a deep-rooted hatred of all ideologies – left or right – and dictatorships of all kinds is not surprising. However, this was not the only thing which united them, as they also had many musical, literary and artistic tastes in common. Thus, bolstered by their personal and professional affinities, Karbusický and Ligeti held joint music colloquia on

three occasions in the 1980s, seminars on a wide variety of topics which reflected shared and individual interests. And finally, they both had a wonderful sense of humour, which certainly made for entertaining after-seminar get-togethers at the local pub.

Louise Duchesneau earned her PhD in 1985 under Vladimír Karbusický with a dissertation entitled *The Voice of the Muse: A Study of the Role of Inspiration in Musical Composition*. She also lectured from 1982 to 1993 in Systematic Musicology at Hamburg University. From 1983 to 2005 she was the assistant to György Ligeti and, with Wolfgang Marx, she coedited a collection of articles entitled *György Ligeti – of Foreign Lands and Strange Sounds*, Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011.

Golan Gur

Musical Signs and the Semantics of History: Vladimír Karbusický's Model of Music Semiotics in the Context of Cold War Ideologies

At the height of the Cold War, intellectual debates about musical meaning were deeply intertwined with broader ideological divisions, reflecting opposing views on social reality and the forces shaping human knowledge and cultural expression. The Marxist theorist Georg Lukács, whose influence extended beyond the Eastern Bloc, proclaimed that art, in its own distinctive way, reflects social conditions and must ultimately be evaluated in terms of its ability to “mirror” reality. Within this materialist framework, artworks became inseparable from sociological and political categories. Emerging in the 1930s, this paradigm took on various forms within the field of music aesthetics. Since the 1960s, it has been increasingly enriched by interdisciplinary approaches, particularly critical theory, semiotics, and cybernetics. Vladimír Karbusický, active in Czechoslovakia and, later on, in West Germany, was acutely aware of this materialist perspective. His writings critically examined the limitations of such reductive theories of musical “realism” and advanced alternative approaches to understanding processes of communication and signification in music. The paper explores Karbusický’s contributions to the aesthetics of music, focusing on his use of semiotics and structuralism as methodologies for decoding musical meaning. My analysis situates his work within broader debates on the societal meanings of music, particularly in connection with critical East German music scholars such as Georg Knepler and the early Christian Kaden. By engaging with these discussions, my aim is not only to contextualize Karbusický’s semiotic theories but also to reassess their relevance to present-day sociologically-oriented musicology and sound studies.

Golan Gur studied at Tel Aviv University and Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich, and earned his doctorate from Humboldt University of Berlin. Following his PhD, he received a Newton International Fellowship at the University of Cambridge and held several postdoctoral appointments, including at the Herbert D. Katz Center for Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, the IFK International Research Center for Cultural Studies in Vienna, and at Royal Holloway, University of London. He is currently a faculty member at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna, where he served as Deputy Head of the Department of Music Sociology between 2023 and 2025.

Štěpán Hurník

The Concept of Music as a Source of Karbusický's and Jiránek's Dispute on the Nature of Music Semiotics

Between 1992 and 1993, a polemic took place in the journal *Hudební věda* (Musicology) between two important representatives of music semiotics: Vladimír Karbusický and Jaroslav Jiránek. The subject of the dispute lied in their different views on the sign nature of music and the role of semiotics in musicology and aesthetics. While Karbusický emphasised the limitations of employing a semiotic perspective within the context of music, given its inherent oscillation between an asemantic musical form and a sign reference, Jiránek understood semiotics more broadly, namely as a method through which the semantic and aesthetic dimensions of music can be explained. In my conference paper, I will argue that the cause of the split between the two musicologists did not only lie in their incompatible views on the function of semiotics in musical aesthetics and musicological research, but particularly in their fundamentally different conceptions of the term of music itself. In the following discussion, I will point out that while Karbusický, in accordance with his ethnomusicological research, insisted on an anthropological and historically invariant essence of the music, Jiránek situated music within a dynamic historical framework arguing that its own nature changes through transformations in the social-historical context. These differing conceptions of the historical basis of the concept of music will be seen as an important reason for Jiránek's and Karbusický's contrasting views on the sign character of music.

Štěpán Hurník is a PhD student in the Department of Aesthetics at Charles University in Prague. His research focuses on the aesthetics of music, particularly musical meaning, musical history and the aesthetic experience of music. He has long been interested in the aesthetics and philosophy of Roger Scruton. He is also actively involved in music journalism, writing reviews and articles about music for the *KlasikaPlus* website.

Matěj Kratochvíl

"Sonic Environment of Our Lives." Vladimír Karbusický and Transformations of Czech Ethnomusicology

After the Second World War, Czech research on folk music underwent two parallel transformations, reflecting the development of the entire academic sphere. On one hand, it became a tool of the politics of the Communist Party and its ideology. On the other hand, the field was taking a similar direction as in the West, moving towards what soon became called ethnomusicology. This presentation will look at Vladimír Karbusický's research on folk and popular music in the 1950s and 1960s to see how his understanding of the study of "music in culture" evolved. In the early 1950s, he was looking to move from a 19th-century focus on rural areas to researching the culture of urban workers with a strong ideological accent. It was not long after that he opened to a broader and more liberal view of which music should be studied and what questions the researcher could ask. While ethnomusicology was just one of his many interests and he shifted his focus after his emigration from Czechoslovakia in 1969, he managed to open several important issues that are still relevant today.

Matěj Kratochvíl works as a researcher at the Institute of Ethnology, Czech Academy of Sciences. He focuses on contemporary developments and transformations of traditional music and festivities in the Czech Republic, but also among Czech communities in the USA. In the second area, his research focuses on archival materials related to the history of folk music collection to understand their social and political context.

Lucia Reiprich Maloveská (Academy of Performing Arts Prague)

Systematic Musicology Now and Then: Karbusický's Concept from Music Theory's Perspective

Adler's division of musicology into historical and systematic one has become a functional basis for characterizing and defining the subdisciplines of musicological discourse, especially in German-speaking countries. There are several criteria according to which disciplines are classified into one of the two groups. However, these criteria are not always clearly defined: usually, they include the methodology of the discipline, its epistemology, and its focus. However, authors who have dealt with systematic musicology (including Karbusický) have often pointed out that the understanding of systematic disciplines is much more complex and less precise than that of historical disciplines. The understanding of systematic musicology therefore varies – one of the features in which it often differs is the classification of music theory. In some concepts, it is completely absent (Karbusický, 1979), in others it is included in systematic musicology (de la Motte, 2004), others have its ambiguity emphasized its ambiguity (Dahlhaus, 1971). In my contribution, I would like to compare the concepts of systematic musicology from the perspective of music theory, focusing on Karbusický's conception, presented in his seminal work *Systematische Musikwissenschaft* (1979). Through Karbusický's conception and his terms such as *Struktur*, *Methode*, and *System*, I will also examine more recent, predominantly North American views on the classification of musicology. The topic has been addressed already in my dissertation (*Role and Methods of Music Theory in the 21st Century*, 2024), in which I used concepts of musicology to explain the position of music theory in a broader musicological context.

Lucia Reiprich Maloveská defended her dissertation *Roles and Methods of Music Theory in 21st Century* at the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague in 2024, where she also completed her master's degree (*Dynamical Aspect of Musical Form*, 2021). Results of her research have been published and presented at several conferences (e.g. "Interdisciplinarity of Music Theory" in Belgrade 2022, Jahreskongress GMTM 2024, Ligeti Conference in Cluj 2025). She is organizer of conferences in Prague and the author of concert texts and reviews.

Ulrich Morgenstern

Vladimír Karbusický – a Scholar, a Teacher and a Humanist

Vladimír Karbusický was an exceptional personality. His welcoming and friendly attention to his colleagues and students filled the air at the Musicological Institute of the University of Hamburg. Those who were privileged to attend his classes could receive intellectual tools for an entire academic life. In my paper, I will try to highlight Karbusický's scholarly ethos: his steadfast commitment to intellectual and academic freedom and his scholarly rigor. Personally, I don't know of any other book with helps to acquire the skills of scholarly thinking better than his *Systematische Musikwissenschaft* (1979). Karbusický was an

intellectual virtuoso in deconstructing simplistic worldviews. He could destroy national romanticist myths of the allegedly archaic, “folkish” and national character of the Czech epics or Marxist-Leninist myths of the paradise on earth with their specific use of language (“word-idols”) and music, as lucidly demonstrated in *Ideologie im Lied – Lied in der Ideologie. Kulturanthropologische Strukturanalysen*. With his unwavering humanism, Karbusický felt deep sympathy to the *humiliated and insulted*, however his rationalism prevented him from falling in the traps of social-romanticism and Manichean oppositions. He was also sympathetic to other peoples’ good ideas and insights. His extraordinary erudition allowed him to present them to his readers and his students in both an intellectually balanced and a beautiful way. As a teacher, Vladimír Karbusický encouraged independent thinking, close reading and well-considered judgement. His voice is bitterly missed today in the postmodernist ivory tower and in times of authoritarian tendencies and cancel culture under whatever banner.

Ulrich Morgenstern studied Systematic Musicology, East Slavic Studies, and History at the University of Hamburg from 1986 to 1993. He gained a PhD in Systematic Musicology at the same university in 2003. Since 2012, he has been a professor of the history and theory of folk music at the University of Music and Performing Arts in Vienna. His main areas of research include European folk music and folk musical instruments, multipart instrumental music, history of folk music research and music anthropology, revival and revitalization, research and political ideologies, and ethnomusicology of violence. He has conducted fieldwork in Belarus, Russia, Hungary, Croatia, Austria, Romania, Turkey, and Georgia.

Dániel Nagy

Music, Meaning, Mimesis – Karbusický’s Theory of Musical Semantics and Its Lessons for Contemporary Semiotic and Cognitive Theories

Vladimír Karbusický was among the pioneering scholars to study the problem of musical meaning – a topic that, after the emergence of the idea of music’s aesthetic autonomy in the 19th century, had long been an anathema in Western musicology. In his 1986 book, *Grundriss der musikalischen Semantik*, he argued that music is not merely a quasi-language with a meaning-making potential in a metaphoric sense, rather an actual semiotic system incorporating all modes of signification (i.e. iconic, indexical, and symbolic based on Peircean theory) rooted in the mimetic capacities of musical sound as a medium. In other words, Karbusický attempted to anchor the concept of music’s meaning to a theoretical account of how musical expression is related to natural and cultural *reality* in a much similar manner to Eastern European scholars of musical *intonation* (like Asafiev, or Ujfalussy), as well as to *topic theory* proposed by Raymond Monelle and other Western musicologists. However, in recent years, semiotic and cognitive theories of meaning generally assume that the cognitive semiotics processes allowing the emergence of semantic relations are inherently metaphoric through the presence of conceptual blending or are based on similar cognitive operations. That is to say, our perception of *reality* which can (or cannot) be “imitated” by musical expression as a communicative-representative system already relies fundamentally on processes appearing as figures of thought within acts of semiosis. In my paper I will review how Karbusický’s theories of music semiotics based on his concept of *mimesis* are applicable to such contemporary, cognitive semiotic investigations of music and meaning.

Dániel Nagy is a musicologist, semiotician, and literary critic. He holds a PhD in comparative literature with his thesis on the semiotic and narratological foundations of the concept of the “literary leitmotif” in the interpretations of certain “Wagnerian novels” of 20th-century authors. His primary field of research is the intermedial relations between musical and literary expression, particularly focussing on the emergence of meaning from their intersemiotic interactions and on the possibilities of narrative coherence in either medium. He currently teaches general semiotic theory and music semiotics at the international Semiotics programme of Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest.

Anna Nikolozishvili

Musical and Social Structures: Contextualising Jozef Kresánek's Slovenská ľudová pieseň zo stanoviska hudobného in the History of Central-European Musicology

Jozef Kresánek (1913–1986), a Slovak musicologist and composer, published his monograph *Slovenská ľudová pieseň zo stanoviska hudobného* [Slovak Folk Song from a Musical Perspective] in 1951. This work emerged during a period of significant growth in musicological research on traditional music in Slovakia, coinciding with broader shifts in the field of music studies. While there is no doubt that Kresánek's fundamental work on Slovak traditional music explicitly relies on structural methodology, it must be considered that over the years, structuralism as an analytical method has taken diverse forms depending on the discipline in which it is applied. This paper seeks to broaden the scope of structuralist methodology in music analysis—dominated by discourse on Schenker and surrounding controversies—by shifting the focus to Central Europe, and more specifically to Slovakia. Examining structural analysis in the context of traditional music from Central Europe offers a perspective less frequently discussed than that of European art music. In particular, this paper explores the degree to which the structural analysis of traditional music by Central European scholars, such as Jozef Kresánek reflects the linguistic and anthropological origins of structuralism. The observations regarding Kresánek's aims and achievements in *Slovenská ľudová pieseň zo stanoviska hudobného* will be contextualised within the historical and political circumstances of his work. This analysis will also address the author's positioning within structuralist traditions, both in and beyond musicology.

Anna Nikolozishvili holds a bachelor's degree in music theory from Tbilisi State Conservatoire, where she specialised in theoretical aspects of Georgian music. At TSC, she served as a co-chair of the Scientific Society of Students in 2023 and completed an internship at the International Office. She recently graduated from a research master's programme in musicology at Utrecht University with a focus on the global history of music theory and analysis, alongside a research internship at the University of Amsterdam.

Aleš Opekar – Jan Blüml

Vladimír Karbusický and His Contribution to Popular Music Research

Popular music research was established in the Czech lands in the early 1960s. The researchers originated on the one hand from jazz journalism and on the other from folklore studies. The paper will show how Vladimír Karbusický entered the field through music folkloristics and

empirical music sociology, as well as through inspiration from foreign researchers such as Theodor W. Adorno. The paper will summarize Karbusický's contribution to Czech research on popular music including the question what Josef Kotek, Ivan Poledňák and Jiří Fukač took from his reflections into the construction of the theory of popular music after his emigration, when censorship forbade quoting articles by emigrants. The broader cultural-political context will also touch on his reception as a researcher in the field of popular music in neighbouring socialist countries.

Jan Blüml has been working at the Department of Musicology, Palacký University Olomouc, Czech Republic, since 2014. His primary academic focus is the history of popular music in East Central Europe, with a particular emphasis on music in the former Czechoslovakia.

Aleš Opekar works in the Department of Musicology at the Institute of Art History of the Czech Academy of Sciences. He specialises in the history and theory of popular music. He is active in the field of music journalism and is co-founder of the Museum and Archive of Popular Music (*Popmuseum*).

Melanie Unseld

A Book from the Literary Estate: Vladimír Karbusický's Geschichte des böhmischen Musiktheaters

In the literary estate of Vladimír Karbusický was a substantial manuscript called *Geschichte des böhmischen Musiktheaters* [History of Bohemian Musical Theatre]. It quickly became clear, even after an initial review of the loose pages, that this manuscript held special significance—not only for Karbusický's own Oeuvre but also for research in the field of musical theatre. For his former colleagues at the Institute of Musicology at the University of Hamburg, it was soon evident that publishing this legacy of Karbusický's was an important undertaking. Of course, the challenge lay not only in determining the correct order of the loose pages, but also in identifying what was missing, supplementing it, and marking those additions. This presentation discusses the editorial process and reflects on the unique features of the book.

Melanie Unseld studied historical musicology, German language and literature, philosophy, and applied cultural studies in Karlsruhe and Hamburg. She gained her doctorate from the University of Hamburg in 1999. She was a Lise Meitner University Special Programme scholar and then a research assistant at the Hanover University of Music and Drama. From 2008 to 2016, she held the professorship for Cultural History of Music at the Carl von Ossietzky University Oldenburg, where, between 2009–2015, she was also director of the Interdisciplinary Centre for Women's and Gender Studies. In 2013, she received her Habilitation from the Hanover University of Music, Drama and Media. Since 2016, she has been Professor of Historical Musicology at the Department for Musicology and Performing Studies at the University of Music and Performing Arts Vienna.