

ABSTRACT

Music, Identity, and Affect:
New Performances of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

by

Matthew Frank Leslie

Chair: Andrew W. Jennings

At a recent talk at Harvard University, Rhiannon Giddens—the banjoist, fiddler, and vocalist in the acclaimed band Carolina Chocolate Drops—stated that it is her role, as a performer conversant with music scholarship, to elucidate through sound the discourses operating in texts that her audience will likely never read. Similarly, my dissertation recitals seek to use performance as a medium through which to articulate certain discussions in music scholarship and women's, gender, and sexuality studies.

My first recital takes a stake in ongoing debates around gender inequality in the field of music composition. Though there is no consensus among women composers about the role of gender in the field, ample evidence shows that there is a lack of gender diversity on composition faculties and that pieces by women are less likely to be commissioned and performed. This recital seeks to foreground the role of women in particular genealogies of American composition and to acknowledge the centrality of women's work in contemporary music. My second recital explores the group of mid-twentieth-century Manhattan-based gay composers responsible for the so-called "American sound," as described by Nadine Hubbs in *The Queer Composition of America's Sound: Gay Modernists, American Music, and National Identity* (2004). Like Hubbs, I foreground the role of these artists' sexualities in relation to their cultural production, which is

often overlooked in the program and liner notes that accompany performances and recordings of their compositions. My third recital explores emergent work in the field of music and trauma. The affective turn in late-1990s critical humanities scholarship resonated in feminist and queer as well as music studies. One direction taken, represented most prominently by musicologist Suzanne Cusick, was to move beyond discussions of music's liberatory potential toward examinations of its role in systems of negative affects, particularly in torture, violence, and trauma. My final dissertation recital considers works written in response to loss, destruction, and war, seeking not to make reductive links between trauma and creative output but rather to present a diversity of artistic production that has emerged from traumatic events in the lives of the composers represented.