

The Historical Ear: What is Auditory History? (Paris, 20–21 Mar 26)

The University of Chicago John W. Boyer Center, Paris, France, Mar 20–21, 2026

Deadline: Jul 15, 2025

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The International Musicological Society Study Group Auditory History is organising its inaugural conference that will be held in Paris, France in March 2026.

In recent years, sound studies and auditory history have emerged as dynamic, interdisciplinary fields that challenge us to reconsider how sound and listening have shaped human experience across cultures and time. Moving beyond traditional reliance on the visual and textual, scholars have increasingly foregrounded the role of sonic environments, listening practices, and the subjectivity of auditory perception in the construction of knowledge, identity, space, and memory. At the same time, methodological innovation and a growing commitment to global and inclusive perspectives have expanded the field's scope—inviting us to listen to the past with renewed critical sensitivity, to listen with the historical ear (Rosenfeld 2011).

The inaugural conference of the International Musicological Society Study Group Auditory History seeks to contribute to this momentum by asking how can we access and interpret auditory experiences in varied historical contexts? Additionally, do we treat them as direct remnants of sonic experiences or as traces of “auditory imagination” (Eliot 1933, Schmicking 2019). Building on foundational work (Schäfer 1977, Truax 1984; 2001) and more recent contributions (Rice 2015, Mansell 2021), the conference is particularly interested in the hearing-listening dichotomy and the diversity of listening practices—including those shaped by marginalised voices, non-elite actors, and sources that are difficult to grasp. While auditory history remains interdisciplinary by nature, we also ask how might we more critically engage with theories emerging from sensory studies? How can multisensorial thinking more meaningfully inform our approaches to sound history? At the same time, we welcome diverse disciplinary perspectives and methodological approaches that offer new insights into how people have made sense of their sonic worlds in the past.

Building on the Study Group's commitment to multisensorial, culturally diverse, and interdisciplinary scholarship, we invite scholars from all fields to explore the complex and multifaceted relationship between people and their sonic worlds across time and place. We particularly welcome historically grounded work that engages with theory-building, methodological innovation, and critical reflection on the aural dimensions of past human life.

Topics may include, but are not limited to:

- Historical auditory environments, soundscapes, and ecologies
- Subjectivity, auditory memory, and affect in auditory history

- Auditory communities
- Listening-hearing dichotomy
- Marginalised auditory perspectives
- Auditory imagination and its literary construction
- Theoretical and methodological considerations
- Advancements in digital tools
- Sonic heritage, preservation, and museology
- Pedagogies of listening

Format: we strongly encourage in-person participation by all active speakers, though we will aim to accommodate individual accessibility needs if requested. The conference will be accessible online.

Submission guidelines: proposals for individual papers (20 minutes + 10-minute discussion) should include a 250-300-word abstract and a 100-word biography of the presenter. We are also open to alternative formats (thematic panels, workshops, or sound-based contributions) especially those fostering collaborative or experimental approaches to auditory history. In addition to an abstract, the alternative format proposal should include a clear outline of the format, its duration and biographies of individual participants (250-400 words). All proposals should be submitted as a single PDF file to auditoryhistory@musicology.org no later than 15 July 2025. The language of the conference is English.

There will be a registration fee.

Further information regarding registration, travel, and accommodation will be published on the conference website in due course: <https://auditoryhistory.musicology.org/conference/>

Contact us at auditoryhistory@musicology.org.

Submit an abstract for an individual paper or alternative format until 15 July 2025 to auditoryhistory@musicology.org.

Confirmation of acceptance: 15 August 2025

Reference:

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