Visualising the Music Hall (St Andrews, 22-23 Apr 27)

School of Art History, University of St Andrews/UK, Apr 22–23, 2027
Deadline: Nov 27, 2026

Dr Billy Rough

Visualising the Music Hall: Images, Performance, and Popular Entertainment Conference.

The Music Hall, with its vibrant history as a site of entertainment, spectacle, and social exchange, was far more than a space for performance - it was a visual and sensory experience. From elaborate stage designs and performer costumes to advertising posters, postcards, sheet music covers, photography, and illustrated periodicals, the music hall generated a rich visual culture that both reflected and shaped the tastes, aspirations, identities, and anxieties of its audiences.

This conference invites scholars, researchers, museum professionals, archivists, and postgraduate students to explore the visual dimensions of the music hall as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon. We welcome interdisciplinary approaches that examine how images, objects, and visual practices contributed to the creation, promotion, circulation, and reception of music hall entertainment.

Submission Guidelines
Please submit an abstract of approximately 250–300 words, together with a short biographical note (100 words), to wwr@st-andrews.ac.uk by 27 November 2026

Key Dates
- Abstract Submission Deadline: 27 November 2026
- Notification of Acceptance: 18 December 2026

For any inquiries, please contact Dr Billy Rough via wwr@st-andrews.ac.uk

We look forward to receiving proposals that illuminate the diverse and dynamic visual worlds of the music hall.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:
- Music hall posters, playbills, and graphic design in the promotion of music hall entertainment
- Fashion, costume, and makeup of music hall performers
- Music hall architecture and interior aesthetics
- The visuality of performance: staging, lighting, choreography
- Photography, postcards, and celebrity culture
- Caricature, photography, and early film representations
- Music halls in illustrated periodicals and popular print media

- Visual satire, political commentary, and social critique
- Cross-cultural visual influences and international circuits
- The legacy of music hall aesthetics in contemporary visual media
- Visual representations of gender and sexuality
- Race, empire, and the imagery of popular entertainment
- Material culture, collecting, and museum collections
- Audience experience and visual consumption
- Digital approaches to music hall visual culture

We are particularly interested in papers that draw upon archival and museum collections, explore overlooked performers and venues, or examine the relationship between visual culture and broader questions of class, gender, race, identity, and popular leisure.

We welcome proposals for:
- Individual papers (20 minutes)
- Panels of three or four speakers
- Roundtable discussions
- Practice-based and collection-focused presentations

The conference aims to foster new conversations about the role of the visual in shaping music hall culture and to highlight the importance of visual and material sources in understanding popular entertainment history.

- Limited funding may be available to support travel and accommodation expenses, with priority given to Postgraduate Researchers and other applicants who can demonstrate financial need.
- Attendees will be invited to a special British Music Hall Society plaque unveiling at the location of Springthorpe’ s Music Hall (Friday 23 April 2027).
- Drawing Projects UK will present a screening of an artist’ s film, 'The Music Hall Disaster', 2025, by Dennis Scholl AM, made in response to the Bell Street Public Hall tragedy as part of his forthcoming solo exhibition in Dundee.
- All Attendees will be invited to a tour of The McManus: Dundee’s Art Gallery and Museum exhibition ‘Dundee Nights’ (Saturday 24 April 2027).

https://visualising-the-music-hall.my.canva.site/

Reference:

CFP: Visualising the Music Hall (St Andrews, 22-23 Apr 27). In: ArtHist.net, Sep 5, 2026 (accessed Nov 23, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/53576>.