

Prison Sounds: Time and Release

Keynote Address, Music Theory Southeast
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Abstract

The listening environment of a prison fosters specific relationships to sound. Sound and silence regulate time. Time is, perhaps, *the* most central factor of incarceration. The incarcerated *do* time and *have* time but have no control *over* their own time. Music speeds up the feeling of time or prolongs it with memories of time past. This presentation asks us to consider the role of musical time in relation to the traumas of incarceration. Augmenting the central tenet of the paper are four vignettes that center on the relationship between time and sound in a prison setting: time as confession in operatic prison arias, time as narrative in bluegrass murder ballads, time as catharsis in prison pow wows, and time as release in the prison music classroom. Each analysis borrows from approaches in musicology, ethnomusicology, music theory, and sound studies to shed insights on the role of the acoustic in phenomenological experiences of incarceration.

Bio

Adriana Helbig is Associate Professor of Music at the University of Pittsburgh where she leads a bluegrass ensemble and teaches courses on world music, global hip-hop, music and disability studies, and prison sounds. She also teaches world music at the Fayette State Correctional Institution as part of the Pitt Prison Education Project. Her research has been supported through generous grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, IREX, American Councils for International Education, and Fulbright. Publications include *Hip Hop Ukraine: Music, Race, and African Migration* (Indiana University Press, 2014) and *Hip Hop at Europe's Edge: Music, Agency, and Social Change* (Indiana University Press, 2017), co-edited with Milosz Miszczyński. She is presently working on a book titled *Re-Sounding Poverty: Romani Music and Development Aid* that analyzes how Roma musician-activists engage with discourses of civil society as promoted via Western aid networks.

