

Research Presentations by Students and Recent Graduates
Saturday, October 10
2:45–3:45 p.m.

*“More Mexican Than the Mexicans and More American Than the Americans” —
Selena Quintanilla-Perez and the Cultivation of the Female Tejano Spirit*

Kirsten Westerman (University of Cincinnati, College–Conservatory of Music)

Mentor: Rachel Mann (University of Texas Rio Grande Valley)

Mere months before being murdered by her fan-club president, Tejano superstar Selena Quintanilla-Perez was being celebrated as, “the next Gloria Estefan” and the immense, rising popularity of Tejano music in the United States was dubbed a direct result of the singer’s meteoric rise. Indeed, despite the majority of her career existing within the Tejano musical sphere, Selena herself lived within multiple worlds: she was born in Corpus Christi, but toured extensively throughout Mexico; nearly all of her original music was in Spanish despite it being her second language; and she was a woman navigating a largely male-driven genre. Despite the sensation surrounding her life and death, scholarship on the “Mexican Madonna” remains scarce, excepting Deborah Paredez’s groundbreaking work, *Selenidad: Selena, Latinos, and the Performance of Memory*, which largely considers the singer’s posthumous iconization. Indeed, much of her memorialization is a direct result of her horrific and untimely death, yet Selena crafted an image that nearly ensured an immense impact following her attempted crossover into the American mainstream. This paper investigates Selena’s calculated public image and persona within the those seemingly dichotic worlds and considers how she transcended societal boundaries within Tejano and American mainstream musical spheres.

Feminism in Tejano Music

Sasha Linn Arteaga (University of New Mexico)

Mentor: Jennifer Sterling Snodgrass (Appalachian State University)

This paper addresses the lack of feminist scholarship on female Tejano artists. Historical musicology has often failed to accurately represent social issues within the Mexican diaspora, specifically in Texas. Arguments in the past have tended to suffer from essentialism, identifying Latina artists through the framework of Anglo-American scholarship and omitting artists that do not fit into these archetypes. In this project, I discuss the role of gender stereotypes in Chicano art and culture.

A familiar example of this gender stereotyping is the entire career of “the Queen of Tejano,” Selena. While Selena became a household name due to her adherence to Chicana gender norms, Anglo-Americans tended to place her in a similar category as Madonna due to her subjectively risqué appearance, revealing dress, and dancing. However, within a framework more attuned to Latinx social customs she was no more nor less sexual than other mainstream Latina artists. On the other hand, musicologists have overlooked how the gender barrier was broken by artists such as Laura Canales, who fronted conjuntos long before it was socially acceptable to do so. Unfortunately, a lack of scholarship on Tejano music since Selena’s death has led to an inability for musicologists to fully understand the intricacies of gender and social roles in musica tejana, and Latinx music more generally. Thus, I believe that by expanding our research to be better informed on gender issues in Tejano culture we can better represent the musical culture as a whole in scholarship.

Exploring the Underrepresentation of Female Composers in the Opera World

Makayla Scherrer (North Dakota State University)

Mentor: Patricia Burt (University of Delaware)

In recent years, the importance of the representation of diverse composers has been at the forefront of many involved in the classical music world. With the increase in the representation of diverse composers, the art songs of female composers such as Fanny Hensel, and Alma Mahler, are being performed across the world stage. However, other female composers, such as those that wrote opera, are continuing to be underrepresented among the classical world. By conducting an extensive literature review and surveying numerous opera houses, this paper argues that operas by female composers contain the same merit as operas by other composers. This paper will present this position through the exploration of a brief history of opera by female composers and share the significance that these composer's hold. As well as examine the reasons that female opera composers are still under performed at today's opera houses. Finally, this paper aims display the strides some opera houses have taken to improve their representation of the female composer and introduce my thoughts on how we can improve representation. This paper aims to open a dialogue on the issue of representation of female opera composers on the world stage and help to forge a solution that can solve this underrepresentation issue in the future.

Revisiting the Music Box-Like Foundations of Rebecca Saunders' Compositions

Ralph Lewis (University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign)

Mentor: Gene S. Trantham (Bowling Green State University)

When the news broke in 2019 that composer Rebecca Saunders received the Ernst von Siemens Prize in recognition of her compositions, it was a rare moment for American musicians to discuss her music publicly. As Saunders' music increasingly appears on US concert programs, revisiting the fundamental elements of her work and how they inform her most recent output will ideally support scholars, performers and new listeners as they encounter her music for the first time.

Throughout her career, the ways Saunders curates fundamental elements in her works have made her stand out amongst other European Post-Serial composers. She artfully sets critical parameters (including instrumentation, harmonic language, and timbral expression) into such narrow yet rewarding circumstances that the choices themselves almost intimate the totality of the resulting piece. This design-minded pre-compositional approach, as seen in pieces such as *Blue and Gray*, where Saunders employs two five-string basses in specific scordatura that support the overall harmonic choices, shows the extent that this approach can shape her works.

Drawing on my earlier research about Saunders' approach, my presentation compares and contrasts these fundamental tendencies throughout her first two decades of compositional output and newer works that build specifically on those experiences and relationships, including how the earlier metaphorical music box-building has now at times given way to pieces for actual music boxes and how Saunders' specificity feeds seamlessly into her ongoing series of collage pieces.