

Music, Nature, *and Sound:*

Musical Ecology

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Music has always existed in dialogue with nature – whether through the imitation of natural sounds, the integration of environmental soundscapes, or the use of sonic metaphors inspired by observations of the world around us. In an age marked by ecological uncertainty, this relationship takes on renewed urgency. The study of ‘musical ecology’ (or ecomusicology) asks not only how music reflects nature, but also how it participates in shaping our understanding of ecological issues. The current volume of *Musicology Today* brings together perspectives that explore sound as a medium connecting human cultures and the environments they inhabit, highlighting the ways in which music both records and reimagines our place in the world of which humanity is a part.

Most of the articles presented here are based on papers delivered at the *International Online Conference on Renewable Music*, held in October 2024 as part of the *Renewable Music. V4 Composers for Sustainability* project (www.renmus.eu). The project that brought together music organisations and artists from the Visegrad Group countries was led by the Polish Composers’ Union and funded under the Creative Europe programme. Coined as a result of this collaboration, the concept of ‘renewable music’ draws on the language of renewable resources to reimagine how music is created, performed, and experienced in the context of environmental sustainability. While all music can be considered renewable in the sense that performances continually regenerate meaning, the term has come to signal broader concerns with reducing the ecological footprint of musical practices. The conference provided a vital space for composers and scholars to share work at the intersection of music, ecology, technology, and sustainability.

The opening article, Makis Solomos’s *Music, Ecologies and Degrowth. A Few Paths to Explore*, situates the concept of ‘degrowth’ within musicology. Drawing on Félix Guattari’s ‘three ecologies’ – environmental, social, and mental – Solomos develops a framework for examining music’s role in post-growth imaginaries. By analysing works by Dmitri Kourliandski and Agostino Di Scipio, the article shows how compositional and technological strategies can foster listening and creativity aligned with ecological thinking. Building on these ecological concerns, Marcin Strzelecki’s *Generating Music, AI and Energy* examines artificial intelligence in music, highlighting its paradoxical nature as both innovative and ecologically costly. Strzelecki emphasises the energy-

intensive processes behind AI training, questioning the sustainability of algorithmic creativity. The article further situates AI-generated music within debates on authenticity, cultural value, and ecological responsibility, demonstrating the need to consider not only artistic but also environmental impacts in contemporary musical practices.

The next two articles present case studies that explore different approaches to analysis of ecologically-oriented musical works. Małgorzata Heinrich’s essay on Hildegard Westerkamp’s *Beneath the Forest Floor*, rooted in acoustic ecology, emphasises soundscape composition as a mediator between environment, culture, and subjectivity. Heinrich’s graphic analysis underscores multimodality in ecological pedagogy and shows how soundscape practice can cultivate attentiveness to the natural world. Katarzyna Bartos’s essay *Depicting Japanese Soundscapes in Grażyna Pstrokońska-Nawratil’s Słowik i kamień* explores the composer’s concept of ‘ecomusic’, grounded in the belief that music itself is an organism – subject to processes of birth, growth, and decay. By analysing the composer’s musical reportage from Japan as both a musical and ecological text, Bartos highlights how contemporary composition can articulate transnational and transcultural encounters with nature while situating them within a broader ecological philosophy.

Jan Andreas Wessel’s *Animals in Early Modern Histories of Music* introduces a historiographical dimension to the volume. By analysing two seminal works of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century music historiography, Wessel uncovers how animal musicality was conceptualised through historical examples, revealing the epistemic functions and reasoning modes at play in early modern narratives of music. While Wessel illuminates neglected dimensions of the genealogy of music-historical discourse, Oľga Smetanová’s *Sustaining Creative Work: Satisfaction of Classical Music Composers with Institutional Support in Slovakia* turns to contemporary sociological concerns, focusing on the conditions of compositional labour today. Using Bourdieu and Sapiro, Smetanová finds that despite high success rates in obtaining grants, composers remain dissatisfied with institutional support. The article underscores structural and symbolic obstacles to creative autonomy, situating music-making within the political economy of culture and highlighting sustainability in artistic work.

Taken together, the contributions in this volume demonstrate the rich and multifaceted ways in which music intersects with ecological, social, and technological concerns. From historical and historiographical perspectives to contemporary compositional practice, and from acoustic ecology to AI-driven creativity, the articles illuminate how musical thought and practice can engage critically with questions of sustainability and ethical responsibility. By highlighting both the imaginative and material dimensions of music-making, this collection offers a timely and compelling vision of music not merely as an art form, but as an active participant in shaping ecological awareness, cultural values, and sustainable futures.

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