

eSEM

European Seminar in Ethnomusicology



Nacionalinė
M. K. Čiurlionio
menų mokykla



41st ESEM

Palanga, 17—22 September 2026

call for papers

abstract submission deadline:
15 April 2026

conference venue:
The National M.K.Čiurlionis School of Art
Arts Education Center
Palanga/Kunigiškės, Lithuania

conference organizer:
Lithuanian Academy of Music and Theatre
Vilnius, Lithuania

Seminar Themes

1. Ethnomusicological Challenges: Theories, Practices, Responsibilities

The subjects of ethnomusicological research cover a long time span—from archaic phenomena to contemporary realities. The results of this research may feed into current musical practices while also shaping general public understandings of different forms of music, sound, and dance, their place in the contemporary world, and the official mechanisms through which they may be promoted. At the same time, especially in the context of what is understood as traditional music research, the field is increasingly confronted with questions of relevance, accountability, and application. It is, therefore, important to reflect on overarching issues concerning the challenges of ethnomusicology and its broader relevance to society: How does ethnomusicological research influence contemporary music, sound, and dance practices (paying attention not only to successes, but also to failures)? How meaningful is this research in the realms of public discourse and in influencing policy? How might it contribute further in these areas?

To interrogate these issues, this seminar welcomes papers including (but not limited to) those exploring:

- 1) How does ethnomusicology position itself in relation to public discourse, cultural policy, and governance (including institutional and non-institutional initiatives at local, national, and transnational levels), and how does research interact with mechanisms of recognition, regulation, and application?
- 2) In what ways does ethnomusicological research shape the visibility, development, and dissemination of musical, dance, and sound practices (through processes such as innovation, mediation, digitalization, and educational integration)?
- 3) What is the role and place of folklore movements within ethnomusicological scholarship (including their institutional, educational, and organizational dimensions), both historically and in the present?

2. Music, Sound, and Dance in Transforming Political Landscapes

Musical heritage and living traditions are often harnessed by politicians for political purposes. Music is deeply implicated in shaping nation-state cultural narratives and in building transnational connections, and this in turn affects music's forms and functions, no matter how cynically or not it may be deployed as a political tool. This theme encourages in-depth study of music, sound, and dance practices research in relation to different political systems, especially under authoritarian or totalitarian regimes and dictatorships. Subtopics may include (but are not limited to):

- 1) Music, sound, and dance in the construction of political enemies and outsiders (including the devaluation of certain styles and practices, and the stigmatization of individuals, groups or nations, as well as the political persecution of musicians and music practitioners).
- 2) Overt and indirect political influences on ethnomusicological research agendas and thematic orientations.

- 3) The creation and promotion of new musical forms and their roles in legitimizing specific political orders, ideological projects, and national narratives.
- 4) Instrumentalization of music, sound, dance in promoting undemocratic, pseudo-democratic, or populist agendas.

3. Free papers

While proposals related to the seminar's main themes will be prioritized, submissions on other topics of interest to ESEM are also welcomed.

Modes of Presentation

A variety of presentation modes are possible, and applicants are encouraged to carefully consider which mode of presentation will work best in presenting their research. You may only present once during the seminar.

Individual paper

Individual paper presentations are 20 minutes long and are followed by 10 minutes of discussion. Proposals must include an abstract of 300 words maximum.

Panel

Organized panels are 90 minutes (three papers, each of 20 minutes plus 10 minutes of discussion) or 2 hours long (four papers, each of 20 minutes plus 10 minutes of discussion). Submissions should include a proposal by the panel organizer (300 words) as well as abstracts by each individual presenter (300 words each). Where an independently submitted abstract appears to fit a panel, the program committee may suggest the addition of a panelist.

Audiovisual session

Proposals for screenings of recently completed documentaries are welcomed. Films are to be introduced by their author and discussed by conference participants. Please submit a 300-word abstract including title, subject, and format, also indicating the duration of the proposed documentary and introduction/discussion.

Roundtable

Roundtable sessions provide opportunities for participants to discuss a subject with each other and with members of the audience. Sessions of up to 2 hours long should include either four or five presenters. The organizer should solicit position papers of up to 15 minutes from each presenter and will facilitate questions and discussion for the remaining time. Position papers are not expected to focus on presentation of original research, but instead to introduce a stance or topic of discussion on the roundtable's themes. Proposals for roundtables should be submitted by the session organizer (300 words).

Instructions for preparing abstracts

Abstracts should include a clearly focused problem, a coherent argument, indication of knowledge of previous research, and a statement of the findings' implications for relevant fields. Proposals may be submitted here: <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=41stesem>

Applying for financial support

ESEM recognizes that financial circumstances may make attending this seminar difficult for some. We therefore invite expressions of interest in benefitting from a limited amount of financial support – with a maximum collective fund of 1,500 euro.

To be considered, please provide a statement of maximum 500 words, laying out:

- (1) Why other forms of funding, from institutional or other sources, are not available or sufficient to enable participation.
- (2) An itemized budget for participation, addressing which budget item(s) ESEM's limited funds would cover, and your plans for meeting the remaining costs.
- (3) The specific outcomes and benefits expected from attending. Please include information about your record and plan for attending conferences in the twelve months either side of this seminar.

(The statements can be provided together with the proposals in <https://easychair.org/conferences/?conf=41stesem>)

Language

English is the official language of the Seminar.

Submission

Deadline for proposals is 15 April 2026.

Evaluation of proposals will be done anonymously, and presenters will be notified of the program committee's decision by mid-May 2026.