

Music History and Cosmopolitanism / abstract & bio  
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### **Cosmopolitanism and the ‘Contemporary’: The Politics and Non-Politics of Neue Musik in the ISCM**

The association between ‘modernist’ music and the idea of aesthetic autonomy has had a range of historical iterations. Notwithstanding the dialectical character of modernism, it is still common to construe certain musical developments of the twentieth century— particularly those that came under the rubric of ‘Neue Musik’— as effectively resisting forms of politicization. The International Society for Contemporary Music (Die Internationale Gesellschaft für Neue Musik), established in the aftermath of World War I as part of a broader push towards promoting cooperation between European nations, was explicit in its commitment to political neutrality, and later to the notion of artistic independence from state interference. The de-politicized standing of Neue Musik was ultimately made to serve political ends during the Cold War, with the CIA-backed Congress for Cultural Freedom promoting the notion of ‘artistic independence’ as a beacon of liberal democracy in an effort to stall the growth of Communism in Europe, funding the performance of music by a range of exiled modernist composers. Despite the ISCM’s waning influence after World War II, it was seen as having provided an institutional articulation of de-politicization that was to become, as some have described it, an “unshakable truth” for the post-war avant-garde.

This heroic narrative of the ISCM’s role in music history is shaped by an implicit assumption that the organisation’s international make-up, its commitment to political neutrality, and its promotion of Neue Musik reflected an over-arching cosmopolitan ethos underpinning its activities. While certain individuals may have cultivated a cosmopolitan stance, I will argue in this paper that all three of the above-mentioned factors, so integral to the Society’s functioning—its internationalism, its de-politicization, and its support of Neue Musik—in fact prevented cosmopolitanism from ever becoming institutionally embedded. Reflecting upon the reasons for the failure of the ISCM to consolidate a cosmopolitan position provides an opportunity to examine the politics of de-politicization, and can inform our own position as music scholars today with respect to the re-emergent cosmopolitanisms.

**Dr. Sarah Collins** is currently a Vice-Chancellor's Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of New South Wales, Australia. Prior to this appointment, she was a Lecturer in Musicology in the School of Music at Monash University. Sarah completed her doctoral study jointly through the University of Queensland and King's College London. She is the author of *The Aesthetic Life of Cyril Scott* (Boydell, 2013) and has articles published in the *Journal of the Royal Musical Association*, *Twentieth-Century Music*, and *Music & Letters*.