



PennState

Musicology and Music Theory

The Penn State Musicology and Music Theory Program presents

“Battle of the Bands: Adolphe Sax’s Sonic Fusillades and the Military Politics of Timbral Homogeneity”

The Belgian inventor Adolphe Sax’s triumph in the French Ministry of War’s April 1845 performance contest demonstrated the inextricability of militarism and musical instrumentation in mid-nineteenth century France. The French military’s quest to improve its soundworld by adopting Sax’s instruments was inseparable from its standardizing of artillery (Valée) and improving the lethality of its long-barreled firearms (Delvigne). Sax’s instruments provided audibility outdoors, high volume levels, and timbral homogeneity, delivering a massed core of sound—a tight grouping of “musical bullets”—with a high degree of accuracy. Musical bombardments thus went hand-in-hand with an increasingly lethal military enterprise, fulfilling a definition of “sonic warfare” more than 150 years before Steve Goodman described the concept.



A colloquium talk by
Samuel Nemeth ‘18
(Case Western Reserve University)

Monday, October 23, 2023 at 4:00 pm

115 Music Building 1

Free and open to the public