

## **At the Threshold: Sound and Music in Sickness, Death, and Commemoration in Early Modern Europe**

Regensburg, 13–14 May 2027

In early modern Europe, the experience of illness and death was profoundly mediated by sound. Music and other sonic practices accompanied the rites surrounding the sickbed, structured burial ceremonies, and shaped acts of commemoration for the deceased. Musicologists have long made art music for the liturgy for the dead a topic of research, but by focusing on major settings by prominent composers—particularly of the Requiem Mass—they have often overlooked this broader range of practices.

This conference, organized within the framework of *troja: Kolloquium und Jahrbuch für Renaissancemusik* (<https://www.troja-online.eu/>) and in collaboration with the research project *Funeral Soundscapes* (KU Leuven / Alamire Foundation) and the festival *Tage Alter Musik Regensburg*, seeks to remedy this lacuna by exploring the human experience at the passage between life and death as a process, rather than focusing on a given musical genre alone. It aims to map a wide range of sonic and musical practices and to investigate their functions and meanings. Attention is given to both institutional and private perspectives, considering settings such as confraternities and hospital chapels, as well as more intimate or domestic experiences of illness, dying, and mourning. In doing so, the conference seeks to highlight how ritualised sound and music operated not only as an ornament of liturgical practice, but also as a social, emotional, and even therapeutic force at the threshold between life and death.

Confirmed guest speakers include Prof. Naomi Barker (The Open University), a musicologist whose research explores the intersections of music, medicine, and religion; Prof. Concetta Pennuto (Centre d'Études Supérieures de la Renaissance), a specialist in the history of medicine and its intersections with musical practices; and Prof. Owen Rees (University of Oxford), a scholar and conductor whose work has significantly advanced our understanding of music for the liturgy of the dead.

We welcome submissions from a wide range of disciplinary perspectives, including musicology, history, theology, sound studies, and related disciplines. Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

**The Foundations:** The classical and scriptural roots of musical practices associated with death, as well as theological interpretations of sound, music, and the passage from life to death.

**Ceremonial Traditions and Regulation of Sound:** Regulations governing musical and sonic practices at the deathbed and in funerary ceremonies, including measures aimed at encouraging or restricting specific practices, and the underlying reasons for such norms.

**At the Threshold:** Functions and purposes of music and other sonic practices in moments of agony and at the end of life, including their roles as practices of healing for body and soul, sources of comfort for the dying and the bereaved, expressions of grief, and mediations between life and the afterlife.

**Commemoration:** Music and sonic practices as a means of commemoration, addressing their functions with regard to the deceased and to those left behind, the tension between general ritual frameworks and the specific demands of commemorative events, as well as the personalization of ritual through sound and music.

**Interreligious Perspectives:** The functions and meanings of sound and music in death-related contexts across different theologies of the afterlife.

Thanks to the collaboration with the Tage Alter Musik Regensburg, on May 15 participants will have the opportunity to hear the ensemble Cappella Mariana, directed by Vojtěch Semerád, perform early modern music for the dead from the chapel of Santo Spirito in Sassia, a Roman confraternity hospital whose choirbooks are now preserved at the Bischöfliche Zentralbibliothek Regensburg.

Proposals for twenty-minute papers should be sent to [antonio.chemotti@kuleuven.be](mailto:antonio.chemotti@kuleuven.be) and [katelijne.schiltz@ur.de](mailto:katelijne.schiltz@ur.de) by 1 September 2026, including a c. 250-word abstract and a c. 100-word biography. We aim to communicate the programme decisions by 15 November 2026. For further information, please contact the organizers by email.