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Keynote Address

“PUTIN, GO \$@!% YOURSELF!”: MUSICAL HUMOR IN TIMES OF WAR

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Musical humor is a form of communication. It may be satirical, farcical, ironic, absurd, surreal, or slapstick. It may be violent and grotesque, inverting religious, sexual, and social norms of propriety. It may be overtly political or offer an outlet for processing situations perceived as beyond one’s control. It may act as a catalyst, influencing perceptions and realities. It may provide an outlet for emotions, offering opportunities to process experiences. In oppressive regimes, expressions of public political dissent often carry serious personal consequences. How people use musical humor to circumvent such outcomes lends insight into how they deal with difficult situations. Drawing on musical humor relating to Russia’s unprovoked war in Ukraine, this talk builds on Thorston and Powell’s idea of humor as a coping mechanism. Specifically, it offers ideas for developing a musical theory of humor as an analytical tool to better understand coping processes in oppressive regimes. It argues that a serious analysis of humor in songs may contribute to a deeper understanding of how people process feelings of oppression that result from state violence. Because the trauma such contexts generate is passed on from one generation to the next, this chapter argues for an analysis of musical humor in historical context since coping mechanisms are passed down alongside memories of trauma.

Dr. Adriana Helbig is an Associate Professor of Music and Chair of the Department of Music University of Pittsburgh. She is the author of *Hip Hop Ukraine: Music, Race, and African Migration* (Indiana University Press, 2014) and the co-editor with Milosz Miszczyński of *Hip Hop at Europe’s Edge: Music, Agency, and Social Change* (Indiana University Press, 2017). Her book *ReSounding Poverty: Romani Music and Development Aid* will be published by Oxford University Press in 2023. She is a classically trained pianist and teaches courses on global hip hop, applied ethnomusicology, music and disability studies, and music and conflict.